

Facing the Music!

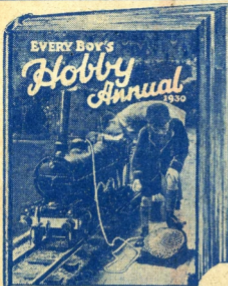
by Owen Conquest



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Facing the Music!

by Owen Conquest



Several sorts of a rotter he may be, but not even VALENTINE MORNINGTON'S worst enemy would call him a thief. Yet that is the accusation the dandy of the Fourth has to face in this powerful story of Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 1.

Dropped!

"EXTRAORDINARY, ain't it?" yawned Townsend.

"Amazin'!" said Topham.

"Beats everythin'," remarked

Peele.

Smythe of the Shell polished his eye-glass in a thoughtful sort of way.

"I've been thinkin'," he observed.

"Go it, Smythey!"

Adolphus Smythe glanced round at the meeting in his study.

It was quite a numerous gathering of the nutty juniors, the select circle who rejoiced in the title of the "Giddy Goats of Rookwood."

There were Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower of the Fourth, and Tracy and Howard and Chesney of the Shell, as well as the great Adolphus Smythe himself.

They were discussing Mornington II.

Mornington Secundus was, in fact, quite a topic at Rookwood. Even the mighty Sixth Form deigned to be interested in him.

It was more than a nine-days' wonder. 'Erbert of the Second Form, the waif of Rookwood, the little ragamuffin who had been treated with studied contempt by Smythe & Co., had suddenly been transformed into a person of great consequence.

And Mornington of the Fourth—Morny the Magnificent—had, with equal suddenness, fallen from his high estate, like Lucifer, Son of the Morning.

Naturally, Smythe of the Shell had been doing some "thinkin'" on the subject. He now proceeded to acquaint his nutty comrades with the outcome of his unusual mental exercises.

"Morny," said Smythe, "always was a bit of an outsider. Morny of the Fourth, I mean."

"Always!" agreed Tracy.

"Insolent rotter, if you ask me," said

Townsend. "Never quite civil, even to his pals. Not that I ever regarded him as much of a pal."

"In fact, we had practically dropped him before this happened," remarked Topham.

"Yaas, that's so."

"Now it appears that he was practically takin' us in," said Smythe. "We understood that he was no end of a great gun—rollin' in wealth, an' all that. Not that we cared anythin' about his rotten money. He kept his cousin dark. Nobody knew he had a missin' cousin. Now his merry Cousin Cecil turns up, an' turns out to be heir to the Mornington estates—an' takes everythin'—Morny is practically a beggar."

"Hard up as that cad Rawson!" smiled Gower.

"Yaas. I regard Morny as havin' squirmed into our set on false pretences," continued Adolphus. "My idea is that Morny's goin' to be dropped—sharp! He was never anythin' but an outsider at the best. I'm done with him, for one. I can't stand a fellow who puts on side, an' turns out to be a nobody, after all."

"Right as rain, old chap!"

"But what about that kid 'Erbert?" resumed Smythe, lighting a cigarette with thoughtful care. "Of course, we treated him with the contempt he deserved, when he was supposed to be a tramp picked off the high road, an' shoved into Rookwood to mix with the fellows here on equal terms. I regarded it as shockin'."

"It was shockin'!" said Howard.

"Yaas. But it turns out that this ragamuffin is really Morny's missin' cousin, kidnapped by gypsies, or somethin'. Under those circes, I think we can be lenient with him. He really never had a chance, had he?"

"He hadn't!" agreed the nuts.

"Now he's taken Morny's place—there's no doubt about it, for old Stacpoole has been down, an' recognised him as his relation an' ward, and the Head's had his name changed to Mornington on the school books."

"No doubt at all, old scout."

"And he'll be fairly rollin' in money, too," remarked Peele. "Just like poor old Morny in his palmy days."

"Never mind his money," said Smythe hastily. "We're not thinkin' of his money!"

"Ahem! Of course not."

"But my idea is to do justice to the kid!"

"Oh!"

"He never had a chance," said Adolphus nobly. "Stolen by gypsies, and left to bring himself up—it's no wonder he can't speak the King's English, an' eats with his knife, an' drops H's and things. He's been hardly treated, you know, an' I really think we ought to take some notice of him. In our society, he may pick up manners an' customs suited to what turns out to be his station in life. I regard it as a duty—a benevolent duty!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Peele.

"It will be rather a trial to our feelin's," went on Adolphus. "But when duty calls, you know. I dare say we can make somethin' of the little beast! Teach him manners, an' all that. Anyway, we're goin' to try. Is that agreed?"

"Yes, rather."

"It would only be kind," said Townsend generously.

"He's rather a savage little beast, though," said Tracy of the Shell. "My minor, in the Second, made it a point to be civil to him, after this came out, and the utter young ruffian pulled his nose! Pulled my minor's nose, you know!"

"H'm!" said Adolphus. "Well, he won't pull my nose, I fancy. Hallo, come in!" added Smythe, as a tap came at the door.

The door opened, and Valentine Mornington stepped in.

There was a general stir of uneasiness among the nuts in the study as they saw the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington had never been liked much by his nutty pals in his wealthy days of importance.

Now that he had fallen from his high estate, his former pals remembered all his insolence, and fully intended to repay it with insolence.

Not that they would have acted any differently if Morny had been as thoroughly decent a fellow as Jimmy Silver or Tom Rawson. Smythe & Co. had no use for a pal who was down on his luck.

But the remembrance of much high-handed superciliousness gave a sort of zest to the process of "droppin'" him.

Smythe of the Shell put up his eyeglass, and surveyed the newcomer with a lofty glance.

He did not speak.

Nobody spoke.

The usual cordial chorus of "Come in, Morny, old chap!" was conspicuous by its absence.

There was a dead silence, and if some of the nuts were a little uneasy, it was because they knew Mornington's savage temper, and wondered whether his exclusion from the nutty circle would lead to some passionate outbreak.

The nuts of Rookwood were not fighting-men, and had a great dislike for fist-cuffs. And there never was really any telling what Mornington of the Fourth might or might not do.

Valentine Mornington looked at them, his well-cut lips curling sarcastically.

"You don't seem especially glad to see me!" he remarked.

Smythe jammed his monocle a little tighter into his eye.

"I don't remember askin' you to my study!" he remarked.

"Fact is, we're rather busy," said Tracy.

"Would you mind closin' the door after you, Mornington?" inquired Chesney, with great politeness.

Mornington stood and looked at them.

It was only too evident that he was no longer the wealthy and important Morny whom the nuts of Rookwood delighted to honour.

"I rather expected somethin' of this sort!" he remarked, after a pause. "You are livin' up to my opinion of you, dear boys."

"The fact is," said Smythe calmly, "we regard you as havin' spoofed us, Mornington. You weren't what you represented yourself to be. I won't say it was false pretences, but it was somethin' very much like it."

"You're not yearnin' for my company now, it seems," remarked Mornington.

"Never was!" said Smythe coolly. "You were always too cheeky for my taste, an' I regard you as havin' forced yourself on me. An' I tell you candidly, Mornington, the less I have to do with you, the better I shall like it."

"I understand!" assented Mornington.

"Glad you do! Close the door after you, dear boy."

"I'm goin'," said Mornington quietly. "But before I go, I feel bound to express my opinion of you, old fellow."

"Look here— Oh, my hat! Yah!"

Mornington made a sudden stride towards Adolphus Smythe, and seized his nose between a finger and thumb that seemed to close like a vice.

Smythe leaped to his feet, spluttering out his cigarette.

"Yow! Led do! Led do by dose!" he stuttered.

Mornington compressed his grip ruthlessly, till the dandy of the Shell howled with anguish.

The nuts were all on their feet now.

But no hand was raised against Mornington. After all, Smythe was big enough to look after himself, if he chose.

Perhaps he did not choose. He aimed a blow at Morny, which the Fourth-Former knocked aside with his left.

Then Smythe's attention seemed to be chiefly devoted to dancing and gurgling.

"Groogh! Led do! Ow! Yow! By gad! Yah! Oh!"

Mornington grinned, and let go at last. Smythe clasped his damaged nose with both hands, gasping with pain and fury. Mornington cast a glance of careless defiance at the nuts, turned on his heel, and walked out of the study.

Tracy kicked the door shut after him.

The nuts looked at one another rather uncertainly.

"Ruffianly beast!" muttered Howard.

"Awful outsider!" murmured Chesney.

"Not worth lickin'!"

And from Smythe came, in a kind of running chorus:

"Ow, ow! Oh, by dose—by dose! Ow, ow, ow!"

CHAPTER 2.

Adolphus Tries it On!

"FEELING very chirpy—what?"

Jimmy Silver of the Fourth clapped the waif of Rookwood on the shoulder as he spoke, with a smile.

'Erbert of the Second—now known in Rookwood as Mornington II.—looked up at the captain of the Fourth with a grin. Though it was known now that his name was Cecil Mornington, the fag was never likely to be called anything but "'Erbert," as of old.

"Yes, Master Silver," he said.

Jimmy shook a finger at him.

"What do you mean with your Master Silver?" he demanded. "Don't you know that you're a person of tremendous consequence, much more important than a common person like myself?"

"Oh, Master Silver!" said 'Erbert, with a chuckle.

"Made a lot of friends since the news came out—what?" asked Lovell.

Another chuckle from 'Erbert.

"Tracy minor 'ave tried to make friends with me," he said. "He was always turnin' up his nose at me afore. Now he's been showin' a lot of friendship, an' I've pulled his nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fistical Four.

"And how are you getting on with Mornington the First?" asked Jimmy.

'Erbert's bright face clouded a little.

"He's very kind," he said. "He's took it splendid. But—but it's rotten to take away wed belongs to Master Morny, ain't it? I don't like it! I said to the old bloke—"

"Eh? What old bloke?" asked Newcome.

"Sir Rupert Staepoole—Morny's guardian," explained 'Erbert. "He's my guardian now, too! I says to him, I'm goin' 'arves with Morny."

"Good for you!" said Jimmy Silver.

"But he says, says he, that ain't possible," said 'Erbert distressfully. "All that there money is mine, but I can't touch it till I'm twenty-one, only my allowance. So he says, says he, I can't go 'arves with Morny."

"Of course you can't, you young ass," said Raby, with a grin. "You can when you're of age, if you like, so far as the property isn't entailed."

"I told Morny that, and he larfed," said 'Erbert. "He won't take nothin' from me, an' I don't like it. He done enough for me, didn't he, afore it was known that I was his relation. But he's set on my doing nothing for him. That ain't nice for me."

"Oh, Morny's all right!" said Jimmy Silver. "He's got his uncle, you know; and he's going into the Army when he grows up. I suppose you're getting a bigger allowance now—what?"

"Yes, Master Silver."

"Would you like a tip from an old pal?"

"Cert'nly, sir."

"Well, look after your money, and look twice at fellows who pal with you who didn't pal with you before," said Jimmy Silver. "There's some black sheep in this school, and you want to give them a wide berth. See?"

'Erbert nodded.

"I'll remember that, Master Silver. I knows wot you mean, and I ain't exactly a duffer, you know."

Jimmy Silver nodded, and walked on with his chums. Jimmy had always been kind to the waif of Rookwood, before 'Erbert's good luck came along, and he had felt impelled to give him that word of advice. Jimmy knew the kind of friends who would gather round 'Erbert in his prosperity.

Probably 'Erbert knew it, too. In his early days as a ragamuffin, he had had his young wits sharpened.

Good fortune had not brought all pleasure to 'Erbert.

The fact that he had taken his cousin's place as heir of Mornington, though against his will, troubled him. His first thought had been to "go halves" with Mornington, and he had been distressed when he found out that that was impossible.

He was thinking a great deal more about Morny than about himself. What would the lofty and magnificent Morny do, deprived of his wealth and his prospects of greater wealth?

Morny, 'Erbert felt, was born to adorn a high station, and poor 'Erbert was not. It did not seem to him, fair, somehow, that Morny should lose so much and that he should gain so much without even having a voice in the matter.

Had Mornington taken it badly, 'Erbert would have been wounded to the very heart. But Mornington was taking it well.

It had been bitter enough to him at first; but the dandy of the Fourth "faced the music" with his usual coolness and nerve, and he had found himself able to bear the change with equanimity.

It meant a great change.

Instead of being the wealthiest fellow at Rookwood, Mornington was now dependent on his uncle and guardian, and was certainly not better off than most of the fellows at Rookwood. He was worse off than a good many.

And he was dependent!

That was the unkindest cut of all, and Morny felt it.

He had taken his cousin's offer of "halves" with good-humoured merriment. He did not think it likely that 'Erbert would hold to that when he came of an age to dispose of his wealth. Morny's faith in human nature was not great.

But 'Erbert meant it sincerely enough, and he would have been very glad to share

his prosperity with the fellow who had been, with all his faults, his generous benefactor.

'Erbert was thinking it over, after Jimmy Silver & Co. had left him, with a wrinkle in his brow. His meditations were interrupted by the drawling voice of Smythe of the Shell.

"Hallo! All on your own, kid?"

'Erbert looked at him.

Smythe's manner towards the waif of Rookwood had always been one of the most profound and unconcealed contempt and aversion.

That manner had changed completely now.

Even the fact that 'Erbert was a fag of the Second Form, and that Adolphus was the ornament of the Middle School, made no difference to Smythe's extreme friendliness.

He was, in fact, beaming upon the fag with the utmost cordiality.

The heir of Mornington was a fellow worth knowing, on Smythe's principles. More than that, Adolphus had had bad luck lately in the billiard-room at the Bird-in-Hand, and he was short of tin.

'Erbert, and the noble game of banker in the study, offered an easy and honourable means of replenishing an exhausted exchequer.

"I've been lookin' for you!" said Smythe graciously.

"Ave you?" said 'Erbert.

Smythe shuddered slightly. The dropped aspirate got on his aristocratic nerves still. But he nobly concealed his distaste.

"Yaas, dear boy," he replied.

"Who's a dear boy?" asked 'Erbert deliberately.

"Eh? You are, you know!"

"Last time you spoke to me I was a measly little toad," said 'Erbert. "'Ow 'ave I changed into a dear boy?"

Smythe coughed.

Really, his change of attitude required some explaining away. He had considered that 'Erbert would be so honoured at being taken notice of that he would be glad to let bygones be bygones. Apparently that was not the case.

Adolphus coughed, and coughed again.

'Erbert looked at him with a sarcastic grin.

"My dear chap, I apologise," said Smythe, taking the plunge, as it were. "I'm sorry if I—ahem!—if I—"

"No if about it," said 'Erbert. "You did!"

"Well, a fellow can't do more than express his regrets," said Adolphus. "Let it go at that, dear boy."

"Cert'nly!" said 'Erbert. "But are you sure I am a dear boy?"

"Eh?"

"S'pose I was to change back into a measly little toad 'again?" suggested 'Erbert.

"Ahem!"

"Or a 'orrid little ragamuffin?" said 'Erbert, recalling some more of Smythe's agreeable expressions. "Or a nasty little waster?"

Smythe was rather at a loss. He changed the subject.

"Had your tea?" he asked.

"No, I ain't!"

"Come and have it in my study," said Smythe hospitably. "We've got rather a spread goin'. Lots, in fact!"

"No, thanks! I don't want to have nothing to do with you, anyway!" said 'Erbert.

And he turned his back and marched off. Adolphus Smythe stood rooted to the ground.

He—Adolphus Smythe, the dandy of the Shell, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form to all junior Rookwood—was cut!

It quite took his breath away.

"By gad!" he ejaculated, at last.

And as Smythe slowly departed, with pink cheeks, he ejaculated again, several times, "By gad!" And 'Erbert of the Second did not come to tea in Smythe's study!

CHAPTER 3.

The Mighty Fallen!

KIT ERROLL's brow darkened.

He had gone into Mornington's study in the Fourth to speak to his chum. Morny was not there, and Erroll stood looking out of the window while he waited for him. He spotted Mornington coming across the quad towards the School House.

There were a good many fellows in the quad, whom Mornington had passed on his way.

Jimmy Silver & Co. nodded genially to the dandy of the Fourth, and Morny stopped a minute or two to speak to the Pistical Four.

Then he came on towards the House, outside which Townsend and Topham and Lattrey of the Fourth were chatting in a group.

Mornington passed quite close to them.

The three nuts of the Fourth stared at him in the most deliberate way, without a sign of recognition.

It was then that Erroll's brow knitted as he looked down from the window.

Mornington had been cut by his former associates—cut in open quad by the fellows who had been glad to be his hangers-on.

A slight flush crept into Mornington's cheeks, but he walked on without giving any other sign that he had noted the "cut direct."

When he had passed, Lattrey and his comrades grinned at one another.

Erroll could see how they enjoyed cutting the lofty Morny, who had snubbed them often enough in the days when he was sought after.

"The cads!" muttered Erroll. "The rotten cads!"

Nearer the House, Morny fell in with Van Ryn, Pons, and Conroy, the Colonial trio. The three Colonials had never been on good terms with Morny in his wealthy days.

He was a black sheep, and they did not like black sheep. But the three of them stopped now, and began speaking to him, and Morny laughed.

He knew—as Erroll, looking on, knew—that Conroy & Co. had made it a point to show civility to Morny because he was down on his luck.

Mornington left the Colonials, and near the porch came upon Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood.

Tubby Muffin had never been treated by the lofty Morny with the respect that he felt was his due. Morny had never concealed his contempt, in fact, for the fat, greedy fellow; and Tubby, who wasn't a bad fellow apart from his inordinate appetite, had resented it keenly.

Tubby had never displayed his resentment, having a deep, inborn respect for wealth. But Morny's wealth was now a thing of the past, and Tubby, too, appeared to consider that his hour had come.

As Morny approached, Tubby's fat face was distorted into a scornful sneer of the largest proportion.

Morny caught his look, and paused.

"Hallo! Anythin' wrong with you, podgy?" he asked.

The fat Classical's sneer intensified. It was intended to convey the most unbounded contempt.

"Is that St. Vitus' dance you've got?" inquired Mornington.

Tubby waved a fat hand at him.

"Don't speak to me!" he said.

"What?"

"I don't desire your acquaintance."

"By gad!"

Tubby's lips curled more terrifically than ever. The effect was extremely comic, though Tubby meant it to be impressive.

"You're not the kind of fellow I want to know," said Tubby crushingly. "You'll oblige me by keeping your distance."

And Tubby turned his back loftily, and rolled away.

His departure was meant to be stately. But the effect was spoiled by Morny, who strode after him and planted his boot in the rear of Tubby Muffin's fat person.

"Yaroo!"

Tubby Muffin roared at that unexpected attack in the rear, and staggered forward and fell on his hands and knees.

"Yow-ow-ow! Yah! Oh!" roared Tubby.

Mornington looked at him and laughed, and walked into the house.

But there was a dark frown on his face when he came into his study. He nodded to Kit Erroll as the latter turned from the window.

"Do you still know me?" he inquired.

Erroll smiled.

"Yes, Morny. I saw those cads from the window. They're not worth your taking any notice of them!"

"I know they're not!" said Mornington, compressing his lips. "I feel like kickin' them round the quad, all the same. I've passed Smythe an' Howard an' Tracy, an' they all turned their backs on me!"

"Miserable rotters!" said Erroll.

"An' you saw Townsend and Topy an' Tubby Muffin—"

Erroll laughed.

"Never mind Tubby; he hasn't brains enough to know what he's doing," he said. "As for the others, you're better off without them."

"It's irritatin', all the same," growled Mornington. "They used to hang around me, and put up with anythin' I chose. Now they don't know me. I don't want to know them, but it's irritatin'. I've a jolly good mind—" He broke off. "Oh, bother

them; they're not worth thinking about! More serious things than that to think of."

"It's a big change for you," said Erroll. "All the fellows think you've taken it splendidly."

Mornny shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not goin' to whine because I'm down on my luck," he said. Besides, I'm not quite a beggar. I shan't have to scud after a scholarship like Rawson. I don't like bein' dependent upon my Uncle Stacpoole, but I can stand it. I shall have to keep clear of my Stacpoole cousins; they'd rub it in. They never liked me!"

"Perhaps—"

Erroll hesitated.

"Ha, ha! You're quite right—I never gave 'em cause to," said Mornnington, guessing the unspoken thought. "I dare say I put on too much side for them. They were my poor relations, in a way! Now I'm a lot poorer than they are! Still, they're not a nice gang. Old Stacpoole is goin' to keep me at Rookwood an' pay my fees, but he won't have to pay 'Erbert's fees any longer. I'm going to have a moderate allowance—about as much as a chap like Jimmy Silver has—out of my uncle's pocket."

"Jimmy makes his allowance do."

"And I can learn to," said Mornnington, with a nod. "After all, there's not much to spend money on. I suppose I can do without cards and smokes and geegees."

"And you will be all the better without them, Mornny. Football will be coming along soon, and that will be a bit better than geegees."

Mornnington nodded.

He was trying to get used to his new position, but it was a wrench at first. It was a very new experience to the dandy of Rookwood to have to consider whether he could "afford" anything he wanted. Upon the whole, he was taking it very well, and Erroll was relieved.

There was a tap at the door, and 'Erbert came in. Erroll, with a nod, quitted the study, leaving the cousins together.

"Well, how are you enjoyin' your new feathers, 'Erbert?" asked Mornnington, with a touch of sarcasm.

'Erbert coloured.

"I ain't enjoyin' 'em, Master Mornny," he said. "I wish as 'ow it hadn't happened. I never wanted to take your money away!"

"Well, it wasn't your fault, kid! Don't

think about it," said Mornnington. "You've got me as a poor relation, but—"

"Don't talk like that, Master Mornny. Look 'ere—" 'Erbert hesitated. "I've got a lot of money now, sir; more than I want. I gets a lot more than I did, of course."

"You'll find some use for it. Peele will teach you how to play banker," said Mornnington sarcastically, "or Lattrey will initiate you into the joys of poker."

"They've asked me already," said 'Erbert, "and I ain't havin' nothin' to do with 'em, especially that rotter Lattrey. But—but you play banker, Master Mornny!"

"Yes, when I had the money to waste."

"Well, let's 'ave a game," said 'Erbert.

Mornnington stared at him.

"Why, you young rascal! Are you tryin' to lead your innocent cousin upon the downward path?" he ejaculated.

"Well, you play," said 'Erbert. "I don't see why we shouldn't 'ave a game, 'ere in the study."

"You young ass, I should clean you out, as clean as a whistle."

"I wouldn't mind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornnington, as he comprehended. "You young duffer! Do you think you're goin' to give me your money by that method? Ha, ha, ha!"

'Erbert stood crimson.

"You young ass, I'm not goin' to rob you," said Mornnington, still laughing. "But there's one thing you can do for me, if you like!"

"Anything, Master Mornny," said 'Erbert eagerly.

"Promise me not to play cards for money with anybody, or let anybody get you to put money on horses."

It was curious enough for the black sheep of Rookwood to be exacting a promise of that kind from the fag. But Mornnington was in earnest.

What was good enough for him he did not regard as good enough for 'Erbert, apparently, and he foresaw the temptations the now wealthy fag would meet with.

"That's a go, Master Mornny," said 'Erbert cheerfully. "I promise that! I don't want to do nothin' of the kind. But I wish you'd—"

"Bow-wow!" said Mornnington, and the subject was dropped.

But when 'Erbert left the study his face was very cheerful. In spite of the changt

in their position, the junior he admired owed him no grudge, and was as kind to him as he had ever been. And that was a great comfort to 'Erbert.

CHAPTER 4.

Evicted!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. found themselves getting on much better with Valentine Mornington than in the old days. The Colonial Co. found him much more tolerable, too.

Tommy Dodd and his friends, of the Modern side, pronounced that Morny wasn't a bad chap, in the main. For the time, at least, the best part of Morny's nature seemed to be brought to light by the change in his circumstances.

Morny found, too, that there were many things he could do without—the wealth he had loved was not, after all, necessary to his comfort. And the simple fact that he could not afford to play the "giddy goat" kept him from many of his old, shady amusements, and he was all the better for it in every way.

Morny was not quite reformed, certainly; but he was on the right road.

Erroll thought it would be easy for him to regard with contemptuous indifference the supercilious looks of Smythe & Co.

But Morny did not seem to find that so easy.

Smythe and the other nuts of the Shell repaid a good many old grudges now by ignoring the fellow they had once sought after and flattered. Townsend and Topham cut him dead.

Lattrey of the Fourth was as unpleasant as he could make himself, which is saying a good deal. Even Morny's study-mates in No. 4—Peele and Gower—were cold and contemptuous.

Morny kept up an appearance of indifference, but this treatment at the hands of his old associates made his eyes glitter at times.

He realised, perhaps, that he was only being repaid with interest for a good deal of "swank" at the time when he could afford to swank. But he resented it as keenly as if he had been faultless.

And Peele and Gower found that his patience had limits. They were having

tea one day in No. 4, when Mornington came in. In order to irritate their study-mate as much as possible, the amiable pair always lingered over their tea in the study, carefully ignoring Mornington all the time.

They ostentatiously ignored his entrance on this occasion. But on this occasion Morny was not to be ignored.

"You fellows nearly finished?" he asked politely.

"I don't know about takin' up football, Gower," said Peele, apparently deaf to Morny's voice. "Too much fag, you know!"

"I asked you a question," remarked Mornington.

"Besides, Silver wouldn't put us in the team," continued Peele. "I don't care about playin' with Silver, either."

"I asked you if you'd nearly finished," said Mornington calmly. "As you don't answer, I'll take it that you've finished. You can get out!"

"Pass the jam, Peele," said Gower, unheeding.

Peele was about to pass the jam when Morny grasped the back of his chair and dragged it away from the table.

As his chair disappeared from under him, Peele sprawled on the floor with a yell.

Gower jumped up.

"You cad!" he exclaimed. "What are you up to?"

"I'm goin' to turn you out of this study," said Mornington calmly. "I don't care for you two as study-mates!"

"Wha-a-at!"

Peele scrambled up, red with rage.

"You cheeky hound!" he roared.

Mornington pointed to the door.

"Do you think we're going to be turned out of our own study by you?" roared Peele, forgetting even to drop his final g's in his excitement.

"Yaas!"

"You cheeky rotter!"

"Draw it mild, you poverty-stricken cad!" growled Gower.

"Are you goin'?" asked Mornington coolly.

"No, you rotter!"

"Then you'll be put out!"

Mornington pushed back his cuffs and advanced upon the two nuts of the Fourth.

Peele and Gower drew together, angry and alarmed. With all Mornny's high-handed ways, they had never dreamed of this.

"Keep off, you beast!" howled Gower. Biff! Bump! Mornnington was hitting out right and left.

As the nuts were two to one, they certainly ought to have been able to defend themselves. But they did not seem able to. Under Mornny's fierce attack they were driven to the doorway, resisting feebly.

Mornnington was a good boxer, and his pluck and recklessness were unlimited. On the other side, those qualities were very limited indeed.

In a few minutes the two furious juniors were driven headlong out of the study into the passage.

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?" sang out Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four came along, bound for the end study to tea.

"Go it, both sides!" said Lovell impartially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm turnin' these cads out!" explained Mornnington. "I'm not goin' to allow them to dig in my study any longer."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You rotter!" howled Peele. "I'll go straight to Mr. Bootles—"

"Do!" said Mornnington. "That won't prevent me from thrashin' you whenever you show your nose in this room!"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Peele.

"Why don't you wade in?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "You're two to one. If you let Mornny turn you out, you deserve all you get!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Sure, discretion is the better part of valour!" chuckled Flynn of the Fourth. "Peele's simply burnin' for combat, but he's exercisin' heroic self-restraint. Ain't you, Peele?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A crowd of the Classical Fourth had gathered in the passage, attracted by the row. The mocking laughter of the juniors drove Peele and Gower to make an attempt at least to recover their rights. They exchanged a look, and rushed in suddenly to tackle Mornnington.

But the dandy of the Fourth was ready for them.

He stood up to the two with perfect coolness, and his left and right came out like lightning.

Peele went backwards into the passage from a crashing blow on the chin, and Gower found himself fighting Mornny single-handed. He was driven round the study under a shower of blows.

"Leave off, you beast!" howled Gower. "I'm goin'!"

He dodged hurriedly out of the study, stumbling over Peele in his haste.

There was a roar of laughter from the juniors.

Mornnington commenced throwing out his study-mates' belongings after them.

There was a shower of books and other articles in the passage.

Then he closed the door.

Peele and Gower, red with rage, but not caring to renew the contest, slunk away. Mornnington remained in possession of Study No. 4.

A little later the two evicted juniors came back, gathered up their property, and carried it away to Lattrey's study. And a little later still, Mornnington's door was opened, and Tubby Muffin's fat face, full of dismay, looked in.

"Get out, you fat bounder!" growled Mornnington.

"I—I say, Mornny—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Lattrey's turned me out of the study," said Tubby Muffin dolorously. "He says he's going to have Peele and Gower for his study-mates now, so there won't be room for me. He kicked me, the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I shall have to come in here, you know!" said Tubby.

"Do, if you want me to help you out with my boot," said Mornnington grimly.

"Look here, Mornny—"

Mornnington reached for a cushion, and Tubby Muffin closed the door and fled. Ten minutes later it opened again, and Mornnington looked round angrily. But it was Kit Erroll who entered, and Mornny's frown changed to a smile. Erroll was smiling, too, as he came in.

"It seems that you've turned out your study-mates?" he remarked.

Mornny laughed, and nodded.

"And Lattrey's taken them in. And Tubby Muffin is without a home for his weary head."

"I'm not goin' to have him here!"

"Would you care to have me here?"

Mornington jumped up.

"You! Yes, rather! I hadn't thought of that!"

"Well, Higgs and Jonck minor are willing to take in Tubby instead of me, so if you like——"

"Good egg!" said Mornington, with great satisfaction.

But the feelings of Peele and Gower were beyond words.

CHAPTER 5.

Startling News!

TUBBY MUFFIN was the first to hear the good news.

Great news it undoubtedly was, as the nuts of Rookwood acknowledged when they heard it.

A week had passed since Kit Erroll had become Mornny's study-mate, and since Peele and Gower had been so ignominiously expelled from No. 4.

During that week the nuts of Rookwood had been very careful to treat the fallen dandy of the Fourth with supercilious disdain.

More than once Mornny's temper had been on the point of breaking out, but he had restrained himself.

And now came the startling news via Tubby Muffin!

Tubby, full of importance, presented himself in his old study, now shared by Lattrey, Peele, and Gower.

Those three cheery youths were improving the shining hour before prep with a game of nap on the study-table.

Lattrey reached for a stump as Tubby looked in.

But Tubby did not retreat. He was simply bursting with what he had discovered.

"I say," he gasped, "it's amazing, you know! Mornington——"

"Bother Mornington!" growled Peele.

"And bother you! Get out!"

"Yes, but Mornington——"

"Buzz off, you fat beetle!"

"But I tell you it's all a mistake!"

shouted Tubby in triumph. "Mornny ain't done in after all! He ain't hard up. And that young bouncer 'Erbert ain't his cousin at all! It's all a mistake! What do you think of that?"

"What!"

The stump dropped from Lattrey's hand.

"By gad!" said Peele.

"My only hat!" stammered Gower. "All a m-m-mistake!"

"It's lies!" exclaimed Lattrey savagely. "The fat fool's trying to pull our leg. I know there's no mistake!"

"There is!" gasped Tubby. "I just heard 'em talking about it—Mornny and 'Erbert, you know. They're out there under the beeches now, if you like to look. They didn't see me——"

"You eavesdroppin' cad!" said Peele.

"I wasn't listening!" exclaimed Tubby indignantly. "Nothing of the kind. I simply happened to stop to rest under the tree. I saw them confabbing, you know, and wondered what it was all about—I mean, I didn't wonder——"

Tubby Muffin broke off, as Lattrey grasped him by the shoulder and shook him angrily.

"Look here, you fat fool——"

"Yow! Leggo!"

"Tell me what you heard, you babbling idiot!"

"Get it out, you silly fool!" growled Gower.

"Ain't I trying to tell you?" gasped Tubby. "They were talking it over. Mornny was looking awfully pleased, and 'Erbert was rather down in the mouth."

"He would be, if it's true!" grinned Peele.

"Mornny was saying he was sorry he was disappointed, and he would look after him just the same as he used to. Old staepoole's coming down about it. It's come out that the real Cecil Mornington died when he was a kid, and they've found proof of it."

"Impossible!" muttered Lattrey.

"I don't see that it's impossible," said Peele. "After all, it was a bit thick, that ragged wastrel turnin' out to be Mornington's cousin, and heir to a fortune an' all that. I thought it was very thick."

"Same here," agreed Gower. "A bit too thick, if you ask me. I remember remarkin' to Smythe that very likely it

was all a mistake, or a swindle, or something."

"I thought so all along!" announced Tubby Muffin. "I never quite swallowed it, you know. It seems that Morny thought it was true, because 'Erbert's got a mark on his shoulder like the Mornington birthmark."

"He has," growled Lattrey. "I've seen it."

"But he's not Morny's cousin, and I never really believed he was," grinned Tubby Muffin. "Morny's heard from his uncle, and he's going to the Head about it."

Lattrey looked out of the study window. Mornington and 'Erbert could be seen, in the distance, seated upon an old oaken bench under the beeches, in animated talk.

As Lattrey stared towards them savagely, they rose and came towards the house.

Mornington's step was jaunty. The waif of Rookwood walked with his eyes on the ground, as if in gloomy thought.

Certainly their aspect bore out Tubby Muffin's amazing story.

Lattrey hurried from the study, and downstairs.

He met Mornington as he came into the House, and gave him a quick, searching look. Mornington took no heed of him! He walked away to the Head's study, tapped, and went in.

Lattrey returned to his study.

"Seen him?" asked Peele.

"He's gone in to the Head!"

"By gad! That looks like it, then!"

"Let's go and see 'Erbert," suggested Gower.

The three nuts left the study, and Tubby Muffin rolled along the passage to impart his wonderful news to other interested juniors.

Lattrey & Co. found 'Erbert downstairs, staring out of the hall window with a knitted brow. Lattrey clapped him on the shoulder.

"Thinking it out, kid?" he asked affably.

"I don't see as it matters to you," said 'Erbert.

"Is Muffin's latest yarn true, or isn't it?" demanded Lattrey sayagely.

"Find out!"

Lattrey clenched his hands, and advanced on the fag. A strong hand was laid on his collar, and he was swung round to

look into the smiling face of Jimmy Silver.

"Spoiling for a fight—what?" asked Jimmy cheerily. "I'm your man!"

"Let go my collar, hang you!"

Jimmy let go his collar, first giving him a twist, and Lattrey spun away and sat down hard.

"I've been looking for you, 'Erbert," said Jimmy. "There's a yarn going round that you're not Morny's cousin, after all, and it's all a mistake. Tubby says he heard it."

"He's a sneaking, listening rotter!" said 'Erbert.

"You don't seem to mind much," said Jimmy.

"I'd rather Master Morny 'ad the money than me," said 'Erbert.

Jimmy whistled.

"Well, I was going to sympathise, but you don't seem to need it," he said. "I suppose Morny feels rather chirpy?"

"He looks it!" grinned Peele.

Smythe of the Shell came along with Howard, evidently having heard Tubby Muffin's yarn. The Shell fellows looked excited.

"Is it true?" exclaimed Smythe.

'Erbert did not answer.

"Out with it, kid!" said Howard. "I never quite swallowed the story. I couldn't quite believe that you came of a gentleman's family, you young ragamuffin."

"Ain't I a dear boy now?" sneered 'Erbert. "Don't you want me to come into your study for a game of nap?"

Howard coloured.

"If you come into my study, you'll jolly well get kicked out!" he said curtly.

"Losing your friends already, kid!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"I shan't miss 'em, sir—not that sort."

"Then it's true!" said Adolphus Smythe, wrinkling his brows. "By gad, I shouldn't wonder if Morny knew it all along; it's just one of his jokes on his pals."

"Oh, by gad!" said Howard.

"Well, now you've fallen from your high estate, 'Erbert, come and have tea in my study," said Jimmy Silver.

'Erbert grinned, and trotted off with the captain of the Fourth. Lovell and Raby and Newcome met him, in the end study,

with sympathetic looks. But 'Erbert did not seem in need of sympathy.

"So your giddy riches have taken unto themselves wings and flown away?" said Lovell.

'Erbert hesitated.

"I—I'd like to tell you fellows somethin', if you won't talk about it outside this 'ere study," he said.

"Silent as the merry tomb!" said Raby. "Go ahead!"

"'Erbert went ahead. And when he had finished there was a howl of laughter in the end study. Apparently 'Erbert's communication had been of a surprising and also a humorous nature.

CHAPTER 5.

A Happy Reconciliation!

SMYTHE & CO. had gathered in Adolphus' study, with serious looks.

Morny, coming away from the Head's study, had passed them in the passage, with his aristocratic nose in the air.

They had nodded to him, experimentally, as it were. Mornington had ignored their existence.

He was quite the old lofty Mornington again, and apparently not in the least inclined to accept the olive-branch from his former pals.

If Smythe & Co. had needed any further proof of the story, this would have furnished it.

The council in Smythe's study was a troubled one.

Mornington was the old Mornington again—wealthy and important, a "fellow worth knowin'." And they had "cut" the dandy of the Fourth—they had "dropped" the wealthiest fellow at Rookwood!

Doubtless Morny's little card-parties would be resumed—his expensive driving-parties—all the luxurious indulgences in which the nuts had taken a liberal share in Morny's old days of prosperity.

And they would not be asked to them!

The wealthy Morny would be surrounded by friends; and they would not have the entree into the magic circle.

Smythe & Co. could have kicked themselves!

Gower, for instance, had made a regular income out of Morny at banker and nap. Peele had always had his expenses paid when he went anywhere with Morny.

Smythe had been proud to be seen with the wealthiest and best-dressed fellow at Rookwood—to join him in great motor-drives, and yachting-runs in the vacation. Morny, in his wealthy days, had been "worth while"; there was no doubt about that.

And they had thrown it all away!

"The—the fact is," said Smythe, at last, hesitatingly—even Adolphus, perhaps, had some slight sense of shame—"the fact is we've been rather hard on Morny."

"I've been thinkin' so for some time," remarked Tracy.

"He was rather an irritatin' beast, of course—"

"Oh, he wasn't a bad chap!" said Peele. "A bit high-handed, but a wealthy fellow like Morny, you know—"

"I always rather liked him, I must say that!" observed Howard.

"Yaas, at bottom we liked him well enough, and I'm sorry we cut up rusty with him," said Smythe. "Look here, we were rather in the wrong. It ain't pleasant to admit it, but—but we can afford to be candid. We were in the wrong. Well, there's only one thing for a gentleman to do when he's in the wrong—own up and apologise!"

"Just what I was thinkin'," agreed Townsend.

"I'm willin' to apologise to Morny," said Smythe. "I feel that I owe it to him, an' to my own self-respect, you know, when I can see that I was—was hasty."

"That's so."

"Well, what about lookin' in on Morny, and puttin' it to him frankly? Can't do more than say we're sorry."

"He's got a beastly temper," said Gower uneasily.

"Well, if he's a bit touchy, we can look over it," said Smythe magnanimously. "We've been rather rusty, haven't we? I'm prepared to let Morny jaw a bit, to—make up, you know."

"Let's see him," suggested Lattrey.

"You'd better not come, Lattrey," said Adolphus decidedly. "Morny can't stand you. You keep off the grass. Fact is, you're not in our set, and we're not goin' to irritate Morny by takin' you up."

Lattrey gritted his teeth. But the nuts streamed out of the study, leaving him there alone. They were more than willing to throw over the cad of the Fourth, without compunction, if by so doing they could make their peace with Valentine Mornington.

They found Mornny in his study, in cheerful talk with his new study-mate, Erroll. Both the juniors stared at the numerous visitors.

"Hallo! Did I ask you fellows here?" said Mornington.

"You did not!" said Adolphus Smythe, coming forward, with an air of great frankness. "We've come of our own accord, Mornny, to ask you to overlook our havin' treated you rather rottenly. We can see we're in the wrong, and we apologise."

Erroll's lip curled.

But Mornington, keen as he usually was, did not seem to see the underlying motive of the worthy nuts.

"Well, that's puttin' it fairly," he said. "If you mean that."

"We do!"

"Honour bright!"

"We've treated you badly, old chap, and we own up!" said Smythe. "We lost our temper with you, and we're sorry. As pals, we can't say anythin' less."

"All serene," said Mornington cordially. "Bygones are bygones, my infants. By the way, there'll soon be some startlin' news for you."

"Startlin' news!" repeated Smythe, as if he had not heard it already.

"Yes; about young 'Erbert and me," said Mornington.

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. I'm goin' to tell all the fellows in the Common-room presently," said Mornington. "I'm goin' to have tea now."

"Come along to my study for tea, old scout," said Smythe affectionately. "We'll have a little party to celebrate the reconciliation—what?"

"Rippin'!" said Mornington heartily. "You'll excuse me, Erroll?"

"Certainly," said Erroll, with a smile. "I'll drop in on Jimmy Silver."

And Mornington left the study with Smythe & Co.

The nuts were in high good-humour.

The reconciliation had been effected without the slightest difficulty. Mornny had been brought back into the fold, and everything in the garden, so to speak, was lovely.

Fellows who saw Mornny sauntering along the passages with the happy nuts did not need any further confirmation of Tubby's startling yarn.

Lattrey was still in Smythe's study when the party arrived. Mornington raised his eyebrows at the sight of him.

"I didn't expect to meet Lattrey here," he said drily. "If he is your guest, Smythe, I must ask you to excuse me."

He made a movement towards the door. Smythe slipped his arm through Mornington's.

"Not at all, dear boy," he said reassuringly. "I never asked the fellow here, an' I'm hanged if I know what he's doin' here. What do you want here, Lattrey?"

Lattrey gave him a black look, and left the study.

There was quite a merry tea-party in Smythe's study, and later, when the nuts went to the Common-room, Smythe walked elegantly, with his arm linked in that of the dandy of the Fourth, evidently on the most chummy terms with him.

CHAPTER 7.

Shown Up!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were in the Common-room.

Most of the Fourth and the Shell had gathered there, and some of the Third, all interested in the change in Mornington's fortunes.

It was known that Mornny intended to tell the fellows, that evening, exactly what had happened, and all wanted to hear him.

Erroll, who was with the Fistical Four, smiled as the nuts sauntered in, with Valentine Mornington in their midst.

"My hat! The lion and the merry lambs have made it up," grinned Conroy. "Tubby had his yarn right, it seems."

"Looks like it," said Oswald. "Blessed if I'd stand the rotters, if I were Mornny." All eyes were on Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth nodded cheerfully to Jimmy Silver.

"Heard the news?" he asked.

"Yes, I've heard it," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"Somebody seems to have heard me talk-in' to young 'Erbert——"

"Quite by accident, Mornny, old chap!" said Tubby Muffin anxiously. "You know I wouldn't listen, don't you, old fellow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps you fellows would like to hear the particulars," remarked Mornnington. "It's rather an interestin' story."

"Yaas! Go ahead!" said Adolphus encouragingly.

"You'll be pleased to hear that I'm on friendly terms again with my old pals," said Mornnington. "It's so nice to be on friendly terms with chaps a fellow really esteems. Ill-natured people might suspect that my pals have rallied round me because I've come into a fortune again. That would be rotten unjust! Nothin' of that sort about my pals."

The nuts grinned feebly and uneasily.

There never was any telling what Mornnington would say next, and they dreaded his bitter tongue.

"Some of you look like doubting Thomases," resumed Mornnington. "I'm rather shocked. In justice to Smythe and the rest, I'm bound to explain that their motives are perfectly disinterested. You see, I'm as poor as a church mouse!"

"Phwat!" ejaculated Flynn.

"But Tubby says——" began Jones minor.

"Why, I heard you——" gasped Tubby.

Smythe & Co. were looking a little queer.

"Yaas," smiled Mornnington. "I wanted to give my dear old pals a chance of showin' what really splendid fellows they are—see? Knowin' that Tubby would listen if he saw two fellows confabbin', I planted 'Erbert and myself on the bench near him, and began to spin a yarn. As I expected, I soon heard Tubby gruntin' on the other side of the tree——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Tubby Muffin.

"I pitched a really entertainin' yarn for Tubby's exclusive benefit," went on Mornnington calmly. "As I expected, Tubby scudded off to spread it over the whole school."

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. It dawned upon

the fat Classical that his eavesdropping and tattling propensities had been made use of by the dandy of the Fourth, for his own peculiar purposes.

"When I came in, I found that Lattrey was on the track already," continued Mornnington. "So I went to see the Head, to put my name down for a prize exam. I dare say it was thought I was goin' to tell him somethin' else——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Smythe's face was a study.

"The little joke has now gone far enough," said Mornnington. "You may be pleased, or not, to hear that there's nothin' at all in Tubby's yarn. I was only stuffin' him up!"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

"But the little joke's done this much good—it's brought all my old friends rallyin' round me in the hour of adversity," said Mornnington. "Here's Smythe an' Howard an' Towny an' Topsy, an' the rest, all prepared to back me up through weal an' woe——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"You—you——" stuttered Adolphus.

"You spoofin' rotter!" shouted Peela.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornnington looked pained.

"My dear old fellows, surely you're not roundin' on me again!" he ejaculated. "Are you goin' to drop my acquaintance once more, after the happy reconciliation that made us all so merry an' bright?"

Smythe & Co. were crimson.

They realised Mornny's peculiar little game now. He had "shown them up" in a way there was no escaping, in the eyes of all the Lower School.

"You lyin' cad!" yelled Smythe, quite losing his temper. "Don't talk to me! You poverty-stricken cad! Just keep your distance, that's all!"

And Adolphus Smythe stalked away, and his friends followed him, amid a yell of laughter from the juniors.

Mornnington sighed.

"Friendship has its ups and downs in this uncertain world," he remarked. "Here, I'm losn' all my devoted pals again, only an hour after a handsome apology an' a happy reconciliation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's heart-breakin'!" said Mornnington.

"I shall have to take up footer to distract my mind, or I shall pine away an' perish! Fancy my dear old pal Adolphus cuttin' up rusty again so soon!"

CHAPTER 8.

Just Like Jimmy!

"ABOUT Morny."

It was Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, who spoke.

Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, his chums in the end study, replied with really remarkable unanimity:

"Bother Morny!"

And Lovell added, with still more emphasis:

"Blow Morny!"

It was quite evident that Mornington of the Fourth was not popular in the end study.

Jimmy Silver smiled serenely.

"About Morny," he repeated.

"Give us a rest!" urged Raby. "Never mind Morny. We're all fed-up with Morny. Erroll's about the only chap in the Fourth who can really stand him. What about the final with Bagshot, Jimmy?"

"Never mind the final with Bagshot," said Jimmy Silver. "About Morny."

Lovell granted.

"I suppose we've got to have it," he said resignedly. "Well, what about Morny? Cut it short."

"I've been thinking about Morny."

"Lots of pleasanter things to think about, I should say," remarked Raby.

"Morny's down on his luck," said Jimmy.

"Go and call on him, and fall on his manly bosom and weep," suggested Lovell satirically. "He will punch your nose, and serve you right! Morny isn't looking for sympathy. He seems to have become a more sneering beast than ever since he's been down on his luck."

"He's been treated pretty badly," said Jimmy. "We never could quite pull with him, but he was chummy with the nuts—Towny and Topsy, and Peele and Gower, and Smythe of the Shell, and the rest. They've cut him dead."

"No great loss to him!"

"Well, no; only he's neglected to cultivate the friendship of really nice fellows like us, you see, so he's left on his lonely own.

excepting for Erroll. Now, Morny as a swanker, purse-proud bounder was rather hard to stand. But he can't have much swank left now. I think we might give him a chance."

"Br-r-r!" said Lovell.

"After all, he's a good cricketer," said Jimmy.

"And a precious blackguard!" said Lovell.

"He's even got friendly with Lattrey again—that shady beast! I know jolly well he was out of bounds only yesterday, playing billiards at a pub. Dash it all, Jimmy, I don't want to set up as a superior person, but a fellow must draw a line somewhere."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Agreed. All the same, I think that now Morny's down on his luck, and the nutty fellows have cut him, we might give him a chance. He can't have much tin for billiards and geegees now. I think we might be friendly, and give him a show, and encourage him to stick to cricket, and all that. It would be only decent to let bygones be bygones, now a fellow's so awfully down on his luck. Dash it all, it's a bit of a sudden change, to become one of the poorest fellows in the school, after being the wealthiest!"

Lovell gave Jimmy Silver a look in which affectionate regard was curiously mixed with exasperation.

"Same old Jimmy!" he grunted. "One never knows with Morny. He's the kind of bounder to bite the hand that strokes him."

"I'm not going to stroke him."

"Fathead! You know what I mean."

"And you know what I mean," said Jimmy Silver, rising. "Let's go and call on Mornington, and be civil to him. He's bound to like it, I should say. His pals have dropped him dead, and he's always been more or less on bad terms with all the decent chaps in the Form. Let's forget everything unpleasant, and make a fresh start. I'll offer him a place in the eleven for the Bagshot final. He's worth it."

"Oh, all right!"

"Put on your sweetest smiles," grinned Raby, "and mind you bow to the ground when you enter the study. Also say 'Hail!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"No, larks!" he said warningly.

"Sober as a judge," said Lovell. "Lead on, Macduff!"

Jimmy Silver led the way, and his chums followed him, grinning.

They had very little faith in Jimmy's idea of letting bygones be bygones, and making a new start with Valentine Mornington.

Still, they were good-tempered fellows, and willing to give the idea a trial. And they admitted that Morny had been sorely tried by the sudden change in his fortunes.

It was no light matter to lose a large fortune at one fell swoop, and with it all the importance and adulation that had fallen to his lot as the wealthiest of all the Rookwood fellows.

Jimmy Silver tapped at the door of Study No. 4 which Mornington shared with Erroll of the Fourth.

"Come in!"

The Fistical Four marched in.

Mornington was alone in the study.

He was seated in the armchair, leaning back, with his elegant legs crossed, a cigarette between his lips. There was a slight haze of smoke in the study.

It was the best-furnished study at Rookwood. Morny had spent any amount of money, in his wealthy days, on providing himself with luxurious surroundings. That beautiful, well-padded armchair alone had cost Morny ten guineas, in the old days. Now the one-time wealthy youth probably had not ten shillings in his pockets.

He did not rise as Jimmy Silver & Co. came in.

He looked at them coolly, through a bluish haze of smoke, with a sneer upon his well-cut lips.

Morny's handsome face had assumed, of late, an almost perpetual expression of sneering.

Certainly, the conduct of his former friends, the merry nuts of Rookwood, had not been calculated to raise his opinion of human nature. But a fellow who had chosen such friends as Peele and Gower, and Smythe of the Shell, ought really to have known what to expect of them in the hour of adversity.

Mornington did not speak, and he did not remove the cigarette from his lips. He only looked at his visitors with a sardonic smile.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned. It was not a promising reception, and they wondered how Jimmy Silver was going to deal with it.

Jimmy Silver, as a matter of fact, felt rather disconcerted himself, but he was not a fellow to be easily beaten. He assumed his most friendly smile.

"Not busy, Morny?" he remarked.

"Not at all."

"Just dropped in for a chat," said Jimmy.

"Awf'ly good of you. Have a smoke?"

"Ahem! No thanks!"

"Do!" said Mornington. "There's a box on the table. Help yourself."

"I—I'd rather not, thanks!"

"It's the last chance," said Mornington.

"That's the last box, and I can't afford to buy any more."

"You know we don't smoke!" growled Lovell, forgetting the friendly intention of the visit for a moment. "Don't be a silly pig!"

Morny blew out a little cloud of smoke. He watched it curl upward with an air of great interest, and seemed to have forgotten that the Fistical Four were in the study at all. There was an awkward pause.

CHAPTER 9.

"N. C. I."

JIMMY SILVER sat on the corner of the table, still with a cheery smile. He was determined to be friendly, if it was possible. He affected not to notice the smoke, though it worried his healthy young lungs a little. He was willing to make every allowance for the bitterness in Mornington's breast that had been the natural result of his change of fortune.

"We're getting on to the end of the cricket," he remarked.

No answer.

"The last match with Bagshot comes off this week," remarked Jimmy.

"Does it?" yawned Mornington.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"There's a place for you in the eleven, Morny, if you like."

"Thanks."

"Well, would you care to play?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"I'll put your name down if you like, then," said Jimmy. "We want a good bowler, and your bowling is really ripping, Morny!"

"Kind of you to say so."

"I suppose you'll be taking up footer when the football season comes along?" said Jimmy.

"I think not."

"No?"

"Can't afford the club subs."

"What rot!" said Lovell. "It's only a few bobs."

"A few bobs are a matter of considerable consequence to me now," said Mornington calmly. "I'm hard up, you know."

"Ahem!"

It was odd enough to hear the once purse-proud Morny glorying, as it were, in his poverty in this way.

"Well, bother the subs!" said Jimmy Silver. "A trifle like that won't keep you out of the footer, Morny."

"Thanks awf'ly! I quite understand your kind motive, my dear fellow, but I haven't come down to charity yet."

"Oh, don't you be an ass!" said Jimmy irritably.

"Bless my hat! I forgot I had to speak to Oswald!" ejaculated Raby, and he left the study.

Raby had had enough of that interesting conversation.

"Wait a tick for me!" said Newcome.

And he followed Raby.

Lovell glanced after them, hesitated, and remained. He felt bound to stand by his study leader.

Mornington threw away the stump of his cigarette, and yawned.

"Mind passin' me the fags?" he asked.

"You're sittin' close to the box."

Jimmy, in silence, passed him the box of cigarettes.

Mornington selected one, and lighted it.

The captain of the Fourth felt more inclined to throw the box at his head, but he restrained that impulse. He had not come there to lecture Morny on his bad habits.

Lovell grunted.

"There's a meeting of the Classical Players this evening," Jimmy Silver remarked. "We're going to get up a play that will knock the Moderns into a cocked hat!"

"How good!"

"You'll come along, Morny?"

"I'm not a member."

"No reason why you shouldn't be. Erroll's a member, and you may as well come along with him. I can find you a part."

"Thanks, I don't care for playin' the fool!"

Jimmy Silver coughed hard.

The amateur theatricals of the Classical Club did not appear to the amateur actors as "playing the fool." Morny's manners

had evidently not been improved by adversity.

"You're playing the fool now!" broke out Lovell angrily. "Better acting plays. I should think, than smoking cigarettes like a silly ass!"

"Thanks for your opinion!" said Mornington, unmoved. "Thanks all the more as I didn't ask for it!"

"Ahem!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell gave the dandy of the Fourth a glare, and stalked out of the study. He was fed-up.

"Your friends have gone," said Mornington satirically. "Are you stayin'? I'm rather expectin' Lattery to drop in for a game of cards."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"You're welcome to take a hand if you like. I'm sure Lattery won't mind. Your money is as good as anybody's!"

Jimmy knitted his brows.

He realised by this time that the visit was a failure, that Morny was still the old Morny, with a new vein of sardonic bitterness in him.

"So you've made it up with Lattery?" he said.

"Why not?"

"Plenty of reasons why not!" grunted Jimmy. "No bizney of mine, but you could do better if you liked."

"What rot! Lattery's a sneakin' worm, but he're rather amusin' worm, and beggars can't be choosers!" smiled Mornington. "Still, it's very kind of you to take an interest in my personal affairs."

Kit Erroll entered the study as Mornington was speaking. He gave Jimmy Silver a friendly nod, evidently pleased to see him with Morny. Jimmy's face was growing crimson.

"Well, I won't bother you with any further interest in your personal affairs, Morny," he broke out. "I was a fool to come here, I can see that."

"You always were a fool!" said Mornington calmly.

"Oh!"

"Do you think you're goin' to patronise me because I'm down on my luck?" said Mornington, dropping his air of assumed nonchalance, and speaking with angry bitterness. "Goin' to be kind enough to take me up—what!—because dear old Smythe and his set have turned their backs on me? Confound your cheek!"

"I never thought of patronising you. a"

you put it," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I did think we might let bygones be bygones, and make a fresh start."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'm a poor chap, without a quid to bless myself with," he said, "but I'm not goin' round beggin' to be spoken to. I don't want your friendship. Keep it till I ask for it!"

Jimmy slipped off the table.

"I was an ass, and no mistake," he said, "a silly ass, to think that you'd ever be anything but a sneering, suspicious cad, Mornington, rich or poor. You won't see me in your study again in a hurry."

"I didn't want to see you this time. There's the door!" said Mornington.

Jimmy Silver's hands clenched hard.

Mornington threw away his cigarette, and stood up, looking at him with a sneering smile, evidently ready for trouble and welcoming it.

"Pile in!" he said mockingly.

Erroll strode between them.

"Shut up, Morny!" he growled.

"Oh, let him come on!" said Mornington.

"I'm quite in a humour to pitch him neck an' crop out of the study!"

"My hat!" Jimmy Silver breathed hard. His temper was rising fast. "I've a jolly good mind——"

"Jimmy——" said Erroll.

Mornington pushed Erroll aside.

"Now, what have you a jolly good mind to do?" he sneered.

Jimmy made a rush at him, his anger breaking out at last. Morny's hands were up at once, and he received a sharp drive fairly on the nose. Jimmy staggered for a moment, and then sprang forward again, hitting out fiercely. Mornington went back into the armchair with a crash.

The captain of the Fourth stood looking at him, with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"Stop it!" exclaimed Erroll. "Stop it, I tell you."

He seized Jimmy Silver by the arm and jerked him to the door.

"Look here, Erroll——"

"For goodness' sake clear off," muttered Erroll. "Don't scrap here, old chap. There's nothing to scrap about."

Jimmy Silver restrained his feelings, and stepped into the passage. Mornington had leaped up from the armchair, panting; but Erroll, turning back, pushed him into the chair again.

"Chuck it, Morny!" he exclaimed.

"You silly ass! Let me alone!" shouted Morny.

Erroll kicked the door shut after Jimmy Silver, and put his back to it. His study-mate eyed him savagely.

"Erroll! I tell you——"

"You're not going to fight Jimmy Silver," said Erroll quietly. "Don't be such an ass, Morny."

"He's punched me!"

"You punched him."

"What are you interferin' for, you silly ass?" exclaimed Mornington angrily.

"Why can't you keep your temper?" growled Erroll. "I know Silver came here to be friendly. Why couldn't you treat him decently?"

"Hang his friendship!"

"You haven't so many friends that you can afford to insult every fellow who wants to be civil to you," said Erroll tartly.

Mornington gave him a deadly look.

"So you're throwin' it in my face, too?" he sneered. "Do you think I care a rap about Smythe and Townsend, and the rest of that silly gang? I've got no friends here, an' I don't want any! I don't want you, for that matter!"

"Morny!"

"Oh, don't Morny me!" snapped Mornington. "I know what this means. You're goin' the same way as the others, because I'm hard up. A pal without a stiver in his pockets is no use to you!"

Erroll's handsome face paled.

"You don't mean that, Morny," he said, after a long pause. "You know that it doesn't make any difference to me whether you're rich or poor."

"Why shouldn't it?" sneered Mornington. "I know you've been rusty with me for the last few days, an' I know the reason."

"I didn't mean to be rusty. I certainly don't like Lattrey coming to this study, if that's what you're driving at."

"Can't I ask a fellow to my own study if I like? I suppose it's still my study, even if I'm stony broke?"

"You can do as you like, of course. But that sneaking cad, Lattrey——"

"Not a more sneakin' cad than most of the others," jeered Mornington. "I know I've had hardly a civil word from anybody since my money went!"

"How do you treat a chap who wants to be civil?" demanded Erroll. "Your money makes no difference to anybody but

yourself. If you insult a chap as soon as he speaks, and make out that he's trying to patronise you, how the dickens can you expect chaps to be civil. When you had money, you thought everybody was after it, now you're poor, you think everybody wants to patronise you because you're hard up. You think a jolly good deal too much about yourself, Morny."

Mornington set his teeth.

"So that's what I get from you?" he said.

"You'll always get the truth from me," said Erroll. "It's not a pal's job to tell you lies. Ever since you've been hard up, you've been edge-wise, looking for trouble with everybody. You suspect every word and every look, and keep on finding offence where none is meant."

"That's enough!" said Mornington. "I might have known you'd follow the rest, in the long run. Well, I'm not hangin' on to you, Erroll. You go your way, an' I'll go mine."

"We're not going to quarrel, Morny," said Erroll steadily. "I'm willing to put up with your temper. I was only pointing out that the other fellows won't, and you can't expect them to."

"Not now I'm on my uppers," sneered Mornington. "Hang them all, you included! I was an idiot to think I had a pal left. But I'm not goin' to stand lecturin' I can tell you. Go and eat coke! You needn't trouble to speak to me again!"

Tap!

The door opened, and Erroll moved away from it. Lattrey of the Fourth came in. He glanced at the two juniors, from one to the other, and his eyes gleamed. It was easy to see that he had interrupted a quarrel.

"Am I in the way?" grinned Lattrey.

"Not at all," said Mornington. "Come in, old scout. I've got the cards here, an' there's a few smokes left."

"Right-ho!" said Lattrey.

"You're going to gamble here?" asked Erroll in a low voice.

"Oh, just a little game," said Lattrey airily. "Like to take a hand, Erroll?"

"No, you unspeakable cad!"

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Does that apply to Morny, too?" he sneered. "We're both tarred with the same brush, I imagine."

Erroll left the study without replying. His face was clouded, and his heart was heavy. Mornington had been so "touchy"

since the loss of his money that Kit Erroll had had to walk very warily to avoid a quarrel with him. Now the quarrel had come.

But there was no resentment in Erroll's heart for Mornington's bitter words. More than that would have been needed to shake his loyal friendship. He was only too willing to make allowances for the embittered junior.

But if that friendship was broken off, what remained to keep Mornington from falling back into all, and more than, his old shady rascality? Erroll's heart was heavy for his friend.

Lattrey of the Fourth locked the door after him. Cards were shuffled and cigarettes lighted. Mornington was at his old pursuits—but in a different way.

In former days, Morny had gambled to kill time, and had taken a pleasure in the wretched pursuit, as much because it was forbidden as for any other reason. But it was not mere perverseness now that spurred him on.

There was a hard greed in the handsome face now. Money was an object to him. As the two young rascals sat over their cards, the once superb dandy of the Fourth and the shady Lattrey, there was little to choose between them.

CHAPTER 10.

The Downward Path!

JIMMY SILVER did not waste any more efforts to get on a friendly footing with Mornington of the Fourth.

He had made the attempt in sheer kindness of heart, and it had failed.

He let the matter drop from that point.

Mornington had never been popular in his wealthy days, though he had had his following.

He was even more unpopular now.

Kit Erroll made more than one attempt to get on the old footing with his chum, but he found Mornington hard and repellent.

Indeed, the black sheep of Rookwood seemed to take a perverse pleasure in out-raging all the ideas and feelings of the junior who had always been his best friend.

Lattrey of the Fourth, whom he really despised and disliked, was almost his only companion now.

Their tastes were in common.

When Morny broke bounds after lights out, which he did more frequently than of old, Lattrey was always his comrade in rascality.

Lattrey was unpopular, and he had no friend in the Classical Fourth, and that was probably part of his reason for attaching himself to Mornington. But the desire to exasperate Erroll, whom he bitterly disliked, was part also of his motive. And Morny's reckless blackguardism was quite in keeping with Lattrey's own nature.

It was not long before the eye of authority was attracted to Mornington. Mr. Bootles detected tobacco-stains on his fingers in class, and caned him severely before the Fourth.

A suspicious prefect found a pack of cards in his study, and Mornington was taken before the Head, and severely lectured and caned. Yet even the reckless black sheep had not lost all his good qualities; he had owned up immediately that the cards were his, and not Erroll's.

The general opinion in the Classical Fourth was that Mornington was booked for the sack, sooner or later, and that it was likely to be sooner than later.

He did not play in the last Bagshot match when it came round.

Jimmy Silver held to his offer of putting him in the eleven; but Morny either forgot the match or affected to do so, and another man was put in at the last moment.

After that Jimmy Silver did not waste any thoughts on Mornington in making up the team for the few remaining matches of the season.

Morny had "chucked" cricket.

But though he had given up cricket as a game, it transpired that he still found a use for it in another way. Jimmy Silver found the fellows in the Common-room discussing the fact that Morny had offered odds on Bagshot for the match, and, as Rookwood had won it, Morny had to pay out several pounds.

Morny's diamond pin disappeared about the same time, from which fact it was easy to guess how he had paid his losses.

"That poor rotter is going to the dogs as fast as he can," Lovell remarked, in the end study, about a week after the futile visit to Mornington. "He used to gamble because he was a silly ass; now I think he's trying to make money by it. One way of getting pocket-money, I suppose!" he added, with a snort of contempt.

"Morny won't get much that way!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Lattrey does!" said Lovell. "He sucks up to Smythe & Co., and keeps in with them, and wins their money. I know that."

"Morny won't put his pride in his pocket to that extent. As for making money out of it, it can't be easy; and Morny's not the sort to do it. If he keeps up that game his merry gold watch will follow his diamond pin."

Jimmy Silver's prediction was verified. A couple of days later Mornington was seen with a cheap gunmetal watch in the place of the handsome gold "ticker" all the Fourth had known and admired.

Some of the juniors chipped him on the subject, and received such savage replies that they soon let the matter drop.

Kit Erroll had noted the circumstance, and thought over it. That evening at tea in the study he made one more effort to break the ice. Mornington was eating in silence. Tea in No. 4 was always a very silent meal now.

"Morny!" said Erroll quietly.

"Hallo!"

"Hasn't this gone on long enough?" asked Erroll. "Can't we be friends, Morny?"

Mornington laughed.

"What's the good?" he said. "You don't want to be friends with a penniless bounder. I don't want your compassion, thanks. Besides, I should shock you—in fact, I'm always shocking you." He laughed again. "I suppose you've noticed that my watch is missin'?"

"Yes," said Erroll. "Where is it, Morny?"

"Pawned."

"Oh!"

"Up the spout!" jeered Mornington. "The last resource of a poor rotter down on his luck, you know. Lattrey kindly introduced me to a pawnbroking friend—a relation of his, I believe, by gad!"

Erroll compressed his lips.

"I'm learnin' a new trade," grinned Mornington, watching his face. "You know how Lattrey used to make money out of me at nap and banker when I had any money? What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the giddy gander. I've tried

makin' money out of Lattrey the same way."

"Not much good, I should think."

"Quite so. He's too much for me. Hence these tears!" grinned Mornington. "And the billiard-sharpers at the Bird-in-Hand have been too much for me so far. But you never know. Luck will turn!"

"Morny! You can't be thinking of falling as low as that—the level of a sharper?" muttered Erroll.

"Why not? Beggars can't be choosers. They've made enough money out of me; why shouldn't I make money out of them if I can?"

"Well, you can't, for one thing."

"I'm goin' to give it a good trial. I've got a good tip for a race, and I'm goin' all out to win a pot of money," said Mornington coolly. "If I have any luck with that gee-gee next Tuesday I shall finger twenty-five of the best!"

"And if you don't?"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"And you think that kind of thing's good enough for you, Morny—a fellow like you?" said Erroll.

"G'od enough for a poverty-stricken bouncer!" smiled Mornington. "Haven't I said that beggars can't be choosers?"

"It means the sack from Rookwood in the long run."

"Let it!" said Mornington.

Erroll said no more.

But when Tuesday came round he was anxious to know what had happened as a result of Mornington's latest plunge. Mornington hurried down to Coombe immediately after lessons, keen for news.

Erroll was in the gateway when he came in. And his face when he came was so white that the junior had no need to ask him what his news was. Mornington gave him a bitter smile.

"Same old luck!" he said. "Gee-gee came in seventh. Ha, ha! One of the merry 'Also rans,' you know. Fifteen quid out. Jolly, isn't it?"

"Morny, you know you can depend on me—"

"Fifteen quid in your trousers-pocket?" grinned Mornington.

"Well, no. But—"

"I haven't come down to sponging yet,"

said Mornington. "I can raise the money. Ta-ta!"

"How Mornington, whose allowance was now a few shillings a week, proposed to raise such a sum as fifteen pounds was a mystery to Erroll. But the mystery was soon explained. When Erroll came into the junior Common-room an hour later he found half the Fourth gathered round a paper pinned on the wall.

The paper was in Mornington's elegant hand, and it ran:

"Notice.

"Sale of Study Furniture!

"Great Bargains!

"Sale will be held in Study No. 4, Fourth Form, at seven o'clock. Bargains for cash!"

CHAPTER 11.

Sale by Auction!

BEFORE seven o'clock there was a considerable crowd of juniors in and around Study No. 4 in the Fourth. The news of the "Sale of furniture" had spread.

Classicals and Moderns came along, to look on if not to purchase. Mornington, the lofty and superb dandy of the Fourth, in the character of an auctioneer, was likely to be interesting and entertaining.

It was known, of course, that Morny must be very hard up to resort to such an expedient, and some good-natured fellows were prepared to help him out by buying his superfluities.

Others were there with an eye to a bargain. Leggett of the Modern Fourth came along with all the ready cash he could muster, prepared to offer a sixth part of its value for anything.

Lattrey was there with the same object. Friendship, in Lattrey's case, was not likely to affect his keenness for a bargain.

The nuts came along in a crowd. Smythe and Howard and Tracy arrived together, and Townsend and Topham, Peelo and Gower, of the Fourth, followed them in. Most of the nuts had money in their pockets, and they had often envied Morny's magnificent surroundings. Half the Fourth and the Shell, in fact, crowded the study and the passage outside.

Erroll was there, with a quiet, grave face.

It was his study as well as Morny's, but Erroll had only lately become a member of the study, and he had found it ready furnished, and nothing had needed to be supplied.

Peels and Gower had formerly shared the study with Mornington, and when they had chanced out they had taken their belongings. All that remained—the major and expensive part—belonged to Mornington, with the exception of the table, which was provided by the school.

"Goin' to be sold up—what?" smiled Adolphus Smythe, tapping Kit Erroll on the arm.

"It seems so," said Erroll.

"Leave you rather stranded, won't it?" grinned Adolphus. "I understand that most of the things are Morny's."

"All of them," said Erroll.

"Oh, Erroll's got lots of money!" said Townsend. "He never spends any, so he must have plenty left—what?"

Rap!

Higgs, the biggest fellow in the Fourth, struck the table with a coal-hammer.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hallo! Are you the giddy auctioneer?" asked Tommy Dodd, the Modern junior.

"That's it," said Higgs. "Can't you see my hammer?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington broke in with a drawl.

"Higgs has been kind enough to undertake the sale for me," he said. "Higgs will sell off everything, without reserve. It's very kind of Higgs."

"Well, you're standing me your old cricket-bat as a fee," said Higgs. "It's worth my while."

There was a laugh.

The lofty Mornington evidently did not intend to demean himself in the rôle of auctioneer.

"Gentlemen, here is a handsome armchair," said Higgs, quite in the manner of a professional auctioneer. "That armchair cost ten guineas. Check action, ball-bearings, gilt-edged, electric light, and all modern conveniences—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What offers for this handsome study armchair?" asked the auctioneer. "Any

gentleman might be proud to squat in that armchair."

"Sixpence!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"This is not a joking matter, gentlemen. Silver, would you mind wheeling that splendid armchair forward? This armchair has been reposed in by a gentleman connected with all the titled families in the kingdom, from the Prince of Hunstein to the Marquis of Tilbury Docks. What offers? Now then, gentlemen!"

"Quid!" said Adolphus Smythe.

"Gentlemen, I am offered a quid for that handsome armchair."

"Thirty bob!" said Townsend.

"Thirty-five!"

"Two quid!"

"Two-ten!" said Erroll.

Mornington started as his study-mate made the bid. He gave Kit Erroll a very curious look.

Rap, rap!

"Gentlemen, I am offered two-pound-ten for this splendacious armchair, as used by the nobility. Two-ten! What advance on two-ten? Going at two-ten—going—gone! Erroll, old scout, it's yours!"

Erroll glanced at Mornington, who had his hands in his pockets, and did not remove them.

"Drop the money in this coffee-pot," said the auctioneer. "The gentleman holding this sale is too aristocratic to touch money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Erroll dropped two pound-notes and a "ten-bobber" into the coffee-pot on the table. Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

Rap, rap, rap!

"Gentlemen, here is a handsome marble clock, real marble, first-class works; actually keeps time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly ass gave fifteen guineas for this clock in the days when he had guineas," continued Higgs.

"Oh, cut that out!" growled Mornington.

"I'll conduct this sale my own way or not at all," said Higgs. "Gentlemen, what offers for this marble clock, an ornament to any gentleman's mantelpiece?"

"Five bob!" said Topham.

"Ten!"

"Fifteen!"

"Quid!" said Erroll.

"Dash it all," said Adolphus Smythe, "I'm havin' that clock! Thirty bob!"

And the dandy of the Shell gave Erroll a lofty look of disdain.

"Two pounds!" said Erroll.

"Dash it all! Two-ten!" shouted Adolphus.

"Three!"

"Look here, Erroll, blow you——"

"Going—going at three quids, this handsome marble clock——"

"Three-ten!" shouted Smythe angrily.

"Four!" said Erroll.

"Guineas!" yapped Adolphus.

"Four-ten!" said Erroll calmly.

"Going—going at four-ten this handsome marble clock—going to Mr. Erroll at four-ten—going—going—gone!"

"My hat, you're made of money, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver, as Erroll dropped a five-pound note into the coffee-pot, taking out a note for change.

Erroll smiled.

Mornington regarded his study-mate very curiously. He knew that Erroll's father was well off, and made his son a good allowance, but he had not expected Kit to produce quids in this lavish way.

Mornington did not seem wholly pleased, either, at Erroll being the purchaser. But he could not very well raise objections, and he was silent.

Higgs was running on.

"Gentlemen, here is a handsome fender and fire-irons, exquisite workmanship and finish, everything in the best of taste; nothing required but a tip to the maid occasionally to look after them. What offers for these splendid articles?"

"Tuppence!" said Jones minor.

"Tanner!" grinned Lovell.

"Did the gentleman say a tenner?"

"No, the gentleman jolly well didn't; he said a tanner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eighteenpence!" said Peele.

"Two bob!"

"Going—going at two bob——"

"Ten!" said Erroll quietly.

The articles were knocked down to Erroll. Mornington made a restless movement.

"Are you buying up the lot, Erroll?" he muttered.

"Why not, if I want to?"

"Oh, nothin'!"

The sale proceeded.

But it really was not much of an auction, as few of the fellows had money enough to offer anything like the value of the articles; and in every case Kit Erroll chimed in with a top bid.

Article after article was knocked down to Erroll, and in each case he produced the money, and dropped it promptly into the coffee-pot.

Curtains and carpet, desk and sofa, vases and tea-things, and other articles, were sold off one after another, and in each case Kit Erroll proved to be the purchaser.

By the time the sale was concluded the sum paid amounted to twenty pounds, all of which Erroll had produced in ready money.

Higgs of the Fourth gave a final rap on the table, and pitched the hammer into the fender with a crash.

"Gentlemen, the sale is over. Where's that old cricket-bat, Morny? Thanks! Gentlemen, you can go and eat coke!"

And Higgs departed with his bat. The juniors, grinning, cleared out of the study, some of them glancing very curiously at Erroll, who remained with the dandy of the Fourth.

Both Leggett and Lattrey gave Erroll dark looks as they went. They had not secured any of the bargains they had come for, and they had not had the pleasure of seeing the lofty Morny's home broken up.

Mornington kicked the door shut, and turned to Erroll.

"Look here, what does this mean?" he demanded. "What have you bought up the whole study for?"

"Well, it's my study, you know," said Erroll, with a smile. "I should have had to furnish it, or at least stand half, if the things had been cleared away. May as well leave them as they are."

"You've paid more than the others would have paid."

"Must make top bid, you know, at an auction, to secure the goods."

Mornington gave him a grim look.

"Come, don't be an ass, Morny!" said Erroll cheerfully. "I raised no objection to sharing the study when everything in it was yours. You needn't mind the things being mine. It's the same thing the other way round."

"Well, I suppose that's so," said Mornington, after a pause: "I haven't got much choice, anyway. But where the dickens did you get that twenty pounds from?"

Erroll laughed.

"You know I don't spend much money," he said. "I had saved a good bit out of my allowance, and my pater sent me a fiver for a birthday present."

"That didn't make twenty," said Mornington. "You went out on your bike after tea."

Erroll coloured.

"Well, I took a leaf out of your book, Morny," he said. "I biked over to Rookham, and—and left my watch there—the gold ticker my father gave me. I didn't want you—I mean, I didn't want the study cleared out. It's all serene. I've got twenty-five pounds in the Post Office Savings' Bank, and I can draw it out in a few days, and get my watch."

Mornington moved restlessly about the study.

He knew quite well that Erroll had done this to save him from losing the luxurious surroundings he dearly loved. Erroll himself cared nothing for silken sofas and padded armchairs and Persian carpets.

The "lots" would have been cheap at six or seven times what Erroll had given for them certainly; but as a matter of fact, Erroll did not want them. He had bought them so that Morny should not lose them. And Morny knew it.

"You're a silly ass, Erroll!" said Mornington at last.

"Thanks!" said Erroll, smiling.

"You'd have bought a few old crocks for a couple of quids for yourself. You don't care for these things."

"Oh, rats!"

"You'll clear out the money your pater put in the savings-bank for you for a lot of rubbish you don't want!"

"Oh, I shan't clear it all out!" said Erroll, with a smile. "I shall have fifteen quids left in the bank nearly."

"You're an ass!"

"Just as you like, Morny. Let's do our prep."

Mornington grouted, and they settled down to work.

CHAPTER 12.

The Last Plunge!

JIMMY SILVER eyed Mornington rather curiously sometimes during the following days.

Jimmy knew well enough why that sale had taken place in Study No. 4.

Morny had been going the pace, and had to pay for it.

Jimmy was shocked and disgusted at the peculiar new traits in Morny's character that had come to light; but he could not help feeling interested in him. As a wealthy youth, Morny had been the victim of sharpers.

Lattrey of the Fourth had made a regular income out of him at one time. Carthew, the sportsman of the Sixth, had often asked him to his study for a little game.

Joey Hook, the bookmaker at the Bird-in-Hand, had been his admiring and subservient friend, and had paid himself handsomely for his servility. And a good many other rascals had done uncommonly well out of the wealthy Mornington.

Now it appeared Morny was ambitious of reversing the position. Instead of being a gull, it was his desire to become a rook.

Morny could not face his new poverty with equanimity.

The dingy profits of a gambler seemed to him better than empty pockets.

It was an extraordinary scheme for Mornington to entertain, but it was in keeping with his reckless character.

Jimmy Silver, who had been thinking about the matter, spoke to Mornington a few days after the sale. He did not like Morny—he could not pull with him. But Morny had good qualities, and Jimmy would have been sorry to see him kicked out of Rookwood.

And it seemed pretty clear that that was what it was coming to. Mornington came up to him in the quad, but Jimmy did not heed his stare.

"Just a word, Mornington," said Jimmy quietly. "You told me once you didn't want me to chip into your personal affairs!"

"I don't!" said Mornington, with a cool nod.

"I'm going to give you a tip, all the same."

"Keep it till I ask for it," suggested Mornington.

"It's this," continued Jimmy, unheeding. "Every fellow in the Form knows what you've been selling things for."

"They're welcome to the knowledge," said Mornington, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't care a rap what all Rookwood thinks."

"It's to pay debts you get into at the Bird-in-Hand," said Jimmy calmly. "The chaps all know it."

"Quite so!"

"Well, sooner or later you won't be able to pay up."

"I shan't ask you to lend me the money," said Mornington satirically.

"I shouldn't lend it to you if you did," said Jimmy Silver. "But this is the tip I was speaking of. If the time comes when you can't pay Hook and his gang what you owe them, you're booked for trouble. That rotter Hook isn't the man to lose his money. He would think nothing at all of showing you up to the Head if you didn't pay him."

Mornington started a little.

"That's what I wanted to warn you about," said Jimmy. "Hook has you there if you don't square him. And you can't in the long run. You can't sell up your study twice over, you know."

"I don't see that it matters to you, anyway," said Mornington, with a sneer.

"It doesn't. Only it would mean the sack for you, and I should be sorry for that."

"Awfully kind of you! Would you mind keeping your sympathy and advice another time till I ask for them?"

And Mornington walked away before Jimmy could reply to that.

Jimmy Silver breathed hard through his nose.

He was strongly inclined to follow after Mornny and biff his head against one of the beeches in return for his insolence. But he refrained. He reflected that Mornny was booked for enough trouble if he kept on as he had begun.

Having done his best in the matter with that result, Jimmy Silver dismissed Mornington from his mind. If the fellow chose to go to the dogs with a crash it was his own business, not Jimmy's.

That Jimmy's warning had had no effect

was quite clear that same night. Mornington was out of bounds after lights-out. All the Classical Fourth knew it, and wondered how long Mornny would be able to keep up this game without being spotted, in which case the chopper would come down with a vengeance, and Rookwood would see the last of the fallen dandy of the Fourth.

The next day Mornington seemed to have lost some of the cool, mocking nonchalance with which he had girded himself as with armour.

He was absent-minded in the Form-room, and Mr. Bootles was very severe with him. He answered the Form-master insolently, and went back to his seat with white face and burning eyes.

Lattrey joined him when the Fourth were dismissed.

"How did you get on last night?" he asked, when they were safe out of hearing in the quad.

Mornington's lip curled.

"I had a plunge at poker," he said. "That merry game you taught me to play, Lattrey. Rippin' game, what?"

"What luck?"

"Lots—for Joey Hook and his pals!"

"Cleaned out?" asked Lattrey, laughing.

"Exactly. With the merry addition of fourteen pounds in I O U's held by the gentlemanly company."

Lattrey stopped dead, staring at him.

"You—you ass!" he gasped. "You're run up fourteen quid, and given your signature on it!"

"I couldn't have gone on playin' otherwise."

"But you can't pay it!"

"Not a tenth part of it," said Mornington calmly.

"Hook thinks you can pay up, as you've always paid," said Lattrey. "He will be as mad as a hornet if you don't!"

"No doubt."

"But what are you going to do?" asked the cad of the Fourth. "If you ask Hook to wait, he won't wait long. And you've got no prospects. Will your guardian stand it, do you think?"

"I don't think—I know he won't!" said Mornington coolly. "And I've got nothin' more to sell. It was a last plunge to set me on my feet. As I can't pay, I shall be reluctantly compelled to swindle Hook."

After all, he's swindled me often enough, dear boy. My conscience is quite easy."

"Only he's not the sort of merchant to be swindled," said Lattrey grimly. "If you don't pay up he'll send your I O U's to the Head. The Head wouldn't take his word against a Rookwood fellow, but he'll have to take it backed up by your handwriting."

"Quite so. Lend me fourteen quid!" said Mornington.

"Are you potty?"

"I should be, if I thought you'd lend me the money!" said Mornington, laughing.

"I couldn't, of course."

"You would not; any way I dare say you could. But I shouldn't take it if you offered it!" said Mornington disdainfully. "I shouldn't care to be under any obligation to a fellow like you."

Mornington left him, and Lattrey stared after him, with a curling lip. He knew that Morny had come to the end of his tether at last. Lattrey, as a matter of fact, could have found the money, but he had not the slightest intention of doing so.

The cad of the Fourth had no use for a "lame duck."

And Mornington's supercilious insolence was not calculated to make his associate feel any keen regret at his ruin.

For it was ruin!

Hook would wait a few days, perhaps, but non-payment would be followed by threats, and the threats would be carried out. Unless Mornington could raise the money the game was up for him at Rookwood School.

And the black sheep, whose curious ambition to become a sharper had been so completely frustrated, had not the remotest chance of raising a quarter of the sum.

The next morning there was a letter for Morny in the rack.

Erroll took it from the rack and brought it to him, with a very grave face, in the quadrangle.

Mornington read it and laughed, and thrust it in his pocket.

"Morny," said Erroll in a low voice, "I know that fist. I've seen it before. Are you mad, to have letters from a book-maker here? Mr. Bootles might have opened it and seen what's in it."

"It wouldn't make any difference," said

Mornington coolly. "Mr. Bootles will know all about Hook to-morrow."

"Morny!" exclaimed Erroll.

Mornington strolled away, whistling. Erroll looked at him with deep trouble in his face. He felt a vague but deep alarm. Had the end come for the reckless black-guard of the Fourth?

It mattered little enough to any other fellow at Rookwood, but it mattered very much to Kit Erroll, for his steady friendship for the reckless junior had never faltered. Whatever Valentine Mornington was, Kit Erroll was his chum, and quietly ready to stand by him through thick and thin.

Mornington's face was very quiet and a little pale at dinner that day. After dinner he went up to his study. He came down with a coat over his arm and a bag in his hand.

"Hallo! Off for a merry week-end?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Mornington gave him a curious smile.

"Exactly. Good-bye, Silver!" He paused. "I'm sorry I haven't pulled better with you, Silver. I've been rather an ass in some ways. Luck's been against me, too. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand.

Jimmy Silver shook hands with him cheerily enough, but he looked at the dandy of the Fourth in surprise and some concern.

"Going to be long away?" he asked. "You speak as if you were going to the world's end!"

"Some little time, I think," said Mornington. "I hope you'll have good luck with the footer and win no end of matches. Sorry I shan't be here to help you. Ta-ta!"

He nodded and walked down to the gates.

Bag in hand, Mornington walked down the lane, his head held high. There was a sound of hurried footsteps behind him, and he turned his head and frowned. Kit Erroll came breathlessly up.

"Morny!" exclaimed Erroll, panting.

"Hallo!"

"I heard what you said to Jimmy Silver." Erroll breathed hard. "Morny, tell me what's the matter! Don't try to fool me. I know you're intending to clear out of Rookwood, and that you're not going home."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Isn't it so?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Well, yes, it is so!" said Mornington impatiently.

"You were going without speaking to me?" said Erroll reproachfully.

"I didn't want any questions," said Mornington. "Still, I'm glad to say good-bye. You're a good chap, Erroll." His face softened. "You've been a better pal than I ever deserved. I—I'm sorry I'm leaving. Good-bye! I've got a train to catch, and—"

"You're not going to catch it, Mornny. You can't leave Rookwood like this. The Head—"

"Bother the Head!"

"Your guardian—"

"I'm done with my guardian!"

"Mornny, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, and I don't care much. I've got to go!" said Mornington impatiently. "If I stayed I should be sacked before nightfall. Do you understand now? I'm goin' so as to go of my own accord, without bein' booted out. Don't you understand? It's the end—the merry end. I've played my game and lost. It was a mug's game. But I've called the tune, and I've got to pay the piper."

"If it's money, you know I—"

"I wasn't goin' to sponge on you, Erroll. An' it's too late now. That letter was from Joey Hook." Mornington laughed sardonically. "If I don't redeem my I O U's by three o'clock this afternoon they're goin' to the Head. You can guess the merry result—Head awfully shocked, the sack on the spot, angry guardian receivin' me home with frowns. Not good enough for me, old scout. I'm goin' out into the wide world. I'm not goin' home to be sneered at an' patronised by my merry cousins. No fear!"

"How much do you owe Hook?" asked Erroll quietly.

"Fourteen quids!" Mornny laughed.

Erroll breathed more freely.

"Thank Heaven it's no worse. You're not going, Mornny. I've got the money—"

"In the bank?" grinned Mornington. "All serene. I knew you'd say that if you knew; and I'm not spongin' on you, I tell you. Too late now. It's pay up by three o'clock or the merry sack!"

"I've got the money in my pocket, Mornny."

"By gad!" ejaculated Mornington in astonishment. "How the merry dickens—"

"I knew it must come to this in the long run," said Erroll very quietly. "It couldn't end any other way. I drew out all I had left in the bank to be ready for it."

"Oh, gad!"

"I've got fifteen pounds-ten," said Erroll. "It's all I've got, and thank goodness it's enough to see you through!"

"I—I won't—"

"You will!" said Erroll. "Mornny, old chap, we've been pals; we're pals still. You can't refuse."

There was a silence.

"Do you know what you are, Erroll?" said Mornington at last. "You're the biggest ass in Rookwood!"

"Good! Let's go down and see Hook and get your paper back."

"But I tell you—"

"Come on!" said Erroll, slipping his arm through his chum's.

And Erroll had his way.

An hour later Mornington had pitched his bag into a corner of Study No. 4. He did not want that now. The chums had walked back from Coombe in silence, but their thoughts were busy.

"You've had your way, Erroll," said Mornington, facing his chum. "You've brought me back, and you haven't asked me even to give up playin' the giddy ox. How do you know I shan't plunge in neck-deep in a couple of days, and begin it all over again? Are you goin' to sell your bike ready for the next emergency?"

"Yes," said Erroll quietly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mornington's laugh was hearty and merry, and it made Erroll's face brighter. "Well, you're not goin' to sell your bike, old scout. Do you think I'd have taken your money if I was goin' on playin' the same fool game afterwards? I'm not quite such a worm as that. It's over an' done with, you ass. It's ancient history, and there's goin' to be no more of it!"

"Mornny," said Erroll, with a deep breath, "if you mean that—"

"Every word! Do you think that's

worth fourteen quid, which I cannot possibly square in three terms?" grinned Mornington.

"Yes, or fourteen thousand, if I had them!" said Erroll.

"Well, it's a go, if it's any satisfaction to you," said Mornington. "I mean real bizney this time, honest injun!" He laughed. "I say, old scout, do you think I've got brains enough to get a scholarship—what?"

"You could if you tried; and I'll help you," said Erroll.

"Done!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Very Raw Recruit!

"MY dear James!" Jimmy Silver halted with a grin. Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned, too.

Somehow fellows always did grin when Cuffy of the Modern Fourth spoke to them.

Clarence Cuffy had been some time at Rookwood. He had been as green as grass when he arrived. Now he was, if possible, greener.

In the pleasant and delectable purlieus of Gander's Green, Clarence had been brought up in unsuspecting innocence. And a term at Rookwood School had made no difference at all to him.

Fellows pulled his verdant leg without limit. Clarence seldom discovered that his leg had been pulled. When he did, he would regard the humorous jokers more in sorrow than in anger.

In Gander's Green, fellows' legs were never pulled.

The Fistical Four of the Classical Fourth were on their way to the football-ground when that ornament of the Modern Side addressed them.

They kindly resolved to waste a few minutes in chipping Cuffy.

"Hallo, Clarence, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"You were proceeding to the football-ground, James?"

"You've hit it!"

"I trust I am not incommoding you by taking up your time for a few minutes?"

"Not whattoo? Oh, no! Not at all! Fire away!"

"The fact is, Silver, I have decided to take up football," said Cuffy, blinking at Jimmy Silver solemnly through his large spectacles.

"Football!" ejaculated Jimmy. "You!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Lovell.

"Exactly!" said Cuffy, with an expansive smile. "And I am sure, my dear James, that you will afford me all the assistance in your power. I am addressing you as captain of the Junior Eleven. I understand that you are playing Bagshot on Wednesday. I should like to play for Rookwood, if I may."

Jimmy Silver almost staggered.

Clarence Cuffy made that modest request with a sweet smile, evidently quite unaware of the enormity of it.

"Play for Rookwood!" murmured Lovell.

"Against Bagshot!" gasped Raby. "Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Newcome.

Cuffy looked mildly surprised. He did not see any reason for hilarity.

"I will explain the circumstances of the case," he said. "Mr. Dodd is coming down on Wednesday or Saturday—Tommy Dodd's uncle, you know. He is my very kind friend, and I have passed many delightful hours in his vegetable garden at Gander's Green. I am sure it would please him to see me playing for Rookwood."

"It would please the Bagshot fellows, too!" gurgled Lovell.

"It would! Ha, ha!"

"It is true that I have played very little football," said Cuffy modestly. "But I am quite willing to practise. We did not play much football at Gander's Green, but I was considered very skilful at marbles."

"Mum-mum-marbles!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, indeed! Of course, I am aware that football is a more strenuous game than marbles," said Cuffy. "Perhaps a little more difficult. But I am prepared to do my best, my dear James."

James chortled.

"It is very extraordinary," said Cuffy. "Dodd and Cook and Doyle laughed in exactly the same way when I spoke to them about it. I do not quite see where the joke comes in, my dear schoolfellows."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Jimmy Silver. "Look here, Cuffy! I can't quite play you against Bagshot on Wednesday. But

there's a Modern-Classical match on Saturday, and Tommy Dodd can play you in the Modern team against us if he likes."

"He'll jump at the chance, Cuffy," said Lovell solemnly.

"I suggested it to him, but he did not seem enthusiastic," said Cuffy, shaking his head. "But it all depends upon whether my kind friend, Mr. Dodd, comes down on Wednesday or Saturday. He would be delighted to see me playing for Rookwood. In fact, he has expressed a wish that I should take up footer, and it is my duty to observe his wishes in every way, as he has been very kind to me. May I take it that I play on Wednesday if Mr. Dodd comes?"

The Fistical Four roared; they could not help it.

To Clarence Cuffy's simple mind a football-match was simply a nice little game—like marbles.

Fellows would have given a term's pocket-money to squeeze into the eleven for the Bagshot match.

Jimmy Silver was exposed to the blandishments of nearly all the juniors at Rookwood when he was making up the team for that match.

A fellow's inclusion in the team was not likely to depend upon whether he had a kind friend coming down to the school on the day the match was played. Not quite!

Cuffy looked at the Fistical Four inquiringly.

"Well, my dear James?" he asked.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I say! Come along, and let's see what you can do at footer, Cuffy. If you're good enough—ha, ha!—I'll shove you into the team. Rely on that."

"I shall be delighted, my dear James!"

And with a smile of contentment on his chubby face, Cuffy trotted down to Little Side with the Classical four.

There was a crowd of fellows on the junior football-ground.

The list for the Bagshot match was not quite settled yet, though it was known that some of the giants of junior footer would be playing, such as Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Conroy, Rawson, Van Ryn, Erroll, Tommy Dodd, and Cook, and Doyle. But two places, at least, were not quite decided.

Raby and Newcome had their own ideas about how those two places ought to be filled. But Jimmy Silver, as football cap-

tain, was impervious to the claims of friendship.

Mornington was a likely recruit, and so was Oswald, and Flynn, and Towle, and, in fact, several more.

But Clarence Cuffy was really not likely to get a place. Even Tubby Muffin would have been a more useful recruit.

"Hallo, Cuffy playing?" asked Oswald, as the five juniors arrived. "Cuffy taking up footer?"

"Yes," said Jimmy seriously. "Cuffy wants to play against Bagshot on Wednesday."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I should be very pleased, my dear Richard," said Cuffy, blinking at Oswald.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Oswald.

"Cuffy's going to show us what he can do," said Jimmy. "Give Cuffy a chance, you fellows."

"On the ball, Cuffy!" yelled the juniors.

Cuffy blinked round.

"See that ball?" asked Jimmy Silver, pointing to the somewhat muddy footer.

"Yes, my dear James."

"See if you can put it into the goal."

"I think that would be quite easy, my dear James."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Conroy, who was between the posts for the practice. "Quite easy—what? Well, try!"

Cuffy started for the ball, with the eyes of all the grinning juniors upon him. To the astonishment of the juniors, he picked it up, put it under his arm, and trotted towards the goal.

"Is he potty?" gasped Lovell.

"Put that ball down, you idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha! This isn't Rugger, you howling dummy! None of your Rugger tricks here!"

Clarence Cuffy glanced round in surprise.

"My dear James—"

"Kick it, you chump!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "You're not allowed to touch the ball with your paws, you howling jabber-wock!"

"Oh, pray excuse my error, my dear James!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clarence Cuffy set the ball down again within a few yards of the grinning goalkeeper. He blinked at it, and blinked at the goal, evidently calculating with great care.

The juniors watched him joyfully.

Cuffy, satisfied at last, backed away and took a little run. Then he delivered a terrific kick at the ball.

Careful as his calculations had been, however, they seemed to be a little out, judging by the result.

His foot missed the ball by about six inches, and the impetus of the kick carried it high into the air.

His foot flew into the air, with the natural result that Cuffy lost his balance and sat down.

Bump!

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clarence Cuffy sat on the ground and gasped and groped for his spectacles. And a hysterical yell went up round the foot-ball-ground.

CHAPTER 14.

Goal!

"DEAR ME!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am somewhat hurt. The impact upon the ground has caused me considerable discomfort!" gasped Cuffy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver took Cuffy by one of his large ears and helped him to his feet. Cuffy gave a loud squeak.

"Ow-ow!"

"Cut off, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. "You weren't born for a footballer. Better get some practice on the fags' ground for a few weeks. That will make a beginning. See?"

"My dear James——"

"Oh, buzz off, fathead," said Lovell. "You've done your comic turn, and now we've got to get some footer."

"My dear Arthur——"

"Hook it!" said Raby.

Cuffy had been given a chance, and now the junior footballers wanted to get to business, and the sublime Clarence was in the way.

But the junior from Gander's Green developed an unexpected trait of obstinacy.

"My dear friends, I am entitled to join in the football practice, and it is my intention to do so!" he said firmly.

"H'm!" said Jimmy Silver, rather

puzzled. "That's so, Cuffy, but it is rather sudden, you know. This is team practice for a match, and silly idiots have to keep off the grass, see?"

"Another time, Cuffy," said Erroll, smiling.

Cuffy shook his head.

"I have no time to waste, my dear Christopher, if I am going to get into form for playing in the Bagshot match," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, buzz him off the ground, bedad!" said Flynn.

"Hook it, Cuffy!"

"Hold on," said Jimmy Silver. "Chuck that old ball out, Jones."

Jones minor pitched out the old ball, used by the fags in puntabouts. Jimmy kicked it to Cuffy.

"What on earth's the game?" demanded Lovell.

"That's for Cuffy to practise with."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "How can we get team practice, with that howling burler fooling about on the field?"

"Leave it to your Uncle James, dear boy. Now, Cuffy—I suppose you know that a footballer has to do as his skipper tells him?"

"Certainly, my dear James."

"Well, you see that ball?"

Cuffy blinked at it.

"Yes, James."

"You're to kick it from here to Mr. Manders' House, across the quad."

"Certainly."

"Having got it there, you're to kick it up the stairs."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"You may find it a bit difficult at first," said Jimmy Silver, with owl-like seriousness. "But if at first you don't succeed, try again, you know."

"I shall be very pleased, my dear James."

"Having kicked it upstairs, you're to kick it into Tommy Dodd's study," continued Jimmy Silver. "If you land it on Tommy Dodd's nose, that counts as a goal. See?"

"I understand perfectly."

"Well, go ahead!"

The junior footballers looked on breathlessly. They wondered whether even Clarence Cuffy, the champion duffer of Rookwood, would be quite duffer enough

to carry out the Fourth Form skipper's instructions.

But Cuffy had no doubts.

He started.

"Go it, Cuffy!"

"On the ball!"

The juniors crowded back to give the duffer of Rookwood plenty of room. There was no telling in what direction the footer might go when Cuffy's foot got near it.

Cuffy kicked the footer again, and it went into touch, and he followed it up. A howl of laughter followed Cuffy as he punted the ball away across the quad.

"My hat!" exclaimed Van Ryn. "Is he going to be really idiot enough to punt the ball into Manders' House?"

"Ha, ha! Looks like it!"

"Let's hope he doesn't meet Manders!" chortled Flynn.

And the juniors yelled again.

Clarence Cuffy, still hopping in pursuit of the ball, disappeared beyond the beeches.

Jimmy Silver & Co. piled into footer practice, while some of the other fellows followed Cuffy to see how he progressed.

Cuffy had learnt at least one football lesson already—to heed the instructions of his skipper.

Jimmy's intention had been to clear the duffer off the football-ground without hurting his feelings. But Clarence took his instructions with literal exactitude.

He missed the ball oftener than he kicked it, but he stuck to his task with deadly persistence, and the footer was propelled up to Mr. Manders' House at last, on the Modern side of Rookwood.

There Cuffy paused to take breath.

His face was crimson with exertion, and his round eyes bulging behind his spectacles. But he was still game.

He restarted after the interval, so to speak, when he had recovered his wind. A lucky kick sent the muddy footer whizzing into the open doorway of the Modern building.

"He's done it!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

"He, he, he!"

"Good old Cuffy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Cuffy was not finished yet. He followed the ball into the House, and began kicking it upstairs.

This was not an easy task, and it was likely to keep Clarence Cuffy occupied some time.

Three or four Modern juniors came along and stared at him.

"What the thump are you up to, Cuffy?" yelled Towle of the Fourth. "You'd better let Mr. Manders catch you at that game!"

Cuffy gasped.

"I have to get the ball to Dodd's study," he spluttered.

"What for?" howled Leggett.

"My football skipper has so instructed me, my dear Albert."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's pulling your leg, you silly owl!" growled Towle. "Look out, here comes Knowles!"

Knowles, the Modern prefect, came along, frowning.

"Who brought that ball in here?" he rapped out.

"Please Knowles, I did!" said Cuffy meekly. "Yaroooh!" he added, in a wild howl, as the prefect's finger and thumb closed on his ear.

"Take it away at once!" snapped Knowles. "Do you hear?"

"Yow-ow! Yes, certainly! Ow!"

Cuffy gathered up the ball and bolted upstairs with it. Under the circumstances, he felt compelled to disregard that part of Jimmy Silver's instructions about kicking the footer up the staircase.

But in the upper passages he resumed operations. Whatever Cuffy couldn't do at footer, he could at least carry out his skipper's instructions to the best of his ability.

The ball was trundled along the passages in the direction of Tommy Dodd's study.

Dodd and Cook and Doyle, the heroes of the Modern Fourth, were detained in their study with lines. They were scribbling and grousing, when the study door was opened, and Cuffy's crimson face looked in.

"Hallo! Take that phizog away!" growled Tommy Doyle.

"And bury it!" added Tommy Cook.

"Pray excuse me, my dear Thomas!" said Clarence Cuffy mildly. "I sincerely trust that I shall not incommode you. I

am going to kick a football into this study, by the instructions of my skipper!"

"What?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

He jumped up from the table, glaring at Cuffy.

But Clarence did not heed his glare. He trundled the footer into the doorway.

"You silly chump!" raved Tommy Dodd. "If you kick that footer in here— Oh, my hat!"

Clarence Cuffy kicked.

The footer flew into the study. It was aimed at Tommy Dodd, so it naturally crashed on Doyle. But it bounced away from Doyle's head and landed full in Tommy Dodd's excited face.

Tommy Dodd sat down in the fender with a crash.

"Goal!" gasped Cuffy.

"Yaroooh!"

"I trust you are not hurt, my dear Thomas."

"Gerrooogh! I—I——"

"I sincerely hope that you are not subjected to any considerable discomfort, my dear Thomas. James stated that if the ball landed upon your countenance, it would count as a goal. I am sure, Thomas, that James will acknowledge that that was a goal, and you will bear witness if necessary, will you not, my dear Thomas?"

Thomas did not answer that question.

He extracted himself from the fender and fire-iron, and flew at Clarence Cuffy like a stone from a catapult.

The next instant Cuffy's head was in chancery.

"Give him beans!" roared Tommy Cook.

"Paste him, bedad, the thafe of the world!" howled Tommy Doyle, rubbing his head. "Give him gip, Tommy darling!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Clarence. "My dear Thomas— Oh, my nose! My dear friend— Yoop! My eye! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crumbs!"

Crash!

Clarence Cuffy landed in the passage, on his back. The study door slammed after him.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Clarence, as he sat up and rubbed his features. "Oh, my word! How very, very bad-tempered Thomas is this afternoon! Ow! And I am sure that it was a good goal. Yow-ow-ow!"

CHAPTER 15.

Good for Evil!

LEGGETT of the Modern Fourth came along the passage as Clarence Cuffy felt himself all over to ascertain that he was still all there. He felt as if he wasn't. Tommy Dodd had been a little excited, and he had not dealt gently with the protégé of his Uncle Dodd.

Leggett grinned down at the unhappy Clarence.

"Hurt?" he inquired.

"Ow! Ow!"

It sounded as if Clarence were a little hurt.

"Here, let me lend you a hand," said Leggett. "Come into my study, and I'll dust you down, old chap."

"Thank you very much," gasped Clarence.

"Not at all."

Leggett led Clarence into his study.

He needed dusting.

Any fellow less unsuspecting than Clarence would have been surprised at the good nature of the cad of the Fourth. Albert Leggett was not much given to helping others.

But Clarence was far from being of a suspicious nature. At Gander's Green, sweet simplicity and trust in human nature were cultivated.

There were no bad boys like Leggett at Gander's Green. Clarence was trustfulness itself.

Leggett dusted him down in a very friendly manner, and then made him sit in the armchair, and gave him toffee.

Clarence sucked the toffee and beamed on Leggett. This kindness was very touching after his rough reception in Tommy Dodd's study.

"You are very, very kind, Leggett," said Clarence gratefully. "I really think the fellows do not do you justice, Leggett, when they call you such unpleasant names as 'sneaking worm' and 'spoofing rotter' and such things. I think, Leggett, that you are far from being such an awful rotter as the fellows believe. Is there anything the matter, my dear Albert?"

"N-no."

"I thought you were looking rather angry."

"N-n-not at all," gasped Leggett.



"You silly chump!" raved Tommy Dodd. "If you kick that footer in here——" Clarence Cuffy kicked. The footer flew into the study and landed full in Tommy Dodd's excited face, and he sat down in the fender with a crash. "Yaroo!"

"Goal!" gasped Cuffy. (See Chapter 15.)

"You're such a charming chap, Cuffy, that nobody could be waxy with you."

"I am so glad to hear you say so, my dear Albert."

Cuffy had a most exasperating way of calling fellows by their Christian names, which had earned him more kicks than halfpence, so to speak, at Rookwood.

"As you are so kind, Albert, I shall make bold to mention a matter that I have been thinking about very seriously," said Cuffy, blinking at him. "Do you not think, my dear Albert, that it is very, very wrong to make bets on football matches? I asked James' opinion, and he said that only a howling rotter would do it. James expresses himself with rather more force than elegance, I fear, but his meaning was very clear. He seemed quite shocked at the idea of your making bets on the Bagshot match, Albert. Quite, quite shocked."

Leggett glared.

Only that afternoon Jimmy Silver had rubbed Leggett's nose in the cold, unsympathetic earth for that very reason.

"So it was you told Silver?" hissed Leggett.

"I did not exactly tell him, my dear Albert. I mentioned the matter in asking his opinion," explained Cuffy. "He was quite, quite shocked. So am I, Albert, and I am sure that you will not take offence if I beg and implore you, my dear friend, to renounce these wicked and unscrupulous ways."

Leggett's eyes wandered to the poker.

Clarence never knew how near he was to being chased out of the study with a poker behind him by his dear friend Albert.

But Leggett controlled himself. He had an axe to grind, and he was not done with Clarence yet.

"The fact is, I've chucked it, Cuffy," said Leggett, with great restraint. "I—I thought to myself, what would they think about such things in Goose's Green, and I decided to give it up."

"I am so glad, my dear Albert. But the name of the delightful village where my parents reside is Gander's Green."

"Yes; I meant Gander's Green. Now, Cuffy, old chap, I hear you're taking up footer. You'd make a splendid player, I should think! Awfully keen on the game—what?"

"Perhaps not very keen, Albert," said Cuffy thoughtfully. "You see, it is a very, very much rougher game than marbles. Have you a cough, Albert?"

"Nunno!" gasped Leggett. "Go on." "I desire to take the game up temporarily," explained Cuffy. "I wish to please my kind old friend, Mr. Dodd. Thomas' uncle, you know. He is very keen on games, and knows all the differences between cricket and football and marbles!"

"My hat! He must be a regular sporting encyclopædia, if he knows all that," said Leggett. "Well, you're keen to play in the Bagshot match, anyway!"

"Very, very keen, Albert, for the sake of entertaining Mr. Dodd if he visits us on Wednesday. If he comes on Saturday, however, I should prefer to play in the home match that afternoon."

"Exactly. Well, the way to get into the team is to please Jimmy Silver, as he is skipper," said Leggett. "If you did Silver some kind favour, it might make a lot of difference. I'd help you."

"You are very, very kind. What can I do to please James?"

"I suppose you know those fellows want their study repainted?" asked Leggett carelessly.

"I had not heard of it, Albert. But, then, I do not see much of the Classical fellows."

"Well, it's a fact. They want it repainted, but they can't afford the paint, or to pay a man to do it. Now, as far as painting goes, you could do it as easy as falling off a form. You're so clever, so jolly clever, I might say!"

"You flatter me, my dear Albert." "Not at all. As for the paint, I'd provide that, as a pleasant and friendly surprise to Jimmy Silver."

"That is noble of you, Albert, considering that Silver was handing you so very roughly a few hours ago, for what reason I do not know. I am so very, very pleased to see you return good for evil, my dear Albert."

"I'm trying to model myself on you, Cuffy," explained Leggett. "I'm sure I couldn't do better. Now, are you willing to do Silver this good turn? It may make a lot of difference about your getting into the eleven, and it will be a very kind action."

"You are sure James wants his study painted?"

"I've heard him say so lots of times, and he's awfully worried because he can't afford it."

"Then I shall be delighted!"

"You're a splendid chap, Cuffy!" said Leggett admiringly.

"Not at all, Albert. My dear papa always inculcated in me the desire to be useful and obliging to others."

"I—I see. Well, there's no time like the present," said Leggett. "Hoping that you would help, I've got the paint ready, and a brush. You can paint the study while those fellows are at footer practice. They won't be in till tea-time, and it will be a pleasant surprise to them."

"How good of you to think of them!" said Clarence, beaming.

"I'm trying to be good. But don't mention to Silver that I found the paint."

"My dear Albert, I must give you credit for your kind works," said Cuffy. "I cannot consent to take all the credit of this friendly action."

"Not at all! I want to hide my light under a bushel, like a really good little boy," explained Leggett. "Simply say, if you're asked, that a friend gave you the paint. Promise not to mention my name, or I can't have anything to do with it."

"Very well, if you wish, Albert."

"Good!" Leggett rose and opened his study cupboard. "Here's the paint."

He took out a three-pound tin of ready-mixed paint and a large brush. The tin was labelled "Light green."

"That's Silver's favourite colour," said Leggett. "I've heard him discussing it with his friends, and his idea is to have the study painted throughout in light green, including the furniture—chairs, table, bookcase, and the rest. I'm afraid you're taking on a lot of work, Cuffy."

"I do not mind that in the least, Albert."

"No, I thought you wouldn't. Put on plenty of paint, as thick as you like. And paint everything, especially the chairs and table. Begin with the chairs and table."

"Certainly!"

"And the clock—don't forget the clock!"

"I will be very, very careful, Albert."

"Better lock the door while you're at it, so that you won't be interrupted," said Leggett. "You're a really good chap,

Cuffy, and I'm glad you're willing to help me return good for evil in this way."

"I am delighted, Albert. It proves that you are by no means the malicious and revengeful rascal the fellows suppose."

"I—I—exactly! Yes, quite so. Well, here you are!" said Leggett. "I'll come as far as the end study with you. We'll go the indoors way."

The two Modern juniors left the study together. Leggett led the way along the winding passage that gave access to the Classical buildings. There was a locked door in the passage, but Leggett had a key to it.

The Fourth-Form quarters on the Classical side were deserted. All the fellows were out on the playing fields.

Leggett opened the door of the end study, and they entered.

"Go ahead, Cuffy!"

"Certainly, my dear Albert. How pleased James will be when he comes in!" said Clarence, beaming.

"Pleased isn't the word. He'll be delighted! Let's see you begin."

Confident as he was in the extreme simplicity of the duffer of Rookwood, Leggett could hardly believe that Clarence Cuffy would be ass enough to paint the end study as instructed. But his doubts were soon relieved.

Cuffy jerked off the lid of the tin, thrust in the brush, and started.

Leggett almost exploded as the paint was lathered on the table-top by a way of a beginning.

"Oh! Ha, ha! Oh, dear!" gasped Leggett.

Clarence looked round in surprise.

"All serene. I—I just caught the smell of the paint," said Leggett, coughing. "Go ahead, old chap! Lock the door!"

Leggett beat a retreat from the end study. Clarence locked the door after him; and Leggett, waiting a few moments outside, heard the swishing of the active paint-brush. Cuffy was hard at work.

Leggett scuttled back to the Modern side. He threw himself into the armchair in his study, kicked up his heels, and yelled. In the end study of the Classical side the duffer of Rookwood painted away industriously, his face beaming with satisfaction as he thought of the pleasant surprise that awaited dear James when he came in from the footer.

CHAPTER 16.

Black Ingratitude!

JIMMY SILVER threw on a coat and muffler as he left the football ground with his chums as the dusk was beginning to fall. The Fistical Four were late for tea, but they had had a good practice. Jimmy had put his men through their paces, and he had decided about the vacant places in the eleven.

"Well?" said Raby and Newcome together as they came away.

"You, Raby——"

"Oh, good!"

"And Mornington," said Jimmy Silver. "Sorry Newcome, old chap, but footer is footer, you know, and we've got to beat Bagshot."

"Oh, all serene!" grunted Newcome. "Let's get in to tea, anyway! I'm famished!"

"So you won't be playing Cuffy?" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footballers crowded in, and the Fistical Four hurried along to the end study. Jimmy turned the handle of the door, but it did not open.

"Hallo! What's the matter with this blessed door?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"There's somebody in there!" said Lovell. "I can hear somebody moving about! Tubby Muffin after the grub, perhaps."

"I'll scalp him if it is!" Jimmy Silver thumped on the panels. "Here, open this door, fathcad!"

"Certainly, my dear James!" came a well-known voice from within.

"Cuffy!" ejaculated the Fistical Four in a surprised chorus.

"What's that blessed niff?" exclaimed Newcome, sniffing. "Is there any fresh paint about?"

"Smells like it."

The key turned in the lock, and the door was opened. Clarence Cuffy's chubby face and big spectacles beamed at the chums of the Fourth. Cuffy's hands were stained, and there was a smear of green on his nose, and he looked a little tired. But he was beaming with good nature.

"Come in, my dear James!"

Jimmy Silver did not come in.

He stood in the doorway, thunderstruck. The paint in the study had certainly

seen better days. It might have been renewed with advantage. But not in the way Clarence had renewed it.

The study reeked with paint.

The chairs were a dazzling light green. The table fairly shone with the same artistic hue.

The clock was green, the bookcase was green, the armchair was green—light green, wet, and smelly!

The Fistical Four could hardly believe their dazzled eyes.

"By gum!" gasped Lovell at last.

"You like it, my dear Arthur?" asked Cuffy cheerfully.

"Like it!" stuttered Lovell. "Like it!"

Jimmy Silver found his voice.

"Cuffy! You Modern idiot!"

"My dear James!"

"You've mucked up our study like this!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"My dear——"

"You mad idiot!" roared Raby. "Do you think this is a joke? I call it more than a joke! My hat! The place is reeking!"

"You thumping ass!" shouted Newcome.

"You—you—you silly villain!"

Clarence gazed at the four in dismay.

He had expected them to be pleased. He had, in fact, expected them to be very, very pleased.

But they weren't pleased.

Whatever was doubtful about the matter, that wasn't doubtful at all. The Fistical Four were anything but pleased.

They gasped as they stared at the reeking paint. The study was fairly swimming with it. Already they had smears on their clothes.

"My hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "This is a modern jape! This is the Modern brand of humour! By gum, we'll show 'em how we appreciate it! Collar that burbling idiot!"

"My dear J-j-j-ames—— Oh, dear!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome grasped the unhappy doer of good deeds.

Jimmy Silver seized the paint-pot. There was still some left. He jerked the brush away from Clarence and jammed it into the tin, and gouged out the rest of the paint—over Clarence's head.

Cuffy roared as the paint showered on his face and hair.

He opened his mouth to explain, but ho

closed it again, gurgling spasmodically when the paint-brush was shoved into it.

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Paint him!" yelled Lovell. "Let him have the lot. Here's some ink, too. Get some soot, Raby!"

"Groogh-hoo-hooogh!"

Clarence Cuffy wriggled in the grasp of the incensed juniors.

Paint and ink and soot were added together to adorn him.

Not the remotest suspicion had Jimmy Silver & Co. that the duffer of Rookwood had been doing a kind action to please them.

They regarded it as a Modern jape on the Classics, and a jape that was far beyond the permitted limits.

In a few minutes Cuffy's appearance was extraordinary.

Where he was not sooty and inky he was a bright and shining green.

"Now kick him out!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"All together!" yelled Lovell.

Four boots crashed behind the unhappy Cuffy.

He flew out of the study.

Bump!

"Arrah, and phwat's the row?" roared Flynn along the passage. "Howly Moses! Phwat's that intirely? Is it a banshee?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Classical Four, as Clarence was propelled along the passage by four lunging boots.

"Yow-ow-gug-gug-gug!" stuttered Clarence. "My dear friends—yaroooh!—my dear James—yooop!—Arthur, my dear fellow— Yah! Oh! Oooooo! Wooooop!"

Clarence Cuffy vanished down the staircase.

He crossed the quad in record time, and burst into Mr. Manders' House, out of breath and palpitating with astonishment and terror.

"Hallo! What on earth's that?" shouted Tommy Dodd, as he sighted him. "Is it— is it Cuffy?"

"Yow-ow! Groogh! My dear Thomas—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was no—groo!—occasion for risibility, my dear Thomas! Gug-gug-gug!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Manders rustled up. "Cuffy! Is that Cuffy?"

"Groogh! Yes, sir! Gug-gug!"

"How dare you appear in such a state?" thundered the Modern master.

"Groogh! I have been painting, and— Groogh!"

"Go and clean yourself at once, and take five hundred lines!" shouted Mr. Manders. "You disgraceful boy! Get out of my sight!"

Clarence was glad enough to get out of his sight.

He sprinted for the dormitory, and the Modern juniors followed him in a yelling crowd.

As he rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed, Clarence gasped out an explanation. He was still in the dark as to why Jimmy Silver & Co. had cut up so rusty, and he asked dear Thomas if he could tell. But dear Thomas was in hysterics, and could not reply.

Meanwhile, nearly all the Classical Fourth had gathered to stare into the recking end study, and howl with laughter.

It was rather thick for a Modern jape, but it was funny—at least, the Classical Fourth thought so.

"By gad, it looks a corker!" exclaimed Townsend. "Nice and smelly, too! Save you somethin' in scent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't have tea there!" mumbled Lovell. "Oh, I'll scalp that villain Cuffy! Come to think of it, somebody must have put him up to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come and have tea in my study!" said Erroll, laughing.

And the Fistical Four had tea with Erroll and Mornington, and they did their prep in the Common-room that evening. The end study was not quite fit for habitation.

The next day, when the Fourth came out of the Form-room, Clarence Cuffy bore down on Jimmy Silver with a beaming smile. He did not seem to note the deadly gleam in Jimmy's eyes.

"My dear James," he said. "Mr. Dodd has written that he is not coming after all, so I shall not want to play in the Bagshot match this afternoon. I hope you are not disappointed. I think— Yaroooh!"

Clarence Cuffy sat down with a sudden jar, and Jimmy Silver walked on, leaving Clarence gasping and groping for his spectacles.

"Dear me!" stuttered Clarence. "James

is growing very, very ill-tempered. I shall not speak to James again till he has apologised."

Which was just as well for Clarence, for Jimmy Silver was really not quite safe for the duffer of Rookwood to approach at present.

The Bagshot match was played without the assistance of Clarence Cuffy, and Bagshot was beaten by two goals to one, which would certainly not have been the case had Clarence assisted Jimmy Silver's team.

CHAPTER 17.

Mornington's Answer!

"MORNY!"

"Darion kai Parysatidos——"

"Mornington!"

"Gignontai paides duo——"

"Oh, shut up that rot, Mornington!" exclaimed Lattrey of the Fourth irritably. "Give it a rest!"

Mornington did not even look up.

The dandy of the Fourth was seated on a bench, under one of the old beeches in the quadrangle at Rookwood.

Xenophon's "Anabasis" was open on his knees, and Morny was mumbling over the Greek.

He was not looking happy.

The once magnificent Mornington, dandy and slacker and "blade," was about the last fellow at Rookwood to take to "swotting" of his own accord.

But here he was swotting on a half-holiday!

On Little Side, his chum Erroll was at football practice with Jimmy Silver & Co.

Mornington would have been glad to join the footballers. On that keen afternoon football would certainly have been more agreeable than sitting under the beeches with Xenophon.

But Morny was sticking it. He detested work, and he hated Greek. The celebrated "Retreat of the Ten Thousand" possessed no interest for him whatever.

Yet here he was, mumbling over the "Anabasis," and Lattrey of the Fourth regarded him with mingled surprise and irritation.

"How are you getting on with your swotting?" asked Lattrey sarcastically.

"Rotten! And none the better for bein' interrupted."

"Towny says you're entering for a scholarship, and working for the exam," said Lattrey, eyeing him.

"Towny's right for once!"

"You'll never get it!"

"I don't suppose I shall. But I'm goin' to try. I wish I'd given Greek a bit more attention. Horrid bore!"

"Suppose you get it, what's the good of it to you?" asked Lattrey. "Three years without fees, and some money for books. Pah! Your uncle's paying your expenses here now. You don't stand to gain anything. It will only save your uncle's pocket if you get the schol."

"Quite so."

"Then what's the game? I don't understand."

"You wouldn't!"

"Look here, Morny, I can tell you a trick worth two of that!" said Lattrey, sitting down on the bench. "No need for us to be enemies because we've had rows."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

He did not like Lattrey, and he had had bitter quarrels with the cad of the Fourth. But he did not repulse him now. He was so horribly bored with work that any excuse for taking a rest was welcome to him.

"No need for you to be so jolly hard up, and having to ask your uncle, old Stacpole, for pocket money," continued Lattrey.

"Got a special tip for another swindlin' race?" grinned Mornington.

"No, look here. That kid, 'Erbert, would do anything you told him. He would follow your lead in anything and everything."

"I know that."

"Well, don't you see?"

"No, I don't!"

"Oh, you're blind!" said Lattrey impatiently. "Can't you see that that young ruffian is a goose that could lay golden eggs? What about having him in the study, teaching him nap and banker and bridge, and making a regular income out of him—what? I know he's a sharp little beast, and mightn't lose his money, but there are ways and means. That's where I can help you. You can't afford to be particular, Morny. Beggars can't be

choosers. That kid has quids and quids, and nothing to do with them. Why, between us we could fairly skin him! And under your influence he would come like a lamb to the slaughter—see?"

Lattrey's voice was eager, his eyes glistening.

Mornington looked at him fixedly.

There was not the slightest doubt that Lattrey's scheme would be a success, if Morny chose to adopt it. And Morny had been a very good deal of a blackguard in his time.

But there is a difference between blackguardism and sheer rascality, which Lattrey did not allow for.

Morny's eyes were burning.

"So that's the idea?" he said quietly.

"That's it. Easy as falling off a form."

"But it's rather superfluous," drawled Mornington. "If I chose to take money from 'Erbert, he would hand it to me for the askin'. No need to swindle him at all."

"Yes; but could you take charity from the kid? I know how touchy you are," said Lattrey. "It would get about, too. That's why you haven't done it."

"Well, I had some other reasons for not doin' it, too," remarked Mornington. "Reasons you wouldn't understand, dear boy. And if I were inclined to rob poor old 'Erbert, I think I'd rather do it by borrowin' his money than by inveiglin' him into games of banker and cheatin' him. But it's a great idea, Lattrey—simply great! And worthy of you! Just the kind of idea you'd be likely to think of. As for what I think of it, I'll show you!"

Morny's hand shot out suddenly, and his finger and thumb closed on Lattrey's sharp, thin nose.

His grip closed there like a vice, and Lattrey uttered a yell of anguish.

"Yow! Oh! Let go, you rotter! Oh!"

Mornington tweaked the nose of the cad of the Fourth grimly.

Then he let go and jumped up.

"That's what I think of your idea, my dear fellow," he drawled. "Now, if you'd like to put up your hands, I'll give merry old Xenophon a rest while I thrash you—what?"

Lattrey, in anguish, clasped his nose with both hands. He was hurt.

But he did not accept Mornington's in-

itation. He had not come there for a scrap.

"Ow-ow!" he mumbled.

"Put 'em up, dear boy!"

"Oh, you rotter! You hound!"

"Not spoilin' for a fight?" grinned Mornington. "Well, then, clear off! You're rather too unclean to sit on the same bench with me, dear boy! Cut!"

Lattrey gave him a look of deadly hatred, and moved slowly away.

Mornington sat down again, smiling. He renewed his application to the "Anabasis" with a more cheerful expression on his face. The tweaking of Lattrey's nose seemed to have comforted him.

CHAPTER 18.

Mornington II.

JIMMY SILVER greeted Mornington with a friendly nod, when the dandy of the Fourth came down to the football ground a little later.

"Come on, Morny," said the captain of the Fourth cheerily. "We shall want you in the front line when we play Greyfriars, you know!"

"I hope so," said Morny. "I couldn't get down before. I've been grindin'."

"You grinding? Ha, ha!"

"Honest Injun!" said Mornington. "But I've done enough for a bit. I'd rather play footer."

"I should think so," said Jimmy, laughing.

Mornington joined in the practice with great zest.

He was in good form, too. Swotting did not detract from his form so much as his old habits, by any means.

He enjoyed the practice, and when it was over, he left the footer ground with Erroll, a ruddy glow in his face.

"How are you getting on with the Greek?" Erroll asked, with a smile, as they walked to the house.

"Rotten! Like a kid in the Third!"

"We'll have a go at it together after tea, if you like."

"Oh, dear!"

Erroll laughed.

"Not unless you like, Morny," he said.

"Oh, I do like!" said Mornington.

"I've got to stick it! I've simply got

to get that schol. I'm not goin' to have my Staepoole cousins turnin' up their noses at me as a pensioner on my uncle!"

"Perhaps they wouldn't turn up their noses, Morny," suggested Erroll gently.

"They never liked me. I've quarrelled with the lot of them, more than once."

"Was it all their fault, old chap?"

"No, more likely mine," said Mornington coolly. "But I don't like 'em, and they don't like me, and I'm not goin' to be dependent on their father, if I can help it. The schol., if I get it, will set me up till I leave Rookwood, an' I can get into the Army then, an' get killed respectably. I'll bring young 'Erbert in to tea, if you don't mind, Erroll."

"Of course, I don't mind! I like Herbert!"

Kit Erroll had tea ready in Study No. 4 when Mornington came in with 'Erbert of the Second.

'Erbert was looking very cheery.

"How are you getting on in the Second now, 'Erbert?" asked Morny, as he helped his guest to bread and marmalade.

"Fust-rate!" grinned 'Erbert. "Tracy minor is awf'ly pally—same as Tracy of the Shell! Lots of fellers that never knowed me before are awf'ly pally now. Old Jones got his back up a bit at first—he thought I was going to put on side, says he. But he's all serene now."

"I suppose you've got plenty of dibs?"

"'Eaps!" said 'Erbert brightly. "Sir Rupert sends me a big allowance, you know. I don't spend much. I've got ten pounds now."

"My hat! What a merry millionaire!"

"Course, it was a bit queer 'aving bank-notes of my hown at first," said 'Erbert. "But you soon git used to it. I got two fivers in my pocket now, and I sometimes forget they're there. There ain't so very much in 'aving money. If you spend it, it's gone and you ain't got it, and if you don't spend it, it's the same as not 'aving it!"

"You're a philosopher, 'Erbert," said Erroll, laughing.

"Would you mind listenin' to a word of advice from a poor relation, 'Erbert?" asked Mornington blandly.

"Oh, Master Morny!"

"I believe you've had offers of friendship from some chaps in the Fourth, and

the Shell—Townsend, and Peele, and Gower, and Smythe, and that crowd?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get on with them?"

"I've told 'em to go an' eat coke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I knowed what they was arter," said 'Erbert disdainfully. "When I was a poor kid, they turned their noses up at me, and sneered at you, Master Morny, 'cause you took me in and looked arter me. I know their sort, and I ain't taking any!"

"What about Lattrey of the Fourth?"

"I hit him in the eye!"

"What?"

"He wanted me to play banker," said 'Erbert. "Course; I used to play banker at Dirty Dick's, when I was a nipper—they all did. But not at Rookwood. Besides, I knowed what Lattrey wanted. So I hit him in the eye!"

Mornington and Erroll roared.

"He went for me," continued 'Erbert. "But old Jonesy came up, and we bumped him down the passage. He ain't spoken to me since."

Mornington chuckled.

"So that's why dear old Lattrey was tryin' to enlist my assistance," he remarked. "I've had a flatterin' offer from Lattrey, kid. We were to go halves in swindlin' you at banker."

"The utter rascal!" exclaimed Erroll hotly.

"Yes, he is rather a corker," agreed Mornington. "I wanted to put you on your guard against that bounder, 'Erbert, but you don't seem to need it. Don't have anythin' to do with him."

"No fear!" said 'Erbert emphatically. "He's a rotter all through, he is. I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole!"

Mornington grinned when 'Erbert left the study after tea.

"My fatherly advice wasn't needed," he remarked. "'Erbert can look after himself. I fancy Lattrey will find him a hard nut to crack. Now about that Greek, Erroll, if you feel up to it."

"Right!"

And the books were got out, and the two chums were soon grinding.

'Erbert went down the passage to the stairs, and as he passed Lattrey's study the cad of the Fourth stepped out.

'Erbert eyed him grimly.

"You've been to tea with Morny—what?" asked Lattrey, with a sneer.

"That ain't your business," said 'Erbert. "But I 'ave, if you want to know."

"I can guess what he wanted you for," said Lattrey, eyeing him. "I heard from Tracy minor that you've got two five-pound notes."

The fag's face crimsoned with anger.

"You're a liar!" he said, with the directness of speech he had learned before he came to Rookwood School. "Master Morny never wanted nothing of the sort, an' you know it."

"Have you got the notes now?" sneered Lattrey.

"Find out!"

"No need to find out," said Lattrey, laughing. "I can guess where they are."

"You lyin' hound!" exclaimed 'Erbert furiously, "Look 'ere!"

He jerked a pocket-book out, opened it, and showed two crisp five-pound notes inside.

"Wot price that, you rotter?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Lattrey, "I was mistaken it seems!"

"You wasn't mistaken! You was lyin', and you know it!"

"You surely don't carry those bank-notes about with you, kid?"

"Why shouldn't I? They're mine, ain't they?"

"But is it safe——"

"Not while you're about, I dessay!" said 'Erbert.

And with that Parthian shot he scuttled on towards the stairs, just eluding Lattrey's angry clutch.

Lattrey, his eyes gleaming, made a rush after him. 'Erbert ran down the stairs and bumped into the Fistical Four, who were coming up. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome grasped him together, and sat him down.

"Look where you're going, young 'un!" said Lovell severely.

"Ow!" gasped 'Erbert. "That 'ound Lattrey's arter me!"

"Oh, all serene!"

Lattrey paused on the stairs at the sight of Jimmy Silver & Co. He would have retraced his steps, but the chery Co. ran up and collared him before he could escape.

"Bullying 'Erbert again—what?" said Jimmy Silver. "I think I promised you something for that, Lattrey."

"Let me go, hang you!" shouted Lattrey savagely.

"Yes, when you've had what you've been promised!"

"I—ow—yow——"

Bump, bump, bump!

The cad of the Fourth, struggling in the grasp of the Fistical Four, snote the landing thrice in succession. His yells rang along the passage.

Peele and Gower came out of their study.

"Look here——" began Peele.

"Do you want some?" demanded Raby.

Apparently Peele didn't, for he retreated into his study. The Fistical Four walked on to the end study, leaving Lattrey gasping on the floor. Gower gave him a hand up.

'Erbert, chuckling, cut away to the Second Form quarters. Lattrey's luck seemed to be out all round.

CHAPTER 19.

A Strange Mystery!

JIMMY SILVER started, and awoke.

It was past midnight, and deep gloom reigned in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood.

Jimmy turned his head on the pillow, blinking into the darkness.

Something had awakened him, and he listened for a moment or two.

Faintly, in the darkness, came the sound of a cautiously-closed door.

Jimmy grunted.

He knew that that sound was made by someone creeping out of the dormitory.

"Rotter!" murmured Jimmy sleepily.

He wondered which member of the Classical Fourth was going out of bounds. It was an old habit of Morny's, but Morny had dropped it of late.

Lattrey and Peele, Gower and Townsend and Topham were given to breaking out of bounds after lights out, too.

Evidently it was one of the "nuts" of the Fourth.

But Jimmy was puzzled, too.

The merry nuts who sneaked out of the school after lights out generally went much

earlier than this. There could not be much going on at the Bird-in-Hand after midnight.

But Jimmy Silver was sleepy, and he was still thinking over it, when he fell fast asleep again.

He did not awaken again till the morning light was streaming in at the high windows and the rising-bell was clanging out over Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver sat up and yawned.

"Blessed old bell!" grumbled Lovell, as he turned out.

Jimmy Silver rose, and he remembered the incident of the night, and glanced at Townsend & Co. None of them showed any signs, so far as he could see, of having left the dormitory during the night.

"Which of you bounders was out last night?" asked Jimmy.

Lattrey glanced at him.

"Was somebody out?" he asked.

"Yes. I woke up and heard him go."

"Well, didn't you see who it was?"

"I'm not a cat, fathead! I can't see in the dark. Besides, he was outside when I heard the door close. One of you nutty rotters, of course!"

"It wasn't I!" yawned Townsend.

"Was it you, Morny?"

"My dear idiot, I've given up such wicked ways!" said Mornington. "I can't afford to be welched at the Bird-in-Hand now. Lattrey, most likely."

"I was fast asleep all night," said Lattrey.

"That settles it!" grinned Lovell.

"Lattrey couldn't tell a lie if he tried!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lattrey scowled, and made no rejoinder.

"By gad, though, who was it?" said Topham curiously. "It wasn't one of us, and it wasn't Lattrey. He's not due at the Bird-in-Hand till to-night. It was for to-night, wasn't it, Lattrey?"

"Oh, ring off!" grunted Lattrey.

"Morny at his old games!" chuckled Gower. "I thought he was spoofing."

Morny gave Gower a grim look.

"I've already said it was not I, Gower," he said quietly. "If you take the liberty of doubtin' my word, dear boy, I shall assume the liberty of pullin' your nose!"

"Oh, rats!" said Gower.

And he turned to his washstand, and the subject dropped.

Jimmy Silver was frowning a little as he went down with his oluns. It was not exactly Jimmy's business, but the "blades" of the Classical Fourth had an exasperating effect on him.

Sooner or later there was certain to be a discovery, probably to be followed by disgrace and expulsion from the school, and though Jimmy would have been glad to see Lattrey at least kicked out of Rookwood, he was sensitive about the honour of his Form.

He did not want the Modern fellows to cackle about Classics getting expelled for shady conduct, for one thing.

"That rotter Lattrey wants pulling up!" growled Jimmy, as the Fistical Four went out into the quadrangle. "According to Topham, he's going out on the giddy randan to-night, so I suppose it wasn't Lattrey last night. But he jolly well ought to be stopped."

"Perhaps a prefect will drop on him, and then it will be good-bye to Lattrey," said Lovell. "Hallo! Here's young 'Erbert!"

"Master Morny down yet?" asked 'Erbert, as he came up.

"His merry lordship is still at his toilette," said Raby. "He's a bit more particular than us common mortals. Anything up?"

"I s'pose it's a joke," said 'Erbert. "Somebody's been playin' tricks. I found Master Morny's hanky in our dorm. this mornin'."

"His handkerchief?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in astonishment.

"Yes. Here it is."

'Erbert held it up. Morny's beautiful handkerchiefs, with his monogram in the corner, were well known in the Fourth. There was no mistaking the article.

"You found that in your dorm?" exclaimed Newcome.

"Yes. Jones saw it lyin' beside my bed," explained 'Erbert. "It wasn't there when I went to bed last night. Somebody's put it there. Blessed if I know why. I want to see Master Morny an' give it to 'im."

"Well, my hat!"

Mornington and Erroll came out of the School House together, and 'Erbert ran off to them. The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"What on earth does that mean?" asked Lovell. "Looks as if it was Morny went out last night, and went to the Second dorm. What on earth should he do that for?"

"Goodness knows!" said Jimmy Silver, quite mystified.

"Hallo! That's my handkerchief," said Mornington, as the fag came up with it in his hand.

He felt in his pocket.

"What on earth are you doin' with my hanky, 'Erbert?" he exclaimed.

The fag explained.

Mornington stared at him blankly as he took the handkerchief, and listened to 'Erbert's explanation as to where he had found it.

"Is that a joke?" he demanded, at last.

"Course it ain't, Master Morny! Jones saw it on the floor, and then I picked it up and saw it was yours!"

"But how the merry thunder did my handkerchief come to be in your dorm?" exclaimed Mornington. "It was in my pocket when I went to bed."

"I dunno, sir. But there it was, and 'arf the Second saw me pick it up," said 'Erbert, rather warmly.

He felt that a doubt as to his statement was implied.

"Have you taken to sleep-walking, Morny?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Of course I haven't, you ass!"

"Then it's jolly queer. Somebody went out of our dorm last night, and your hanky's picked up in the Second dorm this morning. You must have been there."

"I never opened my eyes all night."

"It must be a practical joke of some sort," said Erroll.

"But where does the joke come in?"

"Oh, I give that up!"

Mornington thrust the handkerchief into his pocket. He was astonished and annoyed—unless he was acting. Jimmy Silver wondered whether he was acting. Morny might have broken bounds by way of the Second Form dormitory, but it seemed unlikely.

It was not like him, either, to deny it, if he had done so. He cared nothing for the other fellows' opinion of his conduct. Jimmy had to admit that it was a puzzle. If some practical joker had taken Morny's

handkerchief there, it was extremely difficult to see where the joke came in.

The breakfast-bell called the juniors in, and the matter was dropped. But some of the fellows remembered it, and wondered.

CHAPTER 20.

A Startling Discovery!

"GREAT pip! What's the matter?" Lessons were over at Rookwood, and the Fistical Four were sauntering in the quad before tea, when they came upon 'Erbert under the beeches.

They halted at once, as Jimmy uttered a startled exclamation.

'Erbert's expression struck them.

The fag was standing by a beech, with a pale and troubled face, and a deep wrinkle in his brow. He looked as if all the troubles of the universe had suddenly settled on his shoulders.

Jimmy Silver tapped him on the arm, and the fag looked up suddenly, his pale face flushing crimson.

"What's the matter, kid?" demanded Jimmy.

"Nothin'!" stammered 'Erbert.

"Oh, don't be an ass! There's something wrong. Has Lattrey been ragging you again? My hat, I'll—"

"'Tain't Lattrey, sir," said 'Erbert hastily. "Nothin' of the sort."

"Well, what is it? You can tell your Uncle James," said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "Keep smiling, you know, and tell your kind old uncle."

But 'Erbert did not smile, and he did not speak.

"Can't you talk?" demanded Lovell.

"Nunno! I mean, no!"

"Take him to Morny," suggested Newcome. "Morny's his patron saint!"

"Ha, ha! Good! Come on, kid!"

'Erbert shrank back.

"No!" he exclaimed shrilly. "I don't want to go to Master Morny! Lemme alone! There ain't nothing the matter. I ain't going to say nothing."

Jimmy Silver looked at him hard. It was only too easy to see that 'Erbert was in a state of great stress of mind.

Jimmy could only conclude that he had

been bullied, and that was a matter for Uncle James to see to. Uncle James had a very heavy foot to put down on that kind of thing.

The fog was moving away, but Jimmy's hand on his shoulder jerked him back.

"Now, I don't want to bother you, kid," said Jimmy kindly, "but I'm going to see into this. Tell me what's the matter."

'Erbert hesitated. His glance dwelt doubtfully upon Jimmy's chums, and they understood his look, and grinned.

"Pitch it to Jimmy by himself," said Lovell. "Jimmy's the kind uncle. See you later, Jimmy, when you've finished the father-confessor biznez."

And the Co. laughed and walked away together.

"You'd rather tell me alone, kid?" asked Jimmy, in amazement.

"I—I'd like to tell you, Master Silver, an' ask your advice," faltered 'Erbert, "but nobody else. You keep it dark, sir."

"My hat! Is it something serious?"

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy's face became grave now.

"You've always been very good to me, sir," mumbled 'Erbert; "and you're friends with Master Morny now, so I'd like to tell you. But—"

"Is it something to do with Morny, then?"

"No, it ain't," said 'Erbert hastily. "But—but rotten fellers might say it was—specially sneakin' cads like that chap Lattrey!"

"Blessed if you're not mysterious!" said Jimmy Silver, more and more amazed. "Well, go ahead and tell me, and I'll give you my advice. I'll keep it dark, of course, if you want me to."

"Thank you, sir," mumbled the fog.

"Well, what is it?"

"I—I've been robbed, sir!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"What?" he shouted.

"Robbed!" repeated 'Erbert. "My bank-notes, sir. I 'ad two five-pun' notes, and they've been took!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Jimmy Silver, aghast. He was serious enough now. "Are you sure, 'Erbert?"

"Quite sure, sir," said 'Erbert miserably. "I never found it out till arter lessons. I kep' the two fivers in the pocket-book, in my inside jacket-pocket. I never wanted them to spend, really. But arter lessons

to-day, I was going to get something for tea, and I found I was out of tin, and I thought of changing one of them at the school shop. And when I looked for them they was gone!"

"Your pocket-book was gone?"

"No, the notes. They was took out of the pocket-book. That was still in my pocket."

"My hat! But how could they be taken out of your pocket-book if you keep it in your pocket?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

'Erbert gave him an almost haggard look.

"They must 'ave been taken when I 'ad the jacket orf, sir."

"In the dorm?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Yes, sir, when I was in bed," said 'Erbert. "That's the only time they could 'ave been took. I never missed them till now, 'cause I never opened the pocket-book till now. They was took last night."

Jimmy Silver's face was sombre. Mornington's pocket-handkerchief, found in the Second Form dormitory by 'Erbert's bed, had a new significance now.

"Last night, 'Erbert? They may have been taken some other night, if you haven't looked at them lately."

'Erbert shook his head.

"It was last night, sir. They was there yesterday, 'cause I showed them to Master Lattrey. He was makin' out that Master Morny borrowed my money, an' I showed 'im the notes to prove he was a liar. But for that, I should 'ave thought they was taken some other night."

"You haven't mentioned this, 'Erbert?"

"Only to you, sir."

"You ought to go to the Form-master. Mr. Bootles will have to inquire into it," said Jimmy Silver.

"No, sir—oh, no! Don't you see"—'Erbert's voice was low and husky—"Master Morny's 'anky was picked up near my bed this mornin' in the dorm. Fellers will say at once that he was there. Master Morny's poor now, an' I'm rich, sir; and—and it's really 'is money. Fellers—specially chaps like Lattrey—will say—you understand, sir."

Jimmy Silver nodded. He understood only too well.

It was as clear as daylight, Jimmy Silver thought. The dandy of the Fourth was hard up—all Rookwood knew that. Doubtless he regarded the Mornington money as

his own, in a sense. At all events, he considered it hard that he should be deprived of it.

He wanted money, and he had helped himself. Like a clumsy thief, he had dropped his handkerchief on the scene of the theft.

It was all too painfully clear.

Blackguard and gambler Morny was known to be. Was it a very long step from that to stealing?

The fag was watching Jimmy Silver's face anxiously. He could read there the thoughts of the captain of the Fourth only too clearly.

"You, too?" he muttered. "You think it was Morny, an' you know what a splendid feller he is! You know what he did for me. That's why I ain't said nothing, sir. I knowed silly fools would say it was Master Morny!"

"Well, I hope I'm not a silly fool, 'Erbert," said Jimmy, smiling slightly. "But it looks pretty clear to me."

"I wish I 'adn't told you now," said 'Erbert miserably. "I thought you would 'ave more sense, Master Silver. I thought you might 'elp me find the 'ound that has took my bank-notes. I don't care nothin' for the money, only I want to find that 'ound, in case it comes out, and then fellers will think it was Morny."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

The little fellow's faith in his magnificent friend was touching. It was only the fear that Morny might be unjustly suspected that troubled 'Erbert.

Not for a single instant did he allow a doubt of Mornington to creep into his loyal heart.

But Jimmy was far from sharing 'Erbert's unwavering faith. He knew that there was good in Morny, but he knew that there was much evil, and he had seen much more of the evil than of the good.

"Won't you 'elp me, sir?" pleaded 'Erbert. "It wasn't Morny; that's all rot. It was some chap—I don't know who. If you can't 'elp me, and I can't find 'im, I want to keep it dark."

"But the money——"

"Hang the money! I don't care for that! I'm only afraid of them cads accusin' Master Morny."

"You know how it looks to n.e. 'Erbert?"

"I thought you'd 'ave more sense, sir."

Jimmy Silver laughed—he could not help it.

"Well, my advice to you is to go to the Form-master, and tell him what's happened," he said. "Your own Form-master; or I'll take you to Mr. Bootles, if you like. Or the Head."

"Then they'd find out about Master Morny's 'anky bein' there, an' think it was him."

"They'd find out the truth," said Jimmy.

"They might, an' agin they mightn't! I ain't doing anythin' to 'urt Master Morny; I know that. I ain't goin' to my Form-master."

"Well, then," said Jimmy Silver, "let's go to Mornington! Morny's your cousin and your good angel, and he ought to know. If he's innocent, as you think, you ought to tell him."

"He—he might think I—I——" 'Erbert faltered.

"He wouldn't think you suspected him, you young ass! He knows you wouldn't suspect him if you caught him in the act," said Jimmy, laughing. "Come along with me, and tell Morny. He's got a right to know!"

"Orl right, sir."

And 'Erbert, though evidently very uneasy in his mind, accompanied Jimmy Silver to Study No. 4 in the Classical Fourth. Tubby Muffin was in the passage there, and he stopped them at once.

"What do you think of that rotter Morny, Jimmy?" he asked, with an expression more of sorry than of anger. "He's kicked me out of his study! I just dropped in to tea, and he kicked me—me, you know!"

"Serve you right!" said Jimmy Silver unsympathetically.

"I say, young Mornington," said Tubby to 'Erbert, "I hear that you've got two fivers!"

"Oh, you've heard that, 'ave you?" said 'Erbert gruffly.

"Tracy minor said so."

"Bother Tracy minor."

"Well, my idea is that you might lend me one of them," said the fat Classical confidentially. "You see——"

"Oh, dry up!" said 'Erbert.

"Cut off, Fatty!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, if you're after 'Erbert's fivers—— Yarough!" roared Tubby, as Jimmy sat him down on the floor.

Tubby sat on the floor and roared, while Jimmy Silver and 'Erbert went on to Mornington's study and entered, Jimmy closing the door carefully after him.

CHAPTER 21.

By Whose Hand?

MORNINGTON and Erroll were working in the study.

Tea was over, and the books had been brought out, and the chums of the Fourth were grinding.

If Valentine Mornington did not get a chance for the "schol.," it would not be for want of help from his loyal chum. Indeed, Kit Erroll was really doing more work for the exam. than Mornington was.

Mornington looked up as Jimmy Silver came in with 'Erbert. He was glad of a rest.

"Hallo, Silver!" he yawned. "Don't say footer—no footer for me this afternoon. I'm swottin'."

"It isn't footer!" said Jimmy. "By gad! I wish it was!" grinned Mornington. "I think I should let you persuade me. Erroll, old scout, I shall never get that scholarship, and I shall have to stick to spongin' on my uncle, unless I take to card-sharpin' or burglary."

"Master Morny!" gasped 'Erbert. "Well, I'd rather be a burglar than a swot, if it was a matter of choice," said Mornington, laughing. "Look out for your merry banknotes, 'Erbert. I shall burgle them some night when I get quite fed up with Greek."

"Don't!" stammered 'Erbert, his face quite pale. "Don't, Master Morny! Don't talk like that 'ere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington. "Do you think I was serious, you young ass?" Erroll laughed, too.

"'Erbert's 'been robbed," said Jimmy Silver, coming to the point. "Somebody took two fivers out of his pocket-book while he was asleep last night."

"By gad!" exclaimed Mornington, in astonishment.

"That's serious enough," said Erroll, his face growing very grave. "I suppose there's no mistake about it?"

"It seems not. 'Erbert knew the banknotes were there yesterday, and they were gone when he opened the pocket-book this

afternoon. They could only have been taken last night."

"My hat!" said Mornington. "That means a jolly serious scandal. Some young rogue in the Second Form. Can't you guess who it was, 'Erbert?"

"No," said 'Erbert, in a low voice. "Tracy minor, perhaps," yawned Mornington. "He's very goey for a fag—he's been the pace sometimes with his cheery major, Tracy of the Shell, and dear old Adolphus Smythe! What a sad end for a merry blade to come to, right at the beginnin' of his rictous career!"

"Never mind Tracy minor!" said Jimmy Silver. "'Erbert hasn't reported the matter yet, though I've advised him to."

"I advise him to, also," said Mornington. "Why haven't you been to your Form-master, 'Erbert? He's the proper person to deal with this. Of course, you can afford to lose the money, you bloated aristocrat, but a thief ought to be dropped on heavy. It's up to you, kid."

'Erbert did not answer. His face was pale and red by turns.

"'Erbert's got his reasons," said Jimmy Silver. "He's afraid of suspicion falling upon the wrong party."

"I don't quite see it!" said Mornington, puzzled.

He glanced at 'Erbert, Jimmy Silver, and Erroll in turns. He did not seem able to understand the expression on their faces. Erroll was quite pale.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Mornington sharply, staring at them. "What are you blinking at me like that for, you owls?"

"Don't you see, Master Morny?" groaned 'Erbert. "Your 'anky—"

"My what?"

"Your 'anky, sir."

"My handkerchief?" Morny stared at him. "What are you babbling about my handkerchief for?"

Then the truth suddenly flashed on him. His face changed, and he sprang to his feet. The drawling indifference was gone now.

"By gad! My handkerchief was found in your dorm—near your bed! You young scoundrel, have you come here to tell me that you suspect me of stealing your filthy money?"

He made a furious movement towards his cousin. 'Erbert started back with a cry.

"Master Morny, it ain't that! I don't! I don't! It's what the fellows would say—"

"What do you mean, you young idiot?" demanded Mornington harshly.

"Easy does it, Morny!" said Erroll quietly, laying his hand on his chum's arm. "Don't jaw, 'Erbert—he doesn't mean anything of the sort."

"Course I don't," muttered 'Erbert, his voice trembling, and the tears coming into his eyes. "Oh, Master Morny, you might 'ave knowed better than to think I'd go for to think anything like that 'ere."

"What do you mean, then?" snapped Mornington.

"Can't you see?" broke in Jimmy Silver angrily. "Your handkerchief was left in the Second dorm last night, near 'Erbert's bed. The banknotes were taken about the same time. 'Erbert thinks the fellows will put two and two together, and make it an excuse for accusing you."

"Chaps like Lattrey would be glad of the chance, sir!" pleaded 'Erbert. "Course, I knowed it wasn't you! I'd hit anybody what said it was. But the chaps what say so, sir—specially Lattrey an' Peele an' that lot."

Mornington sat down again. His face was set, his lips compressed.

"I understand," he said. "By gad, it would look pretty black, too. Lattrey would be able to make a yarn out of that, and he would do it like a shot. So you've kept this dark, 'Erbert, in case I should be suspected?"

"Not suspected, sir," said 'Erbert loyally. "Nobody what knows you could suspect you of anything dishonourable. But fellers like Lattrey would pretend to suspect you, sir. They'd make up a yarn out of it, I know that."

Mornington chuckled.

"'Erbert, old scout, you're worth your weight in gold," he said. "I'm sorry I jumped out at you like that—I didn't catch on. I suppose you wouldn't suspect me, even if you saw me doing it—what?"

"No, sir," said 'Erbert simply. "I should think you was orf your onion."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's not quite a laughing matter, Morny," said Jimmy Silver. "'Erbert's a little prize-packet, I know; but he's about the only fellow at Rookwood who thinks of you like that."

"Not the only one," said Kit Erroll quietly. "There's another here."

"Two merry believers in my honesty!" smiled Mornington. "What's your opinion, Jimmy Silver? But I needn't ask."

"I haven't any opinion—yet," said Jimmy. "You know what it looks like, Morny. Your handkerchief didn't walk into the Second dorm last night, did it?"

"Not likely! I should imagine that it was taken there by the cad who bagged 'Erbert's banknotes," said Mornington coolly.

"Oh!" said Jimmy, taken somewhat aback.

"You never thought of that, of course?" said Mornington sarcastically. "You wouldn't! But are you idiot enough to think I should leave my visitin'-card at the place where I'd stolen banknotes, if I were rotter enough to steal them?"

"It's narrowed down," said Erroll quietly. "Jimmy heard somebody go out of the Classical Fourth dorm last night. Whoever it was, was the thief. It's somebody in the Fourth—not the Second."

"Right!" said Mornington.

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath. "It must have been some awful rotter, if he took Morny's handkerchief to leave there!"

"We've got some rotters in the Fourth, I think!" said Mornington, with a sneer. "There's the dear fellow who proposed to me to help him cheat 'Erbert at cards!"

"Lattrey!" exclaimed Erroll.

"More likely Lattrey than anybody else," said Jimmy Silver. "But I don't believe in jumping on a fellow entirely without evidence—even a fellow like Lattrey. It's for you to decide, Morny, whether the matter goes before the Head. 'Erbert will do as you tell him."

Mornington bit his lip hard.

"Nobody knows yet?" he asked.

"Nobody, Master Morny."

"Then keep it dark for the present!" said Mornington decidedly. "If it goes to Bootles or the Head, it's no good telling them somebody else took my hanky there. They wouldn't believe it for a minute. It sounds too steep."

"It is rather steep!" said Jimmy Silver drily.

"Yes, isn't it?" sneered Mornington. "I know what you think, Jimmy Silver, and you can think it, and be blowed! You

can go and shout it out to all Rookwood, if you like. I don't care!"

"Master Silver won't say nothing, sir!" broke in 'Erbert eagerly. "He's promised!"

"Then keep it dark!" said Mornington. "Let's look for the thief ourselves. I fancy we shan't have far to look. Keep it dark! Hallo!"

A sound at the door caught his ear. He made one bound to the door, and tore it open. There was a yell as Tubby Muffin tumbled headlong into the room.

CHAPTER 22.

Mornington's Guilt!

TUBBY MUFFIN sat up and roared.

The fat Classical's fat ear had evidently been at the keyhole. He was not hurt yet, but he fully expected to be hurt, and he was roaring in anticipation.

"Yaroo! Lemme alone! Help! Ow!" "You scoundrel!" shouted Mornington, white with fury. "You've been listening!"

Tubby Muffin gasped breathlessly. "Yaroo! I haven't! I never heard a word! I don't know what you fellows have been talking about! Yow! Whoop! Leave off kicking me, you beast!"

But Mornington did not leave off kicking. He kicked the fat junior with terrific vim, and Tubby Muffin rolled about the carpet, yelling frantically.

"Yow-ow! Woop! Help! You rotten thief, Mornington! I'll tell all the fellows you've got 'Erbert's banknotes! Yaroo! Oh, crumbs!"

Tubby Muffin dodged out of the study at last and fled.

His hurried footsteps died away in hot haste down the passage.

"Not much chance of keeping it dark now," said Jimmy Silver drily. Mornington panted.

"Well, that fat rotter's got something for cavedroppin'," he said. "I wish I'd given him some more!"

"It'll all be out now!" muttered 'Erbert. "Oh, the fat brute! I'll go arter him and smash him!"

"It would be better to go to Mr. Bootles about it now," said Erroll. "Muffin will spread the yarn up and down the Form in five minutes."

"Let him!" said Mornington.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage. The door opened, and Conroy of the Fourth looked in.

"Hallo! It's spreadin' already!" said Mornington sarcastically.

"You fellows know what's up?" asked the Australian. "Tubby's got a thrilling yarn down the passage."

"Oh, we know!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose there's nothing in it?" said Conroy, looking from one to another. "I would suggest your bottling Tubby up. I came to give you the tip."

"It's true!" Tubby Muffin's voice came in a yell from the passage, where a crowd of the Classical Fourth was gathering already. "Morny's bagged that fag's fivers! He's got 'em in his pocket now! He's a thief!"

"Shut up!" came Dick Oswald's voice.

"I'm not going to shut up! Morny's a thief, and he's going to be shown up! He's kicked me, the beast! Think I'm going to be kicked by a thief? Yah!"

Mornington compressed his lips.

Evidently the idea of "keeping it dark" had to be given up now. Everybody in the Fourth Form passage could hear the voice of the indignant Tubby.

The crowd thickened round the doorway of No. 4, looking in.

"What on earth does all this mean?" demanded Higgs of the Fourth. "You been bagging a fag's banknotes, Morny?"

"No, you fool!"

"Not so much of your 'No, you fool!' snapped Higgs. "This wants looking into! I've heard about the fags finding your hanky in the Second dorm. If a kid there has been robbed—"

"'Erbert's been robbed!" howled Tubby Muffin. "Two fivers! And Morny's got them in his pocket, and 'Erbert isn't going to tell Mr. Bootles because he don't want Morny to be sacked!"

"Shut up, you fat fool!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"It's true!" yelled Tubby.

Mornington eyed the buzzing crowd with a bitter sneer.

"You can clear out of my quarters!" he said. "Go and hold your merry meetin's somewhere else, you silly duffers!"

"Listen to me," said Erroll, and his voice, though quiet, was clearly heard over the excited buzz. "This matter has got to be

settled, and it can be settled. Tubby Muffin was listening at the keyhole; that's why Morny kicked him out, and serve him right. He hasn't told you all the yarn."

"Well, let's hear it," said Higgs. "No need for Morny to fly out like a wild Hun, if he's got nothing on his conscience!"

"If!" sneered Lattrey.

Erroll gave the cad of the Fourth a look of contempt.

"You needn't chip in, Lattrey," he said. "Now, you fellows, here's what happened. Last night somebody sneaked out of the Fourth dormitory—you all know that."

"We know it was Mornington!" said Lattrey.

"You know nothing of the kind!" said Erroll sharply. "Hold your confounded tongue, you cad, or I'll shut you up! Somebody sneaked out—Jimmy Silver heard him. Somebody sneaked into the Second dorm, and took 'Erbert's banknotes from his pocket while he was asleep. That somebody left Morny's handkerchief on the floor. That's clear now. Well, it wasn't Morny—"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Let me finish. Whoever sneaked down a passage from the Fourth dorm to the Second wouldn't take the trouble to dress before he went. He would go in his pyjamas. He wouldn't be many minutes gone. Well, if it was Morny that went, he would be in his pyjamas—but his handkerchief would be in his clothes, where he left it. I suppose he wouldn't take his hanky with him specially to leave there as evidence against himself?"

"By gad! That's well put!" said Townsend. "Chap wouldn't dress for that, and he wouldn't have his hanky in his pyjamas!"

"Whoever left that hanky there left it on purpose," said Erroll. "Some cad who wanted to bag 'Erbert's money, and wanted to make himself safe by putting it on another chap—some chap he disliked! Morny's got enemies here!"

"Makes 'em wherever he goes, I should say!" grinned Townsend, and there was a laugh.

"Never mind that," said Erroll. "I've made it clear that it wasn't Morny. Some sneaking cad has got 'Erbert's banknotes, and he's trying to make it look as if Morny has them. Now, Morny hasn't been out of the school to-day. This is his study, and here's Morny. If he's got the plunder, it's

here. You're all present to see a search. Select a couple of fellows to search Mornington and his belongings, and if you find any banknotes, I'll eat them!"

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're a regular lawyer, Erroll!"

"Does Morny agree?" said Townsend. Mornington bit his lip.

"No, I don't!" he said curtly.

There was a buzz at once.

The refusal of the dandy of the Fourth had the immediate effect of undoing the good impression Erroll's arguments had produced.

"Master Morny!" muttered 'Erbert.

"Morny!" exclaimed Erroll.

Mornington smiled a sneering smile.

"Do you think I'm goin' to be searched, like a dashed pickpocket at a police-station?" he exclaimed passionately. "Go an' eat coke, the lot of you!"

"That settles it," said Townsend, with a curl of the lip.

"You know what the fellows will think, Mornington," said Jimmy Silver, with a grim look.

"Let 'em think what they like!" sneered Mornington. His haughty, passionate temper was fully roused now. "Hang them—and hang you! Get out of my study!"

"Confound your cheek!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver hotly. "You're acting like a thief, Morny, afraid of being found out!"

"Think so if you life!"

"Morny!" said Erroll.

"You needn't talk, Erroll! I'm not goin' to be searched," said Mornington. "I've got a bit too much pride to stand anything of the kind, I hope. Let 'em think what they like, an' be hanged to them!"

Erroll was troubled and silent. He could make allowances for Morny's haughty temper, but the rest of the Fourth drew their own conclusions, and their looks showed what conclusions they drew.

"By gum!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell angrily. "I think we've stood about enough of Mornington's cheek! Morny, if you don't get searched, as your own pal has suggested, it will look as if you've got the banknotes about you, and want to get rid of them as soon as you're clear of us."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, we're not going," said Lovell grimly. "If there's a thief in the Fourth, he's going to be shown up! What do you say, you fellows? If Morny won't agree to a search, let's search him, willy-nilly!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Lattrey.

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Conroy.

"You cheeky cads!" shouted Mornington.

"Lay a finger on me, and I'll—hands off, hang you!"

His insolent defiance was too much for the Fourth, under suspicion as he was. He was collared on all sides, and, struggling furiously, borne to the floor. Erroll made a move forward and then paused. Jimmy Silver was grimly in the way. He could not help Morny, and he said quietly:

"Morny, old chap, it's for your own good! It's to prove your innocence, and it's got to be proved!"

"Search him!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "I'll bet he's got the banknotes about him. And if he's got any, they're 'Erbert's. He's got none of his own now."

Mornington was held firmly in the grasp of the Classical juniors, panting with rage. Higgs of the Fourth searched his pockets. There was a sudden yell as Alfred Higgs drew his hand out of an inside pocket of Morny's jacket and held it up.

A crisp five-pound note rustled in his hand!

"Look at that!" roared Higgs.

"The banknote!"

"Thief!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Erroll, staggering back.

He sank helplessly into a chair. Well he knew that Morny had no banknotes of his own now.

Mornington suddenly ceased to struggle. His face had gone white.

"Let me go!" he said very quietly.

"There's two! Find the other!" chortled Tubby Muffin. "Ain't there two, 'Erbert?"

'Erbert, with a face like death, had slipped from the study. The discovery had almost stunned the loyal fag. Erroll looked stunned, too. He had suggested the search to prove his chum's innocence. And it had proved his guilt!

But the search failed to reveal the second banknote. Mornington was allowed to rise to his feet.

"I'll hand this to young 'Erbert," said Higgs. "Where's the other, Mornington? There are two. You may as well own up now."

"Did you—did you get that out of my pocket?" muttered Mornington huskily.

"You know I did! Where's the other one?"

"I—I—" Mornington panted. "That banknote was put in my pocket by the same fellow that left my handkerchief in the Second dorm!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"And it was Lattrey!" shouted Mornington, his eyes burning at the cad of the Fourth.

"Did Lattrey make you refuse to be searched, too?" sneered Townsend.

Mornington was dumb.

Too late, he realised how his haughty, passionate pride had played into his enemy's hands. Who would—who could believe him now?

"I fancy we all know what to think," said Lovell contemptuously. "You'd better get that other fiver and hand it back, Morny, or there'll be trouble for you! I'm done with you!"

"Thief!" growled half a dozen voices.

The juniors crowded out of the study.

Mornington was left alone with his chum. He stood for some minutes, looking dazed.

Erroll did not look up.

Mornington fixed his eyes on his chum as if waiting for him to speak. But Erroll did not speak, and he did not look up to catch Mornington's haggard glance.

Very quietly the dandy of the Fourth crossed to the door and left the study.

In the deserted passage, outside, 'Erbert was waiting. He caught Mornington's arm.

"Master Morny! It's all lies! You never did!" 'Erbert's voice was half a sob.

"Master Morny, I know you never did!"

"Thank you, 'Erbert," said Mornington quietly.

He went on down the passage. The study door was flung open, and Erroll came quickly out, calling:

"Morny! Morny!"

But Mornington was gone, and he did not hear the voice of his chum.

CHAPTER 23.

Guilty or Not Guilty?

"TROT in, 'Erbert!"

The Fistical Four, of the Classical Fourth, were in the end study when 'Erbert of the Second Form tapped timidly at the door and looked in.

Jimmy Silver's usually sunny face was very serious.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were very grave, too. The Fistical Four were not by any means in their accustomed cheery mood.

Jimmy Silver gave the fag a welcoming nod as he appeared in the doorway.

Mornington II. was pale, and there was a suspicious redness about his eyelids.

He came timidly into the study.

"Cheer up, kid!" said Lovell kindly.

"It wasn't your fault, 'Erbert," said Raby. "You couldn't help your precious cousin bagging your banknotes!"

'Erbert's pale face flushed.

"He never did!" he exclaimed hotly.

"'Erbert, old chap!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"That's what I come 'ere to speak about," said 'Erbert. "Master Silver, won't you stand by Mornington, an' see him through? All the fellows are saying that he is a thief!"

"Well, isn't he?" demanded Newcome in surprise.

"No, he ain't!"

"You young ass!"

"Master Silver——"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"Look here, 'Erbert," he said quietly, "this won't do. I know you're attached to Mornington, and that he did a lot for you in the past, but there's such a thing as common sense, you know. Morny came to your dorm last night and bagged two fivers from your pocket. You know he did. What's the good of sticking out that he didn't, when you know he did?"

"He didn't!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Then you won't 'elp 'im?" said 'Erbert wistfully. "I thought you 'ad more sense, Master Silver! As if Morny could be a thief!"

"He's a gambler," said Raby curtly. "It's not such a tremendous step from gambling to stealing."

"He couldn't 'ave done it!" 'Erbert's voice trembled. "As if he would! If he'd asked me, I'd 'ave given 'im the money, and all I 'ad, too! You know what Master Morny done for me! Me, what was starving in the road when he found me and brought me 'ome, and all his 'igh-class pals sneerin' at 'im for doin' of it!"

'Erbert's voice broke.

Jimmy Silver shifted uneasily. He had

no doubt of Mornington's guilt, but 'Erbert's loyal faith held true, in spite of the clearest of evidence.

"It ain't proved!" went on 'Erbert. "It can't be proved! I didn't think you would go for a chap what was down, Master Silver!"

Jimmy made an impatient gesture.

"Look here, 'Erbert, it is proved!" he exclaimed.

"Clear as daylight!" growled Lovell.

"It ain't!" said 'Erbert.

"Do you mean to say that you still believe in him?" demanded Lovell.

"Yes, I does."

"Then you're a young idiot!"

"I'd rather be a young idjit than believe that Master Morny was a thief," said 'Erbert simply. "I know he ain't! And if this 'ere matter comes before the 'Ead, I won't let Master Morny suffer. I'd rather tell lies, an' swear that I never 'ad any banknotes at all."

"It won't come before the Head," said Jimmy Silver, after a pause. "It's not known to any of the masters or prefects. I don't suppose that anybody will report it. We all know what to think of Mornington now. He'll be sent to Coventry by all the Lower School, and I hope he'll clear out. I shan't say anything about him, at all events."

"We don't want a thief at Rookwood," grunted Lovell.

"He can't stay, now he's found out," said Jimmy. "Let him leave quietly, without a scandal. If he doesn't go, we'll put it to him plainly."

"Well, that's all right."

"And so you're down on 'im, all of you?" said 'Erbert.

"Yes, rather," answered the Fistical Four, with one voice.

'Erbert gave them a miserable, haggard look, and turned and left the study without another word.

"Young ass!" grunted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver had a troubled look.

"He is a young ass, and no mistake," he said. "But—but this is a blow to the poor kid. He simply worshipped Morny, and—and, after all, it was splendid the way Mornington took him up. It was pretty hard on Morny, 'Erbert turning out to be the missing heir of Mornington. But there isn't any excuse for a thief. But—but I'm sorry for 'Erbert."

And the Fistical Four went down to the Common-room with glum faces.

They were sorry for 'Erbert, and touched by his devotion to his hero. His blind faith in Morny, in spite of the evidence of the plainest facts, was a little exasperating; but it was touching, all the same.

The whole affair was disturbing and troublesome. It was not pleasant, either, to think of its getting about Rookwood, especially to the ears of the Moderns.

It was a disgrace to the Classical side, and to Rookwood generally.

The only thing was for Mornington to go, and the sooner he went the better it would be for all concerned.

CHAPTER 24.

A Loyal Chum!

"**T**HIEF!"

Valentine Mornington started violently.

The dandy of the Fourth was tramping to and fro under the old beeches in the quadrangle in the deepening dusk, when a sudden voice reached his ears.

"Thief!"

The dandy of the Fourth spun round; his face flaming with rage.

Lattrey of the Fourth stood before him, a sneering, mocking smile on his face.

Mornington clenched his hands as he looked at his old enemy,

"You!" he muttered.

Lattrey laughed.

"I've been lookin' for you," he drawled. "I wondered how you were takin' it. How does it feel to be found out, Morny?"

Mornington did not answer, but his hands clenched harder.

"You've held your head pretty high here," continued Lattrey. "I've stood a lot of insolence from you, as well as other fellows. I fancy we shan't have much more of your insolence, Morny. When are you going?"

"Goin'?" repeated Mornington.

"Yes. I suppose you're not stayin' at Rookwood after this?"

"You think not?"

"You won't be allowed to," said Lattrey, with a laugh. "The fellows are discussin' it in the Common-room now. Some of them think the affair ought to be reported to Bulkeley, or Mr. Bootles."

"Let them report it!"

"That would mean the sack," smiled Lattrey. "Most of them, though, think that if you get out of the school, you should be allowed to go quietly, and save a scandal. But you'll have to go!"

Mornington set his teeth.

"You want me to go, Lattrey?" he said.

"Naturally. I'm not a particular chap, but I draw the line at a thief."

"You call me a thief?"

"What are you?" sneered Lattrey.

A hand was laid on Lattrey's collar from behind as he spoke, and he was swung round in a grasp of iron.

It was Kit Erroll of the Fourth who had seized him.

His eyes blazed at Lattrey's startled face as he shook the cad of the Fourth, and shook him again savagely.

Lattrey struggled.

"Let go!" he gurgled. "Let go, you hound! Let go!"

Erroll shook him again and again, and then flung him savagely away. Lattrey reeled along a couple of paces, and fell at full length on the ground.

Kit Erroll's eyes blazed down at him as he rose on his elbow.

"You cad!" said Erroll, between his teeth. "Get up, you cad, and I'll lick you within an inch of your life!"

Lattrey's eyes gleamed with hatred, but he did not get up.

"So you're standin' up for that thief, Erroll?" he said thickly.

"Get out, or I'll kick you out!"

Lattrey struggled to his feet, and as Erroll made a stride towards him he hurried away.

Erroll turned to Mornington, who was regarding him with a curious expression.

"What does that mean, Erroll?" drawled Mornington. "Does that mean that you are standin' by me?"

"Yes."

"By gad!"

"I called to you when you left the study," said Erroll. "I've been looking for you, Morny."

Mornington smiled mockingly.

"I thought you were joinin' the rest," he said. "You looked like it when I left you."

Erroll flushed.

"I was fairly knocked over," he said.

"It was a shock. I—I didn't know what to think. But—but—"

"You believe in me?"

"Yes."

"But you think the evidence is conclusive?"

"Well, yes. You can't expect the other fellows to believe in you."

"Quite so. You mean you're believin' that I'm innocent, although you know I'm guilty?" grinned Mornington. "You feel that it's up to you, as a pal?"

Erroll did not answer.

"As a matter of fact, Mornington had put it in a nutshell. It was only because Erroll was his pal that he was keeping his faith in him.

In reason he could not doubt Mornington's guilt. But his belief came from this heart, not from his head.

"You deny it, of course, Morny?" he asked at last.

"Naturally."

"Morny, you are not a thief?"

"Not at all!"

Erroll made a gesture.

"Morny, I don't understand you! This isn't a laughing matter."

"My mistake! I thought it was!" said Mornington coolly.

"Surely you can see how serious it is?" exclaimed Erroll, aghast. "Every fellow in the Classical Fourth believes that you're a thief—with one exception."

"Two exceptions," said Mornington, with a smile.

"Don't deceive yourself, Morny. I'm the only fellow in the Form who doubts your guilt for one moment."

"Not at all! There's one other."

"If you mean 'Erbert—"

"'Erbert's in the Second, not the Fourth. But there's another fellow in the Fourth who knows I am innocent, old scout."

"Who is it?"

"The real thief, naturally."

"Oh!" said Erroll.

"The cheeky merchant who bagged 'Erbert's banknotes naturally knows that I did not bag them," said Mornington.

"I—I suppose so."

Mornington looked at Erroll's troubled, harassed face, and burst into a laugh.

"You don't half believe me, even you," he said.

"I do—I do."

"You mean you're determined to, against common-sense," smiled Morny.

"Why did you resist the search?" said Erroll huskily. "It was mad—mad! Oh, I know it was your confounded pride! Hang your pride! But everybody else believes it was because you knew the banknote was in your pocket, and you can't blame them, Morny."

"I don't blame them," said Mornington tranquilly. "Besides, I deserve this. I'm not complainin', Erroll. If ever a fellow deserved this, I do."

"I—I don't understand you—"

"I'll explain," said Mornington quietly. "I'll tell you somethin' that happened before you came to Rookwood, Erroll, though I dare say you've heard allusions to it. I was up against Jimmy Silver at the time—we never pulled together. I tried to make him out a thief, by plantin' a banknote on him."

"Morny!" said Erroll huskily.

"Shockin', ain't it?" yawned Mornington. "You picked out the biggest rascal at Rookwood, Erroll, when you chummed up with me. Well, that's what I did. I don't quite know how I came to do it. I was a bound, there's no mistake about that! I was glad afterwards that the trick failed—jolly glad! It's one of the few things in my life that I'm really thankful for. Erroll, old scout, do you believe in judgments?"

"I don't catch on."

"Well, I do," said Mornington. "This is a judgment on me. That rotten trick I played on Jimmy Silver, because I hated him, has been played on me by a fellow who hates me. I haven't the slightest doubt that he's heard the yarn about the way I treated Silver, and that that put it into his head. It's my own rotten game, turned on me, Erroll, and it serves me right!"

"Morny!" muttered Erroll.

"I'm not grumblin'," said Mornington. "If ever a fellow asked for it, I did—and now I've got it! But this fellow—whoever he is—is a bit worse than I was. I plotted to ruin Silver, but I wouldn't have touched stolen money. But this dear fellow—whoever he is, Erroll—used only one of 'Erbert's banknotes to plant on me. He's kept the other. That's a bit lower down than I ever went, at the worst!"

"But—"

"He's a bigger rascal than I was," said

Mornington lightly. "That's a comfort. I'm not the blackest sheep in the merry flock! What are the fellows saying about it, Erroll?"

"I don't know, but—but I think——"

"Let's go in."

"Better not, Morny—better keep away for a bit. I——"

"By gad, they'll be thinkin' that I'm keepin' out because I don't dare to face them!" Mornington's eyes gleamed. "I'm goin' in, Erroll; you can please yourself about comin'."

And Mornington strode away towards the School House. Erroll hurried after him.

CHAPTER 25.

Facing the Music!

THERE was a crowd in the junior Common-room.

Nearly all the Classical Fourth were there, and most of the Shell.

An excited discussion was going on.

The discovery of Mornington's dishonesty had greatly excited the Classical juniors.

No one was inclined to lay information before the Head on the subject. But that Mornington, a proved thief, should stay at Rookwood was impossible.

He must go!

If he did not choose to go, he would have to be made to go; that was the general opinion. And Jimmy Silver, disinclined as he was to kick a fellow who was down, heartily agreed.

As captain of the Fourth, Jimmy Silver was expected to take the lead in the matter. He was quite prepared to do so.

The fellows were not surprised that Mornington did not put in an appearance. In the circumstances, it was natural enough that he did not want to face his school-fellows. Even Morny's nerve was not equal to that.

But the Classics were quite mistaken on that point. The discussion was still going on, when Tubby Muffin squeaked out: "Here he is!"

The elegant dandy of the Fourth stood in the doorway, looking at the crowd of juniors with a cool smile.

All eyes were turned on Mornington at once.

"By gad!" ejaculated Townsend. "He's

got the check to show himself here, after all! By gad!"

"What a nerve!" said Smythe of the Shell.

"Don't come in here, Mornington!" growled Higgs. "You're not wanted here! We bar thieves!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Get out, you rotter!"

Mornington stepped calmly into the room. Angry looks and jeers had no more perceptible effect upon him than hail upon glass.

"By gad! You fellows seem excited this evenin'!" said Mornington calmly. "Anythin' special on?"

"What a nerve!" repeated Adolphus Smythe, with some admiration. "Doesn't he take the merry biscuit—what?"

"He'll take somethin' else if he sticks here!" grunted Lattrey. "Does the fool think he can brazen it out?"

"Looks like it!"

Erroll followed Mornington into the Common-room, and joined him. He was dismayed by Mornington's insolent coolness, but he would not desert his chum.

Jimmy Silver's brow was dark.

Morny's supercilious cheek was not pleasant at any time. At the present time it was intolerable, and not to be borne.

There was a threatening murmur from all sides.

It did not affect Mornington. With his hands in his pockets and a cool smile on his face, he glanced round at the lowering juniors.

"Quite a merry meetin'!" he remarked. "Am I flatterin' myself unduly, or is this excitement on my account?"

"Ye thafe of the world——" growled Flynn.

"Look here, you rotter——" began Lovell hotly.

"You sneaking worm!"

"You thievin' cad!"

"Don't all speak at once!" urged Mornington. "You're all delightful, but if you all speak at once I lose some of the pleasure of your conversation. Take it in turns."

Jimmy Silver strode towards Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth eyed him coolly, and did not recede an inch.

"You takin' first turn?" he asked. "Ring off, you others, an' give Jimmy Silver a chance! I'm sure we shall enjoy his well-known eloquence. Go it, Silver!"

"If you think you can brazen it out, Mornington, you're making a mistake," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "You've brought a good deal of disgrace on your Form, one way and another. You've touched the limit now. A thief isn't wanted at Rookwood. You can understand that, I suppose?"

"Quite!"

"Nobody wants to inform against you," went on Jimmy. "That's not in our line. But we expect you to get out of the school. It's not much to ask, considering that you would be expelled at once if the Head knew the facts."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Jimmy, taken aback.

"Yes, why?"

"Are you potty? I suppose you know the Head would expel you if he knew you were a thief?" exclaimed the captain of the Fourth.

"You said if he knew the facts," smiled Mornington. "If the Head knew the facts, dear boy, he would pat me on the back, as a sadly wronged an' innocent youth, and I suppose he would expel the fellow who pinched 'Erbert's banknotes. I'm sure I hope he would!"

"You silly, cheeky ass!" roared Lovell. "Do you think you're going to get anybody to believe that?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, you're mistaken," said Jimmy Silver. "You needn't take that line, Morny. It won't do you any good."

"You know you're guilty, you rotter!" growled Conroy. "What's the good of lying?"

"Am I allowed to speak a word or two?" asked Mornington, with undiminished calmness. "I believe there's such a thing as fair play."

"You can say what you like," said Jimmy Silver. "It won't make any difference!"

"Thanks! In the first place," said Mornington, "I am innocent!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Liar!"

"Shush! I haven't finished yet, and this is my innings, you know."

"Let him run on," said Jimmy.

"Thanks! Bein' innocent, gentlemen, I am sorry to see you backin' up like this and playin' the game of the rotter who planted 'Erbert's banknote on me."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Van Ryn.

"I beg to point out that Jimmy Silver, our respected and never-sufficiently-to-be-admired Form captain, was once suspected of theft, owin' to a banknote bein' found in his clothes. Is there any gentleman present who doubts the lofty an' unstained moral character of Jimmy Silver?"

"Why, you rotter," roared Lovell, "it was you planted it on him, and you owned up to it!"

"Quite so. I am only mentionin' the circumstances as an illustration," said Mornington urbanely. "I have first-hand knowledge of the matter, as I planted it on Jimmy Silver, as you express it. May I suggest that another rogue—even worse than I was at that time—has heard of that trick, and is usin' it against me? It's possible, you know."

"Why did you refuse to be searched, then?"

"Because he knew the banknote was in his pocket," said Lattrey.

"Let him answer!"

"I'm willin' to explain, dear boys. I refused to be searched because I regarded a search of my person as a rotten insult—and I still do. I hadn't the faintest idea that Lattrey had put the banknote in my pocket."

"Lattrey?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"I?" yelled Lattrey.

Mornington nodded.

"Yaas. I'm sure I hope that you don't mind my mentionin' it, Lattrey, as it's rather a personal matter. But the fact is, I suspect you of stealin' 'Erbert's banknotes."

"You slanderin' rotter!" shouted Lattrey furiously.

There was a laugh from some of the juniors. Mornington's coolness and his unfeeling politeness struck them in a comio light.

"Don't shout, dear boy," chided Mornington. "I didn't shout when I was accused. I think it was you, Lattrey. I'll give my reasons. You are about the only fellow at Rookwood mean and unscrupulous enough to play such a dirty trick. You admit that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You hound!" hissed Lattrey.

"Secondly, you have been my enemy ever since I gave up pub-hauntin' and gamblin' with you," said Mornington.

"That's true!" said Erroll.

"Thirdly, my dear Lattrey, I pulled your nose the other day, because you proposed to me to go into partnership with you an' swindle young 'Erbert out of his money at nap and banker. I believe you were very much annoyed at havin' your nose pulled, though you disdained to fight me about it."

Lattrey's face was a study.

"And is that all?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"That's all at present, dear boy."

"Well, there's nothing in it. You could make that accusation against anybody if you don't bother about proofs. I don't believe a word of it."

"I didn't expect you to. I'm statin' it because it's the fact, not because I expect you to believe it."

"Have you anything more to say?"

Mornington reflected.

"No; I think that's the lot," he said at last.

"Then you can hear the decision of the Form!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You're guilty of theft, and you've got to get out of Rookwood. You'll be given time to write to your uncle, and ask him to take you away. In any case, you'll go. If you're still at Rookwood at the end of the week we shall have to consider whether to take you to Mr. Bootles, and report the matter. We're not having a thief in the Fourth Form, and that's settled!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good," said Mornington, unmoved. "And if I prove my innocence, dear boys, I suppose I may count upon an apology from you?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"And I can count upon your assistance, Silver, in provin' my innocence?"

"You silly ass!"

"I may need it," explained Mornington.

"Enough said!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You've heard the verdict. And you're sent to Cöventry as long as you stay here."

"Thanks! I shall try to bear up under the misfortune of missin' your entertainin' conversation."

Erroll stepped a little nearer to his chum. Jimmy Silver observed him with a frown.

"You're not sticking to that fellow, Erroll, after what he's done?" he exclaimed.

"I believe in him, and I'm standing by him," said Erroll quietly.

"Then you're a silly ass!"

Erroll did not reply to that. His mind was made up, and his intention was fixed.

"Send him to Coventry, too!" exclaimed Lattrey. "If they're birds of a feather, let 'em have the same measure."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "Let Erroll alone! He's a silly ass; but if he believes in that fellow let him stick to him. It won't be for long, anyway—Mornington's going!"

"A little mistake on your part, dear boy," said Mornington. "I'm not going. At all events, I'm only going—to do my prep. I Ta-ta!"

And Mornington strolled out of the Common-room with Erroll, leaving the Classical juniors in a state of great exasperation.

CHAPTER 26.

Trouble in Study No. 4.

KIT ERROLL glanced at his chum several times uneasily as they sat doing their preparation in 'Study No. 4 that evening.

He could not understand Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth was working away very steadily, apparently quite in his usual mood.

Erroll worked, too, but less steadily.

He was more concerned for Mornington than Morny appeared to be for himself.

Mornington pushed his books away at last, with a yawn.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Yes, if you are."

Morny laughed.

"My dear chap, don't neglect your prep. I You'll have to have it out with Bootles in the mornin' if you do."

"Never mind Bootles now," said Erroll.

"I can't put my mind into prep. I'm thinking about you, Morny."

"Thanks!"

"Morny, you're in an awful fix!"

"Yes, it looks rather rotten for me, doesn't it?" said Mornington calmly.

"Lattrey has played his cards well."

"You think it was Lattrey?"

"Sure of it, dear boy. Whom else could it have been?"

Erroll was silent.

He had declared that he believed in his chum's innocence—and he did! It followed that someone else was guilty—and that someone had striven to throw his guilt upon Mornington.

Lattrey, as Erroll knew, was a rascal, and he hated Mornington.

Yet to suspect the fellow of such baseness, without an atom of proof, went against the grain.

Mornington glanced at his chum with an amused smile.

"Look here, Mornington, if you suspect Lattrey, why not demand a search of him and his belongings?" asked Erroll at last. "He could not refuse—the fellows wouldn't let him refuse. The second banknote hasn't turned up yet, and if Lattrey's got it—"

"He's got it."

"Then it could be found."

"My dear chap, Lattrey isn't such an idiot as that. That banknote isn't about him, or about his belongings. It's hidden in some place where, if it were found by chance, it couldn't be connected with Lattrey at all."

Erroll's face fell.

"I suppose you're right," he said slowly. "But—but—Morny! There's no proof whatever that Lattrey was mixed up in it! I—I don't like your saying such things of him without any proof."

"Whom else could it have been?"

"I don't know."

"Lattrey or I," smiled Mornington. "If it was I, where's the other banknote? It wasn't found in the search of my study. Hidden somewhere, the fellows would say. But why should I have hidden one banknote somewhere and kept the other in my pocket? What?"

Erroll nodded.

There was a thump at the door, and Conroy of the Fourth opened it. Half a dozen juniors were with him—and Lattrey.

Erroll rose to his feet. Mornington looked round with a cool smile, without rising.

"Trot in!" he said genially. "Have you come to apologise?"

"No!" said Conroy grimly. "We've come to tell you something—and Erroll. You accused Lattrey of stealing 'Erbert's banknotes, and planting one of them on you."

"Yaas."

"Nobody believed a word of it, of course," said Jones minor.

"Not really?"

"No," growled Conroy. "But Lattrey asked that a search should be made to make it clear. He had a right to that. He has

been searched, and his study, too, and there's no sign of 'Erbert's other banknote. You had better withdraw what you said about Lattrey, Mornington. It's the least you can do."

"Not much good expecting a thief to do the decent thing," sneered Lattrey.

"Well?" snapped Conroy.

"I'm withdrawin' nothin', dear boy," drawled Mornington. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

The Australian junior gave him a dark look. Conroy, like all the Classical Fourth, looked upon Morny's accusation against Lattrey as nothing but an example of utterly reckless slander.

As several fellows pointed out, Morny might just as well have said it about any other chap as Lattrey, as there was not the faintest shadow of proof to be adduced.

The thought that the reckless accusation might have been made against any one of themselves naturally made the juniors very angry.

Indeed, Mornington was more severely condemned for that wild accusation than for the theft itself. No fellow's reputation was safe if the reckless black sheep of the Fourth was allowed to make such wild and whirling charges.

"Is that all you've got to say, Morny?" demanded several voices.

"Oh, yaas!"

"Then you're a slandering cad!" said Conroy.

"Thanks!"

"And a mean rotter!" roared Higgs.

"Good!"

"As well as a thief!" hooted Flynn.

"Keep it up!"

"Erroll, you're not standing by that outsider!" shouted Conroy. "You see what he is—a thief and a slanderer!"

Erroll's face was pale and harassed. But he did not falter.

"I'm sticking to Morny," he said quietly.

"Perhaps you believe what he's said about me?" said Lattrey, with a sneer.

"I don't know what to believe about that."

"Why, you rotter—"

"It's not fair," said Conroy. "I don't like Lattrey. You fellows know I've always been down on him. I can't stand him. But there's such a thing as fair play. Morny has accused him without a shadow of proof or reason. Morny's got to take it back."

"Rats!" said Morny.

"That's only fair!" said Rawson.

"Go an' eat coke!"

"You'll withdraw it, or you'll take a jolly good ragging, Morny."

"Look here——" began Erroll.

"Shut up, Erroll! We're speaking to Morny. What's your answer, Mornington?"

"Rats!"

"Collar him!" exclaimed the exasperated Conroy.

There was a rush at the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington jumped up, and Erroll sprang to his side at once.

But the Colonial Co. pitched Erroll aside, and barred him off, and the other fellows seized Morny, and, in spite of his savage resistance, bore him to the floor.

"Bump the cad!" roared Pons.

"Give him jip!" said Higgs.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh, by gad!" gasped Mornington, struggling furiously in the grasp of the ragers.

Erroll, struggling fiercely, was held in the grasp of the Colonial juniors.

Morny smote the floor thrice again with sounding concussions.

"Now, are going to withdraw your lies?" demanded Flynn.

"Hang you, no!"

Bump, bump!

"That will do!" said Conroy, "He's an obstinate beggar! Mornington, that's for a start! Another word about Lattrey for you, and you get the same over again! Come on, you chaps!"

The ragers crowded out of the study.

Mornington rose to his feet, dusty, panting for breath, his eyes gleaming with fury.

"The hounds!" he panted.

"It's natural they should be ratty," said Erroll quietly. "It's a bit thick your accusing a chap without any proof."

Mornington gritted his teeth.

But he did not answer. He brushed down his clothes, and set his tie straight. Then he glanced at his watch.

"Hallo! Time we were movin'," he remarked.

"What——"

"I told 'Erbert to go to the end study as soon as Second-Form prep was over," said Mornington. "We're going there to see him. Come on!"

"But what the dickens——" exclaimed Erroll, in astonishment.

"You'll see! Come on!"

Mornington left the study, and Erroll, in blank amazement, followed him to Jimmy Silver's quarters.

CHAPTER 27.

Up to Jimmy Silver!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. had just finished their prep when 'Erbert tapped at the door, and came into the end study.

The fag glanced round as if expecting to see someone else there.

"Hallo, kid!" said Jimmy. "What is it now?"

"Master Morny ain't 'ere?"

"Eh? No. He's not likely to be here, I suppose."

"Master Morny told me to come 'ere," said 'Erbert. "He told me to come w'ya prep was done. So I've come."

"What the dickens for?" grunted Lovell.

"Well, sit down, and have some of these chestnuts, as you're here," said Jimmy Silver good-humouredly.

The half-open door was pushed open a few minutes later, and Mornington and Erroll came in. Mornington carefully closed the door after him, that proceeding being watched grimly by the Fistical Four.

"Have you come here for a thick ear, Morny?" demanded Raby.

"Thanks, no!"

"Then you'd better slide."

"What does this mean?" demanded Jimmy Silver angrily.

"I don't know," said Erroll. "No good asking me."

"Let me explain," said Mornington calmly. "We've never been friends, Jimmy Silver, and I'm not pretendin' to feel friendly now. But you're captain of the Fourth, and you're straight. I want your help."

"Oh, rot! What do you mean?"

"To prove my innocence, dear boy!"

"Oh, cheeze it!"

"Look here, Mornington, you get out!" growled Lovell. "You're not wanted here, and that's flat!"

"You won't hear what I have to say?"

"You had a chance of saying anything you wanted to in the Common-room," said

Jimmy. "You said too much, as a matter of fact. No good beginning again here."

"I couldn't speak out there."

"Why not?"

"I'll explain, if you'll give me a chance. Look here, admitting the bare possibility that I am innocent, you'd like to nail the guilty party, I suppose, and see justice done?"

"Of course. But——"

"Give me a chance, then."

"Dash it all, you can hear him, Jimmy!" exclaimed Erroll warmly. "That won't do any harm, I suppose."

"Oh, all right!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Only more jaw, I suppose; but you can run on, Mornington."

"Cut it short!" said Newcome.

Mornington sat on the corner of the table, as cool as ever.

"I couldn't bring it all out in the Common-room," he said. "I couldn't put the thief on his guard without spoiling my own game. That is how the matter stands. 'Erbert lost two banknotes. One was found on me. Where's the other?"

"You ought to know!" said Raby drily.

"You're beggin' the question, dear boy. I don't know. The thief knows. 'Erbert!"

"Yes, Master Morny."

"Did Lattrey know that you had two fivers in your pocketbook?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" said Jimmy Silver. "How did Lattrey know that, 'Erbert? You don't have anything to say to Lattrey, as a rule!"

"He spoke to me arter I had been to see Master Morny in his study yesterday," said 'Erbert, colouring. "He made out that Morny 'ad been borrowin' my money, and wouldn't believe different till I showed 'im the notes. Tracy minor 'ad told him I 'ad them; he's thick with that young rotter!"

"Oh," said Jimmy Silver.

Mornington smiled.

"Lattrey had heard of the fivers, and he wanted to make sure 'Erbert had them, and to see if he carried them about with him," he said lightly. "That's why he pretended to think that I had borrowed 'Erbert's tin. He found out what he wanted to know that way."

Jimmy Silver was silent.

"Last night," continued Mornington,

"you heard someone leave the dorm, Silver. My handkerchief was picked up on the floor in the Second dorm. A fellow who sneaked out of one dorm to another to pick a pocket wouldn't take the trouble to dress first. My hanky was left in my pocket when I went to bed. The chap who went to the Second dorm went in his pyjamas, I fancy; but he took my hanky to leave there. He bagged two fivers from 'Erbert's pocketbook. He planted one in an inside pocket of mine when he came back from the Fourth-Form dorm. It was found there to-day. But the other——"

"Lattrey's been searched at his own request," said Raby.

"Quite so; he didn't keep it about him. You see the game—killin' two birds with one stone. One banknote was used to fix it on me an' clear himself. The other he is keepin' to spend. Lattrey's hard up—he's had bad luck on the cards and the gee-gees. Towny & Co. will tell you that if you ask them. Lattrey's goin' down to the Bird-in-Hand to-night—you know that. Towny's mentioned it."

"I know it!"

"And he's goin' to take 'Erbert's other

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banknote with him," said Mornington coolly. "He knows 'Erbert can't report the theft an' give the numbers—because it's fixed on me, an' 'Erbert won't see me suffer. So he's quite safe to pass the banknote. But 'Erbert's got the numbers."

"Yes, Master Morny."

"The note found on me was 0002468," said Mornington. "The missin' one is the next number—0002469. If that note's found on Lattrey, what then?"

"Lattrey's been searched!"

"Exactly. The note isn't on him. My belief is, that after he gets out of the dorm to-night, he will take that fiver from the place where he's hidden it, and take it out of the school with him."

"Oh!"

"That's where I want your help!" said Mornington quietly. "If I laid for him, and found the note on him, he'd say I put it there, an' you'd believe him. But Jimmy Silver, the great and only, is above suspicion. You've got to collar Lattrey to-night, Jimmy Silver, after he's started for the pub. You've got to search him for that note. I know it's risky, gettin' out of bounds at night. But—"

"Never mind the risk," said Jimmy Silver. "If I thought there was anything in it—"

"There's this much in it," said Mornington. "If you don't do it I'm going to the police-station at Coombe, and goin' to get a policeman to do it. That means an awful scandal, an' prison for a Rookwood chap. I'm givin' you the choice of savin' that, if you choose. But my mind's made up."

"You can't refuse, Jimmy," said Erroll, whose eyes were glistening now.

Jimmy Silver was silent.

The Fistical Four looked at one another. Oddly enough, Mornington's cool confidence had taken them quite aback.

They could not help admitting that Morny's contention was, at least, possible. If he was the victim of a cunning plot, it was up to them to get at the truth.

And what motive could he have for telling them this, unless he believed it himself? For a search of Lattrey's person, after he had got out of school, would settle the matter one way or the other.

Jimmy Silver spoke at last.

"I'll do it, Morny. Blessed if I don't half-believe you."

"Thanks! You'll wholly believe me later, I think. Of course, not a whisper about this—if Lattrey had the faintest suspicion it would be no go."

"I don't see how we're to get out of the dorm to-night without his knowing," said Lovell.

"Easy enough. Let him go first," said Mornington. "After he's gone, we go. He has to go straight up the road to the Bird-in-Hand; and we can put on a spurt and run him down."

"Well, that's so!"

"It's a go!" said Jimmy Silver resolutely. "Lattrey hasn't the note about him now, that's certain. If he tells it about him, when he's out of bounds to-night, it's because he's stolen it and hidden it somewhere, to take away when it's safe to do so. It follows that he kept one note for himself, and planted the other on you, Morny. We shall see—to-night."

Mornington slipped off the table, with a grin.

"We shall see," he agreed.

And he left the study with Erroll and 'Erbert.

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums.

"Well, what do you think, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Blessed if I know what to think! But it's up to us to give Morny a chance—and we're going to do it!"

And the Co. agreed to that.

CHAPTER 28.

Landed at Last!

JIMMY SILVER did not close his eyes that night, after Bulkeley had seen lights out for the Classical Fourth.

Mornington was keeping awake, and he had promised to call the other fellows when Lattrey had gone. But Jimmy kept awake, too, and so did Erroll. They lay silent, in the dark dormitory, waiting.

An hour passed. All was dark and still in the Fourth-Form dormitory.

But soon after half-past ten there was the sound of a movement.

Jimmy Silver lay very still.

He heard the slight sounds of someone

dressing in the dark, and then the faint noise of a closing door.

The blackguard of the Fourth was gone. His destination was the back parlour at the Bird-in-Hand, where Joey Hook and the other "sporting gentlemen" were improving the shining hour with cards and dice.

"You fellows awake?"

It was Mornington's cool, drawing voice. Jimmy Silver slipped out of bed, and awakened Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome. Erroll and Mornington were already up.

The six juniors dressed rapidly in the dark.

Taking shoes in their hands, they crept out of the dormitory, and Jimmy Silver closed the door softly.

The juniors moved along the passage on tiptoe. It was necessary to be cautious, for there were still lights below, though the upper passages were in darkness. The window of the lower box-room was unfastened; Lattrey had gone out that way.

In a few minutes the juniors were on the ground, and scudding away through the shadows towards the school-wall.

Lattrey had five or six minutes' start.

That was sufficient time—if Mornington's theory was correct—for the cad of the Fourth to take the stolen banknote from its hiding-place, and get out of Rookwood with it.

But the juniors were very silent and cautious as they approached the school-wall in the darkness. They did not want to run into Lattrey within the walls.

"Hark!" whispered Erroll suddenly.

It was a scraping sound in the silence—the sound of someone sliding down the wall on the outer side. The soft thud of feet on the road followed.

"Good!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

They waited a minute, within the wall, and then climbed, and dropped one by one into the road outside.

There they waited to listen.

There was no sound on the road.

Lattrey was gone.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver.

He led the way at a run.

The juniors ran as softly as they could, making little sound. Their eyes were on the road ahead, in the pale starlight.

A figure loomed up dimly ahead.

"Lattrey!" grinned Mornington.

The dim figure halted and turned.

Lattrey had heard the pursuing footsteps.

Jimmy Silver ran on at top speed.

"Stop, Lattrey!" he called out.

Lattrey had started running.

"Stop!"

The cad of the Fourth did not stop, and Jimmy ran his hardest and caught him.

Jimmy's grasp closed on his shoulder like a vice, and Lattrey was swung to a halt. The rest of the party came up panting.

Lattrey's eyes glittered at the captain of the Fourth.

"Let me go, you fool! What do you want with me? I'm in a hurry!"

Mornington laughed softly.

"You fellows handle him," he said, keeping his hands in his pockets. "I'm not coming near him! If I touch him he'll have a chance for some more lies."

"Keep back!" said Jimmy.

Lattrey's face had paled, and he made an effort to tear himself loose.

"What do you want?" he panted.

"We want to know whether you have Erbert's missing banknote about you, Lattrey!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.

Lattrey staggered.

"I? Are you mad? You think——"

"We're going to find out."

"You—you dare to insinuate——" panted Lattrey.

Jimmy Silver interrupted without ceremony.

"Oh, cut that out, Lattrey. Morny says you planted one fiver on him and kept the other. It's going to be proved one way or the other. That's why we're here."

"You know I was searched this evening—I demanded it myself," said Lattrey, in a choking voice. "You know that!"

"Yes, I know that!"

"Then how could I have the banknote?" snarled Lattrey.

Mornington chuckled.

"Because you had hidden it somewhere, you rotter, and you left it hidden till you thought it was safe to get it out of the school. You stole it to gamble with at the Bird-in-Hand, and that's where you're goin' now."

"It's a lie—a lie!"

"We shall see!" grinned Mornington.

"My idea is that you shoved the banknote somewhere outside the House—most likely in a crevice of the wall, so as to

be handy. You only had to pick it up on your way out to-night—and you've got five quids in your pocket for the little game at the Bird-in-Hand. I fancy you're fixed, you rotten plotter!"

"It's a lie!" muttered Lattrey; but his face was pale as death.

"Do you object to being searched?" said Erroll.

"Yes, hang you!"

"That settles it," said Jimmy Silver. "Hold him!"

Lattrey began to struggle fiercely.

But Lovell and Raby held his arms, and Newcome had a grasp on the back of his collar.

Jimmy Silver turned out his pockets.

It was not a pleasant task, but Jimmy did not shrink from it. It was necessary for someone far above possible suspicion to undertake the search. And Jimmy Silver went through with it quietly.

But the search was not a long one.

He turned out a leather purse from Lattrey's pocket. The purse was opened, and among the shillings and half-crowns in it was a folded crisp paper.

Jimmy Silver unfolded it.

"Well?" said Erroll breathlessly.

"A five-pound note!" said Jimmy very calmly.

"That settles it."

Lattrey panted.

"That's mine!" he said thickly. "It—it's mine! I—I had it from my uncle yesterday."

"You had this note from your uncle?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"Very well! If it's yours, it's yours. We shall see."

Jimmy Silver struck a match and read the number on the note.

"0002469," he said.

"That's the number of 'Erbert's note, next number to the one that was found on me," grinned Mornington.

Lattrey made an inarticulate sound.

"You sneaking thief!" said Lovell, with bitter contempt. "So it was you all the time, Lattrey!"

"That's 'Erbert's note," said Jimmy Silver. "I shall keep this note, Lattrey, and give it to 'Erbert in the morning."

"It—it's a trick!" muttered Lattrey hoarsely. "Morny's done it—he's changed that note for mine somehow."

"You had no note about you when you were searched this evening," said Lovell. "You said nothing about a note from your uncle then. Don't tell any more lies."

"Oh, let him run on!" smiled Mornington. "We'll go to Mr. Bootles, and ask him to write to Lattrey's uncle and inquire whether he sent Lattrey a fiver yesterday. That suit you, Lattrey?"

Lattrey choked.

He did not want that.

"You—you won't go to Bootles!" he muttered. "Jimmy Silver, you—you won't! You let Morny off that when—when you thought it was him!"

Jimmy Silver gave the wretched junior a look of scorn.

"No!" he said. "We won't—on conditions! To-morrow morning, Lattrey, you'll own up to the truth before all the Classical Fourth to set Mornington right with the Form! And then you'll arrange to get out of Rookwood at the earliest possible date."

"I—I—"

"On those conditions we say nothing about it. But, mind, if you haven't owned up to the whole Form before lessons to-morrow, I go straight to Mr. Bootles and tell him the whole story."

Lattrey groaned.

"I—I'll do it!"

"That's enough! Come on, you fellows!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned towards Rookwood, and Lattrey followed.

There was no sleep for the cad of the Fourth that night.

He was thinking of the morrow as he lay sleepless through the hours of darkness. The way of the transgressor was hard!

The next morning Jimmy Silver gave Lattrey a very significant look when the Classical Fourth turned out at the clang of the rising-bell.

Lattrey licked his dry lips.

The time had come!

"Gentlemen, chaps and fellows!" drawled Mornington. "Before you go down, our dear friend Lattrey has a merry little yarn to tell you."

Lattrey gave him a look of hatred.

"Pile in, you cad!" growled Lovell.

"Hallo, what's on?" asked Conroy.

"Lattrey's got a confession to make to

the whole Form," said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "Lattrey stole 'Erbert's banknotes, planted one on Morny to make out that he was the thief, and hid the other to take down to the Bird-in-Hand to gamble with. We found it on him. Is that so, Lattrey?"

Lattrey muttered something indistinctly.

"He's going to own up, or we're going to take him to Mr. Bootles," added Jimmy.

"My hat!" said Conroy. "Lattrey, you rotter, what have you got to say?"

"I—I— It's true!"

The words seemed torn from Lattrey.

"By gad!" said Townsend.

"I—I—I never meant—" Lattrey stammered helplessly. "I—I was going to— to own up, anyway!"

"Yes, you look like it!" said Conroy scornfully.

Lattrey's voice died away. He was not sensitive, but the contempt and disgust in every face stung him. Even Peele and Gower gave him scornful looks.

The punishment of the wretched schemer was, perhaps, severe enough. His face was haggard as he left the dormitory with dragging steps.

"By Jove!" said Conroy, with a deep breath. "The rotten rascal ought to be in prison. He will have to get out of Rookwood. If he doesn't we'll see that he's sacked!"

"Gentlemen," said Mornington, "you owe me an apology! Now that you are all satisfied that I am not a thief, you owe me some little reparation, I think. May I ask a favour?"

"What are you driving at?" grunted Conroy.

"Let Lattrey down lightly. He's been shown up—and he's pretty hard hit. Let

nothing more be said about it. It's a lesson to him—he's not likely to play any game of that kind again. Let him off!"

"My only hat!"

"By gad!"

"Morny, you ass!"

The juniors stared at Mornington in blank amazement. Morny was the injured party; he had very nearly been disgraced and ruined by Lattrey's scheming. Yet he was asking for mercy for the discovered schemer.

"Are you potty?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Not at all, dear boy! Forgive and forget, you know. I've got a few little sins on my conscience myself—surprisin' as it may seem to you—an' I don't want to be hard on Lattrey. Let him off! As the injured party, I've a right to make the suggestion. Send him to Coventry for the rest of the term, if you like, and let it go at that!"

"Well, if Morny says so, we may as well say so," said Jimmy Silver, after a long pause. "Blessed if I expected Morny to take that view! What's the matter with you, Morny?"

"It's Erroll!" explained Mornington blandly. "Erroll's exercisin' a wonderfully improvin' influence on my merry character."

"Fathead!" said Erroll laughing. "But I'm glad to hear you speak as you did, Morny. Let it drop!"

And Mornington had his way. Lattrey, to his surprise and relief, did not find himself driven from Rookwood, but in the cold shades of "Coventry" he had plenty of time to meditate upon his rascality, and Jimmy Silver & Co. hoped that the lesson would not be lost upon him.



BLARNEY!

Imagine yourself hanging upside-down over a sheer drop of 150 feet, hold only by your legs, closing your eyes to shut out the topsyturvy landscape in the distance, and then kissing an ancient brown stone set in a castle wall. You might well demand: "What on earth for?"

Yet the probability is that you, too, would risk your neck in the same circumstances as cheerfully as hundreds of pilgrims before you, for that castle is Blarney Castle and that ancient stone the Blarney Stone.

Blarney Stone Aerobatics!

The ceremony of kissing the Blarney Stone, it will be realized, is far from being an easy or pleasant affair, which makes it still more of a mystery why generations of travellers to the famous little village in Southern Ireland should have been ready to undergo it.

In the early days of its fame, people who kissed the stone were hung head first over the parapet—a nerve-racking practice that had its inevitable result one day when a pilgrim slipped from the insecure grasp of his friends and went hurtling into space. Since that time the performance has been carried out in the rather more safe method described above, with the caretaker of the castle, who acts as guide to sightseers, sitting on the kisser's legs and holding his feet, while that unfortunate derives one more degree of confidence by grasping two iron hand-rails. For all that, however, few visitors who take their lives into their hands can repress a gasp of relief as they lever themselves up from the abyss and stagger into safety!

How to be a Humbug!

The reason for the Blarney Stone custom is to be found in the dictionary's definition of the word: "To beguile by wheedling speech; humbug with agreeable talk." Once you've kissed the stone, according to the legend, you

become miraculously possessed of as much persuasive eloquence as any plausible-tongued inhabitant of the Emerald Isle. How the custom originated no one can say, but the word "blarney" is said to have been coined in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

The present moss-grown ruin was the third castle to be built on that site, and its lord and master at that period in history, Dermot McCarthy, Baron of Blarney, was required, in the name of Elizabeth, to surrender the fortress as proof of his loyalty to the throne. Naturally, Dermot McCarthy couldn't see the fun in that, so, while professing his readiness to do what was required of him, he arranged things so that there was always an excuse for him to offer when the surrender didn't come off.

The Baron's Blarney!

Time and again something happened at the last moment to keep the castle in the hands of its wily baron. His frequent and plausible excuses became so celebrated that it was not long before anything in the nature of wheedling or humbug came to be known as "Blarney talk."

There is no doubt that the custom of kissing the Blarney Stone is unique—there is nothing else like it in the world. Difference of opinion seems to exist, however, as to which is the original rock of Blarney and where it is to be found. Some say it is twenty feet from the top of the tower at its southern angle, with an inscription in Latin upon it and the date: A.D. 1446. According to others, it bears a shamrock in relief and only a few people know where it is to be found.

The feelings of a pilgrim who discovers this after having endured the ordeal may well be imagined, but probably he goes his way thinking that the legend of the Blarney Stone is the greatest bit of blarney of all!

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