

TO NEWSAGENTS!

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The Penny Popular

No.
241.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



THE RIVAL BANDS!

(An Amusing Incident from the Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)

A Grand
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE ROOKWOOD MINSTRELS!

By
Owen
Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Good Samaritans.

"WHAT was that?"
Jimmy Silver gave a sudden start.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, the Fistical Four, were strolling along the passage towards their study. A sound from behind a closed study door had caught Jimmy Silver's ear—a sound that made him stop suddenly.

It was the sound of a sob.

Jimmy Silver was as hard as nails to an enemy, and a pretty tough customer at any time—as Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern side at Rookwood had found to their cost; but, all the same, he had a tender heart, and a sound like that was sufficient to awaken all his sympathy in a moment.

"Did you hear it, kids?"

"Rather!" said Lovell. "Somebody had a licking, I suppose, and turning on the tap as a relief."

"It didn't sound like that kind of a howl," Jimmy Silver remarked thoughtfully, looking at the door of the room from which the sound had proceeded. "It's Topham's study. I wonder what's wrong with him?"

"Can't go in very well," said Lovell, shaking his head. "If there's anything the matter, he would think we had come to taunt him."

"That's so. Still——"

"Well, we'll see what's the matter, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "I hate to see a fellow doubled up without trying to lend him a hand."

And Jimmy tapped at the door.

There was no reply from within.

Jimmy Silver waited a few moments, and then opened the door and looked into the study. It was indeed Topham who was in trouble. The dandy of the Fourth was sitting at the table, his elbows resting upon it, his head in his hands.

"I say, Topham!" said Jimmy Silver.

Topham had not heard the tap, nor had he heard the door open. But Jimmy Silver's voice startled him, and he looked up suddenly. He showed a ghastly face—white, drawn, and tear-stained.

"What's the matter, Topham?"

"Get out!" muttered Topham hoarsely.

"I say——"

"Get out! Let me alone!"

At any other time the chums would not have needed telling twice that they were unwelcome. But the case was unusual now. Instead of leaving the study, they came further in, and Raby quietly closed the door.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"Mind your own business!"

Even at that Jimmy Silver did not flinch. He came closer to the junior. Topham gave him a bitter, savage look.

"You are going to stay!" he muttered.

"You enjoy this, of course. You'd jump for joy if I was expelled from Rookwood, wouldn't you?"

The Fistical Four stared at him in amazement.

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"Don't talk rot!" said Jimmy Silver sharply. "If you really felt like that, you want a good hiding; but I don't believe you do. We haven't come in here to crow over you, as you seem to think. If you're in trouble, we'd like to help you."

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell, in his straightforward, sincere way.

"Hear, hear!" said Raby. "Now, what's the trouble, Topham? I reckon we'll help you out of it if we can."

"Yes, we will!"

Topham's face brightened up.

He had evidently deemed himself quite friendless in his misery, and the offer of aid from fellows whom he had not got on with to any extent came like a ray of light in great darkness.

"You mean that, Silver?"

"I reckon so."

"You could help me if you liked—more than anybody else at Rookwood," said Topham eagerly.

Jimmy Silver looked puzzled.

"I don't see how that can be. But explain. How can I help you?"

"Because you've got the money."

Jimmy Silver stared at him.

"You don't mean to say it's money?"

"Yes."

"You are in want of money? All this fuss because you want——"

"You don't understand. I owe Beaumont, the prefect, four pounds!" faltered Topham.

"You—four pounds! What on earth——"

"I—I lost it on—a horse!"

"And Beaumont wants it back?"

"Ye-es."

"And you can't pay it?"

"I haven't more than five bob in the world."

"But that's nothing to howl over. I can't understand a prefect lending a junior four pounds; but if he did it, he ought to take the consequences of being such a careless idiot. Tell him you can't pay. You're not afraid of his speaking to the Head, I suppose? Dr. Chisholm would jump on him for lending you the money."

Topham caught his breath.

"You—you don't understand, Silver."

"No, I don't."

Jimmy Silver looked at him keenly.

"Is there something more behind this?"

"Ye-es."

"What is it?"

"I—I borrowed the money of Beaumont."

"Well?"

"But—but Beaumont——"

"Go on!"

"Beaumont doesn't know!"

It was out at last. Topham sank into his chair again and covered his face with his hands. The Fistical Four looked at one another, sufficiently impressed now by the gravity of the case. It was serious—more serious than they could have imagined. Topham was a thief!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Promise.

JIMMY SILVER was the first to break the silence.

"I understand now," he said quietly.

Topham sobbed miserably.

"You mean that you stole the money from Beaumont?"

"No, no; not that!" moaned Topham. "I knew where he kept it, you see, and I was quite certain that Freezing Point was going to win——"

"Another of your dead cert's. I suppose?" remarked Jimmy contemptuously.

"I was told it was a dead cert. by a man who knows——"

"But it lost?"

"Yes. Joe Hook says it was pulled."

"And you took four pounds of Beaumont's money to lay on that horse?"

"Ye-es; with Hook the bookmaker."

"And there's no chance of getting it back again, I suppose?"

Topham looked up in amazement.

"Get money back from a bookmaker?" he ejaculated.

"Well, I reckon it's impossible."

"I should say it is."

"Then this is what it comes to: You borrowed, as you call it, four pounds of Beaumont's money to lay on Freezing Point, and the money's gone, and you can't replace it."

"I've got hardly five bob in the world."

The Fistical Four could not raise ten shillings between them just at that moment, though each was willing to contribute all he had.

Jimmy Silver looked perplexed.

He was determined to help Topham; but how to do it was a puzzle. An appeal to Beaumont was not to be thought of. Beaumont was the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood, and as hard as iron. He was of a "sporting" taste himself, and probably his bad example had in the first place led Topham into the wretched sin of gambling, which had been followed by worse. But that would make no difference to Beaumont. If he found his four pounds gone, he would make Rookwood ring with his loss. The Fistical Four knew Beaumont well, and they did not even think of trying to appease him. The money had to be replaced before the prefect discovered the loss. But how?

The juniors did not reflect upon one side of the matter. Topham had not intended to steal the money; they believed that. But the fact that he was a thief, whether he had intended to replace the money or not—that was a serious aspect of the case. In their pity for the wretched culprit, the Fistical Four had rather recklessly taken on the responsibility of hushing up his fault. After all, if he were saved, this terrible experience would be certain to be a lesson to him.

But could he be saved? Where was the money to come from?

"Four pounds!" muttered Jimmy Silver restlessly. "By writing——"

"There's no time," groaned Topham, "even if it were any good. Beaumont is

certain to discover his loss to-morrow, if not to-night."

"How's that?"

"He'd put the money aside in a drawer in his desk, to pay for a new camera he's just ordered. The man is going to bring it over from Coombe to-night or to-morrow."

Jimmy Silver's face became grave.

"Then what on earth is to be done?" muttered Lovell.

"Blessed if I know!"

"It's an absolute giddy puzzle."

Topham threw himself forward, his face on the table, shaking from head to foot with a passion of misery and terror.

"It's all up! Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? I shall be expelled! What will my father say? Oh, what shall I do?"

"Buck up, Topham. We'll see you through."

The words were spoken upon a generous impulse; the means were as unknown as ever. But Jimmy Silver was so well known as a true and honourable fellow at Rookwood that the words were as the balm of comfort to the unhappy young gamester. He raised his haggard face hopefully.

"Do you mean that, Silver?"

"I reckon I do."

"But you have no money."

"I—I'll get some, somehow."

His chums looked doubtfully at him, but their faith in Jimmy Silver was also strong, and they felt something of assurance as they read his determined expression.

Topham gave a choking sob.

"If you can get me out of this, Silver, I swear it will be a lesson to me. Oh, if I can only get out of this!"

Jimmy Silver did not reply to that. He knew that this would be a lesson to the junior.

"Keep your pecker up, kid," he said at length. "I've given you my word. I'll get the money from somewhere—and to-day, if possible. Mind, not a word to a soul! And we'll keep mum, too. Come along, you chaps!"

The Fistical Four left the study, leaving Topham comforted, half-tearfully hopeful. Jimmy Silver's face was very grave.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Raby, as the Fistical Four walked up the passage.

"There's only one thing for it," said Jimmy. "I must try to wire to the pater."

"But then the money couldn't come down to-night, could it?"

"I reckon so."

"I'll ask him to telegraph it."

"It's pretty steep to wire to your governor, asking him to wire you as much as that," said Lovell.

"I don't know how it will turn out," admitted Jimmy Silver. "Still, we can only try."

They forthwith made their way to the post-office.

The telegraphist told them it would be an hour or more before a reply could come through.

They strolled out into the village street to pass the time away until they could get a reply from Jimmy's father. After a few minutes the chums were attracted by the sound of a twanging banjo and a squeaky tenor voice.

They came across a couple of nigger minstrels, and listened for a while. It was obvious that the niggers were doing very well, as there was quite a rain of coppers when they had finished.

"Come away, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver abruptly.

The others followed, surprised by his manner. He was looking excited now, as if a new idea had taken possession of him.

"What is it?" asked Lovell.

"What's the matter with turning nigger minstrels?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Eh!"

"What!"

"I can play the banjo, and you, Lovell, and you, Newcome, can sing—after a fashion!" said Jimmy. "Raby can go round with the hat."

"But those two have roped in all the cash in this place, so it's no use going round here again," said Lovell.

"I wasn't thinking of this place," said Jimmy.

"Where then?"

"Rookwood!"

"Rookwood? The school?"

"Why not?"

"My only hat!" said Lovell. "Of all the nerve—"

"Well, are you game?" said Jimmy.

And the others replied:

"We are!"

"That's settled, then. Let's go to the post-office now, and see if there's an answer to my wire."

for anything that comes for you to be sent up to the school, and then—we'll busk it."

"That's right."

It was done, and the chums left the post-office. Hope from that quarter was practically over, and if Jimmy Silver's pledge was to be redeemed, it was necessary to find other means of raising the wind.

The nigger minstrel idea might be a wild one, but it was the only one they had at present, and there was no other course. The idea was to be carried out.

Mr. Isaacs was a second-hand clothes dealer, naturalist, dealer in athletic goods and fishing-tackle, and costumier, and half a dozen other things all rolled into one. He had good customers in the Fistical Four, and they found him very obliging.

He was surprised to learn what they wanted, but he knew the Fistical Four, and asked no questions. Their money was



"Come right out of your little black feet—I mean come right out of your cabin, sweet!" A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer. Lovell had not the nerve of Jimmy Silver, and he was getting mixed. "Go on, Brudder Sambo!" exclaimed Jimmy, as Lovell paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main on the banjo.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Amateur Minstrels.

THE Fistical Four entered the village post-office, and inquired for the answer to Jimmy's telegram, and sure enough there it was. Jimmy Silver opened it eagerly. Then a look of disappointment overspread his face.

"No good?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy silently handed him the telegram.

"Silver, Post-office, Coombe.—Your father away on business. Have sent on your telegram. Will wire again later.—BLAINE."

"Who's Blaine?" asked Newcome.

"Pater's secretary."

"H'm! Then your dad hasn't seen the wire—may not see it to-day at all. And may not send the cash if he does. I fancy the game's up in that direction, Jimmy."

"I reckon it is."

"Suppose you leave instructions here

safe, and that was the chief object with Mr. Isaacs.

He had the things they wanted, from coloured pants to wigs and grease-paint, and for the charge of ten shillings he was willing to lend the properties for the afternoon, with as much make-up as the juniors required. And, moreover, to lend his valuable assistance in the process of making-up in his stuffy little back-parlour.

Under Mr. Isaac's skilled hands, the Fistical Four, divested of their own attire, were soon transformed into three very good imitations of nigger minstrels.

Mr. Isaacs declared that he would never have known them from the genuine article. Their faces were black and shiny, so were their hands, and they wore striped red pants and gay jackets, and thick woolly wigs. It would indeed have needed a keen eye to detect the Fistical Four under that remarkable disguise.

Jimmy Silver took the banjo provided by Mr. Isaacs, and strummed on it. Jimmy could play the instrument quite well enough for the twanging accompaniment that was required; but Lovell did not feel so sure about his singing when it came to the point.

As for Raby, there was no doubt that he could do his part of the business, and take round the cap. Whether he could collect nearly four pounds in it was another question.

"This is ripping!" said Jimmy Silver, surveying himself in a cheval-glass. "We look a treat. How do you feel, Lovell?"

"Rotten!" said the straightforward Lovell.

"That won't do, old fellow," said Jimmy anxiously. "Remember, if we got spotted in this rig at Rookwood, life wouldn't be worth living afterwards. We simply must not give ourselves away!"

"Oh, I'll be jolly careful!"

"So will I," said Raby. "I'll say things to put them off the scent."

"No, you won't!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You'll keep your mouth shut, you ass! They'd know your tongue at once. Mum as an oyster, remember!"

"Oh, anything for a quiet life, Jimmy!"

"You'll take round the cap, keeping your mouth shut," said Jimmy Silver.

"If you speak, we shall be known, and then I shall bust the banjo on your silly

"I shouldn't think so, Jimmy. I should say they happened to be there by accident," remarked Raby.

"I don't see why they should be watching us," Jimmy assented. "If they saw us go in they might be suspicious. Anyway, we're in for it now, and we've got to risk it. Come on! We're going to get a little practice in the street here before we go on to the school. Now, then, Brudder Sambo!"

Jimmy Silver, whose nerve was seldom wanting, strummed on his banjo. Lovell struck up his song in a quavering voice:

"Honey, honey, I see your loving coon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!

Honey, honey, I want a boon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!

Come right out from your cabin, sweet,

Come right out on your little black feet,

Honey, you're the girl I see gwine to

meet,

Underneath de lubly moon!"

This beautiful lay, which was one of Lovell's own composition, was sung in a shaky voice, but it was well backed up by the banjo. But either Coombe had had enough nigger minstrels for that afternoon, or else the quality was not up to that of the former entertainment.

Only three persons stopped to listen, and one of them was a deaf old lady, another a tramp, and the third a cheeky

visit the school, and take in the fellows

"They'd have taken us in, too, if we hadn't spotted the wheeze," said Tommy Cook. "Come on!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. A Select Entertainment.

"WHAT'S that row?"

"Sounds like a banjo!"

"And that other noise—is

that somebody singing?"

"Yes, or else a dog run over!"

"What on earth does it mean?"

Such were some of the ejaculations of the Rookwood fellows as a strange, weird noise made itself audible in the quad.

In a spot where the big trees hid them from the view of the windows four young nigger minstrels had taken up their stand.

They had walked in at the open gateway of Rookwood with all the coolness imaginable, followed by curious glances from the fellows who happened to see them. They stopped under the elms, and the individual who carried the banjo began to strum.

The noise was heard near and far, and curious fellows crowded to the spot. In less than a minute fifty fellows at least were crowding round the minstrels, among them Dodd, Cook, and Doyle.

Jimmy Silver hastily strummed on his banjo, and Lovell started off, while Newcome kept time with his feet.

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napper—so remember! It's time we got along, kids. We shall get to Rookwood about the time the fellows are coming in, just in good time to gather a crowd."

The ten shillings were handed over to Mr. Isaacs, and the Fistical Four left the little parlour and made their way through the shop. In the outer doorway they paused.

It was a kind of stage-fright they felt at showing themselves in the open street in their peculiar rig-out. But they were in for it now, and Jimmy Silver made the plunge boldly.

He strode from the shop, and Lovell, Newcome and Raby followed. There were several passers-by in sight, and they naturally glanced at the supposed nigger minstrels. The chums turned crimson, but their blushes were hidden under the black upon their faces.

"Hallo, look there!" muttered Lovell. The chums glanced across the street. Leaning against the churchyard railings opposite were three well-known figures. Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the leaders of the Moderns at Rookwood, were staring across the street straight at Mr. Isaac's shop, and looking with great curiosity at the four minstrels.

Jimmy Silver bit his lip.

"Have they spotted us, do you think?" he muttered.

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village youth, who advised the young minstrels to chuck it, and to get 'ome.

Even Jimmy Silver was a little dismayed, but he bore up.

"You see, we can't expect to catch on first try," he remarked. "I reckon we shall simply make things hum at the school!"

"Let's get along, then," said Lovell, rather desperately. "In for a penny, in for a pound"—and we've got to go through with it."

"Where are those rotters?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking round as they started up the lane towards the school. "They've gone!"

The Modern juniors were no longer in sight. Their disappearance comforted the amateur minstrels. It was a proof that they were not suspected. Alas, if they could have seen them at that moment! Behind a corner of the church wall Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle were rocking to and fro with laughter.

"My hat! To think of those silly Classics taking to busking to raise the wind! Won't this make a furore at Rookwood!"

"I should say so! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd peeped round the corner. The quartette of amateur minstrels were just vanishing out of sight up the lane. Tommy Dodd gave a start.

"My only aunt! They're going to

"Honey, honey, I see your loving coon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!

Honey, honey, I want a boon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!

Come right out of your little black

feet—

I mean come right out of your cabin,

sweet!"

A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer.

Lovell had not got the nerve of Jimmy Silver, and he was getting mixed.

"Go on, Brudder Sambo!" exclaimed Jimmy, as Lovell paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main.

Lovell hastily started off again. But his confusion was worse than ever now, especially as he discerned peculiar grins upon the faces of Tommy Dodd and his chums. They were watching him with such curious expressions that a dread feeling seized him that they had penetrated his disguise.

He plunged into the song again, starting the second verse, and in his confusion getting it mixed up with the first.

"Honey, honey, I want a boon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!

Come right out in your little black

moon,

Tra-la-la-la-la!"

The Rookwood fellows roared with laughter.

They could see that the minstrel was confused; though why he had lost his nerve was unknown to them. But his peculiar version of that coon song was certainly funny. Dodd, Cook, and Doyle clapped till their hands ached.

"Bravo!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Ripping! Come right out in your little black moon!"

"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell blundered on:

"Come right out and—and—and——"

"Well, go on, you——" began Raby.

"Hallo! I know that voice!"

Jimmy Silver strummed desperately. He gave Raby a dig in the ribs, and whispered to him fiercely:

"Go round with the hat, and keep your head shut!"

"Right, I will, Jimmy! I won't say a word—ow!" Raby hopped on one foot, the other having been jammed under Jimmy Silver's heel.

"Ow! What did you do that for?" yelled Raby.

There were exclamations of amazement from the nearest of the crowd.

"Shut up!" whispered Jimmy, in an agony. "Can't you see they'll guess? Go round with the hat, and shut up!"

"All right!"

Raby took round the hat. Some of the fellows were staring at him in blank amazement, not knowing what to make of the matter. Most of them were laughing hysterically, the result of Lovell's pathetic song.

All seemed to be in a generous mood, for coppers rained into the hat, and there was here and there a glistening of silver among the bronze. Dodd, Cook, and Doyle paid up, and hardly one fellow let the hat pass him by.

Raby was grinning with delight as he carried the hat back to Jimmy Silver, who was still twanging away on the 'jo.

"It's a real harvest, Jimmy!"

"Shut up!"

"Well, I——"

"Oh, come along, we've finished here!"

Jimmy Silver caught Raby by the arm, and Lovell took him by the other, and Newcome followed behind, and they all moved towards the gates.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle had disappeared.

Jimmy Silver roughly counted the proceeds in the hat as they went down to the gate, a curious crowd following them. His face was a study when he had finished.

"How much do you think?" he asked.

"Fifty pounds?" asked Raby vaguely.

"Ass! Just ten shillings—just enough to pay for the hire of the costumes!"

"My hat!" said Lovell, in dismay. "It hasn't panned out quite so well as we expected!"

"I reckon——"

Jimmy broke off. They had reached the gateway, and they found it crammed with grinning juniors.

Dodd, Cook, and Doyle were there, grinning like Cheshire cats, and each of them had his hand behind him.

"Let us pass, please!" said Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Just a minute, Snowball! There's a little black on your face."

The juniors howled with laughter.

"Let us pass——"

"Clean 'em!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

Three hands came out from behind three juniors, and three dripping wet sponges were revealed. They were squeezing upon the faces of the nigger minstrels the next moment.

Jimmy Silver gave a yell, and his banjo crashed upon Tommy Dodd's head and shivered into twenty pieces. But resistance was too late, and it was futile, for a dozen juniors, let into the secret by Tommy Dodd & Co. hurled themselves upon the nigger minstrels and held them fast while their faces were rubbed with the sponges.

In a few seconds the white came out through the black, and the Fistical Four were shown up, literally, in their true colours.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Saved!

"HA, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood juniors were yelling with laughter.

"Good old Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four struggled desperately in the grasp of their assailants. Their wigs came off in the struggle, and the black was nearly all rubbed off their faces. Further disguise was hopeless.

Nearly all Rookwood seemed to be crowded round them, laughing hysterically, and at last the four chums incontinently bolted, and did not stop till they were safely locked up in their own study. Even then the passage without rang with endless laughter.

"My only hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"This has been a time! We shall never, never hear the end of it!"

"If this is a sample of your ideas——"

"It would have worked all right but for those beastly Modern kids."

"They've done us this time."

"They must have spotted the wheeze in Coombe, after all," said Jimmy ruefully.

"It was decent of them to let us send round the hat before they jumped on us. But we're done for now, and we shall be

chipped to death. Let's get these horrible things off, and make ourselves look decent again."

The juniors changed their clothes and washed off the remnants of the colouring. Then they felt rather better. They had tea in the study, to the accompaniment of some allusion to their adventure shouted every few minutes through the keyhole. But Jimmy Silver was grave now—he was thinking of Topham. The scheme of raising the wind had been carried out, and it had raised just enough money to pay its own expenses. The sum wanted for the saving of Topham was as far off as ever.

There was a knock at the locked door. "Can I come in?" It was Topham's voice.

Jimmy Silver made a grimace, and unlocked the door. Topham came into the study, his face almost as haggard as when the chums had seen it last. He fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver.

"Have you any news yet, Silver?"

The leader of the Fistical Four shook his head.

"Not yet, Topham."

"Remember," said Topham, licking his dry lips feverishly—"remember I rely on you. I have your word to save me."

There was a knock at the door.

"Oh, go away, fathead!" roared Jimmy.

"Packet for Silver from the post-office," said Toots, the Rookwood page, entering the study.

Jimmy Silver gave a jump. He tossed the lad sixpence, and opened the packet. Topham watched him with burning eyes.

Jimmy Silver gave a sudden whoop.

"Hoorah! Pater's turned up trumps, after all!"

Topham gave a choking cry.

"The—the money! You have the money?"

"Here it is! Take it, and buzz off! And don't forget your promise to chuck up being a cad and a blackguard! Now's your chance, too—Beaumont's in the quad!"

Without a word Topham seized the notes and tore out of the study.

Jimmy Silver gave a gasp of relief.

"We've saved him, kids! I wonder if he was worth saving, and whether we have a right to shield him? But I suppose it's always right to help a lame dog over a stile. I think it will be a lesson to him, anyway. But, oh—oh, kids, when shall we hear the end of the nigger minstrel business!"

Needless to say, it was long, long before Rookwood, and especially the Modern side, ceased to chuckle over the adventure of the Rookwood Minstrels!

THE END.

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By OWEN CONQUEST.

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