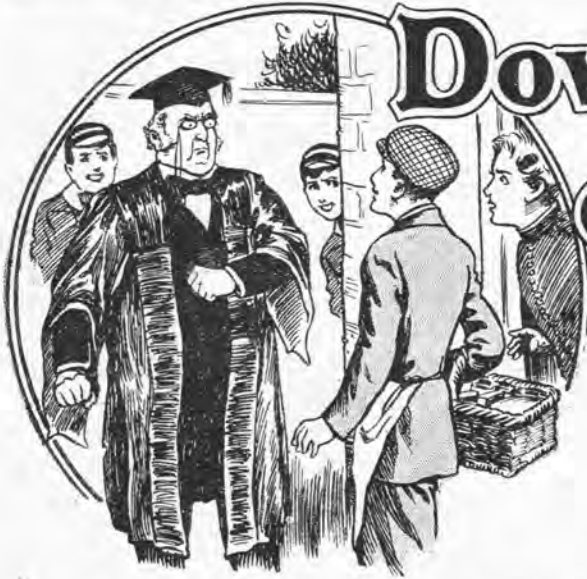


MORNINGTON FACES THE WORLD ON HIS OWN!

One would have thought that the hardships and difficulties with which Val Mornington is faced would have turned him from his objective, and sent him back to his guardian for forgiveness. But not so! He sets out to earn his living in spite of everything and everyone. Some may call it obstinacy, and others pluck. At any rate, Morny, the Rookwood runaway, is determined that he will never remain a burden upon his unwilling relatives!



Down on his Luck!

A Grand Long Complete Story dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood.

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the stories of the Rookwood Chums appearing in the "Boys' Friend" every week.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Very Troublesome Youth!

"**B**OOTLES looks worried!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

There was no doubt that Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, looked worried.

He was feeling worried, too.

The fact that a fellow in his Form had been expelled from the school was enough to worry Mr. Bootles, who was a very kind-hearted little gentleman. But the additional fact that the fellow in question—Valentine Mornington—had refused to go home with his guardian, and was coolly and cheerfully "hanging about" near to Rookwood, was still more worrying. How to deal with so extraordinary a situation as that was a problem beyond Mr. Bootles' powers of solving.

Mr. Bootles was on his way to the Head's study, to hand the problem over to that stately gentleman, and he was far too preoccupied to observe the smiling faces of the Fiskist Four as he passed them.

He tapped at the Head's door with a nervous hand, and entered.

Dr. Chisholm glanced up.

The Head was not in a good temper that Monday afternoon. The affair of Mornington had annoyed him very considerably. He had been glad to wash his hands of the troublesome youth, and it was exasperating to discover that his hands were not so completely washed of Mornington as he had supposed.

"Well, Mr. Bootles?" he said, with some acidity. "Has anything been heard of that unruly and disrespectful boy?"

"I came here to speak about him, sir," said Mr. Bootles.

"It is unheard of!" said the Head, frowning. "Sir Rupert Staupoole should certainly have taken his nephew home with him. He has some control over the boy, I presume. I was astounded to receive his letter this morning, stating that Mornington had quitted him on the way home, and had not been seen since. If he should have the impudence to present himself at Rookwood again, I will see—"

The Head paused on the verge of a very emphatic remark.

"The fact is, sir—" murmured Mr. Bootles.

"You have heard something of him?"

"I have seen him, sir!"

The Head started.

"Then the boy has been here!" he exclaimed. "Has he had the audacity to enter the precincts of Rookwood?"

"Not exactly, sir. I found him at the gates—"

"At the gates!" repeated the Head.

"Talking with a number of the boys—"

"Talking with the boys!"

"Yes, sir! I interfered—"

"That was very right and proper. Rookwood boys must not be allowed to hold any communication with an expelled rebel!" said the Head emphatically. "The boy seems lost to all sense of shame. Although he no longer belongs to the school, I shall take the liberty of flogging him if he should set his foot within the walls of Rookwood!"

"He did not precisely do that, sir," said Mr. Bootles. "He was standing in the public road outside the gates. He was excessively impertinent to me—very impertinent indeed! I was so astonished—"

"You need not be astonished at anything said or done by that young scapegrace," said the Head. "Where is he now?"

"He walked away in the direction of Coombe."

"Is he staying there, then?"

"I presume so."

The Head made an angry gesture.

"He must be removed at once!" he exclaimed.

"I—I was thinking, sir, that he should be detained and sent home," said Mr. Bootles. "But he had the audacity to tell me that I had no authority to touch him now that he does not belong to Rookwood. I—I suppose that statement was correct?"

Mr. Bootles blinked inquiringly at the Head over his spectacles. Dr. Chisholm gave utterance to a sound strongly resembling a snort.

"He must be taken away," he said. "I will telephone to Sir Rupert Staupoole immediately, and request him to send for his nephew."

"Very good, sir!"

The Head turned to the telephone, and Mr. Bootles quitted the study, glad that the difficult matter was off his hands, at least.

It was a trunk call to Staupoole Lodge, and the Head had to wait some time before he was through.

He occupied that time by pacing to and fro in his study, with a knitted and frowning brow.

But the bell rang at last, and the Head took up the receiver again. The voice that came through was that of Sir Rupert Staupoole, uncle and guardian of the scapegrace of Rookwood.

"What—what? Is that Dr. Chisholm?"

"Dr. Chisholm is speaking," said the Head acidly. "There is news of your nephew, Sir Rupert. He has been here."

"Bless my soul!"

"It appears that he has now taken up his quarters at Coombe, the village near the school."

"The young rascal!"

"I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will send for him, or call for him, and remove him at once, Sir Rupert."

"Hem!"

"It is quite impossible for the boy to remain in close proximity to the school after being expelled. It will have a very bad effect upon the discipline of the school."

Something that sounded like a grunt came along the wires.

Possibly the baronet was not chiefly concerned about the discipline of Rookwood School.

"May I take it that you will fetch him away to-day, sir?" asked the Head.

"How can I possibly fetch him away?" demanded Sir Rupert Staupoole. "He deliberately ran away from me. No doubt he will return home when he no longer has any money."

"What? What?"

"You say he is in the village of Coombe. What is his precise address at the present moment?"

"I do not know, naturally. Doubtless he is somewhere in the village."

"Am I to take a long and troublesome journey, sir, to search through a village for a boy who will take to his heels at the sight of me?" exclaimed the baronet testily. "You must see for yourself that it is impossible!"

"But he cannot remain there, sir!"

"As I have said, he will doubtless come home when he no longer has any money. His impudence cannot last longer than that, and I am certain that he has very little money. You will doubtless see that his friends at Rookwood do not supply him with any."

"Certainly! But—"

"The fact is, Dr. Chisholm, I am a busy man, and I cannot spend my time in a ridiculous chase of a rebellious boy!" exclaimed Sir Rupert. "He has chosen to run away. I shall give him time to come to his senses. If he chooses to come home and apologise for his conduct, I will receive him into my house. Otherwise, I shall wash my hands of him!"

"But—but—"

"If you should see him, sir, you may give him that message from me. There is nothing more to be said."

"But—but—" stammered the Head.

There was no sound along the wires. Sir Rupert Staupoole, apparently, had rung off. Dr. Chisholm put up the receiver.

He realised that Sir Rupert was just as exasperated with Mornington as he was himself, and that it was very probable that the

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baronet would not be displeased if Morny went away "on his own" for good. To ask the old gentleman to undertake a long, troublesome, and difficult chase in order to take home with him a nephew who caused unending trouble in his house, was really asking a great deal.

Sir Rupert's decision to leave the boy to himself till he had "roughed" it long enough to bring him to his senses was doubtless a wise one. It was wise, at least, from Sir Rupert's point of view. From the Head of Rookwood's point of view, it was most annoying, as Mornington seemed determined to haunt Rookwood with his obnoxious presence.

Ten minutes later there was a paper on the notice-board in the Head's "list." In the severest terms it forbade any Rookwooder to hold any communication with the outcast, and, above all, to supply him with money. The direst penalties were foreshadowed for anyone who should transgress that severe prohibition.

The Rookwood fellows gathered round that notice in crowds, and read it with a buzz of comment. Most of the fellows made up their minds to observe the Head's injunction. But there were some who were doubtful on the point, feeling that it was up to them, to a certain extent, to lend a helping hand to a fellow who was down on his luck, and among them were Morny's chum, Erroll of the Fourth, and his cousin, little Erbert of the Second Form, and Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Outcast of Rookwood!

"CRICKET?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy Silver looked very thoughtful.

After lessons that day, the Fistical Four sauntered into the quadrangle, and it was to be observed that "Uncle James" seemed to be thinking.

"May as well put in some cricket, Jimmy," remarked Raby. "What are you scowling about, old chap?"

"Get it off your chest, Jimmy," said Newcome encouragingly.

"The fact is, I was thinking about Morny," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "The silly ass ought to have gone home with his uncle—"

"He ought!" agreed Lovell.

"But he hasn't—"

"He hasn't, that's a fact."

"The Head says we're to keep clear of him," went on Jimmy, still more deeply in thought.

Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled.

"You can guess that the Head's in a state about it," he said. "If we see Morny, we'd better keep it awfully dark. Do you want to see him?"

"Well, he's down on his luck," said Jimmy Silver. "He's got some potty idea in his head of defying his uncle and getting a job somewhere. Of course, it's all rot. The fact is, his uncle isn't a bad old sport; he must have found Morny rather trying at times."

"You bet!" chuckled Lovell.

"Morny ought to go home," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "I'd like to speak to him and reason with him. I know Erroll means to see him. Suppose we drop in at Coombe, and if we meet him by chance, that won't be disobeying the Head, will it?"

"If we meet him, it must be by chance," said Lovell thoughtfully. "We don't know where he's hanging out."

"Exactly."

"But if we go to Coombe on purpose—"

began Raby.

"We won't do that," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll go to Coombe to have some ginger-pop at Mrs. Wick's. See?"

"Ha, ha! Quite! Come on!"

The Fistical Four strolled out of gates with a very careless air. A junior was in the road ahead of them, going towards the village, and Jimmy Silver hailed him.

"Hallo, Erroll!"

Kit Erroll glanced round.

He waited for the Fistical Four to come up, colouring a little.

"You fellows going to Coombe?" he asked.

"We're dropping in at Mrs. Wick's for some ginger-pop," grinned Lovell. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to look for Morny."

"What about orders from the Beak?"

"Morny's my chum," said Erroll quietly.

"I'm sticking to him. I've a right to speak to my chum if I like, I suppose?"

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"The Head doesn't seem to think so," remarked Newcome.

Erroll frowned a little.

"I'm sorry for that," he said. "I think I've a right. The Head's sacked Morny from the school; his authority ends there, I think. It isn't as if Morny had done anything bad—as if he wasn't fit to speak to. He's only kicked over the traces—"

"Only!" grinned Lovell.

"I mean, he's been unruly and disrespectful, but that isn't as if he'd done wrong. If a chap was expelled for stealing, for instance, we shouldn't want to speak to him, and the Head's order wouldn't be necessary. Morny has only been a reckless ass, and that's quite different. He won't do us any harm, I suppose? I'm going."

"The fact is, we're rather thinking we may fall in with Morny," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. "Trot along!"

The five juniors walked down to the village together.

They thought it very probable that they would see Mornington, for it was most likely that he would be on the look-out for his friends from Rookwood.

That expectation was realised. Valentine Mornington, late of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, was seated on the old bench outside Mrs. Wick's little shop when the juniors came up. There was a glass of ginger-beer on the little table at his elbow. He nodded coolly to the five juniors, who stared at him.

There had been a considerable change in Mornington's appearance.

The most elegant junior at Rookwood, Morny had been the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the Lower School. Even after his fall from fortune, he had contrived somehow to be the best-dressed fellow in the Fourth. Smythe of the Shell, who spent four times as much on his clothes, never succeeded in catching Morny's elegance. But that elegance was a thing of the past now.

Morny was dressed in a cheap suit of tweeds, with a cheap tweed cap and heavy boots. The change was remarkable.

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Is that really you, Morny?"

"Little me!" smiled Mornington. "Did you fellows come along to see me?"

"Impossible—it's forbidden. This meeting is entirely by chance," said Jimmy Silver.

"But we're jolly glad to see you."

"I'd ask you to have some ginger-pop," said Mornington. "But cash is short. I haven't got a job yet."

"You get a job?" grinned Lovell.

"Why not?"

"Well, there are a thousand reasons why not," said Jimmy Silver. "You can't do anything that it's worth anybody's while to pay for, in the first place. You're not going to offer a farmer to do Latin verses for him, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Morny, old chap, you ought to go home," said Erroll, in a low voice. "I came to find you, and to advise you—"

"Then you're wasting your breath, old top. I'm not going home."

"Your uncle isn't a bad sort, if you treat him properly—"

"He's quite a good sort," answered Mornington coolly. "I dare say my Stacpoole cousins are good sorts, too. Only, you see, I can't stand 'em. If I go home, I shall be rown' and raggin' with that lot before the first day's out. When we rag, they remind me that I'm a poor relation, eatin' the merry bread of charity. I'm not proud, but there's a limit."

"Oh!" said Erroll, in great distress.

"Of course, I am a poor relation, since my money went, and I have been eatin' the bread of charity," said Morny, with bitter coolness. "It's the fact; but, somehow, a fellow doesn't like havin' it rubbed in. But that isn't all. I can't stand my dear relations, any more than they can stand me. Old Uncle Rupert means well, but he bores me to briny tears. I'm goin' out into the wide world on my own."

"But what on earth are you going to do?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Get a job in the village, to begin with."

"Rot!"

Mornington smiled.

"I've been 'goin' the rounds already," he said. "The school grocer won't take me on. He's afraid of offendin' the Head."

"You've asked him?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Certainly."

"Look here, Morny, if you're not going home, you'll want money—"

"I shall—bad!" assented Mornington.

"Well, then—"

"Nothin' doin', old top! I'm not takin' your money, or any money that I don't earn by the giddy sweat of my brow. Besides, I've got a good chance of a job. I've applied to the other grocer, Mr. Bandy."

"And what does Mr. Bandy say?" asked Newcome, with a grin.

"As he doesn't serve Rookwood, he don't care two pins for the Head, of course. Grocers are quite independent gentlemen, you know, when they haven't your custom. I've got a good chance with the Bandy-bird. If I can take a few customers with me, I'm pretty certain of the job. That's why I've been hanging about to see you fellows."

"Oh!"

"Of course, I don't expect you to know me in these trousers," continued Mornington. "Public school chaps don't know errand-boys."

"Don't be a silly ass, Morny!" interrupted Jimmy Silver gruffly.

"But, for the sake of old times," went on Morny, unmoved, "you might remember me and give me an order. You will always find me attentive to customers, and I shall know my place—rather a distinction in a tradesman in these merry days. By constant and respectful attention, I hope to merit your further patronage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It isn't a laughing matter—it's business. Can I take some orders for you young gentlemen?" asked Morny.

He touched his cap, and then took out a cheap pocket-book and pencil.

The Rookwood juniors blinked at him.

In spite of his ironical manner, Valentine Mornington was evidently in earnest.

There was a good side to Morny's peculiar character. In his high and palmy days he had never been a snob. Now that he was down on his luck, it was evidently his intention to turn to honest work; and he had too much good sense to suppose that there was anything derogatory in any work, so long as it was honest.

He glanced at the amazed juniors with quite a businesslike air.

"I won't recommend Bandy's tea," he said thoughtfully. "His tea is rather a corker. What about butter? He gets his butter from a farm, and it's good, and two-and-six a pound. Would any of you young gentlemen care to sample our two-and-six butter?"

The juniors chuckled.

"If you really mean it—" began Jimmy.

"Of course I do! I tell you, I can bag the job at Bandy's, if I can take him some customers, and a few orders as an earnest of future custom."

The juniors exchanged glances.

The whole affair appeared to them in the light of a "lark," serious as Valentine Mornington was about it.

"Well, it's a go!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "We can whack out a pound of butter among the four of us."

"One pound of butter," said Mornington, making a note in his order-book. "Any sardines?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, put in a tin of sardines!"

"One tin of sardines. Cocoa—coffee—spices—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four entered into the spirit of the thing, and they made up a list of orders for Morny. That list of orders mortgaged their allowances for the week, but they felt that it was in a good cause. When the one-time dandy of the Fourth had taken down the list, he turned to Erroll, who was looking on in grave silence.

"Anythin' for you, Master Erroll?" he asked.

"If you call me Master Erroll, you ass, I'll punch your silly head!"

"My dear chap, I know my place," said Mornington. "I'd be very glad to serve you. I can recommend our butter and cheese—"

Erroll burst into a laugh.

"Put me down for what you like," he said. "Make it come to a pound. I wish you'd give up playing the goat, Morny!"

"This isn't playin' the goat; this is startin' in business. I may be a big shop-keeper some day—sort of Harrods or Whiteley's. Big things come from small beginnings. Rely on me to give you the best value for your quid," said Mornington.

"The goods shall be delivered to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

Mornington rose.

"I'll cut off to Bandy's now," he said.

"With an order like this, the job's mine."

Bandy's as good as said so. He will be rubbin' his fat paws over the prospect of gettin' Rookwood custom. Excuse me, gentlemen! I have the honour to bid you a very humble and respectful good-afternoon!"

And Mornington touched his cap and walked away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him.

"Well!" said Jimmy, with a deep breath. Lovell chuckled.

"What a change for Morny! I wonder how long it will last?"

And the juniors walked home to Rookwood, wondering. There was no doubt that it was a big change for Valentine Mornington, and they wondered what would come of it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mr. Bandy's New Boy!

"YOU fellows—"

Tubby Muffin gasped. He was full of pews—almost bursting with it—in fact, he was too breathless and excited to get it out. So he spluttered.

It was the day following Jimmy Silver & Co.'s visit to Coombe, and the Fistical Four were chatting outside the School House, after morning lessons, when Tubby rolled breathlessly by. The Co. regarded the fat Classical curiously as he panted.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver inquiringly. "What's happened? Has Couroy found out it was you that bagged his cake, and is he after you with a stump?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Muffin. "I—I say, I've seen him—"

"Which him?"

"Morny!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy Silver held up a severe hand. "Haven't you seen the Head's list on the notice-board?" he demanded. "You're not allowed to see Morny, you young rascal!"

"Well, I like that—when you went down to Coombe to see him yesterday!" exclaimed Reginald Muffin warmly. "I heard you telling Putty Grace. Besides, how could I help seeing Morny, when he's come here?"

"Here?" exclaimed the Fistical Four together.

"Yes, rather! He's here now!" gasped Muffin. "He's come to the back door with a basket—"

"A—a basket!"

"Delivering groceries!" shrieked Tubby. It was out now! "What do you fellows think of that?"

"Phew!"

"Hallo! What's that about Morny?" asked Tommy Dodd, the Modern junior, coming up. "Morny still hanging about?"

"Delivering groceries at the back door!" spluttered Tubby Muffin. "I've seen him! I say, he's wearing awful clothes. He's got a white apron on, too, tucked up, like a shopman, you know. I've just seen him come in at the tradesmen's gate."

"Another of Morny's weird larks," grinned Tommy Dodd. "I'm going to see him!"

Tommy Dodd started off at a run, quite eager to see Mornington in his remarkable new character. Five or six fellows who had heard Tubby's startling announcement followed. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another, and they followed the crowd.

Quite a little army of Rookwood juniors came round the buildings, and gathered round the handsome youth who was standing at the kitchen door.

It was Mornington—and he was as Muffin described him. A white and spotless apron was tied round him, and tucked up on one side in the proper professional style. He had put down a large basket stacked with groceries, and rung the kitchen bell.

He glanced at the crowd of excited juniors as they arrived, and touched his cap in ironic respect.

The kitchen door opened, and Tupper, the page, looked out. Tupper almost fell down at the sight of Mornington, with groceries.

"Hallo! Wot's this game?" asked Tupper. He stared at Mornington, and he stared at the grinning juniors, and he stared at Mornington again. Evidently Tupper supposed that it was a "lark."

"Goods from Mr. Bandy's, sir," said Mornington.

"Who are you calling 'sir,' Master Mornington?" ejaculated the astonished Tupper.

"You, sir!"

"Oh, my eye!" said Tupper.

"Will you kindly take the goods, sir?"

asked Mornington lifting the basket. "I have another round to make. Goods for five young gentlemen of this school, with separate bills. I think you will find them correct."

"Oh, lor!" said Tupper.

He took the basket mechanically.

Mornington waited outside the door.

More and more juniors were gathering on the scene now; Tubby Muffin had spread the news far and wide. There was a chorus of chorlines—though Morny's face was quite grave. Apparently he was taking his new job with becoming seriousness.

"Here comes a merry prefect!" murmured Lovell. "I wonder what Bulkeley will say? Carthew, too?"

Bulkeley and Carthew of the Sixth came up. The prefects had noticed the army of juniors streaming round the house, and they

beginning, sir, but I hope to make a good shopman when I'm a little older, and perhaps keep a shop of my own some day. May I hope, sir, that I shall have your custom?"

"You young ass!" stuttered Bulkeley.

Carthew strode forward. As Bulkeley was head prefect, there was no need for Carthew to interfere; but the bully of the Sixth did not mean to let the opportunity pass. His old grudge against Morny had not been mollified in the least by the junior's expulsion from Rookwood.

"Get out!" he snapped. "I give you one second before I kick you out! Now, then—sharp!"

Mornington's eyes glittered.

"May I appeal to you, Master Bulkeley?" he asked. "I have to wait for my basket, which is Mr. Bandy's property."



A SHOCK FOR THE HEAD!—"You're an interfering old codger, sir!" repeated Mr. Bandy with enjoyment. Dr. Chisholm wondered for a dizzy moment whether he was dreaming this. But it was no dream. Mr. Bandy's face was real, his podgy forefinger pointing to the door was real! (See Chapter 5.)

had followed to see what was "up." They expected to find a light or a "rag" of some kind going on, and they were astounded at the sight of Valentine Mornington, in a white apron, waiting at the kitchen door.

"Mornington!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "You again! What are you doing here, you young sweep!"

Morny touched his cap.

"Business, sir," he answered.

"What?"

"I'm Mr. Bandy's new boy, sir," explained Mornington. "I'm delivering the goods to the school."

"Great Scott!"

The Rookwood captain could only blink at him. Carthew struck in:

"The Head's forbidden you to enter Rookwood, Mornington. Clear out at once!"

"I'm waiting for my basket, sir!"

"Don't be a young fool! Clear off!" said the bully of the Sixth. "I'll help you with my boot if you don't go!"

Mornington did not stir.

"I'm afraid I couldn't go without my basket, sir," he answered. "There are other goods in it for my round."

"Do you want to make out that you're really a grocer's boy?" exclaimed Bulkeley.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Bandy has kindly given me a job—six shillings a week, all found, and sleep in," said Mornington. "It's a small

"Let him alone, Carthew," said Bulkeley. "If he's really delivering groceries, he must have his basket."

"Rot! It's only a cheeky excuse of the young cad's to wedge into the school!" exclaimed Carthew angrily. "You know that as well as I do, Bulkeley."

"Let him alone, I tell you!" answered the captain of Rookwood gruffly. "If you touch him, Carthew, you'll have to deal with me; I warn you. Mornington, get out of this as quickly as you can!"

"Certainly, sir; only waiting for my basket," answered Mr. Bandy's new boy cheerfully.

Carthew gave the Rookwood captain a bitter look. He did not venture to lay hands upon Morny after Bulkeley's warning.

"You are aiding and abetting this young rascal in his insolence," he said, between his teeth. "I shall report this to the Head at once!"

"You will please yourself about that," answered Bulkeley, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Carthew strode savagely away. It was evidently his intention to bring the Head upon the scene, and the juniors began to look anxious. What would happen if the Head arrived and found Mornington there, in

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his remarkable new character of grocer's boy, they could not imagine.

"I say, better hurry Tupper up a bit!" murmured Lovell. "Morny, call out to Tupper to buck up!"

Mornington shook his head.

"I hope I know my place too well, sir," he answered. "Master Tupper must take his own time. I remember he always did take plenty of time about everything."

"But the Head's coming!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Carthew's gone to fetch him!"

"I've no objection to seeing the Head, Master Silver."

"Eh?"

"Perhaps he will give me an order."

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Jimmy.

Tupper, within, was certainly taking his time in unloading the grocery-basket. Tupper was not a hustling youth at the best of times, and just now he was in a state of astonishment and breathless excitement. Cook and housemaid had to be told of the astounding reappearance of Mornington before the basket was unpacked. Two or three surprised and astonished faces were peering from the kitchen windows at Mr. Bandy's new boy. Mornington touched his hat respectfully to the cook as he caught her glance. Cook gasped and disappeared.

Mornington was waiting with complete calmness, but the fellows gathered round were decidedly uneasy. Carthew was certain to lose no time in bringing the Head upon the scene, and when he came—

"Here he comes!" squeaked Tubby Muffin breathlessly.

And there was an awed silence, as Dr. Chisholm strode upon the spot, with Carthew at his heels.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Orders for Morny!

DR. CHISHOLM stared at Mornington. He seemed to find a difficulty in expressing his feeling in words.

Mr. Bandy's new boy touched his cap respectfully.

"Mornington!" gasped the Head, at last. "Yes, sir! Anythin' I can do for you, sir?"

"How dare you come here?"

"Excuse me, sir, I was sent to deliver groceries for my master, Mr. Bandy, sir, of Coombe. I am also prepared to take orders. Perhaps you would like to give our bacon a trial, sir?"

"Wha-at?"

"Best home-cured, sir; we keep no American stuff," said Mornington, talking out his order-book. "We have in a fresh side, of the very best quality. If I may venture to advise you, sir, you should give an order now, as bacon is short, and we may be sold out pretty soon. I should be very pleased to secure your custom."

The Head almost gasped for breath.

The juniors were grinning again; but a glance from their headmaster caused the grins to die away on their faces. Dr. Chisholm's glance just then was not unlike that of the fabled Gorgon.

"Mornington!" breathed the Head. "I command you to go to your home at once!"

"I'm goin' there, sir, as soon as Master Tupper hands out my basket. I live at Mr. Bandy's."

"I mean your guardian's home!" exclaimed the Head. "You know perfectly well what I mean. I command you to return to Sir Rupert Stacpoole!"

Mornington shook his head.

"Sorry I can't oblige you, sir," he said.

"We do everything we can to please the public, but there is a limit. May I point out, in the most respectful manner, sir, that you have no authority to command me to do anythin', as you are no longer my headmaster? Anythin' in the way of business, sir—"

"Boy!"

"If you would care to give our home-cured bacon a trial—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" shouted the Head; and there was instantly a silence that might have been felt. The juniors looked anywhere but at Dr. Chisholm; they did not want to meet his eye.

That eye glittered at Mr. Bandy's new boy. "Mornington, I am perfectly aware that this conduct is intended for insolent defiance!" said the Head breathing hard. "It is correct that I have no authority over a boy who has left this school; but within

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these walls, sir, my authority is absolute. I command you to leave this place, and never set foot within these precincts again, on any pretext whatever!"

"But if my master orders me to deliver goods here, sir—"

"I will communicate with Mr. Bandy on that subject," said the Head, with a withering look. "Go!"

"Very well, sir; but I must take my basket."

Tupper, fortunately, appeared at the door with the basket, and handed it to Mornington. The Head called to him harshly:

"Tupper, you are not to take anything in future that may be brought here by Mornington. He is not to be admitted under any circumstances whatever. Bear that in mind."

"Yessir!" gasped Tupper.

"Now go, you insolent boy!" commanded the Head.

Mornington put his basket on his arm. "Certainly, sir! You are sure there is nothing I can do for you in the grocery line—"

"Go!"

"I may point out, sir, that you would do well to secure some of our home-cured bacon. The demand is very keen."

"Go!" gasped the Head.

"Can we supply you with jam, sir—home-made by Mrs. Bandy, and warranted of the very best quality?"

Dr. Chisholm made a stride towards the grocer's boy. Mornington touched his cap rather hastily, and walked away to the tradesman's gate, basket on arm. The juniors gazed after him speechlessly, till the gate swung shut behind him, and Mr. Bandy's new boy was gone.

The Head strode away, and there was silence until he had disappeared; but then a buzz of voices and a chorus of chortles broke forth. Mornington's latest delighted the Rookwood juniors beyond all bounds.

"Isn't he a corker?" gasped Lovell. "Isn't he a real gilt-edged corker? I thought the Head would burst a boiler when Morny was recommending his home-cured bacon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't be able to come here any more, now," remarked Raby. "We can't give him any more grocery orders."

"Never mind; he's got his job now, at any rate," said Jimmy Silver.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER, Floored!

THE next day was Wednesday—a half-holiday at Rookwood. On that half-holiday there would have been a regular procession to Mr. Bandy's grocery shop in Coombe, to see Mornington in his new job. But the Head had foreseen that. There was a notice on the board placing Mr. Bandy's establishment out of bounds; and, furthermore, forbidding all Rookwood to have any dealings with Mr.

Bandy at all. The new custom which Mornington had brought to his employer was, therefore, brief. Mr. Bandy's new boy was not to have another opportunity of visiting Rookwood School with a basket of groceries on his arm.

Some of the Rookwood fellows felt very restive at the Head's new prohibition. They remarked that he was exceeding his rights; as perhaps, indeed, he was. Lovell argued in the Common-room that it wasn't the Head's bizney where a fellow bought a tin of tomatoes or a pound of cheese, and Lovell's remarks were heard with applause by the juniors. Unluckily, they were also heard by Carthew of the Sixth, who was prowling round the doorway, and Carthew marched Lovell off to the Head, there to repeat his arguments, if he liked. Lovell came out of the Head's study rubbing his hands hard, and was observed to be in anything but an argumentative mood afterwards. Whether the Head was exceeding his rights or not, it was pretty clear that he was going to have his way.

The procession to Mr. Bandy's shop, therefore, did not come off. Peele remarked, in his slangy way, that as the Head was so shirty about it, it would be wiser to give Mr. Bandy a miss in bank. And as Carthew walked down to Coombe on Wednesday afternoon, probably in the hope of catching offenders, and currying favour with the Head by reporting them, most of the juniors decided to give the Bandy establishment a wide berth.

Not so the Fistical Four, however. Lovell, no longer argumentative on the subject of the rights of the master, was angry and obstinate, and he told his chums he was going to Bandy's. He told them, in a subdued voice, in a quiet corner, rubbing his hands the while. The Head appeared to have given his cane some considerable exercise for Lovell's behoof, and Arthur Edward was smarting.

"Risky!" said Newcome.

Snort from Lovell.

"You sheer off, then, if you're funky!" he said.

"If the Head hadn't given you enough, old top, I'd dot you in the eye," said Newcome placidly. "Let's go!"

"Let's!" assented Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four sauntered out of gates, and started to walk in the opposite direction from Coombe. That was a cautionary measure, in case eyes were upon them. At a suitable distance they left the road, cut through the wood, and emerged into the lane again near Coombe village. They walked down the little old High Street, and stopped opposite Bandy's shop, and scanned it across the road.

"No beaks in sight," said Lovell. "That cad Carthew is somewhere about! But the coast looks clear."

"Careful, though!" said Jimmy Silver. "If we were spotted, and reported to the Head, there would be wigs on the green. The Head isn't sweet-tempered about Morny."

"Safe enough; come on!"

After a further cautious survey of the village High Street, the Fistical Four crossed quickly and plunged into Mr. Bandy's shop. It was a little dusky shop, two steps down from the street, and redolent of bacon and soap and other things in the grocery line.

Mr. Bandy, a stout gentleman with a bald head and red whiskers, was behind his little counter, and he grinned welcome to the Rookwooders. Mr. Bandy was highly satisfied with his new boy and the prospect of custom from the big school. He was not the chief grocer of Coombe, and he did not serve Rookwood—in fact, his business was not a very prosperous one, and all was grist that came to his mill.

"Afternoon, young gentlemen!" he said affably. "What can I do for you this afternoon?"

"Well, we really dropped in to see your new boy, Mr. Bandy," said Jimmy Silver. "He's an old friend of ours, you know."

Mr. Bandy smiled.

"Very kind of you, sir, to take notice of him now he's come down in the world," he said.

"Oh! Ah! Hem! Yes! Can we see him?"

Mr. Bandy jerked a fat thumb towards the little parlour behind the shop.

"He's in the parlour, 'aving his tea," he explained. "You're very welcome to step in. Make yourselves at 'ome, gentlemen."

"Thank you very much!"

"Not at all!" said Mr. Bandy politely.

Jimmy Silver & Co. entered the little parlour. Mornington was seated at the table, with a plate of thick bread-and-butter before him and a big cup of tea. He was eating with a good appetite. From the kitchen, which adjoined, came a sound of clinking crockery, which seemed to hint that Mrs. Bandy was at her household duties there.

"Hallo, you chaps!" exclaimed Mornington, looking up. "Pancake seen' you here! I don't know whether I'm allowed to receive visitors in business hours—"

"Mr. Bandy told us to come in," grinned Raby. "How are you getting on in the grocery line, Morny?"

"First rate!"

"Like the business?"

"Toppin'! Squat down somewhere. You don't mind if I go on with my tea?" asked Mr. Bandy's new boy. "I've got to mind the shop when my master goes out."

"Mind the shop!" murmured Newcome. "Oh, my hat!"

"I've been rather expecting an influx of Rookwood customers this afternoon," said Mornington. "Ain't I goin' to get your custom?"

"Head's put the shop out of bounds," Mornington whistled.

"Well, I suppose he would!" he assented. "That's rather a facer, though. I shan't bring Mr. Bandy much custom at that rate."

"We'll do what we can," said Jimmy Silver. "But the Head's very waxy; he's caned Lovell for talking too much. We'd buy some stuff now if we had any money; but we're cleared out at present."

"My dear man, big businesses are built on credit. I'll get you tick."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy laughing. "You can assure Mr. Bandy that we will settle."

"Like a bird! You'll have to take the goods away—I can't deliver at Rookwood any more."

"Ha, ha! No."

The chums of the Fourth remained chatting with Mornington while he finished his tea. It did not take him long. So far, at all events, Morny was keen on attending to his duties. Mr. Bandy, in fact, had quite a jewel of a shop-boy—so far.

Morny returned to the shop, and the Fistical Four followed him. They made their purchases and pocketed the articles, and Morny made entries in a big book, under Mr. Bandy's eye. Morny was apparently taking over the book-keeping of the establishment; his abilities in that line were probably quite equal to Mr. Bandy's.

"Better scout before we step out," murmured Lovell; and he put his head cautiously out of the shop doorway, under cover of a stack of brooms and brushes exposed for sale.

He drew it back as suddenly as if he had unwittingly put it into a lion's jaws. His face was quite pale.

"The Head!" he stuttered.

"What?"

"He's just coming!"

"Oh crickey!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not stop to think. They bolted back into the parlour like rabbits into a burrow at the sight of a terrier.

Barely had the glass door closed when there was a stately tread in the shop doorway. They had just escaped!

"He's coming in!" breathed Lovell faintly. "Oh dear! Might have run into him! Oh!"

"Shush!"

The upper part of the parlour door was of glass, covered by a thin muslin curtain. Through the muslin the juniors were able to look into the shop without being seen. They watched breathlessly, feeling almost giddy from their narrow escape.

Dr. Chisholm's stately form loomed in the shop doorway; and he uttered an exclamation as he stumbled over the steps down from the pavement.

"Mind the step, sir!" called out Mornington, who was with Mr. Bandy behind the counter.

"Bless my soul!"

The Head recovered his balance, and sailed into the dusky little shop. He was breathing hard. He gave Mornington one steely look, and then turned all his attention to Mr. Bandy.

That gentleman blinked at him dubiously. He knew nothing of the circumstances in which Mornington had left Rookwood; but as he did not serve the school—officially, at least—the Head's wrath was not alarming

to him. Indeed, Mr. Bandy, like so many unsuccessful men, was a bit of a Socialist, and quite prepared to give as good as he got—as he would have expressed it—in dealing with even so august a personage as the Head of Rookwood.

"I have called, Mr. Bandy, in reference to that boy!" said the Head, in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir—good-afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Bandy. "Anything I can send you, sir?"

"I am not here to give an order, Mr. Bandy. That boy, as you are doubtless aware, formerly belonged to Rookwood."

"I believe so, sir," assented Mr. Bandy.

"His presence in the neighbourhood of the school is extremely distasteful to me."

"Indeed, sir?" said Mr. Bandy blandly.

"Extremely so," said the Head. "He has come here, I fear, in order to cause me annoyance. I hope, sir, that you will send him away, at my request."

"I've found 'im a very good lad, so far, sir," said Mr. Bandy.

"He is the most insolent boy it has ever been my misfortune to deal with," said Dr. Chisholm, raising his voice a little.

"Can't say I've found 'im so, sir," said Mr. Bandy. "Very nice, respectful lad, to my mind. You can wrap up that there cheese, my lad."

"Certainly, sir!" said Mornington, very respectfully.

"Very bright lad, and seems cut out for the grocery, sir," said Mr. Bandy confidentially.

"It is not a proper state of affairs, Mr. Bandy, for a boy expelled from my school to take a position as grocer's lad in the adjoining village."

"Think not, sir?" asked Mr. Bandy calmly.

"The pore lad 'as to earn 'is bread, I s'pose?"

"His guardian is willing to allow him to return home. In fact, he is very anxious for him to return—at least, I presume so."

"Well, sir, if his guardian calls 'ere about 'im, I'll 'ave a talk to him," said Mr. Bandy.

"'Course, I wouldn't think of keeping a boy whose guardian wanted him at 'ome. That would be agin the law, too. You mention to his guardian, sir, that I'll be pleased to see 'im if he cares to call, and give 'im a cup of tea, sir, and 'ave a talk."

There was a faint sound of a chuckle from the back parlour.

The idea of Sir Rupert Stapoole taking a cup of tea with Mr. Bandy was almost too much for Jimmy Silver & Co.

The Head of Rookwood flushed a little. He was a peremptory old gentleman, and accustomed to having his way. It was a little difficult for him to remember that outside the walls of Rookwood his lordly will and pleasure was of no especial consequence to anyone but himself.

"I hardly think that it is likely that Sir Rupert Stapoole will call upon you in reference to the matter, Mr. Bandy!" he said haughtily.

"Then in that case, sir, there don't seem

anything to be done, do there?" said Mr. Bandy, with unruffled calmness.

"I have called, Mr. Bandy—"

"And very glad I am to see you, sir! Won't you take a seat? Boy, place a chair for the gentleman!"

He brought out a stool for the Head. That gentleman ignored it. He remained standing, his eyes fixed on Mr. Bandy's fat, smiling face. Mr. Bandy was beginning to enjoy the interview. He was making mental notes of it, with a view to telling the tale, with great effect, at the social circle which met of an evening at the Red Cow.

"I have called, sir," said the Head in a deep voice, "to request you, most urgently, to send that boy away!"

"'Em!"

"His presence, sir, in this village is most annoying to me personally!" said Dr. Chisholm in his most stately manner.

"And who, sir?" said Mr. Bandy, with silky politeness. "Who, sir, may I ask, are you, sir?"

The Head started.

"What, what?"

"If you come 'ere, sir, to order goods, well and good," said Mr. Bandy. "I'm hopen to serve you, sir, and which I 'ope that my goods always give satisfaction, being of the best quality, and prices reasonable. But if you come 'ere, sir, to teach me how to manage this 'ere establishment, sir, and to dictate to me about the 'ands, sir, that I employ in this establishment, I can only say, sir, with the greatest politeness, sir, there's the door, sir!"

And Mr. Bandy emphasised his observation by pointing a very plump and buttery forefinger at the shop door.

The Head blinked at him.

He seemed deprived of the power of speech for some moments.

As Mr. Bandy afterwards described it, with great enjoyment, to the social circle at the Red Cow:

"Fair took the wind out of 'im, you believe me! Fair knocked 'im!"

In the parlour four juniors waited breathlessly. They had never heard their headmaster talked to like that before. Neither had the Head ever had such an experience. But it was the first time he had come into personal contact with a grocer of socialistic proclivities.

"Sir!" gasped the Head at last.

"Impudence!" said Mr. Bandy emphatically. "I don't come up to Rookwood, interfering with you, sir, I s'pose? When I does so, you tell me to mind my hown business, and I'll mind it! And until then, sir, you leave me to manage my shop my own way! I can manage my shop, sir, without assistance, which I don't require. With all possible respect, sir," continued Mr. Bandy, warming up with the effect of his own eloquence, "you're an interfering old codger, sir!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Interfering old codger!" repeated Mr. Bandy, with enjoyment.

Dr. Chisholm wondered, for a dizzy moment, whether he was dreaming this. But it was no dream—it was real! Mr. Bandy's red face was real, his podgy forefinger pointing to the door was real, and Dr. Chisholm had really been called an interfering old codger! Not a word further escaped the hapless old gentleman. He backed to the shop door, stumbled over the steps, and faded away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. escaped by the back door, and fled for their lives. Not for the wealth of Golconda would they have allowed the Head to suspect that they had been witnesses of that remarkable interview. They arrived breathlessly at Rookwood.

Prudence counselled silence; it was evidently a case in which silence was golden. But the story was too good to keep, and that evening all the Classical Fourth was chortling over it. The Head, as he pondered in amazement and horror over the occurrence, was fervently glad that Mr. Bandy's shop being out of bounds, no Rookwood boy had been present at his discomfiture. It was fortunate that he could not hear the joyful talk that was going on in the Fourth Form studies.

THE END.

(In next week's special issue there will be another topping, long, complete story, dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, entitled: "Val Mornington—Shop-boy!" by Owen Conquest.)

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