

They have had all kinds of masters at Rookwood. Decent ones, meek ones, and rotters. But never have they had such an out-and-out bounder as Mr. Skinforth, the new maths master!



The Worst Master at Rookwood!

ANOTHER ROUSING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD,

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Elusive Half-crown!

IT was Arthur Edward Lovell's idea. Lovell rather prided himself upon being a fellow with ideas.

Generally, Lovell's chums did not think much of his ideas. But Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome admitted that this particular idea was rather funny, and might afford entertainment.

There was a wait of twenty minutes at Latcham Junction for the local train to Coombe, the station for Rookwood. Rookwood fellows swarmed the platform at Latcham, gathering from all corners of the kingdom for the opening of the new term. Fellows of all Forms loafed about the platform, or consumed refreshments in the buffet, or exchanged greetings and cat-calls with friends and foes while they waited for the local train. And Arthur Edward Lovell weighed in with his little scheme for passing the time in an entertaining manner.

It was quite simple. Lovell was the happy possessor of a "lucky" half-crown; that is, a half-crown in which some individual, regardless of the laws upon the subject of defacing the King's coinage, had bored a hole.

By means of that bored hole Lovell had attached a thin string of elastic to the half-crown.

The half-crown lay near Lovell's right boot, on the platform, glimmering in the wintry sunshine.

It looked like a coin that had been dropped and forgotten—a lost coin that anybody might have picked up.

But the string of black elastic, invisible against Lovell's dark trousers, held it captive, in spite of appearances.

The other end of the elastic was in Lovell's hand.

His hand, to all appearance, was shoved into his overcoat-pocket for warmth that cold day. In reality it was shoved through the slit in the lining, and held the end of the elastic attached to the coin, ready to jerk the half-crown away as soon as someone stooped to pick it up.

Lovell and his chums stood in a row near a waiting-room door, apparently quite unconscious of the half-crown so near them on the platform. They were waiting for victims.

And a victim was not long in coming. Leggett of the Modern Fourth came along the platform, and his sharp eyes fell at once on the dropped coin. Leggett paused.

He was not on friendly terms with the Fistical Four, and had had, until that moment, no intention of greeting them. Now he edged towards them with a friendly grin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned, too. They were quite aware of what Albert Leggett was after.

"Hallo! You fellows back?" said Leggett cordially.

"Yes, here we are again," said Jimmy Silver.

Leggett blew his nose, and dropped his handkerchief skilfully on top of the half-crown.

It was really done quite skilfully on Leggett's part, and had that half-crown been a lost coin, undoubtedly Leggett of the Modern Fourth would have captured it, and it is much to be feared that he would have kept it.

Leggett stooped—for his handkerchief.

His bony fingers slid under the handkerchief for the half-crown. His fingertips just touched it.

Then it moved.

Leggett was so surprised as the coveted coin slipped away from his fingers that he gave quite a jump. A half-crown that was endowed with the power of motion, on its own, was a surprising sort of coin.

He grabbed up the handkerchief.

The half-crown was gone.

The elastic had jerked it up under Lovell's overcoat. But Leggett was not yet aware of that fact.

His expression, as he stood with the handkerchief in his hand, blinking at the blank spot where the half-crown had been, was bewildered—almost idiotic.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four yelled. They had meant to keep up an air of detachment, but Leggett's expression was too much for them. They yelled.

"I—I say—" he stammered.

Arthur Edward Lovell allowed the lucky half-crown to dangle down below his overcoat. Leggett saw it fluttering there, and then he understood:

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leggett, with a very red face, stalked

away. Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled loud and long.

"That's the first giddy victim," he remarked. "There'll be another soon. Here comes Tubby Muffin."

Reginald Muffin of the Classical Fourth rolled up to greet the Fistical Four. His eyes fell at once on the half-crown, now lying on the platform in its former place.

Tubby did not think of adopting strategy as Leggett had done. He made a plunge for the coin at once, his fat hand extended to clutch it.

It seemed like black magic to Tubby when the half-crown whisked up under Lovell's overcoat, a second before his fat fingers could reach it.

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

"Try again!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" said Reginald Muffin, and he rolled away in great annoyance, without wasting any greetings on Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver looked at his watch. "Train's due in five minutes," he remarked.

"Oh, we'll catch two or three more in that time!" said Lovell cheerfully. "Who'll be the giddy next, I wonder?"

The half-crown, glimmering on the platform, remained unnoticed for a minute or two—or, at least, unregarded. Then a rather tall, thin gentleman came out of the waiting-room door near at hand. The Fistical Four noticed him casually. Without looking at him they were aware that he had paused, and that the glance of two rather close-set, greenish-grey eyes was fixed upon the "lost" coin.

They looked away across the line towards the opposite platform, with an elaborate air of unconsciousness.

The thin, green-eyed gentleman looked about forty; and certainly they had not expected to catch so old a bird with so simple a trick. Also they were rather shocked at him. They felt, rather than saw, that he had designs on the half-crown; and really, at his age, he ought to have known better. As the half-crown lay so near Lovell's boot it looked as if Lovell had dropped it; and anyone who bothered about it at all ought to have drawn Lovell's attention to it, as presumably it was his.

But the thin, green-eyed gentleman did not do that. He moved along towards the Fistical Four with a sliding movement.

He did not stoop for the half-crown. Before Lovell could guess his intention he had placed his boot on it.

Lovell jerked the elastic—but he jerked in vain. The coin was pinned to the platform by the thin gentleman's boot.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome grinned—but Lovell did not grin.

The thin gentleman glanced at the juniors.

"Is this the right platform for Coombe?" he asked. No doubt the thin gentleman asked that question as a sort of explanation for stopping so close to the juniors.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"Thank you!"

Lovell hoped that the thin gentleman would move on. But he did not. He waited; and it dawned upon the juniors that he was hoping that they would move and give him a chance of picking up the half-crown unnoticed. They were not likely to do so.

"The train's signalled!" said Raby.

"There'll be a rush," remarked Newcome. "Don't let those Modern cads bag all the carriages."

"No fear!" agreed Jimmy. "Better get a move on!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave another vain jerk at the elastic. The thin gentleman's boot pinned the half-crown to the platform; and evidently he had no intention of moving. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were growing more and more entertained, and Lovell was growing uneasy and restive. He did not want to lose his half-crown. He had had several little jokes with it, but he did not want to pay half-a-crown for the entertainment.

"Here comes the train!" said Jimmy. "We shall have to shift, Lovell!"

Lovell looked at the thin gentleman.

"Would you mind getting off my half-crown, sir?" he asked politely.

The thin gentleman started.

"What! What!"

"You're standing on my half-crown, sir—your left foot," said Lovell coolly.

The thin gentleman's greenish eyes glared at him.

"Nothing of the kind! Don't be impertinent, my boy!"

"Look here, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell, in angry astonishment. "Look here, sir, that's my half-crown, and I want it! See? Take your boot off it!"

The thin gentleman did not move. But the train was coming in now, and there was no more time to waste. Lovell gave the thin gentleman a slight shove, and the boot had to move. The half-crown was revealed.

"You young rogue!" exclaimed the thin gentleman sharply. "That coin is mine; I must have dropped it—"

"Rats! It's mine!"

"Stand back!" snapped the thin gentleman.

He stooped for the half-crown, and his long, thin fingers fairly clutched at it. Lovell jerked at the elastic at the same moment, and the coin was jerked up from the platform, and vanished under Lovell's overcoat.

For an instant the thin gentleman stood dumbfounded. Then he flushed a deep crimson. And then—

Smack!

The thin gentleman's bony hand shot out and boxed Arthur Edward Lovell's ear—with a terrific box!

"Ow!" roared Lovell, staggering

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back against the waiting-room window. "Oh! Ow! Ooooh!"

The thin gentleman strode away, and was lost in the surging crowd on the platform.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trouble in the Train!

"H A, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. roared. Lovell, knocked spinning by that terrific box on his ear, staggered and almost fell. He recovered his balance, however, and stood rubbing his ear, his face blazing with wrath.

This unexpected ending to his little joke struck Jimmy Silver & Co. as irresistibly funny—the funniest part of the whole episode, in their opinion. It did not impress Arthur Edward Lovell in the same way.

"Why, the—the cheeky rotter!" howled Lovell. "I'll go after him, and—and—and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you silly chumps?" hooted Lovell. "My head's singing—ow! Why, I'll hack his shins—I'll—" Lovell glared round for the thin gentleman.

Jimmy Silver caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, you ass!"

"I tell you I'll—"

"You jolly well won't!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Come on and catch the train; we don't want to get left!"

"I'll hack his shins! A beastly thief—that's what he is!" hooted Lovell.

"Saying it was his half-crown—he knew jolly well it wasn't, though he didn't know it was on a string. A rotten pickpocket—"

"Come on; we're losing the train!"

"Blow the train! I—I—"

But Lovell was rushed away by his comrades towards the train, which was filling rapidly. A good many of the fellows had to wait for the second train; and, though the wait was not a long one, nobody wanted to wait. Something like a battle was going on between a crowd of Classical fellows and another crowd of Moderns, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were never "backward in coming forward" on such an occasion.

"Back up, Classics!" shouted Valentine Mornington. "Pile in, you slackers!"

"Go it, Moderns!"

"Oh, my hat! Ow! Oooop!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. were swept back from the open carriage door. Jimmy Silver and a crowd of Classics poured into the carriage—the Fistical Four and Mornington and Erroll and Rawson and Gunner and Dickinson minor and Oswald and two or three more fellows. There was no room in the carriage for so many, especially as there was already a grown-up passenger inside, but the juniors found room somehow.

The whistle screamed, doors slammed, and the train began to move.

"We've done those Modern cads in the eye!" grinned Lovell. "I say, let a fellow sit down!"

Lovell was standing at the window till the train moved, prepared to repel boarders. Now he made the cheerful discovery that all the seats were bagged. In the far corner sat a tall, thin gentleman, frowning at the noisy crowd of schoolboys; and there were five other seats, occupied now by eight or nine juniors.

"Standing room only, old bean!" said Mornington.

Lovell grunted.

Then his eyes fell on the gentleman in the far corner, sitting bolt upright with a grim face, and he recognised the claimant to his half-crown, who had boxed his ears.

"Hallo! That rotter!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Eh, what?"

"Look out for your pockets!" said Lovell.

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Mornington.

"Cheese it, Lovell!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "We don't want a row here."

Lovell snorted.

"I didn't want my head thumped by a fellow who was trying to bag my half-crown!" he retorted.

The thin gentleman glanced across at Lovell. His close-set, greenish eyes glittered at the Rookwood junior. His face was rather red, under the curious looks of the juniors. Lovell met his angry stare undauntedly.

"You can scowl!" he said coolly. "You tried to bag my half-crown, and you know you did!"

"You insolent young rascal!"

"Oh, can it!" said Lovell.

The thin gentleman glared across at Lovell as though he would have liked to bite him—as perhaps he would.

"You young rascal! Will you hold your tongue?" he exclaimed. "Another word of insolence and I will lay my stick about you!"

"Rats!"

The thin gentleman started up in his place, grasping his walking-stick. He plunged towards Lovell.

But it was not easy to get along a carriage crowded by twice the regulation number of passengers. Two or three feet came in the thin gentleman's way—perhaps by accident. He pitched forward and dropped on his hands and knees among innumerable feet.

"Oh! Ah! Oh!"

"Try again!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The thin gentleman struggled up, with a furious face. Two or three hefty "licks" from his walking-stick elicited loud yells from some of the Rookwooders. Then the thin gentleman was on all fours again, and someone jammed down the back of his head, and his nose ground into the dusty floor of the carriage.

"Make it pax, sir!" suggested Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Young rascals—scoundrels! Yaroooh! Groooh!"

"Hallo! Here we are! Coombe!" called out Rawson.

The train slowed down in the village station. Lovell hurled the carriage door wide open.

"Ow! Oh! Release me! I—I—"

The thin gentleman was spluttering on the dusty floor.

Jimmy Silver & Co. streamed from the carriage on the platform at Coombe. Jimmy glanced back into the carriage and saw the thin gentleman struggling to a sitting posture, gasping for breath and covered with dust. Then he joined the stream of Rookwood fellows pouring out of the station.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Unpleasant Discovery!

"THE Bull's gone!"

Mornington loafed along the Classical Fourth passage that evening and looked into the end study to make the remark. It was an item of news on the first night of term.

Mr. Bull was mathematics master. Generally he was spoken of with the definite article before his name instead

of the "Mister" to which he was entitled "Rotten!" said Lovell. "What's the Bull gone for? Is he gone for good?"

"Crooked, I hear," said Mornington. "Winter sports in Switzerland, and a tumble. Can't get back for the term, and mayn't show up again for weeks. They'll have to have a new man in his place. Let's hope he'll get into a railway accident comin' down."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mathematics, though a valuable study, did not really appeal to the heroes of the Classical Fourth.

Tubby Muffin rolled along to the end study.

He rolled in and blinked hungrily round. The Fistical Four had finished tea, but there was a bag of tarts on the table. Reginald Muffin helped himself to a tart.

"You fellows heard?" he asked.

"Heard which?" "There's a new maths beast instead of the old maths beast," said Tubby. "Beast named Skinforth. What a name, you know!"

"Oh, they've got a new man already, have they?" grunted Lovell. "Might have given us a week's rest at least."

"Catch them!" said Tubby. "I say, I don't like the man's looks. I saw him in masters' Common room. Mr. Dalton was introducing him to old Greely Looks a hard nut to crack."

"Oh, he won't be worse than the Bull," said Morny. "The Bull made us work, and nobody can do worse."

"What's he like to look at?" asked Newcome.

"Long-legged sort of a merchant," said Muffin. "Looks a bit foxy, if you ask me—greeny sort of eyes, close together, you know. Sharp as a beastly razor."

Lovell started a little. The description recalled the thin gentleman he had encountered that day at Latcham Junction.

"He came along with us, if we'd only known it," went on Muffin. "I remember seeing him on the platform at Latcham, only I didn't know then that he was coming to Rookwood."

"Oh!" said Lovell. "Phew!" murmured Mornington.

Morny and the Fistical Four exchanged glances. It dawned upon them that the thin gentleman, whose nose had been rubbed on the dusty floor of the railway carriage, was a Rookwood master!

Tubby Muffin annexed another tart. He was annexing a third, when Lovell rapped his fat paw with a ruler, and Reginald Muffin took the hint and rolled out of the end study, seeking for other worlds to conquer.

"Well, this beats it!" said Valentine



HEAVY HANDED! "I shall not trouble to report your insolence to your Form-master," said Mr. Skinforth, to Arthur Edward Lovell. "I shall punish you myself!" And the new master suited the action to the word. Lovell staggered under a terrific box on the ear. "Oh! Ow! Whooop!" he yelled. (See Chapter 4.)

Mornington. "We shall have a jolly time in the maths set this term. Who'd have thought that skinny merchant was a new master for Rookwood?"

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "I dare say the man will let the matter drop. If he reports us to the Head, we can explain that we didn't know who he was—and anyhow he started with his giddy walking-stick, and he smacked Lovell's head at Latcham, too. He's in the wrong."

"After all, it mayn't be the same chap," said Lovell hopefully. "Let's go down to Hall again and see. He's bound to be about somewhere."

To which Lovell's chums assented, and, the tarts being finished, the Fistical Four sauntered down the Fourth Form passage and went down to Hall.

Hall was crowded, as was usual on the first night of term. Some of the masters were to be seen there, but not the new mathematics master. Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled along in the direction of masters' Common-room, where they found Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, in sole possession, with an evening paper. Mr. Greely's lengthy and dictatorial comments on the news in the evening paper had cleared the other masters out of Common-room.

"Where's the beast hiding himself?" grunted Lovell

"Gone to bed, perhaps," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll see him to-morrow, anyhow."

"I want to see him to-night," growled Lovell. "I want to know whether there's going to be a row to begin the term, fathead. I was up before the beak just before we left for Christmas, and I don't want to be up before him again to begin the term ass. Let's rout out the bounder!"

"I suppose he'll have the Bull's old room," suggested Raby. "Maybe unpacking his things there. Any excuse for going up to his room?"

The Fistical Four pondered over that. They really were anxious to know whether Mr. Skinforth actually was the thin gentleman whom they had so unluckily handled in the train to Coombe.

"After all, we don't know officially that there's a new maths beast," said Lovell. "Let's go up as if we thought it was the Bull there, and say how-d'ye-do. We were friendly enough with the old Bull."

"That's all right," agreed Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four proceeded upstairs again, and stopped at the room which had been occupied the previous term by Mr. Bull.

There was a light under the door, which indicated that the occupant was at home.

Lovell tapped at the door.

The juniors heard the sound of a movement in the room. Footsteps crossed to the door, and it was unlocked. They heard the key turn back in the lock, softly but quite clearly, with some surprise.

Mr. Bull's room was a double apartment, the bed-room opening out of the sitting-room; and there was no apparent reason why the sitting-room door should have been locked.

The door opened.

"What is it?"

A tall, thin figure stood before the juniors, and two close-set, greenish-grey eyes were fixed on them in annoyed inquiry.

They had a glimpse of half-unpacked bags in the room; and the thin gentleman's look and tone showed that he did not like being interrupted in his unpacking.

They recognised him at once—it was the thin gentleman at Latham. He recognised them almost at the same moment.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "You!"

His brows knitted darkly.

"You!" he repeated. "Give me your names! I have not yet reported your ruffianly conduct to the headmaster. I will take down your names at once."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell, rather wishing that he had not "routed out the bouncer," as he had expressed it.

"Your name?" snapped Mr. Skinforth, whipping out a pencil and notebook and fixing his eyes on Lovell.

"You're going to complain of us to the Head?" asked Lovell.

"Certainly! Your name?"

Lovell closed one eye at his chums.

"Jones," he said—"Jones primus, of the Shell."

Mr. Skinforth wrote it down.

"Your name?"

"Jones secundus," said Raby. "Same Form."

"And yours?"

"Jones tertius," said Newcome, entering cheerily into the joke. "Same Form."

"And yours?"

"Jones quartus," said Jimmy Silver. "Same Form."

Mr. Skinforth eyed them sharply. Perhaps he was surprised at meeting so many Joneses all at once. Still, Jones was not an uncommon name, and there were bound to be Joneses at Rookwood. "Very good!" he snapped. "You will hear more of this!"

He shut the door in the faces of the Classical chums, and they heard the key turn again. Then there was a sound of Mr. Skinforth rummaging among his bags.

Jimmy Silver and Co. walked away, wondering what would be the outcome when Mr. Skinforth reported four non-existent Joneses of the Shell to the Head.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Looking for Jones!

DR. CHISHOLM frowned a little. He had had a busy day and a busy evening. He had retired to his study for a quiet half-hour, and everybody who knew the

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manners and customs of Rookwood School knew that he did not want to be interrupted there.

A new master, however, could not be supposed to be well acquainted, so far, with Rookwood manners and customs, and the special manners and customs of the headmaster. So Mr. Skinforth, the new mathematics master, tapped at the Head's door and came confidently in.

Mr. Skinforth had already, of course, made the Head's acquaintance, and been duly inspected, so to speak, by that stately gentleman. The Head was not in the least desirous of another interview. He was desirous of devoting his whole and undivided attention to Euripides—what would have been a severe punishment to any Rookwood fellow was a mild and genial relaxation to the headmaster.

"What is it, Mr. Skinforth?"

"I trust I am not interrupting you, sir."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Skinforth, you are interrupting me," said the Head ruthlessly. "However, what is it?"

Mr. Skinforth coloured faintly.

"I have to place before you, sir, a matter of some seriousness. On my journey here to-day I was treated with great disrespect in the railway train by a number of Rookwood boys. I have now ascertained their names."

"Indeed! That certainly is a serious matter!"

"I was sure you would think so, sir. The boys names are—they are all named Jones—"

"Four boys, did you say?"

"Four, sir. There were others, but these four were ringleaders."

"I was not aware of four boys named Jones at Rookwood. To what Form do they belong?"

"The Shell."

"In any case, Mr. Skinforth, you need not have troubled me in the matter. Minor details of discipline are left to the Form masters."

"Oh!"

"I refer you to Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell."

"Oh! Very good, sir!"

Mr. Skinforth retired from the study with slightly flushed cheeks.

Then he walked down the corridor with a knitted brow. He could not say to the Head what he would have liked to say, but he could, no doubt, "take it out" of the offending Joneses.

Meeting Bulkeley of the Sixth in the corridor, he inquired his way to Mr. Mooney's study, only to find that apartment untenanted. Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, was in Hall; and Mr. Skinforth sought him there. He found the Shell master in conversation with Mr. Dalton and Mr. Wiggins, comparing notes on the subject of the holidays, and the three masters welcomed him into their group very civilly and pleasantly.

Mr. Skinforth, however, had not come there to be pleasant.

"The Head has referred me to you, Mr. Mooney—"

"Indeed, sir!"

"In a matter of reporting four members of your Form for disrespectful conduct," said Mr. Skinforth.

"Indeed sir," repeated Mr. Mooney, very dryly.

Mr. Dalton and Mr. Wiggins exchanged a glance and moved away a little.

"Ruffianly conduct, I may say," added Mr. Skinforth.

"I trust that no member of my Form is likely to be guilty of ruffianly con-

duct," said Mr. Mooney, drier than ever.

"Unfortunately, your trust is misplaced in that case," said Mr. Skinforth tartly. "These four young rascals—"

"Kindly do not refer to boys in my Form by such a epithet, Mr. Skinforth," said the master of the Shell. "I shall, of course, inquire into the matter, as you say that the Head has referred you to me. What are the names of the boys in question?"

"Jones, sir!" snapped Mr. Skinforth.

"Jones!" repeated Mr. Mooney.

"Jones!" said Mr. Skinforth, more snappishly than before.

"Not all of them, I suppose?"

"Yes, all of them."

Mr. Mooney smiled slightly.

"There is a mistake somewhere," he said.

"There is no mistake, sir," said Mr. Skinforth. "I demand the exemplary punishment of these juniors. I—"

"There is not a single boy in my Form of the name of Jones, sir," said Mr. Mooney calmly. "And certainly not four of the same name."

Mr. Skinforth started.

"What! What! Are you sure of that?"

"I am very well acquainted, sir, with the names of the members of my Form," said Mr. Mooney.

The new master set his teeth, his face flushing with anger. He realised that his leg had been pulled by the Fistical Four when they had given in their names.

"So I have been deceived!" he stammered.

"It would certainly appear so," said Mr. Mooney, smiling. "No doubt you will be able to point out the boys, if you care to step into my Form-room to-morrow."

"Yes, yes; no doubt—"

"But as they have—ahem—misled you with regard to their names they may also have misled you with regard to their Forms," suggested the master of the Shell. "In that case, I cannot help you."

Mr. Skinforth did not take the trouble to reply. He turned, and stalked away, and left Hall with a glint in his green-grey eyes. He did not leave a very pleasant impression on the other masters.

For some time, Mr. Skinforth was making angry inquiries. He learned that there were two Jones at Rookwood—not four—and that they were Jones major of the Sixth, and Jones minor of the Fourth. Only the latter afforded a possible clue; and, having ascertained the number of Jones minor's study in the Classical Fourth passage, Mr. Skinforth repaired thither, in the hope of discovering one at least of the delinquents.

There were four fellows in Study No. 2 in the Fourth when Mr. Skinforth arrived there—Jones minor, "Putty" Grace, Tubby Muffin, and Higgs. They were devoting their attention to a large cake which Higgs had brought back to school with him. Mr. Skinforth threw open the door without knocking, and strode in.

The four juniors stared at him.

"It's the new maths man!" murmured Tubby Muffin.

"Is Jones here?" snapped Mr. Skinforth.

"Yes, sir," said Jones minor.

"You are Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Skinforth would gladly have boxed Jones minor's ears; he was feeling, by this time, almost feverishly anxious to box somebody's ears. But Jones minor was a complete stranger to

him, and even in his extreme annoyance he could not very well box his ears.

He gave a grunt, and stepped back out of the study, and slammed the door.

"What a Hun!" grunted Higgs. Mr. Skinforth stood in the Fourth Form passage, scowling. Sooner or later, no doubt, he would again see the four juniors who had given the name of Jones, and ascertain who they were; the trouble was that he wanted to see them sooner, not later.

And, as luck would have it, as he stood there, Arthur Edward Lovell came out of Study No. 4, where he had dropped in to speak to Morny. Lovell had been telling Morny and Errol about Jones primus, secundus, tertius, and quartus, with many chuckles, and he was still smiling as he came out of the study. The smile died suddenly off his face as he met Mr. Skinforth's glinting eyes.

"Oh!" ejaculated the new master. "So I have found you!"

Lovell eyed him warily. "Were you looking for me, sir?" he asked.

"You gave me a false name!" rapped out Mr. Skinforth. "You told me your name was Jones!"

"Do you like Smith better?" asked Lovell?

"What?"

"I'll make it Smith, if you like, sir. Or Robinson."

Mr. Skinforth trembled with anger. There was no doubt that Lovell was "cheeky." This really was not the way to answer a Rookwood master. But the fact was that Lovell had no respect for this particular master—the incident of the half-crown at Latcham prevented that.

"I shall take you to your Form master," declared Mr. Skinforth. "Mr. Dalton shall know of this insolence. Come!"

He stepped towards Lovell, and grasped him by the collar. Arthur Edward eyed him coolly.

"I'm quite prepared to go to Mr. Dalton," he answered. "I'm ready to tell him all that happened, and that all the trouble was caused by your trying to pinch my half-crown!"

Mr. Skinforth started violently. Lovell had played his trump card, as it were; and he had played it with effect, as Mr. Skinforth's look showed. For the first time the new master seemed to realise that he had extremely little credit to gain from the affair; and that, indeed, the less that was said about it, the better it would be for him.

"Are we going to Mr. Dalton, sir?" asked Lovell, victoriously aware now that that was not Mr. Skinforth's intention.

"No," said Mr. Skinforth, between his teeth. "I shall not trouble your Form master on the first night of the term."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lovell, with mocking humility.

"I shall punish my myself," said Mr. Skinforth.

And the new master suited the action to the word. Arthur Edward Lovell staggered under a terrific box on the ear. It was against all the laws and traditions of Rookwood for a fellow's ears to be boxed. Perhaps Mr. Skinforth did not know that—and perhaps he did not care. Lovell staggered under the blow, and almost fell—and a heavy box on the other ear set him right again. He reeled and roared.

"Ow! Ow! Whooooop!" "Oh, gad!" ejaculated Mornington, looking out of his study. "I say, that

won't do for Rookwood sir! It's not done here."

Mr. Skinforth gave him a glare, and stalked away towards the stairs. Arthur Edward Lovell staggered against the wall, with both his hands to his head. "Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

In a few minutes a sympathetic crowd surrounded Lovell—some of them advising him to go to Mr. Dalton and make a complaint—others suggesting the Head. Lovell did not heed. His head was singing and aching; but he had no idea of making complaints to anyone. He moved away to the end study, leaving a crowd of the Classical Fourth in a buzz of comment on the incident—and all the juniors agreed, nem con, that Mr. Skinforth was a rank outsider, a no-class snob, and the last word in rotters. In which opinion the Classical Fourth possibly were not very far wrong.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Mysterious!

RAG him!" "Yes." "Lovell, old chap!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward Lovell rubbed his burning ears and glared.

"Do you think I'm going to take this lying down?" he roared.

"Well, no; but—" "I've a jolly good mind to hack his shins, and chance it—"

"Phew!" "But I won't do that!" said Lovell.

"No, I—I shouldn't!" murmured Raby.

"I'm going to rag his quarters," said Lovell. "I'm going to rag his rooms right and left—see?"

"But he'll guess—"

"Let him! If he wants the whole thing to come out before the Head, let him!" hooted Lovell. "I'll tell my story fast enough if he tells his. I don't care! I'm going to rag him!"

Arthur Edward's mind was made up. He was in a state of raging wrath that would not brook delay. Boxing any fellow's ears was a serious matter enough—boxing Lovell's ears was a matter of unparalleled seriousness. Lovell's chums sympathised; but they had doubts as to the wisdom of carrying on this feud with a man who was, after all, a Rookwood master—howsoever much the heroes of the Fourth disap-

proved of him. But Lovell was in no mood for wisdom.

Lovell settled the matter by leaving the end study, and his comrades followed him rather dubiously. They reached the door of the room that had been Mr. Bull's, and was now Mr. Skinforth's. The Co. rather hoped that Mr. Skinforth might be there—which would have prevented the proposed "rag," and left the matter over till Lovell was cooler. But there was no light under the door.

Lovell turned the handle. The door did not open.

"What the thump does the man keep his door locked for?" he snorted.

"Well, it seems that he does," said Jimmy Silver, rather relieved. "Must chuck it, after all, old scout."

Another snort from Lovell.

"Chuck it be blowed! The key of Dicky Dalton's room fits this lock—you remember the time Putty locked the Bull in for a lark and Dicky Dalton had to let him out."

"But—" "Blow your 'buts'!"

Lovell went along to Mr. Dalton's room and abstracted the key from the lock. Mr. Dalton was still in Hall. The junior came back, and quickly unlocked the door of the Bull's room.

"You fellows keep watch and sing out if anyone comes up!"

"Oh, all right!"

Lovell stepped into the room and turned on the light.

The room was in some little confusion; Mr. Skinforth had done a good deal of unpacking, but had not yet stacked away all his things in drawers and wardrobes. Lovell marched boldly into the adjoining bed-room, and started by dragging off all the bed-clothes and bundling them into the fender. Then he hurled heaps of shirts, socks, and other articles into the middle of the floor, and overturned a coal-scuttle on them.

Then he came back into the outer room, feeling a little better. His chums watched him anxiously from the corridor, with one eye in the direction of the staircase.

Bump!

Lovell overturned a trunk.

"Old chap, chuck it!" whispered Raby. "You've done enough—too much, in fact."

"Rats!"

He bumped the trunk over again, and the locked lid burst open.

"Great Scott! You've busted the lock!" ejaculated Raby.

"I don't care!"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "I suppose we shall all get a Head's licking for this. That's what you seem to want!"

"Rot!"

Bump!

The trunk went over again, and its contents streamed out on the floor. There were books and papers and other articles, and they streamed round Lovell, and he proceeded to kick them right and left. It was a record "ragging."

Suddenly Lovell gave a jump.

"Why—what—what—what—"

He fairly stuttered, as he stood still, as if rooted to the floor, his eyes upon a bundle of papers he had kicked.

"What is it?" asked Raby.

"Great Scott!" gasped Lovell.

He jumped after the bundle and picked it up, and held it up to the light, staring at it with round eyes of amazement.

"Banknotes!" "Eh?"

DAVID JACK
on the
CUP-TIES

Don't miss the famous footballer's comments and notes on next Saturday's Cup-ties in ALL SPORTS. This paper will keep you informed of all the latest developments in the world of Soccer. Read it regularly.

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(Continued on page 22.)

The vessel might not be sailing until the morning.

Sir Crawford suggested ringing up the police at Caistowe, but Nelson Lee pointed out that that would be quite useless. Pitt's evidence, although valuable, was not sufficiently strong for the country police. There was no proof that Mason was on board the ship; and, indeed, it would be necessary to obtain a warrant before the authorities could search the vessel. They couldn't walk aboard without any warrant.

If possible, Lee wanted to effect Mason's rescue unofficially. He knew well enough that the police would be useless at this juncture. There would be so many delays owing to red tape that the game would be more trouble than it was worth.

So the gov'nor hurried out and fetched his powerful touring-car out of the school garage; he always kept it ready for instant departure. It was roomy, and accommodated the lot of us—that is, Nelson, Lee, Sir Crawford, Pitt, Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. Sir Montie and Tommy really had no excuse for accompanying us, but as Nelson Lee didn't order them out of the car when they entered, they naturally stopped there. It wasn't likely that they'd allow this adventure to come to a close without their presence—if they could help it.

The loss of the locket was of secondary importance just now. The main thing was to recover Jack Mason, and, if possible, to get hold of Simon Grell and Jake Starkey. They would certainly have no mercy this time.

Pitt and my chums were rather at a loss to account for Mr. Strong's terrible anxiety concerning Mason. They had always looked upon the old gentleman as a mere friend. But he was now acting as though Mason were his own son, and it was certainly rather mysterious.

I, of course, was in the same boat at the time. But I afterwards learned the truth, as I have set down. Sir Crawford believed that Mason was actually his own son, and he was wild with worry now.

We drove to Caistowe like the wind. It was absolutely a race, and we covered the ground at a terrific speed. But even this was not fast enough for Sir Crawford; he was certainly not nervous.

At last we arrived in Caistowe, and Nelson Lee swung the car round on to the quay and pulled it to a halt. Pitt was standing up in his seat, gazing out into the channel of the River Stowe.

"The steamer's gone, sir!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Gone!"

"It's not there now, sir—"

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Sir Crawford, his voice quivering. "But you must be mistaken, Pitt. There has not been sufficient time—"

"I think the lad is correct," put in Nelson Lee. "If you will look, my dear sir, you will see the lights of the vessel out in the bay. She can only have raised her anchor a short time ago."

We all gazed out, and then faintly saw the steamer's lights in the haze. For a mist was drifting in over the bay, obscuring the headlands and enshrouding the fishing craft which were anchored close by.

"This is disaster—a sheer disaster!" exclaimed Sir Crawford huskily. "Poor boy! To think that he is on that vessel and we can do nothing to aid him. But we must, Mr. Lee, we must!"

"You can be assured, Mr. Strong, that Jack will come to no real harm," said Nelson Lee soothingly. "Pray do

not allow your fears to get the better of your judgment. I urge you to remain calm."

"But can't we do anything, sir?" asked Pitt. "Oh, this is rotten! I thought we should be able to rescue him! There must be some motor-boats in the town, and we could easily overtake that old tramp."

"No doubt, Pitt," said Nelson Lee; "but such a step is impracticable."

"Why is it, sir?" I asked quickly.

"Because, for one reason, the captain of the vessel would almost certainly refuse to allow us on board," replied Nelson Lee.

I realised that the gov'nor was right. It sounded easy enough—to hire a motor-boat and chase a ship; but it was an impossible task. We might catch up with the ship; but that was no guarantee that we should get on board. We couldn't fire revolvers, and act like people in a cinema play.

"Then what is to be done?" asked Sir Crawford Grey, pacing up and down beside the car. "What is to be done, Mr. Lee?"

"Our first plan must be to make inquiries here," replied the gov'nor.

And this plan was carried out. It wasn't long before we learned that the steamer was called the *Foreland*, and that her port of destination was London. She would drop anchor in the Thames, and was due to arrive on the following evening. A most important point was that she had no intermediate call.

Our next inquiry was at the station, and here we learned that Grell and Starkey had taken train to London. The clerk remembered them perfectly, and this disposed of the idea that the rascals were on board the *Foreland*.

We collected outside the station, an anxious group, for it seemed to most of us that we had failed miserably, and that there was no telling when we should see Jack Mason again.

But Nelson Lee was calmly confident.

"Let me say at once that the position is entirely satisfactory," he exclaimed.

"There is no cause for alarm whatever. To begin with, the *Foreland* will not touch land until it arrives in the Thames to-morrow evening. That gives us plenty of time to make our preparations. We can get to London in good time, and be on hand to board the vessel as soon as she drops anchor. Jack Mason will come to no harm meanwhile, although he may spend a rather uncomfortable twenty-four hours. Viewed calmly, the position is really excellent. By careful planning we can rescue Mason, recover the locket, and have Grell arrested. After that, our other inquiry will go forward apace."

Sir Crawford knew exactly what Nelson Lee meant, and he was greatly relieved in mind. He lost his agitation, and actually smiled.

"I trust to you, Mr. Lee," he said simply.

"Thank you," said the great detective. "I hope that I shall prove worthy of that trust, Mr. Strong. At all events, I shall do my very utmost to bring this affair to a satisfactory conclusion to-morrow evening. For the present, we must restrain our impatience and return to St. Frank's."

And that's what we did, hoping for the best.

THE END.

(Now, chums, you must not miss next week's topping long complete tale of the *Boys of St. Frank's*, entitled: "THE SHIPWRECKED SCHOOLBOYS!")

THE WORST MASTER AT ROOKWOOD!

(Continued from page 11.)

"What?"

"Rot!"

"Look at it!" gasped Lovell.

Forgetting, in their surprise, the necessity of keeping one eye on the staircase, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came into the room. They stared blankly at the bundle of crisp slips of paper.

The top slip in the bundle was obviously a five-pound note. The others seemed to be the same; but if they also were fivers, the sum of money represented there was an amazing one. For there were at least a hundred of the crisp slips of paper, fastened together by a rubber band.

Lovell let the ends run through his fingers, like the leaves of a book. There was a crisp rustling.

"Fivers!" gasped Raby.

"Five-pound notes!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Why, there—there's five hundred pounds in that bundle! Is the man a millionaire in disguise?"

"There's another bundle—"

"Phew!"

"And another—"

"Great pip!"

The Fistical Four looked at one another in amazement in something like awe. Who—what was Mr. Skinforth, mathematics master of Rookwood at a moderate salary—and in possession of ready cash to the tune of at least fifteen hundred pounds? One thousand five hundred pounds—and perhaps more, if the juniors had cared to look!

"Well, this beats it!" said Lovell dazedly. "What—what—what can it mean? It can't be his own money! It can't!"

"Go easy, old chap—"

"Well, I think—blessed if I know what to think—"

"For goodness' sake let's get out!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "We've seen too jolly much already! Goodness knows what it means! But it's not our biznez, anyway. Get out!"

Even Lovell was willing to get out now. The light was turned off, and the juniors hurried out of the room, locking the door behind them with Mr. Dalton's key. That key was returned to the door to which it belonged, and then the Fistical Four scudded away.

What Mr. Skinforth thought when he found his rooms ragged and his bundles of banknotes lying on the floor the Fistical Four did not know, and could not guess. They wondered the next day whether they would hear that the new master would guess the identity of the ragers was fairly clear—indeed, when they passed him in the quad that day he gave them a look which revealed that he knew, plainly enough. But he did not speak—and no complaint was made on the subject of the ragging.

Obviously Mr. Skinforth felt that the least said was the soonest mended; and Lovell thought he knew why; the new master did not want anything said on the subject of the bundles of banknotes. But on that subject Jimmy Silver & Co., if they said nothing, thought the more—and the more they thought of it, the more strange and mysterious did it appear to them.

THE END.

(There will be another stirring long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, next week, entitled: "LOVELL, THE TEE!")