

LOVELL on the WARPATH

by
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When Arthur Edward Lovell set out to get his own back on the new Maths Master at Rookwood, he little guessed what sensational results his "rag" was to lead to!

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.

Now, properly speaking, Lovell's little joke ought to have been an absolute failure, because nobody to whom the half-crown did not belong ought to have thought of taking possession of it.

But Lovell was quite sure, nevertheless, that somebody would attempt to pick it up, a belief which really showed rather a want of faith in human integrity on Lovell's part.

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.

"Hello! 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 finger-tips 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 stuttered.

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.

"There's Carthew!" murmured Raby, a few minutes later.

Carthew of the Sixth, the old enemy of the Fistical Four, bestowed a scowl on them

in passing. In the act of scowling at them, he caught sight of the half-crown near Lovell's boot. He was walking with Knowles of the Modern Sixth. He stopped suddenly.

"Hold on a minute, Knowles."

"What's up?" asked the Modern senior.

"I think I dropped something—a coin, I think," said Carthew.

"I didn't hear it."

"Well, I did. Hallo, there it is!" And Mark Carthew came across towards the Fistical Four, to pick up the half-crown.

Knowles stood and watched him. Certainly he had not heard the coin drop, and he was thinking that it must have rolled a good distance before settling down, if Carthew had



"Hallo, here's the half-crown I dropped!" said Mark Carthew, and he stooped to pick it up. Whisk! The coin suddenly disappeared under Lovell's coat!

dropped it. But there it was, and Carthew stooped to pick it up.

Whisk!

The half-crown disappeared under Lovell's overcoat.

Carthew stood, half-stooping, transfixed for a moment. Cecil Knowles burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sold again, Carthew!"

Carthew spluttered.

"I—I thought——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Knowles.

"You dropped it, did you? Queer that it tied itself on the end of a string in that fag's paw, what? Ha, ha!"

Carthew gave the heroes of the Fourth a deadly glare, and moved away, crimson with confusion. Knowles was chuckling as they went up the platform, and Carthew was scowling.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave his comrades a blissful grin.

"What price that?" he chuckled.

"I never expected to catch a Sixth Form senior. I say, the Head ought to look after the Sixth a bit better, they're not honest, you know."

"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 his 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 foot 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!”



Smack! The thin gentleman’s bony hand shot out and boxed Arthur Edward Lovell’s ear. “Ow!” roared Lovell, staggering back. “Oh! Ow! Ooooh!”

“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 realised the trick, and his thin face 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 back against the waiting-room window. "Oh! Ow! Ooooh!"

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——!"

"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, Classicals!" shouted Valentine Mornington. "Pile in, you slackers!"

"Mop up those Classical cads!" shouted Tommy Dodds of the Modern Fellows.

"Now then, order there!" roared Bulkeley of the Sixth, towering over the mob of juniors.

But in the excitement of the moment Bulkeley's voice was not heeded. Tommy Dodd & Co. were shoving back the Classicals—and the reinforcement, in the shape of the Fistical Four, came just in time. Even Lovell forgot the offensive thin gentleman, and the box on his burning ear, in joining up for the first scrap of the term with the Modern fellows.

"Kick them out!" roared Lovell.

"Back up, Classicals."

"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 Classicals poured into the carriage—the

Fistical Foul 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.

"Order! Stop this scuffling!" shouted Bulkeley.

And the captain of Rookwood headed off Tommy Dodds & Co., as they were rushing back to make a desperate attempt to carry the carriage by assault.

"Crawl away, you Modern worms!" roared Lovell victoriously, from the window.

"Yah! Classical cad!"

"Modern worm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The carriage door was closed and held from inside against attacks. The enraged Moderns went along the train, consoling themselves by upsetting stray Classics on their way.

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.

"Shut up, Lovell!" urged Newcome. "What's the good of a row?"

"You boys belong to Rookwood School, I presume?" said the thin gentleman, eyeing the crowd crammed in the carriage.

"Oh, yes!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You will hear again of this insolence. I shall lay a complaint before your headmaster."

"Rats!" said Lovell.

"Boy!"

"More rats!" said Lovell. "Nobody here cares twopence for you, my man, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it! You tried to bag my half-crown. You're not honest!"

"Lovell!" urged Erroll.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Lovell. "He wanted to make out that it was his half-crown. He



Specially drawn for the "Holiday Annual" by Savile Lumley.

BACK TO ROOKWOOD!

Rival juniors indulge in a first-day-of-term "rag." See the story "Lovell on the Warpath!"

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didn't know I had it on a string. Look here!" Lovell displayed the "lucky" half-crown with the elastic attached. "Said it was his!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, the gentleman may have thought he had dropped it," said Erroll. "You shouldn't play kid tricks like that, Lovell."

"You go and eat coke, Erroll!"

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! Groooogh!"

"Hallo, here we are! Coombe!" called out Rawson.

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

"Ow! Oh! Release me! I—I—I——" The thin gentleman was spluttering on the dusty floor.

Jimmy Silver & Co. streamed from the carriage on to 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.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at supper in the end study. There was no prep that night, and Rookwood School was still in a good deal of buzz. There had been supper in Hall, and a speech from the Head—but there had been, as Putty of the Fourth described it, more speech than supper and the Fistical Four were solacing themselves with welsh rarebit in their own quarters.

"Trot in, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Join the festive throng, old scout. What's that about the Bull?"

"Mizzled!" said Morny, as he sat on a corner of the table and helped himself to welsh rarebit.

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.

"I say, that's rather good news,"

said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We may get off maths for a time."

Raby shook his head.

"No such luck!" he said. "The Head's sure to bag another maths master fast enough. There's lots of them."

"Three a penny, almost," said Mornington. "Shouldn't wonder if a new man was already engaged to begin the term."

"It's most likely, I think," said Jimmy Silver. "The Head's always particular about the time-table. Ten to one there's a new maths master all ready to jump on poor little us."

"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. All very well for Modern chaps, who went in for chemistry and German

and suchlike "tosh." All the Classics were agreed that the curriculum on the Modern side was tosh. The Moderns, on the other hand, professed to regard Latin and Greek as "piffle," and commiserated the Classics for having to waste their time on such stuff.



"Another word of insolence from you and I will box your ears!" exclaimed the thin gentleman. "Rats!" retorted Lovell. The thin gentleman started up in his seat and plunged across the carriage towards Lovell.

Tubby Muffin rolled along to the end study.

He rolled in and blinked hungrily round. The Welsh rabbit had been "whacked" out, 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 the 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 !

Of course, a mathematics master was not so important as a Form-master—nevertheless, he was a member of Dr. Chisholm's staff, and much too important and dangerous a person to have his nose rubbed on a carriage floor.

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 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 ? "

" I—I suppose it's the same chap," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully.

" Looks like it ! "

" I don't care ! " grunted Lovell. " He did try to pinch my half-crown. You fellows know he did. "

" Forget it," grinned Mornington. " Isn't it just like Lovell to land us all in a scrape like this ? "

" Oh, just ! " said Raby.

" Lovell all over," agreed Newcome. " We really ought to get a muzzle for Lovell and lead him about on a chain. "

" You silly owls——" began Arthur Edward wrathfully.

" 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. "

" That doesn't make much difference when it's a master," said Mornington. " He said something about reporting us to the Head, too. I wonder whether he noticed that it was I who jammed his cheeky head down on the floor in the train. "

" Let's hope not," said Jimmy, laughing.

" 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. "Well 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



Jimmy Silver glanced back into the carriage. The thin gentleman was struggling into a sitting posture, gasping for breath and covered with dust!

which indicated that the occupant was at home.

Lovell tapped on 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 bedroom opening out of the sitting-room; and there was no apparent reason why the sitting-room door should have been locked.

The door opened.

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 of Latcham. 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 bounder," as he had expressed it.

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

"I don't see——" began Lovell.

"Your name—at once!"

"The fact is, sir," said Jimmy Silver, in his gentlest tone, "we—we're sorry there was any trouble at——"

"Oh, yes," said Raby, "we're sorry."

Mr. Skinforth smiled unpleasantly.

"No doubt," he said. "That does not alter the fact that you have acted with insolent disrespect, and that you will be punished. Give me your name at once, boy."

"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, as everywhere else.

"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 & 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 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 in.

Mr. Skinforth had already, of course, made the Head's acquaintance, and had 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. The Head returned at once to Euripides, and forgot the existence of Mr. Skinforth. The mathematics master, on his side, did not so soon forget the existence of the Head. A snub is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive. When the study door had closed Mr. Skinforth stared at it for nearly a minute, with a very disagreeable expression on his face. He seemed to be thinking over the things he would have liked to say to Dr. Chisholm—had he dared!

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 conduct," 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 an 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, 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 nice man!" 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 Erroll 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.

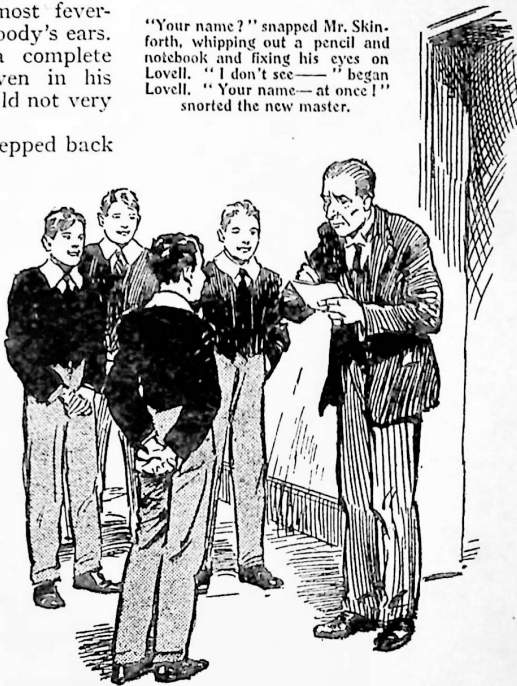
"Were you looking for me, sir?" he asked.

"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?"

"Your name?" snapped Mr. Skinforth, whipping out a pencil and notebook and fixing his eyes on Lovell. "I don't see—" began Lovell. "Your name—at once!" snorted the new master.



"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 Latham prevented that. His opinion of Mr. Skinforth was that he was a rank outsider, and no class, and not worthy of respect. Moreover, Lovell was aware that Mr. Skinforth was going to make things as hot for him as he possibly could, and he had a feeling that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, so to speak.

"What is your name?" hissed Mr. Skinforth.

"Any old thing, sir," said Lovell coolly. "Doesn't Shakespeare say, 'What's in a name?' Make it Perkins."

"I presume that you belong to the Fourth Form, as I find you here?" gasped Mr. Skinforth.

"Anything you like, sir!"

"For the last time, give me your name."

"Make it Wilkins," said Lovell.

"Does that suit, sir?"

"Very well!" said Mr. Skinforth, between his teeth. "You shall suffer for this insolence. If you will not give me your name——"

"I've given you several, sir," said Lovell cheerfully. "If you'd like some more——"

"I shall take you to your Form-master," said 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 replied. "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.

Lovell's heart beat rather fast.

He did not respect Mr. Skinforth—but, respected or not, a master was a master, and it was no light matter to "cheek" him.

But his shot told, even more effectively than he had expected. Mr. Skinforth's face grew crimson, and then pale.

"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 you 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.

"Oh! Ow! Whoooooop!"

"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 to the stairs. Arthur Edward Lovell staggered against the wall, with both hands to his head.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

In a few minutes a sympathetic crowd surrounded Lovell — some 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 — ”

“ Dicky Dalton would jolly well call him to order, ” said Newcome.

“ Maths masters ain't allowed to whack a fellow, anyhow ; they have to report you. And slapping a fellow's head—that's the limit. ”

“ It's more than the limit ! ” said Raby. “ The fellow's a rank outsider. Dicky Dalton would call him to order fast enough. ”

“ I'm not going to tell Dicky Dalton, or anybody else. I'm going to make him sit up on my own, ” said Lovell savagely.

“ But — ” murmured Jimmy.

“ 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 ! ”

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully.

“ If he catches you at it — ”

“ I shan't let him, fathead ! Though I'd jolly well hack his shins if he touched me again, I can tell you. I'm going now. It's dorm in half an hour, and there's no time to waste ! ”

“ I say, Lovell — ”

“ Rats ! ”

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 disapproved 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 anybody 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 bedroom and started by dragging off all the bedclothes 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!"

"For goodness' sake——" breathed Newcome uneasily.

"Bosh! You fellows can cut if you like!"

"Oh, don't be an ass! This may mean a flogging," said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't care!"

Lovell, in his present mood, did not care—though later on, if it came to a flogging, it was probable that he would care very much indeed. 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 in the light, staring at it with round eyes of amazement.

"Banknotes!"

"Eh!"

"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.



"Great Scott!" Lovell stooped and picked up the bundle and held it up in the light, staring at it in amazement. "Banknotes!"

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

"Five hundred quids!" breathed Newcome. "Oh, my hat!"

"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 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 bizney, 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—and a few minutes later they joined the Classical Fourth on the way to dorm.

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 raggers 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 SIXTH CHAPTER

NOT OFF!

"I'm off!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, spoke in determined tones.

"Off!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes."

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome regarded Lovell with surprised inquiry.

They were due in No. 2 class-room at two-thirty, in the "set" presided over by Mr. Skinforth.

It was now two-twenty-nine, so the Fistical Four of Rookwood had exactly one minute in which to reach No. 2 class-room. And they did not want to be late; at all events, three members of the quartette did not. Mr. Skinforth was not a pleasant gentleman, and he had a special dislike for the Fistical Four—a dislike quite unfounded in the view of the four, but probably not in Mr. Skinforth's view.

With sixty seconds at their disposal, and trouble awaiting them if they were late, Jimmy Silver & Co. were not disposed to hang about the corridors. But Lovell had stopped, with his most obstinate expression upon his face, and announced that he was "off."

"I don't quite catch on," said Jimmy, puzzled. "You've not forgotten that it's maths, I suppose?"

"No."

"Well, then, come on; we've only just time——"

"I'm not going in to Skinforth's set," said Lovell, with calm deliberation. "I'm going to cut maths."

"Fathead!"

"I'm off!"

"I think you must be," agreed Newcome. "Right off—off your onion. You can't cut maths."

"I jolly well can—and shall."

"Look here——" began Raby.

"I've made up my mind," said Lovell. "I'm fed-up with Skinforth. Isn't he always down on me?"

"H'm!"

"Doesn't he try to make me look a fool before all the mathy set?"

"He doesn't have to try very hard," murmured Raby.

"What?" roared Lovell.

"I—I mean—— Oh, come on! We shall be late."

"He's been down on me ever since the term started," said Lovell. "He knows jolly well it was I who ragged his rooms the first night here. He hasn't said anything about it; but he knows. And he tries to take it out of me in class. I'm not a whale at maths——"

"You're not!" grinned Newcome. "Not even a tadpole!"

"But if I could beat the head of the Sixth at the game, Skinforth would still find fault," said Lovell. "Well, I'm fed-up. I'm off."

"But you can't cut maths, old man," argued Jimmy Silver. "I know Skinforth is a first-class rotter, and I jolly well wish Mr. Bull were back again. But we've got to stand the Skinforth-man so long as he lasts."

"I'm not standing him."

"Lovell, old man——"

"You fellows can go in, if you like. If Skinny asks after me, tell him he can go and eat coke—from me."

"We're likely to!" chuckled Newcome. "Now, come on, Lovell, and don't play the giddy ox!"

"I'm off!"

Arthur Edward Lovell settled the matter by swinging round and walking through the door to the quadrangle.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell!" shouted Raby.

Lovell did not heed.

He disappeared from the gaze of his anxious chums into the quad, evidently quite determined that he would not endure, that afternoon, any more of the unpleasant manners and customs of Mr. Skinforth, the temporary "mathy" master at Rookwood.

Mornington came hurrying along the passage.

"You fellows will be late!" he called out in passing.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome followed Valentine Mornington. Lovell was gone; and anxious as they were about him, they could not run him down and collar him and carry him bodily into No. 2 class-room. That really was out of the question.

Arthur Edward Lovell, with a grim and determined expression on his face, strode out into the quad.

He had suffered a good deal at the hands of Mr. Skinforth, and now he

had taken the bit between his teeth, so to speak.

He did not expect his dereliction of duty to pass unpunished. But a licking from his Form master, Mr. Dalton, was really better than the mathy set with Mr. Skinforth, in Lovell's opinion.

So he stalked away, resolute.

His idea was to pass the next hour in the old clock tower, with a "Modern Boy's Annual" and a bag of nuts. This was distinctly an improvement on "maths."

But alas for Arthur Edward!

He had just reached the archway leading into Little Quad, when forth from the old stone arch stepped a majestic figure.

Dr. Chisholm, headmaster of Rookwood, stopped and fixed his eyes on the Classical Fourth-Former.

Lovell paused at a sign from the Head.

"Lovell!"

"Yes, sir!" faltered Arthur Edward.

"Why are you not in class?"

"I—I——"

It was useless to hope that the Head would be ignorant of anything going on within the ancient walls of Rookwood. There was not the most trifling detail in the school time-table that the Head did not have at his august finger-tips.

Dr. Chisholm glanced at his watch.

"You should be with Mr. Skinforth now, Lovell, I think."

The Head said "I think"; but as the hapless Lovell remarked afterwards to his friends, he jolly well knew!

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"You are going directly away from the House, Lovell." The Head knitted his brows. "Is it possible, Lovell, that it was your intention to play truant?"

No answer.

"Follow me!" said the Head grimly.

He rustled on, and Arthur Edward Lovell followed him, in the lowest of spirits. Rebellious as he was that afternoon, Lovell did not think of disobeying the Head. It was "maths," after all, and trouble with the headmaster to boot! Truly, it was not Arthur Edward Lovell's lucky day.

Lovell trailed dismally after his headmaster.

Dr. Chisholm walked, slow and stately, into the House; slow and stately, to No. 2 class-room.

Slow, but anything but stately, Arthur Edward Lovell limped after him.

The "mathy" set were just about to settle down to business when the Head came in with Lovell.

Mr. Skinforth's close-set, greenish eyes glittered at Arthur Edward. His manner to the Head was extremely deferential; "soapy" in the opinion of the class.

"Mr. Skinforth, this boy should be present, I think——"

"Yes, sir. He has absented himself without permission," said Mr. Skinforth. "He is a very unsatisfactory pupil in every way, sir."

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly fetch the cane from the desk in my study."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

Lovell stood with a dogged face, while Jimmy Silver was gone on that unwelcome errand.

The captain of the Fourth returned, and the Head took the cane from him.

"Hold out your hand, Lovell."

Swish!

"The other hand!"

Swish!

"I trust, Lovell, that this will be a warning to you," said the Head; and he left the class-room taking the cane with him.

And the hapless Arthur Edward, squeezing his hands convulsively, was left to the tender mercies of Mr. Skinforth.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

TOO THICK!

"OLD bean, you're wanted!"

Valentine Mornington came along the Classical Fourth passage, and looked into the end study with that announcement.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at tea.

One member of the Co. looked savage and morose; the other three members looked as sympathetic as they could. Arthur Edward Lovell was "up against it," and naturally his comrades sympathised. Doubtless it was partly by Arthur Edward's own fault that he had landed into such a peck of troubles. Nevertheless, his chums sympathised deeply.

"Wanted!" repeated Jimmy Silver looking round. "Who wants Lovell now?"

"Dicky Dalton."

Lovell gave a snort.

"More trouble!" he said. "I know jolly well that Skinforth has reported me to Mr. Dalton. I knew he would."

"Well, you did rather cheek him at 'mathy,'" said Newcome.

"Isn't he a rotter?" demanded Lovell.

"Hem! But——"

"Hasn't he got a special down on me because I happen to know that he's a rotter?"

"Hem!"

"Dicky Dalton told me to bring you the message, Lovell, old bean," said Mornington, with a curious look at Arthur Edward. "You seem to be

in the jolly old wars! You never see the Skinny-bird without trouble!"

Lovell's eyes gleamed.

"I could tell you why, if I liked," he said.

"Least said, soonest mended," said Jimmy Silver. "Mr. Skinforth is only here till Mr. Bull comes back, and he's coming back this term. Grin and bear it."

"I'm not standing much more!" growled Lovell. "I've a jolly good mind to tell Mr. Dalton what I know."

"It wouldn't be any good—and likely as not, there's nothing in it," said Raby.

Morny started.

"You're jolly mysterious," he said. "What's the giddy secret about the Skinny-bird—if any? We all know he's bad-tempered and stingy, and a rather foxy sort of a bird. Anythin' more?"

"Come in and shut the door and I'll tell you," said Lovell. "I'd like to have your opinion, Morny. You're a keen chap."

"Thanks."

Morny, much surprised, came into the end study, and the door was shut. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked rather uneasy. But Arthur Edward Lovell went ahead.

"You know we had trouble with Skinforth in the train, coming here the first day of term," said Lovell.

"Well, he smacked my head afterwards, and I ragged his rooms in return."

Morny whistled.

"Like your neck!" he said. "No wonder the Skinny-bird is down on you, if you ragged his rooms. He knew you did it?"

"Well, I know he knows, though he's said nothing," said Lovell. "Ragging his things, a trunk burst open—"

"Great Scott! You must have been goin' it!"

"I was going it," said Lovell. "I admit it was a bit thick—I never really meant to go that far. But that's what happened. When the trunk burst open, I kicked the things in it right and left. And then—" Lovell paused. "Then I saw the banknotes."

"Banknotes!" said Morny blankly.

"He had bundles of banknotes in his trunk."

"Gammon!"

"I tell you he had!" roared Lovell. "More than a thousand pounds in fivers and tenners!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington. Arthur Edward Lovell glared at him.

"What are you cackling at, you dummy?" he demanded.

"My dear man," chuckled Mornington, "a yarn like that might do for Tubby Muffin—might send him



"Lovell!" said Dr. Chisholm. "Yes, sir," faltered Arthur Edward. "Why are you not in class?" "I—I—" It was useless to tell the Head that he wasn't going to stand the new master!

rootin' round the Skinny-bird's rooms lookin' for loot! It might do to stuff up Gunner. But what's the good of spinnin' such a yarn at me?"

"Don't you believe me?" howled Lovell.

"Of course not."

"These fellows saw the banknotes, too."

"Rot!"

"We did, Morny," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Fairly took our breaths away! Nearly two thousand pounds, I think."

Mornington ceased to chortle, and stared at the Fistical Four.

"You're not stuffing me, then?" he asked.

"No."

"It's genuine," said Raby. "We all saw them. We were keeping cave at the door while Lovell was ragging the man's rooms."

"The banknotes were there right enough," said Newcome. "Tied up in bundles, with rubber bands, like they have them at banks, you know."

"Well, my only summer hat!" said Mornington.

"You believe it now?" snapped Lovell.

"Well, if you fellows give me your word, I—I suppose I believe it," said Mornington, in great astonishment. "But what does it mean? Mathematics masters don't have thousands of pounds. Fifty pounds in the bank perhaps, put aside for a rainy day. But thousands in banknotes—phew! Are you fellows quite sure you didn't dream it?"

"Fathead!" growled Lovell. "The money was there. We were pretty startled, I can tell you—"

"I can quite believe that!" grinned Mornington.

"We left the stuff just where it was," went on Lovell. "Of course,

when Skinforth went to his rooms, he found what had happened. He knew that somebody must have seen his bundles of banknotes. He knew jolly well that it was I, too. I don't know whether he guesses that these chaps were with me—perhaps not. But he knew it was I, right enough. That's why he's down on me. It's put his back up."

"Well, the ragging would do that," said Mornington. "But he could have reported it to Mr. Dalton."

"He didn't want the banknotes mentioned, I fancy. What's a 'mathy' master in a school doing with thousands of pounds in banknotes in a bag?" demanded Lovell. "Can it be his own money?"

"Great Scott! Whose, if not his?"

"Well, it's a lot of money, and he's a beast. He's pretty unscrupulous, too—I'm sure of that. Looks to me as if he's pinched all that money from somewhere," said Lovell.

"That's rot," said Mornington decidedly. "The Skinny-bird hasn't been distinguishin' himself in a hold-up at a bank, what?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned involuntarily at the thought. Certainly Mr. Skinforth did not look like a man to carry out a desperate enterprise of that kind.

"Well, where did the money come from?" said Lovell. "If he had thousands of pounds of his own he wouldn't be working as a 'mathy' master in a school."

"Blest if I can make it out!" said Mornington. "He may have had a legacy or something."

"Legacies aren't paid in banknotes. The money would be in a bank."

"Most likely. But—" Mornington wrinkled his brows. "Look here, you fellows, are you quite sure?"

You may have taken bundles of something else for bundles of banknotes."

"We're sure enough," said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell thinks that Skinny never reported the ragging of his rooms because he didn't want it mentioned about the money being there."

"Perhaps he preferred to take it out of Lovell himself," smiled Morny. "He seems to have done that pretty effectually. I say, I take your word about this, of—of course. But it's not a yarn I'd tell in the Common-room, if I were you. It sounds much too steep, you know."

"I know," said Jimmy.

"Well, I'm jolly well thinking of telling Mr. Dalton," said Lovell grimly. "Skinny is down on me like

anything because I know. If there's anything fishy about it the Head ought to know."

"The Head wouldn't believe a word of it, or Dicky Dalton, either," said Mornington. "It's altogether too much like a fairy tale. Even if they believed that the money was there, they'd be bound to believe that it was Skinforth's own. Whose else could it be?"

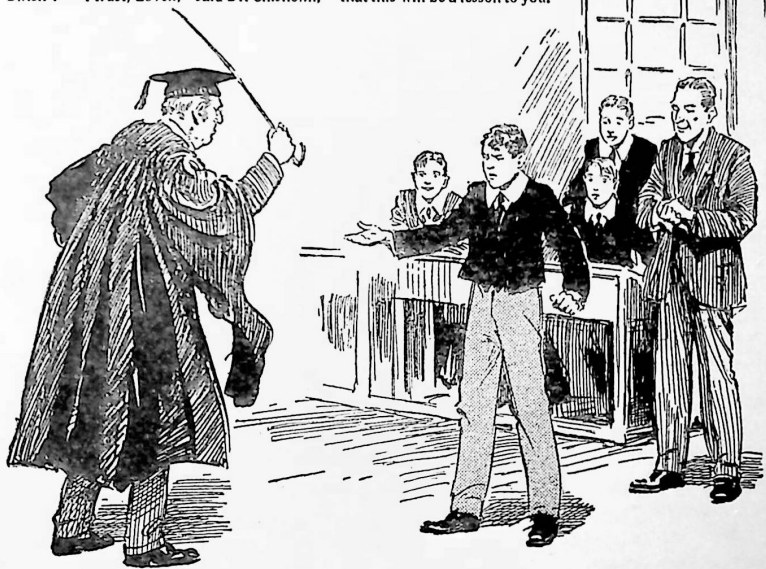
"You don't think——"

Lovell hesitated.

"I don't think he's a giddy burglar, hiding his giddy loot at Rookwood," grinned Mornington. "Not quite. If—if you're sure the money was really there——"

"You silly owl, it was there!"

"Hold out your hand, Lovell!" said the Head. Swish! "The other hand!" Swish! "I trust, Lovell," said Dr. Chisholm, "that this will be a lesson to you."



howled Lovell. "Do you think four fellows could be mistaken?"

"Well, I dare say you were a bit hurried and excited, and—and—well, let's take it that the money was there," said Mornington, evidently with a lingering doubt. "In that case, I should say, that most likely the Skinny-bird had received a legacy, and was keepin' the money in hand till he reinvested it, or somethin' of the sort. If you tell Dicky Dalton the banknotes were there, you won't have the neck to suggest that Skinforth didn't come by the money honestly, will you?"

Lovell was silent. Bitter tongue-lashings in the "mathy" set, many canings following reports to his Form master, had deeply embittered him. But even Lovell realised that his intense personal dislike of Mr. Skinforth could scarcely justify so terrible an accusation against him.

"Besides, you're known to be up against him," said Mornington. "Only to-day the Head caned you himself for cutting 'maths' with Skinforth. Anythin' you said would be put down to malice."

Jimmy Silver started a little.

"My hat! Is it possible that that's why Skinforth is so awfully down on Lovell—to discount in advance anything he might say?"

"Jolly likely!" growled Lovell. "Well, I've asked your opinion about it, Morny. What do you think?"

"I think you'd better keep your mouth shut about the giddy banknotes—if any," said Mornington, with a laugh. "Nobody will swallow such a story, to begin with; and you can't mention it without admitting that you ragged the Skinny-bird's rooms so frightfully that a dashed trunk burst open. That's a Head's flogging if it comes out!"

Mornington strolled to the door.

"Dicky Dalton expects you in his study, you know," he remarked, and he sauntered away, smiling.

His smile seemed to indicate that he did not, on the whole, place a very firm belief in the story of the banknotes. That Jimmy Silver & Co. had told untruths, he did not think for a moment, but that they were mistaken seemed much more likely than that the "mathy" master had thousands of pounds in banknotes in his possession.

The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"The silly owl doesn't quite believe it!" growled Lovell. "If—if he doesn't, I suppose Dicky Dalton wouldn't."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"It's too thick," he said. "In—in fact, I've been wondering a bit whether it's possible we made some sort of a mistake. Anybody can see that Skinforth isn't a rich man. He doesn't dress well, he never spends money, and—and——"

Lovell grunted and left the study. He had to see his Form master, whether he told him of the strange discovery in Mr. Skinforth's rooms or not.

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, received Arthur Edward Lovell with a frown. A cane lay on his table.

"Lovell, I am sorry to say that I have received another report from Mr. Skinforth concerning your conduct in the mathematics set," he said.

"He's always down on me," said Lovell sullenly.

"He informs me that you were insolent in the class, and that you actually snatched or pulled a pointer out of his hand," said the Fourth Form master sternly.

"He was rapping my knuckles with it," muttered Lovell.

"Do you consider that an excuse?"

"Yes."

"Then our opinions differ very considerably," said Mr. Dalton dryly, taking up his cane. "You will hold out your hand, Lovell."

Lovell hesitated.

"I—I could tell you why Mr. Skinforth is down on me, sir," he stammered.

"I refuse to believe for one moment that Mr. Skinforth is down, as you call it, on you or any other junior," said Mr. Dalton.

"I know something he wouldn't like me to tell!"

Mr. Dalton stared.

"Do not be absurd, Lovell!"

"I can tell you, sir——"

"If you know anything about Mr. Skinforth's personal affairs, Lovell, you are quite well aware that you have no right to repeat it, especially to me," said Mr. Dalton sternly. "Not another word! Hold out your hand!"

Swish, swish!

Arthur Edward Lovell left his Form-master's study with his hands tucked under his arms, squeezing them desperately. He fairly wriggled his way back to the end study in the Fourth.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER SUSPICIOUS!

"THERE'S the rotter!"

It was Saturday afternoon, and Jimmy Silver & Co. came out of the House a cheery little crowd. It was a half-holiday, and there was no match on at Rookwood that day, and the Fistical Four were going over to Bunbury for the afternoon.

Bunbury was a good distance from the school—fifteen miles, at least—



Arthur Edward Lovell left his Form-master's study with his hands tucked under his arms, squeezing them hard.

and, of course, out of bounds; but there was a football match at Bunbury that afternoon between the Bunbury Rovers and the Latcham Ramblers, and the Co. had obtained a special exeat from their Form-master to see the match. It was one of the occasions when the excellent reputation of the Fistical Four stood them in good stead. Their Form-master was aware that they could be trusted out of bounds, and out of bounds they were going.

Lovell's remark was caused by the sight of Mr. Skinforth walking down from the House to the gates.

Evidently the "mathy" master was going out for the half-holiday.

There was nothing to cause surprise in that, however, for it was a custom of Mr. Skinforth to spend his leisure hours away from the school.

In the few weeks he had been at Rookwood, he had never spent a single half-holiday within the walls.

Rain or shine, Mr. Skinforth left after dinner, and did not return till lock-up. It was understood that he was a great walker, and went for long walks, and it had rather been commented upon that he always went by himself, no other master ever accompanying him on those long walks. But in that, too, there was nothing surprising, for Mr. Skinforth was not popular in masters' Common-room. He was on civil terms with the rest of the staff, but he had made no friend among them, and he had made it fairly clear that he did not care for their company in his leisure hours.

Indeed, it was also known that Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, had one day condescended to join Mr. Skinforth as he walked out, and had been snubbed for his pains. It was an act of condescension on the part of the portly, important Fifth Form master; he had intended to be kind, in his lofty way, to a man who, as he expressed it, was "new among us." And he had been greatly offended when Mr. Skinforth made it clear that his portly company was not desired; and since then Mr. Greely never bestowed more than the curtest of nods upon Mr. Skinforth, and never spoke of him if he could help it.

"There he goes!" repeated Lovell, with a dark look after the thin, angular figure of the "mathy" master. "Off on one of his jaunts."

"Let him rip," said Jimmy Silver

carelessly. "Thank goodness, we've done with him for this week, anyhow!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four walked away to the bike-shed for their machines.

It was a clear, frosty afternoon, with an unusual amount of sunshine for the time of year. The chums of the Fourth were prepared to enjoy their ride to Bunbury.

They pedalled away cheerfully from Rookwood. As they passed through the village of Coombe they sighted again a tall, angular figure in a dark overcoat and silk hat, a bag in his hand.

"Skinny again!" grinned Raby.

"Blow Skinny!"

"Blow him as hard as you like, old chap."

Mr. Skinforth was entering the railway station at Coombe, and he did not notice the four cheery juniors wheeling by. They rode on, and the tall thin figure vanished from their sight and from their thoughts. The Fistical Four had much more pleasant things to think about that sunny afternoon than the unpopular "mathy" master.

It was a long run to Bunbury, and the juniors enjoyed every mile of it.

Bunbury was reached at last. And the Fistical Four stopped at the railway station there, where they intended putting up their machines while they walked down to the football ground.

The bicycles were disposed of. And the juniors were about to leave the station, when Arthur Edward Lovell uttered a sudden ejaculation.

"Blessed if he isn't haunting us!"

"He! Who?"

"That beast Skinny!"

"Skinforth here!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

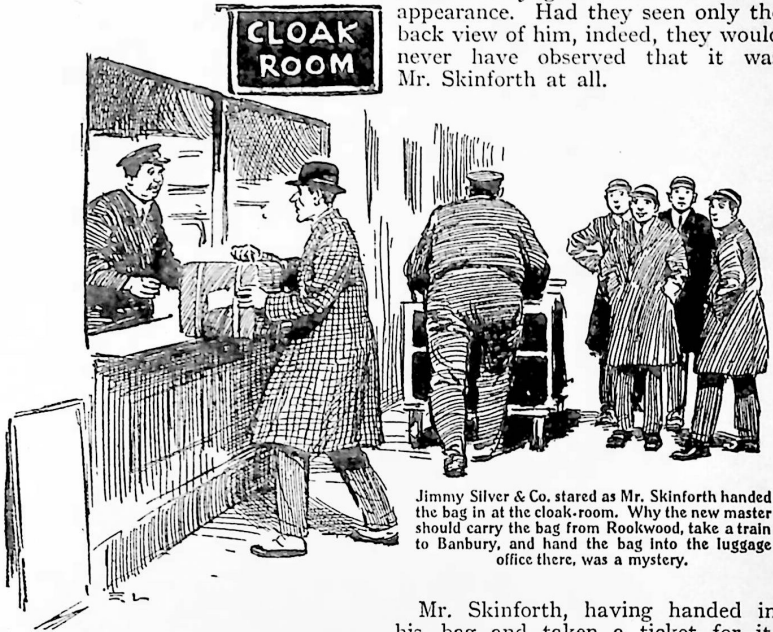
"Look!"

"My only hat!"

A tall, thin gentleman was standing at the "left luggage" office, his back partly turned to the juniors, who were at a little distance. But they had a glimpse of his profile, and they knew the thin features and sharp nose of Mr. Skinforth.

a mystery. But that was not all. Mr. Skinforth had left Rookwood in a dark overcoat and a silk hat. Now he was wearing a light check overcoat and a bowler hat.

But for the well-known sharp features the juniors would not have known that it was Mr. Skinforth at all; the change of hat and coat made a very great difference in his appearance. Had they seen only the back view of him, indeed, they would never have observed that it was Mr. Skinforth at all.



Jimmy Silver & Co. stared as Mr. Skinforth handed the bag in at the cloak-room. Why the new master should carry the bag from Rookwood, take a train to Bunbury, and hand the bag into the luggage office there, was a mystery.

They stared. They could not help it.

Mr. Skinforth was handing in a bag to be taken care of—the bag he had carried in his hand from Rookwood. Why a man should carry a bag from Rookwood, take a train to Bunbury, and hand the bag into the "left luggage" office there, was rather

Mr. Skinforth, having handed in his bag and taken a ticket for it, walked away to the street without a glance in the direction of the Fistical Four. Obviously, he did not know they were anywhere near at hand; in fact, Bunbury being far out of bounds for Rookwooders, he could not have supposed that any Rookwood fellows would be in the town that afternoon at all.

"Well," said Arthur Edward Lovell with a deep breath, "what do you fellows think of that?"

"Queer!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Jolly queer!" said Lovell emphatically.

"I say, do you think the Skinny-bird is a bit off his rocker?" asked Newcome. "He must have brought that hat and coat in his bag and changed in the train from Coombe. Why should he?"

"Must be a bit potty!" said Raby. "Anyhow, no bizney of ours. Let's get off to the Rovers' ground. There'll be a crush."

"Yes, come on!" said Jimmy.

The proceedings of the "mathy" master were undoubtedly singular. But they were, after all, no concern of the Fistical Four, who had come over to Bunbury for the football match.

But Arthur Edward Lovell halted.

"Hold on," he said.

"We haven't got too much time," urged Raby. "We want to get a front place. We're not taking expensive seats, you know!"

"Hold on, I say. I don't like the look of this!" said Lovell.

"Of what?"

"Skinforth——"

"Nobody could like the look of Skinny!" grinned Raby. "He's no beauty. But what the thump are you driving at, Lovell?"

"It's fishy!"

"What is?" exclaimed Raby impatiently.

"This is," said Lovell warmly. "Is it a natural thing for a man to come out in one hat and coat and bring another lot in a bag and change in a railway train?"

"Well, no. But I suppose it's no bizney of ours. Blow Skinny and his hats and coats!"

"It's practically a disguise," said Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anybody seeing him here would never know that it was Skinforth, unless he saw him quite close. He's never worn that coat at Rookwood, and I've never seen him in a bowler-hat. It's been remarked on that he always sports a topper."

"So does old Greely," said Jimmy Silver. "The Fifth Form chaps say that Greely lives in his top-hat and goes to bed in it."

"But he doesn't change it for a bowler out of sight of the school. That man is up to something over here this afternoon, and he doesn't want to be recognised."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Well, if he's up to something, let him rip," said Newcome. "Are we going to miss the Rovers' match while we discuss Skinny's hat?"

"I'm going to, whether you fellows do or not," said Lovell deliberately. "My belief is that Skinny is up to no good!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, old fellow!"

"I'm going to keep an eye on him and see what he's up to," said Arthur Edward Lovell obstinately.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"You're not," he said quietly. "We don't like Skinny, and he may be up to some game he doesn't want known at Rookwood, for all I know. But you can't watch a man; that's outside!"

Lovell flushed.

"Can't pry on a man like Tubby Muffin, old chap. Cut it out and come along!"

"If he's up to something——"

"Not our bizney if he is!"

"It may be everybody's bizney. He may be going to add to his collection of banknotes!" said Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell.

"Well, old chap, if you're suggesting that Skinforth has come over here this afternoon to hold up the Bunbury bank——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owls!" hooted Lovell.

"I don't know what he's up to, but it's no good, and I'm going to see. And if you like to call it prying, you can call it prying and be blowed!"

And with that Arthur Edward Lovell marched out of the station, taking the direction Mr. Skinforth had taken, which happened to lead directly away from the Rovers' ground.

"Lovell!" shouted Jimmy.

"Rats!" retorted Lovell, over his shoulder.

"Look here! We're going to the match!"

"Go, then! I'm not stopping you!"

"Aren't you coming, you ass?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Then turn up at the station at five. We'll be here, then."

"All right."

Lovell marched on after the tall, angular figure that was still visible at a distance in the High Street of Bunbury. His three chums looked at one another in a rather exasperated mood.

"The silly ass!" growled Raby.

"Lovell's fairly got a bee in his bonnet on the subject of that man Skinny! Anyhow, we're not going to miss the Rovers' match playing detectives!"

"No jolly fear!" said Newcome emphatically.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver.

The three juniors walked down to the football ground. They were soon

watching the struggle between Bunbury Rovers and Latcham Ramblers, quite forgetful of Mr. Skinforth—and, indeed, of Arthur Edward Lovell too. It was not till the match was over that they remembered their chum and wondered where he was and what he was doing.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

LOVELL—DETECTIVE!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL was perplexed.

More than once, as he "kept an eye" on Mr. Skinforth that afternoon in the busy streets of Bunbury, he stopped, and was tempted to give it up, and join his chums at the Rovers' ground to see what was left of the football match.

Of what he suspected Mr. Skinforth he could hardly have said himself. He knew, too, that his opinion of the man was coloured by his dislike of him, and the man's harshness towards himself.

Yet the great sum of money he had seen in Mr. Skinforth's room at Rookwood was suspicious—more than suspicious. Added to that, Mr. Skinforth's change of coat and hat on this expedition—what could it mean, if not that Mr. Skinforth was on some "shady" business of some kind?

Was he a thief—perhaps a pick-pocket? Lovell shook his head over that. Pickpockets, howsoever skilful and successful, do not accumulate wads of banknotes in their peculiar profession.

Yet, whether it was dislike of the man, or superior sagacity—the latter, he was inclined to believe—Lovell was sure that the great mass of money in Mr. Skinforth's trunk had not been come by honestly. If it had been come by in honest ways, why did the man carry it about with

him in banknotes instead of banking it? That question seemed to Arthur Edward Lovell unanswerable.

Yet Mr. Skinforth's proceedings that afternoon—in spite of the change of coat and hat, that seemed so suspicious—appeared innocent and harmless enough.

He went into the clothier's shop in the High Street, and emerged with a bundle in his hand. He seemed to have been buying hosiery, or something of the sort. Later, he dropped into a bookshop, and came out with a little parcel under his arm, that apparently contained books. His third visit was paid to a bootshop, and another parcel swung from his hand when he emerged.

Lovell began to feel rather foolish.

In the firm belief that Mr. Skinforth was "up to something" of a shady nature, Lovell had felt it his duty to watch him. But he was quite conscious of the meanness of watching a man's actions. It savoured horribly of spying. Only a sense of duty could justify it—as in the case of a detective, for instance, or a policeman. Lovell had constituted himself a private detective for the afternoon. And he had discovered that Mr. Skinforth had visited Bunbury to buy shirts or socks, boots and books. It was rather a "facer" for Lovell, and he felt more and more uncomfortable.

He was more and more careful, too, that Mr. Skinforth should not see him on the watch. He kept at a distance—all the more carefully because he noticed that Mr. Skinforth looked round sharply at times—really almost as if he half expected to be watched by someone.

After Mr. Skinforth's visit to the Bunbury Boot Emporium, Lovell gave it up. He was disappointed and annoyed, and rather ashamed of

himself now—which was a very uncomfortable state of mind to be in. Mr. Skinforth, too, was heading for the railway station at a brisk walk, as if he had finished his business in Bunbury, as, doubtless, he had.

He disappeared from sight—no doubt to reclaim his bag at the station, and take the train home to Coombe.

Lovell leaned on the shop-front of the Bunbury Boot Emporium and thought it out—worried, puzzled, and irritated. Was the man wrong in his head? Why had he practically disguised himself by that change of coat and hat in order to buy harmless and necessary goods at the shops in Bunbury? Lovell felt that if a policeman had known of the thing he would have become suspicious. But what would he have suspected? Lovell could not guess that.

What could there possibly be of a suspicious nature in the purchase of a pair of boots? Lovell flushed deeply when he thought of meeting his chums and reporting progress. He could hear, in advance, the chortles of the Co. when he should tell them what he had discovered—that the suspected man had been buying shirts and boots.

Really Lovell couldn't possibly confess that to Jimmy Silver & Co. And in his eager keenness to think of something that would at least justify his having "kept an eye" on Mr. Skinforth that afternoon, Lovell thought of another circumstance. Why had Mr. Skinforth come to Bunbury at all to do his shopping—a railway journey of fifteen miles? Everything he wanted, everything he had bought, could have been obtained in Latcham, a few miles from the school, or in Rookham, a few more miles. Why pay the extra fare, and take the

extra time, for a journey to Bunbury? Lovell wrinkled his brows over it.

There was something in it—something, he was certain. All Mr. Skinforth's proceedings were strange, odd, suspicious. A detective would have detected something, Lovell felt sure of it. But what? More and more Lovell felt that the man was some kind of a rogue. But what was his roguesy? He remembered the incident of the first day of the term, when Mr. Skinforth had attempted to annex the half-crown Lovell had dropped on the platform at Latcham. A man who would steal a half-crown would steal anything. But he could not have been stealing in the Bunbury shops. A thief could not walk out of a shop with his plunder in parcels.

What did it all mean?

Lovell cudgelled his brains. Was it possible that Mr. Skinforth had got the goods on "tick," without intending to pay the bill? It was wildly improbable; in fact, it was certain that the shopkeepers would not let the goods go without the money, in dealing with a stranger.

Then what—what—

Arthur Edward Lovell strolled into the Bunbury Boot Emporium at last. What he hoped to learn there he did not know; but he had a desperate hope of picking up some information—enough to justify himself in his own eyes at least. Anyhow, Mr. Skinforth was safe off the scene now, and would know nothing about it.

The emporium was deserted, save for a couple of yawning shopmen. A very large proportion of the inhabitants of Bunbury were on the Rovers' ground that afternoon, and trade was not brisk. A young man came towards Lovell to inquire what he wanted.

"Has my uncle been here?" asked Lovell, adopting Mr. Skinforth as his

uncle on the spur of the moment, by what he really regarded as an inspiration.

The young man smiled slightly.

"I'm afraid I don't know your uncle, sir," he said. He could see that Lovell was a schoolboy, and he plainly thought him a rather foolish schoolboy.

"I think he was here," said Lovell, colouring under the shopman's smile. "He wore a light check overcoat."

"I think Mr. Montgomery served a gentleman in a light check overcoat, about twenty minutes ago," said the young man. "I will ask him."

"Thank you."

The young man crossed over to the other young man, and spoke to him. Mr. Montgomery came over to Lovell.



Mr. Skinforth went into a clothier's shop and emerged presently with a bundle in his hand. He little knew Lovell was keeping an eye on him, in the firm belief that the new master was up to something shady!

"I'm afraid your uncle's gone, sir," he said kindly. "Is it Mr. Judson you are inquiring for?"

"Judson!" repeated Lovell. "I mean a man—rather tall and thin, with a light check overcoat and a bowler hat; nose rather like a beak, and a very tight mouth."

Mr. Montgomery smiled.

"I think that was the gentleman," he said. "Name of Judson."

Lovell's brain was almost in a whirl. Had Mr. Skinforth given a false name in the shop? Why had he given a name at all? Customers do not give their names, true or false, in boot emporia, as a rule. But Lovell calmed himself with an effort. He felt that he was undoubtedly on the track of something now—though of what he was still in the dark.

"That's all right," he said, his heart beating. "If he told you his name was Judson—"

"Yes, Judson," said the young man.

"You know him, I suppose?" said Lovell.

"Not at all, sir—quite a stranger here."

"But he, my—my uncle, told you his name was Judson?"

"He wrote it on the banknote."

Lovell almost staggered.

"The—the banknote!"

Mr. Montgomery eyed the Rookwood junior with increasing surprise.

"Certainly," he said. "We always require a customer, not personally known to us, to write his name on a banknote—his name and address. It is the usual custom."

"I—I know!" gasped Lovell. "I—I thank you! I—I dare say I shall find him all right."

Lovell hurried out of the bootshop, leaving the two shopmen staring after him, and winking at one another.

But Lovell did not care what they were thinking of him. His brain was in a whirl. Mr. Skinforth had changed a banknote at the boot shop, and signed a false name on the back of it.

Why?

THE TENTH CHAPTER

ASK A POLICEMAN!

JIMMY SILVER and Raby and Newcome strolled into the railway-station soon after five o'clock. Arthur Edward Lovell was waiting for them.

"Here we are again, old bean!" said Jimmy cheerily. "Rovers beat the Ramblers by two to one."

"Blow the Rovers and bother the Ramblers!" said Lovell. "I've found out something."

"Caught Skinny holding up a bank?"

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Or spotted him pinching watches in the High Street?"

"Don't be an ass! Come over here, and I'll tell you," said Lovell, his face aglow with excitement.

"I say, we've got a long way to go, you know. What about lock-up?"

"Blow lock-up!"

"Oh, all right!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly.

The three followed Lovell into a quiet corner by a stack of luggage. There they listened, with smiling faces, as he started his narration. It was plain that they were not disposed to take Lovell's detective work very seriously.

But their faces grew serious as he came to the incident of the false name endorsed on the banknote in the boot emporium.

"I say, that's jolly queer!" said Newcome.

"It's more than queer," said Lovell, with a sombre look. "There's something awfully fishy in it. He comes

fifteen miles to buy his boots, which he could get at Latham if he liked, and he endorses a banknote with a false name. What does he do it for?"

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows.

"Can't imagine," he said.

"It's a sort of forgery, isn't it?" said Lovell.

"Well, no. The banknote was his own, I suppose, and it's just as good with Judson on the back as with Skinforth. Perhaps he doesn't want it known that he does his shopping at Bunbury, though why, goodness knows. Let's get the bikes out."

"The bikes?" repeated Lovell.

"Yes. It will be rather a close thing for lock-up at Rookwood. We don't want to be late, as Dicky Dalton was so decent about letting us come."

"You can leave the bikes where they are," said Lovell coolly. "I can't quite understand this; but it's frightfully fishy and I'm quite sure that a policeman would know what it meant. So I'm going to ask one."

His chums blinked at him.

"You—you ass!" exclaimed Raby. "You're going to spin yarns to a policeman about a Rookwood master? Are you off your chump?"

"I can ask without mentioning names," said Lovell. "I've a right to ask a constable for advice."

"Yes, but——"

"Lovell, old chap——"

"I'm going to," said Lovell; and he



"Why should a man changing a banknote in a shop where he wasn't known, sign a false name on it?" asked Arthur Edward. "Only one reason, I suppose," said the constable. "Either he'd stolen the note or it was a counterfeit one."

settled the matter by walking across to a stout gentleman in blue who was on duty at the railway station.

"Excuse me, officer," said Lovell, while his comrades looked on in silence.

The big policeman looked down at the schoolboy good-naturedly.

"What is it, my lad?" he asked.

"Can I ask you something, as an officer of the law?" said Lovell.

The constable smiled.

"Certainly. Go ahead."

"Suppose a man changed a

banknote in a shop," said Lovell. "Suppose he was asked to endorse it with his name and address, you know, and suppose he put a false name on it?"

The constable stared.

"What's that?" he ejaculated.

And the good-natured smile on the officer's face was replaced by a very keen and alert look, as Jimmy Silver & Co. noticed at once.

"What would you think he did it for?" asked Lovell. "I can't make it out, but I thought a policeman might be able to. Of course, a man changing a banknote in a shop where he wasn't known would have to sign his name on it. Why should he sign a false name?"

"Only one reason, I suppose," said the constable, staring. "Either he'd stolen the banknote or it was a stumer."

"A—a—a what?"

"A counterfeit note," explained the constable. "If you know about anything of the kind, young man, you'd better tell me."

Lovell fairly staggered. Like a blinding flash of light the revelation came to him.

"Kik — kik — counterfeit!" he gasped.

"Counterfeit!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "False banknotes? Oh, my Aunt Matilda!"

The constable dropped his gloved hand lightly on Lovell's shoulder.

"What's happened, and what do you know about it?" he said, very quietly, but very decisively. "Come now, out with it!"

Lovell gasped.

"Can you tell a false banknote when you see one?"

"I fancy so."

"Then I'll take you to the place. But, mind, I'm not going to mention

any names till I know. But I'll tell you this, the man has got thousands of pounds in banknotes in his trunk, and I've seen them. I—I—I never dreamed they might be counterfeit."

"If you're pulling my leg, young man——"

"Come to the shop! For goodness' sake, come to the shop!" exclaimed Lovell, and he jerked at the constable's tunic in his excitement.

"Where's the shop?"

"The boot shop only a few minutes from here."

"Right."

With a heavy tread the big policeman marched beside the excited, gasping schoolboy. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome followed, quite forgetful of lock-up at Rookwood now. They were almost as breathless with excitement as Arthur Edward Lovell. Was it possible—was it—or was Lovell putting his foot in it again in the way his chums knew only too well? But this time, apparently, Arthur Edward had something to "go" upon.

The two shopmen in the Bunbury Emporium looked rather surprised when the constable entered with four schoolboys. Lovell gasped out:

"That banknote——"

"Eh?"

"That banknote with Judson on it—show it to the constable."

"What on earth——"

"The man's name wasn't Judson!" shouted Lovell. "I know him, and his name wasn't Judson! He signed a false name."

"Your uncle——"

"He's not my uncle. That was gammon!"

"Oh, was it?" said Mr. Montgomery sharply. "I think——"

"Better let me see the banknote, sir," said the constable. "There's

been a lot of stumers passed the last few weeks in these parts ; it's supposed that somebody's working the district."

That was enough for Mr. Montgomery. He looked quite alarmed as he cut across to the cash-desk. In a few moments he came back with a five-pound note in his hand.

"It looks all right," he said, "right as rain ! We sold a thirty-five-shilling pair of boots, giving three pounds five change."

The constable took the banknote and examined it with care.

"It's one of the best I've seen," he said at last. "Ninety-nine people in a hundred would be taken in by that note, I fancy. By gum, I should be taken in myself, only I've seen one like it that was passed at Rookham a week ago. It's a stumer."

"Done !" breathed Mr. Montgomery.



"That banknote with Judson on it," said Lovell as he entered the shop with the constable and his chums, "show it to the constable." "What on earth—" began the shopman. "The man's name wasn't Judson !" exclaimed Arthur Edward.

Lovell's eyes danced. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked intensely relieved. For once, at least, Arthur Edward had not put his foot in it.

"You'd better let me take this note away for the present, sir. And you young gentlemen had better come to the station with me. You'll have to tell us what you know about the man ; he's the man that's been wanted for weeks."

"He went to two other shops," said Lovell. "I know them both."

"Come on, then."

The constable and the excited juniors visited the bookshop and the clothier's shop in turn. In each was found a banknote, one endorsed in the name of J. A. Smith, the other in the name of William Brown. Evidently Mr. Skinforth used a different name every time.

Lovell seemed to be walking on air as he accompanied the constable to



*A Small Selection of Rookwood
Fellows*

LEADER of the Classics,
Smiling through whate'er befalls,
Sunny-tempered, good at games—
JIMMY SILVER—"Uncle James!"

Leader of the Modern House,
Never feels disposed to grouse,
Sturdy, with a heart of gold—
TOMMY DODD, a warrior bold!

Always in a famished state,
Weighs about six hundredweight,
Lives and moves and schemes for grub—
TUBBY MUFFIN, Rookwood's Tub!

With his cool, keen-witted brain,
He has been the masters' bane,
Bold, defiant, reckless, shrewd—
MORNINGTON, we must include!

He's a dandy and a knut,
With his clothes of matchless cut,
Shirts and socks and ties of silk—
SMYTHE, **ADOLPHUS** of that ilk!

He's a prefect and a cad,
He is everything that's bad,
Bully, waster, gambler, sweep—
CARTHEW of the Sixth—black sheep!

Headstrong, often obstinate,
Full of pluck, at any rate;
And he always plays the game—
ARTHUR LOVELL is his name!

He is full of tricks and japes,
Constantly in fearful scrapes,
Though he has a "cherub's" face—
TEDDY (alias **PUTTY**) **GRACE**!

Bunbury Police Station. He gave his comrades triumphant looks. Undoubtedly there was a hint—more than a hint, in fact—of swank in the manner of Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward was immensely pleased with himself, and for once his comrades were pleased with him. Lovell was often a great man in his own eyes, and now he was a great man in the eyes of his comrades.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER
EXIT SKINFORTH!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. were late for lock-up that evening at Rookwood. But that did not matter very much, in the circumstances.

They arrived at the school in company. Four bikes were stacked on top of a big car, and in the car were packed the Fistical Four and an inspector and two constables from Bunbury. And in the inspector's pocket was a warrant entitling him to search the belongings of Mr. Skinforth at Rookwood.

The sight of the official uniforms caused a sensation in the school. Crowds of Rookwood fellows stared at the two constables, while the inspector was admitted to the Head's study to explain the purport of his visit to Dr. Chisholm.

In Mr. Dalton's study, the Fistical Four explained the matter to their Form-master. They had the privilege of seeing Mr. Dalton's face when he heard, and it was, as Lovell said afterwards, a sight to behold!

Mr. Skinforth had been in more than an hour when the official visit took place. He was in his room when the Bunbury inspector arrived there, with the startled Head and the two constables bringing up the rear—behind them a buzzing mob of excited Rookwooders.

The door of Mr. Skinforth's room opened and the new master, his face chalky white, walked out between two constables—with handcuffs on his wrists!



Mr. Skinforth opened his door to a knock, and his face changed colour at the sight of the police.

The Bunbury inspector, the Head and the two constables entered the room. The door closed, much to the disappointment of the Rookwood crowd. A quarter of an hour later it opened.

Mr. Skinforth came out walking between the two policemen, with handcuffs on his wrists!

He was hurried down to the car and whirled away, and Rookwood was left to thrill with excitement.

Many particulars became known later with regard to Mr. Skinforth. He was not the counterfeiter himself; he was the distributing agency for a gang of counterfeiters in London. He was a good man at mathematics, with good testimonials to show, and sometimes he had a post in a school, sometimes he set up to take private pupils; but, wherever he was, his

dwelling-place was the centre of his operations as a distributor of counterfeit notes. Never more than for a few weeks in one place, he had hitherto followed his peculiar profession with impunity. And he might have been following it with impunity still but for one person of the name of Arthur Edward Lovell!

But he had been brought up with a round turn now, so to speak. His activities were at an end, and he was booked for a long, long rest; and Rookwood had lost its unpopular "mathy" master, which was still better news to the juniors. Altogether, it was admitted in the Classical Fourth that Lovell was entitled to swank a little.

And there was no doubt that Lovell did!

THE END

CLASS-ROOM COUPLETS

A Double Alphabet

By **FRANK NUGENT**

A is for ALPHABET. This we learn first,
Then comes the ASHPANT to give us the
worst.

B is the BLACKBOARD which sometimes
we smash,
Then comes the BIRCH (a worse plant
than the ash!).

C is for CLASSES which very soon fall,
Then comes the CANE ; it's the worst of
them all !

D is DIVISION, a sum we all hate,
Then comes DETENTION, a miserable
fate !

E is EXAMS which we all have to suffer,
And EUCLID at which I'm a dunce and a
duffer !

F is for FRENCH, which I try hard to
speak,
And make the whole FORM (and the Form-
master) shriek !

G is for GREEK, which I study in vain,
The GRAMMAR alone makes me frantic
with pain !

H is for HORACE. My head fairly aches !
And also for HISTORY. Who burnt the
cakes ?

I is for IDIOT talking in class,
An IMPOT will very soon punish the ass !

J is for JUNIORS, masters don't love us !
Also for JUVENAL, work far above us !

K is the KALENDS of Classical Greece,
Also our KNOWLEDGE, which doesn't
increase !

L is for LATIN, a subject we spurn,
Because it's a LESSON we all have to
LEARN.

M is MATHEMATICS, no subject's as bad !
We MEASURE and MULTIPLY till we
go mad !

N is for NEUTER, a gender unkind,
And when it's a NOUN it is always
"declined."

O is ORTHOGRAPHY—learn how to
spell !
Our ORAL dictashun is spellt verry well !

P is for PENCIL and PAPER and PEN,
We need 'em for PREP, so get busy, you
men !

Q is for QUELCHY, our awe he has won !
And Q.E.D.—which is, Quite Easily Done !

R is the ROW which is bound to begin
When any REMOVE fellow sits on a pin !

S is for SUBJECTS as deep as the
SPHINX,
Like SCIENCE, for instance, or otherwise
—STINKS !

T is the TIME which we have to endure
Old Quelch's TUITION so steady and
sure.

U is for our UNDERSTANDING of all
The things in the UNIVERSE, mighty or
small !

V is for VIRGIL. The rotter ! The worm !
His VERSE and his VERBS make me
wriggle and squirm !

W's for WRITING. My fingers are sore !
I WORK till I feel I can't do any more.

X is for XENOPHON—works so immense
That even X-RAYS can't discover their
sense !

Y is the YEARNING we have for our
class,
It's shown in our YAWNS as the hours
slowly pass.

Z is for ZOOLOGY—not a bad stunt !
It tells us the ZEBRA is striped back and
front !