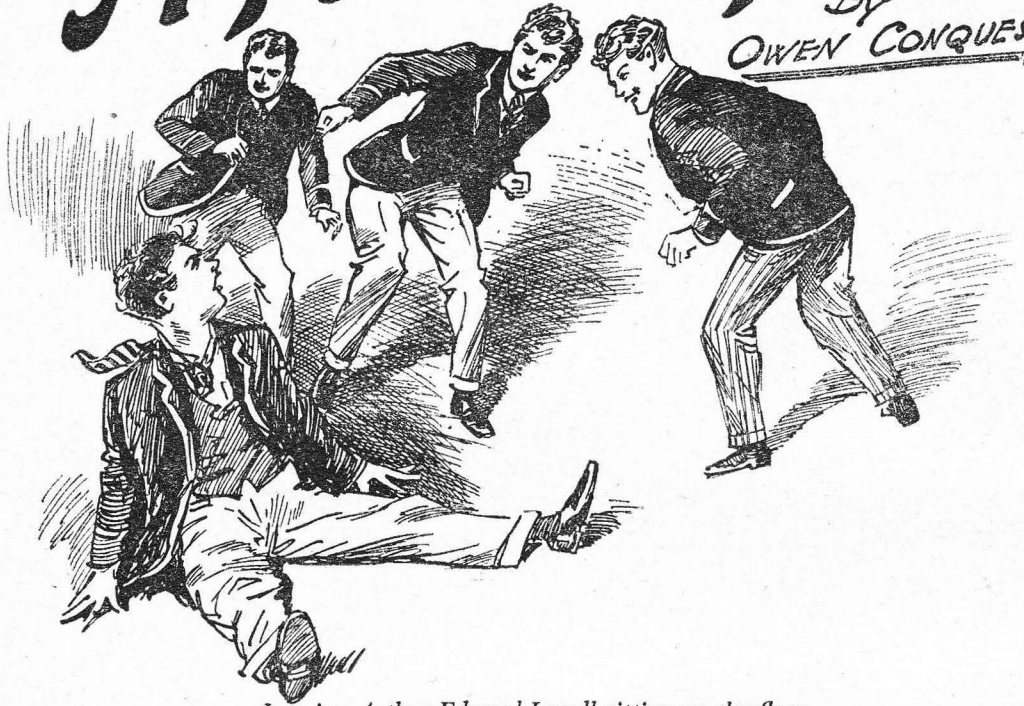


A ROOKWOOD PRAG!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



Leaving Arthur Edward Lovell sitting on the floor

CHAPTER I

“SOCCER!” said Jimmy Silver.

“Never mind soccer now,” said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver looked at him.

“Uncle James” of Rookwood was generally, very patient with Arthur Edward Lovell. Arthur Edward was a fellow who required quite a lot of patience from his friends. And quite a lot of patience was exercised in the end study in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Jimmy Silver was very patient: Raby a little less so: Newcome least of the three. But they were all more or less patient with Lovell.

But there was a limit.

And when, on the day of a soccer match with Manders’ House, Lovell said, “Never mind soccer”, that limit had been reached.

"Did you say never mind soccer?" inquired Jimmy Silver, in measured tones.

"Yes, I did."

"We're playing the Moderns this afternoon! Manders House beat us last time. And you say never mind soccer."

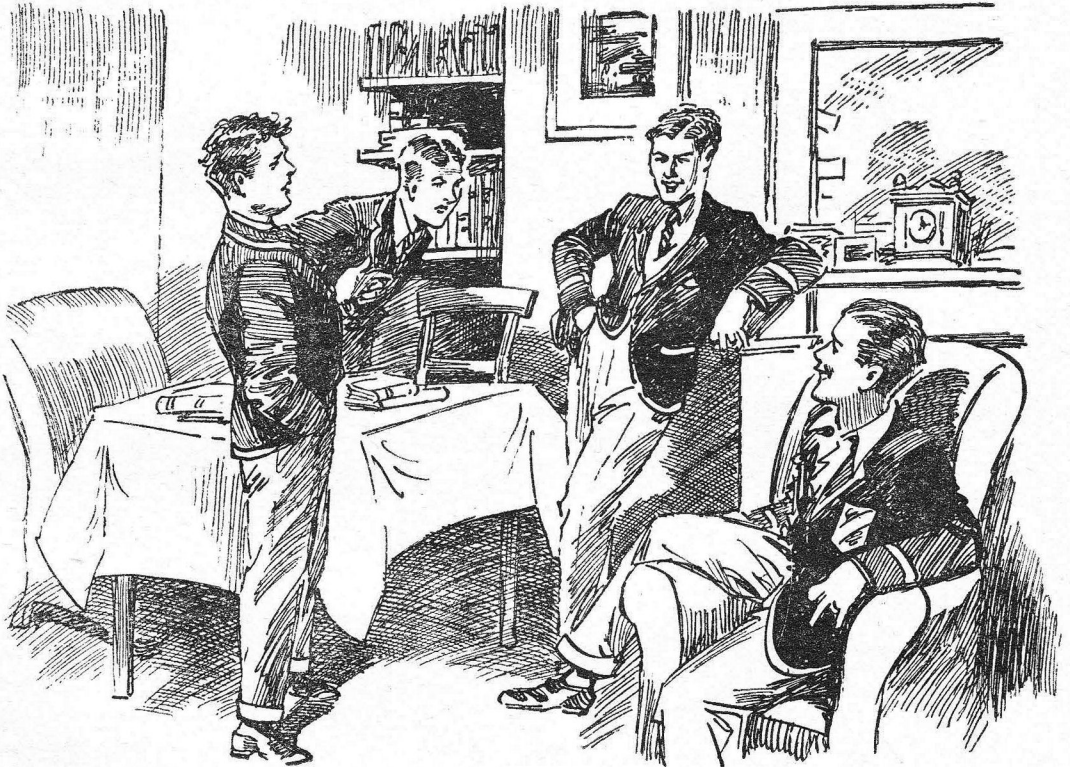
"We shall beat the Modern ticks all right," answered Lovell. "But never mind that now—."

"Ass!" said Jimmy.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Goat!" said Newcome.

Three members of the end study were quite concentrated on football. Other matters were dismissed from mind. In the last soccer game before the school broke up for Christmas, obviously the Classics had to beat the Moderns—especially as they had failed to beat them last time. Lovell, no doubt, was as keen as his friends on beating the Modern ticks of Manders' House, but in his mind other matters, for the moment, predominated.



"If you'd let a chap speak, without interrupting him"

"If you'd let a chap speak, without keeping on interrupting him—" went on Lovell.

"Would you ever stop, if you weren't interrupted?" inquired Newcome.

"Not likely," said Raby, shaking his head.

"Look here—!" hooted Lovell.

"Cut it out!" said Jimmy Silver. "Try not to be such a silly ass, Lovell. I know you can't help it. But do your best."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard.

"I've told you," he said, "that I've got Extra School on Saturday, because Manders complained about me to our beak. He made a fuss because he saw me dipping a Modern man's head in the fountain. Next Saturday I've got to stick in Extra, because old Manders couldn't mind his own business."

"Never mind next Saturday—"

"I do mind! If Manders rags me, I'm going to rag him back. Think I'm going to take it lying down?" demanded Lovell.

"You'll take it bending over, if you start ragging Manders," said Newcome.

"Forget all about it!" suggested Raby.

"I'll forget all about it when I've made old Manders sit up!" said Lovell.

"And I know just how, as I've told you. Manders went out after dinner. He left his study window wide open. All I want is a bunk up to that window. If it was on the ground floor I shouldn't need you fellows to help. But it's too high up without a bunk. You needn't all come. One of you can give me a bunk up to that window, and I can get into Manders' study."

"And what are you going to do, when you get in?"

Lovell laughed—one of those sardonic laughs!

"Leave that to me," he said. "But I can tell you that when Manders comes in, he may think that a wild bull has been loose in his study. It will be a lesson to him to leave Classical men alone."

"And suppose you're copped there?"

"I shan't be copped! I know my way about," said Lovell. "I can drop from the window when I'm through."

"That window's too high to drop from," said Raby.

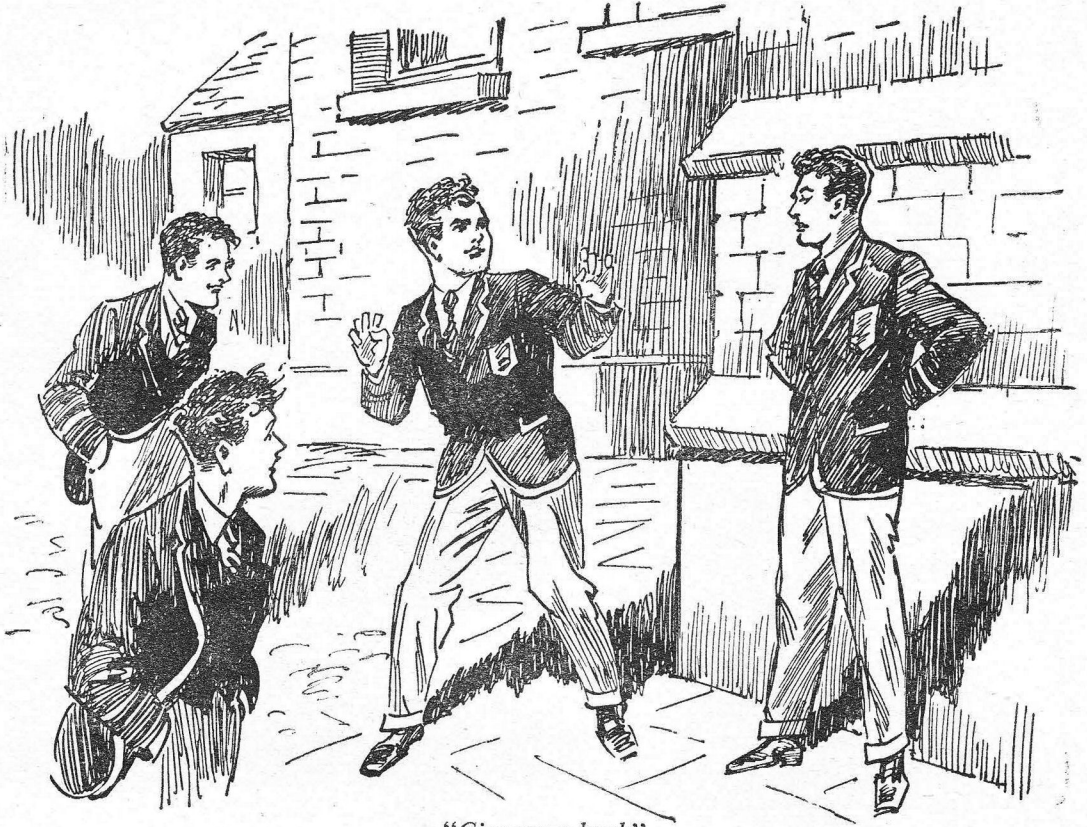
Sniff, from Lovell.

"Might be for you," he said. "But I've got some nerve."

"You cheeky ass—!"

"Look here, we've had enough palaver," said Lovell. "Which of you fellows is coming to give me a bunk at Manders' window?"

"And you look here," said Jimmy Silver. "We're playing soccer this afternoon, and we kick off in an hour's time. You're wanted in the team, and you're not going to land yourself in a row just before the match. Ten to one



"Give me a bunk"

you'd be seen clambering up to Manders' window, and if not, you'd be copped in his study; and if you weren't copped, they'd spot you getting away—and if you got a detention, you'd be out of the soccer. You're wanted to play."

"I know that!" agreed Lovell. "Lots of time to rag Manders before the kick-off. You coming, Jimmy?"

"No, you ass! No, you goat! No, you fathead! Nobody's going to help you play the giddy ox. You're going to steer clear of Manders House."

"You coming, Raby?"

"Not in these trousers."

"You coming, Newcome?"

"Fathead!"

Evidently, nobody was coming. If Lovell's rag on Mr. Manders depended on aid from the end study, that rag did not seem likely to materialize.

"Now stop talking rot," said Jimmy Silver. "Never mind old Manders, and never mind ragging. Soccer—."

"Please yourselves!" snapped Lovell. "I can't get up to that window without a bunk, but I daresay I can dodge into the House, and get away by the window afterwards—I can drop it—."

"You can't!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!" retorted Lovell.

He turned to the door. His three chums gazed at him, exasperated. Patience was at a very low ebb now. Lovell, headstrong fathead as he might be, was a tower of strength in the junior Classical football team: he simply could not be spared from the game. Often it seemed that Arthur Edward Lovell was one of those fellows who are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward: but really, it seemed to his friends, even Lovell might have been expected to dodge trouble with beaks just before the last match of the term, within an hour of kick-off. It was true that Lovell had unbounded confidence in himself, and in his ability to carry out his plans without mishap. But that confidence was very far from being shared by his comrades.

"Where are you going?" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"I'm going to Manders House."

"You're not."

"I jolly well am."

At that point, "Uncle James's" patience finally gave out.

"Bump him!" he said.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Raby and Newcome together.

"Here, look, here—!" roared Lovell, as his three friends jumped at him and collared him. "Stoppit—chuck it—leggo—oh, my hat! Whooooooop!"

Bump!

"Coooooooooooooh!" gasped Lovell, as he landed.

Bump!

"Woooooooooooooh!"

Bump!

"Goooooooooooooh!"

"There!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Now forget all about it. You go near Manders House before the game, and we'll give you some more—lots more! If you haven't as much sense as a bunny rabbit, try to act as if you had!"

"Wuuuuurrrggh!" gurgled Lovell, breathlessly.

And his three friends departed, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell sitting on the floor of the end study, gasping and spluttering, and spluttering and gasping, as if gasps and splutters were going to keep him busy for quite a long time to come.

CHAPTER II

"I'll show 'em!"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed those words to himself, as he stood in Mr. Manders' study, in Manders House. He was going to show Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome. They fancied that they could stop him, did they? They had had the cheek to bump him, as a warning, had they? Well, Lovell was going to show them!

Manders had landed him in Extra. That, to Arthur Edward, was ample reason why Manders should get something back. Opposition never had any effect on Arthur Edward, except to make him more determined. He was going to rag Manders; that was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. And if Uncle James fancied he could stop him, he was going to show him!

He had been lucky in getting to Manders' study on the Modern Side of Rookwood. Mr. Manders was out, and on that fine, clear winter's afternoon, almost everyone else seemed to be out also. Anyway the coast was clear—Lovell entered Manders House cautiously, but his caution was not needed; he did not pass a single soul on his way to the house-master's study. He slipped into that study, and shut the door, and then all was serene. Nobody—at least nobody but Lovell—was likely to come to that study during Manders' absence: it was at his mercy. And he was not going to be merciful. He was going to make the Modern master sorry that he had landed a Classical man in Extra. He was going to shy books and papers all over the room: he was going to scatter ink right and left: he was going to leave that study in a state that would make Manders' eyes pop when he came in and beheld it. And he was going to be safe off the scene, leaving Manders to guess, and keep on guessing, who had called while he was out.

"I'll show 'em!" breathed Lovell, "I'll show 'em, and I'll show old Manders. I'll jolly well show 'em!"

He stepped to the big open window and looked into the quadrangle. Manders was out, but he might, of course, come in. From the high window, Lovell took a survey of the quad. Mr. Dalton, his own form-master, passed at a little distance, and he drew back till Dalton had disappeared. Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, came along, but he too disappeared. Others were to be seen, but quite a long way off. It would be all right if he had to drop from the window. All he had to do was to slip out, hang on the sill with his hands, and drop—a matter of seconds. That was all right.

But was it?

Now that he was actually in the study, looking down from the window, Lovell realized that it was a rather long drop. His friends had told him that he couldn't do that drop, and knowing better, he had laughed that suggestion to scorn. Now, looking down, he was not quite sure that he had known better. It was undoubtedly a long drop, and it was uncomfortable to think of a sprained ankle, or something of that kind, as a result. He did not want to crock himself for the soccer. His face grew very thoughtful, as he looked down at that drop, and calculated the distance. He decided that he would not, if he could help it, drop from that window after all. Better to leave as he had come; if the coast was still clear at any rate.

He realized that the sooner he was through, and gone, the better. And he was turning from the window, when three Classical juniors came in sight—Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome. All of them stopped and looked up at that window.

Lovell grinned.

No doubt they had missed him, and guessed where he was. Well, they couldn't even try to stop him now! Grinning, he waved a hand to the three. Jimmy Silver made him an almost frantic sign. Lovell wondered why—till, looking past the three, he discerned a tall, lean figure coming along from the direction of the school gates.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

He stared down at Mr. Manders.

Manders had come in! There he was—walking towards his House. That was why Jimmy was making signs!

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Lovell.

He backed from the window, hastily, lest Manders should glance up. He stood for some moments nonplussed. So far, he had not started to rag the study. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—he decided that he wouldn't begin. If he was caught there, with the room in disorder, ten to one Manders would march him off to the Head. Lovell did not want to call on Dr. Chisholm that afternoon—very much indeed he didn't! Indeed, at that exciting moment, he rather wished that he had listened to his friends, and steered clear of Manders House. There was no escape now but by the window—and he couldn't drop from that window with Manders walking towards the House, he had to wait till Manders was inside the building. After which, there would not be much time; and if Manders caught him there, even without a "rag" having taken place, it meant trouble.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Lovell.

He peered cautiously from the window again. The lean figure of the



He backed from the window, hastily

Modern master disappeared into the porch. If he came direct to his study, it was only a matter of moments now. Lovell swung himself from the open window and, holding on to the sill, hung there, ready to drop. Below, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared up at him.

And then—!

Thinking was not much in Arthur Edward Lovell's line. If he ever thought at all—which his friends doubted—it came too late to be of much use. Now—too late as usual—he couldn't help doing some thinking! It was borne in upon his mind that it was too long a drop, after all: that if he let go that window-sill and dropped, and hit a concrete path ten or twelve feet below, the result would be serious—probably awfully serious. Only at the very last moment did it dawn on Arthur Edward that he had bitten off more than he could chew. But it did dawn—in time to stop him. He hung on the window-sill, and did not drop.

“Oh, crikey!” breathed Lovell.

He heard, from within, the sound of a door opening. Mr. Manders had come into his study. Lovell heard the creak of an armchair as the Modern master sat down, no doubt to rest after his walk. Manders, evidently, had not the remotest idea that a Classical junior was hanging outside his window. That was a respite, at least. Lovell hung on undetected, his chums gazing up at him from below.

"That ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"That goat!" murmured Raby.

"That dithering dunderhead!" sighed Newcome.

They could only gaze up at him. They could not help him. They realized that, at the last moment, Lovell had got it into his somewhat solid head that he couldn't do that drop. They also realized that he could not hang on to Mr. Manders' window-sill for ever!

Neither could he hang on it very long unobserved. The coast, at the moment, was clear: but anybody might come along at any moment and behold him dangling there. In fact, in a couple of minutes Tubby Muffin, came rolling along, and he stopped to blink at Jimmy Silver and Co.

"What are you staring at?" asked Tubby. Then he stared up too. "Oh, gum. Is that Lovell? What's he doing up there? He, he, he."

Other fellows came along: Mornington and Rawson of the Classical Fourth; Hansom of the Fifth; Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. They all stopped to stare at the junior dangling from Manders' window-sill. Obviously it would not be long before a beak or a prefect came on the scene.

But there was nothing to be done. Fellows below could only stare up—and the fellow hanging on the window-sill could only hang on. The crowd thickened—innumerable eyes stared up at Lovell. He was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes. Arthur Edward Lovell rather liked the limelight, but he did not enjoy it now. He was getting much more publicity than he wanted. It was really awful for Lovell. He could have climbed in at the window again—to face Mr. Manders. He did not want to face Mr. Manders! Neither did he want to hang there with dangling legs till all Rookwood gathered to gaze up at him. He almost made up his mind to drop and chance it. But just a glimmer of common-sense checked him. He hung on. Voices reached him from below.

"That ass Lovell—!"

"What's he doing up there?"

"That goat, Lovell—."

"Daylight burglar, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell hung on.

CHAPTER III

MR. MANDERS rose from his armchair. He was conscious of a crowd gathering under his window, at last. He wondered, irritably, why. He stepped to the window and looked out.

Then he almost fell down, in his astonishment. He stared at Arthur Edward Lovell's crimson face over the window-sill. Lovell stared up at him.

"What—what—what!" stuttered Mr. Manders.

Lovell did not speak. There was nothing for him to say. Also, he was feeling the strain by this time. His arms were strong, but they were aching now. He was feeling all hot and bothered and breathless. He could only gaze up at Mr. Manders' astonished face.



A bony hand fastened on to his collar and dragged him in

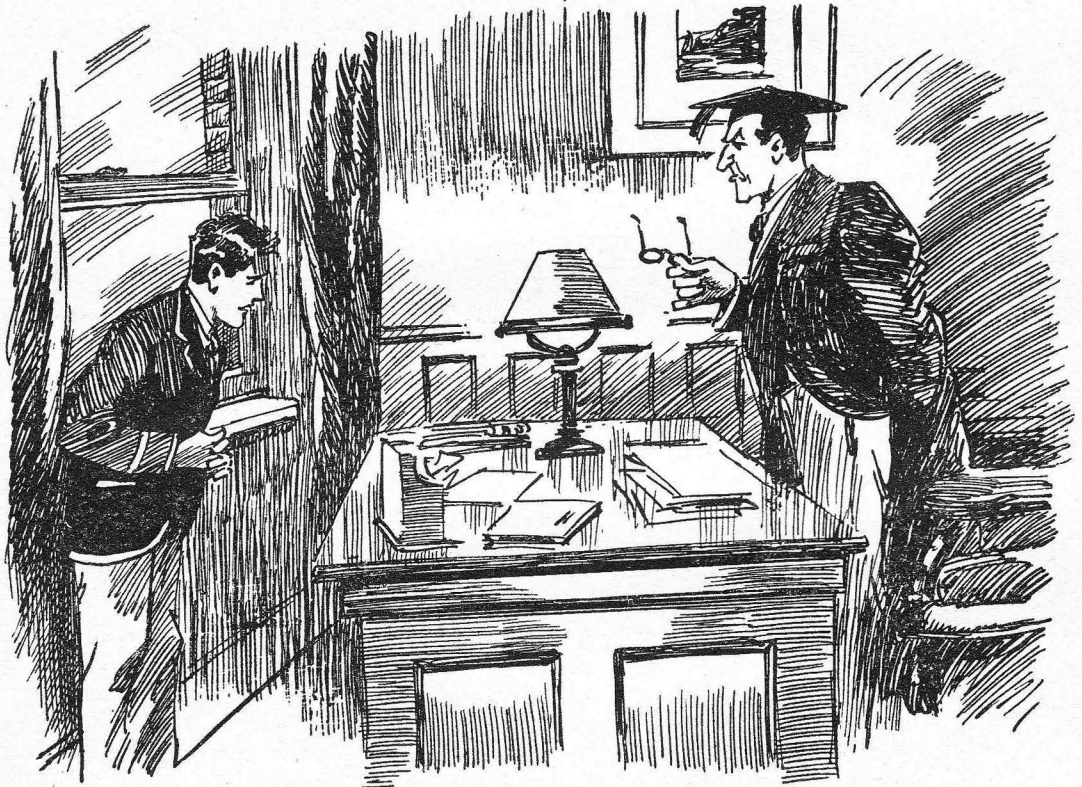
"Lovell! Is that Lovell? What are you doing there?" gasped Mr. Manders. "You utterly foolish and reckless boy, how dare you climb up to a high window—at the risk of limb and life? You incredibly stupid and reckless boy."

Apparently Mr. Manders concluded that Lovell had climbed up to that window! Perhaps Lovell was content to leave it at that. Anyhow, he had no breath for conversation. He just gazed speechlessly at Manders.

"Such stupidity—such reckless foolishness!" ejaculated the Modern master. "But—but hold on, Lovell—take care that you do not fall! I will help you in at the window! Take care!"

Manders was angry. But he was more concerned than angry. He stretched out a bony hand to help. Lovell could have climbed in without that: but the bony hand fastened on his collar, almost throttling him, and dragged him in. He slithered in at the window, and disappeared from the gaze of his numerous audience below.

He stood once more in Mr. Manders' study, red, panting, breathless. He



"I shall take you at once to your form-master"

listened, without the least pleasure, to what Mr. Manders had to say to him, which lasted several minutes. Fortunately, Mr. Manders remained under his impression that the Classical junior had only been performing a reckless exploit by climbing up to that window, and had no idea how narrowly his study had escaped a "rag". But so reckless an exploit could not pass without results.

"I shall take you at once to your form-master, Lovell!" Mr. Manders wound up. Which he did, forthwith.

LOVELL, already booked for Extra on Saturday, sat in Extra that afternoon, while the last soccer match of the term was played without him. He had the pleasure, or otherwise, of reflecting, while he sat in Extra, on the doubtful result of that football match, and on the absurd figure he had cut dangling from Manders' window-sill. Jimmy Silver and Co. agreed that if the Moderns beat them, the scragging of Arthur Edward Lovell should be a record in the annals of Rookwood. Luckily for Lovell, they beat the Moderns after all.

THE END