

THE CHEAT!



By OWEN CONQUEST

It is all UP with Lovell at Rookwood unless he passes the English history exam.—and it's his weakest subject! But on the eve of the exam, the questions fall into his hands

THE FIRST CHAPTER

HISTORY UNDER DIFFICULTIES!

"THOMAS À BECKET—born in eleven-eighteen—"

"One pair of tennis shoes!"

"Made Archbishop of Canterbury, eleven-sixty-two—"

"One pullover!"

"Assassinated in eleven-seventy—"

"One swimming costume. Two sports shirts. Now lemme see—"

"Fathead!"

"Eh?"

"Fathead!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, glaring across the table in the end study at Rookwood. "Idiot! Chump! Shut up about your silly holiday kit, can't you?"

"Shut up about your silly English history, if it comes to that!" retorted Jimmy Silver warmly. "I've got a

jolly important problem to consider—holiday kit!"

"Same here!" chimed in Newcome.

"You're interrupting, Lovell!"

"Hear, hear! Who wants to hear a lot of potty dates when there's an important thing like holiday kit to settle?" asked Raby argumentatively.

"Give it a rest, old bean!"

Lovell eyed the three other members of the Fistical Four with a wrathful eye.

"Think I'm doing it for pleasure?" he hooted. "If you do, you're wrong. It's English history exam, to-morrow."

"Same goes for the rest of us," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Why worry?"

"For a jolly good reason!" snorted Lovell. "I haven't said anything about this before, but the fact is, I've simply got to pass in history to-morrow. If I don't—then I'm afraid it's all UP with me at Rookwood!"

Lovell's studymates jumped.

"All UP? What's the idea?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Are you trying to tell us that if you don't get a pass in English history you're going to be taken away from the school?"

"Just that!"

There was a roar from Newcome and Raby.

"Don't be an ass, Lovell!"

"Draw it mild, old sport!" protested Newcome. "Your pater's not such a fathead as to yank you away from Rookwood on account of one measly history paper?"

"Well, no—not in a way," said Lovell cautiously. "Pater's not so potty as that. And yet that's what it really boils down to to-night. What he said was that he'd shift me to another school if I didn't get two passes out of the six subjects in the annual exams."

"Oh!"

"That's different!"

"The worst of it is that it's not so different now—in fact, it's just the same thing!" said Lovell ruefully. "We've taken five out of the six subjects now, as you know. And I'm practically certain that the only one I've passed in is maths."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"So what it amounts to is that if I fail in that history paper to-morrow, I leave Rookwood!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Lovell's three studymates regarded him in dismay.

"Well, of all the asses!" said Jimmy Silver in measured tones. "The first we've heard of it, too! Why didn't you tell us when you first heard about it?"

Lovell shrugged.

"I didn't think there was any danger of my not passing in two subjects out of six—and I didn't want to worry you fellows without reason."

"You're an ass!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Now if you'd come to your Uncle James right away——"

"You'd have given me extra toot, I suppose, and kept me grinding away at Latin prose and French irregular verbs?" remarked Lovell, with a somewhat sarcastic grin. "Don't be funny, James! The fact is, my idea was best—to keep it quiet and mug up the exam. subjects on my own."

"All right if you'd carried it out; but you haven't!" grunted the leader of the Fistical Four. "Now you're up against it—and it's all your own silly fault! English history is your weakest subject, you prize idiot!"

Arthur Edward nodded gloomily.

"Exactly. That's just why I'm worried."

"Still, never say 'die'!" said Jimmy Silver briskly. "It's late to start swotting now——"

"My hat! Just a little!" grinned Raby.

"But you've got from now till bedtime—about an hour. I tell you what, Lovell. We'll get out our text-books and fire questions at you, and—ow!"

The leader of the Fistical Four broke off, his hand clapped to his face. A small object that had just flown through the window dropped from Jimmy Silver's face to the floor of the study.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby looked at that small object and then looked at their leader. And there was a murmur of wrath from them as they saw that it had left an inky smudge behind it on his cheek.

"Ink-pellet!" said Newcome.

"Somebody getting fresh with a catapult!" said Raby.

"Modern cads!" said Jimmy Silver.

There was a rush to the window. The Fistical Four saw at once that

Jimmy Silver was correct. In the quadrangle below, red in the light of the setting sun, stood Tommy Cook, Tommy Dodd, and Tommy Doyle—the three Tommies of the Modern House. They were armed with catapults, and they waved cheerily to the Classics.

"Thought we'd have a little target-practice before term ends," explained Tommy Dodd. "I was aiming at your nose, Silver, but I see I've hit your face instead. Mind if the others have a go? Your turn, Cooky!"

Four heads bobbed down suddenly as Tommy Cook took aim with his catapult.

Inside the end study the Fistical Four crouched down below the level of the window in a state of seething indignation.

"Of all the nerve!" said Jimmy Silver. "Not safe in our own blessed study now. What next?"

"Are we going to stand for this?" asked Newcome.

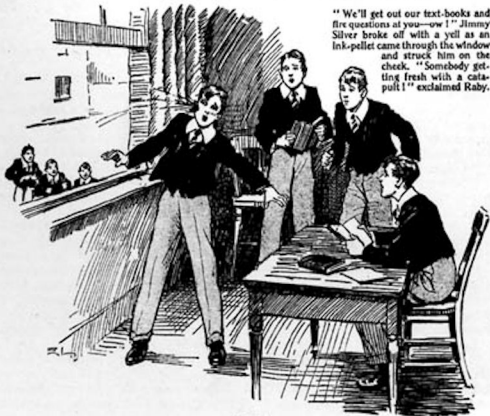
"What silly ass said an Englishman's home was his castle?" demanded Raby. "It's coming to something when we have to kneel down in our own room because three cheeky Modern cads feel like using us as targets for their catapults!"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard.

"They're going a bit too far—no mistake about that!" he said. "What we ought to do is to go down and mop up the quadrangle with them. But there's Lovell."

"H'm! Exactly!"

Arthur Edward frowned.



"We'll get out our text-books and fire questions at you—ow!" Jimmy Silver broke off with a yell as an ink-pellet came through the window and struck him on the cheek. "Somebody getting fresh with a catapult!" exclaimed Raby.

"Don't mind me. Leave the history bizney till afterwards. You go down and pitch into them. I'll stay here and get on with my swotting—that is, if you don't mind?"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"But your history, old bean! We said we'd give you a hand——"

"Blow the history!" said Lovell.

"I'll get on with it on my own. You chaps buzz!"

"Well, if you really don't mind——"

"Buzz!" roared Lovell.

He grabbed his text-book and dived into the study armchair, which was in the corner out of range of the Modern sharpshooters.

Jimmy Silver, Newcome and Raby looked at each other. Then, with one accord, they crawled to the door. Lovell evidently meant what he said, and, in spite of their anxiety to help him in the exam., they were prepared, in the circumstances, to take him at his word.

The trio from the end study buzzed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

LOVELL'S FIND

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL should have found it easier to concentrate on English history now that his noisy colleagues were out of the way.

But, in spite of the quietude that descended on the end study after the departure of the others, Lovell found that he could not get down to it. It seemed even more difficult than before to keep his attention on the England of olden times. His thoughts were far more concerned with the England of modern times and, in particular, that very small portion of England known as the quadrangle at Rookwood, into which Lovell's chums were now descending, bent on teaching the three Tommies what was what and who was who.

Lovell put down his text-book and listened.

He heard sounds of wordy warfare from below the end study, followed by the din of a regular battle.

Lovell went to the window and looked out. His chums were driving back the Modern raiders into their own territory.

And then, as he leaned out of the window, he saw that reinforcements were arriving for the three Tommies. Towle, Lacy and Wadsley happened to be taking a constitutional before bed-time; and, judging by the way they were hurrying towards the scene of battle, they had every intention of chipping in and turning the tables on the Classics.

"Oh, scissors!" murmured Arthur Edward.

His text-book on English history dropped to the floor. Exam. or no exam., Arthur Edward Lovell could not stand there and watch his pals vanquished by the Modern crowd.

Lovell fairly bounded out of the end study. He went down the stairs at quite a hair-raising speed and rushed out into the quad. The battle had moved away almost to the school wall by this time. Lovell made for the school wall at top speed.

"Up, the Classics!"

His war-cry rang out lustily. English history quite forgotten, he plunged into the fray.

But his part in the encounter lasted only a matter of seconds. Unnoticed by the combatants and Lovell, a grey-haired figure had been approaching from the gates. It was that of Dr. Chisholm, headmaster of Rookwood.

Before Lovell had had time to do more than give Wadsley a biff on the nose, Dr. Chisholm had intervened.

"Boys!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"The Head!"

Fighting ceased as if by magic. The dishevelled juniors gazed at the Head ruefully, while Dr. Chisholm seemed to be gazing at the juniors more in sorrow than in anger.

"Really, boys, this is inexcusable!" he exclaimed. "I can forgive a little horseplay at the end of the term—but I do seriously think you might be more profitably occupied on the evening before the last day of the examinations."

"Oh, sir!"

"Go back to your Houses at once and employ the time that remains before bed-time in preparing for to-morrow's test," added the Head. "Not you, Lovell. I want a word with you separately."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

The rest scattered. Lovell uncomfortably remained. The Head eyed him with a frown.

"I am particularly surprised by your being here, Lovell, having regard to the importance which your father has chosen to place on these examinations. You are aware of what will happen in the event of your failing to obtain two passes out of six?"

"Ye-es, sir."

The Head pursed his lips.

"Well, no useful purpose would be served by my lecturing you on the subject now. We will see what happens when your papers are checked. Return to your House, Lovell."

And the Head, with a nod, went his way.

Lovell turned to follow his chums. But before he rejoined them a white object on the ground attracted his eye and brought him to a stop. It was a typewritten sheet and had evidently been dropped by one of the juniors or by the Head.

Lovell picked it up and glanced at it.

A moment later he jumped. One glance was sufficient to tell him that it had fallen from the Head's pocket.

Lovell looked at it, and, as he looked, he gave a long, low whistle.

The paper was headed:

"ENGLISH HISTORY. Fourth Form. Time allowed: 2 Hours."

It was a copy of the examination questions which Lovell had to answer in the morning!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

HONOURS FOR LOVELL!

"Oh, my hat!"

Lovell blinked at the test paper.

That was all he seemed able to do for a few seconds. The unexpected sight of that paper temporarily deprived him of all power of movement.

Lovell had a sense of honour as strongly developed as that of any fellow at Rookwood. In the ordinary way, finding such a document in such circumstances, he would have run after the Head and handed it straight over to him.

Instinctively, Lovell felt like doing that now. But something held him back.

The English history exam. on the following day had a fateful significance for Arthur Edward Lovell of the Fourth. He felt practically certain that on the number of marks he obtained in that paper depended his father's decision as to keeping him on at Rookwood or sending him elsewhere.

Lovell very decidedly wanted to stay on at Rookwood.

And now, the means of ensuring that he would certainly stay on had fallen into his hands like manna from Heaven!

Lovell glanced at the test paper, his heart beating fast. It was just a matter of reading through the questions and memorising them roughly, then going back to the end study and preparing his answers with the aid of the text-book. Nothing could have been easier.

There was only one drawback about it.

It was dishonest!

Lovell's face turned crimson at that thought. And yet he did not run after Dr. Chisholm.

Slowly and deliberately he folded up the paper. He had no doubt whatever what was the right thing to do—to avoid looking at it, anyway, even if he did not invite inquiry by returning it to the Head.

But the temptation to take advantage of his find was a severe one, which was going to be very difficult to resist.

It was most unlikely that the Head would ever notice his loss. He would not be concerned directly with the Fourth Form examination, and would have no reason for referring again to a paper which had undoubtedly been one of a complete set of test papers which he carried about with him during examination time. He would probably consign the lot to a waste-paper basket after the examinations in the morning, without bothering to check them.

"Easy!" murmured Lovell, involuntarily uttering his thoughts aloud.

He crimsoned again at the unexpected sound of his own voice.

Jimmy Silver and the others were looking back for him now. Lovell stuffed the folded paper into his jacket pocket and hurried after them.

"Ticking off from the Beak?" asked Jimmy Silver, as he joined them.

"Eh? Oh—er—yes!"

"All serene. No need to jump out of your skin!" grinned the leader of the Fistical Four. "Must have been a pretty fierce one, if your face is anything to go on!"

Lovell was as red as a turkey-cock.

"Something wrong with my face, then?"

"Only the colour of it—apart from its usual faults, of course!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell. And he tramped back to the House without another word—and with his thoughts centred on that all-important sheet of paper in his jacket pocket.

There was little time left for swotting now, and although Lovell's chums were eager enough to help now that they were back in the House, they realised that such help as they could give Lovell at this late hour was not likely to influence the result of the exam. one way or the other.

On hearing from Lovell that swotting was "off" for the night, they adjourned to the junior Common-room for a talk with the crowd before bed.

But Lovell went back to the end study.

In the privacy of the Fistical Four's room, he paced the floor for some minutes, turning the thing over in his mind.

If only the proposition his father had confronted him with had not been so unfair, there would have been no excuse for hesitation. But Lovell felt that he was not receiving a square deal over it. Many fellows at times had to pull their socks up so far as classwork was concerned. But for his pater to threaten to take him away from Rookwood altogether merely on the result of a school examination



"Up, the Classics!" roared Lovell, plunging into the free fight between the Classics and the Moderns. And he landed out with his fist, giving Wadsley a biff on the nose. But at this point Dr. Chisholm came hurrying on the scene. "Boys!" he exclaimed. "This is inexcusable!"

seemed to Lovell to be hardly playing the game.

If ever there was an occasion when a lapse from usual standards would be justified, surely this was it!

With sudden resolution, Lovell dived into his pocket and drew out the test paper.

He sat on the edge of the table and deliberately read it. Now that he had made his decision, he found it quite easy to do so in cold blood without any uncomfortable reactions.

It was the whole bag of tricks—no mistake about that! The questions were entirely straightforward. No tricks or trimmings were discernible in them to Lovell's critical eye. They were all questions that could be answered fully and satisfactorily with the aid of the text-book.

Lovell fielded the text-book from the floor where it had fallen.

From that time until bed-time he was busy reading up answers to the questions from the text-book.

Bed-time naturally put an end to his activities; burning the midnight oil was not allowed at Rookwood. There was no law, however, against a fellow getting up early in the morning for the purpose of swotting; and so it came about that Arthur Edward was up at least an hour before rising-bell, putting the finishing touches to his preparations for answering the questions which he knew would be asked in the examination.

Lovell was no swot. But he was no fool either; and, the need for coming through the exam. with flying colours being so urgent and pressing, he used his time to the best advantage.

By the time he sat down at his desk in the gym., temporarily taken over for scholastic purposes during the

examination period, he was just about ready to get honours in the test.

And that—surprisingly enough from the point of view of his friends—was exactly what he did get!

Two days before breaking-up day, the results of the exams. were called out in Hall.

Lovell had four failures to record. But, as he had anticipated, he had passed in maths, and then came the announcement that he had passed also in English history.

With honours!

Jimmy Silver, Newcome and Raby simply could not understand it, when they showered their congratulations on him after the assembly.

"How did you do it?" yelled the leader of the Fistical Four.

"Greely checked the papers," grinned Newcome. "Did you bribe him with a box of his favourite Burma cheroots to wangle it for you?"

And Jimmy Silver and Raby laughed.

But Lovell did not laugh. After the first pang of relief at the thought that the danger of his being removed from Rookwood had gone, he felt far from happy over the affair.

Lovell took the earliest opportunity of adjourning to the end study on his own and communing with himself over things in general and the English history exam. in particular.

Now that he had succeeded, he experienced the horrid thought that he would have been better satisfied had he failed!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

TWO LEARN A LESSON!

"EXCELLENT!"

"I am glad you think so, Mr. Lovell!"

"Excellent!" repeated Mr. Lovell, with emphasis. "It is a disappoint-

ment to me, Dr. Chisholm, that my son failed in four subjects. But the fact that he gained honours in English history is a very real compensation. I am delighted."

Dr. Chisholm drummed on his desk.

"It is gratifying to me, of course, to know you are content to allow your son to remain at Rookwood now, Mr. Lovell," he said. "At the same time, you must allow me to say that the test which you saw fit to apply to the case did not meet with my approval."

Lovell's father frowned.

"Yes, yes, I understand that you hold that view, Dr. Chisholm, although I must say I do not quite see your point. To me it seems an entirely fair proposition that I should put to the test in this way the education that my son is receiving at Rookwood and——"

"Excuse me," murmured the Head, as a tap sounded on the door. "Come in!"

The door opened.

Arthur Edward Lovell entered.

Mr. Lovell greeted him with enthusiasm.

"Hallo, Arthur! I was just talking about you to Dr. Chisholm. You got your two passes all right. Only two—but one of them was with honours. I am satisfied!"

Lovell shook hands silently with his father. There was a somewhat strained look on his face.

"I—I'm glad you're pleased, pater. But there's something I'd like to tell you——"

"In the circumstances, Arthur, as I have just been telling Dr. Chisholm, I am very happy to allow you to stay on at Rookwood," beamed Mr. Lovell. "You will naturally be pleased to know that."

Lovell bit his lip. Really he did not look as if he could be pleased about anything at that moment.

"Yes, I'm pleased, pater," he muttered. "But there's something I really must say."

"What is it, Lovell?" asked Dr. Chisholm, whose keen grey eyes had not moved from the uncomfortable Fourth Former since his arrival.

Lovell gulped.

"Please, sir—that English history—I didn't really mean to—I'm sorry——"

"What on earth are you talking about, Arthur?" exclaimed Mr. Lovell.

"The fact is, sir, I cheated!"

It came out with a rush.

The Head started.

Mr. Lovell stared for a moment.

Then he jumped.

"Cheated? What? What are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry," groaned Lovell. "I couldn't help it, somehow. I knew I'd only passed in maths. I knew I had to pass in English history if I wanted to stay on at Rookwood. Then I happened to pick up the test paper before the exam. You dropped it out of your pocket, sir, when you stopped us scrapping."

"Bless my soul!"

"I ought to have run after you with it, sir. But, like a fool, I stuck to it, and looked up all the answers. That's how I got honours.

Without it I couldn't even have got a pass! All I can say is, I'm sorry!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Mr. Lovell. There was a long and painful silence.

Lovell stood in front of the Head, his face red with shame and his eyes on the floor. The Head watched him keenly for some time. Then his gaze returned to Mr. Lovell, and he coughed.

"Mr. Lovell, I, too, am sorry."

"Please, sir—that English history exam.—I didn't mean to—I'm sorry——" stammered Lovell. "What are you talking about, Arthur?" asked Mr. Lovell. "The fact is, sir, I cheated!" said Arthur Edward. The Head started and Lovell's father stared in astonishment.



Lovell senior nodded dumbly.

"I must admit that I missed my copy of that particular examination paper," said the Head. "It did not occur to me that it had gone astray in this way."

"That is unimportant," said Mr. Lovell harshly. "What concerns me is that my son—the boy I thought had gained honours—is, on his own admission, a cheat——"

Dr. Chisholm coughed again.

"Mr. Lovell," he said quietly, "will you allow me to say that in my estimation you have no cause whatever to worry?"

"But he cheated——"

"A great temptation came his way, Mr. Lovell. That was partly my fault and partly yours. Mine because I was so careless as to drop that test paper. Yours because you placed such a high value on a mere examination that you threatened to take your son away from the school he liked if he failed!"

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"If you will allow me, sir!" said the Head firmly. "Whatever may be the case at other schools, boys do not come to Rookwood for the purpose of learning to pass examinations. That is certainly part of their training—but a very small part. Chiefly they are here to learn how to become men—how to face the problems of life with courage and honesty!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Lovell.

"Your son, sir, has been through an ordeal. He has been subjected to a temptation and he has given way.

But now, with most commendable spirit, he has realised his fault and has made a full and frank confession. He has gained full honours, sir, in a test that is far more important than the examination in which his honours were gained by cheating!"

"Dr. Chisholm! You need say no more!" gasped Lovell's father. "I see your point entirely now!"

"I am very glad indeed, Mr. Lovell, to hear you say so," smiled the Head. "As for you, Lovell, you have done well to admit your deception. The offence was a serious one, and I shall cane you for it. But, in spite of your examination failure, I shall be very pleased to know that you are staying on at Rookwood next term with the full approval of your father."

Mr. Lovell beamed.

"Dr. Chisholm, you have it! I am more than satisfied!"

"Despite what has happened?" asked the Head.

"No, sir, but *because* of what has happened!"

"Oh, thanks, pater!" gasped Lovell. "And thank you, too, sir!"

And that was that. And when Lovell rejoined his chums he was smiling his old care-free smile once again.

Which, as Jimmy Silver said, broke two records. Not only had Lovell won and lost the same examination; he had also received the distinction of being the only fellow in history to walk away from a Head's swishing with a smile on his face!