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THE *Return of* **FERRERS LOCKE** **DETECTIVE!**

The **POPULAR**

"The **TERROR**
OF THE
FROZEN
NORTH!"

2d



OUR FIRST EXTRA-LONG
DETECTIVE THRILLER!

SPEND THE YULETIDE WITH THE MERRY
CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD!

Jimmy Silver & Co.'s Christmas Jape!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

Jimmy Silver & Co. run up against trouble and excitement on the way to Lovell Lodge for the Christmas Holidays!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Off for Christmas!

THE young ass!" "It's all right, Lovell—" "It isn't all right!" "Oh!"

"The silly young ass!" said Lovell. Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood, wore a worried look.

His three comrades on the other hand, looked merry and bright.

Rookwood School had broken up for the Christmas holidays, and the Fistical Four of the Fourth Form were in the train speeding westward through a snowy landscape.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not see anything to worry about. So they did not worry.

The chums of the Fourth were bound for Lovell's home in Somerset. They had a carriage to themselves. Somewhere on the train, also, was Lovell's young brother, Teddy of the Third.

Teddy Lovell was the cause of Arthur Edward's worried look.

Lovell, feeling the responsibility of an elder brother—feeling it a little too much in the opinion of his chums—had advised, warned, and commanded Teddy Lovell to keep in the carriage under the guardianship of the elder-brotherly eye.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not yearn for the society of the Third-Former; but they were prepared to tolerate it for Lovell's sake.

But a Third Form man of Rookwood was not the fellow to take orders from a Fourth-Former, even when the Fourth-Former happened to be his elder brother.

Unfortunately, it was a corridor train. Teddy Lovell had taken the first opportunity of wandering along the corridor and vanishing from the sight of the elder-brotherly eye.

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"The silly young owl!" continued Lovell. "We change at Templecombe, and he will be left on the train, for a cert!"

"Teddy knows how to change trains!" murmured Raby.

"There will be a row if I arrive home without him!" said Lovell crossly.

"It's a good way to Templecombe yet," said Newcome. "He will turn up all right, like a bad penny."

"Suppose he doesn't?" grunted Lovell. "Suppose we have to go on without him? What then?"

The looks of Jimmy Silver & Co. indicated that they would not regard the loss of Teddy's society as an irreparable misfortune.

Lovell gave a sniff, and rose from his seat.

"I'd better look along the train for him," he said. "You fellows mayn't care if he gets lost. But he happens to be my brother, you see. I'll look for him and jolly well smack his head."

And with that brotherly intention, Arthur Edward Lovell quitted the carriage, and tramped along the corridor in search of the elusive fag.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged smiles.

Lovell, as a matter of fact, was not in the best of tempers that day. Certain little incidents which had preceded breaking-up at Rookwood had annoyed him. Moreover, he had confided to his comrades that his Uncle Peter was coming to Lovell Lodge for Christmas. He had not seen his Uncle Peter for years and years, not since he had been quite a little chap in fact; but he remembered him as a very crusty, and sharp-tempered gentleman, with a chronic dislike for boys.

Lovell's opinion was that his parents might very well have left Uncle Peter over for another occasion—saved him up for a rainy day, as it were—instead of asking him to the Lodge at the time

Lovell was taking his school friends there. But Lovell's parents had not consulted him on the matter, as Arthur Edward apparently considered that they ought to have done.

On top of all this—putting the lid on, so to speak—Teddy Lovell was displaying his independence as a Third Form man who declined to take orders from any chap in the Rookwood Fourth, brother or not. Lovell was certain to be blamed at home if Lovell minor got left on the train, or changed into the wrong train, as the young scamp was well aware. Yet he had scuttled out of the carriage and disappeared from the brotherly supervision, and had failed to reappear.

"Bother these fags!" said Raby, as Arthur Edward went tramping down the corridor.

"Bless 'em!" said Newcome. "Lovell's like a hen with a chick about his blessed minor. Of course, the young sweep will turn up all right—and what does it matter if he doesn't?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"There he is!" he said.

Arthur Edward Lovell had only been gone a couple of minutes when the cheeky face of Lovell minor looked into the carriage from the corridor.

Teddy Lovell grinned at the three Fourth-Formers.

"Arthur gone to look for me?" he asked.

"Yes, you young rascal!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Good! Then I'll sit down."

The fag sat down in the corner seat, next to the corridor. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at him expressively.

The circumstance that his brother was hunting up and down the train for him did not seem to worry the cheery Third-Former; rather, it seemed to provide him with a little mild entertainment.

There was a heavy tramp of footsteps in the corridor about a quarter of an hour later, and Lovell, with a red face, tramped past.

"Lovell!" called out Jimmy Silver. Lovell did not heed.

He tramped on and disappeared.

Having searched one end of the train for his elusive minor, he was now going to search the other end.

It did not occur to him that, in the meanwhile, Teddy might have returned

to the carriage; he did not even look in as he passed, and he was too cross to heed the call of the captain of the Fourth.

Teddy chuckled. He sprawled comfortably on the seat, and drew Lovell's rug over him.

"The dear old chap's waxy," he remarked.

"He's looking for you," said Jimmy Silver. "Why couldn't you call out to him, you young rascal?"

"What rot! This will keep him amused till we get to Templecombe, and save us all from his chin-wag!" yawned Teddy.

Ten minutes more passed, and then Lovell came tramping back along the corridor. The station was drawing near now where the Rookwooders had to change trains.

Lovell tramped into the carriage without noticing the fag curled up in the corner of the seat next to the corridor, with a rug pulled over him. Lovell had left his travelling-rug there, and it was of ample size and nearly all of Teddy had disappeared under it.

"He's not on the train!" snorted Lovell.

"Eh?"

"I've looked in every carriage from end to end. He must have got out at an earlier station," said Lovell. "Goodness knows where he is now."

"But——" began Jimmy Silver.

"No good butting——"

"But——"

"I tell you it's no good butting, like a blinking billygoat!" roared Lovell. "The young ass isn't on the train, and he's lost somewhere on the way here from Hampshire — goodness knows where! I must say it's you fellows' fault!"

"What?"

"Why couldn't you help me keep an eye on him, instead of chipping a fellow for looking after his young brother?" demanded Lovell. "It's rotten. And you needn't grin; it's not a grinning matter, I can jolly well tell you!"

But Jimmy Silver & Co. really couldn't help grinning.

The fact that Teddy was curled up under the big plaid travelling-rug at Lovell's very elbow, as he stood in the carriage, struck them as comic.

Only Teddy's face showed over the rug in the corner, and Lovell had his back to that, having come half across the carriage from the corridor with one wrathful stride.

Lovell did not think of looking round. He glared at his comrades.

The matter was serious. Grinning was quite out of place. Arthur Edward Lovell was intensely exasperated.

"Look here, you dummies, you can grin!" he bawled.

"Right-ho! We will!" agreed Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall be at Templecombe in a few minutes now. We can't take the next train without Teddy. If you think I'm going on home without my brother, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses——"

"It's all right, old chap. We won't lose Teddy!" grinned Raby. "I'm sure he'll turn up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake, ring off while I try to think out what's going to be done!" hooted Lovell. "Here we are at Templecombe."

The express rattled to a halt. Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered up rugs and bags and various impedimenta and jumped

out on the platform. Lovell glared after them.

"Come on, Lovell."

"What about my brother? I'm not going on to the other platform without him!"

"Well, you don't want to stay in that train, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "Pick up your rug and hop out."

Lovell snorted, but he followed that advice. He grabbed up his travelling-rug from the seat.

Then he gave a yell of astonishment. "Why—what—Teddy!"

The Rookwood fag yawned and sat up.

"Time to change trains—what?" he asked. "All serene! Don't leave anything in the carriage, Arthur. You know what an ass you are!"

And Teddy Lovell coolly alighted from the train and joined the chuckling trio on the platform. Arthur Edward Lovell, with feelings too deep for expression in words, gathered up his rug and followed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not Wanted!

"HERE'S the jolly old train!" said Raby cheerily.

"Lots of time!"

"And here's an empty carriage—or nearly empty."

"Good!"

The train for Shepton, the next stop for the Rookwooders, was waiting in the station. Three cheery Fourth-Formers and one frowning Fourth-Former and a grinning fag arrived at the train and stopped at a carriage that had only one passenger in it. It was not a corridor train this time. Jimmy Silver jerked open the door and tossed in a bag.

There was the sound of an annoyed grunt in the carriage.

Only one passenger was there—a gentleman of middle age, wrapped warmly in a fur-lined overcoat with a big fur collar, and a silk hat. The gentleman's face was somewhat crusty in expression when in repose, and it grew much more crusty as the juniors stopped at the carriage. Doubtless the old gentleman had expected, or hoped, to have that carriage to himself, and was not pleased to see it invaded by a horde of schoolboys, in exuberant spirits, going home for Christmas.

Still, there were five empty places in the carriage, and the party numbered five, so the old gentleman, howsoever much he desired to have the carriage to himself, really had no right whatever to interfere.

Probably he was an old gentleman of an interfering disposition. Possibly he was an old bachelor, unaccustomed to cheery and exuberant youth, and finding no pleasure in the contemplation of merry young faces.

Anyhow, he interfered.

As Jimmy Silver was following his bag into the carriage an arm was stretched across the entrance, barring his way.

He stopped, with one foot on the step and one in the carriage, in astonishment.

Two sharp grey eyes stared at him over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

"Kindly find some other carriage," said the old gentleman.

"What?"

"There is, I believe, plenty of room on the train," said the crusty one. "I am, in fact, assured that the train is not at all crowded. Please go farther along."

"My hat!" said Teddy Lovell. "What a cheek!"

"My dear sir," said Jimmy Silver mildly. He was rather annoyed, but

Jimmy was a good fellow, and always respectful to age and considerate to the little infirmities of temper which sometimes come with age. "Please let me pass!"

"Find some other carriage!" snapped the old gentleman.

"But——"

"I tell you there is plenty of room on the train. Close that door at once. There is a draught."

Arthur Edward Lovell gave an angry snort. With great self-control he had refrained from punching the cheeky head of his minor. But he was not going to stand sheer cheek from a perfect stranger.

"Shove in, Jimmy!" he exclaimed.

There was a slamming of doors. The train was about to start. The Rookwood party had no intention of splitting themselves into several parties spread among two or three carriages to please this unreasonable old gentleman, but it was too late for even that now. They had to bolt into this carriage or be left behind.

Jimmy Silver, shoved on from behind by his comrades, pushed against the extended arm and pushed it aside.

He tramped across the carriage to the farther seat, and his comrades followed him in and sat down, filling all the seats.

The gentleman in the fur coat glared at them.

"Scandalous!" he ejaculated.

"Keep smiling, sir!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"What—what! Boy, you are impertinent!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Jimmy politely. "But isn't it rather cheeky of you to want to bag a whole carriage?"

"Silence!"

"Eh!"

"Be silent! If you are to crowd this carriage, at least be silent!" snapped the old gentleman. "Scandalous, scandalous!"

And the fur-collared gentleman unfolded his "Times" and disappeared behind it; and the Rookwooders grinned cheerily at one another.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Trouble on the Train!

"DISGUSTING!"

It was the fur-collared gentleman who made that remark suddenly, popping it out like a pistol-shot. His head popped out from behind the paper, like the head of a tortoise from its shell, as he made it.

Really, it wasn't disgusting. Arthur Edward Lovell had sorted out a bag of jam-tarts. December weather made healthy fellows hungry, and jam-tarts, though not very solid, were grateful and comforting. Jam-tarts were handed along the carriage, and Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to dispose of them. Evidently the crusty old gentleman did not approve.

"Disgusting!" he repeated.

Jimmy Silver grinned cheerily. He had come across ill-tempered and unreasonable gentlemen before; but this especial old gentleman really seemed to take the cake. Even Mr. Manders at Rookwood, was not quite so savage-tempered and blind to sweet reasonableness as this old gentleman. Hitherto Jimmy had considered Mr. Manders the limit.

Crash! Rattle! Jerk!

The train stopped in a station. It stopped rather suddenly, and the old gentleman, deeply absorbed in his paper, was not prepared for it. He lurched forward in his seat, and nearly

fell across on Lovell's knees. His newspaper fell on Lovell.

"Oh, gad! Bless my soul!" Lovell took hold of the newspaper, with a wink at his comrades.

"Thank you, sir!" he said demurely. "If you've done with it—"

"What—what?" "Much news in it, sir?" asked Lovell affably.

The old gentleman righted himself, and glared at Lovell. He did not believe for a moment that Lovell really supposed that the newspaper was being offered to him as done with by the owner.

"You young scamp! Give me my paper!"

"Not finished with it?" asked Lovell. "No!" roared the old gentleman.

"Very well, here you are, sir!" Lovell tossed the paper back.

The "Times" is a fairly hefty publication; both in contents and in avoirdupois it is weighty. It cannoned on the ill-tempered old gentleman's chest with quite a heavy smite as Lovell tossed it to him.

"You—you—you—" stuttered the irate gentleman.

He looked for a moment as if he would box Arthur Edward's ears. Fortunately, he refrained. Boxing Rookwood ears was a perilous undertaking.

He jammed down the window, and put his head out to look at the name of the station. December mists hung rather thickly round the station, and the name, of course, was well hidden among prominent advertisements, as is customary in railway stations.

He was still leaning from the window when the train restarted after the interval, so to speak Lovell, leaning across the bulky figure bundled in the fur-lined coat, deposited a jam-tart in the corner seat vacated by the gentleman at the window.

Jimmy Silver gave him a warning look.

The other fellows grinned. The fur-lined gentleman sat down again as the train rolled out of the station, still in blissful ignorance of the point on his journey that he had reached, though doubtless enlightened as to the invigorating qualities of Squeecham's Pills, Chipton's groceries, and holidays in the Isle of Man.

Squelch!

It was a large and juicy jam-tart. It was a large and heavy gentleman that sat on it.

The tart was reduced, at one fell swoop, to the shape of a pancake, with a juicy squelch that was audible all through the carriage.

The fur-lined gentleman started.

"What—what—" he ejaculated. He rose from his seat and looked at it. Jammy traces were visible on the cushions, but the tart itself clung to the overcoat, and whisked round as the wearer whisked round.

There was a howl of laughter in the carriage. The Rookwooders really could not help it. The sight of the old gentleman peering at the seat, while the tart was displayed to them sticking on the tail of his coat, was too funny. They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "What—what—"

The fur-lined gentleman gave a suspicious glare round the carriage at the juniors, and glared again at the stickiness on the cushion. Then he groped round his voluminous coat, and the sticky tart came away in his hand. He held it up and stared at it blankly.

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It was some moments before he seemed to understand what had happened. Then he understood, quite suddenly, and with equal suddenness he leaned over towards Arthur Edward Lovell, and surprised that youth with a terrific box on the ear.

Smack! Loud and clear, almost like a pistol-shot, it rang through the carriage, and louder yet rang the surprised and enraged yell of Arthur Edward Lovell.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Only a False Alarm!

"YAROOOOOOH!" "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Lovell leaped up. Certainly, he had placed a sticky tart for the irate gentleman to sit upon; but, equally certainly, the irate gentleman had asked for it. Rookwood ears were not to be boxed with impunity.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Lovell. "Laying your paws on me! By Jove, I'll jolly well hack your shins!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. He caught his excited chum by the shoulder in time.

"Let go!" roared Lovell. "Chuck it, old chap—"

"I tell you— Whooop!" roared Lovell, as the irate passenger smote again, this time on his other ear.

While Jimmy Silver was restraining Lovell, the enemy was carrying on the war, so to speak. He boxed Lovell's other ear, and even that did not satisfy him, he proceeded to grasp Lovell by the collar, and with his free hand groped for his umbrella.

"Chuck it, you old donkey!" exclaimed Raby.

Lovell wriggled in the old gentleman's grasp. Elderly as the gentleman was, his grasp was hefty. Lovell plunged along the carriage to get loose, and the irate gentleman plunged after him. Teddy Lovell put out a foot at the right moment, and the angry passenger stumbled over it, and fell on his knees, releasing Arthur Edward.

His wrath instantly turned on Teddy. The fag was grasped by the collar, and jerked from his seat.

Shake, shake, shake! "Whoop!" roared Lovell minor. "Stop him! Rescue, you chaps! Yaroooh!"

"Let him go!" bawled Lovell. Smack, smack, smack!

Having shaken Teddy, the angry gentleman was boxing his ears. It was really too "thick." Lovell jumped at him like a charging bull, and the angry gentleman staggered and sat down. Teddy was hurled flying across the carriage, and Lovell sprawled across the angry passenger. He sprawled over a purple face and a pair of dislodged, gold-rimmed glasses.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Newcome. "What a shindy! I say, that bouncer ought to be given in charge!"

"Mmmmm!" came in a muffled roar from the irate passenger, gasping under the sprawling Lovell.

Teddy Lovell had staggered against the opposite door of the carriage. He turned the handle, and sent the door flying open.

"What—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. The fag gave him a cheery wink, dived down, and squeezed under the seat. The angry passenger, who was struggling to shift Lovell off his purple face, saw nothing of what was happening.

"Groogh! Mmmm! Will you gerroff?" he was spluttering.

For a second Jimmy Silver stared after the fag who had squeezed under the seat and vanished from sight. Lovell blinked at him, not understanding. But Jimmy caught on at once.

"Help! Stop the train!" he shouted. "He's gone!"

"He's gone!" yelled Raby and Newcome, playing up instantly.

"My brother!" roared Lovell, catching on last of all. Arthur Edward was not quick on the uptake, but he caught on at last. "My brother! Stop the train! Pull the cord! Stop! Help! Murder!"

He scrambled up. The angry passenger sat up dizzily. He groped for his gold-rimmed glasses, and set them on his nose. He blinked at the juniors.

"You young rascals—ruffians—scoundrels—villains—" he spluttered.

"Murder!" roared Lovell.

"Manslaughter at least!" howled Raby.

Jimmy Silver pointed to the open door of the carriage, flying in the wind of the train.

The fur-lined gentleman stared round with a startled, scared look.

He knew that there had been five of the schoolboys, and now he saw only four, and the door of the carriage flying open. He knew that the missing one was the one he had hurled away when Lovell charged him over. His purple face became quite pale.

"Bless my soul! What has happened?" he stuttered, staggering to his feet.

"You've killed him!" roared Lovell. "Boy!"

"It's murder! Stop the train!"

"Has—has—has that boy fallen out of the carriage?" stuttered the fur-lined gentleman, in horror.

"He didn't fall out!" howled Newcome. "You flung him right against the carriage door—you know you did!"

"I—I threw him aside—"

"We all saw him fall against the door!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We shall all be witnesses—"

"At the inquest!" said Raby.

"The—the inquest!" stuttered the fur-lined gentleman.

That awful word seemed to take all the starch out of him, as it were. He collapsed into his seat, quite heedless now of sticky jam on the cushions.

He stared at the juniors with a chalky face. He could not deny that he had hurled the Rookwood fag off, and that Teddy had fallen against the opposite door of the carriage. Perhaps at that moment he repented him of being such an extremely bad-tempered old gentleman. Certainly he had meant the poor boy no real harm.

"Oh dear! Goodness gracious! Bless my soul!" he articulated. "I—I never dreamed I—I never supposed—I never intended—"

"You've done it now," said Raby.

"Goodness gracious! If—if the boy has fallen upon the line, he—he must have been injured—"

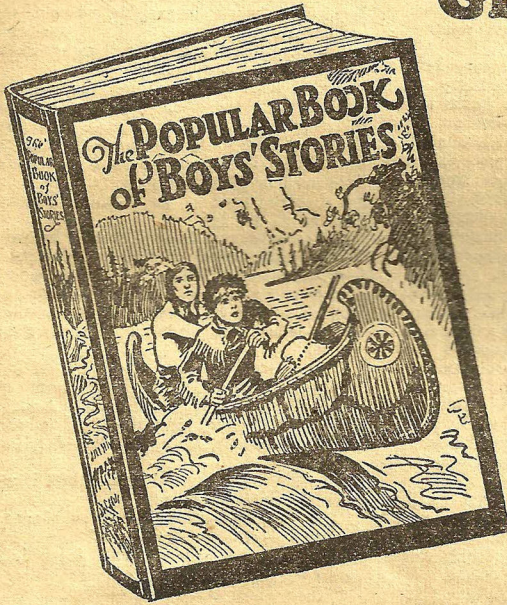
Lovell gave a scornful snort. "Injured! Do you think a fellow could fall on the line from the train without being killed?"

"Oh dear!"

"We're getting into a station now," said Jimmy Silver. "We shall be at Shepton in a few minutes. Keep

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round and see that he doesn't escape before the police arrive, you fellows!"

"Yes, rather."

"This is what comes of losing your temper for nothing, sir," said Jimmy Silver, very gravely. "I hope, sir, that it will be a warning to you—that is, of course, if you are not hanged."

"Wretched boy!" gasped the fur-lined gentleman. "You are well aware that it was an accident—a dreadful accident—"

"I don't believe there was an accident."

"I'm certain there wasn't," said Newcome.

"Nothing of the kind," said Lovell. "We shall all be able to swear that there was no accident in the matter at all."

"Yes, rather."

The angry gentleman gazed at the juniors speechlessly. He wondered dizzily whether the law would allow a mob of schoolboys to swear his life away in this manner.

"We're stopping," said Lovell.

The train drew up at Shepton.

"We change here," said Lovell. "We shall have to give this man in charge—"

"Good gad!"

The guard was at the door as soon as the train stopped. He opened the other carriage door and stared in.

"What's this here?" he demanded gruffly. "That there door is flying open. What's this here?"

"An—an accident, guard," gasped the fur-lined gentleman. "A sheer accident. I scarcely touched the boy when—"

"Wot boy?"

"The—the unfortunate lad who has fallen out—"

"Wot!" stuttered the guard.

He stared at the juniors, remembering that there had been five of them. Now there were four. The guard's face assumed an expression of terrifying grimness.

"Wot's that?" he demanded. "You've shoved one of these here boys out of the train while it was going? Why, the young feller must have been killed."

"I scarcely touched him!" almost screamed the fur-lined gentleman. "I—I was boxing his ears for impertinence when—"

"Do you mean you was assaulting him?" demanded the guard.

"I—I merely flicked him—a mere touch. Then—then I was knocked over, and—and the boy—oh dear! It was a pure accident—I did not even see the boy fall. I never knew—"

"This here is a matter for the police," said the guard. "You stay where you are, the lot of you, till I've called a constable."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "You'd better show up, Teddy—we shall lose the connection, at this rate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Teddy Lovell, a little dusty but very merry and bright, crawled out from under the seat.

The guard stared at him. The irate gentleman blinked at him with eyes that seemed to bulge from his head.

"The—the—the boy did—did not—fall out, after all?" stuttered the passenger blankly.

"Not quite, sir," said Teddy cheerily.

"Look 'ere," bawled the guard. "what's this game? Pulling this old covey's leg, hey?"

"He was so awfully excited," explained Teddy. "I thought I was safer under the seat till we got to a station, guard. He looked dangerous."

"Jolly dangerous!" agreed Lovell. "My belief is that he's been drinking."

The guard burst into a chuckle. "You young rips!" he said, and passed on.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We change here, you know, and we've got a train to catch. Good-bye, sir—merry Christmas!"

"Good gad! Bless my soul!"

The angry gentleman undoubtedly was relieved to see Teddy Lovell still

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in the land of the living, and to realise that his bad temper had not led him to the length of inadvertent manslaughter. He was relieved; but his temper was not improved by the discovery that the playful schoolboys had been pulling his irate leg.

"You young rascals!" he said. "Impudent young scoundrels! By Jove, if you were boys of mine—"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather pleased that they were not boys of his. Undoubtedly they would have been booked for a rough time had they been so unfortunate.

The Rookwooders crowded out of the carriage. The irate gentleman followed them out.

"Hallo, the old bird's looking for more trouble!" said Lovell. "Let's bump him on the platform!"

"Fathead! Come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "Good-bye, sir, and a merry Christmas to you!"

And the Rookwooders marched away cheerily to catch their train, leaving the angry passenger glaring after them.

"Chuck it!" said Teddy Lovell, in a tired voice.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

In the local train, now drawing near to Lovell's home, Arthur Edward felt it incumbent upon him to talk to Teddy Lovell for his own good. Undoubtedly, Arthur Edward had been greatly entertained by the fag's extraordinary jape, and the fright it had given the fur-lined gentleman. But on reflection Lovell realised that such tricks were dangerous, especially opening a carriage door while a train was in motion; and for a quarter of an hour Lovell told his brother so. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome fully concurred, but they felt a little tired; Teddy was tired and did not concur. But his major seemed, like the little brook, likely to go on for ever.

Hence his suggestion that his dutiful elder brother should "chuck" it.

Lovell frowned wrathfully. Jimmy Silver interposed with tact.

"Must be getting pretty near now," said Jimmy Silver. "What's the station for your place did you say, Lovell?"

"Froode," said Lovell.

Jimmy put his head out of the window as the train slowed.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated.

From a carriage farther down the little local train another head was projected—a head crowned by a silk hat, surrounded by a fur collar, and adorned by a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on a beaky nose.

"That merchant!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"He's on the train!"

"My hat!" said Lovell. "So he's going to our part of the world, is he? If we see him during the Christmas holidays we'll jolly well snowball him."

The train stopped in a little wayside station.

Jimmy Silver & Co. alighted, at the same time as the fur-lined gentleman, who stared at the juniors with a grim stare, turned his back on them, and marched away with a frowning brow.

There was snow on the Mendip Hills, glimmering through the dusk of the December afternoon. The juniors came out of the little station in a cheery crowd. Outside a rather ancient-looking horse-omnibus was waiting.

"This takes us a couple of miles," said Lovell. "We drop off right at the gates of my place. But look here, what about shoving the bags on the bus and walking? I'd like to stretch my legs a little after the train."

"Good idea!" said Jimmy Silver.

The baggage having been disposed

of, Jimmy Silver & Co. started walking up a hilly road. The omnibus rolled off and passed them.

Half an hour later they reached the gates of Lovell Lodge.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Uncle Peter!

"YOU fellows all right?"

"Right as rain."

"Then we'll go down to tea," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were very bright and cheery. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had a large room with three beds in it, with a big window that looked over the Mendip Hills, and a roaring log fire in the grate. It was very cheerful and comfortable, and they had a warm welcome from Lovell's father and mother, and they were ready for tea—an ample West Country high-tee, for which their long journey had given them good appetites.

Lovell looked in at their door with a cheery face. The juniors had removed the signs of travel, and had made themselves look very nice, and a credit to the Classical Fourth Form of Rookwood.

"By the way," went on Lovell, "I told you my Uncle Peter was coming for Christmas—"

"You did, old man," said Jimmy. "Rely on us! We're going to be nice to him."

"The mater says she's expecting him to-day, but he hasn't turned up yet," said Lovell. "He's her brother, you know, and she seems to like him somehow. No accounting for tastes. The pater stands him nobly, I believe. He's had twenty years in India, long, long ago, and he's got the idea that he can treat everybody as if they were coolies. Do your best to stand him."

"We will," said the Co. solemnly. "We'll back you up, old man."

"Butter shan't melt in our mouths when we meet Uncle Peter," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll make him love us before we've done with him."

Lovell chuckled.

"Well, let's go down," he said.

"Hallo! I dare say that's my uncle at the door now. Somebody's banging as if they wanted to knock the door through. That's his style."

"What a nice man!" murmured Raby.

The juniors went down the old staircase. The hall below, hung with holly and mistletoe, was brightly lighted. There was a sound of voices, and the juniors paused on the stairs. One of the voices from the hall seemed familiar to their ears.

"No, I have not had a pleasant journey!" said Uncle Peter, in reply to a question from Mrs. Lovell. "I have had anything but a pleasant journey. I have had a very unpleasant journey indeed!"

The juniors started, and looked at one another. They stopped at the bend of the staircase. An extraordinary expression came over the face of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I was pestered in the train by a mob of unruly, disagreeable, disrespectful schoolboys," went on the voice. "Yes, help me off with my coat. Thank you! I was pestered—in fact, persecuted!—by a mob of young ruffians. What the schools are coming to in these days I can hardly imagine. They do not flog the boys sufficiently, Mabel, that is the root of the trouble. In my day we were soundly flogged."

Mrs. Lovell's voice was heard murmuring something gently in response. There was a snort from her formidable brother.

"We live in namby-pamby times. Mabel, that is the trouble. Boys are not thrashed sufficiently. Five young rascals—I might say scoundrels—yes, scoundrels! I was pestered, worried, persecuted! I have had a most unpleasant and uncomfortable journey."

"My dear Peter—"

In silent horror Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at one another on the staircase. Well they knew the rasping voice of the fur-lined gentleman. The fur-lined gentleman and Lovell's Uncle Peter were one and the same!

Mr. Lovell came along the hall to greet his visitor. The horrified juniors, peering over the banisters, saw him shake hands with the grumpy gentleman. Mr. Lovell had a ruddy, cheerful face and a pleasant eye, and he bore his brother-in-law, as Arthur Edward had said, nobly.

"Welcome my dear Peter!" he said. "It's really good of you to give us a few days at Christmas—really good! My sons are home from school to-day, and they will be very glad to see their uncle—very glad indeed, after so many years!"

Grunt from Uncle Peter.

"Let me take you to your room, my dear fellow," said Mr. Lovell. And his kind and hearty manner had a very pleasant effect, even on the fur-lined gentleman.

Uncle Peter grunted again, but it was a more amiable grunt.

"So you haven't had a very pleasant journey down to Somerset?" said Mr. Lovell, as he piloted the formidable guest to the staircase.

"Such an outrage, sir—"

At the bend of the staircase Jimmy Silver & Co. stood in a horrified group. As Mr. Lovell mounted with his guest they had wild ideas of fleeing upstairs again. What was going to happen when the fur-lined gentleman recognised them they could not even guess. If only they had known in time that the terrible old gentleman was Lovell's Uncle Peter! But, of course, they had not known that, or ever dreamed of it.

"Why, here are the boys!" said Mr. Lovell unsuspectingly. "Arthur, this is your Uncle Peter, whom you have not seen for so long. My son's school friends—introduce your friends to your uncle, Arthur!"

But Lovell was speechless.

Two gleaming, glinting eyes were turned on him over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

The fur-lined gentleman recognised Jimmy Silver & Co.

"You!" he stuttered.

"Oh dear!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"You!" roared Uncle Peter.

Mr. Lovell looked perplexed, and rather alarmed.

"What—?" he began.

"These young rascals—"

"What?"

"These are the young scoundrels I told you of. This one"—Uncle Peter pointed an accusing finger at Lovell, "this one was the worst."

"Goodness gracious! But—"

Lovell and his comrades scuttled down the stairs. The angry grunt of Uncle Peter, the astonished voice of Mr. Lovell, followed them. But they did not heed.

In the hall below they looked at one another blankly, in silence.

"Well," said Lovell, at last. "This is a go!"

And his chums agreed that it was.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's rousing long story of the merry chums of Rookwood, entitled: "NO LUCK FOR LOVELL!")