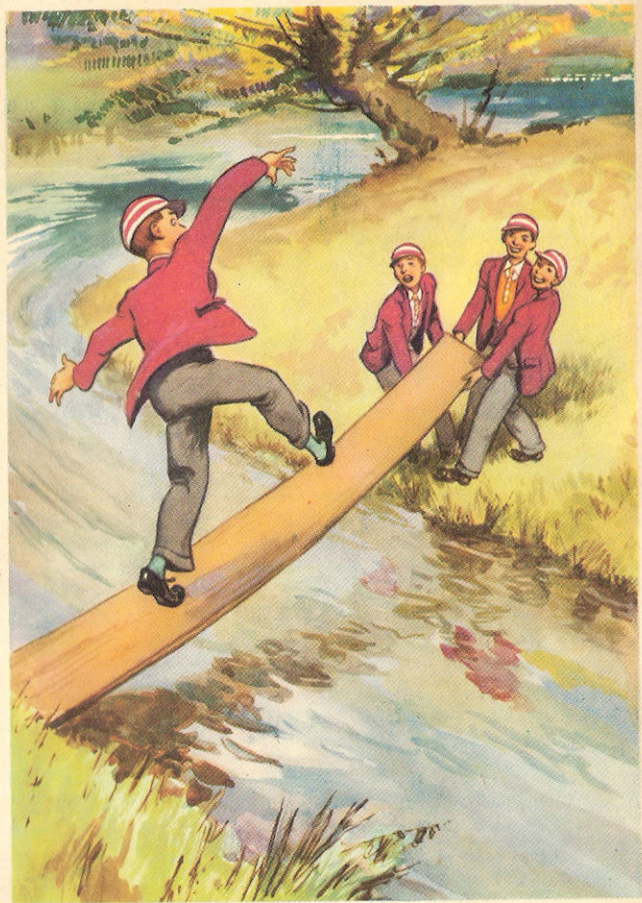


The RIVALS of ROOKWOOD

**OWEN
CONQUEST**



'Let that plank alone!'

THE RIVALS OF ROOKWOOD

Owen Conquest



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LONDON

Published by

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SPRING HOUSE - SPRING PLACE - LONDON NW5

Printed in Czechoslovakia

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CHAPTER I

BACK UP!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, snorted.

Lovell had a way of snorting, when he was irritated, disdainful, contemptuous, or anything in that line.

Now he was all three: so his snort was unusually emphatic.

He sat at the table in the end study, with Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome. Prep was on in the Classical Fourth.

All four of the juniors should have been concentrating on the section of the *Æneid* assigned by Mr. Dalton, their form-master, for preparation. Three of them were so doing. But Arthur Edward Lovell, like Brutus, passed it by like the idle wind which he respected not.

He looked across the table at his three friends. His three friends looked at their books. Lovell's snort, emphatic as it was, did not make them look up. So he proceeded to speech.

'Look here——!' said Lovell.

'Prep!' murmured Jimmy Silver.

'I said look here——.'

'Hic templum——,' murmured Raby.

'What?'

'Junoni ingens——,' murmured Newcome.

'Look here, Jimmy——.'

'Sidonia Dido condebat——!' murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell breathed hard.

As a Classical man, Lovell, of course, studied the classics: not like the fellows on the Modern side, who revelled in 'stinks.' In Lovell's opinion, the Classical side at Rookwood was 'the' side: in fact, it was Rookwood: the Modern side merely a super-

fluous appendage, an also ran. He felt both scorn and derision for fellows who understood such tripe as chemistry and book-keeping, and didn't know a thing about Caesar or Virgil: who could produce ghastly smells in the Lab but couldn't have construed the simplest passage in Eutropius to save their young lives.

Such being Lovell's view, he might perhaps have been expected to take a deep interest in the classical studies which distinguished his side of Rookwood, and to revel in the deathless verse of P. Vergilius Maro.

But he didn't!

Lovell's 'con' was the worst in the Classical Fourth, with the solitary exception of Tubby Muffin's. So far from revelling in Latin verse or prose, Lovell would have swapped all Virgil's works to hit a sixer, and all the classical volumes in the Head's library to pull off a successful rag on Tommy Dodd and Co. of the Modern Fourth.

At the present moment, obviously, Arthur Edward Lovell was in no mood to revel in Virgil. He did not care a boiled bean whether Sidonian Dido had founded a temple in honour of mighty Juno, or whether she hadn't.

The other members of the 'Fistical Four' did not, perhaps, care very deeply. But they had to think of Dalton in the form-room in the morning. Arthur Edward Lovell dismissed Dalton as carelessly as he dismissed Virgil.

'Will you fellows listen to a chap?' asked Lovell.

'—donis opulentem—!' murmured Newcome.

'—et numine divae—!' murmured Raby.

Lovell breathed harder.

'All right!' he said, in a tone which indicated that it was all wrong, and very wrong indeed. 'Stick to that tosh! I'll go it alone.'

Lovell rose from the study table. He hurled Virgil into a corner of the study: an action which revealed his real, sincere, unaffected opinion of that great poet. Then he crossed to the window.

At which, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome sat up and took notice.

'Hold on, old chap,' said Jimmy, hastily.

'Don't be a goat, Lovell,' said Raby.

'Have a little sense,' urged Newcome.

Lovell turned round. He was prepared to 'go it' alone, if his comrades persisted in sticking to that tosh. But certainly he would have preferred his pals to back him up: as he had a right to expect, he considered, when he had planned a rag on the ticks of the Modern Fourth.

'Well, look here——!' he said.

'You look here, Lovell,' said Jimmy Silver, 'It's prep——.'

'Never mind prep now——.'

'We don't want Dicky Dalton to scalp us tomorrow,' snapped Newcome.

'Chance it,' said Lovell.

'There's a row if a man goes out in prep,' said Raby.

'Is this study afraid of a row?' asked Lovell, scornfully, 'Not that there's any risk, if you're in a funk. It's dark enough for nobody to see us slithering down from the window. We've been down that rain-pipe before, and we can go down it again, and nobody the wiser. Who'll be out in the quad now?'

'Old Manders might be taking one of his trots——.'

'Never mind old Manders. He's only a Modern beak anyhow.'

'But——!' said Jimmy Silver.

'What I want to know is, whether you're going to back a fellow up,' said Lovell, 'I take all the trouble to think out a stunt to dish those Modern louts, and all you fellows can do is to sit there and chew Latin.'

'Prep's prep!' explained Jimmy. 'Schoolmasters expect a fellow to do his work. Frightfully unreasonable, and all that, I daresay: but there it is.'

'If you're going to talk rot, Jimmy Silver——.'

'Not at all: that's in your line, and I'll leave it to you, old bean,' answered the captain of the Fourth.

'You cheeky ass——!'

'Look here, Lovell, squat down and get on with your prep,' exclaimed Raby, 'Jimmy's skipper, anyway.'

'If a skipper doesn't skip, he has to be pushed,' said Lovell, 'I suppose you fellows would sit down and let the Modern ticks carry on as they like. I'm standing up for the House.'

'And we're sitting down for prep,' said Newcome, 'You do the same—and stand up afterwards.'

'You see, old chap——!' urged Jimmy.

'I don't!' said Lovell, 'Look here, did Tommy Dodd chuck a packet of his chemical muck in at this study window, and did it stink us out of the study?'

'He did—and it did!' said Jimmy Silver, 'And we'll make him sit up for it—but not in prep——.'

'We can get him now,' said Lovell. 'I tell you, those Modern ticks are out of their House—that mouldy old barn they call a House. I tell you I heard them, just before lock-ups. They shut up like oysters when they saw me coming by, but I distinctly heard what Tommy Dodd said to Cook and Doyle. "Eight-thirty tonight by the old arch." What did that mean, I'd like to know?'

'Sounds as if it means that they'll be at the old arch at half-past eight,' said Jimmy Silver, 'Blessed if I see why they should.'

'I expect it's a rag of some sort,' said Lovell, 'I don't know why they're going there—but I know they're going. And I know that I'm going to be on hand, with my big squirt full of ink: and I know that they're going to get the ink all over their Modern mugs. And I expect you fellows to back me up and do the same, see?'

There was but a faint interest to be read in the faces of Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome.

True, if Tommy Dodd and Co. were, for some unknown and mysterious reason, foregathering at the archway which led from Big Quad into Little Quad, that dusky evening, it would be rather a lark to be on the spot: and surprise them with a sudden and unexpected fusillade from squirts of ink. It would be tit

for tat: a Roland for an Oliver: just retribution for the stink-bomb Tommy Dodd had projected into the end study that day. But——!

There were ever so many 'buts.'

Fellows really couldn't go out in prep. There would be a row if it came out. And fellows really had to do their preparation, or take the risk of being bunged into Extra for a skewed con. Neither had Lovell's chums any faith whatever in his ability to plan a rag, or to plan anything else. Lovell was no end of a planner but his schemes always seemed to skew somehow. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome did not enthuse.

'Well?' rapped Lovell.

'Oh, forget it,' advised Jimmy, 'It's prep, you know——.'

'That's enough!' snorted Lovell. His snort was like that of a war-horse, 'Don't jaw any more. I'm going.'

And Lovell, grasping the sash, opened the window: with the evident intention of going on his own, since his faithless chums preferred prep.

NOT AS PER PROGRAMME!

'WE'LL come!' sighed Jimmy Silver.

Raby and Newcome grunted.

Jimmy rose from the study table. 'Uncle James' of Rookwood was very patient and tolerant with his chum Lovell. Indeed, any fellow who chummed with Arthur Edward Lovell had to cultivate patience as a fine art. Lovell was a splendid chap really, and his friends liked him no end. But it was not to be denied that he did try their patience, often and hard.

It seemed so clear, to Lovell, that he knew best. It was so clear to him, that he could only wonder that it was not equally clear to others.

Jimmy Silver was the acknowledged leader of the Fistical Four. But Lovell was wont to take the bit between his teeth, as he was doing now. Often and often he had his way, because he was convinced that it was the best way, and because his comrades were convinced that he would talk their heads off if he didn't have it.

'Oh!' Lovell turned from the window again, 'You're coming? Good! I tell you, we shall get those Modern ticks on the hop. Back up, you know.'

'We can't let you go it alone,' said Jimmy, tartly, 'You'd come some sort of a mucker, if we did.'

'Look here——.'

'Better keep an eye on him,' sighed Raby, 'If he goes round with a squirt, he's as likely to squirt the Head as anybody else.'

'Look here——!' hooted Lovell.

'Have you filled your squirt?' asked Newcome.

'Eh! Oh!' Lovell felt in his pocket and drew therefrom a large squirt. He proceeded to charge it, at the study inkpot.

Three fellows grinned. Lovell had been about to start on his punitive expedition, to squirt ink at the Modern ticks—with an empty squirt in his pocket! It was rather like Lovell to overlook little details like that.

Lovell frowned as he charged his squirt. Any fellow might have forgotten a petty detail! There was no occasion for three fellows to grin like monkeys!

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, still grinning, sorted out squirts. They filled them with ink, carefully, and stowed them in pockets. Lovell, less carefully, spilt ink on his fingers, and dropped extensive blots on his trousers. Then, testing the squirt to make sure that it was in good order, he inadvertently ejected a rivulet of ink over the books on the study table.

'Blow!' said Lovell.

'Keep some for the Moderns,' suggested Newcome.

Lovell did not deign to reply to that. He refilled the squirt, with a splash on his waistcoat, jammed it into a pocket, and was ready.

'Better turn off the light,' said Raby.

'Oh, come on,' said Lovell, 'I don't suppose there's anybody in the quad to see us, except those Modern ticks at the arch, and they can't see this study from there. How you fellows hang about.'

'If anybody should be out——!' said Newcome.

'If—if—if——!' mimicked Lovell.

Jimmy Silver turned off the light in the study. It was a fine summer evening, though quite dark. It was quite possible that some 'beak' might be taking a walk in the quad: and if so, that beak would certainly have taken immediate heed, had he spotted four fellows sliding down a rain-pipe from a study window. But with the study dark, that danger was eliminated.

Lovell led the way. He groped to the window in the dark, and there was a sudden crash, and a howl.

'Wow!'

'What on earth's the matter now?' exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

'Ow! wow! I've banged my knee on a chair! Wow! Of course you had to turn the light off!' hooted Lovell. 'Do you think Dr. Chisholm's out there standing on his hind legs watching our window? Wow!'

'Are we going?' asked Raby.

'Ow!' Lovell rubbed his knee, 'Wow!'

'What about getting on with prep, while Lovell does his song and dance?' inquired Newcome.

'Come on,' said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

Lovell being busy with his knee, the captain of the Fourth went first. It was easy to reach the old rain-pipe clamped to the wall quite close by the study window. Jimmy grasped it, and slithered down, hand below hand, and dropped lightly on his feet.

Raby followed, and then Newcome. They waited in a bunch for Lovell. Looking up, they saw a head and shoulders looming from the study window. Lovell was peering down at them.

'Wait a minute,' he called out.

'Quiet, you ass!' breathed Jimmy Silver.

'Eh! Did you speak?'

'Quiet!' hissed Jimmy.

'I can't hear you! I say, hold on a minute! I've dropped my squirt.'

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome held on for more than a minute. They held on with deep feelings. Still, it was clear that nobody was at hand, or Lovell calling from the window would certainly have been heard.

Lovell reappeared at the window at last, and slithered down the rain-pipe in his turn. He landed without any mishap except kicking Jimmy Silver in the ribs as he jumped clear.

'Now come on,' he said, 'And don't make a row—'

'What?'

'Don't make a row! We've got to keep this dark—getting out of the House in prep,' said Lovell, 'I don't want to be called up by Dicky Dalton, if you fellows do. Come on.'

Lovell's chums manfully refrained from kicking him, and followed on. It was dark in the quad: unusually dark for a summer's evening, which favoured the Fistical Four. There was a glow of light near the House, from many windows—and three of the Co. turned rather uneasy glances on Mr. Dalton's study window, and on that of Bulkeley of the Sixth, captain of Rookwood. But they gave the lighted facade of the House a wide offing, keeping in the shadows, as they made their way towards the old arch.

'Stop!' breathed Jimmy Silver, suddenly.

'What—?' began Lovell, impatiently.

Jimmy grasped him by the arm, and dragged him behind one of the old Rookwood beeches. Raby and Newcome did not need dragging. They blotted themselves behind the beech even more rapidly than Jimmy. A lean figure had loomed up in the shadows, spotted by the three at the same moment.

'Look here—!' began Lovell again, 'What—?'

'Will you be quiet?' hissed Jimmy, in his ear, 'It's Manders.'

'I never saw—.'

'Quiet!'

'Well, if it's Manders—.'

'Shut up!' hissed Newcome.

'Oh, rot! You fellows are as nervous as old hens. I never saw anybody, and—.' Lovell snapped off suddenly, as a sharp voice came from the gloom.

'Who is there?'

A dim glimpse of a lean figure had been enough for Jimmy and Raby and Newcome. Lovell had seen nothing: but he knew the sharp voice of Mr. Manders, house-master on the Modern Side at Rookwood.

Manders, evidently, was taking one of his walks: and the Fistical Four had very nearly walked into him, in the gloom.

They hugged the darkness, behind the beech, with beating hearts. Manders, it was clear, had heard voices—at a time when no Rookwooder should have been out of his House. If Manders spotted them—!

There was a sound of footsteps, and then Manders' voice again.

'Who is that? Is that you, Knowles?'

'Yes, sir!' The voice that replied was the voice of Cecil Knowles of the Sixth, captain of Manders House. 'Is anything the matter, sir?'

The Fistical Four scarcely breathed. Only the massive old beech was between them and Manders, and now there was a Modern prefect on the spot. True, Modern masters and pre's had nothing to do with the Classicals. But it was absolutely certain that if either master or prefect spotted them, they would be reported to Dalton, their form-master. This venture was, in fact, rather more risky than Arthur Edward Lovell had fancied, when he laid his plans in the end study.

'I thought I heard voices,' said Mr. Manders, 'Did you hear anything, Knowles?'

'No, sir.'

Master and prefect moved off together. Whether they were looking for the owners of those voices or not, Jimmy Silver and Co. did not know. Anyway, they moved off, and the coast was clear again.

'Jolly close shave,' muttered Raby.

'A miss is as good as a mile,' said Lovell, cheerily, 'Come on! Half-past may strike any minute now.'

'Are we carrying on, with a beak and a pre spotted about?' grunted Newcome.

Snort from Lovell.

'I am!' he said: and he did. He marched on for the archway: and his three friends followed him. Lovell had the advantage: his friends could not argue with him now, without risk of their voices reaching Manders or Knowles. Still less could they collar him, and bang his head against a beech, as perhaps they felt rather inclined to do. Caution was necessary.

It was black as a hat under the old stone arch. They groped into the blackness. Half-past eight chimed out from the clock-tower as they did so.

'We're on time,' whispered Lovell, 'Those Modern ticks may be on hand any minute now, and—.'

Lovell was suddenly interrupted.

There was a sound of a movement in the darkness under the old stone arch. It was immediately followed by a shower of something dusty and smelly. The Fistical Four could not see it, but they could feel it and smell it, as it scattered over them, and it smelt like soot. Taken quite by surprise, they tottered to and fro, gasping and spluttering.

'Oooooogh!' gurgled Lovell, 'What—.'

'Wooooch!' spluttered Raby.

'Ooooo-er!' came from Newcome.

'Wooogh! It's soot!' gasped Jimmy Silver.

'Urrrrrggh!' gurgled all four.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came a sudden yell of laughter, from the darkness. Then there was a sound of scampering feet.

Footsteps and laughter died away, across the dusky quad, and Jimmy Silver and Co. were left tottering, spluttering and gasping and gurgling, under the old arch, in clouds of soot.

CHAPTER III

MAN DOWN!

'DID we get them?'

'We did!'

'Faith, and we did entirely!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth chuckled. Tommy Dood, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, seemed to be enjoying life.

At a distance from the old arch, they slowed down. Looking back, they could see nothing of the Classics they had sprinkled with soot. But they could hear distant sounds of spluttering and gurling.

'Did they walk into the trap?' went on Tommy Dood.

'They did!' chuckled Tommy Cook.

'And sure we got them a trate!' chortled Tommy Doyle.

'The whole jolly family!' said Tommy Dodd, 'I banked on Lovell, after letting him hear me talk about eight-thirty at the old arch. I saw him lap it up. But he got his pals to come with him. The whole jolly family—they will want a wash when they get back to their mouldy House.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What I like about old Lovell,' went on Tommy Dodd, 'is the easy way he lets a fellow pull his leg. He hadn't the faintest idea we let him hear us talking—he thought it was just luck!'

'He would!' grinned Cook.

'You could see in his face how he lapped it up,' chuckled Tommy Dodd, 'As soon as he knew we were coming along to the old arch at half-past eight, he was on to it! Did he think of guessing that we should be there early, waiting for him?'

'Sure he did not!' chortled Doyle. 'No more than he guessed that we should have a bag of soot ready.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It was so jolly palpable, really, that I wondered whether even Lovell would fall for it,' said Tommy Dodd, 'But you can bank on Lovell falling for anything. Is he Rookwood's prize ass?'

'Sure he is, and then some.'

'Is he the biggest chump ever?'

'Faith he is, and some over.'

And the three Tommies chortled again. Arthur Edward Lovell had walked into an easy trap, and his friends had followed him in: and it was one more score for the Moderns over the Classics.

Tommy Dodd and Co. chortled merrily—and a little incautiously—in the exuberance of their spirits. Their chortles died away suddenly as a voice called from the shadows:

'Who's there?'

Tommy Dodd gave a jump.

'Oh, my hat! That's Knowles!' he breathed, 'By gum, if Knowles catches us out of the House—'

'Hook it!' whispered Cook.

'He's not seen us—mizzle!' muttered Doyle.

A dim figure loomed up in the shadows, between the three Modern juniors and the old arch, coming towards them. Knowles, the Modern prefect, was evidently out in the quad, and he had heard them.

Tommy Dodd and Co. did not linger. With a prefect of the Modern Sixth in the offing, it behoved them to stand not upon the order of their going, but to go at once. They dashed away towards Manders' House at a rapid run.

But it was not a case of more haste and less speed. Cecil Knowles was not the only inhabitant of Manders' House who was out that dusky evening.

Crash!

'Oh!'

It happened before the three Tommies knew that anything was happening. They did not see a dark figure in the dark, and never dreamed that it was there till they crashed into it. They did not know that Mr. Manders was out, that he too had heard them, and that he was approaching from a different direction. They never dreamed of Manders till they crashed.

It was quite a terrific crash.

Tommy Dodd, going at full speed, landed fairly on Manders. Mr. Manders, taken quite by surprise by the sudden shock, spun.

Bump!

'Goodness gracious! What—who—?'

As Tommy Dodd reeled from the shock, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle sprawled headlong over Mr. Manders' long legs, spread out in their path.

Both of them landed heavily on the Modern master.

'Oooooogh!' came a choking howl from Mr. Manders, 'Ooooh! What—who—how dare you—who are you?—what—who—what—oooooh!'

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Tommy Dodd.

'Manders!' gasped Cook, faintly.

They bounded to their feet. Knowles was behind them: Manders was under them. If they were caught now, after charging over their house-master, the consequences would be simply awful.

They ran desperately.

Mr. Manders sat up, dizzily.

'Stop!' he shouted, 'You hear me? Stop at once! Ooooooh!'

The three Tommies were not likely to stop.

They heard the voice of their house-master: but like the Gladiator of old, they heard but they heeded not! They flew.

As they flew, voices floated to them from behind. Knowles, evidently, had heard the crash, and come up.

'Is that you, sir?'

'Ooogh! Yes! Is that Knowles? Ooogh! I have been knocked over, Knowles—actually knocked over—.'

'Is it possible, sir?'

'It has happened, Knowles! I have been knocked over—oooh! They rushed into me and knocked me over.'

'Who did, sir?'

'I could not see them—three or four juniors. Ooooh! I was certain that some boys were out of the Houses, and now—ooogh—this is proof of it. I have been knocked over—rushed into, and knocked over! Oooogh! They must be found, Knowles—ooooh!'

'Did you see which way they went, sir?'

'I cannot see in the dark, Knowles! Ooooh! I have not the faintest idea who they are—ooogh!—or which way they went. But they must be found, Knowles—they must be found and identified—oooooh—.'

Tommy Dodd and Co. did not hear more. Neither were they interested to hear more. The fact that Mr. Manders had not the faintest idea who they were, or which way they had gone, was reassuring. But they did not lose a moment. They cut on through the shadows to their own House, and arrived breathlessly at the back window left ajar for their return.

'Quick!' breathed Tommy Dodd.

They tumbled in at the window, one after another, with breathless speed. Two minutes later, they were in their study, safe and sound: ready to meet inspection with innocent faces if the prefects came round, and prepared to be quite astonished at the news that Mr. Manders had been up-ended in the quad.

CHAPTER IV

LOVELL ALL OVER!

'YOU ass, Lovell!

'You fathead, Lovell!

'You chump, Lovell!

Arthur Edward Lovell did not, for the moment, make any rejoinder. He was very busy trying to extract soot from his mouth with the help of a handkerchief. He gave a suffocated gurgle, but that was all.

'Oh, you priceless ass!' breathed Jimmy Silver.

'Urrrrggh!' from Lovell.

'We might have known,' hissed Raby.

'Of course we might,' said Newcome, 'Isn't it Lovell all over?'

'Just Lovell!' sighed Jimmy Silver.

'The ass—!'

'The fathead—!'

Lovell gasped and gurgled soot. But he found his voice at last. He breathed soot and indignation.

'Was it my fault?' he snorted, 'Wharrer you mean? I tell you I heard those Modern ticks fixing it up, and Tommy Dodd said plainly half-past eight. We got here before half-past eight. They were early—.'

'You benighted ass,' said Raby, 'Can't you see that your silly leg was pulled? They were waiting for us here with a bag of soot.'

'They let you hear them jaw, you footling fathead,' said Newcome, 'They knew you'd lap it up like milk.'

'Rot!' said Lovell.

'Oh, dear!' sighed Jimmy Silver, rubbing at soot, 'Can't you see it now, you ass—now that you've walked into the trap?'

'And led us into it,' hissed Raby.

'Rubbish!' said Lovell.

'I tell you they saw you with your silly ears wide open, and just talked for you to hear,' hooted Newcome, 'They knew you'd fall for it!'

'Bosh!' said Lovell.

It was as clear as noonday to Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, that Lovell had been taken in by the artful Moderns. They had let him know that they would be at the old arch after dark, having no doubt that he would seize such an opportunity of going on the war-path: assured, in fact, that he would swallow the bait like a gudgeon. But though that was quite clear now to three members of the Fistical Four, it was not at all clear to Arthur Edward Lovell. His opinion of such an explanation was that it was rot, rubbish, and bosh!

'I'm not the sort of chap to have my leg pulled,' said Lovell, scornfully.

'Not!' ejaculated his three friends.

'No!' hooted Lovell, 'And I can jolly well say—oh, crumbs! What's that?'

'That' was a sudden sound of alarm from the dusky quadrangle. The three Moderns having vanished after sooting the hapless Classics, Jimmy Silver and Co. had not expected to see or hear anything more of them. They did not see anything: but they heard—the sounds of collision in the dark, the startled howls of Mr. Manders, and the voice of Knowles of the Modern Sixth. They peered out from under the dark arch into the dusk of the quad.

'What on earth's up now?' muttered Jimmy.

'That's Manders——.'

'And Knowles——.'

'Something's happened——.'

'Better cut,' muttered Lovell, 'I believe they're coming this way. Listen!'

'Better stick in cover,' whispered Jimmy, 'They can't see us here. Listen!'

Mr. Manders' voice, with a very angry note in it, reached their ears.

'They must be found, Knowles! Three or four of the juniors are out of their House—and they rushed into me and knocked me over. They came from this direction—are you sure you have seen and heard nothing of them—.'

'I was going over to the Classical side, sir, to speak to Bulkeley about the cricket, and—.'

'Yes, yes, but never mind that now. These juniors must be found, and it must be ascertained to which House they belong.'

'Oh, certainly, sir.'

'Come on,' whispered Lovell, 'They may come rooting about here any minute. The sooner we're back in our study the better. I jolly well want a wash, too.'

'Keep where you are!' breathed Jimmy, 'Those Modern blighters seem to have run into Manders, in the dark—we don't want to do the same.'

'That's all right,' said Lovell, reassuringly, 'Keep close to me, and I'll see you through.'

'You howling ass—.'

'Look here, Jimmy Silver—.'

'Keep quiet, and don't move!' hissed Newcome, 'They're coming this way.'

'If you fellows want to be copped, I don't,' retorted Lovell, 'I tell you I'll see you through. Follow your leader.'

And Lovell, emerging from the dark arch, cut off towards the House. But his three comrades did not follow. Their faith in Lovell's leadership, if any, was at its lowest ebb. It was much darker under the arch than in the open quad, and they wisely hugged cover.

'The ass!' breathed Jimmy Silver.

'The fathead!' said Raby.

'The goat!' said Newcome. 'Oh! Listen!'

The sharp voice of Mr. Manders was heard.

'Who is that—there is someone! That is one of them, Knowles—follow him at once!'

'I'll get him, sir.'

There was a sound of rapid running. Jimmy Silver and Co. could really have groaned. In the darkness under the old arch they were invisible, and had only to wait for an opportunity of slipping away. Lovell, knowing best as usual, had emerged into the open, and had been spotted, and was being chased.

'Knowles will get him,' muttered Raby.

'Serve him right,' growled Newcome.

Jimmy Silver listened anxiously. The sound of running feet died away. Lovell, with Knowles on his track, was somewhere in the shadowy spaces. Nothing more was heard of Manders—probably he was following the chase.

Minute followed minute, and nothing more was heard. Whether Lovell had escaped, whether they had 'got him,' or whether the hunt was still going on, the three juniors could not even guess. They could only wait and listen in tense anxiety.

Jimmy Silver broke the silence at last.

'All clear for us now,' he said, 'We'd better cut! Lovell may have got in. Very likely the pre's will be going round, to see whether anyone's out of the House. We don't want to be missed.'

'Come on,' said Raby.

The three emerged from the arch. The coast was clear: wherever Manders, Knowles, and Lovell might be, they were nowhere at hand. The trio cut away at a trot, and in a few minutes more, were under the window of the end study.

Jimmy Silver clambered up the rain-pipe, followed by his chums. They had a faint hope that Lovell might be already in. But when they clambered in at the window, they found the study vacant. Lovell was not in.

'Oh, the goat!' breathed Raby, 'I wonder where he is!'

'Anywhere but where he ought to be,' grunted Newcome, 'If they've got him, it means an awful row.'

'Well, I'm going to get a wash!'

All three were badly in need of one. They slipped quietly from the study, and washed off the soot at the sink at the end

of the passage. Having washed, and brushed, and cleaned off most if not all of the soot, they returned to the end study. It was still vacant.

'Where is that ass?' breathed Jimmy Silver.

'Echo answers where!' grunted Raby.

'What about prep?' asked Newcome.

'We can't turn on a light—Lovell would be seen getting in—if he comes,' answered Jimmy.

'Oh, the ass!'

'Oh, the fathead!'

The three juniors peered anxiously from the window. They could see nothing. But suddenly they heard a sound below—a sound of gasping, grunting, and clambering. Somebody was coming up the rain-pipe.

It was Lovell, at last! A shadowy figure clambered in, and a sooty face peered at the three juniors.

'Oh! You've got in,' panted Lovell. 'I say, I had a narrow squeak!' He shut the window, and pulled the blind, 'Put the light on.'

Jimmy Silver switched on the light. The three juniors gazed at Lovell, sooty and breathless.

'So you got clear?' said Raby.

'It was touch and go! I say, Knowles cornered me in the beaks' porch,' panted Lovell, 'Got me right into a corner.'

'How on earth did you get away, then?'

Lovell gave a breathless chuckle.

'I got him with my squirt,' he said.

Three juniors jumped, as if electrified.

'You—you—you what?' gasped Jimmy Silver.

'Presence of mind, you know,' said Lovell, 'He fairly had me, and I remembered the squirt in my pocket, and grabbed it out, and let him have it. Right in the phiz!'

'Great pip!'

'You should have heard him gurgle when he got the ink! He was fairly flummoxed, and I got away,' chuckled Lovell, 'I cut, and left him spluttering. All serene now.'

'You—you—you got a Sixth-Form prefect, with a squirt, right in the phiz!' said Raby, faintly.

'Right on the wicket,' said Lovell, 'Presence of mind, you know. He'd have had me if I hadn't! O.K. now. I say, I shouldn't wonder if the pre's come round. I'd better get a wash.'

Lovell left the study. He left his three chums speechless, gazing at one another in horror. Lovell had escaped—by getting the captain of Manders' House in the 'phiz' with a squirt of ink! What was going to happen, after that, Jimmy Silver and Co. hardly dared to think.

CHAPTER V

THE CHOPPER COMES DOWN!

'HIC templum Junoni—.'

Even Lovell realised the need for getting on with prep.

It was possible, indeed very probable, that the prefects would come round, to discover, if they could, who had been out of the House in lock-ups.

And it was of considerable importance that they should make no such discovery. Breaking House bounds in lock-ups was serious enough: but Lovell's exploit with the squirt put the lid on. A Sixth-form prefect had received a volley of ink in the middle of his features, and such an insult and injury to the dignity of the prefects was almost enough to rock Rookwood to its foundations. It was certain that there would be a terrific row: and the Fistical Four could only hope that suspicion would not come their way.

Lovell was fairly confident. Lovell seldom lacked confidence. But three members of the Co. were deeply perturbed, and in dread of an official visit to the Fourth-form quarters. Lovell was assured that Knowles did not know who it was he had cornered in Common-Room porch: that stream of ink in his 'phiz' had done the trick, and done it well. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome felt by no means so assured.

All four agreed that their cue was to be deep in prep if beaks or prefects came round. Also, it was only prudent to be in a position to hand out a good 'con' in the morning. If Richard Dalton discerned that they had neglected prep, he might guess that they had been otherwise occupied—and how.

So in the end study, four juniors piled industriously into the adventures and misadventures of the 'pius Æneas': though, as

they were listening for footsteps in the passage all the time, it was not really easy to concentrate on P. Vergilius Maro.

'Hic templum Junoni ingens,' mumbled Lovell, 'Oh, blow Juno and her blessed temple! I wonder if they'll come. We're all right, anyhow.'

'Sidonia Dido condebat—,' murmured Jimmy Silver.

'Oh, blow Dido,' said Lovell, 'Donis opulentem—oh, blow!'

'Et numine divae—.'

'It's all right, of course,' said Lovell. 'Knowles would have had me—I was fairly cornered. You see, I dodged into the beak's porch, thinking he would run on past it, but he must have heard me, and he followed me in. He was fairly grabbing at me when I thought of the squirt and let him have it.'

'You don't think he saw you?' asked Jimmy.

'Is Knowles a cat?' asked Lovell.

'What?'

'If he isn't, he can't see in the dark,' explained Lovell, 'It was black as a hat in the beak's porch.'

'But he must have been very close—!' said Raby.

'He was—got the ink a treat on his phiz.' Lovell chuckled, 'I say, he looked a picture—ink all over his dial.'

Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome suddenly forgot prep. They sat up and stared at Arthur Edward Lovell.

'What?' gasped Jimmy.

'He looked a picture!' stuttered Raby.

'Oh, my hat!' said Newcome.

'What about it?' asked Lovell, 'Don't you think a fellow would look a picture, with ink splashed all over his face?'

'You—you—you saw the ink splashed all over his face!' exclaimed Jimmy. 'Oh, suffering cats! If you saw him, he saw you.'

Lovell started.

'Oh!' he ejaculated, 'No! N-n-no, I—I don't think so! It was awfully dark in the beak's porch—.'

'You say you saw him!' hissed Raby. 'If you did, he must have seen you as much as you saw him.'

'Oh, rot,' said Lovell, uneasily, 'He never saw me—never saw anything but ink. Don't you fellows get nervy. Look here, let's get on with prep—there's not a lot of time left. *Aerea cui gradibus*—.'

They resumed prep: but three fellows, at least, felt that the game was up. No doubt it had been very dark in Common-Room porch: but the visibility must have been as good for Knowles as for Lovell. That desperate expedient of squirting a Sixth-Form prefect had saved Lovell from being collared on the spot. But if Knowles had seen him—!

There was a sound of footsteps in the Fourth-form passage. Four juniors in the end study pricked up their ears to listen.

It was a firm tread: a tread they knew. Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth Form, was coming up the passage.

'That's Dicky!' whispered Raby.

'He's coming here,' breathed Newcome.

'I expect he's looking in all the studies,' said Lovell, 'Of course they'd go round to find out who'd been out, if they could.'

But even Lovell was feeling unquiet. There was no sound of opening doors along the passage: only that firm tread approaching. Even Lovell had to realise that Mr. Dalton was coming direct to the end study.

'Hard at work!' whispered Jimmy, as the footsteps reached the door. And the four juniors buried themselves in prep, as there was a tap, and the door opened.

An athletic figure appeared in the doorway, and 'Dicky' Dalton's pleasant, almost boyish face, looked in. That face was not so pleasant in expression as usual. It wore a deep frown.

Mr. Dalton looked in—at four heads bent over books: four juniors deeply and industriously penetrating the mysteries of Virgil. A slightly sarcastic smile passed over Dalton's face. Apparently the juniors had not heard him—being so very deep in Virgil!

'Silver!'

Jimmy gave a dramatic start.

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

He rose to his feet. Lovell and Raby and Newcome rose to their feet. They all looked respectfully and inquiringly at Mr. Dalton. Few fellows could have looked more innocently surprised at a visit from their form-master.

If Mr. Dalton knew nothing, they were not going to give themselves away. But they had a deep misgiving that Mr. Dalton knew a great deal.

He surveyed them grimly.

'I have received a report, and a complaint, from Mr. Manders,' he said, 'It appears that several juniors were out of their House a short time ago. Three or four, Mr. Manders thinks. One of them discharged a squirt of ink at a prefect—Knowles, of the Sixth Form. That one was you, Lovell.'

Lovell gazed at him.

'Knowles is positive that it was you whom he chased into the porch of Common-Room,' said Mr. Dalton, 'Although it was very dark, he is sure that he recognised you. You do not deny it, I presume?'

Lovell said nothing.

'The others were not seen near enough to be recognised,' went on Mr. Dalton, 'But as one of the party was you, Lovell, I think I may guess very easily at the identity of the others.'

Silence.

'Silver! Raby! Newcome! You were out of House bounds with Lovell during lock-ups?'

'Yes, sir,' mumbled the three. There was no help for it.

Mr. Dalton's face was not pleasant at all now. He was looking as grim as Manders at his grimmest.

'Very well,' he said, 'All four of you will have Extra School for four half-holidays, for leaving the House during preparation. You, Lovell, will be caned most severely for so outrageous an attack upon a Sixth-Form prefect. You will follow me to my study.'

In dismal silence, Arthur Edward Lovell followed Mr. Dalton down the passage.

'Extra—!' said Jimmy.

'Four half-holidays!' breathed Raby.

'And the House match on Wednesday!' said Newcome, 'And St. Jim's next week!'

'That ass, Lovell—.'

'That fathead, Lovell—.'

'That dithering chump, Lovell—.'

'The House match will go to pot,' said Jimmy Silver, 'The Moderns will simply walk away with it, with this study left out. All we can do now is to scrag Lovell when he comes back.'

'We'll scrag him bald-headed,' said Raby.

'Better lynch him!' said Newcome.

'Or boil him in oil!' said Raby.

'The ass!'

'The fathead!'

'The chump!'

Three juniors waited quite anxiously for Lovell's return. If ever a fellow deserved to be scragged, lynched, and boiled in oil, Arthur Edward Lovell did: they were all agreed on that. Lovell had let Tommy Dodd pull his leg: he had led his friends on a wild-goose chase: he had got them sooted, and he had got himself caught: and all the fat was in the fire. They simply yearned to make it clear to Lovell what they thought of him: and their expressions were quite ferocious when, at last, they heard him coming up the passage.

But ferocity evaporated, when Lovell came in. One look at him, and all desire to scrag him, lynch him, or boil him in oil, disappeared on the spot. It was a sad and suffering Lovell that limped into the study.

He glanced at his friends with a lack-lustre eye, mumbled, moaned, and stood leaning on the table. He did not speak: he seemed beyond speech. He leaned on the table and mumbled, evidently having no desire to sit down. Only too clearly, Richard Dalton had felt it his duty to deal with him faithfully: and faithfully had he dealt with him.

'Had it bad, old chap?' asked Jimmy Silver, sympathetically.

'Mmmmmmmmmmm!' mumbled Lovell. It was like the moo of a very sorrowful cow. Evidently, Lovell had had it bad.

When the other fellows went down after prep, Lovell stayed up in the study. He was in no mood for company. Fellows who passed the study door heard strange mumbling and mooing sounds from within. Arthur Edward Lovell was still looking much the worse for wear and tear when the Classical Fourth went to their dormitory.

CHAPTER VI

DOWN ON THEIR LUCK!

JIMMY SILVER wore a worried look the next morning.

Raby and Newcome looked unusually serious.

Lovell was glum.

His glumness, probably, was increased by reminiscent twinges of the 'six' he had received in Mr. Dalton's study the previous evening. Dalton had made it painfully clear to Lovell that squirting ink at a prefect—even a Modern prefect—was a much more serious matter than he seemed to have supposed. But even without those twinges, the situation was enough to make any fellow glum.

Four juniors, all four of them members of the House junior eleven, were booked for Extra for four half-holidays. But for the inking of Knowles they might have got off with lines. But that outrage, as it was regarded by beaks and prefects, made the affair awfully serious. Sixth-Form prefects were not to be inked with impunity. Lovell, the actual inker, had been whopped: but all four had to go into Extra on Wednesday and Saturday that week, and on Wednesday and Saturday the following week.

And on this Wednesday there was the House match with the Moderns: and on the following Wednesday a School match: nothing less than the regular cricket fixture with St. Jim's.

So it was awful: more than enough to make 'Uncle James' look worried, Raby and Newcome serious, and Lovell glum. The Fistical Four were sadly down on their luck.

The Rookwood men were keen cricketers. It was very important to beat Tommy Dodd and Co. in the House match. The rivals of Rookwood were rivals in all things, especially in games.

Each, in its own esteem, was cock-house at Rookwood. But the side that pulled out ahead in games was indisputably cock-house for the time being. That House match was a gonner, without the Fistical Four in the ranks. And there seemed nothing that could be done.

All the Classical Fourth were dismayed, when they learned that the four were booked for Extra. Jimmy Silver, their invaluable skipper, was essential: and Lovell could hardly be spared. For Arthur Edward Lovell, though a bit of a dunce in class, and a fathead in most other things, was a mighty man with the willow: and useful batting covers a multitude of sins. Raby and Newcome might be replaced more or less satisfactorily: but Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell were really irreplaceable.

Jimmy Silver could have kicked himself for letting Lovell land him in Extra. Still more could he have kicked Lovell. But that would have been no present help in time of need.

'I've simply got to bat to-morrow, Jimmy,' said Lovell, after class that day, 'We can't let the Moderns walk off with the match.'

'Better go and tell Dalton so,' answered Jimmy.

That was sarcasm. But Lovell had no perception of sarcasm.

'Think he might let me off for the match?' he asked, 'After all, Dicky's rather a sportsman, in his way. He's playing cricket with the Sixth to-morrow himself. What do you think he'd say if I asked him?'

'Bend over,' answered Jimmy, briefly.

Lovell stared.

'You silly ass!' he ejaculated, 'Mean to say you think he'd whop me for asking him?'

'Most likely. Go and ask him and see,' suggested Jimmy, 'Another whopping would do you good. You can't have too many.'

'Oh, don't be a goat,' hooted Lovell, 'Look here, I'm going to bat to-morrow. What about cutting Extra? It's French with Mossoo, and Mossoo ain't a bad little beast. Morny's cut Extra

more than once, and hiked out of gates and left Mossoo to report him to Dicky Dalton.'

'And had six when he came back,' grunted Jimmy.

'I'd take six, to play in the House match,' said Lovell. He gave a wriggle, reminiscent of his latest six. 'I don't care, so long as we beat those Modern ticks.'

'Same here, if we could work it,' said Jimmy, 'But we can't cut and play cricket under Mossoo's nose, you ass. We should be rounded up.'

'Um!' said Lovell, thoughtfully, 'Well, look here, we shall have to think out a way, as I've simply got to bat against the Moderns to-morrow. I shall be able to plan something—I'm pretty good at planning, as you know—.'

Jimmy Silver did not answer that. Words could not have expressed what he thought of Lovell and his planning. He walked away, leaving Lovell to think out his plans!

'Oh, here you are!' Valentine Mornington met him in the quad, 'What about the match to-morrow, Silver?'

Jimmy made a dismal grimace.

'You'll have to captain the side, Morny,' he answered. 'You'll have four places to fill.'

Mornington whistled. He was keen enough to captain the side, if it came to that. But four places to fill was a problem.

'I suppose Dalton wouldn't let you off?' he asked.

Jimmy shook his head.

'He can't! Next week, perhaps, for the St. Jim's match—there's a sporting chance. But he couldn't now. Manders would make a fuss—he doesn't like his dashed prefects being inked by Classical men. I've no doubt he thinks Dicky has let us off too lightly as it is. Next week it may have blown over a bit. But there's not an earthly now.'

'You must be an ass to get into Extra just before a House match,' said Mornington, 'You might have thought of the cricket.'

'If that mad ass Lovell hadn't inked Knowles, it would only have been lines. Dicky had to come down heavy because Man-

ders kicked up a row,' groaned Jimmy, 'Next time Lovell has a stunt on, I'll bang his head on the study door. But that doesn't help now.'

'We've got some good men,' said Mornington, thoughtfully, 'Little me, and Erroll, and Rawson—Conroy, and Pons, and Van Ryn—Oswald and Teddy Grace—eight good men. But—.'

'But—!' grunted Jimmy.

'I suppose you couldn't cut?'

'Under Mossoo's nose?'

'Um!' said Morny.

'If we were playing away, I think I'd chance it. But can fellows cut Extra and play cricket in sight of Mossoo's classroom window?'

Mornington laughed.

'Hardly,' he agreed, 'If Dicky won't let you off, you're done.'

'Well, he can't! Manders thinks we were all in it together, inking his precious prefect, and that's why we were out in lock-ups. It may blow over by next week, and if we toe the line, Dicky may go easy on St. Jim's day. But you'll have to do the best you can without us to-morrow.'

When the Fistical Four gathered in the end study for tea; three faces were cheerless. But one was bright. Arthur Edward Lovell had a satisfied grin, as of a fellow who had solved the problem.

'I've thought it out,' he told his friends.

He beamed at them as he made that announcement. Apparently he expected them to brighten up on the spot.

If so, he was disappointed. They did not brighten up. They only gave him grim, glum looks. Jimmy grunted, Raby snorted, and Newcome sniffed. That was all Lovell received in reply.

'You're looking a pretty pessimistic crew,' said Lovell, surveying them. 'You can't think of any way out, of course. Lucky for you you've got a fellow with brains in the study.'

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Jimmy.

'I've thought it out, and planned it all,' said Lovell, 'It's as easy as falling off a form. We're playing cricket to-morrow.'

'Fathead!' said the three, in unison.

'We're going to cut Extra—.'

'And play cricket with Monsieur Monceau looking on from his class-room?' asked Newcome, sarcastically, 'Think he'll give us a cheer?'

'Monsieur Monceau won't be in his class-room,' retorted Lovell.

'And why won't he?'

'Because I'm going to lock him in his study,' answered Lovell, calmly.

'WHAT!'

'Surprised you?' grinned Lovell, 'Well, that's the idea! I've planned it—I can plan, you know, if you fellows can't!'

They gazed at him. Inking a Sixth-Form prefect was not, apparently, enough for Lovell. Beaks were his game now. They gazed at him silently.

Lovell rattled on.

'I've got it all cut and dried. Mossoo has a Modern set tomorrow morning, and we shall be in form with Dicky. I make an excuse to get out of form—.'

'You make an excuse to get out of form—!' repeated Jimmy Silver.

'Leave a tap running, or something,' said Lovell, 'That's only a detail. Mossoo being with the Modern ticks in class-room, I can snoop the key of his study easily enough.'

'You snoop the key of his study?'

'Exactly! Then just before Extra, I nip along the passage and lock him in, and put the key in my pocket. See?' said Lovell, triumphantly.

'Oh, holy smoke!'

'Easy as winking' said Lovell, 'Mossoo will be locked in—can't go to Extra—we play cricket. I daresay there will be a row afterwards—.'

'Oh!' gasped Newcome, 'You've thought of that?'

'I've thought of everything,' assured Lovell, 'I don't leave anything out when I'm making plans, I can tell you. Planning

is the thing! Leave it to me to make plans—you fellows haven't the heads for it. Well, now I've thought it out, and it's settled—'

'Settled?' stuttered Jimmy Silver.

'Yes, now it's settled, you can cheer up a bit, and stop looking like a set of moulting fowls,' said Lovell, 'What do you think of the idea?'

Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath.

'We're landed in Extra because you inked a prefect,' he said, 'Now you propose that we should go up to the Head to be sacked for locking a beak in his study! It's no good talking, you fellows! Bang his head on the door.'

'Good egg!' agreed Raby.

'Hear, hear!' said Newcome.

Lovell stared at them.

'Don't you like the idea?' he asked, 'Can't you see it's a winner? Look here—leggo—wharrer you fancy you're doing?—will you leggo—I'll jolly well punch your head, Jimmy Silver—I'll mop you up, Raby—I'll knock you spinning, Newcome—will you leggo?—Yaroooooh!' Bang!

Lovell's head was hard. But the old oak door of the end study was harder. There was a fiendish yell as the two established contact.

'Whooooooop!'

Bang!

'Wow! Leggo! I'll—whooooooop!'

Bang!

'Yarooooooop!'

Bang!

'Oh, crikey! Stoppit! Wow! ow!'

'There!' gasped Jimmy Silver, 'Now let's hear anything more about your planning, and we'll give you the same again.'

'And harder,' said Raby.

'Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!' Lovell rubbed his head, and glared at his chums, 'You cheeky asses—you silly fatheads—you—you—you—wow! wow—'

Lovell looked, for a moment or two, like charging at his chums, and hitting out right and left. But they were so obviously ready to resume the banging process, that he stalked out of the study instead, still rubbing his head: and retired to hall to tea, like Achilles to his tent.

Having thus made it clear what they thought of Lovell and his planning, Jimmy Silver and Co. supposed that they had heard the last of it. Which only showed that even yet they did not quite know their Arthur Edward.

CHAPTER VII

TRYING IT ON!

'PLEASE, sir——.'

'Well?'

Richard Dalton shot that monosyllable at Lovell almost like an arrow. He had just told Rawson to go on con: and did not seem pleased to be interrupted by Arthur Edward Lovell.

Just lately, the end study were not in their form-master's good graces: Lovell least of all.

That affair in lock-ups on Monday evening had not pleased Mr. Dalton. Mr. Manders had made a tremendous fuss, demanding condign punishment for the culprits. Dalton had had to admit that it was a quite serious matter. Boys of his form had broken House rules, and one of them had squirted a Modern prefect with ink. It was very annoying to Dalton, who did not like complaints from the Modern side about his boys. Since the occurrence, Dalton had had a somewhat grim eye on Jimmy Silver and Co., and three members of the quartette realised that it was only prudent to walk warily for a time. But it did not occur to Arthur Edward Lovell to follow the excellent example of Agag of old, and walk delicately! This was the time Lovell had selected for a new stunt!

The sharp monosyllable, and the penetrating eye of Richard Dalton did not discourage Lovell. His plans, as he had told his friends, were made: all that remained was to carry them out. That was the matter now in hand.

'Please, sir, I've left my book in my study,' said Lovell, 'May I go and fetch it?'

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome glanced at one another. They had fancied that banging Lovell's head on the study door had done the trick. Now they realised that it hadn't!

'Your book, Lovell?' repeated Mr. Dalton, frowning.

'Yes, sir, my Virgil.'

Lovell was, of course, speaking the truth. He had left his book in his study—intentionally. He had debated whether to make it a forgotten book or a running tap! But Morny had got out of the form-room a few days ago by leaving a tap running, so Lovell decided on the book.

'May I go and fetch it, sir?' asked Lovell. He half rose.

'You should not have forgotten your book, Lovell,' said Mr. Dalton.

'Oh! No, sir! Yes, sir! I—I left it in my study—.'

'You will take fifty lines for forgetting your book, Lovell.'

Lovell breathed hard. It was, perhaps, worth fifty lines, to get out of the form-room and snoop the key of Monsieur Monceau's study door. But it was very annoying.

'And you need not fetch your book,' added Mr. Dalton, 'You may use the next boy's.'

Lovell sat down again.

He rather wished now that he had made it a running tap! But it was too late! He was the richer by fifty lines, and as far away from Mossoo's study key as ever.

Rawson went on con while Lovell sat thinking it out. Other fellows in the Classical Fourth were grinning.

Most of them knew why Lovell had left that book in his study. Lovell's remarkable plans for cutting Extra were not a secret. He had told a dozen fellows at least what he was going to do. It would have been more prudent to say nothing. But silence was never one of Lovell's gifts.

Mornington winked at Erroll, who smiled. Tubby Muffin gave a fat giggle. Peele and Gower and Townsend and Topham grinned at one another. Richard Dalton gave his class a sharp glance, guessing that something was 'on'.

Jimmy Silver's feeling was one of relief. But that did not last. He had little doubt that ere long Lovell would be 'at it' again. Banging his head had evidently not had the hoped for effect of knocking any sense into it.

Mr. Dalton's frown died out as Rawson put up his con. Rawson was always good in class, and really saw something in the *Æneid* more than perplexing tosh. Then Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were put on in turn, and each acquitted himself pretty well. They had worked hard in prep to that very end. All three hoped that Lovell would not be put on. Lovell had hardly looked at his prep in the study, his powerful mind being occupied by other and weightier matters. If a good con was one way to Dalton's good graces, Lovell was not likely to find that way easy. But Dalton evidently had a special eye on the end study now, for after Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, he rapped out:

'Lovell!'

By that time Lovell had thought it out. Time was getting on, and he had to snoop Mossoo's key while Mossoo was in his class-room with the Modern ticks. After Mossoo came out it would be difficult, if not impossible.

'If you please, sir—!' said Lovell.

'You will go on, Lovell. You may use Oswald's book.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! But—.'

'I have told you to go on, Lovell,' said Mr. Dalton, with a deep rumble in his voice.

'Yes, sir! But—but I—I've got rather a headache, sir—it had rather a knock on a study door yesterday—may I go and ask the matron for something for it, sir?'

Possibly Lovell had, lingering in his somewhat thick head, a reminiscence of the bang on the door of the end study the previous afternoon. If so, he remembered it rather too late for it to be of any use.

'You may go to the matron, Lovell—.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir—.' Lovell rose.

'After you have left the form-room—.'

'Oh!' Lovell sat down again.

'And if you put forward any further pretexts for getting out of class, Lovell, I shall cane you.'

'Oh!' gasped Lovell.

It looked as if Dicky Dalton guessed that he had some secret and surreptitious reason for wanting to get out of the form-room during form!

Possibly Mr. Dalton might have swallowed the head-ache, but for the forgotten book. But he really could not be expected to swallow both, one after the other!

'You will now construe,' added Mr. Dalton.

There was no help for it. Lovell had to abandon his designs on Monsieur Monceau's study key, and concentrate on Virgil, with the aid of Dick Oswald's book. It was rather unfortunate, in the circumstances, that he had been too busy the previous evening to look at his prep. Prepared Latin did not come easy to Lovell. Unprepared Latin left him stranded. And Richard Dalton did not seem in a mood to pass over a very bad con with tolerance. He had been known to smile at Lovell's howlers. He did not look like smiling now.

'Where do I go on?' Lovell whispered, as he took the book from Oswald. He had not even been listening: his mind being full of planning.

'From "concurrere virgo,"' whispered Oswald.

Lovell stared at 'Haec dum Dardanio Aenene miranda videntur,' and wondered dizzily what it might mean if indeed it meant anything.

'You are wasting time, Lovell,' said Mr. Dalton, ominously.

'Oh! Yes, sir! I—I'm just going on—,' stammered Lovell.

'Construe at once.'

'Oh, certainly, sir! While—while—.'

'Go on!'

'While—while—while—!' stammered Lovell. Dum, at least, was no mystery to him. But the rest seemed wrapped in mystery.

'I am waiting, Lovell,' said Mr. Dalton, still more ominously.

'While—while—while Aeneas was seen in Dardania—!' ventured Lovell.

'Oh, crumbs!' groaned Jimmy Silver.'

There was a titter in the form. Even Tubby Muffin grinned.

Lovell got no further with his con. At that point Mr. Dalton seemed to have had enough.

'That will do, Lovell!' he rapped.

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

'You will stay in after the form and write out the lesson.'

Arthur Edward Lovell collapsed. So far from getting out of the form-room during class to snoop Mossoo's key, he was not even getting out of the form-room after class—till he had written out the lesson! It really looked as if Lovell, like so many planners, had a technical hitch somewhere in his planning.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVELL IN LUCK!

JIMMY SILVER and Co. were waiting for Lovell, in the quad, when at length he emerged from the House. It was close on dinner-time when Lovell was through, and he looked tired and peeved when he came out.

He gave his friends a glum look.

'Rotten luck,' he remarked. 'Better luck next time, though.'

'There's not going to be a next time,' said Jimmy Silver, 'Now, Lovell, old man, you've got to listen to reason.'

'Mossoo went to his study after getting through with the Modern set,' said Lovell, unheeding, 'He's there now. But later——'

The three had been discussing the situation, while Lovell was writing out the lesson in the form-room. They were going to give Arthur Edward a heart-to-heart talk. But it did not look as if the reception would be good!

'You're not going to play the goat with Mossoo's study key,' said Jimmy, 'We've landed enough trouble to go on with.'

'And some over,' remarked Raby.

'Have a little sense,' urged Newcome.

'I'm playing cricket this afternoon,' answered Lovell, stolidly, 'That's fixed, and settled, like the laws of the Thingummies and What's-his-name's.' Probably Lovell was referring to the Medes and Persians.

'Listen to me,' said Jimmy, as patiently as he could, 'We've got to toe the line, see? A chap like Morny thinks he can carry on just as he likes at school, but we've got more sense—some of us, at least. It's pretty tough to be out of the House match to-day——'

'Too tough for me,' said Lovell.

'But it can't be helped—.'

'I fancy it can! I've planned—.'

'Never mind that! We know all about your planning, and what happens when you set it going. Now, this is our line,' said Jimmy, 'Next week there's the School match with St. Jim's. We've simply got to play in that, if it can be worked. And the only way is to toe the line, and give Dicky a chance to come round.'

'That's the big idea,' said Raby, with a nod, 'No kicking over the traces—no rows and rags—.'

'Specially no rags on beaks,' said Newcome.

'Dicky may come round, if we give him a chance, on a big occasion like St. Jim's day,' explained Jimmy, 'But the only way is to give him a chance—to toe the line and make him see that we haven't set up to be trouble-hunters like Morny. Instead of inking pre's and sneaking beaks' keys, Lovell, you can slog at prep and put up a good con, see?'

'You won't put Dicky in a good temper, by telling him that Aeneas was seen in Dardania, when he wasn't!' pointed out Newcome.

'Your con this morning was rottener than Tubby's,' said Raby, 'Instead of "while these wonders were seen by Dardanian Aeneas," you told Dicky that Aeneas was seen in Dardania—.'

'Near enough, as far as I can see,' grunted Lovell.

'That's not very far, then,' said Jimmy, 'Now, you see the idea, Lovell—we've all got to play up, and be good—awfully good—until after St. Jim's day. Model school-boys, in fact.'

'We can keep it up for a week,' said Raby.

'And that's that!' said Newcome.

Lovell looked at them, evidently unconvinced. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, would no doubt have felt the strain of being model schoolboys for a whole week. But they were prepared to face it. Lovell did not seem to be.

'That's all very well,' he said, 'I know we've got to play in the St. Jim's match next week. But sufficient for the day, you

know! The point is, that we've got to play in the House match to-day.'

'We can't!'

'If I get Froggy safely locked in his study——!'

'Are you still thinking of that?' hissed Jimmy.

'Of course.'

Words, evidently, were wasted on Lovell. Perhaps there was room in his powerful intellect for only one idea at a time. And his present idea was playing in the match with the Moderns that afternoon, by hook or by crook. The programme drawn up by the Co. was really the only practicable one in the difficult circumstances. But their arguments glided off Lovell like hail off glass.

Three fellows looked at Lovell with very expressive glances. There was no study door at hand, on which to bang his obstinate head. They were considering whether to duck that obstinate head in the fountain, when the dinner-bell rang.

'Oh, come on,' said Jimmy, 'He can't play the goat during tiffin, at any rate. We'll talk to him afterwards.'

They joined the crowd heading for hall. Lovell followed them, slowly. No doubt he was thinking out plans. And a sudden gleam came into his eyes, at the sight of Monsieur Monceau going into hall with Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth. He paused. After all, a fellow could be late for tiffin!

It was not till they were seated at the Fourth-form table, that Jimmy Silver and Co. noticed that Lovell had not followed them in.

Jimmy watched the door anxiously, hoping to see Lovell come in. Mr. Dalton, at the head of the table, frowned as he noted that Lovell was late. Dalton's opinion was that he had had enough bother with that member of his form.

Lovell was five minutes late. But he came in at last, with a bright and cheery countenance.

'You are late, Lovell,' rapped Mr. Dalton.

'Sorry, sir——.'

'You will take fifty lines.'

'Oh! Very well, sir.'

Lovell went to his place, and sat down, not apparently much dismayed by fifty lines being added to the fifty he had acquired in the form-room that morning. Weightier matters than lines were in Lovell's mind.

He winked at Jimmy as he sat down. Jimmy responded with a glare that was almost ferocious.

'What have you been up to?' he muttered.

Lovell smiled.

'I've got it!' he whispered.

'Mossoo's key?' breathed Jimmy.

'What do you think?' grinned Lovell.

'You're not going to lock him in!' hissed Raby.

'Ain't I just!'

'And give him the trouble of getting out of the window?' inquired Newcome, in a sarcastic whisper.

Lovell chuckled.

'He won't get out of the window in a hurry, as I've jammed a wedge between the sashes,' he answered.

'Oh, crumbs!'

Evidently, Lovell had done some planning! It had occurred to his mighty brain that Mossoo, if he couldn't get out of his study by the door, might try the window! And he had put paid to that!

'Better shut up,' added Lovell, 'If Dicky gets a word of this, there'll be a fearful row.'

On that point there was no doubt: no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever. The Co. duly shut up. It was impracticable to slay Lovell in hall, under the eyes of all the Classical side at Rookwood. So there was nothing they could do! Lovell sat triumphantly through dinner, with the key of Monsieur Monceau's study in his trousers' pocket.

But when they went out after dinner, Jimmy and Raby and Newcome gathered round him. They were not losing sight of Lovell while he had that study key in his pocket. In the quad they surrounded him.

'Hand over that key!' said Jimmy, tersely.

Lovell shook his head.

'Leave it to me,' he said, 'You couldn't get away with locking him in, Jimmy—leave it to me.'

'You howling ass, I'm not thinking of locking him in. I'm going to put the key back, you blitherer.'

'Don't be an ass, if you can help it.'

'Will you hand over that key?' hooted Raby.

'No, I jolly well won't.'

'Bag him!' said Jimmy, 'Up-end him and drop the key out of him.'

'What-ho!'

'Look here—!' roared Lovell, as his friends seized him, and proceeded to up-end him, 'You fatheads—leggo—I tell you—.'

'Shake it out of him!'

'Oh! Ow! Leggo! I—I—I—wow! Urrggh! Leggo!' spluttered Lovell, 'You mad asses, I tell you—wow!'

'Stop that, you young sweeps.' Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding up, with a frowning brow, 'Stop that horseplay at once! I've a jolly good mind to whop you all round! Stop it.'

The Rookwood captain's word was law to the Lower School. Jimmy Silver and Co. had to stop it, at once. They stopped it—and Lovell backed away from his friends, panting for breath, and considerably dishevelled—but with Mossoo's key still safe in his trousers' pocket.

Bulkeley gave the Co. a warning frown, and walked away: and Lovell promptly departed from the spot. He cut into the House: to keep at a safe distance from his chums, until the moment came for using that key. Jimmy Silver and Co. looked at one another in exasperation.

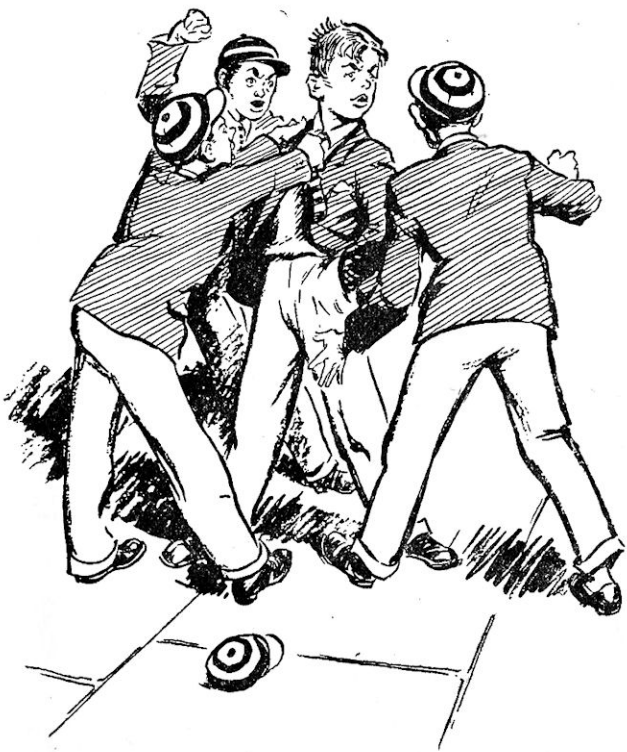
'That does it!' said Jimmy.

'Bother Bulkeley! If he knew—.'

'That ass—that chump—that fathead—!'

'All that, and more,' sighed Jimmy Silver, 'Goodness knows what will happen, if he does lock Froggy in. Oh, the ass!'

Valentine Mornington came up to the three.



In the quad they surrounded him

'What were you ragging Lovell for?' he asked.

'He's bagged that key——.'

Mornington laughed.

'Well, let him rip! If he does get away with locking Mossoo, in, you fellows can play cricket, and chance it. It's worth a whopping, to beat the Moderns.'

'We couldn't get by with it,' said Jimmy, shaking his head.

'Chance it,' said Morny.

Jimmy shook his head again, and the Co. went into the House to look for Lovell. They found him sitting in the window at the end of Masters' passage. It was a safe spot: for it was quite impossible to collar him, and shake the key out of him, within sight and hearing of the masters' studies.

Lovell gave them a cheery grin.

'Come out into the quad, old chap,' said Raby.

'I'll watch it.'

'Well, look here, come up to the study,' said Newcome.

'Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly!' grinned Lovell.

'Look here, old chap——!' pleaded Jimmy Silver.

'Wash it out,' said Lovell.

Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, came along. He glanced at the juniors, went into his study and shut the door.

'Lovell, old man——!' murmured Jimmy.

'Shut up. Here comes Mossoo.'

Little Monsieur Monceau passed up the passage. Like Greely, he went into his study and shut the door. Lovell's eyes gleamed.

'For goodness sake, Lovell——!' breathed Jimmy.

'Leave it to me,' said Lovell.

And as there was no help for it, the Co. had to leave it to Lovell. And Lovell, with the cheery confidence of a fellow who had no doubt that he knew how, waited and watched for the coast to be quite clear, before tiptoeing along the passage to lock the door of the French master's study.

CHAPTER IX

NO EXIT!

MONSIEUR MONCEAU snored gently.

Seated in his armchair in his study, the little plump French gentleman had been reading 'Le Petit Journal' since dinner. He nodded over 'Le Petit Journal,' his eyes closed, his chin drooped, and he slumbered.

Mossoo was accustomed to a comfortable forty winks after dinner. The room was warm, with the summer sunshine streaming in at the window. Most study windows were open that day: but not Mossoo's. Mossoo's was as hermetically sealed as if it were mid-winter. Mossoo did not share the taste for fresh air of the barbarous English. The warmer and stuffier and fuggier his study was, the better Mossoo liked it. It would have made a British head ache: but Mossoo found it very happy and comfortable.

The 'Petit Journal' dropped on his knees. His eyes shut, and his mouth slightly opened. He slumbered, and at intervals snored.

A slight sound at his door did not disturb him.

Mossoo, coming back to his study, had never thought of noticing that the key was gone from the inside of the lock. Had he noticed it, he certainly would not have expected that key to be inserted in the outside of the lock, by a member of the Classical Fourth.

But that was precisely what was happening.

In the mists and shadows of sleep, Monsieur Monceau remained happily unaware that the key had been turned on the outside of his study door, and that he was now locked in his study.

He did not know that the key was slipped back into the trousers' pocket of a Classical Fourth-former, after having been turned on him. Neither did he know that that Classical Fourth-former, after a cautious glance up and down the passage, produced a squirt from his pocket.

That squirt, a couple of days ago, had contained ink, with dire results to Knowles of the Sixth, and the Fistical Four of the Fourth. Now it contained liquid cement!

Carefully and cautiously, the contents of the squirt were squeezed into the keyhole, filling the inner spaces of the lock with a sticky fluid that, given time, would set as hard as the old oak of the door itself.

If somebody came along with a spare key later, that somebody was going to have an uphill task in unlocking the door!

Unconscious of all this, Mossoo slumbered on, in his armchair, dreaming of la belle France, and a little whitewalled house among the vineyards, where he was going to live happy ever after, when he had saved enough to escape from the foggy island in which he now sojourned.

Not till two o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower, did Monsieur Monceau's eyes open, and he sat up and yawned.

Extra was at two. That day Mossoo was detention master. So it behoved Mossoo to get along to his class-room without delay. He was often a few minutes late for a class, and was accustomed to find his flock waiting for him at the door of his class-room.

He yawned a second time, rose from his armchair, and trotted across the study to the door. He turned the handle, and naturally expected the door to open. It did not open.

'Mon Dieu!' murmured Mossoo.

He tugged.

The door seemed to be jammed somehow. He had never known it happen before. It was annoying: as he was already a few minutes late. He tugged and tugged.

'Ma foi! Qu'est-que-c'est, donc!' exclaimed Mossoo, tugging, 'Vat is ze mattair viz zat door, zen?'

He gave a terrific wrench at the door.

But it booted not! The door remained immovable. And then, for the first time, Monsieur Monceau noticed that the key was missing. Then he comprehended.

His sallow face flushed with wrath.

A French master's life at Rookwood was not a bed of roses. Not infrequently, Mossoo was ragged. If he found oil in his inkpot, or the leaves of a text-book gummed together, he bore it with philosophical patience, expecting nothing better of barbarous islanders. But this was the limit! This was unendurable! This was intolerable. He was locked in his study unable to emerge and take his class in Extra School. Mossoo was not often wrathful: but he was wrathful now, and getting very excited.

'Allons donc! Suis-je prisonnier?' he ejaculated, 'Ces garçons! Mon Dieu, zat somevun come and open a door.'

Thump! thump! thump!

Mossoo had to get out of that study. He could not get through the keyhole. Indeed, a gnat could not have got through the keyhole, which was clogged with liquid cement, slowly setting. He thumped on the door to attract attention.

Thump! thump! thump! Bang!

Footsteps in the passage! It was the heavy tread of the portly Greely, master of the Fifth. There came a tap at the door. Then the handle turned from outside: but the door did not open.

'Is anything the matter, Monsieur Monceau?' called out Mr. Greely.

'Is anyzing ze mattair?' spluttered Mossoo, 'Mais oui! mais oui! I am lock in a study viz myself, isn't it? Mon bon Greely, zat you unlock ze door.'

'Did you say locked in your study!' ejaculated Mr. Greely.

'Mais oui! mais oui! Je suis prisonnier ici! Zat you unlock la porte.'

'But there is no key here, Monsieur Monceau,'

'Ciel! Vat to do, zen?' exclaimed Mossoo, 'Somevun lock me in a study viz myself, and take away ze clef. Vat to do?'

'Outrageous!' exclaimed Mr. Greely.

'Mais que faire—vat to do?' shrieked Monsieur Monceau, 'It is necessary zat I go to my class, isn't it? Je dis, vat to do?'

There were more footsteps and voices in the passage. Other beaks were gathering on the scene.

'Whatever is the matter here?' It was the voice of Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell.

'My dear Greely, what—?' This was the master of the Third.

'Amazing!' said Mr. Greely, 'Someone has locked Monsieur Monceau in his study, and taken away the key.'

It was just as well that Mossoo could not see through solid oak. Otherwise he would have spotted three beaks smiling. It was, of course, outrageous: and they sympathised with poor Mossoo, and very properly condemned the action of the ragger who was ragging him. Nevertheless, they smiled. A master who let himself be ragged evoked compassionate amusement among beaks who were made of sterner stuff.

Thump! thump! thump!

Mossoo was getting wildy excited. He thumped on the door again and again. Then he gave a sudden howl, and ceased thumping, to nurse a damaged knuckle.

'My dear Monsieur Monceau, it is useless to beat on the door, as it is locked,' said Mr. Greely, 'Do you think you could leave your study by the window, with my assistance from outside.'

'Wow! ow! wow!'

'Eh! What did you say, Monsieur Monceau?'

'Wow! I bang me ze finger—he is verree damage! Wow! Le doigt, he have one pain in him. Mais vous avez raison, Monsieur Greely—la fenêtre—c'est ça.'

'I will go outside and help you down,' said Mr. Greely.

Monsieur whisked across to his study window. Seldom, if ever, did he open it. But he was going to open it now—at least, he fancied so.

Mossoo could, of course, guess why he had been locked in his study. He had a numerous detention-class that afternoon: six or seven of the Fourth, half-a-dozen of the Shell, and some of the Third. Someone among those young rascals had locked him

in to make him late for Extra. Chatting at the class-room door was more entertaining than French verbs. It did not yet dawn on Mossoo that he was to be kept away from Extra altogether.

He shoved at the window-sash. It did not rise.

He shoved and shoved again. Outside, the portly form of Mr. Greely appeared, obligingly prepared to help Mossoo down from the rather high window. He expected Mossoo to have the window open. But it did not open.

'I am here, Monsieur Monceau,' called out Mr. Greely, 'If you will open the window, sir—'

'He do not open, sair! Je ne comprends pas! Zat vindow he is like ze door and he do not open viz himself!' wailed Monsieur Monceau.

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Greely.

'Aha! C'est fermé—fermé comme ça!' shrieked Mossoo, as he suddenly discerned the wooden wedge between the sashes.

He grabbed at the wedge. But he grabbed at it in vain. It was a peg of wood, sharpened at one end by Lovell's pocket-knife. It had been hammered down between the sashes, with hefty smites of Mossoo's poker. It was far beyond the power of human fingers to pull it out. Only a powerful pair of pincers in a sinewy hand could have shifted it.

Mossoo gave almost a yell of rage.

'Je suis prisonnier, donc! I am a prisoner in a study viz myself! Zere is no to get out! Allons donc! Vat to do—vat to do?'

Mr. Greely could not answer that question. So far as he could see, there was nothing to be done. He stared up at the study window, within which he could see Monsieur Monceau, red with wrath, gesticulating frantically, almost dancing. Rookwood fellows gathered round, to gaze up also. Most of them were grinning, as if they saw something of a comic nature in a French master being locked in his study, unable to escape by door or window. And Mornington of the Fourth, after grinning up at the window, hurried away to carry the glad tidings to the little crowd waiting at the door of the French class-room.

CHAPTER X

CRICKET!

'COME on!' said Lovell.

To which his three friends, replied, in unison:

'Fathead!'

They were in the crowd at the door of the French master's class-room. Extra was at two: and at two, they had turned up with the rest. Lovell, certainly, was there, only to get his friends away. Lovell was thinking of cricket, not of French grammar or translating the *Henriade*. Having done his full work at Mossoo's study, Lovell considered that the coast was clear.

More than a dozen fellows were there—the Fistical Four, and Townsend and Topham and Peele, of the Fourth: Smythe, Tracy, Howard, and several other Shell fellows: Pipkin and Wegg of the Third. For various sins of omission or commission, they had all been given Extra. And all of them, undoubtedly, would have been very glad to dodge the same, on a glorious summer's afternoon. Only Lovell, so far, was thinking of doing so.

Lovell was impatient.

'For goodness sake, come on,' he urged, 'I tell you, Mossoo won't be coming along to take Extra. Dicky Dalton's on Big Side playing cricket with the Sixth. Safe as houses! Come on.'

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome could only reiterate 'Fathead!' A reply which did not satisfy Lovell, and which did not even seem to him veracious. Lovell did not know that he was a fathead.

'Hallo, here's Morny,' said Newcome, as Valentine Mornington came on the scene, 'What are you grinning at, Morny?'

Mornington chuckled.

'You fellows can chance it,' he said, 'Mossoo's locked in his study. He can't get out of the window—it's wedged or something. No good stickin' here.'

'Oh, gad!' exclaimed Smythe, of the Shell, 'Froggy locked in his study! Who the dooce locked him in?'

'Some person or persons unknown,' grinned Morny.

'Good man, whoever he was,' said Tracy.

'Yes, rather,' said Adolphus Smythe, 'Jolly good man! But they'll get another key an' let him out, you know.'

'Hardly,' said Lovell, 'I believe the man who locked him in squirted liquid cement into the lock. They won't turn a key in it in a hurry.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from all the crowd booked for Extra.

'I say, sure of that?' asked Howard.

'Quite!' grinned Lovell.

'Then I'm jolly well off! They can't expect us to stand around waitin' for Froggy if he ain't coming.'

'No fear,' said Tracy. 'We're off!'

'Mizzle!' said Adolphus Smythe.

And the three Shell fellows, grinning, walked off together. Pipkin and Wegg of the Third exchanged a glance, and sidled away.

The detention crowd was already melting! Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked at one another uncertainly. Jimmy shook his head: but Raby and Newcome were evidently inclining to Lovell's view now. After all, why stand around waiting for a detention-master who wasn't coming?

'Better chance it,' said Mornington, 'What's the good of stickin' here? Stumps pitched at two-fifteen, you know.'

'I'm chancing it, at any rate,' said Lovell, 'If you fellows funk it, stick here and be blowed.'

'The other chaps are going, Jimmy,' said Raby.

'They haven't got to worry about the St. Jim's match next week,' said Jimmy.

'Oh, blow the St. Jim's match next week!' hooted Lovell, 'Can't you think about beating the Moderns to-day?'

Conroy, Pons, Van Ryn, and Oswald, all members of the Classical junior eleven, came up the corridor. They were full of the news.

'Lovell's done it,' said Conroy.

'Froggy's a fixture,' grinned Oswald.

'There'll be a terrific row about it,' said Van Ryn, 'But it's done, Jimmy. No good losing a chance like this.'

'Spot of luck, Jimmy,' said Pons.

Evidently 'Uncle James' of Rookwood was in a minority! It was all the harder on Jimmy, because he was longing for cricket that sunny afternoon, and would have given almost anything to find himself on Little Side in flannels.

'Well, I'm going,' said Lovell: and with that, he went. Raby and Newcome gave Uncle James persuasive glances.

'May as well, Jimmy,' said Raby, 'After all, a fellow isn't bound to wait about for a beak if he doesn't turn up.'

'No—there's that,' assented Newcome, 'What's done can't be undone, Jimmy, and we want to play cricket, you know.'

'Come on, Jimmy!' urged Conroy.

'Get a move on, old man.'

'Nobody else is stickin' here,' said Mornington, 'Do you want to camp in this corridor like Robinson Crusoe on his island, all by yourself?'

'Look here, Jimmy, I'm going, and chance it,' said Raby.

'Same here,' said Newcome, 'Come on, Jimmy.'

Jimmy Silver was now in a minority of one! Even his own pals had gone over to the opposition. Certainly he did not want to stand at the door of the French class-room on his lonely own—like Robinson Crusoe on his island, as Morny put it. He hesitated.

'Look here,' he said, 'We can't get by with it.'

'Oh, rot!'

'Forget it, Jimmy.'

'Brace up,' said Mornington, 'You're not usually a funk, Jimmy. Everybody else is chancin' it.'

Jimmy flushed.

'I tell you, we can't get by with it, and it will only make matters worse,' he rapped, 'But if you're all against me, I give in.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Good old Jimmy!'

'Come on!'

'We'll get by all right!'

'Get a move on.'

It was said of old that wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it! The wisdom of Uncle James of Rookwood was evidently at a discount. Every other fellow was thinking only of cricket, postponing consideration of other matters till afterwards. Uncle James gave in, against his better judgment: and walked down the corridor with the happy crowd.

His face was a little clouded, as he went. It was true that fellows booked for a class were not bound to wait for ever if a master did not turn up. Had Mossoo been kept away by forgetfulness or any other normal cause, Jimmy would not have hesitated. But the fact that Mossoo was locked in his study made the whole thing too palpable. It would be obvious to everyone that he had been locked in for one reason, and one reason alone: so that he couldn't take Extra School. It was too much to expect to get by with such a stunt—at least, so it seemed to Uncle James.

But it was useless to worry about that, now that it was settled: and Jimmy cleared the cloud off his brow, as he went down to Little Side with the cricketers, and hoped for the best. Cricket was the order of the day now, and he concentrated on it.

The Moderns were ready. Tommy Dodd, and the rest, all looked very curiously at the Fistical Four.

'Weren't you fellows in Extra?' asked Tommy Dodd.

'Didn't they give you Extra for inking Knowles?' asked Tommy Cook.

'Faith, and have ye cut entirely?' asked Tommy Doyle.

'You'll get whopped, if you have,' said Towle.

Lovell smiled.

'Somebody's locked Froggy in his study,' he explained, 'There was nobody to take Extra, and a man's not bound to wait for ever. So here we are.'

'Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!' ejaculated Tommy Dodd, 'Who locked Froggy in, then?'

'Nobody knows,' answered Lovell, blandly, 'Seems to be a mystery.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I'm jolly glad you're here, anyway,' said Tommy Dodd, 'We don't want the Classics to make out that we beat them because they had to leave out some of their men.'

'Oh, you couldn't beat us anyhow,' assured Lovell, 'We'd beat the Moderns with Tubby Muffin and Towny and Toppy—.'

'You Classical ass!'

'You Modern fathead!'

'If you want your silly head punched, Lovell—.'

'I want all the punches that a Modern tick can hand out!'

'I'll jolly well—.'

'And I'll jolly well—!'

'Shut up!' roared Jimmy Silver. 'Have we come here to rag, or to play cricket?'

'Well, we've come to play cricket,' said Tommy Dodd, affably, 'You fellows have come to play your usual game—not what we call cricket!'

'Hardly!' grinned Tommy Cook.

'Look here, you Modern ticks—!' hooted Lovell.

'Shut up, Lovell.'

'Look here, Jimmy Silver—.'

'Put a sock in it, old chap,' said Jimmy, 'And let's get going. The sooner we wipe these Modern chumps off the earth, the better.'

'It would take you a couple of lifetimes,' remarked Tommy Cook.

'Faith, and then some,' said Tommy Doyle.

'Bow-wow!'

The two skippers tossed, and Tommy Dodd having the luck, and the wicket being perfect, he chose first knock. Jimmy Silver and Co. went into the field, and Dodd and Cook opened the innings. Conroy went on to bowl: and there was a buzz of glee among Classicals when Cook's sticks went down in the first over to the bowling of the Australian junior, after Tommy Dodd had scored a single. Doyle took his place, only to be dismissed by Jimmy Silver by a really brilliant catch in the field.

It was a good beginning for the Classicals: and even Jimmy Silver dismissed all thought of other things from his mind, and lived and breathed cricket. Lovell gave him a grin as the field crossed over.

'Better than Extra, what?' he said.

And Jimmy Silver nodded and laughed. There was no doubt that this was better than Extra—if it lasted.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEAD TAKES A HAND!

'NOM d'un chien!'

Dr. Chisholm frowned.

The Head was standing in Master's Passage, with a key in his majestic hand. That key was intended to open the door of Monsieur Monceau's study: the original key being missing. Mossoo, probably, did not know that the Head had arrived on the scene, or he would hardly have invoked the name of a dog! But poor Mossoo, by this time, was almost frantic.

Greely, Mooney, and Bohun were there. Carthew of the Sixth was there: the only Classical prefect who was not playing in the Sixth-form game on Big Side. They all looked properly solemn and serious. The Head, it was clear, failed to see anything comic in this occurrence, and so it was up to the Staff and his Prefects to fail to see anything comic either.

'Mon Dieu! Moi prisonnier ici! Nom d'un chien!'

Dr. Chisholm raised the key. Instead of inserting it in the lock he rapped on the door with it.

'Monsieur Monceau!' he rapped with his voice, after having rapped with the key.

There was a startled exclamation within the locked study, as Mossoo was apprised of the august presence of his Chief.

'Ciel!'

Mossoo did not call upon the name of a dog again! Such expressions were not for such majestic ears!

'Kindly calm yourself, Monsieur Monceau!' said Dr. Chisholm, icily.

'Mais oui, mai oui!' gasped Mossoo, 'Je vous demande pardon, monsieur, mais vous savez—je suis prisonnier, et—'

'I understand perfectly, Monsieur Monceau,' said the Head, coldly, 'I have a key here, and am about to unlock the door.'

'Allons! Ça va très bien, monsieur.'

Dr. Chisholm inserted the key in the lock. He inserted it about half-an-inch. Then it stopped dead.

'I think the lock is blocked up somehow, sir,' ventured Mr. Mooney.

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips.

He made an effort to drive in the key. But Lovell's liquid cement was setting hard by that time. The key simply wouldn't go in.

The headmaster withdrew it, with a spot of colour in either cheek. Dr. Chisholm was a somewhat severe gentleman at the best of times. Now it was plain that his wrath was rising. He was quite calm: he was never anything but icily calm. But the compression of his lips, and the glint in his eyes, boded ill for somebody.

'Is it known who played this absurd prank, Mr. Greely?' he asked.

'No one seems to know, sir,' answered the Fifth-form master. 'I was drawn here some time ago by Monsieur Monceau knocking on the door. That was the first I knew of it.'

'Monsieur Monceau!'

'Sair!'

'Do you know who has locked your door and taken away the key?'

'Mais non, je n'en sais rien, sair! I know nozzing! I find zat he will not open, and I find aussi zat ze vindow he will not open, and zat is all zat I know.'

'Some mischievous junior—!' ventured Mr. Bohun.

'No doubt!' said the Head. He reflected for a moment. 'Is there a detention class this afternoon, Mr. Mooney?'

'Undoubtedly, sir! Some boys of my own form are in Extra School— or at least would be in Extra if Monsieur Monceau were there to take them.'

The Head's face grew grimmer.

'Carthew!'

'Sir!'

'Please ascertain whether Monsieus Monceau's detention class is now in his class-room, or waiting for him there.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Carthew disappeared. The Head waited with majestic calm for his return. He was back under a minute.

'There is nobody at the French class-room, sir,' he reported.

'I imagined not!' said Dr. Chisholm, grimly, 'The boys should be there, waiting for Monsieur Monceau. I think we need seek no further for the reason why he has been locked in his study. Monsieur Monceau!'

'Sair!'

'It will take a considerable time for this lock to be forced. Probably it will be necessary to send to Latcham for a lock-smith.'

'Mon Dieu!'

'In the meantime, obviously you cannot take your class. Kindly give me a list of the boys in Extra School.'

'Mais la porte est fermée, sair—ze door he is shut—.'

'It is possible to pass a paper under a door, Monsieur Monceau!' said the Head, with icy patience.

'Mais oui! Mais oui! I do not zink of zat! Toute de suite, sair.'

Dr. Chisholm, still calm, still majestic, waited, till a paper was pushed under the study door. Carthew stooped, picked it up, and handed it to the Head. The headmaster glanced down the list.

'Carthew! I shall be obliged if you will collect all the boys named in this list, and direct them to go to the French class-room,' he said.

'Immediately, sir.'

Carthew hurried away with the paper.

'Obviously,' said the Head, 'It is some boy under detention who has played this disrespectful and inexcusable prank on Monsieur Monceau. As Monsieur Monceau is unable to leave his study at present, the detention class must be taken by

another master. If one of you gentlemen is prepared to sacrifice his leisure—'

Not one of the gentlemen was prepared to sacrifice his leisure, if he could help it. But it was not possible for any member of the Staff to confide that circumstance to the Chief. Greely, Mooney, and Bohun all suppressed their inward feelings, and answered in a sort of chorus:

'Certainly, sir.'

'Thank you!' said the Head, majestically. Apparently he was leaving it to the gentlemen to decide among themselves which was to be the happy victim. 'It is, of course, impossible to allow any boy to escape detention by such a prank as this. Monsieur Monceau!'

'Sair!'

'At what hour was Extra School this afternoon?'

'Deux heures, sair—two of ze clock.'

'It is now a quarter to three,' said Dr. Chisholm, 'Probably it will be three o'clock by the time all the boys are in Extra School. An hour has been lost. I suggest prolonging Extra School for one hour to make up for lost time.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Mooney.

'Oh, quite!' said Mr. Bohun.

'Precisely,' said Mr. Greely.

With a slight bow to those members of his Staff, the Head sailed majestically away. Not till they were sure that he was safely out of hearing, did Messrs. Greely, Mooney, and Bohun, begin to argue which of them was to take Extra—this proving rather a long and warm argument. Within the study, after the Head was gone, Monsieur Monceau, doomed to remain a prisoner till a locksmith came, called again and again on the name of a name of a dog—but in suppressed tones, lest the Head should come back. And Carthew of the Sixth, with a grin on his face, roamed over Rookwood, rooting out one hapless junior after another whose name was on the list, and despatching him promptly to Extra.

CHAPTER XII

CALLED TO ORDER!

'GOOD old Jimmy!'

'Bravo!'

'Well bowled, Jimmy!'

The House match was going strong. Wickets were going down, but runs had been going up: especially from Tommy Dodd, who was in tremendous form. The other two Tommies had been despatched runless to the pavilion: and several more Moderns had followed them by this time: but the junior captain of Manders' House was still hitting in great style: till at length Jimmy Silver put paid to his account. Raby and Rawson and Erroll and even Conroy had been unable to touch his sticks: but Jimmy Silver got him at last: and the Classical crowd round the field roared applause.

'Well bowled, Jimmy!'

'Oh, good man, good man!'

Tommy Dodd gave a sad glance at a wrecked wicket, and started homeward! But the Moderns at the pavilion gave him a cheer as he came. Tommy had piled up forty off his own bat, and altogether Manders' were seven down for sixty: so Tommy had done well for his side.

'All over bar shouting,' Arthur Edward Lovell declared, 'The tail won't take us long! And then——!'

Lovell had great anticipations of 'then.' In everything, as well as in cricket, Arthur Edward had a quite sublime confidence in himself. But in cricket his confidence really was justified. Some fellows said that he had a lot of luck at the wickets. If so, his luck was fairly constant: for there was no doubt that

Lovell was a tower of strength on the Classical side when he had the willow in his hands.

He was simply yearning to wield the willow, and knock the Modern bowling all over the field: as Cassius had an itching palm for gold, so Arthur Edward Lovell had for the cane handle of a bat. And it was coming soon—as soon as the Modern 'tail' had been disposed of by the Classics. Or was it?

Leggett was next man in for the Moderns. Leggett was a rabbit, and not expected to live while Jimmy Silver finished the over. But Leggett was granted an unexpected respite.

'SILVER!'

Hardly anyone had noticed Carthew of the Sixth coming from the direction of the House. But they had to notice him now, as he stepped on the field, and shouted to the captain of the Fourth.

Jimmy gave a little jump.

Cricket had banished everything else from his mind. Everything else came back with a rush as Carthew shouted.

'Oh!' gasped Jimmy.

'A pre——!' breathed Raby.

'Oh, scissors!' muttered Newcome.

Lovell stared at Carthew. He wondered why he was interrupting the game. He did not, for the moment, connect Carthew with Extra. The others guessed at once.

Carthew, heedless of the juniors' game, came directly towards the pitch. There were howls among the onlookers as he did so: Carthew was not popular with the Lower School: and even Bulkeley would have had inimical looks if he had interrupted a game.

'Keep off the grass!'

'Get out!'

'Go home, Carthew!'

And there was a good deal of hissing. Carthew did not heed it.

'Silver! Raby! Lovell! Newcome!' he rapped.

'What's up, Carthew?' asked Jimmy, quietly. He knew well enough.

'Look here, we're playing cricket, Carthew,' bawled Arthur Edward Lovell, belligerently, 'Can't you see we're playing cricket?'

'All four of you go into Extra!' said Carthew, 'Head's orders.'

Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath. He had said that the truants could not get by with it. He had hoped that they could: but he had not believed so. Now the worst of his misgivings was realised. The juniors had cut Extra—and the four were called to order, in the middle of a game.

It was utterly dismaying.

'Look here, Carthew——!' hooted Lovell. Only into Lovell's solid brain had it not yet penetrated that the game was up.

'That will do!' said the prefect.

'We're playing cricket——.'

'I can see that! You've cut Extra to play cricket—I've got your names in this list! Go back to the House at once.'

'The beak didn't turn up for Extra!' said Lovell, 'A man's not bound to wait if his beak doesn't turn up.'

Carthew laughed.

'And he didn't turn up, because he was locked in his study!' he said, 'Some of you will get a flogging for this. Cut off.'

Lovell's face set obstinately.

Carthew turned to walk away, nothing doubting that the quartette would follow. Jimmy Silver called to Mornington.

'You'll have to take over, Morny, and carry on,' he said, 'Better speak to Tommy Dodd. You can field substitutes.'

Valentine Mornington whistled.

'We want batsmen and bowlers, to beat the Moderns,' he said, 'But we'll do our best, Jimmy! What a rotten sell!'

Snort, from Lovell.

'Look here, I'm not going,' he said, 'I'm going to bat in our innings, see? Carthew can go and eat coke.'

'Head's orders, ass!' snapped Newcome.

'I'm not going!' said Lovell, obstinately. 'Why, it would have been better to stand out of the match, than to chuck it now, and leave substitutes. It's made matters worse, not better.'

'Only just thought of that?' asked Jimmy Silver, sarcastically, 'For goodness sake don't jaw, Lovell. Come on, and let the game go on.'

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome started. Arthur Edward Lovell remained where he was. His wonderful plan had fallen down. It had succeeded so far as to make matters worse, and then petered out. It was a severe jolt to the master-planner of the end study. He was in a mood to defy a Sixth-Form prefect, and remain on Little Side playing cricket in spite of everything and everybody.

Jimmy looked round.

'Are you coming?' he called.

'No!' hooted Lovell.

'Do you want Carthew to take you by the neck?'

'I'll jolly well punch his face if he does.'

'You howling ass!' exclaimed Mornington, 'Get off the field. Do you think we want the Head here next, calling you off?'

'Blow the Head!' snorted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver made a sign to Raby and Newcome, and they turned back. Whether Carthew would have taken Lovell by the neck, or gone off and reported to the Head that he refused to obey orders, they did not know: but they knew that it was not going to be put to the test. When a fellow reached the pitch of 'blowing' the Head, it was time for action.

Lovell's three chums gathered round him, grasped him, and walked him off. Arthur Edward went protesting and resisting, but he went. Carthew, looking round, stared at them as they came off the field.

'Leggo, you ticks!' Lovell roared, 'I tell you I'm not going!'

'What's that?' exclaimed Carthew, 'Any more of that, Lovell, and I'll give you six before you go into Extra. Go and get changed at once.'

Carthew had his official ash under his arm. It dawned even upon Arthur Edward Lovell that there was nothing doing. If Carthew told him to bend over and take six, he had to bend over and take six: or else go up to the Head! With deep feel-

ings, Lovell made up his mind to it: and the Fistical Four went off together.

The cricket match continued—with good fortune for the Moderns. Generally the rivals of Rookwood were fairly evenly matched: but with four good men taken out of the Classical side, the odds were too heavy. Tommy Dodd and his merry men carried on in great style: Morny and his not-so-merry men fought an uphill fight—down on both innings, and finally beaten by a hatful of runs. Which was the final happy outcome of the master-planning of Arthur Edward Lovell.

CHAPTER XIII

NOT POPULAR!

EXTRA, that afternoon, was not enjoyable.

Seldom, if ever, was Extra enjoyable. But on this occasion it was less so than ever.

Lovell fumed like a suppressed volcano. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, dragged away from the cricket, and leaving matters on the field worse than if they had never started, were resigned but dismal. And every other man in Extra was in an extremely disgruntled state.

Extra would have been from two to four-thirty. But as it was an hour late, it was booked to last from three to five-thirty. Fellows who had supposed that they had got off Extra, were faced with an additional hour of it to make up for lost time.

Even that was not the worst. It had fallen to Mooney, master of the Shell, to take them. Mooney, naturally, did not like it, and was in a cross temper, and signified the same in the usual way.

And there was even worse than that. With Mossoo, the class would have done French, which was bad enough, and the tedium would have been relieved by a little mild ragging of the patient little French gentleman. But with Mooney it was Latin, which in the universal opinion was infinitely more putrid than French: and Mr. Mooney was not to be ragged, ever so mildly. Mooney had a cane on his desk, and his expression indicated that he was prepared to use it, if not actually keen so to do!

The fact that Monsieur Monceau was locked in his study all this while was no comfort. The detention class would rather have had Mossoo than Mooney, since they had to have some-

body. They would rather have had French than Latin. They would rather have finished at four-thirty than at five-thirty. They were all feeling like kicking the unknown person who had caused all the trouble by locking Mossoo in. And some of them knew who it was, and cast inimical glances at Arthur Edward Lovell.

Even Lovell realised that his wonderful plan had been a complete wash-out. He had not foreseen the Head's intervention—though really, he might have. He sat in Extra with a gloomy brow, nothing doubting that the Classics were losing the House match, for lack of those mighty swipes with the willow that he had intended to supply.

A disgruntled class and a disgruntled master got through Extra somehow, and the welcome chime of half-past five came at last. Mooney dismissed the class, glad to be done with them: and the class crowded out, glad to be done with Mooney.

The Fistical Four went out into the quad. There they met Valentine Mornington: already changed, a sign that the match was over.

'How did it go?' asked Jimmy.

'How did you expect it to go?' grunted Mornington, 'Licked to the wide! The prize idiot of yours ought to be lynched.'

'Look here—!' hooted Lovell.

'Oh, go and eat coke!' said Morny, and he walked away.

Lovell, breathing hard, looked at his chums.

'That cheeky tick's making out that it was my fault,' he said.

'Isn't it?' snapped Newcome.

'Fathead!' said Raby.

'Ass!' said Jimmy.

Lovell gave them a glare, and tramped away. The company of his chums did not seem to afford him any satisfaction at present.

He tramped under the old Rookwood beeches, with his hands showed deep in his trousers' pockets, and a frown on his brow. He was indignant. Things hadn't worked out quite as planned—Lovell admitted that. But he had done his best in difficult

circumstances, he considered, and this was the thanks he got! Pipkin and Wegg of the Third came up to him under the beeches. Lovell hardly glanced at them. Small fry of a fag Form were beneath his notice. But the fags had something to say, and they said it. Both of them had suffered under Mooney and Latin.

'Look here, Lovell——!' began Pipkin.

'Oh, get out!' snapped Lovell.

'I heard a man in the Fourth say that it was you locked Froggy in,' said Wegg.

'I said get out!' growled Lovell.

'Well, was it?' demanded Pipkin.

'Find out!'

'That means that it was,' said Pipkin, 'Nice for us, wasn't it, having old Mooney instead of Froggy, and sticking in Extra till half-past five!'

Lovell turned a disdainful back.

The next moment he regretted it. Pipkin made a sign to Wegg, and they charged suddenly, getting Lovell in the back. Taken by surprise, the Fourth-former went headlong, sprawling on hands and knees.

In a split second, Pipkin and Wegg were running for their lives! They had vanished before Lovell scrambled up, red with fury.

'Oh!' gasped Lovell.

He glared round for Pipkin and Wegg. Space had already swallowed them. Lovell, breathing hard, dusted his hands, and the knees of his trousers. He resumed his walk under the beeches, his frown darker than before. He could hardly believe that Third-Form fags had had the nerve to barge him over! But they had!

'Oh! Here you are, Lovell!'

Smythe, Tracy, and Howard of the Shell came up. Apparently they were looking for Lovell. Now they had found him.

'Is it true you're the man who locked Mossou in?' asked Adolphus Smythe.

'A good many fellows are saying so,' said Tracy.

'What about it?' asked Howard.

'Oh, give a chap a rest!' exclaimed Lovell, irritably, 'And don't jaw that kind of thing where a pre can hear you, either.'

'We're not givin' you away to the pre's,' said Smythe, 'But we're jolly well goin to let you know what we think of you for landin' us with Mooney instead of Froggy.'

'Look here——!' roared Lovell, as the three Shell fellows closed in on him.

'Collar him!'

'Bag him!'

'Bump him!'

Smythe and Co. did not barge and run, like Pipkin and Wegg. They collared Arthur Edward Lovell, and swept him off his feet.

Lovell hit out furiously. He could have handled Adolphus Smythe or either of his comrades quite easily. But the three of them were too many for him. Lovell went down with a heavy bump.

'Give him another!'

'Go it!'

'There, you silly ass!'

Bump!

Lovell smote the cold, unsympathetic earth a second time, and spluttered. Apparently finding solace in it, Smythe and Co. heaved him up, and bumped him again, and yet again.

Then they walked away, leaving Lovell struggling for wind. It was some minutes before he was on his feet again, dusty and breathless. His feelings were deep as he went to the House at last, to go up to the end study for tea.

As he went up to the Fourth-form passage towards the end study, he passed Townsend and Topham in the doorway of No. 7. He was not surprised when they gave him inimical looks. He had realised by this time that he was quite unpopular with the fellows who had been in Extra.

'Oh, here's the silly ass!' said Townsend.

'Ditherin' chump!' said Topham. 'What the dooce did you lock Mossou in for, you fathead, and land us with that animal Mooney?'

'You ought to be jolly well booted,' said Townsend.

'Let's jolly well boot him,' said Topham, 'Here, Peele, ol' man, here's the silly ass who landed us on Mooney. Come an' boot him.'

Lovell continued his journey up the passage rather hastily. He tramped into the end study, and slammed the door.

His friends were there, and tea was ready. But all three gave him grim looks. His unpopularity evidently, for the moment at least, extended to his own study. Tea in that study was not the usual cheery function.

'They're making a fearful fuss about Mossou being locked in,' Raby remarked.

'Are they?' said Lovell, indifferently.

'Nobody knows who it was—yet!' said Newcome, 'I hear that Dalton, Mooney, and Bohun are putting their heads together—they jolly well know that it was some man in Extra that did it.'

'More than a dozen men in Extra,' said Lovell.

'It means a flogging if they get you,' said Jimmy.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

'Half the Lower School know who it was,' said Raby.

'They can give me away, if they like,' said Lovell, 'You fellows can go to Dicky now, if you like, and tell him.'

'Oh, don't be an ass!'

'Let's hope it won't get to the beaks,' said Jimmy, 'But—'

'But—!' jeered Lovell, 'I'm the only fellow in this study, or in the form, with brains enough to plan anything: and this is the thanks I get. I've a jolly good mind to wash my hands of the whole business, and let Tom Merry and his mob walk all over us next Wednesday.'

The three looked at him.

After what had happened that afternoon, they had not expected to hear of any more planning from Arthur Edward Lovell.

But it appeared that his powerful brain was still working on the same lines.

'But I won't,' added Lovell, 'We've got to play cricket next Wednesday, when the St. Jim's men come over. Somebody's got to think it out, and I'm the only man with the brains to do it.'

'Oh, gum!' said Raby.

'You're going to lock Dicky Dalton in his study next Wednesday?' asked Newcome.

'And have us walked off the field with a St. Jim's mob looking on?' asked Raby.

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet.

'It's no good talking to him—,' he began.

Lovell knew what was coming next! He jumped up, and jumped into the passage, before his pals could collar him and bang his head on the door.

That door closed after him with a resounding bang.

'If that ass plays the goat again—!' said Jimmy, with a deep breath.

'We'll scrag him,' said Raby.

'We'll lynch him,' said Newcome.

It was said of old that a prophet has no honour in his own country. It was certain that Arthur Edward Lovell, in his own study, was utterly unappreciated.

CHAPTER XIV

A HOT CHASE!

'KNOWLES!' said Jimmy Silver, as a voice floated over the hedge.

'That Modern swob!' grunted Lovell.

It was the following day, after class. Jimmy Silver and Co. were strolling down to Coombe in the pleasant summer afternoon.

They were all looking rather thoughtful.

At Rookwood, beaks and prefects were still seeking the unknown ragger who had locked Monsieur Monceau in his study on Wednesday. Not fewer than twenty or thirty juniors, Classical and Modern, knew who it was. But so far, no discovery had been made by those in authority, which was the important point. They hoped that no discovery would be made. Even Lovell realised that he did not want a Head's flogging, when he came to think of it.

But other thoughts were banished from the minds of the four, as the voice of Cecil Knowles, of the Modern Sixth, came to their ears, over the hedge of Pooter's Meadow. Knowles was rapping out, in angry tones:

'Let me pass, will you?'

Apparently there was a row on in Pooter's Meadow. The four Classical juniors came to a halt, looked round, and installed themselves at a gap in the hedge, to see what was going on.

Lovell grinned.

'That's old Pooter!' he said, 'He's after Knowles! Serve him jolly well right.'

'Will you let me pass, Captain Pooter?' came Knowles's voice again, angrier than before.

'No!' came another voice, 'I won't! I won't have schoolboys trespassing in my meadow! Go back.'

And the Fistical Four smiled.

Knowles of the Modern Sixth was standing on a grassy footpath, that crossed the meadow from the tow-path on the river, to Coombe Lane.

Directly in front of him, barring his way, stood a little stout gentleman in gaiters and a bowler hat, with a red face, and an up-raised hand.

It was rather amusing to the Classics. Knowles, a prefect, captain of his House, and a tremendous 'Blood,' evidently did not like being described as a 'schoolboy,' as if he were some negligible junior or inconsiderable fag. Captain Pooter addressed him, prefect and house-captain, as he might have addressed Pipkin of the Third, or Snooks of the Second.

It was an ancient dispute about that path across Pooter's Meadow. Everybody but Captain Pooter believed that it was a public right-of-way. Captain Pooter either didn't or wouldn't! It was quite possible that some fellows used that right-of-way as a short cut to the captain's fruit trees! Anyway, Captain Pooter had fenced up the stile that had once given access to it from the lane—though that had had the result of various gaps appearing in the hedge soon afterwards! He had been known to chase small boys out of the meadow with a big stick. Indeed, Jimmy Silver and Co. had once or twice had a brush with the angry captain, when taking a cut across the meadow to save time. Now he had fallen in with Knowles of the Sixth, in the middle of the meadow: and was treating him as he might have treated some urchin from the village: which was more than enough to rouse the wrath of a Rookwood prefect and house-captain.

'Look here——!' snapped Knowles.

'I said go back!' snapped Captain Pooter.

'I'm walking across to the lane.'

'You're not! I won't have my land crossed by mischievous schoolboys.'

Knowles almost choked. Prefect, house-captain, righthand man of Manders—a mischievous schoolboy!

The Fistical Four chuckled. They were finding this quite entertaining.

‘By gum! I hope he’ll smack his head!’ murmured Lovell, ‘I’d jolly well like to see Knowles’ head smacked.’

It was quite a happy anticipation to Lovell. He was very shirty with Knowles. It was the fuss Knowles had made about being inked, that had caused so much trouble to Arthur Edward! Lovell, indeed, would have liked to smack Knowles’ head himself, had it been practicable to smack prefectorial heads.

‘Go back!’ repeated Captain Pooter. He was short as well as stout, and the Rookwood prefect almost towered over him. But he was a very determined old military gentleman, and he blocked Knowles’ way like a fierce bantam. ‘Not another step, my lad! Keep to public land.’

‘This is a public path!’ rapped Knowles.

‘I’m not arguing that with you!’ said Captain Pooter, ‘And I’ve no use for impudence from a schoolboy, either.’

‘I am a prefect at Rookwood!’ snapped Knowles.

‘I don’t care whether you are a prefect, or a consul, or a Roman Emperor!’ retorted Captain Pooter, ‘You’re not crossing my meadow.’

Knowles, still at a halt, eyed him savagely. He could have rolled the little stout captain out of his way like a barrel: but he hesitated to take such drastic measures. On the other hand, he certainly was not going to turn round and walk back to the river at the captain’s behest, like a scared little village urchin. That was miles beneath the dignity of a Rookwood prefect, Classical or Modern.

The Fistical Four, unnoticed in the thick hedge at a distance, looked on at the entertainment, wondering what the outcome was going to be. Knowles would not retreat and he could not advance without walking into the captain. Neither could he stay where he was for ever! Captain Pooter gave the Rookwood prefect a shove on the chest, to start him on his way back.

'Get out of it,' he said.

That was too much for Cecil Knowles. He was a head taller than the captain, and he was not to be shoved about by an irate little bantam, whom he could have picked up under his arm.

He grasped Captain Pooter by both shoulders with both hands, twirled him aside, and sat him down in the grass.

Then he walked on, leaving Captain Pooter sitting in the grass, puffing and blowing.

'Gad!' came a spluttering gasp from the captain. He struggled up, his face purple. Then he yelled:

'Caesar! Caesar!'

In the next field was the bungalow in which Captain Pooter dwelt. He was looking towards the bungalow as he yelled 'Caesar.' Jimmy Silver and Co. guessed that Caesar was a dog's name: Captain Pooter could hardly have been calling on any of the Twelve Caesars they had met in form!

From the next field came a loud bark. Evidently, Caesar was a dog, and he was answering promptly to his master's voice.

'Caesar!' roared Captain Pooter.

There was a volley of barking. Through an open gateway from the next field, a huge black mastiff came careering.

'Oh, my hat!' breathed Jimmy Silver. 'If that brute gets after Knowles—'

'Dangerous looking brute!' said Raby.

'Some teeth!' murmured Newcome.

'Look at Knowles!' grinned Lovell.

Knowles was glancing back, at the sound of barking. He gave a start, at the sight of the careering Caesar. He had handled the little captain easily enough: but a huge mastiff, with a set of teeth that looked like a shark's was a very different proposition. Knowles gave the mastiff one look, and quickened his pace. He disdained to run—if he could help it! But he walked very quickly—very quickly indeed.

'Fetch him, Caesar! Get him, Caesar! Bite him, Caesar!' shouted Captain Pooter.

With an absolute cannonade of furious barks, Caesar rushed after Knowles.

'Phew!' murmured Lovell.

The Fistical Four were not smiling now. The dog was so huge, so well supplied with teeth, and looked so fierce and dangerous, that they were alarmed for Knowles.

Knowles was also alarmed for himself. He gave another look back, and the colour wavered in his face, at the sight of Caesar charging after him across the meadow, Knowles was no funk: but bare hands were a poor defence against snapping teeth, and the mastiff was coming on furiously. Knowles' hurried walk changed into a run—and he ran hard for Coombe Lane.

After him tore Caesar.

Knowles put it on. He put on a pace he had seldom equalled on the playing-fields at Rookwood. He came sprinting desperately for the hedge on the lane. A fence blocked the exit from the meadow where once a stile had been—and Knowles had to pick a gap in the hedge. He picked the nearest, which was a few yards from the gap where the Fistical Four were looking through. And he just did it! Caesar's teeth were snapping only inches behind him, as he plunged headlong through briar and bramble, and panted out into Coombe Lane.

But he did not stop there.

Caesar, with a terrific bark, plunged through the hedge after him. Knowles headed for Rookwood as if he were doing the School 100-yards. Jimmy Silver and Co. packed in the hedge, watched him as he went, breathlessly. Knowles passed without seeing them, and flew on. Caesar passed them a split second later, going all out in pursuit of Knowles. They disappeared up the lane, both going strong.

'Oh, scissors!' breathed Jimmy Silver.

'Never fancied a Modern tick could run like that!' chuckled Lovell, 'He could beat old Bulkeley on the cinder-path—with a dog behind him.'

Jimmy Silver glanced into the meadow.

Captain Pooter was walking away, towards the bungalow in the next field. He seemed content to leave Knowles to the tender mercies of Caesar. He disappeared from sight, and Jimmy frowned.

'The man must be crackers, to set a dog like that on a fellow,' he said, 'If Knowles doesn't get clear—.'

'He was going strong!' grinned Lovell.

The juniors stepped out of the hedge, and looked up the lane. Judging by Caesar's looks, the result would be serious, if his teeth established contact with the Modern prefect. And the result of that might be serious for Captain Pooter, too, who certainly would be called to account for setting on a ferocious dog, if harm came of it.

But Knowles, no doubt, reached safety, for a few minutes later, the juniors saw the big black mastiff come trotting back. It was a relief to them, Knowles, no doubt, was only a Modern tick: but they did not want even a Modern tick to be mauled by a fierce and powerful mastiff.

'He's all right,' said Jimmy, 'I daresay he got over a gate, or something. Oh, my hat! Look out!'

Caesar, as he spotted the juniors by the hedge, came at them with a rush. Perhaps he thought they had been trespassing in his master's meadow, like Knowles: or perhaps, having finished with Knowles, he sighed like Alexander for fresh worlds to conquer! Anyhow, he came at the Fistical Four, with a fierce bark, and a gleaming eye.

'Look out!'

'Dodge him!'

'Oh, crumbs!'

In a moment, or little more, the four juniors scrambled into a tree in the hedge of the meadow. They were only in time, for as they swarmed into the branches, Caesar arrived, below, and pranced underneath them, letting out volley after volley of barks.

'Oh, corks!' spluttered Lovell.

'Oh, scissors!'

'Bother the beast!'

'Hang on!' gasped Jimmy Silver. 'I don't like the look of those teeth! That old ass has gone home—he can't call him off! Oh, my hat! We shall have to stick here till the brute goes.'

They hung on to the branches, and stared down at Caesar. Caesar pranced, and barked, and glared up at them, with a display of really magnificent teeth. The more the juniors saw of those teeth, the less they liked the look of them. They were fairly 'tree'd': and could only hang on and wait for Caesar to go.

The drawback was, that Caesar showed no sign whatever of going!

CHAPTER XV

NOT DANGEROUS!

'THAT old ass——!' hooted Lovell.

'The thumping old donkey!' said Raby.

It was not a pleasant position for the Fistical Four of Rookwood. They clung on the branches, out of Caesar's reach, and watched Caesar, while Caesar watched them.

He had ceased to prance about and bark. He sat down under the tree, watching, apparently waiting for the Rookwood juniors to fall to him like ripe apples. Every now and then he gave a low, blood-curdling growl.

Jimmy Silver and Co. had heaps of pluck. They feared no foe. But they had no defence against rending teeth, if they came within Caesar's reach. And they wisely stayed out of his reach.

'That old chump——!' said Newcome.

They were referring to Captain Pooter. How any man could be ass enough, donkey enough, chump enough, to leave so dangerous a dog loose, was hard to understand. If that savage looking brute had mauled Knowles, his owner would have been answerable to the law: and if he mauled any of the juniors, there was not even the excuse that they had been trespassing in the meadow. Apparently the captain allowed that ferocious mastiff to wander about, heedless of the harm he might do.

'I'm fed up with this!' growled Lovell, 'We can't stick here.'

'Better, I think,' said Jimmy.

'That brute's not going.'

'He doesn't look like it,' admitted Jimmy, 'But——.'

'We might tackle him, all together,' said Lovell.

'Like to try bare hands against teeth like that?' asked Newcome. And Lovell, after another glance at the teeth, decided that he wouldn't.

'But look here, how long have we got to stick in this tree?' exclaimed Lovell, angrily, 'That old duffer must be crackers, I think. The brute might go for anybody coming along the lane.'

Jimmy Silver climbed a little higher in the tree, and looked out through the foliage, towards the bungalow in the field. It was at some distance, on the other side of the wide meadow. He hoped to see Captain Pooter in the offing, within reach of a shout. But Captain Pooter was not to be seen. No doubt the captain would have called the dog off, had he known how the schoolboys were tree'd. But he did not know, and there was no means of conveying the information to him.

'See anything of him?' asked Lovell, as Jimmy rejoined his chums.

'No: he seems to have gone in.'

'The potty old ass! We can't stick here.'

'Blessed if I know what else we can do,' said Jimmy. 'Mind you don't slip off that branch, Lovell—you don't look too safe.'

Snort, from Lovell. He was sitting on a low branch, holding on with one hand to a higher one. His position looked a little precarious: but Lovell seemed quite satisfied with it.

'Think I'm ass enough to slip off?' he asked, 'I'm all right! I—Oh!' Lovell gave a sudden gasp, as he slipped.

'Look out!' yelled Raby.

'Lovell, old man—'

'Oh, crumbs!'

Evidently Lovell was ass enough to slip off the branch, for he slipped off it! His friends grabbed at him, too late. Lovell tumbled downwards, clutching wildly at bough and branch as he tumbled. His clutch closed on a low bough, and it broke under his weight, and he shot earthward.

'Oh!' gasped Jimmy.

Lovell landed in the grass under the tree, within three feet of Caesar's jaws! He landed sprawling, winded, and gasping.

'Come on!' panted Jimmy.

Caesar, who had been sitting and watching, leaped up, barking furiously. The three juniors scrambled down through the branches. The mastiff's teeth were no more attractive than before: but they could not leave Lovell to it: they had to help him, and tackle the brute together now, whatever the outcome.

But they could not have reached Lovell before Caesar's teeth reached him, had Caesar been disposed to use his teeth.

Unexpectedly, Caesar was not so disposed.

He pranced round Lovell, as he sat dizzily up, but showed no desire whatever to bite or maul. His barks came like machine-gun fire: but it was evident that his bark was worse than his bite.

One after another, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome dropped from the branches to join Lovell. Caesar greeted them with fierce barking. But he did not attack them. Barking seemed to be Caesar's long suit.

Lovell staggered up.

'Look out, you men,' he gasped, 'Run for it.'

'Hold on!' exclaimed Jimmy.

'Run, I tell you—.'

'Nothing to run for, fathead! He's all right.'

'Wha-a-t?'

Lovell turned back. Actually, the juniors would have had no chance to run, had Caesar been the ferocious brute he looked.

But he wasn't! His looks, his barks, his growls, were all quite terrifying. But his actions were quite peaceable.

Caesar was no biter! He was a terrific barker, but bites were not in his line at all.

He pranced round the juniors. He barked. He showed his teeth. His eyes gleamed. But he did not come within three feet of them. No doubt, had they run, he would have chased them merrily, as he had chased Knowles. As they did not run, he contented himself with fireworks.

'Oh!' gasped Raby, 'It's all right! I thought—.'

'I—I thought—!' panted Newcome.

'Oh, my hat!' stuttered Lovell, 'We—we—we've been sticking up in that tree, and—and he never meant to touch us at all.'

Jimmy Silver laughed.

He had wondered how Captain Pooter could be such an ass, such a donkey, such a chump, as to leave so dangerous a brute loose. The explanation was simple—the brute was not dangerous.

He looked it—but it was only a matter of looks!

In fact, it was quite clear now that Caesar was a perfectly harmless bow-wow, who had no idea whatever of using that magnificent set of teeth on anything but a bone! No doubt his master had trained him to put up a terrifying show to scare trespassers out of the meadow. But the captain was not, after all, ass enough, donkey enough, or chump enough, to let loose an animal that might have bitten wayfarers. Caesar was all bark and no bite—which was a tremendous relief to the Fistical Four of Rookwood.

Indeed, as his prancing and barking had no effect on the juniors, now they knew they were not going to be bitten, Caesar seemed to tire of it, and lay down again.

Jimmy Silver and Co, looked at him, and at one another. They could not help feeling a little sheepish.

'Tame as a rabbit,' said Raby.

'Good tempered old buffer, really,' said Newcome,

'I say, we were rather asses to stick up in that tree.'

'Well, we never knew,' said Jimmy, 'He looks as if he would take a chop or a steak out of anybody. Knowles thought so.'

Lovell chuckled.

'Ha, ha, ha! Fancy Knowles bolting like that, from a dog that wouldn't have touched him! Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, we bolted fast enough, up that tree,' said Jimmy, 'And it was the sensible thing to do, too. Oh, my hat! He looks as if he's going to sleep now.'

Caesar's eyes had closed.

The juniors could not help laughing. It was an absurd end to an alarm. Knowles, certainly, had fled for his life, in the full belief that a dangerous animal was after him. The Fistical Four

had made a very unexpected discovery. Lovell even ventured nearer to Caesar, and patted him on the head!

Caesar opened his eyes and looked at him. But he did not even bark. He seemed in fact to like it, and Lovell patted him again.

A distant voice was heard calling:

'Caesar! Caesar!'

The mastiff trundled to his feet, plunged through the hedge, and disappeared into the meadow. Jimmy Silver and Co., grinning, resumed their interrupted walk to Coombe. And they sagely resolved to say nothing of their peculiar adventure, at the school. Caesar looked so fierce and dangerous, that it had been only sensible of Knowles to run, and of the juniors to take to the tree. Still, as Caesar had turned out to be a harmless old 'buffer,' there was an element of the comic in the affair, which would have made the other fellows laugh. So they dismissed the matter: little dreaming, just then, how they were to be reminded of it, later.

CHAPTER XVI

LOVELL—AS USUAL!

'TOE the line!' said Jimmy Silver, in the end study that evening.

Lovell grunted.

'Think it will be any good?' he demanded. 'You've said yourself that Dicky Dalton can't let us off, because old Manders would yowl, if he did.'

'Quite!' agreed Jimmy, 'But it's the only chance. If we're awfully, fearfully good for the next few days, Dicky may stretch a point on St. Jim's day—Manders or no Manders.'

Lovell gave another and still more emphatic grunt. The prospect of being awfully, fearfully good, for several consecutive days, did not seem to have a very strong appeal for him.

'Are we to let those Modern ticks brag that they beat us at cricket, without punching their heads?' he demanded.

'They did beat us at cricket—and punching their heads won't get us off next Wednesday,' answered Jimmy Silver.

'They didn't beat us,' hooted Lovell, 'Beating the Classical team without this study in it doesn't count. They make out that it does: and the best thing we can do is to lay for Tommy Dodd and his gang and sky 'em.'

'I said toe the line, and I mean toe the line,' said 'Uncle James,' 'You can sky all Manders House after next Wednesday, if you like. No more rags till then. Pile into your prep, and let Dicky have a good con from you—.'

'Br-r-r-r-r!' said Lovell. 'Look here, I've been thinking—.'

'For goodness sake,' exclaimed Newcome, 'Don't start that! You've got nothing to do it with, anyway.'

'If I don't do the thinking in this study, I'd like to know

who would!' jeered Lovell, 'We've got to play cricket next Wednesday. That's settled. I'd rather collar Dicky Dalton and head him up in a sack, than cut the St. Jim's match. I've got an idea——.'

'Boil it!' suggested Raby.

'I tell you I've got an idea——.'

'Keep it parked, and get on with prep,' said Jimmy Silver, 'You won't get Dicky in a good temper by skewing in con. Shut up, old man.'

Snort, from Lovell. Shutting up was not really in his line. However, he shut up, and the Fistical Four gave their attention to prep.

Raby and Newcome were heartily in agreement with 'Uncle James's' idea of placating Dalton by 'toeing the line,' and showing what really good, dutiful, and studious youths they were—with a view to getting off on St. Jim's day. They were not sure that it would work: but as there seemed no other resource, it was worth trying on.

Lovell was not keen. Any Modern allusion to the result of the House match inspired him with a desire to punch a Modern head. And nothing could inspire him with a desire to work hard in prep. He was willing to hand out a good construe, if that construe came along of its own accord, as it were. But swotting over Virgil was quite another story.

Still, he gave in, and worked with his chums that evening, and as they gave him all the aid they could, he looked like scraping through the next morning. But when Latin con was done, Lovell rose, regardless of another item that had not been touched.

'Where are you going?' asked Jimmy, as Lovell went to the door.

'Just going along to speak to Morny.'

From which Lovell's chums deduced that, as they would not give ear to Lovell's latest idea, he was going to let Mornington have the benefit of it.

'There's rep, you know,' said Jimmy, 'We have repetition to-morrow.'

'Blow rep!'

'Don't be an ass, Lovell,' exclaimed Jimmy, 'We get English Literature in third school to-morrow, and we've got to mug it up. Here's Shakespeare——.'

'Blow Shakespeare.'

'It's Julius Caesar——.'

'Blow Julius Caesar.'

'I tell you we've got to toe the line!' roared Jimmy.

'Oh, blow!'

Lovell came back from the door, exasperated and impatient. A jaw in Morny's study obviously attracted him more than preparing for 'repetition' in the English Literature class. But once more he yielded to the wisdom of Uncle James, and gave what attention he could to Julius Caesar: little as he appreciated that great work of the great bard.

'Do have a little sense, old chap,' urged Jimmy, 'Dalton's got his eye on this study. He's shirty with us. I believe he jolly well knows that it was one of us that locked Mossoo in yesterday. Nothing's come out, but he jolly well guesses. We've got to stroke him down the right way.'

'Br-r-r-r-r!' said Lovell, 'Well, let's have a shot at the tosh.'

Lovell did not find it easy to learn verse. He did not, in fact, find it very easy to learn anything. There were fellows in the Fourth, like Rawson, or Oswald, or Tommy Dodd, who revelled in Shakespeare, and asked nothing better than to stand up and thunder forth majestic lines. Lovell did not object to thundering forth, if it came to that: his objection was to learning the lines to thunder. He wasn't interested: and besides, he had so many other matters on his mind, having all the thinking to do for the end study!

He gave ten minutes to Shakespeare. That was rather a concession. Then he went on strike, as it were, and quitted the study, regardless of argument. After all, Dalton mightn't call on him for 'rep.' If he did, Lovell would do his best—and no fellow could do more!

Leaving Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome to give William Shake-

speare the attention which that great poet really merited, Lovell strolled along to No. 4 Study, where Mornington and Errol were at work.

Kit Erroll did not look too pleased when Lovell looked in: Erroll was a fellow who took his work seriously. But Mornington, glad of an excuse to 'chuck' it, gave him a welcoming nod. They proceeded to talk cricket, Lovell standing in the doorway, Morny sitting on the table, and Erroll putting in what work was possible in such difficult circumstances. Morny had heard that Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's were in great form: especially a chap named Wynn who was a tremendous bowler, and a man named Talbot who knocked up no end of runs, and a fellow named D'Arcy who looked like a tailor's dummy but was real mustard with the willow. Which interested Lovell ever so much more than William Shakespeare possibly could.

'All that means that they'll walk all over Rookwood next Wednesday, if we're bunged in Extra,' said Lovell. 'It simply can't be done! Dicky Dalton will have to think again, and I've got an idea—.'

'You and your ideas!' chuckled Morny.

'I've been thinking it out—.'

'Lockin' somebody in a study?' grinned Morny.

'That chicken won't fight twice,' said Lovell, 'But I can jolly well tell you this, I'm playing cricket on Wednesday, and if Dicky Dalton thinks I'm going to stick in Extra, why he's got another guess coming, and—.'

'Lovell!'

'Oh, jiminy!'

It was rather unfortunate that Lovell had not heard a foot-step in the passage, and did not know that Mr. Dalton was coming up from the landing, until he heard his voice.

He spun round, in Morny's doorway, in dismay.

Richard Dalton gave him a grim look. There was no doubt that he had heard Lovell's reckless words. Possibly he had heard Morny's too, and drawn his own conclusions therefrom. But Dicky Dalton was not the man to take action on words

overheard by chance. He made no allusion to what he had heard. He rapped out:

'You are out of your study in preparation, Lovell.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! I—I came along to speak to Mornington,' stammered Lovell.

'You will take a hundred lines, and return to your study at once.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

Lovell trailed back to his study. While Jimmy and Raby and Newcome were finishing their prep, Lovell was busy writing lines, and he was still writing lines when they went down. And he could not help realising that the prospect of getting off on Wednesday was now more dubious than ever!

CHAPTER VII

NO LUCK!

TOMMY DODD^o shook his head.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle gave him rather exasperated looks.

Generally, the three Tommies of the Modern Fourth pulled together in complete harmony. Tommy Dodd was acknowledged leader, and the other two Tommies followed his lead with unquestioning loyalty. Now, however, there seemed to be a rift in the lute: at least a difference of opinion.

It was morning break the following day, and the three Moderns were in the sunny quad—arguing. Arthur Edward Lovell, coming along, eyed them with a frowning brow. Lovell did not think much of Moderns, anyhow: and he was feeling sore over the House match. No doubt that Modern victory had been due, at least in part, to the fact that the Fistical Four had been 'bunged' in Extra. But while that was clear as the sun at noonday to every Classical junior at Rookwood, not a Modern admitted it. The Modern view was that they would have beaten the Classicals anyway, being better cricketers! As they made no secret of that opinion, there had been rather more than less rags and rows than usual, the last day or two, between Classicals and Moderns.

So Arthur Edward Lovell frowned at the three Moderns, who, deep in their argument, did not even glance at him.

'Now, look here, Tommy——!' said Cook.

'Yis, you look here bedad, Tommy,' said Doyle.

Tommy Dodd shook his head again.

'Rot!' he said. 'My dear man, we've got to beat St. Jim's next week, if we can: and that's what counts.'

'You'll skipper the team in a School match, if Jimmy Silver's out,' said Tommy Cook, 'And you've got to fill up the places with Modern men, see?'

'It's time Manders House had a real show, Tommy——.'

'We beat them in the House match——.'

'And we're better cricketers all round——.'

Tommy Dodd shook his head again. He was as keen and patriotic a Modern as any man in Manders House: but the School came first with Tommy Dodd. In a School match, the team was selected from both sides at Rookwood: and Classics and Moderns had to bury the hatchet, forget their rivalry, and remember only that they were Rookwooders, playing for Rookwood.

'If Silver's out, and I captain the team, I'm going to play the best men, and I don't care two hoots whether they're Classical or Modern,' said Tommy Dodd.

'That's right,' agreed Cook, 'But we've got the best men, see?'

'We beat them in the House match, didn't we?' said Doyle.

Tommy Dodd laughed.

'That ass Lovell made us a present of it,' he answered. 'Look here, I jolly well hope that Dalton will let Jimmy Silver off on Wednesday. That's what we really want.'

'We want more Modern men in the team,' hooted Cook.

'Bow-wow!' said Tommy Dodd.

'Look here——.'

'Yis, you just look here——!'

'We're better men all round——.'

'We can play their heads off——.'

'Manders House can simply walk over them——.'

'Easy as falling off a form——.'

'You silly Modern asses!' Arthur Edward Lovell broke in, with a sudden roar. This was much too much for his patience. 'You can't play cricket on the Modern side. All you can do is maths and stinks. If I were skipper, I wouldn't play one Modern against St. Jim's. You're no good!'

Lovell had a school edition of Julius Caesar in his hand. He

had been giving Julius the once-over in break, with a view to English Literature in third school. But he forgot that noble Roman in his wrath.

The three Tommies turned round on him.

'You stick to stinks and algebra,' went on Lovell, scornfully, 'That's your mark. Marbles is your game, if you want a game. You can't begin to play cricket!'

'Bump him!' said Tommy Dodd, tersely.

The three Tommies went into action at once. They collared Arthur Edward Lovell, swept him off his feet, and bumped him down in the quad. That was the only possible reply to his remarks, in the opinion of the Moderns.

Lovell landed hard on the quad, gasping. He dropped Julius Caesar: and Tommy Dodd picked it up, and rammed it down the back of his neck.

Then the three Tommies strolled away, to continue their argument elsewhere: leaving Arthur Edward sitting on the earth, gasping for breath. He was breathlessly struggling to his feet, when the bell rang, and Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came along from the tuck-shop, at a trot.

'What's the row?' asked Jimmy, pausing.

'Those Modern cads!' gasped Lovell, 'Ow! They've stuck my book down the back of my neck—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' roared Lovell, 'Look here, get it out for me, some of you, I can't get at it, and I can't go into form with a book down my back—.'

'You'll have to,' said Jimmy Silver, laughing, 'The bell's stopping. We can't be late for Dicky.'

'Look here—!'

'Can't be late, ass,' said Raby, 'Come on! Why the thump can't you keep clear of ragging with the Moderns for a day or two?'

'I tell you—.'

'Come on,' said Newcome. 'We're not going to be late!'

Three good boys raced for the form-room. Three members

of the Co. were still determined to be good, very, very good, with a faint hope that it might prove useful on St. Jim's day. Certainly they were not going to be late for class because Lovell couldn't steer clear of a row, and had a book down his back. They ran on regardless, and Lovell followed them, gasping for breath, and wriggling uncomfortably. It was not a large book: but any book down a fellow's back was extremely uncomfortable.

Lovell was last in the form-room. Mr. Dalton gave him a glance as he went to his place, including his friends in the glance. Good as three of them, at least, had been of late, there was no doubt that Richard Dalton was 'shirty' with the end study. He knew, or as good as knew, that that study was responsible for the locking-in of the French master: which, added to breaking House bounds, and inking a prefect, naturally did not raise them in the esteem of their form-master. Richard Dalton was a kind-hearted young man, and strictly just: but there was no doubt that he had a rather grim eye on the end study, these days. Perhaps he even guessed why three members of that study were being so very, very good of late, and doubted whether it would last!

His glance returned to Lovell, several times, as English Literature proceeded. At length he rapped!

'Lovell! Cannot you sit still?'

'Oh! Yes, sir,' stammered Lovell.

Really, it was not easy for a fellow to sit still, with a book poking in the middle of his back! Lovell was wriggling most uncomfortably. However, he tried hard not to wriggle. If there was anything in Jimmy Silver's idea of placating Dicky Dalton by good behaviour, Lovell was willing to give it a trial—according to his lights. He had even been mugging up Julius Caesar in break, with that end in view. But it was hard to keep still, with that book down his back.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were all called on for 'rep.' They acquitted themselves well, one after another, with a mollifying effect on Mr. Dalton. Lovell's turn came next.

'Ooooh!' gasped Lovell, as he rose. A corner of that wretched book had caught him under a rib, as he stood up. 'Ooooh!'

'What is the matter with you, Lovell?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir.'

'You will go on with Caesar's speech.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.' Lovell went on. But Lovell's memory for verse, especially blank verse, was never good: and a Modern bumping, and a book scratching and tickling his back, did not aid memory. Lovell's 'rep' was seldom satisfactory: and now he had no luck.

'Let me have about me men that are—are—are—are——.'

Lovell had quite forgotten the kind of men Julius wanted to have about him. He stammered.

'Fat!' whispered Rawson.

Lovell did not quite catch the word. But he thought he did, and went on brightly:

'Let me have about me men that are flat——.'

'Men that are what?' interrupted Mr. Dalton.

'Flat, sir.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Lovell!'

'Fat!' hissed Rawson.

'Oh!' Lovell got it this time, and re-started, 'Let me have about me men that are fat——.'

Lovell paused. He almost remembered that the next line was 'sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.' But not quite.

'Go on,' rapped Mr. Dalton.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' Lovell plunged on, getting as near as he could.

'Let me have about me men that are fat,
Weak-headed men, and such as sneak o' nights.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Fourth Form. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome glared at Lovell. All the other fellows chortled.

'That will do, Lovell!' snapped Mr. Dalton, 'You may sit

down. You may also write out Caesar's speech twenty times after class.'

Arthur Edward Lovell sat down. He gave his chums a reproachful look. This was what came of mugging things up and trying to please Dicky Dalton! Not even given a chance with his rep, and told to write out the tosh twenty times! From that moment Lovell made up his mind that being good was not a winner, and resolved to make no more efforts in that unaccustomed direction.

CHAPTER XVIII

UP TO TOMMY DODD?

'MANDERS could do something, if he liked.'

Lovell made that statement, in the end study, after tea.

His friends looked at him inquiringly.

'Manders!' repeated Jimmy Silver.

'Well, look at it,' said Lovell, argumentatively, 'We're bunged in Extra all through Manders. Dicky Dalton can't let us off, because Manders has his back up, and would make a fuss—might go to the Head. Now, why has old Manders got his silly back up to such an extent?'

'Because a potty fathead inked his precious prefect,' grunted Raby.

'That's all very well,' said Lovell, 'But I had six for that, and that washes out Knowles and the ink. As for our being out of House bounds on Monday, that's nothing to do with a Modern beak. Manders has got his back up because he was barged over that night, and he doesn't like being barged over.'

'I daresay that helped,' admitted Jimmy Silver, 'I suppose he put it all down to us.'

'Of course he did, and that's that,' said Lovell, 'Well, of course, we'd rather like to barge Manders—but we never did, did we?'

'What about it?'

'It must have been those Modern ticks who up-ended Manders, galloping about in the dark,' said Lovell.

'Most likely,' assented Jimmy, 'But what—?'

'Well, Manders puts it all down to us,' said Lovell, 'And we never did anything to him. If Manders knew that it wasn't us who barged him over, it would make a difference.'

'Um!

'Well, he jolly well ought to know,' declared Lovell, 'He could do something for us, if he liked. He might speak to Dicky.'

'Um!

'He's a sour old bean, but not bad really,' went on Lovell, 'I've heard Modern chaps say that he's just, in his own House. Well, it ain't just to be down on us, because men in his own House up-ended him in the dark. He can take it out of those Modern ticks and let us alone, see?'

Three heads were shaken.

It was very probable that the shock he had had that eventful night, by fellows rushing into him in the dark and bowling him over, had given an edge to Mr. Manders' wrath, and made him all the more emphatic in demanding condign punishment for the Classics—as no doubt that, as well as other things, had been put down to Jimmy Silver and Co.'s account, in Mr. Manders' mind. But it did not seem probable to the Co. that enlightening Mr. Manders on that point would produce anything in the way of useful results. The fact remained that Knowles had been inked: and that Sixth-Form prefects couldn't and mustn't be inked.

'You don't agree?' asked Lovell, sarcastically.

'Nothing in it,' said Jimmy, 'If you hadn't inked Knowles—.'

'Oh, give us a rest about that,' interrupted Lovell, 'Look here, Manders came down heavy, and jawed Dicky into coming down heavy too—but Dicky would let us off for a School match if he could. If Manders put in a word—.'

'He wouldn't,' said Raby.

'It would work the oracle, if he did,' argued Lovell.

'But he wouldn't,' said Newcome.

'Well, he might,' said Lovell, 'It's a chance, anyway. I'm pretty certain that it was being barged over that put his back up, chiefly. He ought to know that we never did it, and it might make a difference.'

'Well, we can't tell him,' said Jimmy.

'I know we can't, ass! But those Modern ticks can, and ought to.'

'Rot! What's the good of getting them a licking for nothing? If we'd been nailed for it, Tommy Dodd would have owned up like a shot. But we were nailed for inking Knowles—.'

'Do give a chap a rest about that!'

'Well, that's how it stands,' said Jimmy, 'Dicky Dalton may stretch a point next Wednesday, if we play up and toe the line—.'

'And give us a rest about that, too,' snapped Lovell, 'We've tried that—and a fat lot of good it was! Look how he got shirty this morning over my rep, when a fellow was doing his best—.'

'Your best is so jolly like any other fellow's worst,' sighed Newcome.

Lovell rose from the tea-table.

'Well, I think it might make a difference, if Manders knew,' he said, 'And I'm jolly well going to put it up to those Modern ticks. We're not going to lose cricket matches to save them from a whopping.'

'Look here, Lovell—.'

'Look here, you ass—.'

'Look here, you fathead—.'

But Arthur Edward Lovell did not 'look there.' Arthur Edward had thought the matter over, and was satisfied with his own view. He marched out of the study, leaving his friends—as he often did—in a state of exasperation.

Lovell walked over to Manders House.

He passed Knowles and Tresham of the Modern Sixth, going in. Knowles gave him an expressive glance. He had not forgotten the inky squirt of Monday evening. And Lovell, as he caught Knowles' glance, grinned. He had not forgotten Knowles' frantic flight from a harmless bow-wow.

Knowles did not seem to like that grin. He beckoned to Lovell.

'What do you want here?' he snapped.

'Just going to speak to Dodd about the cricket.'

'Well, you can speak to Dodd about the cricket: but don't come here grinning like a hyena, or you may get kicked—like that!' said Knowles.

'Wow!' gasped Lovell, jumping away actively from the Modern prefect's foot, 'Look here, Knowles—'

'That will do!'

Lovell went into Manders House breathing hard. He resisted the temptation to ask Knowles whether he had seen Captain Pooter's dog lately—a question that certainly would have earned him another kick. He went fuming up to Tommy Dodd's study: where he found the three Tommies at tea.

'Hallo, come in,' said Tommy Dodd, cheerily, 'Locked any beaks in lately?' And Cook and Doyle chuckled.

'Barged over any house-masters lately?' counterquestioned Lovell, with sarcasm.

'Don't yell, you Classical ass,' said Tommy Dodd, hastily, 'Think we want Manders to know about that?'

'I daresay you don't,' jeered Lovell, 'But I can tell you this, you Modern worms—it's up to you to own up.'

'No business of yours, is it?' asked Cook, staring at him.

'Yes, it jolly well is! We're bunged in Extra because of that, more than anything else—'

'Rot!' said Tommy Dodd, 'You've got Extra for inking a Modern pre, and serve you jolly well right.'

'Think you can ink our pre's?' demanded Cook.

'You'd jolly well ink 'em yourselves, if you dared,' retorted Lovell.

'Well, perhaps we would: but you Classical cads can't cheek Modern pre's,' said Tommy Dodd, 'If that's the lot, travel.'

'It isn't! I believe we might get off Extra next Wednesday, if Manders knew it wasn't us that barged him over that night,' said Lovell, 'That's what I've come to tell you. I think it's up to you to go to Manders and tell him.'

'And get six all round?' howled Doyle.

'You can't leave it on us,' said Lovell.

'It's not on you!' snapped Tommy Dodd, angrily, 'If it was, we'd own up like a shot, and you know it. You're nailed for inking Knowles—.'

'I'll ink him again if I get a chance. He kicked me when I came in,' said Lovell, 'But never mind Knowles now. I tell you I think we might get off Extra if Manders knew—.'

'Rubbish!'

'Well, I think—.'

'Oh, draw it mild,' protested Tommy Dodd, 'What's the good of telling us you think, when we jolly well know that you've got nothing to do it with.'

'You cheeky Modern worm—.'

'You silly Classical ass!'

'Are you going to own up to Manders?' howled Lovell, 'If you don't you're a measly funk, leaving it on us.'

'It's got nothing to do with it—'

'I think it has—.'

'And I tell you you can't think.'

'If you funk owning up—.'

Tommy Dodd rose to his feet.

'You said Knowles kicked you when you came in?' he asked.

'Yes, the Modern rotter.'

'Then we can't do better than follow his example, and kick you as you go out,' said Tommy Dodd, 'Go it, you fellows.'

'What-ho!'

'Hear, hear!'

It was not uncommon for Arthur Edward Lovell to put fellows' backs up. He seemed now to have put three backs up quite effectively in that study. Dodd and Cook and Doyle came at him in a bunch, and how many kicks he collected before he got out of the study Lovell never knew. In the passage, Towle and Fletcher and several more Moderns joined in, and Lovell had quite an exciting time before he fled down the staircase and escaped from Manders House. It was a rumpled and breathless Lovell that tramped back to the Classical side, in the worst temper ever.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVELL MEANS BUSINESS!

RICHARD DALTON looked round sharply, and frowned.

Second school, on Saturday morning, was geography: and in the pursuit of geographical knowledge, the two divisions of the Fourth Form were united in the form-room. So in the three-minute interval between first and second school, the Modern Fourth, who had been doing 'stinks' in the Lab, trooped into the Fourth-form room to join the Classical Fourth there. And as they went to their places, a very distinct interchange of whispers was heard.

'Modern cad!'

'Classical chump!'

'Who's a funk?'

'Oh, pack it up, you Classical fathead!'

'Lovell! Dodd!' rapped out Mr. Dalton.

Richard Dalton was, of course, aware, that the rivals of Rookwood School seldom met without an exchange of compliments. But the form-room was no place for such an exchange, in Richard Dalton's opinion.

'Lovell! Dodd! Each of you take fifty lines!' rapped Mr. Dalton.

After which, Lovell and Dodd exchanged no more whispers. But they exchanged glances during geography.

All three Tommies, in fact, looked at Arthur Edward Lovell as if they could have eaten him. They were feeling extremely sore. Lovell, for his part, looked at them with all the scorn and contempt he could screw up into his expressive countenance.

Lovell was sticking to his belief that if old Manders knew that it wasn't the Classics who had barged him, it would make

a difference. Dalton couldn't go easy with them because Manders was fierce about it. A word from Manders would be enough. That was Lovell's opinion, for what it was worth. In the opinion of the other fellows, it was worth nothing. But Lovell was not wont to submit to the judgment of others. He had complete faith in his own judgment. Lovell's fixed view was that it was up to Tommy Dodd and Co. to own up, and chance it.

Tommy Dodd and Co. naturally, differed. If the Classics had actually been nailed for that barge in the dark, certainly it would have been up to them. But they hadn't been: they had been nailed for inking Knowles. A licking all round for the three Tommies wouldn't make an atom of difference, in the opinion of the three Tommies. Likewise, they did not want a licking all round!

Lovell was determined to rub it in, and fairly make them own up. He hoped for good results therefrom. It was useless for Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome to point out that it was no good three fellows asking for a whopping for nothing. Lovell, as usual, knew best.

That afternoon the Fistical Four ought to be at the nets, getting into form to beat Tom Merry and Co. Instead of which, they were going into Extra: and even Lovell was not thinking of locking Mossoo in his study again. But if these Modern worms owned up to Manders, and Manders took a lenient turn, there was a sporting chance at least that things might be righted. Lovell was thinking much more of this than of geography, which was no doubt the reason why he informed Mr. Dalton, in answer to a geographical question, that Milan was the capital of Austria: an answer that did not seem to satisfy his form-master.

A little later a note was passed along the desks, while Mr. Dalton's attention was elsewhere, finally reaching Tommy Dodd.

The junior Modern captain unfolded it and glanced at it: and glared. It was in Lovell's rather sprawling hand, and ran: Modderns are all retched funks. Why don't you own up?

Spelling was not Arthur Edward Lovell's long suit.

Tommy Dodd breathed wrath. He folded up that note, dipped it into his inkpot, and screwed it up into a pellet. While Mr. Dalton, pointer in hand, was indicating something on the map spread over the blackboard, Tommy Dodd lodged the ink-ball on his thumb-nail, and projected it with his forefinger, with an accurate and deadly aim, at Lovell's scornful countenance.

The next moment there was a startled yell from Lovell.

He had not expected his missive to return in that manner: although really he might have!

Lovell, startled, jumped and yelled, with ink streaking his startled face. Mr. Dalton spun round.

'Lovell!' he almost roared.

'Oh!' gasped Lovell. He put his hand to his face, inadvertently turning the streaks of ink into an extensive smudge.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence in the class! Lovell, you have inked your face! I will not permit such buffoonery in form—.'

'Oh!' gasped Lovell, 'I—I—I—.'

'You appear to think it amusing to play the buffoon in form, Lovell!' thundered Mr. Dalton.

'Oh! No! I—I—I—.'

'Yesterday, in form, you persisted in wriggling like an eel. Now you have inked your face—.'

'I—I—I—.'

'You are, I think, the most obtuse boy in my form, Lovell. But even you should know better than to play a prank unworthy of a small boy in the Second Form.'

'But I—I—I didn't—.'

'I shall cane you, Lovell! Stand out before the form.'

'But I never!' yelled Lovell, 'I didn't! It was an ink-ball—.'

'What?'

'Somebody buzzed an ink-ball, and biffed me right in the phiz—.'

'In the what?'

'I—I—I mean, landed it in my face,' gasped Lovell.

'Oh!' Mr. Dalton realised that this sample of 'buffoonery' was inadvertent on Lovell's part. His eyes glinted over the form, 'Who threw that ink-ball at Lovell?'

Silence!

'Dodd!' rapped Mr. Dalton: no doubt remembering the exchange of whispers a little earlier, 'Stand up!'

Tommy Dodd stood up.

'Let me see your hands.'

A fellow could not knead an ink-ball without leaving traces on his fingers, which it did not require a Sherlock Holmes or a Ferrers Locke to detect. One glance at Tommy Dodd's fingers was enough for Mr. Dalton.

'Dodd! Did you project that ink-ball at Lovell?'

'Yes, sir!' sighed Tommy Dodd.

'You will take a hundred lines. Lovell, leave the form-room at once and wash your face.'

Lovell gave the Modern junior captain an inky glare, and went out of the form-room for a very necessary wash. He left the whole form grinning: and Mr. Dalton frowning. He came back with a face that was clean, but decidedly cross in expression.

As he went to his place, he contrived to pass near enough to Tommy Dodd to whisper: 'Modern funk! I'll punch your head after class.'

'Lovell!' rapped Mr. Dalton.

'Oh!' Lovell had not expected Dalton's ears to be so sharp. But Dicky Dalton was giving him special attention. 'Yes, sir.'

'What did you say to Dodd?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I mean, nothing much—.'

'Repeat your words to me at once.'

'I—I—I only said I'd punch his head after class, sir,' stammered Lovell.

'Quite so.' Mr. Dalton picked up the cane from his desk, 'You must contrive to understand, Lovell, that the form-room is not the place for such remarks. Bend over, Lovell, and touch your toes.'



There was a startled yell from Lovell

Lovell, with inexpressible feelings, bent over and touched his toes.

Whop!

'Wow!'

Lovell went to his place, full to the chin with suppressed wrath. But after that, he carefully ignored Tommy Dodd and Co. The form-room was, as Mr. Dalton had said, no place for House ragging: and with the aid of the cane, he had made that clear to Arthur Edward.

Lovell succeeded in suppressing his feelings, till the Fourth were dismissed in break. Then he had the satisfaction of yelling 'Funks!' as Tommy Dodd and Co. went down the corridor.

'Oh, shut up, Lovell, you ass,' growled Jimmy Silver.

'Rats to you!' retorted Lovell. 'They funk owning up, and I'm jolly well going to make 'em!'

'It wouldn't do any good if they did, fathead.'

'Well, I think it would!' said Lovell, 'And I suppose I know best!'

Lovell stated that as a self-evident proposition. Then he followed Tommy Dodd and Co. into the quad, to yell 'Funks' once more as they departed for Manders House.

CHAPTER XX

OWN UP!

TOMMY DODD pitched his books into a corner of his study, in Manders House, with a crash. Tommy did not seem in his usual sunny, cheery mood.

'The dummy!' he growled.

'We'll scrag him,' said Tommy Cook, in concentrated tones, 'Calling us funks—.'

'Sure we'll scrag him entirely, and then some,' said Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Dodd gave an angry snort.

'We'll scrag him all right,' he said, 'But that won't stop him making out that we funk owning up to Manders.'

'That wouldn't do anybody any good—.'

'I know it wouldn't! Lovell thinks it would. He fancies that if Manders knew it wasn't his gang that barged him over that night, he would go easier, and might speak to Dalton—.'

'Rot!' said Cook.

'Rubbish!' said Doyle.

'I know it's rot and rubbish,' said Tommy Dodd, savagely, 'Manders will give us six all round, and that's all the difference it will make. That won't get Jimmy Silver and his gang out of Extra. That blithering idiot Lovell thinks it might. Well, look here, we did barge Manders over that night—.'

'Sure we're not going to mention it to him,' said Tommy Doyle.

'We're not going to have that fathead calling us funks! I daresay that barge did make Manders a bit fiercer that night: and Dalton had to come down heavy or have him go to the

Head with a complaint. Look here, the long and short of it is, that that fathead Lovell makes out that we're leaving it on his gang, and that's not good enough.'

'The ass!'

'The spalpeen!'

'We can't leave it at that,' went on Tommy Dodd, 'I'm going to Manders. I'll jolly well show all that Classical crew whether I'm afraid to own up. I've no doubt Manders thinks it was that gang barged him. It won't make a pin's difference if he knows it was us: but no Classical is going to make out that we leave them to take our gruel.'

'But——!' said Cook and Doyle together.

'No need for you fellows to say anything,' said Tommy Dodd, 'It was I barged Manders over, and a licking for one is enough——.'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' snapped Cook, 'We're all in it together. Anyhow we fell on him after you toppled him over.'

'If you go, we go,' said Tommy Doyle.

'It's not necessary——.'

'Oh, rats!'

'Well, I'm going,' said Tommy Dodd, 'We've got to stop that ass Lovell crowing, and there's no other way. Bother him!'

'Blow him!'

'Bless him!'

Tommy Dodd went to the door. His comrades followed him. They had made up their minds to it: which would have been eminently satisfactory to Arthur Edward Lovell, had he known.

'Hould on, though,' said Doyle, 'Hadn't we better pack? Manders has a jolly heavy hand with a cane.'

Tommy Dodd sniffed. 'Packing' was beneath the dignity of the junior captain of the House.

'I'm not going to pack,' he snapped, 'Come on.'

'Hould on, I tell you! Wait a minute till I shove a sweater into me trousers,' protested Doyle. 'I know what Manders' swipes are like.'

'Rot!'

Tommy Dodd marched off. Cook followed him. And Tommy Doyle followed on, minus the sweater. None of the three looked very cheerful, as they arrived at their house-master's study door. A whopping from Manders was, no doubt, preferable to giving the Classics the slightest excuse for calling them funks. But it was not an enjoyable process.

'Come in!' rapped out Mr. Manders' sharp voice, as Tommy Dodd tapped at the door.

The three Moderns trailed into the study.

Mr. Manders stared at them, over his writing-table. Manders was a rather sharp, and slightly acid, gentleman, and not very patient. He had not the slightest idea why those three members of the Modern Fourth Form had called on him, and did not seem at all pleased to see them.

'What is it, Dodd?' he rapped.

'If you please, sir—,' stammered Tommy.

'Be brief!'

'It—it's about last Monday evening, sir—.'

'What? what?' exclaimed Mr. Manders, testily, 'What do you mean, Dodd?'

'It—it—it was us, sir!'

'I fail to understand you, Dodd! Make your meaning clear at once.'

'We were out of the House, sir.'

'What?'

'Of—of course we—we never meant to run into you, sir—!' gasped Tommy.

Mr. Manders sat bolt upright.

'What do you mean, Dodd? Some Classical boys rushed into me that night, running about the quadrangle in the dark—the same boys who made an outrageous attack on Knowles of the Sixth Form, with a—a squirt—.'

'It was us, sir! We—we were out, and—and we never saw you in the dark, and—and—and it was us, sir!'

Mr. Manders sat gazing at them. Evidently it had been fixed in his mind that the unrecognised juniors who had barged him

over, were the Classical juniors, one of whom had inked Knowles. It took him almost a whole minute to assimilate this. His brow darkened as he assimilated it.

Dodd and Cook stood waiting, in apprehensive silence. Doyle wished fervently that he had packed that sweater.

'Upon my word!' said Mr. Manders, at last, 'I certainly supposed that it was Silver and his friends who rushed into me, as they were out of their House. I was not aware that juniors of my own House had broken House bounds in lock-ups. Upon my word!'

He frowned portentously.

'I was knocked over, in the dark, and now it appears that it was by boys of my own House!' he rumbled.

'It was an accident, sir——.'

'We never saw you——.'

'Couldn't see a thing, sir——.'

'I have no doubt of that,' said Mr. Manders, much to the relief of the trio, 'I should hardly suppose that such an act was committed intentionally. Nevertheless, I was knocked over.'

They waited!

Mr. Manders' glance went to the cane that lay on the table. Tommy Doyle thought with deep regret of that sweater. But the Modern master did not reach for the cane.

'I shall say nothing about the accident,' said Mr. Manders, at last, 'That is in fact immaterial. But breaking House bounds in lock-ups is a serious matter, as you are well aware.'

The three Tommies looked as contrite as they could. Manders was not, as even Lovell acknowledged, really a bad old bean. He was just. An accident was, after all, an accident: and Manders let it go at that. No doubt, too, he was influenced by the circumstances that the three juniors had come to him and owned up of their own accord.

'I shall not cane you,' he went on.

Three faces brightened, and Tommy Doyle ceased to regret the sweater.

'You will be punished in the same way as the Classical

‘juniors who were out during lock-ups the same night,’ continued Mr. Manders.

Three faces fell.

‘You will go into Extra School for four half-holidays,’ said Mr. Manders, ‘I shall speak to Monsieur Monceau.’ He picked up his pen, ‘You may leave my study.’

Tommy Dodd and Co. stood as if rooted.

Manders was really letting them off lightly. He would not punish them more severely than the Classical juniors had been punished for the same transgression. That was just.

But it was something like the K.O. to the three Tommies. Four men were already out of the junior eleven for the St. Jim’s match. This meant that three more would be out! Rookwood would be playing St. Jim’s with a team largely composed of rabbits! They stood rooted and dumb.

‘Oh!’ gasped Tommy Dodd. He found his voice, ‘If—if you please, sir—.’

‘You may leave my study.’

‘Yes, sir! But—.’

Manders gave him a look. He was not accustomed to ‘buts’ from junior boys in his House.

‘Leave my study this instant, or I shall cane you in addition!’ he rapped. And three dismal juniors trailed out of the study.

In the corridor, they looked at one another, with eloquent faces.

‘Extra—next Wednesday!’ said Tommy Dodd, faintly.

‘No cricket!’ groaned Tommy Cook.

‘Faith, and we’ve done it now!’ mumbled Tommy Doyle.

They wandered dismally out into the quad. The bright summer sunshine was not reflected in their faces. Arthur Edward Lovell had had his way. He had fairly driven the three into owning up to Manders. It had not made matters better, as the cheery Lovell had calculated. It had made matters infinitely worse. The St. Jim’s match, already a dubious proposition, was a hopeless goner now; a walkover for Tom Merry and Co. when they came.

From the bottom of their hearts they wished they had never gone to Manders. They could have kicked themselves for having done so. Still more gladly could they have kicked Lovell. But they had done it now—and never in the history of Rookwood School, had three fellows felt so completely done.

CHAPTER XXI

THE K.O.

'WELL?'

Richard Dalton shot that monosyllable at Jimmy Silver almost like a bullet. His look was uncompromising.

Obviously, the end study was not in his good graces: in spite of the effort three of its members had been making for several days to placate him. Probably Lovell had put paid to the efforts of the other three.

It was after dinner. Most of the junior cricketers were going down to the nets: but there were no nets for the Fistical Four. Even Lovell was not thinking of cutting Extra this time. That, however, was not what worried Jimmy at the moment. He was thinking about Wednesday and St. Jim's. If there was a chance of getting off Extra to play in the match, he wanted to know. If not, he and Tommy Dodd had to put their heads together, to scrape up the best eleven possible.

He was feeling far from hopeful as he came into Dalton's study. Dicky Dalton was a sportsman, and a keen cricketer himself, and took an interest in junior matches. On his own, it was likely that Dicky would have stretched a point. But Manders was a difficulty. Anyhow, Jimmy wanted to know the worst, so he had come to put it to Dicky.

'About next Wednesday, sir,' he faltered.

'Well?' Dalton repeated the monosyllable.

'It's the St. Jim's match, sir—.'

'I am aware of it.'

'They're a strong team, and we have to go all out to keep our end up, sir. And if we can't play in the match—.'

Mr. Dalton held up his hand.

'You were aware that Wednesday was the day of the St. Jim's match when you went out in lock-ups on Monday night,' he said.

'Oh! Yes!' stammered Jimmy.

'Well?' said Mr. Dalton, for the third time.

'If we could be let off Extra for Wednesday, sir, to play in the match——'

Mr. Dalton knitted his brows.

'I will speak plainly, Silver,' he said, 'I regret very much that your punishment for a breach of House rules should interfere with a match. But I have no choice in the matter. A prefect on the Modern side was treated with unheard-of disrespect. Mr. Manders was naturally very much incensed. He demanded exemplary punishment in such a case, and it was quite impossible for me to refuse. If I should rescind your punishment, for any reason whatever, Mr. Manders would have a very proper cause of complaint. You can see that.'

'Yes, sir! But——'

'I can do nothing,' said Mr. Dalton, 'I should be glad, if it were possible, to be lenient, in the circumstances. But I cannot play fast and loose with another master.'

Jimmy was silent.

'In fact,' said Mr. Dalton, 'If I did as you ask, Silver, it would make so very bad an impression on Mr. Manders, that I have no doubt that he would lay a complaint before the head-master. Neither have I any doubt that Dr. Chisholm would uphold Mr. Manders' view. The reckless conduct of yourself and your friends on Monday night has placed it out of my power to help you.'

Jimmy said nothing. It was all clear to him, and there was nothing to say.

'I am sorry,' added Mr. Dalton, in a more kindly tone, 'But there is nothing I can do, Silver. You may go.'

Jimmy went.

At the end of the corridor, he found Lovell and Raby and Newcome waiting for him. The expression on his face was

enough to tell them that nothing had come of that brief interview with Richard Dalton.

'Nothing doing?' asked Raby.

Jimmy shook his head.

'Well, we couldn't expect it, really,' said Newcome, 'You can't squirt prefects with ink and get away with it.'

'That was only that ass Lovell,' growled Raby.

'Look here——,' hooted Lovell.

'It's landed us all together,' said Jimmy Silver, 'Dicky would let us off for the match if he could—he as good as said so. It's all Manders. Manders would make out that he favours Classics, and lets them do anything they like, and he'd go howling to the Head! Dicky can't do a thing.'

Raby and Newcome nodded dismally. Lovell smiled. Apparently Lovell drew hope from Jimmy's words.

'That's all right,' he said.

'All right, is it?' snorted Raby.

'Yes, all right! Jimmy says it's all Manders. Well, then, if Manders puts in a word——.'

'Think he would?' hissed Newcome.

'Yes, if he knew it wasn't us barged him,' said Lovell, 'I'm going to make those Modern ticks own up to Manders——.'

'Oh, chuck it, ass.'

'I tell you it's a chance, at least,' insisted Lovell, 'They make out on the Modern side that Manders is a just old buffer. If he knew——.'

'Oh, give us a rest.'

The Fistical Four went out into the quad, Lovell still arguing. Valentine Mornington came up to them.

'Seen Dicky?' he asked.

'Yes: nothing doing.'

'Well, we've got to chew on it,' said Morny, 'You fellows will be out of the game on Wednesday. After all, we've got the Modern side to draw on Tommy Dodd is as good a bat as any man in the Lower School, and Cook is a topping bowler, and Doyle a good man all round. Towle's a useful man, too.'

'That's so,' agreed Jimmy.

'Well, then,' said Morny, 'We've got Eroll, and Rawson, and Conroy, and little me—that's four good men, and four Moderns makes eight. We can fill up with Pons, Van Ryn, and Oswald or Teddy Grace—all good stuff. It won't be a top-hole team, but it will be a good one, and cricket's an uncertain game.'

Jimmy Silver nodded. Lovell grunted.

'You won't beat St. Jim's without our study,' he said.

'We'll give them a run for their money,' said Morny. 'But you jolly well ought to be kicked for getting into Extra.'

'Well, my idea is that we're going to get out of Extra,' said Lovell, 'It all depends on Manders—Dalton's as good as said so. And—.'

'Dry up, old man,' said Jimmy.

'I'm going to rag those Modern ticks till they own up to Manders—.'

'Give us a rest.'

'I tell you—.'

'After all, there's a sporting chance of keeping our end up on Wednesday,' said Newcome, 'Tommy Dodd's at the top of his form now—that's a good thing—.'

'That modern smudge—!' grunted Lovell.

'And Cook put in some jolly good bowling in the House match,' said Mornington, 'And Doyle made some jolly good catches. Dash it all, we can make up a pretty good team, picking from both sides, even if your study is left out.'

'Well, we're not going to be left out,' snorted Lovell.

'Bow-wow!'

'Hallo, there's the bell,' said Jimmy Silver; and the Fistical Four went into the House, to repair to the French class-room, while Mornington went to change for games practice.

Several other Classical juniors gathered at the door of the detention room, with the Fistical Four: Peele, and Gower, and Lattrey, and Jones minor, of the Fourth: Adolphus Smythe once more, with several of the Shell, and Clarence Cuffy and Leggett of the Modern Fourth. And then three more Modern

juniors came up the corridor with clouded faces—the three Tommies: Dodd and Cook and Doyle.

Lovell grinned at them.

'Hallo! You Modern ticks landed in Extra?' he asked.

'Yes, you ass!'

'Yes, you fathead!'

'Yes, you dummy.'

The three Tommies replied in unison.

'Well, serve you jolly well right!' said Lovell, 'Why don't you own up to Manders, and give us a chance?'

'You indescribable idiot, we've owned up to Manders,' said Tommy Dodd, 'We've let you rag us into it, and it's done now.'

'You've owned up to Manders!' exclaimed Lovell.

'Yes, you ditherer.'

'Good!' said Lovell, 'Bet you Manders will put in a word now. He's bound to, now he knows we didn't barge him—.'

'Whopped?' asked Jimmy Silver, sympathetically.

'Oh, no,' said Tommy Dodd, bitterly, 'Manders is too jolly just for that. You men were bunged into Extra for breaking out in lock-ups, so we've got the same.'

'Serve you right,' said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver jumped.

'You don't mean—!' he exclaimed.

'I jolly well do! Four half-holidays in Extra, same as you fellows! And that washes out the St. Jim's match for us.'

'Oh, holy smoke!' said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver stood dumb. He gazed at the three Tommies almost in horror.

'So we're out of it, same as you fellows are!' groaned Tommy. Cook, 'You can thank that idiot Lovell for it. May as well make St. Jim's a present of the match now.'

Snort, from Lovell.

'It won't matter much,' he said, 'I don't think much of Modern cricket! You won't be missed a lot.'

'Oh!' said Jimmy, at last, 'There was a chance of keeping our end up on Wednesday—well, it's gone now. Morny will

have to captain the side, with a team of rabbits! Lovell, you ass—.'

'Look here—.'

'You—you—you dithering dunderhead!' For once the patience and good temper of Uncle James of Rookwood quite failed him, 'You blithering bandersnatch! If we had a chance of pulling it off, you've washed it out now. St. Jim's are going to win by an innings, you crass ass!'

'I don't see it—.'

'You wouldn't said Raby.

'My idea is—.'

'Don't tell us any more of your ideas!' roared Jimmy Silver, 'Bang his silly head! We can't bang any sense into it—but bang it!'

Three incensed juniors collared Arthur Edward Lovell. They banged his head on the class-room door. Lovell had given the K.O. to the last hope of putting up a show against St. Jim's: and, heedless of his wild yells, they banged his head, and banged it again. It was rather fortunate for Lovell that Monsieur Monceau came along to take his class.

'Ciel! Mais qu'est-ce-que-c'est?' ejaculated Mossou, 'Vat is zis? Silvair—you Raby—vous Newcome—zat you stop all zis at vunce! Mon Dieu! Is zis one garden of ze bear?'

Lovell was rubbing his head as he sat in Extra that afternoon, while his friends, as well as the three Tommies, gave him looks that were absolutely ferocious. He had only one consolation: he had, after all, ragged the Moderns into owning up to Manders, and he expected results therefrom. When that happened, no doubt his exasperated friends would be sorry that they had banged his head. In the meantime, they looked as if they would like to bang it again: and immediately Mossou dismissed Extra School, Arthur Edward Lovell promptly disappeared into space, in case they did!

CHAPTER XXII

NOTHING DOING!

MR. MANDERS frowned.

He was sitting at his study window, after class on Monday, looking out into the sunny quadrangle. Old grey buildings, red roofs, and green foliage, made a pleasant picture, and Mr. Manders' expression was quite pleasant too: until his eyes fell on a Classical junior coming across the quad. It was the sight of Arthur Edward Lovell that brought a frown to his brow.

It was Lovell who had inked his prefect, a week ago. Other Classical juniors had been with Lovell, and had no doubt had a hand in it: but it was Lovell who had done the actual squirting of ink over Knowles, of the Modern Sixth. Manders couldn't have disapproved of a junior more than he did of Arthur Edward Lovell. Dalton had been rather severe on him: but Mr. Manders' opinion was, that Dalton had not been sufficiently severe. So as Lovell came Mr. Manders frowned, eyeing Arthur Edward with the grimness of a gorgon.

Lovell, unconscious of Manders at the study window, came on. Three Modern juniors in the House porch equally unconscious of Manders, stepped out to meet him.

'Classical cad!'

'Scrag him!'

'Bump him!'

Lovell jumped back, as Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, came at him together.

'Chuck it,' he exclaimed, 'I've come over to speak to your House beak.'

'Like your cheek!' said Tommy Dodd, 'Keep on your own mouldy side of the quad. Collar him!'

The next moment Lovell was struggling in three pairs of hands. The three Tommies were feeling sore—very sore—about the outcome of their owning up to Manders. It was some consolation to bump Lovell, and dribble him back to the Classical side.

But that consolation was denied them. Mr. Manders rose, and put his head out of his study window.

'Dodd! Cook! Doyle!' he rapped.

'Oh, crumbs!'

'Manders——.'

'Howly smoke!'

Three pairs of hands dropped from Lovell, as if that Classical junior had suddenly become red-hot. The three Tommies spun round.

'Cease this horseplay at once,' snapped Mr. Manders, frowning.

'Oh! Yes, sir!'

To the relief of Tommy Dodd and Co., Mr. Manders left it at that, so far as they were concerned. He fixed his frowning glance on Lovell.

'Lovell! What are you doing here? If you have come here to make some disturbance——.'

'I wanted to speak to you, sir,' gasped Lovell.

'Do you mean that you have a message for me?'

'Oh! No, sir! I——.'

'Then you can have nothing to say to me,' snapped Mr. Manders, 'You had better go back to your own House.'

Mr. Manders turned from the window with that, and disappeared from view. Lovell's face set obstinately. He had come over to speak to Manders, and he was going to speak to Manders!

'Clear off, you Classical chump!' growled Tommy Dodd.

'I'm going to see Manders,' retorted Lovell: and he marched resolutely past the three Tommies, and went into the House. And—with Manders, study window open—they had to let him pass in peace.

He tapped at Mr. Manders' study door. A frown and a snap

from the Modern master were not going to deter Lovell. The matter was too urgent for that.

Lovell had expected something to come of Tommy Dodd and Co's owning up. Nobody else had: but Lovell had. Nothing had come of it so far. Now it was Monday, and the St. Jim's match was on Wednesday. So Lovell had made up his mind to speak to Mr. Manders about it.

Manders did not look encouraging as he entered the study. Seldom had a Rookwood master's face looked grimmer.

'What is it, Lovell? If you have no message for me—,' he snapped.

'It's about what happened last Monday evening, sir,' said Lovell.

Manders' face became, if possible, grimmer still.

'That matter is over and done with, Lovell. I desire to hear nothing further on the subject.'

'I've heard that some Modern fellows owned up, sir, that they barged into you that night, and so you know now that it wasn't us,' said Lovell, somewhat discouraged, but still determined.

'What of that?' snapped Mr. Manders.

'Well, sir, we're in Extra because of it,' explained Lovell, 'And now you know that it wasn't us, we—we thought you might speak a word to our form-master, sir.'

Mr. Manders gave him a freezing glare.

'Your punishment, Lovell, is not because of an accidental collision in the dark,' he snapped, 'It is because you were out in lock-ups and attacked a prefect of this House, as you know very well.'

'Yes, sir, but now you know that it wasn't us who barged you over—,' argued Lovell.

'That has no bearing on the matter at all, Lovell.'

'We never did it, sir—.'

'I am aware of that, since Dodd and Cook and Doyle have acquainted me with the facts. I repeat that it has no bearing on the matter. You may leave my study, Lovell.'

'If you'd speak a word to our form-master, sir, now that you know what really happened—.'

'I have told you to leave my study, Lovell.'

'Tain't fair for us to be bunged in Extra, sir, because men of your House barged you over—,' argued Lovell, 'I—I thought you'd see that, sir.'

'I repeat that that has nothing to do with it!' almost shrieked Mr. Manders. 'Leave my study at once.'

'We couldn't help Modern chaps rushing into you in the dark, sir—,' persisted Lovell.

'Will you leave my study, Lovell?'

'Yes, sir. But it wasn't our fault that these Modern ticks—I mean those Modern chaps—knocked you over, was it, sir?'

Mr. Manders rose to his feet. Words, clearly, were wasted on Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth. Mr. Manders proceeded from words to actions.

He picked up a cane from his table.

Even Lovell realised that it was time to go, as Mr. Manders came round the table, with thunder in his brow, and the cane in his hand.

He made a jump for the door.

The cane swiped as he jumped.

'Yarooop!' roared Lovell, as it caught him across the shoulders. 'Wow! Look here, sir, you can't cane me—I'm a Classical, and—yoo-hoop!'

It was true that Manders, a Modern master, couldn't cane Classics. But it seemed to be equally true that, although he couldn't, he would! A second swipe interrupted Lovell: and, without stopping to explain further to Mr. Manders that he couldn't cane Classics, Arthur Edward Lovell bounded out of the study, and bolted down the passage.

Mr. Manders, breathing hard, laid down the cane. Lovell tramped away to the Classical side boiling with indignation. And if he expected sympathy from his pals, when he told them, he was disappointed.

'Serve you right!' was Jimmy Silver's comment.

'Look here——!' howled Lovell.

'Did he lay it on hard?' asked Raby.

'Wow! Yes! Ow!'

'Good!' said Raby.

'Fine!' said Newcome.

'More power to his elbow,' said Jimmy Silver, heartily.

Lovell's popularity in his form, and even in his own study, seemed at its lowest ebb. It was much to his credit, really, that in spite of this, he still occupied his powerful brain with planning to get them out of their scrape.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOVELL'S LATEST!

'EUREKA!'

That ejaculation greeted the ears of Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome, as they came up to the end study.

It was uttered in tones of great satisfaction.

They looked at Lovell as they came in. He was sitting in the window-seat, with the sunshine on his face. But the sunshine was not so bright as the face. Lovell was in high feather.

His three chums were not—far from it. Cricket matches were serious matters to the Fistical Four: especially School matches. The St. Jim's match was a big fixture. The outlook, owing to the various antics of Arthur Edward Lovell, was now hopeless. Seven men were out of the team. There would be a few good men to play on Wednesday, with a backing of mere rabbits. A walk-over for St. Jim's was a foregone conclusion. Indeed, Morny had even suggested scratching the match somehow, as an alternative to being beaten with an innings to spare. Lovell was as keen as his friends on the great summer game: so why he was now looking so tremendously bucked was quite a mystery to them.

But he was! He beamed on them, as they came into the study. 'Eureka!' he repeated.

Apparently some great idea was working in Lovell's brain, causing him to repeat the remark of Archimedes on discovering the answer to his problem.

'I've got it,' added Lovell, translating Archimedes' remark into colloquial English, 'O.K. now, you fellows! No need to go on looking like a brood of moulting owls. I know how!'

If Lovell expected his comrades to enthuse, it was just one more disappointment for him. They didn't—not in the very least.

'Rot!' said Jimmy Silver, tersely.

'New stunt, what?' asked Newcome, sarcastically.

'That's it!' assented Lovell. 'I'll tell you—.'

'No, don't! Take it out and bury it.

'If you don't want to hear—!' bawled Lovell.

'Right on the wicket!' said Raby, with a nod.

Lovell gazed at them expressively. This lack of enthusiasm was a poor reward for a fellow who had set all his wits to work to solve a knotty problem, and who believed that he had solved it!

'I've a jolly good mind not to say a word more,' exclaimed Lovell, indignantly.

'Stick to that!' suggested Raby.

'But I want to beat St. Jim's on Wednesday, if you fellows don't,' said Lovell, 'And I tell you I know how to get off Extra!'

'What's the big idea—squirting ink at Dalton, or locking the Head in his study?' inquired Newcome, still sarcastic.

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Lovell, 'It's a winner, I can tell you. I've thought it all out, and it's O.K. Will you listen to a chap?'

'Carry on,' said Jimmy Silver, resignedly.

'It all depends on Manders. You know that. Dalton's said so. I thought he'd come round, when he got to know that it wasn't us that barged him over that night, but—but he hasn't! He's a crusty old bird. But if he did put in a word with Dicky, it would be all right for Wednesday. Wouldn't it?' demanded Lovell.

'Oh, quite! But as he won't—.'

'There's such a thing as gratitude,' said Lovell.

'Eh?'

'Suppose we did something for Manders—such as rescuing him from a gang of footpads—.'

Lovell's friends gazed at him.

'Wandering in your mind?', asked Raby.

'Suppose a gang of footpads got hold of him, and were going to bash him, and we rushed in and saved him. Think that wouldn't make him go easy?'

Newcome tapped his forehead significantly.

'Poor old Lovell!' he said, 'Has it gone as far as that?'

'Better see a doctor!' suggested Raby.

'Is that a joke, Lovell, or are you off your onion, or what?' asked Jimmy Silver, quite mystified.

'If you'd listen to a chap, instead of talking nineteen to the dozen, and trying to be funny, you might get the idea,' hooted Lovell, 'Would old Manders be grateful, and go easy, if we rescued him from a gang of footpads, or not?'

'I suppose he would,' said Jimmy, blankly, 'But as it can't happen—.'

'It's going to happen.'

'Wha-a-t?'

'That's the big idea. That's what I've been thinking out,' said Lovell, 'Manders goes for walks—not far, I know: he's no walker. But he does go ambling about, and we can catch him somewhere out of the school—.'

'But—!' gasped Jimmy.

'On the footpath in Coombe Wood, perhaps,' said Lovell, 'That's fairly lonely. A gang of footpads get hold of him—.'

'But there aren't any footpads, and they won't!' yelled Raby.

'There are—and they will!' retorted Lovell, 'We can work that all right.'

'Got a gang of footpads in your waistcoat pocket?' asked Newcome.

'You silly ass!'

'What about tea?' asked Jimmy Silver, 'If you've finished your funny turn, Lovell, old man—.'

'Will you listen to a chap?' hissed Lovell, 'I tell you, I've got it all cut and dried. Some of the fellows can do the footpad stuff—Oswald and Conroy and Teddy Grace or Morny—.'

'Oh!' gasped Jimmy.

'Great pip!' said Raby.

'They blacken their faces, so that they won't be recognised,' explained Lovell, 'They sort out some old coats and caps from somewhere. Manders won't know them from Adam.'

'Ye gods!' murmured Newcome.

'They collar him, see? He thinks he's going to be bashed and robbed by a gang of gangsters. We rush in and save him—.'

'Oh, holy smoke!'

'He's bound to be grateful—even a crusty old bird like Manders. He will put in a word with Dicky and get us off. And there we are, see?' Lovell wound up, triumphantly, 'What do you think of that for a stunt?'

They gazed at him.

'All we've got to do, is to get on Manders' track when he goes ambling,' added Lovell, 'It will work like a charm! What do you think?'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled his three friends.

Lovell glared at them.

'What are you cackling at?' he roared.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome left Lovell to guess what they were cackling at. They just cackled. They were accustomed to bright and original ideas from Arthur Edward Lovell. But this time, Arthur Edward seemed to them to have excelled himself. This was the limit. They yelled.

'Look here——!' roared Lovell.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Don't you think it would work?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you can't do anything but cackle, you cackling hyenas——.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Apparently Jimmy Silver and Co. couldn't. Lovell's latest seemed to have doubled them up. They laughed till the tears rolled down their faces.

Lovell got out of the window-seat. He glared at the Co. as if they were his very worst enemies instead of his dearest pals, and stamped out of the study. He closed the door after him with a bang that awoke all the echoes of the Classical junior studies. He left his friends. still laughing.

CHAPTER XXIV

BACK UP!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON came into the end study, crossed to the window, and stood looking out. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome glanced at him, in surprised inquiry. They were getting tea, and expecting Lovell to return for the same. Instead of which, it was Morny who came in—apparently for the purpose of looking out of their window!

He stood there, looking out, for some moments, and then glanced round at the surprised faces of the three juniors.

‘Come and look here,’ he said.

‘Anything on, in the quad?’ asked Jimmy.

‘Yes—come and look.’

The three joined Morny at the window, and looked out. There were many fellows and some masters to be seen in the sunny quad. The stately figure of Dr. Chisholm was visible, in conversation near the porch of Common-Room with Mr. Greely and Mr. Mooney. Bulkeley of the Sixth was walking and talking with Knowles, the captain of Manders’ House, doubtless on the subject of senior cricket. Tubby Muffin of the Classical Fourth was heading for the tuck-shop. Hansom and Lumsden of the Fifth were mildly ragging Jobson, of that form. Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, in a group with Tracy and Howard of that form, and Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, were talking earnestly: probably on the subject of neckties. Monsieur Monceau was walking under the beeches. Mr. Manders was walking down to the gates. Old Mack, the porter, was standing in the doorway of his lodge. Two or three dozen other figures were to be seen. But what there was, among them all, to attract particular attention, was quite a mystery to the end study.

Having looked out, they looked at Morny.

'Well?' said Jimmy Silver.

Morny made a gesture towards the rather lean figure that was going down to the gates.

'See him?' he said.

'Do you mean Manders?'

'Yes, just Manders.'

'Well, what about Manders?' asked Jimmy, blankly, 'Who wants to look at Manders?'

'Not a particularly charming object to look at,' said Raby.

'Not what you'd call a thing of beauty and a joy for ever,' remarked Newcome. 'Anything specially interesting in a back view of Manders?'

'He's going out,' said Morny.

'Well, why shouldn't he?'

'You know his usual beat when he trots out after class. He ambles by the foot-path in Coombe Wood to the towpath, up as far as Pooter's meadow, and back. Same old grind.'

'What on earth about it?' asked Jimmy, 'Who cares a boiled bean about Manders and his grind?'

'I've just been talking with Lovell. Plenty of time to catch Manders on his way back through the wood, if we get a move on.'

Three fellows jumped, and stared at Valentine Mornington.

'My only aunt Sempronia!' ejaculated Jimmy Silver, 'Has Lovell been talking his rot to you?'

'You're not ass enough—?' began Raby.

'You're not fathead enough—?' began Newcome.

Morny grinned.

'It's a lark, anyway,' he said, 'And it might work! If Manders thinks it was a bunch of footpads grabbed him in the wood—we can get ourselves up so that he won't know us—it will be the jest of the term, if we pull it off.'

'If!' said Newcome.

'Rot!, said Raby.

Jimmy Silver frowned. 'Lovell's latest' was, in his opinion,

the maddest stunt that even Arthur Edward Lovell had ever propounded. There was, perhaps, a chance that it might work out to the desired result. There were about a thousand chances that it mightn't. But he understood quite well why Morny had been attracted by it. Morny was always ready for the wildest escapades. The fact that a beak was to be bamboozled was enough to make the scheme attractive to Morny, and he was too reckless to think of consequences.

'Look here, Morny, you ass,' exclaimed Jimmy.

'I tell you, it may work,' said Mornington, 'Anyhow, what a jolly lark on a Modern beak.'

'Beaks are safer left alone,' said Newcome.

'Safe enough, if you come to that,' said Mornington, 'Manders won't know a thing, when two or three toughs with blackened faces jump out on him in the wood. How could he?' He chuckled, 'No end of a lark.'

'That's what you're thinking about—larking with a beak,' growled Jimmy Silver, 'It's not good enough.'

'It might work the oracle, just as Lovell says. You fellows park yourselves in the wood, ready to rush to the rescue—ha, ha! Well, Manders will be grateful for being rescued, and may get you off Extra—.'

'Rot!'

'Look here, are you game?' demanded Mornington, 'I'm backing up Lovell! Are you letting him down?'

'We're not going to play the mad goat!' snapped Jimmy.

'Funky?' jeered Mornington.

'Oh, go and eat coke.'

'Are you joining up, or not?'

'Not!' answered three voice, in unison.

'Then stick here and be blowed to you! I'm game, if you're not,' snapped Morny, and with that, he left the study, and slammed the door.

'Well, my hat!' Raby whistled, 'That ass Lovell has talked Morny round—.'

'One fool makes many!' remarked Newcome.

'He didn't want much talking round, when he heard that it was a jape on a beak,' growled Jimmy Silver, 'He's always ready to play the mad ass.'

The three juniors sat down to tea, in a very uneasy mood.

Lovell, evidently, was going ahead with his remarkable scheme, and he had enlisted the support of the scapegrace of the Classical Fourth. But the Co. at all events, did not intend to take a hand in it.

A few minutes later the study door opened, and Dick Oswald looked in. He was grinning.

'I say, ain't you fellows going with Lovell?' he asked.

'No!' grunted Jimmy Silver.

'I'm going with Morny.'

'More fool you!' said Newcome.

'So's Teddy Grace! He's sorting out some old clobber we use in the theatricals. I say, it's safe enough,' urged Oswald, 'Old Manders won't know a thing.'

'Br-r-r-r-r!'

'Well, fellows ought to back up a pal,' said Oswald, 'Shall I tell Lovell you'll be coming?'

'Tell him to forget all about it.'

'Rats!'

Oswald departed, leaving the Co. more worried than ever. They had laughed when Lovell propounded that scheme. But they did not feel like laughing now. The matter was getting serious.

The study door opened again. Teddy Grace looked in. He had a bag in his hand—no doubt containing theatrical 'props' that had been sorted out for disguise.

'You fellows on?' he asked.

'No!'

'You can't let Lovell down, you know.'

'Rats!'

'If you're funky——!'

Jimmy Silver picked up a pot of marmalade and took aim, and Teddy Grace shut the door hurriedly and disappeared.

A few minutes later, looking from the study window, Jimmy had a view of three members of the Classical Fourth going out: Mornington, Oswald, and Grace. They disappeared out of gates, and Jimmy turned from the window with a worried brow.

'They're gone,' he said.

'Silly asses!' commented Newcome.

'That ass Lovell——!' sighed Raby.

Once more the study door opened. This time it was Arthur Edward Lovell who looked in. He gazed at his chums, like the elder Hamlet, more in sorrow than in anger.

'Joining up?' he asked.

'No!' roared Jimmy.

'All right! I'll go it alone,' said Lovell, 'A fellow expects his pals to back him up. But if you're afraid of a row——.'

'We're not afraid of a row, you howling ass! But——.'

'Then why don't you come?' asked Lovell, 'Morny and Oswald and Grace have joined up—they've started already, to lay for Manders in the wood. I tell you it will work like a charm. I've thought it out in every detail—and you fellows know now that I'm pretty good at planning——.'

'Ye gods!' said Jimmy Silver.

'And little fishes!' said Newcome.

'The thing simply can't fail,' said Lovell, 'I've planned it too carefully for that. Even if Manders ain't grateful, and don't get us off Extra, it will be a jape on the Moderns—and there's no risk to speak of, planned as it is from A to Z. Look here, come on.'

'Fathead!'

'Ass!'

'Chump!'

'Oh, all right! Let a fellow down, and stick here,' said Lovell, and he marched off down the passage, washing his hands, as it were, of faithless friends.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath, and looked at Raby and Newcome. They shook their heads, guessing what he was going to say.

'It's a potty stunt,' said Jimmy, 'Just nuts! But—but—look here, potty as it is, it might come off, if we keep an eye on Lovell. On his own he's bound to muck it up. We—we can't let him down, you chaps.'

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

'I said that one fool makes many!' he remarked.

'Well—you see——!'

'It's just batchy,' said Raby.

'I know! But—well, look here, I'll go after Lovell, and you fellows keep clear——.'

'Don't be a goat!' said Raby and Newcome together.

And the three left the end study, and hurried after Lovell down the passage. They overtook him on the staircase.

Lovell looked round at them, with a cheery grin.

'Coming, after all?' he asked.

'Yes, ass.'

'Yes, fathead!'

'Yes, ditherer.'

'You'll be glad later, when you see how it's worked,' said Lovell, confidently, 'Just leave things to me, and you're all right.'

Lovell, in great spirits, led the way, beaming. His friends were not beaming as they followed him. But they were for it now, and hoped for the best.

CHAPTER XXV

IN AMBUSH!

'THINK Manders will know us?'

'Not likely!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was a sound of chuckling in the cool green shade of Coombe Wood.

Seven Rookwood juniors were gathered there, in a little shady glade just off the footpath. Four of them—the Fistical Four—presented their accustomed aspect. But three presented an aspect that was really remarkable, indeed, rather unnerving, for Rookwood fellows.

Morny and Co. were getting into their disguise for the 'gangster' act. They had a selection of garments used in amateur theatricals: and in baggy trousers, loose coats much too big for them, and shabby peaked caps, looked extremely unlike Rookwooders. Added to that, their faces were blacked from a bag of soot, well rubbed on. Three black faces looked out under the peaks of the caps: and whatever they looked like they did not look anything like Valentine Mornington, Dick Oswald, and Teddy Grace, of the Classical Fourth Form.

Mornington grinned—a dusky grin—into a pocket mirror. The change in his looks was quite startling, and certainly more than enough to delude Mr. Manders. His nearest and dearest relation could not have known him.

Lovell grinned approval.

This was his wheeze—his great wheeze! He was proud of it! He was assured of its success. Manders could never know a thing. To Manders, the gangster attack would be genuine—the rescue by the Fistical Four equally genuine—and could he fail

to be grateful? Could he fail, in his gratitude, to put in a word for the fellows in Extra, who had rescued him? It was a winner—a winner all along the line. Arthur Edward almost purred with glee.

Morny had taken it up, with great keenness: chiefly as a hare-brained jape on a Modern beak. But it was Lovell's idea—his very own!—And to Lovell it was something much more than a jape: it was a plan, worthy of such a master planner. After this had come off successfully, his doubting chums would have to admit that Lovell could plan.

'Top-hole!' said Lovell, 'Now, you've got it clear? You keep in the bushes by the path till Manders hikes along. You jump out on him all at once, and collar him. Might give him a tap on the nose,' added Lovell, thoughtfully, 'It would look more genuine.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You mad ass, Lovell—!' exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

'You dry up, Jimmy—I'm running this show,' rapped Lovell, 'Leave it to me.'

'You blithering chump—,' said Raby.

'That's enough, Raby,' snapped Lovell.

Mornington chuckled.

'All right, you fellows,' he said, 'We know there's a limit, if Lovell doesn't—we're not tapping a beak on the boko.'

'Look here, Morny—.'

'Pack it up, old man! You talk too much,' said Mornington, 'We'll hustle and bustle the old bird, and make him believe that he's in tough hands—that's all right! Mind you're ready to rush in.'

'We'll be ready all right—I'm looking after that part,' snapped Lovell, 'And as soon as we rush on you, you bunk through the wood. Wash off the black at the pond, leave those clothes in a bundle to be picked up afterwards, and cut off to the school as fast as you can. You won't need any alibi, really—still, the sooner you're right away from the spot, the better.'

Three black-faced juniors nodded assent to that. There was

no doubt that, after such an escapade, the sooner the perpetrators were off the scene, the better.

'We knock you out, of course,' went on Lovell, 'We shall have to give you a few punches, so that Manders won't smell a rat. You won't mind that.'

'You'd better not hand any punches out in my direction,' said Mornington, 'You'll get as good back, if you do.'

'Same here,' said Oswald.

'And then some!' added Teddy Grace, emphatically.

'Now, look here, don't be silly idiots,' urged Lovell, 'We've got to keep up appearances. Three desperate gangsters wouldn't be driven off without a bit of a scrap. We shall have to knock you down.'

'You jolly well won't.'

'Don't argue,' said Lovell, 'It's absolutely necessary, if we're to pull the wool over Manders' eyes. We rush on you and knock you down—then, while we're gathering round Manders, you jump up and run—that's the programme.'

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome grinned. Lovell's proposition no doubt gave an artistic finish to the thing. But the three gangsters did not enthuse. They did not want to be knocked down!

'Better pick our men, so as to have it all cut and dried,' went on Lovell, while three black faces glared at him, 'I'll knock Morny down—you knock down Oswald, Jimmy—and you knock Grace over, Raby.'

'You jolly well try knocking me down, and see what will happen,' said Morny, 'You won't feel like rescuing Manders. You'll want rescuing yourself.'

'If you're going to spoil the whole thing, Morny, because you're afraid of a punch—!' hooted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

'There's one detail you've forgotten, Lovell,' he said.

'I've not forgotten a single detail,' yapped Lovell, 'I never forget anything when I make a plan. What have I forgotten?'

'That Manders may be along any minute, and if you go on

jawing much longer, he will be back at Rookwood before you've finished.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, rats! Look here, it's all settled,' said Lovell, 'Now you fellows get into ambush.'

'I'll tell you what,' said Morny, 'There ought to be a bit of a scrap, to make it look the real goods. I'll knock you down, Lovell—'

'What?'

'—and give you a black eye. That will have a splendid effect on Manders—a fellow getting a black eye rescuing him.'

'You silly idiot!' gasped Lovell, 'Think I want a black eye?'

'If you're going to spoil the whole thing because you're afraid of a black eye—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, don't jaw,' said Lovell, crossly. 'You start handing out black eyes, and I'll jolly well alter the shape of your features, I can tell you. Now get going—you fellows are like a sheep's head—all jaw! Just get going, see?'

Morny and Co. grinning, got going. They moved out of the glade, and posted themselves in a thicket bordering the footpath.

'Now you fellows follow me,' said Lovell, 'The idea is that we're strolling up the footpath, and hear the row, and rush in, see? Come on.'

His friends followed him through the wood, about a dozen yards from the ambush. There they emerged into the footpath.

'All ready now,' said Lovell, with satisfaction, 'As soon as we hear Manders yell, we cut up the path and pile in. Got that?'

'We've got it,' sighed Jimmy Silver.

They waited.

Precisely how long it would be before Manders happened, they did not know: but he was not likely to be long now. They waited and listened for sounds of alarm up the footpath, ready

to rush to the rescue as soon as they received their cue. Three of them hoped that that remarkable scheme might work out according to plan. But Lovell had no doubts. He was serenely confident.

He whispered suddenly:

'I can hear somebody——!'

'Must be Manders——.'

'Listen!'

From up the footpath came the sound of a scuffle, and a startled yell. It was the voice of Mr. Manders, on its top note.

'Oh! Ruffians—rascals—help! Help!'

'Come on!' breathed Lovell.

And the rescuers rushed.

CHAPTER XXVI

NOT QUITE ACCORDING TO PLAN!

MR. MANDERS was taken utterly by surprise.

He was, in fact, astounded.

In that quiet region of Hampshire, nothing of this kind had ever been known. The village policeman, Mr. Boggs, never had to deal with crimes more serious than the annexing of apples by village urchins, or the requisitioning of stray chickens by passing tramps. Gangsters had never been seen in the locality, except on the films at Latcham Cinema.

So it was no wonder that Mr. Manders' eyes popped in amazement and alarm, when three rough-looking fellows with blackened faces suddenly rushed at him from the bushes beside the footpath in Coombe Wood.

Often and often had Mr. Manders taken that walk: it was, as Lovell had said, his usual 'grind'. Never before had he seen anything on that path more dangerous than a rabbit! And now——

He could scarcely believe his eyes. But he had to believe them. The three roughs with blackened faces rushed him down. They collared him on all sides, and jammed him against the trunk of a tree. They pinned him there, spluttering and stuttering with amazement, alarm, and anger.

'Nar then!' hissed one of them, in a voice quite unlike that of Valentine Mornington when it was heard at Rookwood, 'Nar then! 'Old your row!'

'Gotcher!' hissed another, in tones quite unrecognisable as Dick Oswald's.

'And over the swag!' said the third ruffian, whom Mr.

Manders could not dream was Teddy Grace, 'Quick abart it, too, old codger.'

'Bash 'im!

'Knock 'im out!

'Cosh 'im if he don't 'and it out.'

'Nar then, old covey—.'

'Oh! ow! Oooogh! Help!' shrieked Mr. Manders, 'Ruffians! Rascals! Help! Hands off! Help! Bless my soul! Woooogh!'

'Ain't I tell yer to 'old your row, old covey? 'Old 'im, Bill—and you get out that cosh, 'Arry.'

'I'll cosh 'im all right, Mike! 'Old 'im!'

Really, the Rookwood gangsters were playing their parts well: quite well enough, at all events, to convince Mr. Manders. The Modern master, wriggling in their clutches, had not the slightest doubt that he was in desperate hands. He was fairly gabbing with amazement and terror, as the ruffians jammed him on the tree, and the blackened faces glared threateningly at him.

But rescue was at hand!

There was a patter of feet on the grassy footpath.

Four figures came running, under the shady branches: four Classical juniors of Rookwood. They dashed on the scene.

'Help!' Manders was yelling, 'Help!'

'Come on!' roared Arthur Edward Lovell, 'Footpads! Pitch into them.'

'Oh, my eye! Look out, 'Arry!'

'Look out, Bill!'

The gangsters really needed to look out! For Arthur Edward Lovell charged right at them, punching. Lovell's opinion was that it was no use doing the thing by halves. Rescuers dealing with dangerous gangsters wouldn't pull their punches: and it was necessary to keep up appearances to Manders.

'Yaroooh!' roared Mornington, as he went spinning. 'You mad ass! Wow!' It was his natural voice now, 'Look here—ow! wow! Oh!'

The other two, charged and hustled by Jimmy Silver, Raby,

and Newcome, bolted into the wood. They disappeared through rustling bushes, leaving Mr. Manders staggering against the tree, and Mornington sprawling in the grass.

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Manders, 'Bless my soul! Oh!'

He blinked dizzily at the Fistical Four. Never before had he been glad to see those cheery youths. But undoubtedly he was glad to see them now.

Mornington struggled to his feet. His eyes were on Arthur Edward Lovell, with quite a deadly look in them. He jumped at Lovell and hit out.

'Oh!' roared Lovell, as he caught the punch with his face. He hurled himself at Morny. It was a hefty punch, and Lovell's nose spurted red.

In another moment they would have closed in battle: which no doubt would have made the affair more life-like. But it was necessary for that gangster to get off the scene and escape: and Jimmy Silver jumped between them. A punch from Lovell caught him on his right ear: a punch from Morny on his left: but he shoved them apart, both of them staggering away from his hefty shoves.

'Cut, you idiot!' breathed Newcome, in Morny's ear.

'Collar him!' shouted Raby, for Mr. Manders' benefit, and he grasped at the gangster's collar, carefully missing it.

'I've got him!' yelled Newcome, also carefully missing a grab at Morny's arm.

Morny made a dart for the bushes.

But as he did so, Mr. Manders went into action. Two of the ruffians had fled, the remaining one was—apparently, at least—trying to escape from overwhelming odds. Manders rushed at him and grasped him by the collar as he darted away.

'Help me, Silver—Raby—help me—,' he shouted, as the gangster made desperate efforts to tear himself loose.

'Oh, my hat!'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Seize him!' shouted Mr. Manders, 'Secure him! Do you hear me?'

Morny wrenched desperately.

But Mr. Manders had a grasp on him, and he was keeping it. Manders was no athlete: but he was tenacious: and he was very keen that one, at least, of the ruffians who had attacked him should be handed over to justice! He held on to Morny's collar like a steel vice.

'Oh, scissors!' gasped Lovell.

He rather wished that he had not been quite so realistic, after all. Had Morny fled with Oswald and Grace, it would have been all right. But the delay of a few moments had been fatal. Mornington was a prisoner in Mr. Manders' tenacious clutch.

It was utterly dismaying to the rescue party. They hoped, for a moment, that Morny would break loose and run. Instead of which, Mr. Manders grasped him with both hands instead of one, and held on like a limpet to a rock.

'Come on!' breathed Jimmy Silver.

He rushed to Mr. Manders' aid. Collaring Morny round the neck, he dragged him over—hoping thus to loosen Mr. Manders' clutch, and give the hapless gangster a chance to jump away and run.

But Manders' clutch did not loosen. Like grim death he held on to his prisoner.

'Silver! Do not be so clumsy! Hold his arms!' exclaimed Mr. Manders, 'Raby, how dare you rush into me like that—.'

'Sorry, sir—I—I—.'

'You stupid boy, you almost caused me to lose my hold!'

'Did—did—did I, sir?'

'You did, you stupid boy! Oh! Ow! Newcome, you have thrust your elbow into my side—how can you be so clumsy—that is not the way to help—do not be so excited—Silver, you are dragging this rascal out of my hands—let go of him at once—I am quite able to deal with him. Lovell, you need not interfere—what do you mean by pushing me nearly over—all of you stand back.'

The help given by the Fistical Four was certainly not of

much use to Mr. Manders, so far as securing the prisoner went. It very nearly compelled him to let the gangster go. But not quite! Manders had him, and he was keeping him! Nothing short of collaring Manders and dragging him off would have saved Morny—and that, certainly, would not have kept up appearances!

The dismayed rescuers could only hope that they would have another chance of getting Morny clear. For the moment, Manders had him! His bony knuckles were grinding quite painfully into that gangster's neck.

Mr. Manders panted for breath.

He was rather winded: but his steely fingers did not slacken for an instant in their grip. One of the desperadoes, at least, was going to be handed over to the police: Manders was determined on that!

'Shall I hold him, sir?' asked Jimmy Silver, meekly.

'Certainly not! You are very clumsy, Silver—you very nearly pulled him out of my hands—.'

'Oh, sir—.'

'If two of us hold him by the arms, sir—!' suggested Raby.

'I will hold him!' snapped Mr. Manders, 'You may remain with me, however, in case his confederates should return. You may accompany me to the village police-station, where I will hand him over to Mr. Boggs, and charge him.'

'Oh, scissors!' gasped Jimmy Silver, 'I—I—I mean, certainly, sir! We—we won't lose sight of him for a minute.'

Morny had ceased to struggle. There was no escaping from Mr. Manders' tentacle-like grip. But he gave the Fistical Four a very eloquent look. Somehow or other, they had to get him clear, before the affair got as far as Mr. Boggs at the village police-station!

Mr. Manders gave him a grim look. But his glance became almost genial, as it turned again on the Fistical Four.

'I am very much obliged to you, my boys,' he said, 'It was very fortunate that you were so near at hand, when those ruffians attacked me. I should certainly have been robbed—.'

'Oh!

'And probably injured, I am under a deep obligation to you,' said Mr. Manders, graciously, 'It was courageous of you—mere schoolboys, running up to intervene between a gang of desperate ruffians and their victim. I shall not forget this.'

'You—you—you're very kind, sir,' stammered Jimmy.

'I shall certainly report your very courageous conduct to your form-master,' said Mr. Manders, still more graciously, 'At the moment, however, we must convey this scoundrel into the hands of justice. He seems a mere youth, judging by his size, though his looks are so utterly brutal and criminal. I can hold him quite easily. But keep with me—the other wretches may be lurking in the wood.'

Jimmy Silver and Co. were aware—though Mr. Manders was not—that the other wretches were thinking chiefly of keeping at a safe distance. But they were more than willing to keep with Manders, in the hope of getting Morny somehow out of his clutches. Still gripping the prisoner by the collar, with bony knuckless grinding into his neck, Mr. Manders marched him along the footpath: and the Fistical Four, with inexpressible feelings, followed on.

NECK OR NOTHING!

'OH, you ass!

'Oh, you fathead!

'Oh, you footling ditherer!'

Jimmy Silver and Co. could only whisper those remarks to Lovell, lest Manders should hear. But they put a great deal of expression into their whispers.

Lovell made no rejoinder.

He was as dismayed as his chums. He could not see—as they could—that he was to blame in any way. But he had to admit that his great scheme had not worked out according to plan—and that the outcome looked like being awfully disastrous.

So far, Mr. Manders was very genial, and even quite kind, to his rescuers. He was in exactly the mood that Lovell had hoped for, and indeed planned. If only he had not captured one of the gangsters, all would have been well. In that genial mood, grateful to the Fistical Four for their courageous action, it was scarcely to be doubted that Manders would have relented in the matter of Extra, and put in a word for them with their form-master. And only a word from Manders was needed—which Dalton would have been glad to hear. If only this would last, all was well, but clearly it was going to last only till Manders discovered who his prisoner was!

When he discovered that the desperado with a blackened face was nothing more or less than a Classical junior of Rookwood, there would be a change—quite a change! He would know that the whole thing was a jape—gangsters and rescuers acting in collusion to make a fool of him.

Instead of words of praise to their form-master, there would

be an angry complaint, and a fierce demand for condign punishment. That would be the net result of Lovell's latest!

'Oh, you born idiot!' moaned Raby.

'It's our own fault!' muttered Newcome, 'We ought to have sat on his head in the study, so that he couldn't get out and play the goat.'

'If that ass Morny hadn't backed him up—!' muttered Jimmy.

'The goat!'

'The fathead!'

'What on earth's going to happen when Manders finds out—?'

'Goodness knows!'

'It means a frightful row—.'

'We've got to get him away, somehow, before Manders finds out!' breathed Lovell, 'No good slanging me—it's not my fault!'

'Not?' hissed Newcome.

'No—only just rotten luck! How could I guess that Manders would collar one of them—I never thought for a minute—.'

'That's true enough—you never thought for even a second,' said Raby, 'If you had—.'

'Oh, pack it up! You fellows are all jaw, like a sheep's head! You never think of anything. I do—.'

'Well, think of something now, before Manders spots Morny!' breathed Newcome, 'I can't see anything we can do.'

'Lucky you've got me to do the planning, then,' said Lovell.

Three ferocious glares were turned on Arthur Edward Lovell, as he said that. His friends seemed to have had enough of his planning!

'If you say "plan" again, we'll scrag you,' hissed Jimmy Silver. 'This was going to get us out of Extra, wasn't it, according to plan? It looks like Extra now for the rest of the term, as well as six all round from Dicky! You chump—.'

'If not a flogging from the Head,' moaned Raby, 'Oh, you ass!'

'Don't jaw,' said Lovell, 'I tell you we can work it. We have to cross the plank bridge over the feeder before we get to Coombe Lane. That's where we get Morny loose.'

'Thinking of tipping Manders into the water?' jeered Raby.

'We can wangle an accident—.'

'Fathead!'

'If you fellows can think of a better way—.'

'Chump!'

Lovell snorted. Mr. Manders glanced round. The juniors had rather fallen behind, to make sure that their whispering did not reach his ears.

'Come! Keep up!' called out Mr. Manders, 'Please do not loiter.'

'Oh! Yes! Certainly, sir.' The juniors accelerated. Lovell was dabbing his nose with a handkerchief, and Mr. Manders gave him a very kindly glance.

'I am afraid that you received a hard knock, Lovell,' he said.

'Oh! It—it's nothing, sir,' stammered Lovell.

'I am very sorry indeed that you should have received such a blow, in helping me, Lovell. I shall not forget it,' said Mr. Manders, 'I have been very displeased with you, owing to the foolish escapade when one of my prefects was squirted with ink. I think now that I may have taken perhaps too severe a view of that incident. I shall discuss the matter with your form-master.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir.'

'Not at all,' said Mr. Manders, graciously.

He marched on with his prisoner, and the Fistical Four followed on. Lovell could not help giving his comrades a triumphant look.

Manders was in fact just where they wanted him! Manders, crusty as he looked, was capable of gratitude! To that extent Lovell had calculated well: if only the affair had gone according to plan, the cricketers would have been on velvet. That was some satisfaction to Lovell, at least.

It was not much satisfaction to his friends, as the affair hadn't gone according to plan, and they were booked for a fearful row as soon as Manders discovered whose features were hidden under the disguising black on Morny's face.

But Lovell was going to prevent that, if he could. Desperate diseases require desperate measures: and Lovell was ready for anything, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, as it were.

A few minutes later the 'feeder' came in sight. It was a shallow stream flowing through the wood, to join the river at a distance. The footpath crossed it by means of a plank bridge.

It was a thick, solid old plank, about twelve feet in length, that rested on stones on either side of the woodland stream. This was the spot on which Lovell had settled in his mind to make a last effort to save the situation.

The plank was little more than a foot wide. It was impossible for two persons to walk abreast on it.

Mr. Manders, with his octopus-grip on the back of his prisoner's collar, pushed the prisoner in front on him on the plank, walking behind him. Lovell gave his friends a quick look.

'Now—!' he breathed.

'But what—?'

'I'm going to slip on the plank, and grab Manders!' whispered Lovell, 'Accident, of course. He will have to let go Morny, or fall in—.'

'But—.'

'Morny will get loose, and cut—.'

'But—.'

Lovell did not stay to listen to 'buts.' He hurried on the plank after Mr. Manders. He had no time for 'buts.' It was now or never—neck or nothing!

Manders was proceeding slowly and carefully across the plank bridge. As he reached the middle of the stream, Lovell closed in behind him.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome watched breathlessly from the bank? It was in Lovell's hands now.

Just behind Mr. Manders, Lovell contrived to slip. He grasped at the Modern master for support.

'Oh!' gasped Lovell, 'I—I'm falling—oh!'

He threw all his weight on Mr. Manders, who staggered.

'Take care!' shrieked Mr. Manders, 'You are dragging me over! I shall lose my footing! You stupid boy, take care!'

Lovell was taking care—to drag Manders over. He did not want to duck him, if he could help it: but he was going to make him relax his hold on Morny, and give the prisoner a chance to escape.

Mr. Manders staggered wildly on the plank bridge. Mornington, quick on the uptake gave a terrific wrench at his collar, to free himself and run. Between Lovell dragging on one side, and Morny wrenching on the other, the Modern master fairly rocked.

His grasp, involuntarily relaxed, and Morny, with another desperate wrench, tore himself loose—lurched over under the impetus of his own effort, slipped off the plank, and pitched headlong into the stream.

Splash!

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Manders.

'Oh, crumbs!' breathed Lovell.

'Oh, crikey!' came from Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome. All eyes fixed on the widening circles in the stream, where Mornington had disappeared under water. For several moments he remained disappeared, the water wildly agitated as he struggled up. But the woodland stream was only two or three feet deep, and Morny's head came up, his feet finding an uncertain footing in the mud at the bottom.

A wet smudgy face emerged into the sunlight. Morny came up spluttering for breath, struggling with the current. The peaked cap had been washed away. Most of the soot had been washed away also. It was a disguised gangster who had fallen into the water. It was Mornington of the Classical Fourth whose wet and smudgy face emerged, and met all eyes in the sunlight.



Splash!

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL UP!

'MORNINGTON!'

Mr. Manders gasped out that name.

His eyes fixed on the smudgy face over the stream. They were glued on it. They almost popped from his countenance in his amazement.

'Oh, corks!' breathed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stood dumb. They realised that the game was now absolutely up! If there had been a chance of getting Morny out of Mr. Manders' hands unknown and unrecognised, it was gone now. That newly-washed face, smudgy as it was, would have been recognised by any fellow at Rookwood. Obviously it was recognised by Manders. All was up now!

'Mornington!' repeated Mr. Manders, like a man in a dream.

Indeed, for some moments it did appear like a dream to him. Up to that moment, he had not had a doubt that it was a young gangster in his grasp—one of those reckless young roughts who had taken to lawless pursuits in the disturbed post-war days. Now he recognised him as a Rookwood junior. Manders gazed at him, stared at him, glared at him, almost gibbered at him, in his astonishment.

Mornington, gasping and spluttering, struggled to the further bank. Escape was open to him now—if it was of any use!

Manders stared after him, as he went. He did not make any move to recapture the escaped prisoner. He had been very keen indeed to hand over a gangster to the grip of the law. But he had no use for a Rookwood junior to hand over to Mr. Boggs at Coombe. Slowly, the meaning of this extraordinary affair was dawning on his mind.

Mornington dragged himself from the water, further down the stream, and stood there panting for breath and squeezing water from his clothes. Mr. Manders' eyes turned on Jimmy Silver and Co.

They waited for the thunder to roll. Even Lovell was dashed. There was nothing to say. Manders, now that he had recognised the 'gangster' as Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth, knew how the matter stood. He could hardly have supposed that his 'rescuers' were unaware of that gangster's real identity.

The expression on Mr. Manders' face, as he looked at the Fistical Four, was inexpressibly expressive! He seemed to be understudying the Alpine climber, whose brow was set and whose eyes beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath! Or Roderick Dhu, on the occasion when dark lightnings flashed from Roderick's eyes! Often and often had Rookwood fellows, both Modern and Classical, compared Mr. Manders to a Gorgon! But never had he looked so much like a Gorgon as at this moment. He was not merely annoyed. He was not merely angry. He was infuriated.

'That—that was Mornington!' His voice came like a saw. 'That—that was not a—a—a footpad, as—as I supposed—it was a Classical junior of Rookwood in—in an absurd disguise! It was Mornington, of Mr. Dalton's form.'

The juniors were silent.

'You knew this!' thundered Mr. Manders.

Silence.

'The others who were with him—the two others—they were Rookwood boys also?'

Still silence.

'The whole affair is a trick—a practical joke—a disrespectful, impertinent practical joke!'

Frozen silence.

'Very well!' said Mr. Manders, with a look, and a tone, which indicated that so far from being well, everything was as far as possible from well. 'Very well! I have been deluded—deceived

—imposed upon! Very well! I shall place the matter before your headmaster immediately on my return to the school!

With that, Mr. Manders turned his back on the dismayed quartette, and strode away across the plank, and up the foot-path beyond. Jimmy Silver and Co. stood rooted, and dumb, watching him till he disappeared among the trees.

Jimmy drew a deep, deep breath, when he was gone.

'That's that!' he said.

'By gum!' said Raby, 'We're for it now! He's not going to Dicky—he's going to the Head!'

'Flogging all round, most likely,' said Newcome.

'Oh, crumbs!'

Lovell did not speak. For once, Arthur Edward Lovell seemed to have nothing to say. Even Lovell realised that his 'latest' had resulted in awful disaster.

The Fistical Four trailed dismally across the plank. They joined Mornington who was stripping off his 'gangster' attire. His own clothes, underneath, were soaked—he was drenched to the skin. He gave the Fistical Four a sarcastic grin as they came up.

'Looks like getting off Extra, what?' he asked.

'You silly ass!'

'What a jolly old frost!' sighed Mornington.

'Fathead!'

'Oh, come on,' said Jimmy Silver, 'We've got to go up to the Head—the sooner we get it over, the better.'

It was not a happy party that walked back to Rookwood. Lovell, however, recovered a little, and pointed out to his chums that it had been jolly near a success. In response to which, Jimmy Silver and Co. without speaking, seized hold of Lovell, and banged his head on a wayside tree. After that Arthur Edward had no more to say before they reached Rookwood.

Oswald and Teddy Grace met them in the gateway, both looking anxious.

'I say, Manders has come in,' said Oswald, 'He looked fierce! Has anything gone wrong?'

'Manders looked awfully fierce,' said Teddy Grace, 'He marched off to the Head's house. I say, is anything up?'

'Only our number,' said Jimmy Silver, 'You two keep it dark—they don't know you were in it. We're booked for the Head.'

'Oh, scissors!'

Jimmy Silver and Co. walked across to their House, Bulkeley of the Sixth met them at the door. Apparently he was looking out for them.

'Oh, here you are,' he said.

'Here we are!' agreed Jimmy Silver, 'Does anybody want us?'

'Yes—the Head! I've orders to take you to his study as soon as you come in.' The Rookwood captain gave them a curious glance, 'I hear you've been playing tricks on Manders, out of gates.'

'Guilty, my lord!' said Mornington.

'You young asses! Follow me.'

Five juniors followed Bulkeley to the Head's study. Manders, evidently had lost no time. Dr. Chisholm was prepared to deal with them. They could guess how he was going to do it. It was a 'Head's whopping': and some of them knew, by experience, what a Head's whopping was like! Their spirits were down to zero when they arrived at the door of the dreaded apartment.

Bulkeley tapped, and opened the door.

'The juniors, sir!'

'Thank you, Bulkeley! Send them in!'

And Jimmy Silver and Co., looking as if they found life hardly worth living even at Rookwood, filed into the awful presence of their headmaster. What followed was painful. But let us, as the novelists used to say, draw a veil!

CHAPTER XXIX

LOVELL ON THE WAR-PATH!

'THAT tick Manders——.'

'Never mind Manders! Ow!'

'Wow!'

'Yow-ow!'

There were sounds of woe in the end study in the Classical Fourth.

Jimmy Silver stood leaning on the table, on one side. Raby leaned on at the other. Newcome stood in the window. Lovell leaned on the mantelpiece. Not one of the four seemed to want to sit down. Their head-master had dealt with them faithfully: too faithfully, in the estimation of the juniors.

Mr. Manders had no inkling of the real intention behind the affair in Coombe Wood. He did not know that that little comedy had been planned to touch his hard heart, stir his gratitude, and cause him to put in a word for the juniors doomed to Extra on St. Jim's day. So far as Mr. Manders could see, it was a disrespectful, impertinent, insensate practical joke, played by Lower boys on a member of the Staff: and as such he had reported and described it to the Head. And Dr. Chisholm, who naturally had no use for disrespectful, impertinent, and insensate practical jokes played on members of his Staff, had felt it incumbent on him to impress upon Jimmy Silver and Co, that such disrespectful, impertinent, and insensate practical jokes could not be played with impunity.

It was well known that the Head could whop! But never had five members of the Classical Fourth realised it so clearly as now. One after another they had gone through it, the Head laying it on as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet.

They almost crawled away to their study afterwards. In the passage, Mornington only stayed a moment to say to Lovell 'You idiot!' before he limped into No. 4. Lovell made no rejoinder. He crawled on to the end study with his friends: and in that study, there was a chorus of mumbles, moans, and gasps. Several fellows came along to look in, to sympathise or to smile. The Fistical Four did not heed them. They were fully occupied with mumbling and wriggling. Like the young man of Hythe who sat down on a scythe, they did nothing but wriggle and writhe.

Lovell was the first to show signs of recovery. Three members of the Co., lamentable as the situation was, realised that they had received that for which they had asked, and that really they couldn't have expected anything else. Not so Lovell. Lovell was angry and indignant. That it was all Lovell's fault, from start to finish, was clear as noonday to his chums. It was clear to Lovell that the blame lay with Manders.

'That old tick Manders——!' said Lovell, again.

'Oh, crumbs!' murmured Raby, 'Did the Head lay it on?'

'Woooooh!' mumbled Newcome, 'He did!'

'That ass Lovell——!' moaned Jimmy.

'It's all Manders,' said Lovell, savagely, 'It was Manders who got us bunged into Extra! That was the whole trouble. If he hadn't bunged us into Extra, I shouldn't have had to think of ways of getting off. It's all Manders, blow him, and we're jolly well going to make him sit up for it.'

'What?' ejaculated three juniors together.

They forgot to continue their contortions for a moment, as they stared at Lovell. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, had had enough trouble with Manders. It seemed that Arthur Edward Lovell hadn't.

'Are we going to take this lying down?' demanded Lovell.

'We took it bending down,' said Raby, 'Do you want any more? I don't.'

'He had the cheek to whop me to-day—I told him a Modern beak couldn't whop Classics, but he did it all the same——.'

'Serve you right!'

'And now,' said Lovell, breathing hard, 'He's got us a Head's whopping all round. We're still bunged in Extra, and we shall still be bunged in Extra on Wednesday, when Tom Merry's crowd come over, unless I can think of a plan—.'

Jimmy Silver interrupted him with almost a yell.

'Did you say 'plan'?' Jimmy seemed to have heard enough, for the present at least, of Lovell's plans.

'Yes, I did. And—.'

'Well, you say 'plan' again, and we'll stick your head in the coal-locker,' hissed Jimmy Silver.

'And then jump on you,' said Raby.

'Look here—!' roared Lovell.

'Oh, shut up,' hooted Newcome, 'If I didn't feel so jolly bad, I'd take a ruler to you! Give us a rest.'

Arthur Edward Lovell detached himself from the mantel-piece. He wriggled spasmodically as he did so. There were many painful twinges. The very worst was over: but a Head's whopping was not a thing that could be soon forgotten. He eyed his friends with mingled reproach and scorn.

'Look here,' he said, 'Modern beaks ain't going to bung us in Extra, muck up our cricket matches, and get us whopped by the Head, and nothing done. We're going to make Manders sit up. It's all Manders.'

'What's the big idea?' asked Newcome, with weary sarcasm, 'Going to squirt him with ink, like you did Knowles?'

'Or lock him in his study, like you did Mossoo?' asked Raby.

'Or spring some more Fourth-form footpads on him and go up to the Head again?' inquired Jimmy.

'I'm going to tell him what I think of him,' said Lovell, 'I fancy it will make him sit up a bit when he's called a crusty old curmudgeon—.'

'What?'

'And a mouldy old Modern—.'

'You're going to call Manders a crusty old curmudgeon, and a mouldy old Modern?' asked Jimmy Silver, dazedly.

'That's it,' said Lovell, with a nod, 'Let him know what fellows think of him, see? Will he sit up?'

His friends gazed at him.

'Better not let him hear you, when you do,' said Raby.

'He will hear me all right,' said Lovell.

'Isn't a Head's whopping enough for you?' asked Newcome, 'Do you want to be bunked next? Manders would go raging to the Head—.'

'Let him, if he likes! He won't know who it was, only that it was a man on the Classical side. I expect he'd guess that one!'

'But how—what—?'

'I'm not going to walk across to Manders' House, pop into his study, and say 'Manders, you're a mouldy old Modern,' said Lovell, sarcastically. Lovell could be sarcastic! 'I don't want to be walked in to the Head again—I've had enough of the old scout to go on with. I suppose you've heard of such a thing as a telephone,' added Lovell, still more sarcastically.

'Telephone!' said Jimmy.

'I noticed Greely going out, as we came in,' said Lovell, 'Chap could nip into his study and ring up Manders on his 'phone. See?'

'Oh!' said Jimmy. He realised that Lovell did not plan to make those complimentary remarks to Mr. Manders face to face, under the Modern master's astonished nose. He was going to make them surreptitiously, as it were.

'Safe as houses,' said Lovell, 'Mind, I'd rather tell him what I think of him to his face. But I'm not going up to the Head again. I'm going to get on to Greely's telephone: and I tell you, I'll make Manders' hair curl before I'm through with him.'

'Think he won't spot your voice?' yelled Raby.

'I know he won't,' answered Lovell, coolly, 'I can put on a hoarse voice, like a fellow with a cold. That's all right.'

Lovell moved towards the door. Evidently, his mind was made up. Manders, the root of all the trouble in Lovell's opinion, was going to be made to 'sit up': so far as calling him fancy names could effect that process.

As Lovell had mapped it out, it seemed safe enough. But if Lovell's chums had ever had any faith in his planning, they had quite lost it now. Not for a moment did they doubt that Lovell, having already collected enough trouble to last any ordinary fellow quite a long time, was now going in search of more.

'I'm fed up with Manders,' said Lovell, 'Fed right up to the chin! We've had too much Manders, and I'm going to make him cringe.'

Jimmy Silver exchanged a glance with Raby and Newcome.

'Now, look here, Lovell——!' he said.

'Nuff said,' interrupted Lovell, 'I've got to get through before Greely comes in.' Lovell put his hand on the door-handle.

'You're not going to do anything of the kind!' roared Jimmy.

'Ain't I just?' said Lovell, derisively, 'I tell you, it will make him cringe. It will make him as mad as a hatter. I'm going to pitch it hot and strong, I can tell you.'

'You benighted ass!'

'Oh, chuck it,' said Lovell, 'Like to come and keep cave while I'm in Greely's study?'

'You're not going anywhere near Greely's study.'

'I jolly well am!'

'You're not going to say a word to Manders.'

'You'll jolly well see!'

'We've had enough of Manders,' howled Raby.

'I've had too much,' said Lovell, 'Now he's going to get something back. No good jawing—I'm going.'

Lovell turned the door-handle.

He was getting no support in his study. That did not make Lovell less determined. It made him more so. Arthur Edward Lovell was on the war-path: and he was going ahead, regardless of words of wisdom from Uncle James of Rookwood.

'Stop!' bawled Jimmy Silver.

Lovell glanced round.

'Coming to keep cave?' he asked.

'No! And you're not going.'

'I'm going now.'

'Stop, you ass—.'

'Rats!'

'Collar him,' shouted Jimmy Silver, 'Collar him, and sit on his head.'

'Why, you cheeky ass!' roared Lovell, indignantly, 'Think you can stop me? Why, I'll—.' Lovell broke off, and tore the door open, as his three chums rushed across the study.

He jumped into the passage, as they jumped at him. Three pairs of clutching hands just missed him, as he jumped.

The next moment, Arthur Edward Lovell was going down the Fourth-form passage as if it were the cinder-path.

'Stop!' yelled Jimmy Silver.

'Stop, you ass!' bawled Raby.

'Come back, you born idiot!' shrieked Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell did not heed. His anxious chums were prepared to collar him, and keep him from hunting for more trouble by sitting on his head in the study: but Arthur Edward had no use for that demonstration of faithful friendship. He did the passage at about 50 m.p.h., and vanished down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXX

A TALK ON THE TELEPHONE

BUZZZZZZ!

Mr. Manders made an irritable movement.

Manders was sitting in the armchair in his study, happily immersed in a bulky volume dealing with the entrancing subject of the Higher Mathematics, for which Manders had a dry relish. He had dismissed the affair of the Classical juniors from his mind. He was enjoying a spot of leisure, in his own dry way, when he was interrupted by the unwelcome buzz of the telephone-bell.

He gave an impatient shrug, laid down the Higher Mathematics, and reached for the instrument.

He was prepared to be very short and sharp, if this was some parent inquiring after the well-being of some young hopeful in his House. On the other hand, he was prepared to be very suave, if it turned out to be a call from the Head on some School matter. So until he had the receiver to his ear, he did not know whether to turn on sharpness or suavity.

'Mr. Manders?' came a husky voice that he did not recognise.

It certainly was not Dr. Chisholm's. Whose it was, Mr. Manders did not know. So far as he was aware, he had never heard it before. It sounded as if it came from someone whose throat was hoarse with a cold.

'Speaking!' said Mr. Manders, briefly.

'That's Manders?'

'This is Mr. Manders,' snapped the Modern master.

'Crusty old Manders?'

'Wha-a-t?'

'Mouldy old Manders?'

Mr. Manders sat as if transfixed, gazing at the telephone.

The voice was hoarse and husky, but the words came clearly through. He could hardly believe his ear. Never before had Mr. Manders heard such remarks on the telephone. It was really difficult to believe that he was hearing them now.

'Who—who—who is speaking?' he gasped, at last.

There was a chuckle over the wires.

'Wouldn't you like to know, you Modern tick?'

'What? What? What did you say?' gasped Mr. Manders.

'Modern tick! Mouldy old Modern!'

'Where are you speaking from?' shrieked Mr. Manders.

'Guess!'

'I—I—I—you—you—you—.' Mr. Manders was getting incoherent.

'I've rung you up to tell you what I think of you, Manders—what we all think of you! Why don't you retire, Manders?'

'What?'

'We're all fed up with you at Rookwood. Think how it would improve the landscape if you took your face away.'

Mr. Manders gurgled.

'Do you call it a face?' went on the voice.

'You impertinent young rascal! That is a Classical boy speaking! I am quite assured of that.' Mr. Manders almost bawled into the telephone. 'I shall find out who you are, and I shall go to Dr. Chisholm—.'

'I expect the Head's as fed up with you as we are, Manders.'

'You shall be flogged for this! You shall be expelled! You shall—.'

'Bow-wow!'

'I am well aware that you are speaking from the Classical side. You are using some master's telephone. I know perfectly well—.'

'You don't know a thing, Manders! You're an old donkey.'

'Wha-a-t?'

'An old donkey! And a crusty curmudgeon! And a mouldy Modern! How do the men in your House stand you? We wouldn't, at any price.'

Mr. Manders gasped with wrath. It was some Classical speaking: that was plain. Mr. Manders would have given much to know which Classical it was. But there was no clue in the husky hoarse voice.

'We're fed up with you, Manders! Fed right up to the chin! You're a spot of bother! You're a worry! You're the jolly old limit.'

'I—I—I—you—you—you——.' Mr. Manders was getting incoherent.

'Your face would stop a clock, Manders.'

'You—you——.'

'You're a crusty, rusty, musty, fusty, dusty old ragbag, Manders. Got that?'

Slam!

Mr. Manders slammed the receiver back on the telephone, with a slam that made the instrument rock. He seemed to have had enough of this light and genial conversation from the Classical side.

He rose to his feet, fairly trembling with wrath.

There was no doubt that it was a Classical who had been speaking to him. The voice, of course, was disguised: the husky hoarseness assumed. He had not the remotest idea of the identity of the offender. But he was going to find out, somehow. And he was going to Dr. Chisholm to demand the expulsion from Rookwood of that impertinent young rascal. Nothing short of that would satisfy Mr. Manders. But how was he going to find him out?

The young rascal must have taken advantage of some master's absence to use his telephone. He had been 'phoning from a Classical master's study. That was clear enough. But when he had cut off, he would dodge out and disappear. A junior, no doubt—among a couple of hundred Classical juniors! How was Manders to spot him?

With compressed lips and knitted brows, Mr. Manders thought over that problem, when he was suddenly interrupted.

Buzzzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell again.

Mr. Manders gave a splutter of wrath. He had not expected the young rascal to ring up again. He clutched up the receiver, and fairly roared into the mouthpiece,

'You impertinent rascal! How dare you? You utterly impertinent and disrespectful rascal—.'

'Mr. Manders!'

It was an icy voice, in tones of offended surprise.

Mr. Manders almost dropped the receiver. He realised that he had been a little hasty in taking it for granted that it was the young rascal on the Classical side ringing again. It was not the young rascal! It was the head-master of Rookwood: and his surprised voice was as freezing in its tones, as if it came from the deepest depths of a refrigerator.

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Manders, 'I—I—.'

'Really, Mr. Manders—.'

'I—I—I—,' stuttered Mr. Manders.

'I do not understand you, Mr. Manders,' went on the freezing voice, 'I quite fail to understand your use of such expressions—.'

'I—I—I—,' stuttered the unhappy Manders.

'I rang you up, Mr. Manders, to ask you to come to my study, to discuss a modification in the time-table in connection with the mathematics sets,' continued the freezing voice, 'I did not expect—.'

'I—I—I was not addressing you, sir—you—you cannot suppose that I—I was addressing you, sir—.'

'I imagine not! I certainly imagine not!'

'I—I thought it was someone else—a—a—a person who—who—who—.'

'Such expressions, Mr. Manders—.'

'If you—you—you will pip-pip-pip—.'

'What?'

'If you will pip-pip-permit me to explain, sir—.'

'I shall certainly require you to explain, Mr. Manders. I shall require a very definite explanation.'

'I—I—I——.'

There was a whirr on the telephone. The Head had cut off. Obviously he was very much astonished and offended. Mr. Manders put up the receiver, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

Arthur Edward Lovell had set out to make Manders 'sit up.' He had had more success than he could have anticipated. It remained to be seen whether Arthur Edward was booked to 'sit up' in his turn!

CHAPTER XXXI

UNEXPECTED!

'Oh!' gasped Lovell.

He jumped.

Standing by the telephone in Mr. Greely's study, on the Classical side, grinning over the instrument as he talked to Mr. Manders, Arthur Edward Lovell had been enjoying life. It was just 'pie' to talk to Manders like that. In his enjoyment of that conversation, Lovell had forgotten even the twinges from the Head's whipping. Often and often had he wanted to tell Manders what he thought of him. Now he had done so—freely! If Manders had been in any doubt what fellows on the Classical side thought of him, he could be in doubt no longer. Lovell had put it plainly—indeed, with excessive plainness.

All that remained now was to dodge out of Greely's study as cautiously as he had dodged into it, leaving no trace behind. Manders, of course, would rage. Probably he would go to the Head about it. Beaks and prefects would be after the unknown person who had talked to Manders. Lovell did not care. He had talked in a disguised voice. Nobody had seen him getting into Greely's study. Nobody would see him getting out. They could go over Rookwood School with a small comb, if they liked, but they would not get Lovell.

Seldom or never had Arthur Edward felt so pleased and satisfied with himself. True the consequences would be awful if he were found out. Quite likely such an offender would be 'bunked.' But as he was not going to be found out, that was all right. Grinning, Lovell put up the receiver, and turned from the telephone. It was then that he gave a sudden gasp and a jump.

The cause of his sudden shock was the sound of a voice out-

side the study—that of someone speaking in the passage, only a few feet from the closed door.

Mr. Greely's voice was rich and fruity. It was, perhaps, heard too often: but otherwise there was nothing the matter with it. But the voice of a Red Indian raised in a warwhoop could not have startled and dismayed Lovell more at that moment.

'Oh, scissors!' breathed Lovell.

He stood staring across the study at the door. Greely had been out. Lovell had made sure of that. He could not, of course, know exactly when Greely might come in. It appeared that he had come in at a very awkward moment for the planner of the end study. Lovell stood rooted, in dismay, staring at the door. Only that door was between him and Greely: and it might open at any moment.

Indeed, had Mr. Greely come direct to his study, he must have caught Lovell actually standing at the telephone! Luckily, he had paused to speak to somebody in the passage.

'Yes, a very pleasant walk,' Mr. Greely was saying, apparently in reply to a remark from some other beak. 'I walked back from the river by Pooter's Meadow—a very pleasant walk.'

'You did not meet Captain Pooter?' This was Mr. Mooney's voice. The two beaks were talking just outside Greely's door. 'I have heard that he makes himself very unpleasant to people crossing that meadow.'

'I did not, sir! I should know how to deal with Captain Pooter, or any other person, sir, who disputed my right to use a public right-of-way!' exclaimed Mr. Greely, with emphasis.

Lovell hardly breathed.

There was no escape for him. He could not walk out of that study without walking into Mr. Greely and Mr. Mooney. And any minute Greely might walk in. Only that chat with Mooney was delaying him.

A minute ago, Arthur Edward Lovell had been feeling as pleased and satisfied as any successful planner could possibly feel. Now he was feeling a good deal like a rabbit in a trap.

His head almost swam.

If he was discovered there—! Already Manders would be raging after his unknown interlocutor on the telephone. He knew that somebody had been in a Classical master's study using the 'phone. If Lovell was discovered in Greely's study, the game was up. And there was no escape: and any moment the door might open and reveal him to Greely's eyes!

'Oh, crikey!' moaned Lovell.

He made a move towards the window, and peered out. He peered only for a moment, and then backed hastily away—a glimpse of Mr. Dalton, talking to Bulkeley of the Sixth, in full view of the window, was enough for him. There was no hope of escape that way.

He cast a wild glance round the study.

Greely's voice, in the passage, was going on, telling Mr. Mooney how very curtly and effectively he would have dealt with Captain Pooter, had that old military gentleman ventured to be impertinent. Greely was quite warm on the subject. It gave Lovell time to think. Only Mr. Greely's love of the sound of his own voice was saving him from instant discovery.

There was no escape by door or window. But he couldn't and mustn't be found there! The only other resource was to get out of sight somehow, and hope for a chance of getting clear later.

He thought of ducking under the table. It was a large table, and there was ample room for a junior to park himself under it. But Greely might sit down at that table, if he had work to do, and stick his plump legs under it. That was no use.

Then he looked at Greely's armchair. It was a big armchair, with a high back, and it stood in the corner of the window alcove. In the angle of the alcove behind it there was room for a fellow to crouch, with a little close packing. Was Greely likely to move that chair?

Lovell had take the chance. It was a case of any port in a storm. He squeezed himself behind the chair.

It was a close fit. But he was wholly out of sight of anyone

coming into the study, and that was the chief thing. Lovell, in the circumstances, could hardly expect to make himself comfortable.

In the passage, Mr. Greely's fruity voice rolled on. But it ceased about a minute later. Mooney, probably, had heard enough about what Mr. Greely would do if Captain Pooter ventured to be impertinent to a Rookwood master, and he had got away. The door-handle rattled, and Lovell caught his breath.

Mr. Greely came in, and shut the door after him.

For a dreadful second, Lovell fancied that the Fifth-form master suspected his presence, for Mr. Greely came directly across the study to the armchair in the window-alcove. In that dreadful second, Lovell, in his mind's eye, saw himself discovered! Luckily, he did not see it with any other eye! The next moment, the armchair creaked, as if in protest, as Mr. Greely deposited his portly weight in it.

Evidently, Greely had no suspicion. He had come across to the armchair for the simple purpose of sitting down in it—a quite natural proceeding after a walk in warm summer weather.

Lovell heard a faint grunt, as Mr. Greely settled himself comfortably. There was another grunt, and then a mutter of words, Mr. Greely communing with himself, on the subject he had been discussing with Mr. Mooney.

'Captain Pooter indeed! Pah!'

Then there was a rustle of paper: from which Lovell deduced that Mr. Greely had brought in an evening paper.

The wretched junior could have groaned. He was undiscovered, and that was the main point: but this indicated that Mr. Greely had sat down to read the evening paper, which meant that he was a fixture there for some time to come. The chance of dodging out of the study seemed remote.

Minutes—which seemed as long as hours, if not days, to Lovell—slowly passed. The paper rustled occasionally, and occasionally Mr. Greely gave a little grunt. Otherwise the study was silent.

How long was this going to last? Already, it was certain,

Manders would be on the war-path. Already investigation was being made for the talker on the telephone. There could be no doubt about that. Suppose they came to that study——!

Tap!

The door opened.

A rustle of paper again, as Mr. Greely looked up.

'Pray come in, Bulkeley! What is it?'

Lovell almost ceased to breathe. It was the captain of Rookwood who was at the door. Lovell could guess what he was after.

'Excuse me, Mr. Greely. Someone—some junior, it is supposed—has been using a master's telephone on this side, to speak disrespectfully to Mr. Manders in the other House——.'

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Greely.

'The Head has instructed us to find him, sir. If you have been long in your study, it cannot have been this telephone that was used—it occurred about a quarter of an hour ago.'

'As a matter of fact, I came in from a walk about a quarter of an hour ago,' said Mr. Greely. 'But I can hardly imagine that any junior would venture to use my telephone—a senior master's telephone.'

'You did not see any junior here, sir, or about the passage, when you came in?' asked Bulkeley.

'There was certainly no one in this room,' answered Mr. Greely, 'I met Mr. Mooney in the passage, but I saw nothing of any junior boy.'

'Thank you, sir.'

To Lovell's infinite relief, the door closed. Bulkeley was going further afield with his investigations.

All was safe, so far—if only Greely would go, and give a fellow a chance of dodging away by door or window. But Greely showed no sign of going. He sat and read his evening paper. And Arthur Edward Lovell, cramped behind the armchair, could only wonder dismally and apprehensively how this was going to end. He was still wondering when the bell rang for lock-ups.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE ONLY WAY!

'LOVELL!'

No reply.

Mr. Dalton was taking roll at lock-ups. Rookwooder after Rookwooder answered 'adsum' as his name was called, till Richard Dalton arrived at the name of Lovell. Then there was no answer.

Mr. Dalton looked up, with a slight frown, and repeated the name.

'Lovell!'

As there was still no reply, Dalton marked that member of his form absent, and went on with the roll.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, in the ranks of the Classical Fourth, exchanged a glance. Lovell was not present at roll, and where he was, they had not the faintest idea. They had seen and heard nothing of him, since he had raced down the passage to escape their friendly ministrations.

By this time, the Co. had recovered somewhat from the effects of their visit to their headmaster. There were still some lingering twinges. But they were feeling distinctly better. Life no longer seemed weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. It was worth living once more.

But they were worried about Lovell.

That he had carried out his plan of 'phoning Mr. Manders on Greely's 'phone, they could have no doubt: for all the House knew that the prefects were on the prowl, looking for somebody who had used a master's telephone.

Lovell had done it! They knew that. They could only hope that nobody else would know it. What would happen to Lovell, if they 'got' him, would hardly bear thinking of. It was quite

on the cards that a fellow might be 'bunked' for slanging a 'beak.' It was an awful possibility. The chums of the end study were torn between anxiety for Lovell, and a desire to kick him for his fatheadedness. Their feelings were quite mixed. But anxiety predominated.

Where was Lovell?

He had done it—and, having done it, they would naturally have expected him to come and tell them so, grinning with satisfaction over his exploit. They would have expected him to tell them, triumphantly, that he had levelled up with Manders, and that he, Arthur Edward Lovell, was the only fellow at Rookwood who had ever got away with slanging a beak! They would have expected him to be full of it: bubbling over with it, in fact.

But they had not even seen him. He seemed to have disappeared. They had looked for him, but found him not. And now he was absent at roll.

As it was particularly necessary for Lovell, in the circumstances, to avoid drawing attention to himself, it was, of course, just like him to make himself conspicuous by cutting roll. That was Lovell, all over.

But where was he?

Jimmy Silver and Co. had looked for him everywhere, or almost everywhere. It was certain, to them, that he had been in Greely's study, at the 'phone. After that he had apparently disappeared into thin air!

'Where is the ass?' muttered Jimmy, as they left hall after calling-over, 'He was in Greely's study an hour ago—he can't be there still—.'

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Newcome, suddenly, 'Suppose he couldn't get away—.'

'What—?'

'Might have been beaks in the passage or something—if the coast wasn't clear, he couldn't cut—.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

'That's it,' said Raby, with a nod, 'Bet you the silly chump

couldn't get clear after 'phoning! Bet you he's still there, waiting for a chance to dodge out.

'Oh, my only Aunt Jemima!' exclaimed Jimmy, in dismay, 'If that's it—but Greely must have come in before this.'

'I didn't see him in hall,' said Newcome.

'Then he must be in his study.'

'But if Lovell's there—.'

The three looked at one another, in utter dismay. It dawned upon their minds now what must have happened.

Lovell hadn't been able to get away unseen after 'phoning. He had had to remain in Greely's study. That, now they came to think of it, was the only way of accounting for his mysterious disappearance. Lovell, for the past hour, had been in Greely's study—he couldn't have been anywhere else. He hadn't been discovered yet, or they would have heard of it—he would have been up before the Head. But he was there! And if Greely had come in, as no doubt he had, there was only one possible conclusion—Lovell had dodged somehow out of sight, and was still in the study—with Greely!

'Oh, the awful ass!' breathed Jimmy.

'The footling fathead!' muttered Newcome.

'He must be there—.'

'He can't be anywhere else—.'

'Greely may not have come in,' suggested Raby.

'Lovell would have had a chance to cut, before this, if he hadn't—Greely must be there—.'

'But Lovell—.'

'He would hunt cover when he heard Greely coming. May have parked himself under the table, or behind the book-case—.'

'With Greely in the study—!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'The frightful fathead!'

'The howling ass!'

'Lovell all over!'

'Oh, just Lovell!'

There was a strong attachment among the Fistical Four of Rookwood. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome were deeply and intensely anxious about Lovell. But never had they felt a stronger to desire to boot him.

'If it was only a licking from Dicky, we'd jolly well leave him to it,' said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath, 'A licking would do him good—.'

'But——!' said Raby and Newcome together.

'But it's the Head! It may be the sack! We—we—we've got to get him out of it, somehow,' said Jimmy, 'Now it's lock-ups, he could drop out of the window, if—if Greely wasn't there.' Uncle James of Rookwood wrinkled his boyish brow in thought, 'We've got to get Greely out of the room for a minute or two—.'

'How?' said Raby, hopelessly.

'It means a row, but it can't be helped,' said Jimmy Silver. He made up his mind, 'We can't leave the ass to it—it's too jolly serious for that, after what he's done. You fellows go up to the study, and open the window. Lovell will have to get up the rain-pipe. Leave the rest to me—.'

'But——!'

'No time to waste. If it's as we think, the blithering ass may be spotted any minute. Leave it to me.'

'O.K.,' said Newcome and Raby, rather doubtfully: and they went up the stairs. Jimmy Silver made his way to Masters' Studies. There was no help for it. Lovell could not be left to his fate: and Uncle James had resolved to sacrifice himself on the altar of friendship—with a consoling anticipation of booting Arthur Edward Lovell afterwards!

He tapped at Mr. Greely's door.

'Come in!' came a fruity voice from within. Evidently Greely was there!

Jimmy Silver opened the door.

Mr. Greely was no longer perusing the evening paper in the chair by the window. The summer dusk was falling. Greely had transferred himself to his writing-table, and sat down to

correct Latin proses for his form, with his reading-lamp turned on. It was fortunate that Lovell had not sought a refuge under that table, for Mr. Greely's plump legs were stretched there, and would infallibly have contacted him had he been on the spot.

The Fifth-form master glanced up at Jimmy Silver in the doorway. A Fourth-form junior had nothing to do with the master of the Fifth, so Mr. Greely could only suppose that he had been sent there with a message. That, in fact, was exactly what Jimmy wanted him to suppose.

'What is it, Silver?' asked Mr. Greely.

'If you please, sir, would you step along to Mr. Dalton's study for a few minutes,' said Jimmy, meekly.

He did not say that it was a message from Mr. Dalton. But that was certainly the only inference Greely could derive from his words: which savoured perhaps a little more of the wisdom of the serpent than of the innocence of the dove!

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr. Greely.

He laid down the pen, and rose from the table, switching off the reading-lamp. Greely was always ready to step along to another master's study for a chat—too ready indeed, in the opinion of some of his colleagues, as he did not always wait for a request to do so.

Jimmy Silver stepped back into the passage. There he paused to tie up a shoe-lace. Mr. Greely passed him, rolling ponderously down the passage towards Mr. Dalton's study.

As his portly back was turned, Jimmy's head popped into the doorway. Then he whispered—a cautious whisper that did not reach Greely's ears as he rolled away.

'Lovell! Are you there, you mad ass?'

If there had been any doubt that Arthur Edward Lovell was there, it was gone the next moment, as a head and shoulders rose into view behind the high back of the arm-chair in the window alcove. Lovell, undoubtedly, was there!

He stared across the high back of the chair at Jimmy Silver. He was looking quite worn.

The last hour had been a very long one to Lovell!

'I—I say——!' he gasped.

'Cut!' breathed Jimmy, 'Greely will be back in two or three minutes. Hop out of the window—there's nobody out now, after lock-ups.'

'Oh, crikey! I say——.'

'Get round to the end study—the rain-pipe!' breathed Jimmy, 'D'on't stand there gibbering—budge!'

'Look here, Jimmy Silver——.'

'Quick, fathead!' hissed Jimmy.

Lovell squeezed out from behind the armchair. Jimmy Silver backed into the passage, and cut away. Mr. Dalton's study door was half-open as he passed it, and from within came a fruity voice.

'Extraordinary, Mr. Dalton. A Fourth-form boy—Silver, of your form—brought me your message—what I supposed to be your message—and I came at once. Yet you tell me——.'

Jimmy did not hear more as he hurried on. He scudded away: with the happy certainty of a row with Dicky Dalton to come!

COAL-LOCKER FOR LOVELL!

'HERE he is!'

'Here's the fathead!'

'Here's the silly goat!'

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were looking down from the window of the end study in the Fourth, in the thickening dusk. They were looking for Lovell—and suddenly they saw a running figure, cutting round a corner of the school buildings.

That figure arrived panting below.

Lovell stared up, at three faces dim in the dusk. Then he started clambering up the rain-pipe.

It was an immense relief to his three chums. Once Lovell was safe in his own study, no one need know that he had been anywhere near Greely's study at all. The prefects could go on hunting for the junior who had used a master's telephone, as long as they liked. There was no clue to Lovell, if he was not caught in Master's Studies. And here he was—clambering breathlessly in at the window of the end study!

He rolled in and stood panting. Jimmy Silver closed the window, and drew the blind. Newcome turned on the light. Lovell stood panting for breath. But he was grinning as he panted.

'Jolly close shave, you fellows,' he said.

They gazed at him.

Lovell seemed in cheery spirits! He was grinning. His friends were not disposed to grin! Not in the very least!

'Lucky Dalton sent you with that message to Greely, Jimmy.'

'Eh?'

'Jolly lucky, as it happened. I was fairly bunkered. You

see, Greely came in before I could cut after using his 'phone——.'

'We guessed that one,' said Newcome, drily.

'Did you? Well, that's how it was. I parked myself behind that big armchair in the window—just had to, or he'd have spotted me. I can tell you, I wondered how I was ever going to get away. It wasn't too bad while Greely was sitting in the armchair, but when he got up—pew! I had a turn!'

Lovell whistled.

'Might have spotted me any minute, moving about the study, you know. Why, if he'd shut the window and drawn the blinds, he couldn't have missed me. Lucky it was such a fine evening and he didn't.'

'There's such a thing as fool's luck,' agreed Newcome.

'Well, a miss is as good as a mile,' said Lovell, cheerily, 'But I can tell you I was on tenterhooks, when Greely started moving about. Still, I got away all right—but it was a spot of luck Dalton sending you with that message, Jimmy! That's when I got a chance——.'

'Idiot!'

'Look here, Jimmy Silver——.'

'Ditherer!'

'Well, there's nothing to be shirty about, is there?' asked Lovell, 'I've taken all the risk to give Manders something back. You fellows never even thought of it. Well, I thought of it, and did it, too. I say, I did what I told you I'd do—slanged Manders a treat!' Lovell chuckled, 'Called him a Modern tick, and a rusty, dusty, fusty, musty ragbag, over Greely's 'phone! Ha, ha!'

Lovell laughed. His friends did not. They only gazed at him.

'Heard anything about it yet?' grinned Lovell.

'Sort of,' said Raby, 'You howling ass, all the pre's are on the prowl for the man who 'phoned Manders.'

'Let 'em prowl!' said Lovell, breezily, 'They won't know a thing! If I'd been spotted in Greely's study, they wouldn't have

had to look much further for the man they want. But it's all right now—absolutely O.K. Safe as houses! But I say, it was jolly lucky Dalton sent you with that message—.'

'You unspeakable chump!' hooted Jimmy Silver, 'Dalton never sent me with any message to Greely.'

'Eh? Why, I heard you—.'

'You heard me pull his leg, to get him out of the study, and give you a chance to drop out of the window, you dithering fathead!'

'Oh!' ejaculated Lovell.

'And I'm landed in a row with Dicky for it, and he may send for me any minute, or come up to the study for me—to ask me what I mean by pulling a senior master's leg—.'

'Oh!' repeated Lovell.

'Six on the bags, after a Head's whopping!' hissed Jimmy Silver, 'I was an ass not to let you be copped and sacked. If they bunked you from Rookwood, your people might send you to a home for idiots—that's the proper place for you—.'

'Look here—.'

'Now we're going to shove your head into the coal-locker—'

'Look here—!' roared Lovell.

'Collar him!'

Tap!

In another moment, Arthur Edward Lovell would have been struggling in the grasp of his exasperated chums. Jimmy Silver and Co. had been glad, and immensely relieved, to get the wandering sheep safely back into the fold. But now that anxiety was over, exasperation supervened. In the unanimous opinion of his chums, Arthur Edward Lovell wanted a lesson, and wanted it bad! He was not going to be sacked—Jimmy had preserved him from that sad fate. But he was going to have his head jammed in the coal-locker. That, they hoped, would keep Arthur Edward off planning for a time at least.

But just at that moment there came a tap at the door, and it opened. Hands that were raised to collar Arthur Edward

Lovell dropped suddenly, as the juniors looked round at Mr. Dalton in the doorway.

Richard Dalton's brow was very stern.

'Silver!' he rapped.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' murmured Jimmy. He knew what was coming.

'I can scarcely understand your conduct, Silver, in playing an utterly foolish, disrespectful, and meaningless trick, on a senior form-master,' said Mr. Dalton, sternly, 'A senseless trick unworthy of a small boy in the Second Form, Silver. You gave Mr. Greely what purported to be a message from me, calling him away from his study for nothing. Mr. Greely is naturally very much annoyed. But for the fact that you have had somewhat severe punishment from your headmaster already, I should cane you for this, Silver, with great severity. As it is, you will do a Georgic.'

'Oh!' gasped Jimmy.

'Lovell!'

'Ye-e-es, sir,' stammered Lovell.

'You did not appear at roll. You will take a hundred lines.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

Mr. Dalton shut the door and departed. Evidently he was very angry. Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath.

'A Georgic!' he said. 'Did you fellows hear? A Georgic!'

There were more than five hundred lines in a Georgic! Seldom, if ever, was so tremendous an imposition handed out in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. It was enough to make a fellow feel faint to think of it! Only too plainly, the end study was not in Richard Dalton's good books! Indeed its record, of late, had not been of a kind to propitiate a form-master.

'A Georgic!' murmured Raby.

'A Georgic!' breathed Newcome.

Lovell had a word of consolation!

'Well, look here,' he said, 'It's tough! It's beastly tough! But after all, we've got back on Manders for getting us stuck in Extra—I can tell you I fairly made Manders cringe—.'

'What?'

'There's that, you know,' said Lovell.

His friends did not answer him in words. Like one man they rushed at Arthur Edward Lovell and collared him. Dalton's visit had interrupted the programme. Now it was resumed.

'Here, leggo!' roared Lovell, indignantly, 'Look here—my hat!—I'll punch your heads—I'll—I'll—yarooop!'

Lovell resisted manfully. Lovell, in his own esteem had deserved well of his study. He had not, so far as he was aware, deserved to have his head shoved in the coal-locker. And he certainly was not going to have his head shoved in the coal-locker, if he could help it.

But he couldn't!

Three pairs of hands were too many for him. Struggling frantically, Arthur Edward was whirled over, and his spluttering head went into the locker.

There was no coal in the locker: there were no fires in the studies in the summer term. But there was a considerable accumulation of grime and dust: and Lovell's wildly-spluttering head stirred it up in clouds.

Horrid sounds came from the locker, as Lovell's head stirred it up.

'Oooooogh! Wooooogh! Grooogh! Leggo! Woooch! You're chook-chook-chick-choking me! Wooooogh! I'll smash you! I'll—grooogh—spiflicate you! Wooooogh!'

'There!' gasped Jimmy Silver, 'That's a tip, you howling ass!'

'Oooooooogh!'

'Next time you play the goat, you'll get some more of the same,' hissed Raby.

'Groooooogh!'

'Lots more, you dangerous lunatic!' said Newcome.

'Wurrrrrrrggh!'

'Come on, you fellows,' said Jimmy Silver, and the three left the end study, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell to sort himself out. A series of gasps and gurgles followed them.

'Urrrgh! Gurrnggh! Wooooogh! Oooogh!'

Lovell sat on the study floor, black as a sweep, spluttering wrath and indignation and coal-grime. He crawled away, at last, to get the wash he badly needed. For quite a long time, he was busy with soap and hot water: and when, at length, he went down to the day-room, he looked quite tired. And when he saw his chums there, he gave them a glare that the fabled basilisk might have envied. He did not speak—he gave them that basilisk glare, and left it at that! For the time, at least, three members of the Fistical Four of Rookwood seemed to have lost Arthur Edward Lovell's friendship!

CHAPTER XXXIV

ODD MAN OUT!

'COMING out?'

'Quid faciat laetas segetes—.'

'What?'

'—quo sidere terram—.'

'Look here, Jimmy Silver—.'

'—vertere, Maecenas—.'

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed rather hard.

It was after class the following day. The summer afternoon was glorious: blue skies and a gentle breeze seemed to call fellows out of doors. Cricket practice, a boat on the Roke, a ramble in the scented woods, all seemed equally attractive. Least attractive of all was sticking in a study. But it seemed, that was what Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were going to do, though certainly it was not what Arthur Edward Lovell wanted to do.

Having failed to extract any intelligible reply from Jimmy Silver—the first line of a Vergilian Georgic being unintelligible to him—Lovell turned to George Raby.

'Look here, Raby—.'

'Vere novo, gelidus—,' murmured Raby.

Lovell did not know that that was the beginning of the forty-third line of the first Georgic. Neither did he care. He gave Raby a glare, and turned to Newcome.

'Look here, Newcome—.'

'Multum adeo—!' murmured Newcome.

Unaware that that was the beginning of the ninety-fourth verse in the Georgic, and not caring a boiled bean whether it was or not, Lovell snorted.

He surveyed his three busy friends with a frowning brow.

He was getting angry: and he felt like the prophet of old, that he did well to be angry!

Lovell had been very shirty about the episode of the previous evening. He had glowered at his faithful friends who had jammed his head in the coal-locker. He had kept it up for a considerable time, not even saying 'good-night' in the dormitory. In the morning he had come round a little: but only a little. Now, however, after class, he had come right round—making a full circle, as it were. He was prepared to forgive and forget, and to join up with his chums, at cricket, on the river, in the woods, or in ragging the Moderns, or in any other attractive project for leisure hours. He had come up to the study to root out his friends—but had, apparently, wasted his time in so doing. They sat round the table, with three Virgils propped round the inkstand, and seemed to regard Arthur Edward no more than they regarded a fly buzzing against the window-pane. Which was irritating to a fellow who had 'come round' after having had his head shoved in a coal-locker.

He stood surveying them, unheeded. They were all writing Latin: the very last occupation any fellow could possibly have wanted on a sunny summer's afternoon.

'Well, I'm going out,' said Lovell, at last.

'Shut the door after you,' said Newcome.

Lovell breathed harder.

'Sticking in here?' he demanded. 'Look here, Tommy Dodd and his gang have gone out. What about looking for them out of gates, and sticking them in a ditch? It's all their fault really that we're in Extra to-morrow.'

Jimmy Silver looked up at last.

'We've got a Georgic,' he said, 'It would have been ever so much better to let you be hiked off to the Head and bunked—but we've got a Georgic instead. Raby and Newcome are going to help me through. You can't help—so dry up.'

'I don't mind doing my share,' said Lovell. He said it with an effort. He did want to get out of doors in that glorious weather. But Arthur Edward was a loyal pal. He was prepared

to play a pal's part, even if it meant sticking in the study when all Nature beckoned him forth. 'I'll lend a hand, if you like.'

'Fat lot of good that would be,' answered the captain of the Fourth, ungratefully, 'Your scrawl would hit Dicky in the eye, first shot.'

'You see,' explained Newcome, with gentle sarcasm, 'Dicky will expect Jimmy to write out that Georgic, as it's his Georgic. We're going to help: but it will have to be in something like hand-writing. If Jimmy hands in a paper looking as if a spider had crawled out of the inkpot over it, Dicky will know that you helped.'

Snort, from Lovell.

'If you don't want my help—!'

'There's only one thing you can do to help,' said Raby.

'What's that?'

'Keep quiet!'

'Look here—!' roared Lovell.

'Oh, pack it up,' said Newcome, 'We've got to stick here whacking out a Georgic, because you had to play the giddy ox. You've got lots of things you can do without us—go and lock some beak in his study, or squirt ink at a prefect, or 'phone to Manders' House and squat behind an armchair afterwards—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell gave his friends a glare, stamped out of the study, and slammed the door after him.

They did not heed. They were too busy to heed. There were five hundred and fourteen lines in that Georgic. They were taking it in sections. Raby and Newcome were going to do a hundred each: which was as much as could be risked with Dicky Dalton. Jimmy had over three hundred to do. That task was more than sufficient to occupy their minds, without bothering about Arthur Edward and rags on the Moderns. Indeed, it almost drove from their minds the fact that they would be in Extra School on the morrow when Tom Merry and Co. came over to play cricket. Just then, P. Vergilius Maro and his

Georgic reigned supreme in the end study in the Fourth. Lovell had landed them with that Georgic: and for the present, at least, Lovell was welcome to go and eat coke, or anything else he liked. For the present he was merely a spot of bother: and it was a relief to hear the study door slam after him.

'Remote, unfriended, solitary, slow,' as the poet has expressed it, Lovell wandered down the passage.

Valentine Mornington, in flannels, met him on the landing. 'Coming down to the cricket?' asked Morny.

Lovell grunted.

'What's the good? I'm going to be stuck in Extra to-morrow when the St. Jim's men are playing here! I'm fed up.'

Mornington grinned. Every fellow in the Classical Fourth had heard Lovell declare that he couldn't and wouldn't stick in Extra on the day of the St. Jim's match. But it seemed that Arthur Edward had exhausted his resources in the planning line—remarkable as they were—and had made up his mind to the inevitable.

'Nothing you can do about it?' asked Morny.

'Well, what can I do?'

'Thought of getting Dalton with a squirt of ink, or locking the Head in his study?' asked Morny, blandly.

Lovell did not reply to that query. He gave Morny a glare such as he had bestowed on his chums in the end study, and tramped away down the stairs, leaving Morny laughing.

He went out into the quad with a glum face. His eyes gleamed at the sight of Mr. Manders walking and talking with Mr. Greely. Manders was not looking good-tempered—perhaps he was talking about that telephone message of the previous day. Lovell gave him a very inimical look.

Really, Lovell had been in luck. Everybody was saying that the cheeky junior who had 'phoned Manders would be sacked if he was discovered. Owing to Jimmy Silver, Lovell had not been discovered—it was a Georgic for Jimmy instead of the sack for Lovell. But it was all Manders' fault, of course. Lovell had no doubt about that. In fact, if ever there was a Rookwood

fellow who never was to blame for anything, the name of that fellow was Arthur Edward Lovell.

'Modern tick!' muttered Lovell—not loud enough for Mr. Manders to hear, as he passed. He was not on the telephone now!

He lounged on towards the gates—thinking. The sight of Manders had put an idea into his head. Manders would be going out for his usual 'grind'—he was as fixed and regular as his own mathematics. A fellow in a tree over the footpath in Coombe Wood might be able to give Manders a surprise—by dropping a turf on his head, for instance, as he passed underneath. Manders, certainly, wouldn't be able to climb a tree to find out who had done it. Lovell walked on his way, thinking it out.

Clarence Cuffy, of the Modern Fourth, was looking out of the gateway. Lovell kicked him in passing: and Cuffy gave a jump, and stared round in pained surprise.

Arthur Edward Lovell, quite cheered by his designs on Manders, and by having kicked a Modern, walked away down Coombe Lane, whistling. His chums were busy with their Georgic, and had no time for him: Lovell was odd man out. But his time was not going to be wasted: he had, at least, his invariable and unfailing resource of hunting for trouble!

WALKING THE PLANK!

'THAT Classical ass!

'That Classical chump!

'That Classical ditherer!

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, made those remarks in unison. They had been for a ramble by the river, and were coming back by the footpath in Coombe Wood. They had just reached the plank bridge over the woodland stream, when they sighted Lovell coming towards them on the other side.

They gave him grim looks.

'That dithering dunderhead!' said Tommy Dodd, 'He couldn't be satisfied with landing his own gang in Extra on St. Jim's day. He had to land us too. That blithering burler has made Tom Merry's crowd a present of the game to-morrow. He ought to be scragged.'

'Or lynched,' said Tommy Cook.

'Or boiled in oil entirely,' said Tommy Doyle.

'He's grinning!' went on Tommy Dodd, 'Thinking of the cricket to-morrow, I suppose, and St. Jim's walking all over Rookwood, and beating us by an innings.'

'Let's give him something to grin about!' suggested Cook.

'Bedad, and what about sitting him down in the wather?' said Doyle.

'We'll make him jump, at any rate!' said Tommy Dodd, 'Get hold of that plank as soon as he walks on it. If he wants something to grin about, he can grin when we make him dance.'

Lovell, certainly, was grinning. He was thinking of a suitable spot, a little further on, where the branches were thick over

the footpath, and where a turf could be successfully dropped on a Modern Master's hat, by an enterprising fellow completely hidden in foliage! That was the cause of his cheery grin.

He did not notice the three Modern juniors till he arrived at the stream. Then he stared across at them, inimically, as he stepped on the plank.

The three Tommies stooped, at their end, as Lovell reached the middle. They grasped the end of the plank, and gave it a sudden jerk.

Lovell jumped!

Very nearly he tipped off the plank. He just saved himself and stood unsteadily, glaring at the three. Moderns.

'You silly asses! Let that plank alone!' roared Lovell, 'You jolly nearly tipped me off.'

'Fancy that!' said Tommy Dodd.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Will you let go that plank?' roared Lovell.

'Not so's you'd notice it, old tulip.'

'You Modern cad—.'

'You Classical worm!'

'I'll come over and punch your silly head!' bawled Lovell.

'I'll be there when you do it!' said Tommy Dodd, cheerfully, and he gave the plank another playful jerk.

Lovell jumped again. This time he did not land so safely, and he came down sitting on the plank. Luckily, it was well above the stream, and only his feet dashed into the water. They splashed wildly, as he sat gasping.

'Oh!' gasped Lovell.

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared the three Tommies.

They seemed to find Arthur Edward Lovell's gymnastics on the plank amusing. But the entertainment was all on their side. Lovell, like the old Queen, was 'not amused.' He sat and glared at the three hilarious Moderns in almost speechless wrath.

'You silly fathheaded Modern ticks!' he gasped.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll give you something to cackle about when I get across,' shrieked Lovell.

'You're not across yet, you Classical ass!' chuckled Tommy Dodd, 'Try again! If at first you don't succeed, you know: try, try, try again.'

Lovell scrambled up, red with fury. He had got as far as his kness, when the three playful Tommies gave the plank another jerk. Lovell plunged over, clutching at the plank, embracing it as if it were a beloved object, to save himself from slipping off into the water.

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Tommy Dodd and Co.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Lovell.

'Tip him in!' chortled Tommy Cook, 'He wants a wash! They never wash on the Classical side.'

'Sure a wash is just what he wants,' chuckled Tommy Doyle, 'You're going in, Lovell!'

Lovell clung to the plank, as the three Tommies jerked it again. Tommy Dodd and Co. did not really mean to duck him: but they were giving him plenty to do to avoid a ducking. They were quite enjoying this, and quite pleased that Arthur Edward Lovell had come along.

Up scrambled Lovell again, breathing wrath. This time he got on his feet, and was about to rush on, when the Tommies gave the plank a tremendous jerk. He toppled wildly, his arms sawing the air in the effort to keep his balance, almost dancing on the plank.

'Ha, ha, ha!' shrieked the three Moderns.

'Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! You rotters—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell righted himself, rather precariously. He clenched his fists, only anxious to get at his foes, and hit out right and left, regardless of odds. But his next step forward was followed by another terrific jerk, his feet slipped, and he sat astride of the plank, a leg dangling on either side, and his feet in the water again. He sat spluttering.

'Try again!' yelled Tommy Dodd.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell heaved himself up. The grinning Moderns let the plank rest, till he was on his feet. Then, with his fists clenched, and the gleam of battle in his eyes, Lovell rushed forward.

But the three grinning Moderns countered by heaving up their end of the plank, to a height of three or four feet, so that it slanted down towards Lovell at a steep angle. Lovell's rush stopped as soon as it started. He could not charge up that slant. In fact, he very nearly toppled backwards, and only saved himself by a leap like a kangaroo.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Come on, old scout!'

'Faith, and I belave he's losing his timper! Are ye losing yere timper, Lovell?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell had lost it! He was almost foaming. He would have given worlds, or rather whole universes, to get within punching distance of the playful Moderns. Instead of which, he found himself slipping back along the slanting plank towards the bank he had left. And only a desperate backward leap, which landed him on the grassy bank, saved him from tipping over into the stream.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell brandished a fist across the flowing water.

'You rotten Modern ticks!' he bawled, 'If I could get at you, I'd wallop the lot of you!'

'This is where we tremble, you chaps,' said Tommy Dodd.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Perhaps it was just as well for Lovell that he couldn't get at the Moderns. He could hardly have handled the three successfully. His last state might have been worse than his first. But he was too excited to think of that. He brandished an infuriated fist at three laughing faces.

'Will you let that plank alone, you rotters?' he roared.

'Drop it, and let him try again,' grinned Tommy Dodd.

The three Moderns dropped their end of the plank. There

was a sudden heavy splash in the water. The plank had shifted considerably as it was handled, and the end missed the bank as it was dropped, and went down into the stream.

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Tommy Dodd, 'It's going—.'

'Faith, it's gone.'

The plank sagged in the swift current of the woodland stream, swinging away, and the other end came away from the bank on Lovell's side. Almost in a moment, the plank was lengthwise in the stream, and floating away towards the Roke.

'Phew!' murmured Tommy Cook, 'We've done it now.'

'Oh, gum,' said Tommy Dodd, 'We shall have to get back somehow—or there'll be a row! Follow along the bank. Good-bye, Lovell, old bean.'

'If you want to get across, you'll have to jump it!' called out Tommy Cook.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovell stood glaring, while the three Tommies disappeared in the thickets along their bank of the stream. The plank was floating away to the river, and they hoped to recapture it before it was washed out into the wide waters of the Roke. Arthur Edward Lovell was left on his side of the stream: and he was not thinking, as Tommy Cook had playfully suggested, of jumping it!

With deep feelings, Arthur Edward Lovell sat down on a grassy knoll, emptied water out of his shoes, and squeezed his socks as dry as he could. The three Tommies had disappeared in the wood along the stream, and Lovell was still engaged in his drying operations, when there were footsteps on the path, and a lean gentleman came along and arrived on the spot. And Mr. Manders halted, and uttered an exclamation of irritable annoyance as he saw that the plank was missing.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SMACK!

MR. MANDERS stared at the flowing stream.

Then he stared across it.

Then he stared round.

Then he saw Lovell, and frowned.

Lovell reluctantly 'capped' the Modern master. He was not feeling disposed to 'cap' Manders. He was, in fact, feeling disposed, had it been practical politics, to barge him into the water!

Tommy Dodd and Co. had put 'paid' to his design of ambushing Manders. That bright idea was washed out. Manders, certainly, had no suspicion that this Classical junior had intended to get ahead of him on the footpath, and drop a turf on his hat from dense foliage overhead. But he regarded Lovell with a sour suspicious eye. He had not forgotten the happenings of the previous afternoon on that very spot.

'Lovell!' he rapped.

'Yes, sir,' muttered Lovell.

'The plank bridge is gone! I cannot cross. I shall have to go round by Pooter's Meadow. What is the meaning of this?'

Lovell stared at him. Perhaps it was a mystery to Mr. Manders why the plank bridge was gone. It was not the business of a junior in the Classical Fourth to elucidate that mystery for the Modern master.

'Have you been playing tricks here, Lovell?' thundered Mr. Manders.

'No!' grunted Lovell, forgetting to add the 'sir.' It was like old Manders, he reflected bitterly, to put this down to him. Manders, of course, did not know that juniors of his own House

had shifted the plank, or that Modern fellows had been on the spot at all. Really, it was not unnatural for him to suspect Lovell, after his experience of that enterprising if unfortunate youth.

'The plank is gone,' snapped Mr. Manders, 'What has become of it, Lovell? I find you here—and the plank bridge gone. What has become of it?'

'I think it fell in, sir,' said Lovell.

'No doubt—no doubt! But why did it fall?' snapped Mr. Manders.

'Must have been the Law of Gravitation, sir,' answered Lovell.

Mr. Manders stared at him. He did not seem to realise, for the moment, that Lovell was being impertinent.

'What? What?' he ejaculated. 'What do you mean, Lovell?'

'I think it must have been the Law of Gravitation, sir,' said Lovell, meekly, 'The attraction of the earth, sir, causes things to fall. We've had that in class.'

Mr. Manders cheeks reddened. A house-master really did not require instruction from the Fourth Form on the subject of the action of natural forces. He breathed hard through his thin nose.

'Lovell! How dare you be impertinent?' he exclaimed.

'You asked me, sir.'

'I asked you what had become of the plank. Where is it now?'

'Must have floated away, sir! The current,' explained Lovell, still meekly impertinent, 'An object floating in water moves in the same direction as the current—.'

'Upon my word! Did you move the plank, Lovell? Have you been playing more of your unthinking and insensate pranks here?'

'No, sir.'

'Yesterday,' said Mr. Manders, his voice trembling with anger, 'You played a foolish and disrespectful trick on this very spot, Lovell, for which you were severely punished by your

headmaster. I cannot help suspecting that you have deliberately moved that plank, knowing that I take my walk in this direction after class.'

'Indeed, sir.'

'Did you or did you not, Lovell?'

'Not!'

'Your feet have been wet. You have been stepping in water. For what reason have you done so, unless you were moving the plank?'

'I was walking on it when it shifted,' said Lovell.

'It cannot have moved of its own volition,' snapped Mr. Manders, 'It was quite firmly placed, and I have crossed it dozens of times. That plank was deliberately displaced, Lovell. If you did not do this, who did?'

'There were some young hooligans on the other side, sir,' said Lovell, 'Three disreputable-looking young sweeps. They did it.'

Lovell did not intend to mention the three Tommies. He was yearning to punch their heads, but had no intention whatever of getting them whopped by their house-master. And it was rather amusing to describe, to Mr. Manders, three juniors of his own House as young hooligans, and disreputable-looking young sweeps. Lovell wished that Tommy Dodd and Co. had still been within hearing.

Mr. Manders looked at him very hard, and very suspiciously.

He was growing more and more irritated, which perhaps was not surprising in view of the answers he was getting from the Classical junior.

'If what you state is true, Lovell—,' he began.

'No "if" about it,' interrupted Lovell, coolly.

'What? What? How dare you interrupt me with impertinence, Lovell? I repeat that if what you state is true—.'

'And I repeat that there's no "if" about it,' retorted Lovell, obstinately.

'If what you state is true,' almost bawled Mr. Manders, 'This was not your act: but I do not believe your statement, Lovell!'

'Don't you, sir?'

'I do not, Lovell!'

'Then you'd better do the other thing, sir,' suggested Lovell. His own temper was rising, as well as Mr. Manders'.

'What? What? I shall report your impertinence to your form-master, Lovell!'

'Go ahead!'

Mr. Manders almost jumped.

'What—what—what did you say?' he ejaculated.

'I said go ahead.'

Mr. Manders stared at him, blankly, for one moment. Lovell, in a less exasperated frame of mind, would have realised that this was not the way for a Lower boy to talk to a house-master, even a Modern house-master. But he was, as he had told his friends, fed up with Manders: and what right had a Modern beak, anyhow, to doubt a Classical man's word? Lovell was as angry as Manders, and he just did not care what he said to him. Only for one moment did Mr. Manders stare at him, blankly: then he went into action.

Smack!

'Yoo—hooop!' roared Lovell, as a heavy hand smacked: taken by surprise, though really he mightn't have been!

He staggered from the smack, his head singing.

Mr. Manders, with a glare, turned round, and walked back the way he had come. He could not cross the stream—owing, he had not the slightest doubt, to a prank played by that Classical boy. He had to go by Coombe Lane and Pooter's Meadow to take his usual walk by the river. It did not make a lot of difference, really: still, it was annoying. Manders was feeling strongly inclined to repeat that smack before he departed. However, he left it at that, and walked away.

Lovell rubbed his head.

'Why, the—the—the cheeky Modern tick!' he gasped, 'Smacking a man's head—smacking a Classical man's head—the mouldy Modern tick! I've a jolly good mind to cut after him and hack his shins!'

Lovell was fairly boiling. But even on the boil, he did not quite think of hacking Manders' shins! He had, as it were, a jolly good mind to, but a jollier god mind not to! But he breathed wrath and indignation and fury as he glared after the lean figure turning into Coombe Lane.

'If I don't make him sit up for that—!' breathed Lovell, 'If I don't make him cringe—if I don't make him yowl—!'

He hurried on his shoes. Then he hurried after Mr. Manders. Somehow, somewhere, he was going to get Manders, for smacking his head—whether with a turf from a tree, or in some other way—he was going to do it: that determination was fixed in Arthur Edward's mind: fixed and unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Let the risk be what it might, let the consequences be what they might, he was going to do it! With a glint in his eyes, and that determination in his mind, he followed Mr. Manders down Coombe Lane. Jimmy Silver and Co. grinding away at the Georgic in the end study at Rookwood, had probably forgotten Lovell, and were blissfully unconscious that he was heading for more trouble—though, had they remembered him, they might have guessed: for Arthur Edward Lovell was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward!

CHAPTER XXXVII

MANDERS AND THE MASTIFF!

'STOP!

'Sir!

'I said stop!

'What do you mean?'

'Just what I say! No more, and no less! I said stop, and I mean stop! Got it now?' barked Captain Pooter.

Lovell heard that dialogue, as he came along by the hedge of Pooter's Meadow. He recognised the sharp irate tones of the captain. The other voice was that of Mr. Manders.

'Oh, my hat!' breathed Lovell.

He grinned.

He had been frowning, darkly, all the way along Coombe Lane, till he reached Pooter's Meadow. Now his deep frown changed into a grin.

Manders, a little ahead of him, had turned from the lane into the meadow, to cross it to the tow-path and take his usual walk by the river. Probably Manders had heard of Captain Pooter, and his objection to pedestrians crossing that meadow since he had become proprietor thereof. If so, Mr. Manders was about the last man in the wide world to heed such an objection. Manders was not the man to yield one iota of his rights. Lovell remembered what he had heard Mr. Greely say on that subject. But Greely was quite easy-going compared with Manders. Mr. Manders would not have conceded a fraction of his rights, even to a polite request. And Captain Pooter was not making a polite request. He was issuing orders in a most unpleasant tone. He might almost have fancied that Mr. Manders was not a schoolmaster, a house-master, and a distinguished mathematician: but a raw recruit in a barrack-yard.

Wherefore did Lovell grin!

Manders, evidently, had fallen foul of Captain Pooter, just as Knowles of the Sixth had, a week ago. Lovell had almost forgotten that episode. Now he was quite pleasantly reminded of it. A happy vision danced before his eyes, of Manders streaking across that field like Knowles, with his long legs flying, and a barking mastiff after him! Lovell was prepared to enjoy the view.

He pushed into the hedge, and looked into the meadow.

Manders had gone in by one of the gaps which had appeared in the hedge since Captain Pooter had fenced up the stile. Those gaps were often repaired: but industrious hands in the vicinity renewed them again just as often. The fierce little captain was at war with the village, as well as with Rookwood, over that disputed right-of-way.

Manders was almost half across the meadow, when Captain Pooter happened. In the middle of the meadow grew a leafy old oak, and the little captain had been leaning on the trunk, in the shade, when to his wrath and indignation he beheld a long lean gentleman coming across his meadow. Like a lion from his lair, or like a shell from a mortar, Captain Pooter shot out to intercept him.

Mr. Manders surveyed him with angry disdain. He had halted: but no earthly consideration would have caused him to turn back at the little man's order. From his height of well over a foot above the captain's head, he stared down at him, and Captain Pooter stared up.

Lovell watched in happy anticipation.

'I fail to understand you!' Mr. Manders was speaking with great dignity, keeping his angry irritation in check, 'I am crossing the meadow to the river—.'

'You are doing nothing of the kind!' barked Captain Pooter, 'I did not buy this meadow to have it tramped across by every vagabond in the county of Hampshire.'

Mr. Manders purpled.

'Sir! I am a schoolmaster!' he gasped.

'If you're a schoolmaster, you should know better than to set your boys the example of trespassing on a man's land!' retorted the captain, 'I've had to chase the young rascals off a good many times. I've had to spend money on a dog to keep them away! Schoolmaster! Pah!'

'I am not trespassing here!' snapped Mr. Manders, 'This meadow-path has been a public right-of-way from time immemorial.'

'I dispute it,' snapped back the captain.

'You may dispute it as much as you please, sir, but that does not alter facts,' said Mr. Manders, 'I have used this path scores of times before you came into the neighbourhood.'

'Very likely, and I daresay you helped yourself to the apples as you passed the orchard,' said Captain Pooter.

'What-a-t?' stuttered Mr. Manders. 'What? I am a house-master at Rookwood School, and you dare to imply—.'

'I know many apples I've missed! This is my meadow! Get out of it. Go back to the lane.'

'I am crossing to the tow-path—.'

'You're not!'

'I insist upon using this path, which I have every right to do.'

'Are you going?'

'No, sir!' thundered Mr. Manders, 'I am not going! I am proceeding on my way, and I warn you not to molest me, sir, in making use of my undoubted rights as a member of the public.'

Mr. Manders advanced a step. Captain Pooter barred his way like a fierce little turkey-cock. Lovell watched in breathless anticipation. He rather hoped to see Manders smack the captain's head—as he had smacked Lovell's, and the fierce little man punch him in return. That, really, would have been more exhilarating than dropping a turf on Mander's hat!

'Will you stand aside, sir?' demanded Mr. Manders, in a deep voice of wrath.

'No, sir! I will not stand aside! If my dog were not on the

chain at the moment, I would set him on you!" bawled the captain, 'I warn you to go back!'

'I shall certainly not go back.'

'You will!' said Captain Pooter, and as Mr. Manders advanced another step, he put out both hands, and shoved him on the chest. The long lean house-master almost toppled over under the shove.

As he tottered, the little captain victoriously followed him up, giving him another shove.

Mr. Manders jumped back.

'Sir!' He almost shrieked, 'If you dare lay hands on me—'

'I'll lay them on fast enough, if you don't get out!' retorted the captain, 'You're on my land! Get off it.'

Lovell, from the hedge, gazed on blissfully. This was worth watching, and getting more and more so every moment.

Captain Pooter gave Mr. Manders another push. The Modern master of Rookwood gasped. It seemed almost incredible to him that this fierce little man intended to push him out of the meadow, out into Coombe Lane again. But that, evidently, was the captain's intention. That was not to be borne. If Mr. Manders had ever been engaged in a scrap, it was at least forty years ago. Never, indeed, could he have dreamed of anything of the kind, at his present age and in his present position. But he was not taking this: especially from a little man who was not so tall as many of his own prefects.

As Captain Pooter gave him yet one more push, Mr. Manders made a grasp at him, seized him, and fairly flung him away, like a little fat sack of straw.

'Gad!' gasped Captain Pooter, as he spun.

He went whirling for two or three yards, before he toppled over in the grass. He sprawled there spluttering.

'There!' gasped Mr. Manders, 'There!'

'Gad!' gurgled the captain.

Mr. Manders, rather breathless, but victorious, walked on. Captain Pooter blinked after him. Then he bounded up. Lovell wondered for a moment whether he was going after Manders.



'This is my meadow! Get out of it'

But the little captain shot away to the bungalow in the next field. Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled gleefully. He knew what was coming next, though Mr. Manders did not. Caesar was going to be featured in the programme now!

The captain disappeared—and his disappearance was followed, a few moments later by the appearance of the big black mastiff. Caesar came careering into the meadow, with a volley of ferocious barks that caused Mr. Manders to stop suddenly and stare round.

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Manders.

He gazed in horror at the huge mastiff, with gleaming eyes and snapping teeth, coming at him across the meadow.

For a moment he stood stock-still, as if petrified. He had intended to keep on, to the river, in spite of Captain Pooter. But the distance was considerable, and he knew that he could never reach the gate on the tow-path before the mastiff reached him. Coombe Lane was much nearer behind him. That was his only chance. It took Mr. Manders hardly a moment to make up his mind. Then he came back towards the lane at a frantic run.

'Ha, ha, ha!' gurgled Lovell, in the hedge.

This was what he had anticipated! Manders was running for his life, his long legs flying, his hat on the back of his head, his face scarlet and streaming with perspiration. But though terror urged him on, Manders was no sprinter. He had bellows to mend! He gasped and gurgled, he puffed and he blew. Caesar, cutting after him, gained hand over fist.

In his wild haste, Mr. Manders almost ran into the oak tree where he had met the captain. Winded to the wide, he paused, and leaned gurgling on the trunk for a moment, while he glanced back.

Caesar was only yards away! There was no hope of reaching the lane! As the mastiff came rushing on, Mr. Manders dodged round the trunk of the oak.

'Ha, ha, ha!' howled Lovell. 'Here we go round the mulberry-bush! Ha, ha, ha!'

It was amusing from the point of view of a spectator who knew that the mastiff, truculent as he looked, was not really dangerous, and that Captain Pooter only kept him to frighten off trespassers. He was frightening Mr. Manders only too effectively. Twice, thrice, Mr. Manders dodged round the trunk of the oak, with Caesar careering after him, Lovell watching joyfully from the hedge.

But that was not a game that Manders could keep up long. Something touched him as he dodged—it was the mastiff's muzzle! That touch electrified Manders. In awful anticipation of strong sharp teeth sinking into him, he made a frantic bound, and caught a branch of the oak.

And there he swung, suspended like Mahomet's coffin between the heavens and the earth, hanging on desperately for dear life, while Caesar pranced and volleyed barks underneath him, snapping at his feet: and Arthur Edward Lovell, in the hedge, doubled up with merriment.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

EASY RESCUE!

'HELP!'

Mr. Manders shrieked wildly.

'Help!'

Lovell chuckled and chortled. It seemed, to Lovell, fearfully amusing! For Mr. Manders, had he only known it, was in no danger whatever. Had he dropped right under Caesar's jaws, the mastiff would not have hurt him! Like the Chinese warriors who make ugly faces to frighten an enemy, Caesar's ferocity was all in the shop-window, as it were. There was nothing dangerous behind it. Lovell, from his own previous experience, was well aware of that. Mr. Manders, to whom Caesar was a new acquaintance, had not the remotest idea of it. He was, so far as he knew, in imminent danger of rending jaws: and he clung swinging to the branch, barely out of Caesar's reach, and shrieked frantically for help.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Lovell, 'Is this as good as a circus? Ha, ha, ha!'

'Help!'

Mr. Manders made a frantic effort to draw himself up on the branch. But Manders was no athlete. He was long past the age of activity. He could not even get an arm over the branch.

He clung to it desperately with his hands, panting for breath, trying in vain to draw his legs up out of reach of a jump from Caesar.

Bark! Bark! Bark!

Volleyed of barks rang and echoed under Mr. Manders. Caesar, very likely, was enjoying the game, almost as much as Lovell. Again and again, as Caesar made a jump, his muzzle touched Manders' foot, and almost electrified him.

'Help!'

Manders, no doubt, hoped that his wild yells would reach Captain Pooter, and draw him to the spot, to call that dreadful dog off. Possibly the captain, at the bungalow in the next field, might have heard him. But the captain, of course, knew that Manders was in no danger, and was only getting a fright—which, in fact, was what the captain wanted. There was no sign from the direction of the bungalow.

'Help!'

The perspiration streamed down Mr. Manders' face. That face, as he swung on the branch, was towards the lane, and Lovell—unseen in the hedge—was grinning at it, tremendously tickled by its varying expressions.

'Help!'

Manders felt that he could not hang on much longer. His arms were aching—his grasp on the branch threatening to slip. But in awful dread of dropping into those savage jaws below, he clung on desperately.

'Help!'

There was no help from the bungalow, he realised that. The captain was leaving him to it. But he yelled, and yelled, in the hope of some passing pedestrian in the lane hearing him, and coming to his aid.

'Help! Help!'

Bark! bark! bark! bark!

The grin faded from Lovell's face. It was funny, no doubt, from the onlooker's point of view. But it dawned on Arthur Edward's somewhat solid brain that this was awful for Manders: and that it was not, in fact, quite a joke for an elderly man to be going through such an ordeal. Manders had smacked his head, but—!

Lovell had trailed Manders down Coombe Lane, with the express intention of giving something back for that smack. But his wrath had evaporated in merriment. Lovell was a good-natured fellow, and he had a kind heart. Manders had smacked his head: and a Modern beak who smacked a Classical man's

head deserved practically anything. All the same, it was tough, and Arthur Edward resolved to intervene.

Lovell pushed through the hedge.

Had he been unaware of the placid nature hidden behind Caesar's outward appearance of truculent ferocity, Lovell certainly would have forgotten all grievances, and done his best to help Manders. As it was, there was no danger to be run, so he advanced quite cheerfully into the meadow.

Mr. Manders' wild eyes fell on him at once. He was about to shriek 'Help' again when he saw Lovell coming. Instead, he shouted:

'Go back!'

Manders had been yelling in the hope of getting help. But he could expect no useful aid from a junior schoolboy in dealing with a huge ferocious mastiff. It seemed to him that the Classical junior was running into a terrible danger for no useful purpose.

'Go back!' he repeated, 'Go back!'

Lovell stared at him.

'I'm coming!' he called out, 'It's all right, sir! I'm coming.'

'Go back at once!' shrieked Mr. Manders, 'You cannot do anything with that dreadful brute! You will be bitten—injured! Go back this instant.'

Lovell fairly blinked.

That was not what he would have expected from Manders.

Yet he really might have expected it. Manders was a somewhat sour gentleman, with a rather snappy temper. But he was a schoolmaster, with a proper sense of duty, and he could not allow a schoolboy to run terrible risks on his account. He dreaded to see the boy seized and torn by the mastiff's jaws. For the moment he forgot his own danger.

'Go back at once!' he shouted. 'Cannot you understand your danger, boy? Go back.'

'Well, my hat!' murmured Lovell.

'Quick!' shouted Mr. Manders, 'Go at once! Get help if you can—but keep out of danger!'

'It's all right, sir,' called back Lovell, 'I can manage him——.'

'Nonsense! Go back.'

'He won't hurt me, sir——.'

'Nonsense, I say. Go immediately,' shrieked Mr. Manders, 'Oh!' he added, in a gasp, as one of his hands slipped from its hold, and he made frantic but unavailing efforts to grasp the branch again.

The hapless house-master hung by one hand, desperately. Lovell ran forward, and grasped Caesar by the collar. Caesar barked, and pranced, but made no motion to use his teeth.

'I've got him, sir!' called out Lovell, 'I'm holding him! You can drop all right now, sir.'

Manders stared down at him. He could hardly believe his eyes, at the sight of the Classical junior holding that ferocious mastiff by the collar. Lovell seemed to have the upper hand, and to be in no danger: but Mr. Manders, all the same, felt very chary about dropping within reach of Caesar.

'Oh!' he gasped, 'Bless my soul! Lovell, you are a very courageous boy. Can you—can you control that dreadful animal?'

'Oh, yes, sir! He's not dreadful really——.'

'What? Nonsense! He is the most dreadful and savage brute I have ever seen! Are you sure you can control him?'

'Quite sure, sir. You see, he's not fierce——,' Lovell tried to explain.

'Nonsense!'

'But, sir——.'

'Do not talk nonsense, Lovell! If you can keep that dreadful animal in control for a few minutes, that is enough. Can you do so?'

'Easily, sir.'

Manders eyed Lovell and the mastiff doubtfully. But the strain on his arm was too much for him, and he had no choice about dropping. There was no help for it: but it was with deep misgivings that he let go his hold, and dropped to the earth under the oak tree.

There was a sudden volley of barks from Caesar, like machine-

gun fire. Mr. Manders covered two or three yards in a single bound.

'Hold him!' he shrieked.

'I'm holding him, sir—.'

'If you can hold him, in safety to yourself, while I reach the lane—.'

'Oh, yes, sir. You see—.'

'Do so, Lovell!'

Mr. Manders backed further away. Amazing as it was—to Manders—Lovell appeared quite able to hold and control that ferocious dog. He was in no danger. So Mr. Manders had no more hesitation in leaving him to hold Caesar's collar, while he, Manders, got out of the meadow as fast as he could.

His long legs fairly whisked as he headed for Coombe Lane.

'Oh, crikey!' murmured Lovell, 'Caesar, you old fraud, you've got him scared to a frazzle! Poor old Manders.'

In about a minute, Manders was at the hedge, and plunging through a gap into Coombe Lane. There he looked back. Lovell was still holding Caesar by the collar, apparently with ease.

'Lovell!' Manders had to shout, at the distance, 'Lovell!'

'Yes, sir,' shouted back Lovell.

'Get out of the meadow at once, while you are still safe, my boy.'

'Yes, sir! That's all right.'

Mr. Manders turned in the direction of Rookwood. He was not thinking of continuing his walk, after that wild adventure with a ferocious mastiff. Manders had had enough walking for that afternoon. He walked home to Rookwood—and he walked very quickly, anxious to put a safe distance between himself and Pooter's Meadow.

Lovell, grinning cheerily, released Caesar's collar. He walked on towards the river—crossing the forbidden meadow, passing the orchard, and vaulting over the gate to the tow-path. Caesar accompanied him as far as the gate, volleying barks, which would certainly have alarmed Mr. Manders, but did not have any alarming effect on Lovell. The episode which had so terribly

upset Mr. Manders, had had quite an exhilarating effect on Arthur Edward Lovell, and he chuckled as he strolled along the green bank of the Roke. And sighting Dick Oswald and Rawson in a boat, he joined them in a pull up the river—certainly a much better occupation for him than stalking a Modern master with hostile designs on his hat!

CHAPTER XXXIX

ALL CLEAR!

JIMMY SILVER sighed with relief, as he laid down his pen.

'That's that!' he said.

It was done! With loyal aid from his comrades—a manifestation of loyalty of which his form-master, doubtless, would hardly have approved—Jimmy had completed that awful Georgic. Five hundred and fourteen lines had been written, from 'Quid faciat' to 'neque audit corrus habenas.' And it was done!

Raby and Newcome had contributed a hundred each. Then, leaving Jimmy to get on with it, they had gone down to junior nets for a spot of cricket. They came back at tea-time to find Jimmy still struggling with bucolic poetry. So they joined up again, at the risk of over-doing it and drawing Dicky's attention to a variety of hands! And so, with a dead-lift effort all round, as it were, the thing was done.

'Thank goodness!' said Raby.

'That ass Lovell!' said Newcome.

Jimmy sighed.

'Lovell's a good chap,' he said, 'And a good pal! But if he ever gets me a Georgic again, I shall take him into a quiet corner and brain him with a cricket bat! We're late for tea. Newer mind—it's done! You fellows scrounge up something while I take this down to Dicky.'

Jimmy left the end study with his lines. Mornington met him on his way down.

'Lovell come in?' he asked.

'Haven't seen him.'

'Then you don't know what he's been up to?'

'Oh, my aunt Jemima! Has he been up to anything?' groaned Jimmy, 'He went out while I was swotting over my Georgie. What—.'

'Manders has been over to see Dalton. I heard him ask Bulkeley, as he came in, if Lovell had come in yet. What has that mad ass been up to this time?'

'Goodness knows! He was trying to get bunked yesterday—perhaps he's succeeded to-day!' said Jimmy Silver, sadly.

He went down the stairs, with a clouded brow. Arthur Edward, apparently, had been 'up' to something, out of gates, as Manders had come over to see the master of the Fourth about it. Uncle James could only wonder dismally what it was.

He tapped rather apprehensively at Richard Dalton's study door. After a visit from Manders, on the subject of Lovell, he expected to find his form-master looking grim. Dicky Dalton had found the end study rather a large spot of bother lately, and this was no time to add to it. It might make him specially keen in scanning that Georgie, with a possible discovery that various hands had been concerned therein. The possibility of being told to write that Georgie over again made Jimmy Silver feel almost faint!

'Come in!'

To his surprise and relief, there was a quite pleasant note in the voice from Dalton's study. Judging by that tone, Dicky was not in a grim mood.

Jimmy Silver entered the study.

The cloud cleared from his brow. So far from looking grim, Richard Dalton had a smile on his face.

It was a relief: but it was rather a puzzle. A visit from Manders was the last thing Jimmy would have expected to bring a pleasant smile to the countenance of his form-master.

'My lines, sir,' said Jimmy.

'Oh! Very good! You may place them on the table, Silver,' said Mr. Dalton. He was not, apparently, going to examine those lines with the meticulous attention which, in the circumstances, was so very undesirable.

Jimmy placed the lines on the table.

'I have something to tell you, Silver,' went on Mr. Dalton, genially.

'Yes, sir,' mumbled Jimmy.

'Mr. Manders has just been across to see me.'

'Oh! Has—has he, sir?'

'Has Lovell come in yet?' asked Mr. Dalton.

'I—I haven't seen him, sir.'

'Then you know nothing of what he has done?'

'N-n-no, sir!' Jimmy could have groaned. What had that frightful ass, Lovell, been up to, out of gates? On the other hand, if he had been up to something, why was Dalton so genial? It was quite a puzzle.

'It seems,' said Mr. Dalton, 'That while Mr. Manders was taking his walk after class, he was attacked by a ferocious dog, and had a very narrow escape of being bitten and perhaps seriously mauled by the brute. He tells me that Lovell very courageously came to his aid, and succeeded in holding off the dog.'

'Oh,' ejaculated Jimmy, blankly.

He realised that it was not a row! Manders, visit did not, as usual, portend trouble! Quite the reverse, in fact.

'Mr. Manders, naturally, feels a deep sense of obligation to Lovell,' continued Mr. Dalton, 'All the more, as he said very frankly, because he has been somewhat severe with him: and in spite of this, Lovell came to his aid. He spoke very highly indeed of Lovell.'

'Oh!' repeated Jimmy. That was all he could say. He would as soon have expected the bust of Socrates, in the Head's study, to speak highly of Lovell, as Mr. Manders! Evidently, wonders would never cease!

'Mr. Manders desires that his appreciation of Lovell's act should be shown in a practical form,' went on Mr. Dalton, 'He has asked me, as a favour, to cancel all punishment for the unfortunate occurrence last week, when a Modern prefect was squirted with ink—'

'Oh!' gasped Jimmy.

'I have acceded very willingly to Mr. Manders' request,' said Mr. Dalton, with a smile, 'He desires that Lovell and his friends should be released from Extra School, and the whole matter forgiven and forgotten.'

'Oh, sir!' Jimmy Silver's eyes danced. The St. Jim's match on the morrow was not a 'goner,' after all!

'I am very glad of this,' added Mr. Dalton, 'You may tell your friends, Silver, that Extra School is rescinded, and—,' he smiled again, 'I hope you will beat St. Jim's to-morrow.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir,' gasped Jimmy.

'You may go, my boy.'

Jimmy Silver walked on air, as far as the door. Then he suddenly remembered something, and turned back.

'If you please, sir—.'

'What is it, Silver?'

'Mr. Manders wishes Lovell and his friends to be let off Extra, sir?'

'Precisely.'

'Including his friends in Mr. Manders' House, sir?' asked Jimmy, meekly. 'Dodd and Cook and Doyle, sir—.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Dalton.

He gave Jimmy Silver a very hard look. Perhaps it was news to him that the three Tommies of Manders' House were friends of Lovell's!

'Mr. Manders would think it only fair to let off Moderns, sir, if Classics are let off—and—and as he said friends of Lovell's sir—,' ventured Jimmy.

Mr. Dalton smiled.

'No doubt,' he said, 'No doubt! I will mention the matter to Mr. Manders, and I have no doubt that, as friends of Lovell's, Dodd and Cook and Doyle will be released from Extra School. You may go, Silver!'

And Jimmy Silver went: walking on air all the way this time! He fairly raced up the stairs, and burst into the end study like a cyclone with the glad news.

CHAPTER XL

A SURPRISE FOR LOVELL

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL walked into the end study, where three juniors were at a late tea.

He eyed them rather uncertainly as he came in.

He did not expect three fellows who had been swotting at a Georgic on a summer's afternoon to be looking particularly cheerful, or feeling particularly cordial towards the fellow to whom they attributed that affliction.

Relations, in fact, had been growing strained, in the end study in the Classical Fourth. Lovell was not to blame in any way whatever—that was sun-clear to Lovell. But his friends took the view that he was. Raby and Newcome had made no secret of the fact that they were fed up: and even the patience of Uncle James of Rookwood seemed exhausted. When three members of the study bunged the head of the fourth into a coal-locker, it was undeniable that there was a rift in the lute.

So Arthur Edward came in uncertainly, and even a little warily—and met with the surprise of his life.

Three fellows round the tea-table beamed on him.

They did not seem to be thinking of that Georgic, or of any other of Lovell's innumerable sins of commission or omission. Their faces were bright—so bright that really it looked as if somebody might have left them a fortune apiece. And they all beamed round at Lovell, as if he were the most precious of pals, and a man whom they delighted to honour.

And he gazed at them!

'Oh, here you are, old chap,' said Jimmy Silver, cheerily, 'Had a jolly time out of gates, what?'

'Not too bad,' said Lovell, staring, 'I've been on the river with Oswald and Rawson. Done that Georgic?'

'Oh, yes, that's all right,' said Raby, 'You're a bit late for tea, but better late than never, old fellow.'

'We've got in a sultana cake specially,' said Newcome, 'One of Mrs. Mack's sultana cakes that you like, old chap.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Lovell, more and more astonished.

'Here's a chair, old scout,' said Jimmy.

'Squat down, old top,' said Raby, 'I'll make you some fresh tea.'

'Here you are—ham and hard-boiled egg,' said Newcome, 'Cake to follow, and strawberry jam.'

Lovell sat down. Indeed, he almost fell into his chair, in his astonishment. What all this meant was quite a mystery to him. Undoubtedly it was a very great change, and a very pleasant one. He would not have been surprised, after that Georgic, if his head had been within measurable distance of the coal-locker again. But evidently his chums were thinking of anything but coal-lockers, now!

'Anything happened?' asked the mystified Lovell, at last.

'Sort of,' chuckled Jimmy Silver, 'We're all out of Extra for St. Jim's day to-morrow.'

Lovell jumped.

'Out of Extra!' he exclaimed.

'Right on the wicket!'

'Us, and the Modern Tommies,' chuckled Raby, 'The whole giddy seven—you and I and all of us, the great, the short, the tall of us—.'

'And you did it, old fellow,' said Newcome.

Another jump!

'I did!' stuttered Lovell.

'You, old scout! You, old pippin! You, old tulip! Come to my arms, my beamish boy!' chortled Raby.

'Gone crackers?' asked Lovell, 'What have I done, I'd like to know.'

Jimmy Silver laughed.

'Haven't you been doing courageous stunts, while you've been out of gates, and we've been grinding out that Georgic?' he said.

'Not that I know of.'

'What?'

'Look here, what are you getting at?' demanded Lovell, 'I'm jolly glad we're off Extra—if we are—and glad even those Modern ticks are off Extra—if they are! But I've had nothing to do with it. What do you mean?'

His three friends stared at him.

'Did Manders dream it?' asked Jimmy, 'Look here, Lovell, Manders came across to Dicky Dalton, and got us off Extra—.'

'Manders did!' gasped Lovell.

'Yes, Manders! Don't you know why?'

'Haven't the foggiest!'

'According to what Dicky said, you went to Manders' rescue, courageously and all that, and saved him from being mauled by a ferocious dog!' exclaimed Jimmy Silver, 'Manders didn't fancy it happened, I suppose?'

Once more Arthur Edward Lovell jumped.

'Oh, crikey!' he ejaculated. 'Oh, my only summer straw! Mean to say Manders had been doing a song and dance about that?'

'You did what Manders told Dicky—?'

'Yes. But—.'

'Well, it was pretty plucky, then, and no wonder Manders was impressed,' said Jimmy Silver, 'The dog must have been pretty fierce, if Manders could not deal with him himself. You held the brute off—.'

'Yes, but—.'

'Manders jolly well appreciates it, I can tell you. We're all off Extra because of it. It only needed a word from Manders, and—.'

'Oh, crumbs!' said Lovell, 'But it wasn't anything, you ass—.'

'It was!' said Jimmy.

'I tell you—!'

'Modesty, thy name is Arthur Edward!' grinned Newcome.

'It wasn't a fierce dog at all,' howled Lovell, 'Manders thought it was. I tried to tell him the brute wouldn't hurt a baby, but he wouldn't listen. I tell you—.'

'Rot!' said Jimmy, shaking his head.

'But I tell you—.'

'Rubbish!' said Newcome.

'I tell you—.'

'Bosh!' said Raby.

'I tell you it was that mastiff of Pooter's!' shrieked Lovell, 'You remember—the one that chased Knowles last week—.'

'What?' exclaimed Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, all together, blankly.

'He looks fierce enough,' said Lovell, 'But we found out that he was as tame as a white rabbit. Manders thought he was a raging tiger of a brute, but Tubby Muffin could have handled him all right—.'

'That mastiff!' gasped Jimmy Silver.

'That old fraud!' gasped Newcome.

'Oh, crumbs!' said Raby.

'Manders was hanging on a branch,' said Lovell, 'I suppose I'd have tried to help him, if there had been any need—but there wasn't! A baby could have held Caesar's collar as I did. I tried to explain to Manders that he wouldn't bite, but he was too excited to listen—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Jimmy Silver and Co.

'Mean to say Manders has got us off Extra because of that—?' gasped Lovell.

'Ha, ha, ha!' shrieked the three.

'Well, I'm jolly glad to get off Extra, but—.'

'Manders isn't a bad old bean,' said Lovell, 'He thought the dog was dangerous and he called out to me to keep clear, and leave him to it. I wish I hadn't slanged him on Greely's 'phone as I did. He's crusty, but he ain't bad. But look here, if he's got us off Extra because of that—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Lovell all over,' almost sobbed Newcome, 'Everything he plans goes wrong, and makes things worse and worse: and then he works the oracle by accident—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Anyhow, he's worked it!' said Jimmy Silver, laughing, 'We're off Extra. We're going to play cricket to-morrow. Lovell's going to put up a century or two, and I'm going to throw in a few hat-tricks—.'

'Hear, hear!'

'And we're jolly well going to beat St. Jim's,' declared Jimmy Silver. 'All clear now, my beloved 'earers, and—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Lovell, suddenly.

His friends looked at him.

'Ha, ha, ha! It's jolly funny—!' roared Lovell.

'What is?' asked Jimmy.

'Old Manders, you know—ha, ha, ha!'

It had just dawned on Lovell how funny it was, about a minute after his friends had ceased to laugh over it!

CHAPTER XLI

CONCLUSION

'GOOD old Lovell!

'Bravo!

They were cheering on Little Side at Rookwood.

It was a glorious day. And it was a great game. Tom Merry and Co. had come over from St. Jim's in cheery spirits, to meet a team which was able to prove itself a little too tough for the visitors. They little dreamed how very nearly that match had been a walk-over for them! They found it anything but a walk-over.

Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Blake, Figgins, Talbot, and the rest, were all good men and true. They played a good game. But Rookwood were just ahead all the time. After all the doubts and uncertainties and vicissitudes, Jimmy Silver had led a winning team to the contest.

Nobody was thinking of Extra School now. Seven good men who had been scheduled to sit in Extra while the game was played, were all on hand, in the cheeriest of spirits, and at the top of their form.

Arthur Edward Lovell had, after all, done it! Certainly, he had not done it by planning! All his plans had gone wrong, and only resulted in landing his friends deeper and deeper into the soup. But by an amazing chance and a misapprehension of Mr. Manders, Lovell had, after all, done it—and that, really, was the chief consideration. For here were the Fistical Four, and the three Tommies, on the cricket-field, playing the game of their lives, and putting paid to Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's.

Whether Arthur Edward Lovell could plan or not, there was no doubt that he could bat! At the wickets he was a tower of

strength to his side. As a planner he had achieved the result of getting his head shoved in the coal-locker in the end study. But as a batsman, he evoked cheers that woke the echoes. Even Fatty Wynn of St. Jim's could not touch him. In the first Rookwood innings he had made eighty. In the second he was exceeding that figure, and there were still three wickets in hand that were not likely to be wanted. In the field, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's remarked to Tom Merry: 'Bai Jove, you know, that man can bat!' and Tom admitted that that man undoubtedly could!

And when Rookwood had won the game with three wickets to spare, there was quite an ovation for Arthur Edward Lovell. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome gathered round him, looking as if they had never even dreamed of introducing his head into a coal-locker. Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle thumped him on the back, as if they loved Classics in general and Arthur Edward Lovell in particular. And all was calm and bright: though, on the morrow, the Fistical Four and the three Tommies were once more on terms of warfare, and Classics and Moderns once more the rivals of Rookwood School.