

# PRESENCE OF MIND



*Arthur Edward Lovell was born to find trouble, mostly of his own making, and once again, in this thrilling story of the chums of Rookwood School, he lands himself in the soup!*

By OWEN  
CONQUEST

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

PANKLEY AND CO. ON THE WARPATH

"**W**HAT the thump——"  
"What the dickens——"

Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell spoke simultaneously. Raby and Newcome did not speak. They merely stared.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were strolling amiably down Coombe Lane early one bright winter afternoon. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and Jimmy Silver & Co. had obtained permission to travel over to Lantham.

Jimmy's Uncle John was at Lantham Barracks, and Jimmy's father was visiting his brother that afternoon. And he had asked the headmaster

to permit Jimmy and his friends to go over and join him at tea, which the headmaster had graciously consented to do. So the Fistical Four were in high spirits as they strolled along Coombe Lane. The train left Coombe Station at five minutes past three, and they had plenty of time to catch it.

They had reached the stile leading off into the wood when suddenly a frightful figure smote their eyes.

The figure was that of a fat youth, with his hands and his feet tied together, wearing a hideously grinning Guy Fawkes mask over his face. The object jumped dolefully along the road, uttering a moan with each convulsive leap.

"Ow! Groogh! Wow!"  
"What is it?" stuttered Raby blankly.

"Looks like a guy escaped from the bonfires last week," Jimmy remarked. "But judging from the dulcet tones of its voice, I should say it was Tubby Muffin."

A plaintive voice came from the thick grinning lips of the mask.

"I say, old chaps! Cut a fellow loose! Groogh!"

"You fat chump!" snorted Lovell. "What are you charging about the lane like that for?"

"I didn't do it, you ass! Ow! It was the Bagshot bounders. Groogh!"

Jimmy Silver produced a pocket-knife and cut the cord which bound Tubby Muffin's hands and feet. Then he jerked the mask off Tubby's indignant face.

"Bagshot bounders!" repeated Newcome. "Are Pankley and Co. on the warpath this afternoon?"

"Ow! Yes, about a dozen of the brutes. They've got a large stock of masks and cord, and they're waylaying all the Rookwood men going to the village. I say, old chaps, you go and pitch into them. I'll stay here and—and keep cave, you know."

"We'll soon do that," Jimmy said grimly.

"What-ho!" remarked George Raby, thoughtfully tucking up his sleeves as he spoke. "Where are they, Tubby?"

"They were just along the end of the lane when I ran into them. Groogh!" Tubby groaned dolorously. "I say, old chaps, there's a hamper for me at Coombe Station, and I can't get at it while those beasts are hanging about."

"Come on!" said Jimmy briefly.

"Half a minute," said Lovell, pausing. "How many of them are there, Tubby?"

"Ow! Thousands of the rotters!"

"Thousands! Why not make it a million, while you're about it?"

"Well, about a dozen, you know," said Tubby, coming down a bit. "They're on the look-out for Rookwood men."

"They'll find some!" George Raby prophesied grimly. "Get going, you chaps!"

"Hold on!" Arthur Edward Lovell was not in a hurry. Lovell always believed in being different from other fellows, and he was going to be different now. "Our train goes at three-five, you know," said he. "If we get into a shindy with Pankley & Co., and get bumped over and tied up somewhere, we shall miss the train."

"Can't be helped," said Jimmy. "We've got to go to Coombe, anyway, and if we fall in with Pankley & Co. we'll try to give as good as we get."

"But why not take the path through the woods?" urged Lovell, nodding at the stile. "It's rather longer, but we shall get the train all right."

"What rot!" Newcome snorted. "We're not going to run away from Pankley."

Arthur Lovell's back went up at once.

"We're not running away," he sniffed. "It's presence of mind, that's all."

"Presence of piffle!" grunted Raby.

"Presence of mind!" repeated Lovell firmly. "We can't tackle a dozen Bagshot men and get to the station without a scratch. It's not to be expected."

"Well, perhaps that's so," admitted Jimmy grudgingly, "but still——"

"I say, you know," put in Tubby at this point, "don't be funks, you know!"

"What?" roared Lovell.

"I've got to get my hamper from the station, you see. If you fellows

go and mop up Pankley & Co., it will be all right."

"You fat idiot! We're not going over to Lantham looking like pieces of wreckage just because your hamper is at the station. If it comes to that, you can walk through the path with us."

"Look here," said Raby restively, "I don't see why we should go miles out of our way just because a few measly Bagshot fellows are hanging about the road. I'm going through the village."

"Same here!" said Newcome emphatically.

Jimmy Silver hesitated. The cheery Fistical Four were never backward in looking for trouble. They rather welcomed it. But Jimmy could see that Lovell was going to be obstinate.

"We may as well go the straight road," he said persuasively. "Quite likely we shan't meet Bagshot at all. Pankley may have gone into the wood, in which case we should be as likely to meet him on the footpath as in the road."

"Rot!" said Arthur Lovell.

"My dear chap——"

"Utter rot! You've no presence of mind, Jimmy Silver. I'm going through the footpath. You fellows can stick to the road if you like."

"We're going to!" snorted Raby.

"What is it?" asked Raby as a fat figure, wearing a Guy Fawkes mask, jumped along the road towards the juniors, uttering a moan with each jump. "Judging from the dulcet tones," said Jimmy Silver, "it is Tubby Muffin."



"And if you turn up at Coombe Station with your eyes bunged up and your collar on backwards——"

"You'll say 'I told you so!'" murmured Newcome sarcastically. "You're far more likely to meet Pankley & Co. in the wood than we are on the road. If they're ambushing Rookwood men, the footpath would be the best place."

"That really is so," Jimmy pointed out. "Look at it sensibly, old bean."

"I'm going through the footpath," Lovell answered doggedly.

"Then go, and be dashed!" snapped Raby.

"We'll see you at the station, old man," Jimmy said pacifically. "Is Tubby going with you or coming with us? He'd better go with you as he's not much use in a scrap."

"Oh, really, Jimmy! I'd come with you, old fellow, but I've already had a terrific scrap with the rotters, and I'm feeling a little tired, you know. Not that I funk them. I hope that's beneath me."

"Come on, and don't jaw!" snapped Lovell. "We haven't any time to waste if we are to get to the station by three o'clock."

Without another word, Lovell turned his back and climbed over the stile to the footpath. Tubby followed him, stopping only to fling his Guy Fawkes mask into a ditch.

"Silly obstinate ass!" murmured Raby. "It would serve him right if he fell in with Bagshot and got tied up and masked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fistical Four, now reduced to three, stepped gaily along the road to the village. They kept a wary eye open for Pankley, Poole or Putter of Bagshot, but if those cheery youths had been "straddling the road" like Apolyon, they had thought better of it and gone elsewhere.

Quite unmolested, the three juniors entered the small High Street of Coombe, and tramped into the station, just as the clock showed ten minutes to three.

"Quarter of an hour to wait," said Jimmy, as they passed on to the platform. "I wonder what time Lovell will show up."

Newcome purchased a copy of the "Gem," and sat down on a seat to read. Jimmy, Silver and Raby fed pennies into various slot machines, just to see what came out of them. Three o'clock struck from the church

tower across the square, and still Lovell had not made his appearance.

Four more minutes elapsed, and Jimmy peered out anxiously into the High Street. Lovell was nowhere to be seen.

"Blow him! Bother him! Dash him!" grunted Jimmy. "What can have happened to the ass?"

"Perhaps he's fallen in with Pankley and has bolted through the footpaths to Redcliffe," suggested Raby. "If the Bagshot bounders are blocking the way to the village, he would most likely go over to Redcliffe and pick up the train there."

Jimmy grunted again. Soon there was the shriek of a whistle and a train rattled into the station.

"Redcliffe, Lantham, Dunbridge, Dean and Salisbury," bawled the porter, waking up from his after-dinner sleep.

"Pile in!" said Jimmy. "I expect we shall see the ass at Redcliffe."

But, as it happened, they were destined to see him long before they got to Redcliffe.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### LOVELL IN PERIL!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL whistled in a satisfied tone as he tramped along the path. He had not the faintest doubt that Jimmy Silver & Co. would be duly mopped up by the crowd of Bagshot fellows. It was their own fault, of course. Lovell had presence of mind, and they had not. They had made their bed and they must lie on it.

The dead leaves and twigs which carpeted the footpath squelched under his feet as he trod along. Tubby Muffin panted along in the rear. Tubby had rather more weight to carry than Lovell.

"Don't hang about, you ass!" admonished Lovell, glancing over his



shoulder at the perspiring Tubby.  
"We've no time to waste!"

"I say, old fellow," panted Tubby,  
"there's no hurry! I can get the  
hamper at any time up to ten o'clock."

"Bless your hamper! My train  
goes at three-five!"

"That's all right. You can take  
the next."

"You fat dummy! Get a move on!"

Tubby plodded along breathlessly.  
Suddenly there was a roar of laughter  
some distance ahead of them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell started. Tubby jumped.

"I say, that's Pankley!" he gaped.

"He's on the footpath."

"Rot! Come on!"

"But, I say, old chap——"

"Come on!" bawled Lovell.

"Don't stand there talking rubbish  
like a fat frog!"

Lovell was finding some misgivings.  
That laugh had a Bagshot ring in it.  
He thought he had detected the  
cackle of Putter. This, of course,  
only made Lovell all the more deter-  
mined that he was right.

But soon his doubts became cer-  
tainities. As they rounded a corner  
by a large elm, a startling sight met  
their eyes.

Seated on a mossy old milestone,  
struggling furiously with his bonds,  
was another amateur Guy Fawkes.  
A long black moustache ornamented  
his mask, and the face wore a feeble  
grin quite out of keeping with the  
fury of the figure's energies.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell.

The hideous figure looked up on  
hearing his footsteps.

"Rescue, Rookwood!" bawled the  
tones of Putty Grace of the Classical  
Fourth. "Come on, you ass! Don't  
stand there staring like a sheep, you  
dummy! Cut me loose, you potty  
piffler!"

Evidently Teddy Grace was an-  
noyed.

Mechanically Lovell produced a  
knife and cut the bonds of the ill-used  
humorist of the Fourth. As soon as  
Putty was free, he wrenched off the  
mask and jumped on it.

"Those Bagshot villains!" he  
gaped furiously. "There's a whole  
crowd of them just ahead. Look out  
for them!"

"Which way did they go?" asked  
Lovell, with a sinking heart.

"Just along the path towards the  
village, bother them! I'm going to  
collect a mob of the Fourth and come  
back and mop them up!"

"I say, old chap——" bleated  
Tubby, but his bleat changed into a  
cry of alarm. "Yaroooh! Bagshot  
bounders! Bunk!"

Lovell looked ahead and saw a  
crowd of juniors coming through the  
trees.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That Rook-  
wood guy is free!" whooped Pankley.

"And there's dear old Lovell and  
our old pal Tubby!" chuckled Poole.  
"Three more guys!"

"Wait for us, my dears!" croaked  
Putter. "We've plenty more masks.  
We bought 'em specially for Rook-  
wood. They make you much more  
handsome, you know."

The Bagshot fellows charged merrily  
along the path.

Tubby didn't wait for them.  
Neither did Lovell nor Putty Grace.

Tubby plunged into the wood with  
Lovell at his heels. Putty tore back  
along the path towards Rookwood.  
The Bagshot fellows went after the  
chief prize, which was Arthur Edward  
Lovell, a member of the famous  
Fistical Four.

Gritting his teeth furiously, Lovell  
dodged round trunks of trees, dived  
through bushes, squelched through  
pools of mud, and climbed over  
ditches. Tubby Muffin, very much  
in the wars, kept near to him.

"Make towards the railway,"

panted Lovell. "We can edge back to the path alongside Little Wood Cutting."

Tubby nodded without speaking. Loud whoops were still ringing out close behind them. They were leaving tracks easily followed, and the noise of their flight could be heard a very long way.

A ditch with steep clay banks, overgrown with bushes and wild plants, led towards the higher ground by the Cutting. Lovell worked his way cautiously along the top of the bank, clinging where necessary to bushes and the branches of trees.

Tubby was not so lucky. He threw his weight on the branch of a bush to keep himself from falling, and his weight broke the branch. Tubby's heels threshed wildly on the slippery clay bank. Then he went into the ditch with a tremendous squelching slide.

Squi-i-i-sh! Squash! Splash!

"Whooooo!" he shrieked as the ditch, with stagnant water, rotting leaves and mud, received him into its bosom.

"Shut up!" hissed Lovell. "Don't make that row! Pankley will hear you!"

"But look at me!" yelled Tubby, climbing out in a garment of mud.

"Look at me!" he shrieked. "Ain't I a sight! Oh, lor'! Ow-wow!"

Lovell caught him by the shoulder and ran with him through the bushes to where a high stone wall cut off further flight. There he stopped and panted.

Loud whoops and shouts were still echoing close at hand. Presently he heard Pankley shouting to his followers.

"Stop here! They can't go any farther because of the railway! We've got them trapped, my sons!"

Lovell groaned. Tubby stuttered with dismay.

"Oh, corks! How can we get to the station now?" he moaned. "There isn't any way except through the wood where Pankley is."

Lovell's eyes gleamed.

"Yes, there is," he said desperately. "There's a straight road to the station."

"What? Where?" gasped Tubby, blinking about him in amazement.

"Over the other side of this wall, fathead!"

"But—but that's the railway!"

"Well? Doesn't that go to the station?"

"Ye-es, but you can't walk along the permanent way, can you?"

"Why not?" asked Lovell coolly.

"Because of the trains, old fellow. Besides, it ain't allowed."

Lovell sniffed.

"You want presence of mind, old fat bean! The railway is the quickest way to the station, so we shall go that way. Let me give you a bunk up the wall."

"But—but, I say, you know——"

"Don't talk! Sit on my shoulders."

Groaning and gasping, Lovell lifted the weighty Muffin and helped him to climb astride the wall. Then he deftly climbed up the trunk of a tree growing near by, swarmed along a branch and joined Tubby on the wall.

Tubby looked down and shivered. Far below them, shut in by the sides of the steep cutting approaching Fieldhall Tunnel, ran four shining ribbons of steel.

"I—I say, I can't climb down there," he groaned.

"Then you can stay there and let Pankley have you," replied Lovell callously. "I'm going."

He dropped from the wall to the ground, and then slithered cautiously down the embankment until he stood in the middle of the permanent way, just where the points enable the cross-country Southampton trains to

go across to the main line at Eastleigh.

He blinked at the small form of Tubby perched on the wall high above him.

"Come on!" he bawled. "It's as safe as houses!"

"No fear!" came back the distant tones of Tubby Muffin. "I'd rather chance Pankley any day."

"You fat funk! I tell you it's——"

Lovell broke off as Tubby suddenly disappeared from sight on the other side of the wall. Perhaps Pankley was drawing near to him.

"Silly ass!" sniffed Lovell. "There's nothing—Whoohooooop! What—what—Ow!"

Lovell shrieked as something suddenly clutched his foot with a terrific grip. A spasm of throbbing pain shot up his leg. He blinked downwards in agonised amazement. Then he saw!

The signalman in the box at the entrance to the tunnel—which was out of sight around a bend—had just changed over the points. And that iron prong gripped Lovell's foot to the metals of the down line.

Lovell struggled and panted, but his foot was crushed close in that iron embrace. He could not even move it an inch. Perspiration of fear broke out on his forehead.

"Help!" he shouted frantically. "Help!"



To save himself from falling, Tubby threw his weight on the branch of a bush, his feet threshing wildly on the slippery bank. But the branch broke and Tubby went into the ditch with a squelching slide.

There was a sudden clatter behind him. He turned his head and saw that the signal for the down line to Coombe and Winchester had just fallen. Then he remembered that the train to Winchester arrived at Coombe at three-twelve.

He had no idea of the time, but he judged that it must be three o'clock or after. A wild blink along the rails towards the tunnel showed him the position.

The cutting, at that point, took an acute curve, which gave a view ahead of no more than thirty-five or forty yards. In other words, as Lovell

told himself with a groan, the driver of the Winchester train would be about forty yards away from him before he saw him. This train always came up to Coombe at a fair pace, for it was a non-stop from Lantham.

There would be no chance for it to pull up in time. Lovell knew that. He groaned in terror and wrenched so furiously at his leg that he felt he must have dislocated his ankle.

"Help!" he shrieked hopelessly.  
"Help!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### "PRESENCE OF MIND."

"HELP!"

Lovell covered his face with his hands.

It was his last effort to make the man in the signal-box hear him. It had to be the last, for on the air was the rumble of an approaching train. It echoed back and forth in the deep clay walls of the cutting until the whole earth seemed to shake with it. Then came the clank of the engine and the puffing of steam.

Lovell stared eagerly ahead. Judging by the sound, the train was not travelling so fast as usual; it seemed, indeed, to be getting up speed after a halt. And as he stared with terrible eagerness at the curve before him, the rumble suddenly smote him from behind, and he realised that it was an up-train, and not the down-train, which was approaching.

At this fact his heart beat wildly. There was the barest possible hope, the faintest vestige of hope that something would be done for him before the Winchester train thundered out of the tunnel. He half turned and saw the engine rounding the bend—a fussy little tank engine.

He threw himself sideways across the down line in order to be out of reach of the train. He did not dare take his eyes from the curve ahead, for the rattle of the up-train now blotted out every sound, and the other might come on him unprepared. Not, as he told himself with a shudder, that it would make any difference. Indeed, it would be almost better for

death to strike unperceived than for him to watch its swift approach.

The driver of the tank engine gazed blankly at Lovell as it snorted by.

"Get off the track, you young fool!" he shrieked, not perceiving that Lovell's foot was caught.

Lovell gave him a haggard blink, and attempted to call attention to his foot, but the engine swept on.

Then suddenly a loud cry rang above the clamour.

"Lovell!"

He stared at the carriages above him, and saw Jimmy's white face being carried past at the window of a third-class compartment. Through the glass he could glimpse Raby and Newcome.

"Jimmy—my foot——" he shrieked wildly.

Jimmy took in the situation at a glance, and an icy hand clutched his heart. He remembered that the Winchester train was due at Coombe at three-twelve. It was three-ten at that moment.

Almost mechanically his grasp closed over the communication cord. He pulled it frantically.

"Jimmy—what——" gasped Raby, white-faced.

Jimmy set his teeth. He perceived the signal-box floating past them, and knew that the train would not stop for perhaps a hundred yards or so. With one bound he sprang across the carriage, upsetting his chums. He wrenched open the other door and leaped out towards the bed of ferns and gorse on the embankment.

"Jimmy!" shrieked Newcome and Raby, clutching each other with terror.  
Crash!

"Ooooooh!" gasped Jimmy.

The landing knocked all the breath out of his body. Winded and bruised he rolled down the slope and bumped on the gravel at the side of the track. Feeling half dazed, he staggered up,



With a shrieking of brakes, the locomotive rushed on, as it seemed to Lovell's horrified eyes, with tremendous speed. Nearer and nearer it came—rocking and swaying!

stumbled across the metals and waved his hand fiercely to the signalman who was regarding him with wide-open, terrified eyes.

"Stop the down-train!" shrieked Jimmy fiercely. "Stop it! Stop it!"

"Get off the down track, you fool!" screamed the signalman.

He pointed wildly as he spoke, and Jimmy was in time to see a large engine leap fiercely from the tunnel amid a cloud of sparks.

He sprang on the embankment and waved his arms above his head. For

one second he glimpsed a red face goggling at him from the cab of the big locomotive, then there was a screaming and tearing as the powerful brakes were applied. The train seemed to shiver from end to end.

Then Jimmy raced to the signal-box.

"Switch over the points!" he yelled, and promptly collapsed in a stupor at the foot of the steps.

Arthur Lovell heard the screaming before the engine appeared in sight. When it breasted the corner, it was rocking on the metals with the force

of the brakes, but was still rushing on as it seemed to Lovell's horrified eyes, with tremendous speed. Nearer and nearer it came — rocking and swaying with a shrieking, clanging and hissing as its speed diminished. Then there came a jolt which rocked the train from engine to guard's van, and the giant buffers of the engine came to rest within three yards of Lovell's pallid face.

At the same moment, the points shifted over and Lovell fell across the metals and crawled to the grass on the embankment.

"Thanks aw-awfully!" he stut-tered feebly to the astonished driver. "You—you can go on now."

"It was presence of mind!" said Lovell firmly.

He was sitting in the patient's chair in the Rookwood sanatorium, while the nurse, grinning covertly, bandaged his ankle. Seated on three other chairs, and looking fit to eat him, were Silver, Raby and Newcome.

The chums, abandoning their after-noon trip, had returned to Coombe in the down train. A motor ambulance, kindly lent by the Cottage Hospital, had conveyed Lovell back to Rook-wood.

"It was presence of mind!" repeated Lovell. "If I hadn't had the presence of mind to get down on the railway track, Pankley & Co. would have tied me up and masked me, like they did Tubby Muffin after he left me. Think of that, you men!"

Jimmy Silver and his chums were

thinking of it. And only the presence of the matron saved Lovell from common assault.

"You—you—you frabjous owl!" gasped Jimmy.

"Luckily," said Lovell firmly, "I had the presence of mind to dodge them by climbing down the embankment. And so I wasn't caught and Muffin was."

"Oh, great pip!"

The nurse coughed.

"Master Lovell," she said, "the injury to your ankle appears to be more as the result of your wrenching than the grip of the metals."

"I shouldn't wonder," Lovell agreed. "I struggled pretty hard."

"What I mean is," said the nurse, with an innocent look in her blue eyes, "if you had unlaced your shoe, you might have freed your foot. Why didn't you do that?"

Lovell's jaw dropped in consterna-tion. He gaped blankly at the nurse.

"Gug-great Scott!" he gurgled. "I never thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Jimmy Silver & Co.

Clasping each other gleefully, the three chums rose and staggered out of the sanatorium. In ten minutes all Rookwood knew the story of Lovell's "presence of mind."

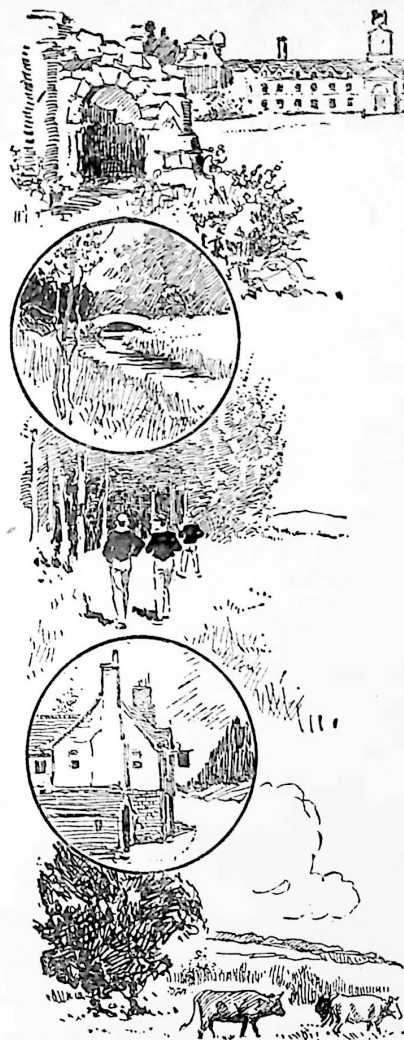
Lovell soon got over the severe caning the Head thought fit to bestow on him. But he did not so soon get over the chaff of the juniors. And to this day he blushes whenever he hears anyone utter the words:

"Presence of mind!"

THE END



# AROUND ROOKWOOD



IN Hampshire's lovely woods there stands  
 A building grey and hoary,  
 And many a sage  
 In every age  
 Has witnessed to its glory.  
 The fame of Rookwood School demands  
 High place in song and story.  
 The Abbey Ruins are close by,  
 Now overgrown with brambles;  
 There, so they say,  
 On Christmas Day  
 A ghostly Abbot rambles.  
 If he is seen by passers-by,  
 There follow shrieks and scrambles.  
 By Stuckey Croft, the Governor's place,  
 A little stream meanders.  
 The turf is soft  
 At Stuckey Croft,  
 But he who on it wanders,  
 A master's "jaw" may have to face,  
 With possibly six "handers."  
 On summer days a little copse  
 To Rookwooders gives shelter;  
 In there it's cool,  
 Though at the school  
 They all perspire and swelter;  
 And when the hated lesson stops  
 They rush off helter-skelter.  
 Down lower is "The Bird in Hand,"  
 Where Carthew comes to anchor.  
 He tries to win  
 A pot of tin  
 At billiards or at banker;  
 But, as a rule, he loses and  
 His pleasure turns to rancour.  
 On every side are rolling hills  
 With little clumps and hollows;  
 And when the cows  
 Go there to browse  
 The fearsome bullock follows;  
 And there the little wheatear trills  
 Among the darting swallows.  
 The sunset with a touch of fire  
 On Rookwood's walls is gleaming;  
 Then sinks from sight,  
 And it is night:  
 The lady moon is beaming  
 In silver on this lovely shire—  
 And Rookwood lies a-dreaming.