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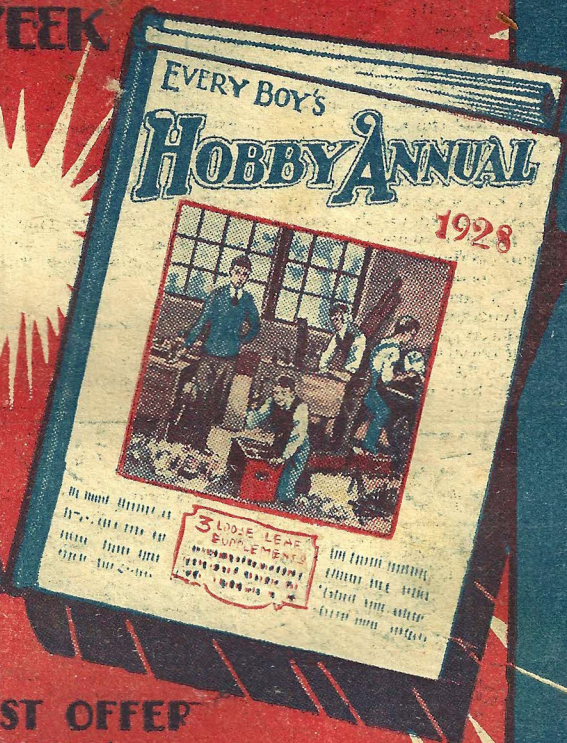
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**ROOKWOODERS ON HOLIDAY!**

*Jimmy Silver & Co. foresaw a good deal of trouble coming with Lovell and his motor-scooter, whilst on holiday. And they prove true prophets, for Lovell's motor-scooter leads the holiday-makers a rare old dance!*



# THE ROOKWOOD RAMBLERS!

A ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE MERRY CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Lovell Asks for It!

"BUCK up!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"For goodness' sake," said Arthur Edward Lovell, in a tone of intense patience, which was more exasperating than impatience, "buck up!"

Three separate and distinct glares were bestowed upon Arthur Edward Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked wrathful. They felt wrathful.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were on the road, and it was a blazing summer's afternoon. The old school had broken up for the holidays; the Form-rooms no longer echoed to the buzz of voices; scarcely a footfall broke the silence of the ancient quad. The Rookwooders were scattered far afield, by mount and stream and sea. And Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth Form had started on their summer cycling tour.

It was a glorious day. Overhead a burning sun swam in a sky of cloudless blue. It was hot; there was no doubt that it was hot. Before the Rookwood juniors the highway ran like a white ribbon over the downs, rising and rising before them. It seemed to three tired cyclists that it never would cease rising.

It was all very well for Lovell to tell his comrades to "buck up."

Lovell was mounted on the motor-scooter.

Behind him was a carrier that carried most of the baggage of the four juniors. The motor-scooter had been Lovell's idea, and his chums admitted that it was a good idea—the first good idea Lovell had ever had, so far as they could remember.

The scooter negotiated the hill quite easily with Lovell and the baggage. It was not really a very steep hill, though it seemed so to the three juniors on the push-bikes.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were bucking up as much as they could. Their faces were red, and perspiration ran down their noses. Lovell's objurgations, addressed to them from a comfortable seat on a petrol-bike, had a peculiarly exasperating effect. The three would have bucked up fast enough had they been going on petrol instead of on their weary legs.

"I don't want to hurry you fellows,

of course," said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a touch of gentle sarcasm, "but we've got to get to a camp this evening, haven't we?"

"Shut up!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Lovell smiled cheerily.

"Now you're losing your tempers," he said. "You shouldn't do that. What's the good of getting into a fluster? I think it's only reasonable to ask you to buck up a little when we've got miles to do before we can camp. I'm getting hungry!"

Jimmy Silver jumped off his machine.

"I'm going to walk the rest," he said.

"Good egg!" said Raby and Newcome together. And they jumped down.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave an expressive snort and jumped down to wheel the scooter. Compared with the push-bikes it was a heavy machine. But Lovell turned on enough gas to keep it going on its own volition. Without that Lovell would have had a terrific task to wheel it up the hill. With that, however, his task was much easier than that of his comrades.

He strolled on quite cheerfully, with his hand on the petrol jigger. He was still sarcastic.

"Of course, I don't mind," he said. "Don't mind me at all. If you fellows prefer to stroll, let's stroll. Only if this is a walking tour, what the thump did we bring the bikes for?"

"Are you wound up, Lovell?" asked Raby, breathing hard.

Lovell laughed cheerily.

"Keep your temper, old man!" he said. "I don't mind wasting time if you don't. Hallo! What are you stopping for?" he asked, as George Raby sat on a green bank by the roadside.

"To rest!" hissed Raby.

Jimmy Silver and Newcome stopped, too.

"You feel you need a rest?" grinned Lovell. "Oh, my hat!

"Poor old chaps! I needn't remind you that it's six miles to Burney Common, where we're going to camp. You know that. I'm not tired. I'll take a stroll round while you're resting. Ha, ha!"

He whistled cheerily as he strolled away among the trees and disappeared. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he disappeared just then. Never had Lovell been so near to a severe ragging without quite getting it!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER. And Gets It!

"OW, I'm tired!"

"Same here!"

"That silly ass—"

It was refreshing to sit in the green grass, under the shade of a tree. Jimmy Silver & Co. were in no hurry to get going again, though the selected spot for the night's camp was still six miles ahead.

Newcome rose to his feet, with a glint in his eyes, and stepped over to the motor-scooter.

He looked into the petrol tank.

"That's all right," said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell filled up at the foot of the hill. There's enough for a dozen miles yet."

"I know that," said Newcome. "But there won't be when I've seen to it."

And Arthur Newcome proceeded to empty the petrol-tank.

At any moment Lovell might return, and sarcastically inquire whether his comrades were sufficiently rested to continue the journey. Newcome's idea was to give him something else to think about. There was a petrol-can among the baggage; but it was empty. The machine was well supplied to last till a new can could be obtained—but for Newcome's "seeing to it." He "saw to it" with such effect that the tank was soon empty, and Newcome closed it with a pleased smile.

Then he returned to his seat in the grass under the tree.

It was ten minutes later that Lovell came sauntering back, with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face.

"I say, there's a jolly good view across there," he said. "You fellows oughtn't to miss it. But I suppose you're too tired to take a little trot—ha, ha!"

"We're ready to go on now," said Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell jerked the motor-scooter out into the road, and turned on the petrol. There was a tiny quantity of juice left at the bottom of the tank, and the machine began to throb.

Lovell jumped on as he started it, and his three comrades mounted their bicycles. The Fistical Four started off together.

"Now, just make an effort," said Lovell encouragingly. "A bit of an effort."

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effort will do it, you know. If not, I think I'd better get on ahead and wait for you at Burney—see?"

"Do!" said Newcome cheerily, wondering how many minutes Lovell's scooter would keep going.

"Hallo! What the thump's up?" exclaimed Lovell, as his machine declined abruptly to respond to the touch of his hand.

Instead of careering forward as Lovell turned on more juice, the motor-scooter came to a stop.

Lovell jumped off.

"Something gone wrong with the works?" asked Newcome blandly.

"No, ass!"

"Run out of petrol, perhaps?"

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped Lovell. "I filled up a mile back. The tank's nearly full."

The trio dismounted again, smiling, and wheeled their machines. Lovell, with a red and angry face, ran his machine on, trying to start up. With the tank nearly full of petrol, there seemed no earthly reason why the motor-scooter shouldn't start up. But it didn't.

"Buck up!" said Raby.

"What?" hooted Lovell.

"For goodness' sake, buck up!"

"You burbling ass!"

"Now you're losing your temper," said Newcome. "What's the good of getting into a fluster?"

"What?"

"I think it's only reasonable to ask you to buck up, when we've got miles to do before we can camp," said Newcome. "I'm getting hungry."

"Can't you see I'm trying to start this blessed jigger?" hooted Lovell.

"That's all very well, but it's six miles to Burney."

"This isn't a walking tour," added Raby. "If it is, why the thump did we bring the motor-scooter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell, in a state of great exasperation, rushed the scooter on again, in the hope that it would start up. He was disappointed.

"I think we'd better get on ahead, and wait for you at Burney, Lovell," said Newcome blandly. "We'll camp and get supper ready."

"You can go to Burney, or go to Jericho, and the sooner the better!" howled Lovell.

"Sure you don't mind?" grinned Raby.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And three cyclists rode up the slope of the hill to Burney, and Lovell vanished from sight behind. Arthur Edward Lovell, wheeling the heavy scooter uphill, laboured long and hard, and the celebrated labours of Sisyphus seemed to him a mere jest in comparison.

But by the time they arrived at Burney Jimmy Silver's heart smote him. Lovell had been intensely exasperating; his jeering had really been hard to tolerate, while he was fresh and his comrades tired. No doubt a lesson was for his good. But by this time, labouring up the hill with the heavy scooter in the blaze of the sun, it was certain that Lovell was tired enough. And Jimmy Silver called to his comrades as they rode by the path on Burney Common.

"I'll get on to the village, and you fellows can pitch the camp—"

"What's the game?" asked Raby.

"I'm going to get a can of petrol and take it back to old Lovell."

Raby laughed.

"Well, perhaps he's had enough," he said.

"I was just thinking so," said New-

come with a chuckle. "After all, old Lovell can't help being an ass."

And the spot for the camp having been selected, Jimmy Silver rode into Burney and purchased a can of petrol, and started back over the dusty road, going to the rescue of his chum.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Friend in Need.

**B**LOW!" Arthur Edward Lovell streamed with perspiration, and he was the colour of a well-boiled beetroot.

And the road over the hill stretched before him, seemingly like an endless white ribbon. But it had occurred to Lovell, at last, to look into the petrol tank.

He found it empty.

He knew that he had filled it, so he looked for a hitherto unsuspected leak. There was no sign of one. Slowly the truth dawned upon the brain of Arthur Edward Lovell. He realised that the tank had been emptied while he was out of sight during the previous halt.

Lovell's feelings were almost too deep for words.

"Oh, blow! Bother! Bless it! Oh dear! Won't I jolly well punch their cheeky heads!" growled Lovell.

There was a footstep on the road, and he looked up hopefully. Anyone who could tell him where to obtain petrol would have been welcome at that moment.

A rather fat gentleman, in ancient clothes that looked a good deal as if they had been gathered from a dust-bin, stopped, and gave Lovell an affable grin. The gentleman looked very much down on his luck. He looked dusty and dry and dilapidated. His unpleasant visage shone with heat. But Lovell was glad to see even a tramp just then.

"Hold on, my man," he said. "Do you know where a chap can get any petrol hereabouts?"

"I reckoned you was in trouble, sir," said the stranger. "That's why I come up. Run out of juice?"

"Yes," said Lovell.

"There ain't a shop within a mile or two, sir. You'll 'ave to go to Giles' Farm. It's 'alf a mile, but they'll oblige you with it there. I know Mr. Giles." Lovell, tired as he was, rose with alacrity.

"Good! Which way?"

"Over that fence, and by the footpath to the pond, and then up the meadow by the oak-trees."

"Oh, my hat! I can't wheel the jigger that way!"

"Never you mind, sir," said the fat man kindly. "I'll sit 'ere and mind your jigger for you."

Lovell ought really to have been grateful for that kind offer from a complete stranger. Instead of which he eyed the fat man dubiously. Leaving his jigger in charge of a tramp was rather too risky a proceeding for the Rookwood junior. He could not help having a suspicion that by the time he returned with the petrol, the jigger, probably, would have vanished, and that the fat man would be "minding" it somewhere else, where Lovell would not be likely to see it again.

"I'm an honest man, sir," said the fat gentleman with dignity, quite understanding Lovell's doubt. "Mr. Giles knows me well—name of Parkins, sir. I'm generally called Honest John in these parts, sir."

Lovell smiled faintly.

"Look here," he exclaimed. "I'll give you five bob for your trouble if you get me the petrol."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Mr. Parkins.

"Here's the can, and here's two bob to pay for the petrol, if you can get it. Five shillings when you come back," said Lovell.

"Right-ho, sir!" said Mr. Parkins cheerfully.

The dusty gentleman took the can and the two shillings, climbed over the fence, and vanished along the footpath.

Lovell sat down again, contentedly.

If honest Honest John were tempted to decamp with the two shillings, obviously he would be restrained by the knowledge that he would lose more than twice as much by his dishonesty. Arthur Edward Lovell felt that he had been very wary and diplomatic.

"The tramp was certain to return for the five shillings. Lovell had only to wait for him."

And he grinned as he pictured the faces of his comrades when he came sailing airily into Burney on the jigger, instead of shoving it in wearily on foot as they expected.

Mr. Parkins had said that it was half a mile to Giles' Farm—a mile there and back. To judge by the speed with which he reappeared he had covered the ground very quickly. It was not more than a quarter of an hour before he was clambering back into the road over the fence.

"Got it?" exclaimed Lovell eagerly.

"Ere you are, sir!" said Honest John.

"Good man!"

Mr. Parkins handed him the can. It was heavy now, and the contents swished inside, as he handed it over, with a sound that was really like music to Lovell's ears.

"Ere's threepence change, sir," said Mr. Parkins. "Mr. Giles couldn't spare very much, and he would only take one-and-nine. Some blokes, sir, would have kep' that threepence. But I 'ope I'm an honest man."

"I'm sure you are," said Lovell cordially. "Keep the threepence, old bean. That's all right! And here's your five bob."

Five shillings was not a small sum to the Fourth-Former of Rookwood. But he felt that Mr. Parkins had earned it. Honest John had been a friend in need. The tramp's eyes gleamed covetously as the shillings dropped into his horny palm.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "I've got to 'urry back. Mr. Giles has offered me a job with the hay, and I'm a demon for work, I am! Thank you kindly, sir, and good-evening to you!"

"Good-night, and many thanks!" said Lovell.

Honest John clambered over the fence again, and disappeared. He seemed to be in a hurry to get to work, for he vanished up the footpath at a rapid run.

Lovell, with the petrol-can in his hands, stepped towards his jigger and opened the tank. He had only to fill up now, and sail cheerily on his way. There was a sudden buzzing of a bicycle-bell. Down the hill, from the direction of Burney, a cyclist came free-wheeling at a terrific pace.

Lovell glanced round, and recognised Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy put on his brakes, and came to a rather breathless halt.

There was a petrol-can fastened on his bike.

"Hallo, old man!" he exclaimed.

"Found you again!"

Lovell glared at him.

"I've found out the rotten trick you played!" he exclaimed. "I know that one of you emptied the tank."



Jimmy grinned. "You asked for it, old man," he said. "You really begged and prayed for it, you know. But I've brought you a can of petrol from Burney."

"You can keep it!" sneered Lovell. "Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy impatiently. "You asked to have your leg pulled, and it was pulled! It serves you right! Now shove this juice into your jigger and let's get on!"

"I don't happen to want it, and you can take it back, and be blowed to you!" said Lovell. "I've got a can of petrol now. I got a man to fetch it for me from a farm!"

"Oh!" said Jimmy, "I wish I'd known that! I've got this dashed hill to negotiate again—for nothing!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" grinned Lovell.

"Well, you may as well put this can on the scooter," said Jimmy. "No fear!" snorted Lovell. "You can take it back on your push-bike, and serve you right for playing silly tricks! Go and eat coke!"

Jimmy Silver frowned, and without another word, turned his bike round, and began to wheel it up the hill.

By that time Jimmy probably regretted the kindness of heart that had brought him to Lovell's rescue. He was already fatigued, and there was a long hill in front of him again.

Lovell grinned, and gave his attention to the scooter. He unscrewed the stopper of the petrol-can, and was about to pour the contents into the tank, when he stopped suddenly.

A strange expression came over Lovell's face. Just in time, he jerked the can back before any of its contents had gone into the scooter's tank.

Then he poured a little of it out into the road, and sniffed at it. Then he set the can down, and glared at it—with a deadly glare.

He had given Mr. Parkins five shillings to bring that filled can to him. Now he would have given five pounds to be within hitting distance of Mr. Parkins. For it was not petrol that the can contained.

It was water!

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
Juice Wanted!

**W**ATER!" Arthur Edward Lovell breathed the word in a sulphurous whisper.

He was almost overcome. He had been quite right—Mr. Parkins had returned for the five shillings, as he expected. Only he had not spent the two shillings on petrol at Giles'

farm—if there existed any such place as Giles' farm. He had stayed out of sight for a quarter of an hour, filled the can with water at a pond, and then returned to Lovell for his reward.

Arthur Edward's feelings were really too deep for expression.

No wonder Mr. Parkins had departed at a run after handing over the can of water to the deluded Rookwooder.

No doubt he was anxious to be well out of reach when Lovell opened the can.

bike once more, and walked it down the hill to meet Lovell.

"All serene, old chap!" he called out.

"Give me that can, Jimmy!" "That's all right. I don't mind the weight on my bike!" said Jimmy cheerily. "Leave it where it is."

"I—I didn't mean—I mean—I don't mean—that is—" Lovell stammered. "You—you see, I want the petrol for my jigger."

"But you've got a new can," said Jimmy, in wonder.



**THE HELPFUL TRAMP!** "Got it?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, eagerly, as Honest John appeared through the hedge, carrying the petrol can. "Ere you are, sir," said the tramp, handing the can to Lovell. "Good man!" said the junior, as he heard the swish of its contents. (See Chapter 3.)

"If—if I could only get near that villain Parkins!" breathed Lovell.

But it was useless to dwell on the joys of punching Mr. Parkins. Honest John was out of sight and out of reach. Besides, punching Mr. Parkins would not have filled the empty tank.

Bitter as it was, Lovell realised that he had to appeal to Jimmy Silver. It was a case of any port in a storm.

He put his hands to his mouth, and shouted:

"Jimmy!" Jimmy Silver did not seem to hear. He was at a good distance now, with his back to Lovell.

Lovell ran desperately up the road after him.

"Jimmy! Jimmy Silver! Jimmy!"

Then the captain of the Rookwood Fourth glanced back over his shoulder. He was surprised to see Lovell tearing up the hill after him in the hot sun and dust. But he was pleased.

Jimmy Silver was a placable fellow, and he hated wrangling. He supposed that Lovell was sorry for the sharp words he had spoken, and was coming after him to say so.

So Jimmy Silver wheeled round his

"I—I haven't; it—it—it—" Lovell stuttered. "I—I've been done! That—that beast brought me the can full of water!"

Jimmy Silver jumped. "Water?" he yelled.

"Yes!" gasped Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Didn't you look at it before you paid for it? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" roared Lovell. "This isn't a laughing matter, Jimmy Silver!"

"Isn't it?" gasped Jimmy. "It seems to me that it is. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You chortling ass!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling dummy!" "Oh dear!" gasped Jimmy Silver,

wiping his eyes. "You really oughtn't to rag with your old pals, Lovell—you're not to be trusted alone, you know! Never mind, here's the jolly old juice!"

Jimmy, still chucking, unfastened the can, and handed it over to Arthur Edward Lovell.

With the scooter going well once more, under the influence of Jimmy Silver's petrol, Lovell soon recovered



his temper. He chugged up the hill contentedly enough, with Jimmy Silver hanging on to his shoulder, en route for Burney Common, the camp, and supper.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Stop, Thief!

"FATHEAD!"

"Ass!"

Raby and Newcome, seated in the grass by the stream, in the shade of the beeches, were speaking of Arthur Edward Lovell.

For a very long time—ages, as it seemed to them—the two Rookwood juniors had been waiting in camp. Jimmy Silver had gone back for Lovell, and there was no sign of his return yet.

It occurred to Newcome that his little trick on Lovell was rather in the nature of a boomerang. It rather recoiled on the head of the japer.

For all the supplies were packed on the carrier of the motor-scooter, and there was no supper until Lovell should arrive.

Arthur Edward Lovell certainly had "asked for it," and he had got what he asked for. That was all right. But Newcome and Raby were getting very hungry, and that was by no means all right.

"I'm glad Jimmy went back with the petrol," said Raby. "That fathead may turn up before we perish with hunger."

"If he doesn't skid, or run into a motor-car, or play some other silly trick!" said Newcome. "You know Lovell!"

"I'm frightfully peckish!"

"Same here!"

"Fact is, it was rather fatheaded to empty his tank, as he's got the grub on the carrier," remarked Raby.

"You didn't think of that at the time!" growled Newcome.

"No, and you didn't! Can't be helped now! It's all Lovell's fault for being such a silly ass!"

"Just that! The chump!"

"The dummy!"

Raby and Newcome, apparently, hoped to find some solace in slanging Arthur Edward. It passed the time, anyhow.

A dingy figure came out of the woods, and tramped across the common. The juniors glanced at the man idly. He was a fat man, in dilapidated garb, with a battered hat. Raby and Newcome had never seen Mr. Parkins before, and they knew nothing of Honest John. But his looks made them decide to keep a wary eye on their bicycles as he came near.

Mr. Parkins seemed to be heading for the village of Burney, which was a good mile off across the common. But as he sighted the camp of the Rookwooders, he changed his direction slightly, and came towards them.

He pulled off his battered hat and saluted them.

"'Ot day, gentlemen," he said.

"Very hot," agreed Newcome.

"Come a long way on them bikes?"

"Yes."

"No objection to a bloke sitting down and taking a bit of a rest, sir?" said Honest John.

"Sit down where you like," said Raby.

"Thank you kindly, sir."

The Rookwooders had no inclination for the company of Mr. Parkins. But his manner was so civil that they did not like to "shoo" him off. Moreover, THE POPULAR.—No. 497.

the common was public land, and Honest John had as much right there as they had.

So they raised no objection, and Mr. Parkins sat down in the grass, with his back to a tree, and fanned his perspiring brow with his battered hat.

His sly eyes were on the bicycles with sidelong glances. There were seven ill-gotten shillings in Mr. Parkins' ragged pockets, which he was intending to "blow" in the inn at Burney. But all was grist that came to Honest John's mill. Although he was keen and eager to get to the inn at Burney, he was prepared to postpone his visit there if there was anything "going." Honest John was always on the look-out for chances, being by profession a snatcher-up of unconsidered trifles.

"Waitin' 'ere for somebody p'r'aps," he remarked, by way of genial conversation.

"Yes," said Raby. "Waiting for two fellows to come along. I suppose you haven't seen them? You didn't come by the road."

"No, I cut across the 'ill by the woods," said Mr. Parkins. "It saves 'arf the distance, if you know the way. I say, them bikes look as if you'd given 'em some work to-day."

"We have," said Raby.

"I'm looking for work," said Mr. Parkins. "You'd 'ardly believe it, but I've tramped fifteen miles to-day in this 'ere 'eat, looking for work."

If Mr. Parkins was right, the juniors hardly believed it. In fact, they did not believe it at all.

"For the price of a bed," went on Mr. Parkins, "I'd clean down them two bikes, so bright and clean you'd 'ardly know them ag'in. Make it a bob."

"That's not a bad idea," said Raby.

"They could do with it."

"I'm your man," said Mr. Parkins. "I'm a demon for work when I get the chance!"

Tired as he looked, he rose to his dusty feet with alacrity.

"You'll find an oil-rag in the saddle-bag," said Raby, pointing to his bike.

"Right you are, sir."

Honest John set to work.

Raby and Newcome kept quite near him, still taking their ease in the grass, but with a sharp eye on Mr. Parkins. They did not want their tools to disappear into his ragged pockets.

Mr. Parkins finished cleaning Newcome's bike, and leaned it against the tree again. Then he started on Raby's machine.

By that time the two juniors were a little less watchful. Mr. Parkins seemed to be thinking of nothing but his work, and they were rather ashamed of their distrust. The fat gentleman did not look very respectable, but it was at least very meritorious on his part to seek to earn his night's lodging by labour, instead of begging.

There was a sound of a motor-horn in the far distance, and Raby stepped out from the trees to look away towards the road. He hoped that the hoot signalled the appearance of Lovell.

"He's coming!" he called out to Newcome.

In the distance, on the white road that ran like a ribbon across the common towards the village, Raby sighted two cyclists—Jimmy Silver on his bike, and Lovell on the motor-scooter. They were just turning from the road into the track across the common towards the trees.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Newcome, joining Raby where he stood, and looking away towards the two newcomers.

A sudden sound behind them made the two juniors turn quickly. Raby gave a yell.

"Hi! Stop!"

Mr. Parkins, mounted on Raby's bicycle, was speeding away across the common, riding on the rough grass towards the track. He had taken good advantage of that moment of inattention.

"Stop thief!" roared Newcome.

Honest John was not likely to stop. Bunched up on the bicycle, with his fat little legs going strong, he dashed away at a great rate. Raby started to run after him frantically. Newcome made a dash for his bike, which still leaned against the tree. Honest John had not attempted to annex both machines. Newcome dragged his machine to him, and then gave a yell of rage.

The tyres were quite flat. Honest John had spared a moment to see to that before he made his hurried departure on Raby's bike. Likewise, he had found another spare moment in which to remove a nut, and Newcome's front wheel spun out and collapsed at his feet.

"The—the villain!" gasped Newcome.

Honest John reached the track across the common, and was already speeding along it towards the road. Raby, breathless, blazing with heat and exertion, was running after him still, but losing yards every moment. Honest John glanced back for a moment, and grinned. Then he ground away at the pedals again, and fairly flew.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not Honest John's Lucky Day!

"THAT chap's in a hurry!" remarked Jimmy Silver carelessly.

The man who was riding a bike towards the two Rookwooders certainly seemed in a hurry. He came suddenly, as it were, out of the green of the common, fairly racing towards Jimmy and Lovell, who had left the high road behind them. Perspiration streamed down his dirty face as he drove at the pedals.

Lovell glanced at him. The man was riding so hard, in spite of the heat, that he was almost upon them as soon as they saw him.

Lovell gave a roar.

"That's the man!"

"Eh! What man?"

"The man who gave me a can of water for petrol."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop, you scoundrel!" shouted Lovell, as the dingy fat gentleman came tearing by.

Honest John gave him a rather startled look, but did not stop. He was gone past in a flash.

Arthur Edward Lovell whirled round the motor-scooter.

"Lovell!" shouted Jimmy.

"Come on!"

"Let him alone, you ass! We've got to get into camp."

"Rot!"

"Raby and Newcome are waiting."

"Let them wait."

"Lovell, you fathead!"

But Arthur Edward Lovell was gone. Letting out the motor-scooter to its top speed, Arthur Edward raced on the track of Honest John. Jimmy Silver uttered an exclamation of impatience.

He was tired and he was hungry.



Doubtless Raby and Newcome were hungry, too, and undoubtedly tired of waiting for supper. And all the provisions were packed on the carrier of the scooter; and Lovell was on the scooter speeding away on the track of the man who had sold him water for petrol. It really was exasperating.

"The silly ass!" exclaimed Jimmy. Lovell was gaining fast on the tramp. The motor-scooter was at least twice as fast as a push-bike, and it went without effort on the part of its rider—a great consideration in a chase. Honest John turned into the high road, and Lovell turned into it a minute later, and rushed on in pursuit, gaining at every throb of the engine.

Jimmy Silver turned his machine round and rode after Lovell. He was annoyed, but he could not leave his chum in the lurch. It was evident that Lovell would catch Honest John. It was very probable that in catching him he would catch a Tartar; for the schoolboy was scarcely a match for the tramp in a struggle. So Jimmy Silver rode as hard as he could to give his chum the help he was certain to need.

Lovell had not thought about that. The powerful brain of Arthur Edward was seldom equal to dealing with two considerations at once. He was only thinking of catching the rascal who had swindled him, and punching him, quite oblivious to the fact that, in all probability, he might himself get most of the punches.

Honest John looked back as he scudded along the dusty road. He saw Lovell close behind, and drawing closer every second.

"Stop, you villain!" roared Lovell. "I've got you! You may as well stop, you scoundrel!"

Apparently Honest John thought the same. He slowed down, put on the brakes, and jumped from Raby's bike. There was a savage gleam in his eyes as he did so.

Lovell came rushing up, and jumped off the motor-scooter.

"Now, you rascal—" The scooter went spinning as the tramp rushed at him. Lovell hit out fiercely, and caught Honest John in the eye with quite a hefty set of knuckles. Mr. Parkins gave a yell, but the next moment his grasp was on Lovell, and the Rookwood junior went down on his back in the dust, with the tramp sprawling over him.

"Follerin' me, are you?" gasped Mr. Parkins. "I'll give you sumfin to foller a bloke for! Take that!"

"Whooop!" roared Lovell, as he took it. It was a tremendous punch. Mr. Parkins followed it up with several more.

Had Lovell been left unaided, certainly he would also have been left in no condition to follow Mr. Parkins any farther. But help was at hand. Jimmy Silver was riding as if on the race track, and he came spinning up while Lovell struggled desperately and breathlessly in the grasp of the ruffian.

Jimmy jumped from his machine, leaving it to run whither it would, and jumped at Mr. Parkins. He twisted both hands in the ruffian's neck-cloth, and dragged him from Lovell.

It was Honest John's turn to sprawl in the road, and as he sprawled on his back Jimmy Silver's knee was planted on his dusty waistcoat.

Lovell staggered up, his nose streaming red, and one eye blinking painfully. "Ow! Ow! Oh!" he spluttered.

"Lend a hand!" gasped Jimmy

Silver, as Mr. Parkins struggled furiously under him.

Lovell was prompt to lend a hand. He grasped Mr. Parkins by his shock of untidy hair, and banged his head on the road.

Bang, bang, bang! "Oh!" roared Honest John. "Ow! Chuck it! Oh crumbs! Chuck it! I give in! Ow-wow! Let a bloke orf! Ow!"

Bang, bang! "That's enough, Lovell!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Mustn't bust his napper."

"Look at my nose!" "That's enough, I tell you!" "Well, let him give me back the seven bob he swindled out of me!" said Lovell. "He shan't go without doing that!"

"I'll 'and it back!" groaned Honest John. "You leave orf banging a bloke's 'ead. Ow; ow!"

"Sharp's the word, then, you rotter!" growled Lovell.

With Jimmy kneeling on him, and Lovell grasping him, Honest John was quite beaten. He sorted seven shillings out of his rags and handed them over savagely.

"Now the rotter can go!" snapped Lovell.

"Hold on a minute," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I fancy the brute's stolen that bike he was riding. You can see it's a boy's bike."

"Very likely," said Lovell. "Keep him safe while I look at it. I don't suppose for a minute it belongs to him. We'll jolly well see that it gets back to the owner."

"Ere, that jigger's mine!" gasped Honest John. "I gives you my word, I bought it with me own 'ard-earned money."

Lovell uttered a shout.

"It's Raby's bike!" "Raby's?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Yes. There's his name on the bag. Besides, I know old Raby's jigger. That villain's stolen Raby's bike!" "Oh crumbs!" gasped Mr. Parkins.

"Raby's bike!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "My hat! The awful rascal!"

"Lucky I ran him down," after all—what? "grinned Lovell. "Lucky for Raby. His bike is worth sixteen pounds!"

"Jolly lucky!" admitted Jimmy Silver. "I'm sorry now I stopped you banging his head."

"That's all right—I can begin again." "There's a ditch across the road," gasped Jimmy. "Roll him in and leave him!"

There was not much water in the ditch, owing to the summer heat. But there was plenty of soft, clinging mud. And there were also plenty of stinging nettles. The sounds that came from Honest John, as he rolled in, were simply sulphurous.

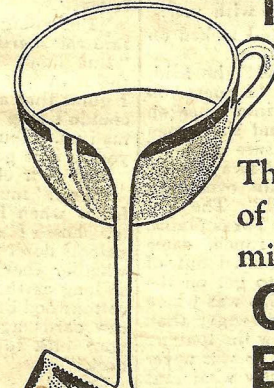
On the track on the common the juniors came upon Raby. "You—you've got it back!" Lovell smiled genially.

"I ran the chap down on the scooter," he said airily.

And Jimmy Silver grinned. Jimmy's part in the transaction—a rather important part—seemed to have slipped from Lovell's memory.

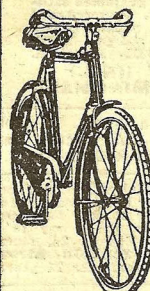
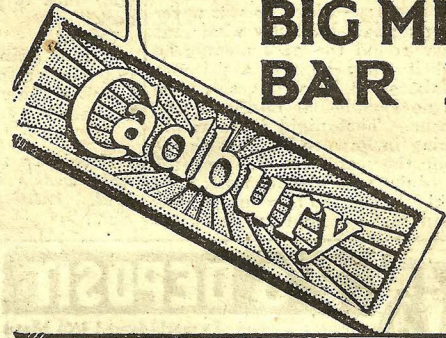
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