

BOYS! DON'T MISS THIS WEEK'S WILD-WEST THRILLER!

The POPULAR

Week Ending November 3rd, 1928.
New Series, No. 510.

EVERY
TUESDAY.

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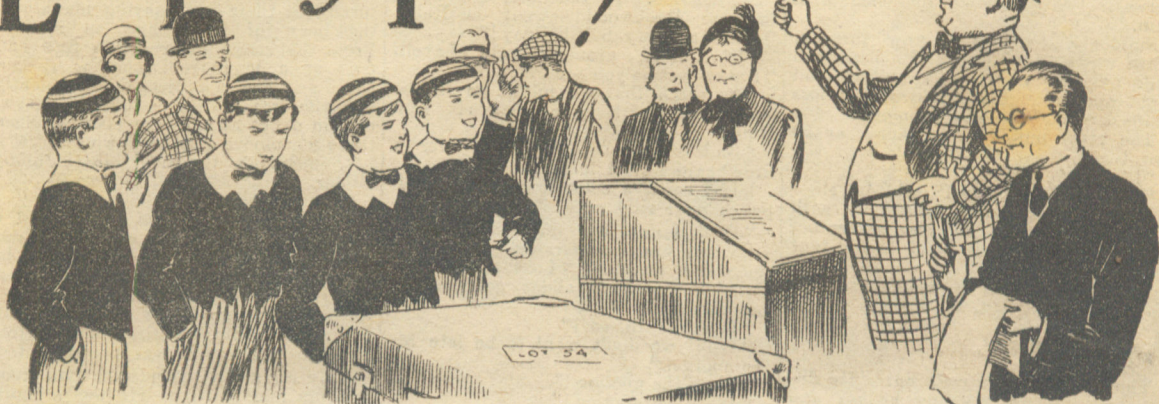


THE "BARGAIN" LOVELL BOUGHT *at the* AUCTION!

JUST LIKE LOVELL!

Arthur Edward Lovell makes a very queer purchase at an auction sale—a purchase which is destined to bring both him and his chums a whole heap of trouble and adventure!

Lot Fifty-Four!



ANOTHER ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Wet!

"It will be rather fun!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked doubtful.

Lovell, of course, looked obstinate at once.

If another fellow doubted the wisdom of his opinion, that was quite enough to make Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, absolutely certain that his opinion was well founded.

"No end of fun," he said.

"Hum!"

"In fact, quite jolly," said Lovell. "Take my word for it."

"You see—" said Jimmy Silver.

"I see that you're going to argue," assented Lovell. "I never met such a fellow for arguing."

"But, you know—" began Raby.

"I know you're going to chin-wag, Raby. Doesn't your chin ever get tired?"

"Look here—" said Newcome.

"Oh, go it, the three of you!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in a tone of deep resignation. "I can see that we're going to spend this half-holiday in chin-wag. Rather a waste of time, if you ask me; but I don't mind if you fellows don't! Go it!"

Lovell leaned back in the armchair in the end study. His three chums looked at him, seemingly inclined to tilt him out of the armchair on to the carpet, and bump him there. Lovell was quite a good fellow—one of the very best—but he often made his comrades feel like that.

Lovell was silent—but only for a moment or two. Indeed, it was but seldom that Arthur Edward Lovell was silent for more than a moment or two.

"It's a lot of fun," he said. "I've been to an auction before. You bid for things and run them up, you know, and it's exciting."

"Must be exciting, if you get landed with the goods and don't want 'em!" remarked Newcome. "I call that a mug's game!"

"You can call it what you like, Newcome. I've never expected any sense from you."

"Look here, Lovell—"

"Can we play footer in this drizzle?"

demanded Lovell. "Do you want to go biking in the rain? Do you want to stick in a stuffy picture palace, blinking at awful rot? Do you want to frown over the study fire like Peele or Gower? It's a half-holiday, and we've got to do something. Well, there's that auction on at Latham. Let's go!"

"But—" said Jimmy.

"We may pick up some bargains," said Lovell. "I heard of a chap once who bought something-or-other at an auction for a few shillings, and it turned out to be real genuine old thungummy, and he made pounds out of it. Pounds!" added Lovell impressively. "Now, I've an eye for a bargain."

"Quite expert on genuine old thungummy, and well up in real antique what-do-you-call-it?" asked Raby.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Raby! The question is, are we going or are we not going?" said Lovell. "I say go. Now, then."

"After all, we want to get out of doors," said Jimmy Silver resignedly.

"It will be a bit muddy walking to Latham. Never mind—let's go to the giddy auction. I don't quite see where the fun will come in; but Lovell seems to know all about it."

Lovell jumped up.

"Now you're talking!" he said. "That's all right. The fact is I'm quite keen on it. We want some new things for the study—the clock's never been the same since that ass Putty put the glue in it. And that sofa would disgrace a self-respecting dustbin. All the chairs are rocky—"

"Are we coming back to Rookwood carrying clocks and sofas and chairs?" ejaculated Newcome.

"Fathead! They deliver the goods for you," said Lovell. "You just select what you want, bid for them, and they're knocked down to you, and you pay for them—"

"There's the rub. I don't like that part."

"Ass! Then they deliver them the next day, and—there you are," said Lovell. "Now, sort out your mags and let's get going. We've wasted too much time in chin-wag already. I really never did see such fellows as you three chaps for talking!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. made up their

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minds to it. After all, something had to be done with the afternoon.

It was wet, it was drizzly, it was distinctly discouraging in every way. Footer was off, cycling was not attractive, and many of the Classical Fourth were at a loose end. Peele and Gower and Lattrey were playing banker in a quiet corner somewhere; but pursuits of that kind did not appeal to the Fistical Four. Tubby Muffin was snoozing over a study fire, but they certainly did not want to snooze. Erroll and Rawson were "swotting" Latin—but Jimmy Silver & Co. felt that they had quite enough Latin with Mr. Dalton in the Form-room—even a little too much, in fact. The Fistical Four sorted out raincoats, and sallied forth from the House.

anyhow, it was something to be out of doors, wet and drizzly as it was. They pulled down their caps, turned up the collars of their coats, and plunged through the drizzle to the gates.

It was a long walk to Latham. The roads were muddy, the lanes muddier. Naturally, they took the short cuts; equally naturally, the short cuts were deeper in mire than the roads. After a mile or two three members of the party considered that they had been prize asses to start for Latham at all; but Lovell ploughed on with a determined, cheerful expression, resolved to enjoy the walk. Since it was his idea, it was a good idea. But had it been anyone else who had proposed that miry tramp to Latham, Lovell certainly would have told him what he thought of him, with more emphasis than politeness.

"Well, this is pretty thick, and no mistake," said Raby at last.

"What's a little mud?" grunted Lovell.

"It isn't a little—it's a lot!"

"Better have gone by train!" grumbled Newcome.

"Railway fares are a waste, when we've got time to walk," said Lovell.

"Buck up! I'm not grousing! Never mind a little mud."

"Oh, rats!"

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

Grunt—from Raby and Newcome. The rain was coming down harder

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now; the drizzle had turned to a down-pour. Even Lovell's determined cheerfulness paled a little, and his three comrades began to look round for some kind of shelter. But there seemed no shelter at hand save weeping, leafless trees—they were following a miry lane between two meadows, drenched with rain.

Suddenly, from a narrow turning, there was a trampling, and a horseman rode out into the lane, splashing mud right and left. The Rookwood juniors jumped out of the way promptly.

The rider pulled in his horse as he saw them.

"Hi!"

"Hallo, it's a bobby!" said Lovell.

It was a mounted constable, with water streaming from his waterproof cloak. He waved his hand to the four schoolboys.

"Have you seen a man pass this way?" he called out.

"No."

"Seen anybody?"

"No."

The mounted man rode on. He disappeared among weeping hedges and trees.

"He's after somebody!" remarked Lovell. "Pleasant job in this weather—I don't think! Come on! We've got miles to do yet."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Raby, a few minutes later.

"What—"

"There's a shed."

"We're not looking for any dashed old shed!" exclaimed Lovell. "We're going to Latcham."

"Go to Latcham, or go to Jericho!" retorted Raby. "I'm jolly well going to get out of the rain!"

And Raby plunged through a gap in a hedge, and headed for the shed. Jimmy Silver and Newcome followed him.

Lovell stared after them.

"Look here, you slackers!" he shouted.

"Rats!"

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted, and followed his comrades. As a matter of fact, Arthur Edward was quite glad to get out of the rain.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. plunged into the shelter of the shed thankfully. The rain was coming down in torrents now, and their raincoats were streaming, their trousers were damp, and their caps wringing wet. Three members of the party were powerfully tempted to turn on the fourth and roll him in the mud, for having led them on this hapless expedition. Perhaps Lovell realised that there was an electric atmosphere, for he did not turn his eloquence upon his drenched comrades.

"After all, it's jolly wet!" he remarked, quite reasonably and amicably. "It's got worse since we started. Of course, a fellow couldn't foresee that."

"Of course you couldn't, at any rate," said Newcome.

"Never mind, we're out of the rain, and it's too fast to last," said Jimmy Silver. "Thank goodness we found this shed!"

"Yes rather!"

It was not an inviting shelter, really, but it was a case of any port in a storm to the Fistical Four of Rookwood. The shed was apparently used as a cattle-shelter. One side was open to wind and weather. In one corner was a large stack of damp straw, not clean. Outside was a trough, swimming with rain.

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The four juniors stood well inside, looking out at drenched fields and trees. The rain came down in great splashes. They stamped their feet for warmth, and wrung out their caps.

"Nice, isn't it?" grunted Raby.

"Rotten!" said Newcome.

"Miles more to Latcham, and miles back to Rookwood!" went on Raby. "What a giddy half-holiday!"

"Oh, don't grouse!" said Lovell.

"I'm as wet as you are!"

"To think that we might be in the study now, with a good fire!" said Raby.

"Bad for a chap to frowst over a fire!" said Lovell loftily.

"If I catch a cold, I shall jolly well punch your silly nose, Lovell!"

"Well, I dare say you'll catch a cold—slackers and frowsters do, you know," remarked Lovell. "I must say it's chilly here. What about going on to Latcham?"

"In this rain, ass?"

"Well, we don't want to be late for the auction."

"Blow the auction!"

"Bless the auction!"

"Bother the auction!"

Auction sales, it appeared, did not seem attractive to Jimmy Silver & Co. just then. Lovell grunted.

"We came out to go to the auction," he said.

"We came out because we were silly asses, and let a sillier ass jaw us into it!" snapped Raby.

"And you're sticking in this shed because you're slackers, and afraid of a little wet!" said Lovell. It was really impossible for Arthur Edward to keep his eloquence bottled up for long.

Raby and Newcome glared. They were wet, they were muddy, they were fed-up to the chin. And Lovell, instead of showing any regret for having led them into this disastrous outing, was adopting his customary attitude of lofty superiority. Perhaps it was not surprising that Raby and Newcome became very cross, though Lovell did not seem to expect it.

"Well, if you like rain, have a little more of it!" roared Raby.

"Yes, rather!" concurred Newcome.

And Raby and Newcome collared Arthur Edward Lovell, and hurled him forth.

"Oh, my hat!"

—Arthur Edward Lovell went spinning out into the rain.

He brought up against the horse-trough, and pitched forward over it, and there was a heavy splash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell lifted a dripping face from the trough.

He glared round at his comrades.

"You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then," interposed Jimmy Silver pacifically.

But Lovell did not heed. He came charging back into the shed with a terrific rush.

The next moment Lovell and Raby and Newcome were rolling over together in a struggling heap.

"Chuck it, you duffers!" shouted Jimmy.

"Buzz him out again!" roared Newcome.

"Outside, you fathead!"

"I'll jolly well—" panted Lovell.

Three excited juniors reeled and staggered to and fro. Lovell lost his footing, and went down bumping on the stack of straw in the corner of the shed, dragging down Raby and Newcome with him.

A yell rang through the shed, but it

was not Lovell, or Raby, or Newcome who yelled. Loud and startled that yell came from under the heap of straw on which they had crashed together.

"What—"

"Who—"

"Great Scott!"

Utterly amazed, the three juniors sprang to their feet, staring blankly at the heap of straw—now in motion. From the straw protruded a foot and part of a leg; from another spot a hand and sleeve projected. Evidently someone was hidden under the straw, and no doubt he had been startled when three schoolboys crashed down on him.

"Somebody's there!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my hat!"

The straw was tossed aside, and a man sprang to his feet. The four juniors stared at him blankly, and he stared back at them, with a fierce, savage, suspicious face. His eyes gleamed like those of a hunted animal, and it came into the minds of the astonished juniors that he was indeed hunted.

Only for a few seconds the man stood panting and glaring. He was a short, thick-set man, with a bulldog jaw and a broken nose, and sharp, fierce little eyes set close together under thick brows. It was a face that, once seen, was not likely to be soon forgotten. But it was only for brief seconds that the Rookwooders saw it. The man turned from them, ran swiftly to the opening of the shed, and bolted out into the pouring rain.

Almost in a flash he disappeared from sight, running hard.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

The juniors stared after the vanished man, and then looked at one another. The sudden and unexpected happening had fairly astounded them.

"The silly ass, to clear out into the rain," said Lovell. "We shouldn't have hurt him, I suppose."

"What the thump was he hiding for?" said Raby. "He must have seen us coming here, and dodged under the straw."

Jimmy Silver looked very thoughtful.

"He had jolly good reasons for keeping out of sight, I should say," he answered. "You remember that mounted bobby we passed some time back—he was looking for somebody. Looks as if it may have been this chap he wanted."

Lovell whistled.

"Shouldn't wonder," he said. "He was scared at being found here, anyhow. If he's some rotter wanted by the police, we ought to have collared him."

"Rather too late to think of that," said Jimmy.

The man had vanished, and the juniors discussed the matter for some time as they stood watching the rain. Fortunately, the surprising happening had restored peace in the Co. Lovell and Raby and Newcome did not renew their argument.

The juniors stamped about the shed, and waved their arms to keep warm, and waited dismally for the rain to stop. It did not stop. But after a time it slackened, and they decided to get moving.

"Are we going on or going back?" asked Newcome.

"I'm going on," said Lovell gruffly.

"Oh, let's keep on, as we've come so far!" said Jimmy Silver. "We can get a train back from Latcham to Coombe, you know."

So they went onward, and tramped through dreary drizzle and deep mire to the town of Latcham, which they were very glad to reach.



A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER! "Look out!" yelled Jimmy Silver. A man who had been lying in some straw in the shed sprang suddenly to his feet. The four Rookwood juniors stared at him blankly, and he stared back at them with a fierce, suspicious face. His eyes gleamed like those of a hunted animal, and it came into the minds of the juniors that he was, indeed, hunted! (See Chapter 2.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Just Like Lovell!

"**H**ERE'S the place!" said Lovell. The Fistical Four were feeling a little better now.

At the old inn at Latham they had had some hot coffee and cake, and had been able to dry themselves at the glowing fire. So they were feeling better as they walked down the old High Street to the building where the auction was being held.

It was a large zinc building, and a poster outside announced that Mr. Bunce was holding the auction there that afternoon. The proceedings were already proceeding, so to speak; the Rookwooders were late for the start. They moved into the building among the crowd, which was not large, the weather having probably kept a good many people away. The auctioneer, a plump man with a rosy complexion, was already at Lot 37, and was tapping with his hammer.

"Gentlemen, this handsome rosewood cabinet—this splendid rosewood cabinet, in excellent condition—I am offered seven guineas for this first-class rosewood cabinet. Gentlemen, what improvement on seven guineas for this desirable rosewood cabinet?"

"Eight!" called out Lovell.
"You frabjous ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Dry up, you blithering chump!" hissed Raby.

Lovell did not heed.

If that handsome and desirable rosewood cabinet had been knocked down to Arthur Edward Lovell for eight guineas several problems would have arisen. First and foremost among them, where Lovell was to get eight guineas from to pay for it.

Fortunately, it was not knocked down to Lovell.

"Nine!" came from a podgy little gentleman with a large, hooked nose.

"Ten!"
"Twelve!"

Lovell grinned at his comrades,

"All serene, you see," he said. "It's quite a game, you know. Only you have to keep your eyes peeled and not get landed with the stuff."

"And suppose you do get landed with it?" demanded Newcome.

"Oh, I shouldn't! But don't you fellows do any bidding. You're as likely as not to put your foot in it."

"And you're not?" snorted Raby.

"Not at all. I know my way about," explained Lovell. "I shan't get landed with anything I don't want. That's all right. Leave it to me!"

The chums of the Fourth had to leave it to Lovell, because there was nothing else to be done. Short of gagging Arthur Edward Lovell, there was no stopping him.

Lovell's confidence in his own perspicacity was unbounded.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were very far from sharing Lovell's confidence. His perspicacity they regarded as a minus quantity. But there was no help for it, short of gagging their exuberant chum, which really was out of the question.

The rosewood cabinet was "knocked down," and Lot 38 came on view. It was a large perambulator. The rosy-cheeked auctioneer tapped gently with his hammer and proceeded with his psalm of praise.

"This beautiful baby-carriage, a triumph of the most modern construction, gentlemen—what offers for this handsome baby-carriage?"

"Ninepence!" came a voice, and there was a laugh. It was the tubby gentleman with the hooked nose and the lisp who made that offer, evidently in a spirit of humour.

The auctioneer grinned indulgently.

"Gentlemen, be serious. This handsome, reliable baby-carriage cost thirty guineas. What offers, gentlemen, for this most desirable lot?"

"Fifteen shillings!"
"A quid!"
"Thirty bob!"
"Thirty-five!"
There was a pause.

"Two pounds!" sang out Arthur Edward Lovell cheerily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged hopeless looks. Arthur Edward was "at it" again. But again Lovell came off scot-free.

"Two pounds ten shillings!"

"Three pounds!"

"Four!" rapped out Lovell.

The auctioneer glanced curiously at Lovell. Possibly he was puzzled by a schoolboy bidding for a baby-carriage. But Lovell had a right to bid if he chose, and he looked well-dressed enough to be good for the money.

"Gentlemen, four pounds I am offered," said the auctioneer. "Four pounds for this handsome baby-carriage, in excellent condition, hardly used. Are you making it guineas, Mr. Isaacs?" The hook-nosed gentleman shook his head.

"Gentlemen, this handsome baby-carriage going at four pounds. Going—going—"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed rather hard. What on earth he would have done with a baby's perambulator, knocked down to him for four pounds, was a deep mystery.

But again he was in luck.

"Guineas!" came from the back of the crowd.

"Gentlemen, I am offered four guineas for this excellent baby-carriage. Going at four guineas. Going—going—gone!"

Rap!

Arthur Edward Lovell had quite a serious look. Four guineas was the top bid, and it had just saved him from being landed with a perambulator to wheel home to Rookwood.

"You thumping ass!" murmured Newcome.

It was an unfortunate remark. Lovell's narrow escape from the perambulator might have been a warning to him. But Newcome's remark roused all his obstinacy again. He was quite determined to show his companions that he knew his way about, and that their uneasy fears were groundless.

Instead of keeping silent, therefore, he plunged into the game more recklessly than before.

Lot after lot was brought forward, and each time Lovell bid recklessly; but, considering that he was not bidding in earnest, he had amazing luck, for each time he was outbid by someone who really wanted the article.

Lovell grinned at his comrades from time to time, as if to say, "I told you so."

They began to watch him with interest now, wondering how long it would be before he got "landed." For such a peculiar game, kept up too long, was fairly certain to end in disaster. Lovell's fate was likely to resemble that of the lion-tamer who put his head into the lion's mouth every day until he put it in once too often. It was certain to be bitten off at long last.

The only question in the minds of the Co. was—what sort of an undesired and undesirable article Lovell would get landed with. They wondered whether it would be a perambulator or a suite of drawing-room furniture, or a grand-father's clock, or a dinner-set, or a carpet.

"Lot 54. Large leather trunk. A very strong trunk of very great capacity. Old-fashioned; but, gentlemen, the old trunks are of the stoutest make. Not one of your light, modern fibre about this. A genuine, strong trunk of solid leather."

There was no doubt that the trunk was solid and of great capacity. It was nearly five feet long, and its other dimensions were about two feet. The man who had built that trunk long, long ago had been a believer in the maxim that there is nothing like leather. Its weight must have been very considerable empty. Two men who had brought it forward looked rather tired when they had set it down. It was a trunk which a modern railway porter would have gazed at in despair and wonder. If in its youth that huge and heavy trunk had ever travelled by railroad, it seemed that there must have been giants on the earth in those days.

Many grinning glances were turned on the big trunk as the auctioneer extolled its value. No doubt a leather dealer might have found his money's worth in it.

Mr. Isaacs remarked that if he bought that trunk he would let it furnished—being evidently a humorist. He started the bidding with fifteen shillings.

"Pound!" said Lovell cheerily.

"Twenty-five shillings!"

"Twenty-six!"

"Thirty!"

"Two pounds!" called out Lovell.

"Gentlemen, this handsome trunk, this well-made trunk, this capacious travelling trunk of the most solid construction, is going at two pounds. What offers, gentlemen? Two pounds I am offered! Did I hear someone make it guineas?"

The auctioneer looked round.

If he had heard someone make it guineas his ears had deceived him, for there was silence.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, two pounds I am offered! Going at two pounds—" Lovell had a cold feeling down his back.

"You've jolly well done it now!" murmured Newcome.

"Going at two pounds—going—going—"

Arthur Edward Lovell cast an anxious glance round him. Had he, indeed, "done it" at last?

He had!

"Going at two pounds—going—going—gone!"

"Yours, sir!" said the auctioneer, with a smile and a nod to the dismayed Lovell. "You will settle with that gentleman yonder. Next lot! Lot 55, a wireless set, complete with—"

Lovell was not listening. He had not the remotest desire to join in the bidding for Lot 55. Lot 54 was enough for him—too much, in fact.

Arthur Edward Lovell was the happy possessor of a gigantic leather trunk, of no conceivable use to him or to anybody else, unless he should start in business as a leather-worker, and cut it up into boot-soles and saddles and such things. Which, of course, was quite impracticable for a fellow in the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Lovell stood and stared at the trunk. His comrades stared at Lovell. He had "done it" now.

A rather dusty and oily gentleman nudged Lovell.

"You settle up now, sir, and, if you like, we can arrange for the delivery of the trunk, or you can send for it later in the day. Two pounds, please."

Lovell had the sum of two shillings and threepence in his pockets. It was obvious, even to Arthur Edward Lovell, that he had put his head into the lion's mouth once too often.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Back Up!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. looked very serious.

Lovell cast an almost haggard look at his chums.

He was landed now; there was no doubt about that. He could not repudiate his own bargain. Exactly how he would have stood legally, had he repudiated it, he did not know—as a minor and a schoolboy, probably he could not have been held to it. But an honourable fellow, of course, could not take advantage of that. The fact that the bargain could not possibly have been enforced on him made it absolutely essential for a decent fellow to stand by it. Perhaps the thought of backing out somehow crossed Lovell's mind for a moment; but, if so, it was only for a moment. He was "for it," and he knew it.

Mercifully, his comrades forbore to deal with him as he deserved.

At a time like this, when a fellow had landed himself in a scrape by his own wilful obstinacy, no doubt they

would have been justified in leaving him to it, but that was not the part for loyal comrades to play.

Lovell had asked for it, and he had got it; and now it was up to his comrades to help him through. Among the Fistical Four there was frequently argument and dispute, and even punching was not quite unknown in their happy circle. But with them it was always sink or swim together. As a matter of course, the three backed up the hapless Lovell without even saying, "I told you so!"—which certainly showed great forbearance and self-denial on their part.

"Two pounds!" said Jimmy Silver. "Wait a minute, my man—it's all serene. How much have you got, Lovell?"

"Two - and - threepence!" whispered Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I've got a ten-bob note," murmured Raby.

"Six shillings here," said Newcome.

The oily gentleman eyed the juniors rather curiously. Bidding for Lot 55 was going on briskly. Nobody was giving any attention to the happy possessor of Lot 54, excepting the oily gentleman, whose business it was to collect the hard cash. The juniors withdrew from the crowd. They were done with the auction now. Even Lovell had not the slightest desire to do any more bidding.

"That's eighteen-and-three altogether," murmured Lovell. "Have you got anything, Jimmy? Of course I shall settle up."

Jimmy Silver suppressed a sigh.

He had a few shillings in his pockets, and a pound note which had been specially sent him by his father for some new football things.

But it was a case of all hands on deck, so to speak. Lovell had to be saved. The oily gentleman was already looking suspicious, and if Lovell had failed to take over his bargain, certainly there would have been a most unpleasant scene.

That had to be avoided at an cost. A Rookwood fellow was bound to be as good as his word, and it was a time for his friends to rally round him, reserving their comments till afterwards. Afterwards, no doubt, Lovell would hear what they thought about the matter and about him—at considerable length. But that was in the future; the present was a time for action.

Jimmy Silver produced a pound note and three shillings. There was more than enough to satisfy the oily gentleman.

"Taking it away with you, sir?" asked the man when his pecuniary claims had been satisfied. "Like to leave it till the morning? All goods 'ave to be cleared afore twelve tomorrow."

"Leave the blessed thing where it is," said Raby. "It's no good to you, Lovell. You don't want it at Rookwood."

"It's cost two pounds, Raby," said Lovell. "It must be worth something. Somebody else offered thirty bob. Of course, I'm not going to chuck it away."

"How the thump are you going to get it to the school, and what the dickens are you going to do with it there?" demanded Raby.

"Leave that to me," said Lovell, with a touch of his old loftiness, which made George Raby breathe very hard. "Of all the crass dummies—" said Newcome.

"Look here, are you going to help me with this trunk or not?" demanded Lovell. "We can carry it among us."

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ALL SPORTS

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"Carry it?" gasped Raby. "Carry that stack to Rookwood? I can see myself doing it!"

"Carry it out of here, anyhow," said Lovell. "We've got to get it away. We can get somebody to give us a lift with it to Rookwood. Or we can hire a horse and cart."

"For fifteenpence?" asked Jimmy Silver. "That's all we've got!"

"Well, we can leave it at the carrier's office," said Lovell. "We can pay carriage on it at the other end tomorrow. I'll borrow a few bob of Morny."

"Oh, let's lend a hand!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "It's not far to the carrier's office, anyhow."

Four pairs of hands grasped the great trunk. A good many grinning faces were turned on the Rookwood juniors as they bore it out into the street.

A light drizzle descended on the trunk and its bearers. But they did not feel cold now. Their exertions sufficed to keep them very warm. Some members of the rising generation of Latcham gathered and followed them, evidently interested in the trunk. One youth inquired whether it was a "moving job," and another asserted that they had "pinched" the trunk—and the latter suggestion caught on.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad to hand that trunk over to the carrier. They came out of the office feeling that a weight was gone from their minds, as well as from their shoulders.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Wanted Man!

"SHANKS' pony again!" growled Raby.

"We've got to hoof it! Oh dear!"

There was no help for it.

Fifteenpence remained to the Fistical Four, and fifteenpence would not cover the railway fares to Coombe for four. Jimmy Silver & Co. had intended to take the train back. That intention had to be abandoned now. It was Shanks' pony, as Raby remarked; and their only consolation was that the rain had stopped at last.

By miry lane and muddy fieldpath the juniors tramped on, leaving Latcham behind. Lovell had declared that it would be "fun" attending the auction; but, so far, his comrades had failed to perceive any fun in it. Indeed, three members of the party agreed that, of all the utterly rotten ways they had ever spent a half-holiday, this was beyond doubt the rottenest. With muddy and miry miles before them, they did not leave Lovell in any doubt as to their opinion on the subject.

"Hallo! There's that bobby again!" remarked Lovell, perhaps glad to change the topic. A mounted constable, who looked very muddy, appeared in sight in the lane.

On a closer inspection, however, the juniors saw that it was not the same mounted constable that they had seen earlier in the afternoon on their way to Latcham. Apparently, more than one officer was patrolling the countryside between Latcham and Coombe, and the Rookwooders wondered whether this search had anything to do with the broken-nosed man with the bulldog jaw whom they had surprised under the straw in the shed.

The constable was riding towards the juniors, and he pulled in his horse as they came up to him.

"Looking for somebody?" asked Lovell.

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"Yes, sir. I suppose you haven't seen anybody dodging or hiding about these parts?"

"Man with a broken nose, by any chance?" asked Lovell.

The mounted man gave quite a jump. "You've seen him?" he exclaimed.

"My hat! Is that the man you want?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We've seen him right enough!"

"Oh, good! Where—and when? Quick!"

The Fistical Four explained about the meeting in the shed three hours or more ago.

"That's Nosey Jenks right enough!" he said. "He's still about here, then. We'll have him, sooner or later!"

"Nosey Jenks?" repeated Jimmy Silver. "What a giddy name! I suppose he's a criminal, as you're after him, officer?"

"Burglar," said the constable. "Six months ago he got away with a bundle of banknotes from the Latcham County Bank. He was spotted, and caught; but he got rid of the notes before our men laid hands on him. He got away before they could get him to the station, and vanished—and we never expected to see him in these parts again. But he was seen the day before yesterday—and again yesterday—so it's pretty clear that he's come back to find the banknotes he hid somewhere before he was caught that night. He's got a face that's easily remembered, with that nose on it."

"I think everybody would remember his chivvy!" grinned Lovell.

"If you should happen to see him again, let them know at the nearest police station at once."

"Yes, rather!"

"He's taken to the fields, and he'll never get to a railway station without being nabbed," said the constable. "But

he's giving us a hunt, and no mistake. Where's that shed exactly?"

The juniors pointed out the direction of the shed, and the mounted man rode away.

The Rookwooders walked on towards the school.

"Lucky we came out this afternoon, after all," said Lovell, with a glance at his comrades.

"How's that?" grunted Raby.

"Well, we've been able to give the police a tip about a man they want. May lead to his capture."

"Rats! I fancy he's a good ten miles away from that shed by this time. Must be, if he's got any sense!"

"Might be that shed where he hid the loot," said Lovell. "I remember seeing something in the local paper about the bank robbery, now. It was rather interesting, too. The thief was spotted getting out of the bank by a top window, and they got after him on the roof, and he got through a window into an attic in the next house—a house belonging to a Colonel Thompson. It's really interesting—"

"Blessed if I see it! Why?"

"Because it was Colonel Thompson's stuff that was being sold by auction to-day," said Lovell. "He's gone abroad, and his household effects were sold by auction—we've bagged his old trunk."

"You have, you mean!" said Newcome. "I wish the giddy colonel had taken his dashed old trunk abroad with him!"

"Put it on," said Jimmy Silver. "We haven't too much time to get back before lock-up."

Tired and muddy, the Fistical Four reached Rookwood School just before old Mack shut the gates. They tramped into the House, not in the best of spirits.

It was some time before they got rid of the mud they had brought home with them. Then they had a rather late tea in the end study, and felt much better.

Over tea Arthur Edward Lovell was quite himself.

"It's all right about that trunk!" he told his comrades.

"Is it?"

"Oh, yes! I've very little doubt that I shall get three pounds for it," said Lovell. "It's really a valuable trunk, though it's so jolly heavy. When I sell it—"

"When!" said Newcome.

"Yes, when!" snapped Lovell. "When I sell it I'll settle with you fellows—"

"You'll get your new footer boots, Jimmy, in time for football next winter, perhaps!" remarked Raby.

"You silly owl!"

And the subject of the unfortunate trunk was dropped in the end study.

When Lot 54 was delivered at Rookwood by the carrier the following day, there was five shillings to pay.

Lovell succeeded in borrowing that sum from Morny, but the problem of where to put the huge trunk was a difficult one. The whole junior school took a great interest in it, and Lovell and his bargain were soon surrounded by a grinning crowd of fellows.

Finally, Lovell persuaded six of his friends to give him a hand, and Lot 54 was dumped down outside the woodshed—where Lovell was left sitting on it, wiping his brow!

THE END.

("THE TRUNK WITH A SECRET" is the title of next week's rousing tale of Rookwood.)

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