

IN BIDEFORD BAY!

OWEN CONQUEST

As his chums have often discovered, it is easier to drive a mule than to dissuade Arthur Edward Lovell from his purpose once he has made up his mind—a regrettable trait that invariably leads to trouble for both Lovell and his chums!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Exciting!

"Westward Ho,
With a rumbelow!"

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL, of the Rookwood Fourth, lifted up his voice in song.

At all events, he lifted up his voice.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not seem to realise that he was singing. They looked at him inquiringly.

It was a sudden outburst of tunefulness—more or less—on Lovell's part. The scene inspired him.

The yacht Silver Cloud was ranging up to Appledore, in the west of glorious Devon, with the white town of Bideford ahead, and rocky Clovelly on the star-board quarter.

Lundy Island speckled the sea astern, amid the Atlantic rollers. It was a glorious August day. Jimmy Silver & Co. were looking merry and bright as they stood on the deck of the Silver Cloud, and gazed at the hills and the sea and the Appledore shipping.

Even Tubby Muffin looked merry and bright, though it was past dinner-time, and not yet tea-time.

Smythe and Howard and Tracy of the Rookwood Shell condescended to glance at the scenery, keeping on their own side of the little deck, not being on the best of terms with the Fourth-Formers of Rookwood. Adolphus Smythe told his nutty pals that it was "toppin"; a remark that ought to have made any Devonian who heard it proud of himself and his county. Praise from Adolphus was praise indeed.

The white town of Bideford, and glimpses of Taw and Torridge, naturally recalled to the minds of the Rookwood juniors thoughts of ancient seafaring days, of Elizabethan mariners and rovers of the Spanish Main. Hence Lovell's tuneless outburst.

"Westward Ho,
With a rumbelow—
And hurrah for the Spanish Main,
oh!"

"What's a rumbelow?" asked Newcome.

Lovell disdained to answer that question.

"Westward Ho—" he recommenced.

"We're not going westward!" remarked Raby. "Unless Captain Muffin's compass is awry, we're going east!"

"Fathead!" said Lovell.

"What's the course, captain?" called out Newcome.

"East by south!" answered Tubby Muffin's uncle, the skipper of the Silver Cloud. "We're going into Appledore to pick up some more passengers there."

"There you are, Lovell!" said Raby. "It's Eastward Ho, with a rumbelow—whatever a rumbelow may be."

"What's a rumbelow, captain?" inquired Newcome.

Captain Muffin stared.

"Eh! I suppose a rum below is much the same as a rum on deck," he answered. "Not that there's any rum on board this craft."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you've got any rum below, Lovell—" began Jimmy Silver, with an air of great seriousness.

"I haven't, you silly owl!" hooted Lovell.

"I should imagine you had, by what you've been saying," said Raby. "You're talking about Westward-ho, when we're going east by south. As for the Spanish Main, that's nowhere in these parts."

"You unpoetical ass!" howled Lovell. "It's an old chanty—"

"A which?"

"A sea song, you duffer! I was singing—"

"Oh, were you?" exclaimed Raby, in great surprise. "My mistake; of course, I couldn't guess that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly chump—"

"It's all right, you fellows," said Raby. "Lovell hasn't a pain or anything, and he hasn't any rum below. He is only singing."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard. It entertained Arthur Edward sometimes to pull the legs of his comrades. But, somehow, he did not like his own leg being pulled. It was a very special leg, as it were, not to be pulled.

"You're a lot of silly, unpoetical, frabjous asses!" he said. "A set of silly, burbling jabberwocks, if you ask me!"

"Nobody asked you, sir, she said!" sang out Newcome softly.

"These waters are historic," said Lovell. "They used to sail from here in their jolly old wooden tubs to fight the Spaniards. I should think even you dunderheads would feel sort of romantic, sailing the historic waters of Bideford Bay."

"We're not sailing—we're steaming," murmured Raby.

"And this is Barnstaple Bay, isn't it?" asked Newcome.

"It's Bideford Bay, fathead!"

"It's Barnstaple Bay on the map," remarked Raby. "But I suppose Lovell is above maps."

"It's Bideford Bay!" hooted Lovell.

"Barnstaple Bay—"

"Bideford Bay—"

"Barnstaple—"

"Bideford—"

"What jolly old bay is this, captain?" called out Jimmy Silver. "Is it Bideford or Barnstaple?"

"Both," answered Captain Muffin. "You can call it whichever you like."

"You pays your money and you takes your choice!" grinned Raby. "I'll call it Barnstaple Bay, if you don't mind, Lovell."

"It's what a crass, fatheaded, dunder-headed, burbling sort of bandersnatch would do!" said Lovell. "I call it Bideford Bay. If you chaps had any poetry, about you, you'd feel thrilled at sailing the waters of Bideford Bay, where the men of Devon went down to the sea in ships—"

"Naturally they went in ships. They couldn't have gone in hansom cabs!" argued Raby.

A steamer coming out of Appledore hooted her siren with a loud, but far from romantic or poetical hoot before Lovell could reply. The sunny air was filled with sound not musical.

"Dry up, you chaps," said Raby. "Lovell's singing again!"

As a matter of fact, Arthur Edward Lovell had opened his mouth for another edition of his chanty when the steamer's siren forestalled him. But really Raby could not have made such a mistake; Lovell's voice was not, perhaps, tuneless, but it was an exaggeration to compare it with the steamer's siren.

Jimmy Silver and Newcome chuckled; the expression on Arthur Edward's face quite entertained them.

The yell of the siren died away in a throaty howl.

"Go on, Lovell!" said Raby encouragingly.

"What?"

"Go it! I didn't catch any of the words that time. Go it!"

Arthur Edward Lovell did not answer. He seemed to feel that it was a time for action, not for words. He made a jump at George Raby. At

the same moment the yacht gave one of her familiar rolls on the swell from the passing big steamer. The yacht rolled, and Lovell rolled, and instead of grasping Raby, and executing summary vengeance upon that over-fascinated youth, Lovell went bowling along a slanting deck, headlong.

Fortunately—or unfortunately, according to the point of view—Smythe & Co. were in the way. They saved Lovell from bowling right across the Silver Cloud. He came across their legs with a crash, and there was a sudden outbreak of fiendish yells as Smythe and Howard and Tracy mixed themselves up with Arthur Edward Lovell on the deck.

"Oh gad!"

"Yaroooh!"

"You clumsy ass! Ow-wow!"

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

Lovell sat up dazedly.

He hardly knew what had happened, it had happened so suddenly. He sat up dizzily on something that wriggled and howled.

"Gerroff! Ow!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Gerroff my face, you villain!" shrieked Adolphus Smythe.

Howard and Tracy staggered up. Adolphus Smythe would have been glad to follow their example; but with Arthur Edward Lovell sitting on his face it was impossible. Adolphus howled muffled howls, and clutched at Lovell, and wriggled and struggled.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell again. He was too dazed to move quickly.

Then he moved all of a sudden.

If Smythe's face had suddenly become red-hot, Arthur Edward Lovell could not have leaped from it with greater suddenness and celerity.

"Ow! Wow! Yow!" he roared, and leaped.

"What on earth——" began Jimmy Silver.

"Ow! Wow!"

"What's the matter with you?" yelled Jimmy.

"Ow! Wow! I'm bitten! Ow!"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha ha!"

"Whoo-hoooh—ow! That villain Smythe! I—I—I—I—I—I—I—I—I—I—I I'm bitten! I'm hurt! I'll—I'll——"

Arthur Edward Lovell, quite forgetful of the fact that Raby was the original object of his wrath, rushed at Adolphus Smythe. That elegant youth was grinning now; but as Lovell rushed at him, he ceased to grin, and bolted for the companion-way. Lovell bolted after him.

"Hi! Stop that game!" shouted Captain Muffin.

"Stop it, Lovell!"

"Chuck it!"

"Lovell, old man——"

Arthur Edward Lovell did not heed. Smythe of the Shell bolted down the cabin steps like a rabbit seeking his burrow with a dog behind. Lovell overtook him just as he was vanishing, and let out a vengeful boot.

"Yaroooh!"

Crash!

Bump!

Adolphus Smythe went down the steps without counting them.

Fortunately, there were not many steps to the cabin of the Silver Cloud. But there were enough for Adolphus, to judge by the infuriated yell that floated up from below.

"Goal!" chuckled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now come up again, Smythe!" roared Lovell.

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But Adolphus Smythe was wise in his generation. He did not come up again.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Woary Willy to the Rescue!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL had quite recovered his good-humour when, later in the golden afternoon, the chums of the Rookwood Fourth strolled into Bideford. Whether Adolphus Smythe had recovered his, the chums of the Fourth did not know; neither did they stop to inquire. A kick more or less for Adolphus was a matter of small moment in the estimation of the Fistical Four of Rookwood, though doubtless it loomed large in Adolphus' own eyes.

Smythe and Howard and Tracy loafed about Appledore when the Fourth-Formers walked up to Bideford. The two Rookwood parties on the Silver Cloud generally kept out of one another's way when they could. No doubt Captain Muffin, when he started running a yacht for the summer with "paying guests" on board, had not foreseen that some of his paying guests might be on fighting terms with some others of his paying guests. Captain Muffin expected them, however, to keep the peace on board his yacht, as he would have expected the same in his boarding-house on shore. He had a right to expect that much, of course. Sometimes, however, his expectations were not fulfilled.

Smythe & Co. simply couldn't help putting on airs of superior swank; and Lovell's temper, at least, could not always be relied upon. So the Rookwooders' life on the ocean wave was occasionally enlivened by Rookwood rags, just as if the juniors had been back in the old school.

Adolphus, indeed, had appealed to the skipper more than once to keep those "dashed fags" in better order.

But Captain Muffin, in point of fact, liked Jimmy Silver & Co. much better than he liked the lofty Adolphus, and his opinion was that Smythe asked for all he got, and needed a little more.

Adolphus regarded his skipper as a "dashed boarding-house keeper"; and, in fact, so he was. But even dashed boarding-house keepers have their personal feelings; and Captain Muffin, in yachting rig and a yachting cap, liked to fancy himself a sea-going mariner; and, excepting when bills were due, he liked to keep the boarding-house keeper part of the business in the background. Jimmy Silver & Co., being accommodating, good-natured fellows, played up, as it were, willing to give the captain his head; and Valentine Mornington, though a rather lofty youth, conducted himself like an unpaying, rather than a paying, guest. But that was not good enough for Adolphus Smythe. His view was that he was paying the man, and that that fact had better be kept in the man's mind.

So Adolphus was not exactly popular, and had he not been a "paying" guest, his stay on the Silver Cloud would not have been a long one. But Captain Muffin was earning his daily bread by running the Silver Cloud, and he could not afford to quarrel with his bread-and-butter.

Nevertheless, he derived a certain amount of satisfaction from seeing Adolphus' lofty swank sometimes sat upon heavily by the Fourth Form fellows, and Adolphus' bitter complaints fell on deaf ears.

Adolphus & Co. had intended to go

up to Bideford to give that ancient town a patronising glance or two; but they decided not when Jimmy Silver & Co. started in that direction with Morny.

"Keep clear of those dashed fags!" said Adolphus.

"Oh, yes, rather!" assented Howard.

"Rotten havin' that crew on the yacht at all!" said Tracy. "What we really ought to do is to give 'em a lick-in' all round!"

"I've thought of that," said Adolphus.

"But——"

"But——" murmured Howard.

"A fellow can't mix up in scraps with Lower School fags," said Smythe. "A fellow has his dignity to consider."

"Oh, quite!" murmured Howard.

Perhaps he wondered whether Smythe's dignity was not already a little impaired by being kicked down the hatchway. But Adolphus was "standing" that yachting holiday to his pals, so Howard did not give utterance to his reflections.

"Besides, we can't lick them," said Tracy. "May as well own up; they're too hefty for us."

Adolphus frowned.

It was the fact, and the nutty party all knew it. Nevertheless, Adolphus did not like to acknowledge it.

"Nothin' of the kind," he said.

"Well, anyhow, we don't want to scrap with them," said Tracy. "But I've got an idea. That chap Ponsoby, of Highcliffe, is rather hefty in the scrapper line, I believe. He's a friend of ours, and we're pickin' him up here, with his friends. I'd like to see him handle Lovell."

Adolphus' face brightened.

"Oh, good!" he exclaimed. "I don't want to soil my own hands on the fellow, but really I should like to see that ruffian Lovell jolly well licked! You see, it's what he wants."

"He does!" agreed Howard.

"And it's what he jolly well is goin' to get if I can work it with the Highcliffe chaps!" muttered Tracy.

And that happy prospect quite cheered up Smythe & Co. as they strolled about Appledore that afternoon.

Arthur Edward Lovell, quite unconscionous of the kind arrangements the Shell fellows were planning for his behoof, walked up to Bideford with his chums in great good-humour. He had a book under his arm, which his comrades had observed to be a pocket edition of "Westward-Ho!"

"We'll sit down somewhere, and I'll read this out to you fellows," said Lovell generously.

"Will you?" murmured Raby.

"It's a ripping book," said Lovell.

"Of course, it's long-winded in places, and rather namby-pamby in parts, but the stuff about the Spanish galleons and so on is tip-top. I'll read it out presently."

"We've read it," murmured Newcome.

"It will do you good to hear it again in this historic place where some of it happened, or was supposed to happen," said Lovell. "There's a jolly old inn at Bideford, and they'll let you see the room where What's-his-name and the other chaps met and founded the Brotherhood of the Thingummy. We'll have a pleasant hour or two while I read it out."

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled.

It was just like Lovell to make a kind arrangement like that for his chums—he had a kind heart.

But, as a matter of fact, the Rookwood juniors intended to walk about the old Devonshire town and see what

was to be seen, and had no desire whatever to sit down in some quiet corner while Arthur Edward read books to them.

However, they made no remark. They were not without hopes that Lovell might drop the book and lose it before they reached Bideford.

They walked cheerily into the town, and Lovell stopped at an old stone wall in sight of the ancient Ship Inn.

"Sit down here," he said.
"May as well take a rest," agreed Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four sat in a cheery row on the stone wall, and three of them gazed with interest on the ancient town, with its old houses and steep streets.

The fourth member of the Co. opened the book.

"Where shall I begin?" he asked.

"Hem!"

"Better begin at the beginning—what?" asked Lovell.

"Why not try the end?" murmured Raby.

"Eh? How can I begin at the end?" asked Lovell. "There wouldn't be anything to read then, you ass, would there?"

"Quite so!"

Lovell began to glare.

"If you fellows don't want me to read this out to you—" he began.

Jimmy Silver sighed. Arthur Edward Lovell was a good chap, and his comrades liked him, and would not have taken their holiday without him for any consideration. But undoubtedly he was trying at times.

Mornington had not sat down. He strolled on with his hands in his pockets, oblivious to the fascinations of "Westward-Ho!" read aloud by Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Morny!" called out Lovell.

Mornington did not turn his head.

"Morny!"

No reply.

"Is that chap deaf?" exclaimed Lovell testily.

Mornington seemed deaf; or perhaps he was too deeply interested in the sights of Bideford to hear Lovell. He strolled onward.

Lovell laid the book on the stone wall and slipped down. He sprinted after Morny to call him back. He did not want the dandy of the Fourth to miss the treat.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged a glance. They could not help grinning. It really amazed them that Lovell did not perceive that Morny was fleeing from a bore.

"Shall we chuck it into the river?" asked Raby, with a nod towards the book lying on the old stones.

"Row with Lovell if we do!" grunted Newcome.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Let the old fellow rip," he said.

"He means well."

A dusty gentleman came "mooching" by, and paused as he saw the Rookwood juniors on the wall. He was a tramp from the country, and was evidently considering whether the three juniors were good to "touch" for a few coppers. Doubtless the dusty gentleman was anxious to sample the liquor at the historic Ship.

A sudden idea occurred to Raby—quite a brain-wave. He beckoned to the dusty gentleman, who came up eagerly.

"Sixpence any good to you?" asked Raby.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the tramp. "It's a dry day, sir."

"You'll have to earn it."

"Oh!" The dusty gentleman's enthusiasm faded out at once. Obviously

the prospect of earning anything had a dismaying effect on him.

"Take that book away and shove it somewhere where it will never be found again, and quick about it!" said Raby.

"Here's your tanner."

The tramp looked astonished—as well he might. But he had no objection to earning sixpence on those easy lines.

"You don't want that there book, sir?"

"No; only want to see the last of it!"

"I could get a few coppers for it, sir, if you don't want it."

"Hem!"

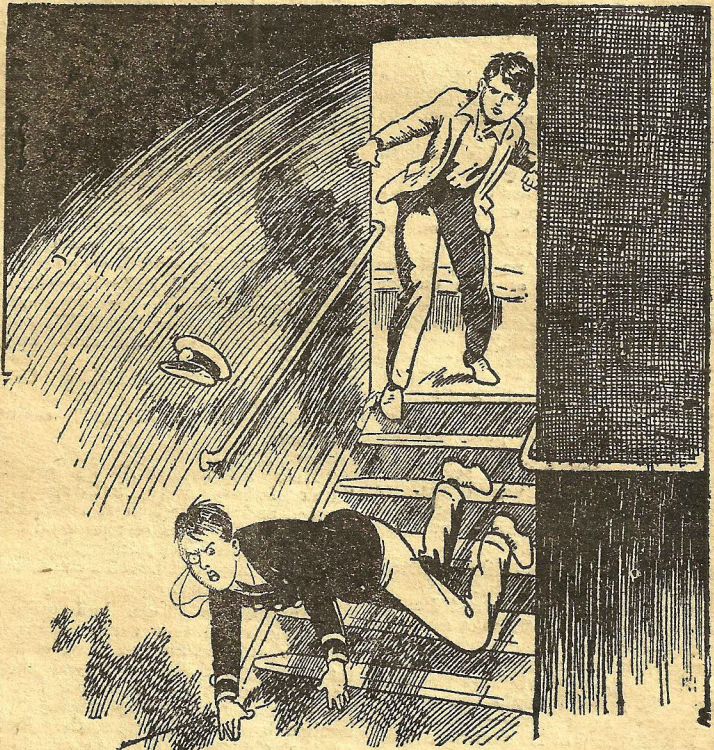
"He said that if I was going to bore anybody I could bore my own pals and let him off!" said Lovell wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell. "I don't see anything funny in Morny's cheek and bad manners."

"Nunno! Of—of course not!" said Jimmy Silver hastily. "Hem!"

"Perhaps you fellows don't want me to read 'Westward-Ho!' to you," said Lovell morosely. "Perhaps you'd rather go rooting about staring at



HELPED ON! Lovell overtook Adolphus Smythe just as he was vanishing, and let out a vengeful boot. "Yarooop!" Crash! Bump! Adolphus went down the cabin steps without counting them. (See Chapter 1.)

"Get as many as you can," said Raby.

"Take it and clear!"

"Thank you, sir!"

The volume and the sixpence disappeared among the tramp's rags, and the tramp himself disappeared very quickly.

"Saved!" murmured Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckled. But they composed their faces to an expression of proper seriousness as Arthur Edward Lovell came back—without Mornington.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

"Westward-Ho!" is Missing!

THE silly ass!"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Eh? Who?"

"The crass duffer! Cheeky, too confoundedly cheeky!"

"Who's what, and which?" inquired Newcome.

"That dummy Mornington!" said Lovell. "I thought he couldn't hear me when I called him, and had to follow him as far as Bridge Street. And what do you think the cheeky ass said?"

houses and things, rather than have your minds improved. If that's what you want, say so!"

"We're waiting for you to begin," said Raby meekly.

"Ready and waiting," said Newcome.

"Go it, old fellow!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "Begin at the beginning, and let's have all you can give us till it's time to walk down to Appledore."

Lovell looked mollified.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I gave three-and-six for that book, and I bought it specially to read to you fellows when we came along here. I knew it would interest you, though you've read it before. We can put in a couple of hours at it, anyhow."

If Jimmy Silver & Co. had felt any remorse for handing over the volume to the dusty gentleman, that would have banished it. To sit on the stone wall for two hours while Lovell improved their minds was a little too much—as it was their day at Bideford.

They sat with unconscious faces while

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Lovell glanced round for the volume. He looked puzzled.

"I say, where's that book?"

"What book?" asked Raby innocently.

"Westward-Ho!" said Lovell.

"Didn't I lay it down here when I went after that ass Morny?"

"Did you?"

"Well, I'm sure I did," said Lovell.

"One of you fellows sitting on it?"

"No; we haven't shifted since you went," said Jimmy Silver.

"Sure you left it here?" asked Newcome, his features composed to the gravity of an owl.

"Well, yes, I'm sure," said Lovell. "I couldn't have shoved it into my pocket without noticing it—not very well."

"You ran off in rather a hurry," said Raby. "Feel in your pockets."

"Well, the book's rather bulky for a fellow's pocket," said Lovell. "I'm certain I laid it down there on the stones."

Lovell groped through his pockets. He did not expect to find the book there, and he was right—it wasn't there. He glanced over the flat top of the old stone wall again, and then he looked over the ground, and then he looked over the wall. But there was no sign of the volume in the stretch of mud on the farther side of the wall.

"Can you see it?" asked Raby.

"No. You fellows look."

The other fellows looked. They could not see Lovell's volume. Naturally, they did not expect to see it, as the dusty gentleman had long ago turned a corner with the volume in the pocket of his ragged coat.

"Can't see a sign of it," said Newcome. "Look here, you chaps, as Lovell brought the book here to read to us, I think we ought to club up and buy him a new copy later on."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Jimmy Silver.

"Later on!" assented Raby.

"But it's all rot!" exclaimed Lovell, greatly exasperated. "Books can't fly away! The dashed thing must be here somewhere, unless somebody's pinched it. And I suppose you fellows wouldn't let anybody pinch it right under your silly noses. Look here—" Lovell paused, and stared at his chums. Lovell was not a suspicious fellow as a rule; but he could not help feeling that these circumstances were extremely suspicious.

"Well?" said Raby.

"If this is a lark, you just own up!" grunted Lovell. "Have you fellows done anything with my book?"

"Haven't touched it, old man!"

"Haven't touched it, Lovell!"

"Not with a little finger!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Honest injun?" asked Lovell.

"Honest injun."

It was absolutely certain that the three juniors had not touched the book. They had been very careful indeed not to touch it. Only the dusty gentleman had touched it during their brief transaction with him.

"Well, it's jolly mysterious!" said Lovell, quite puzzled. "Makes a fellow almost believe in spooks and things. The dashed book seems to have been spirited away!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver slipped from the wall.

"Well, let's take a walk round," he said. "No good staying here, as—as Lovell's not going to read to us after all."

"That's so," agreed Raby. "Really, old man, you might have been a bit more careful with that book, after saying you were going to read it to us."

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"What a chap Lovell is for losing things!" remarked Newcome.

Lovell snorted.

"I haven't lost it. I left it here.

"I'm absolutely certain that I left it here. I can put my finger on the very spot where I laid it down when I went after Morny."

"Where is it, then?"

"Goodness knows! If you fellows sat with your silly eyes shut, somebody may have passed along and nipped it up."

"But we didn't sit with our eyes shut!" said Jimmy Silver blandly.

"On the contrary," grinned Raby.

"We've got our eyes wide open this afternoon, Lovell."

"Well, where's the book, then?" hooted Lovell. "Look here, this is too jolly queer! If you fellows did not touch the book, where has it gone? Of course, I know you did not touch it if you say you didn't. But what's become of it?"

"Did you drop it while you were chasing after Morny?"

"No!" roared Lovell. "I left it here. It's simply amazing! Somebody must have passed and pinched it, with you fellows star-gazing, as usual. Did anybody pass close to you while I was gone?"

"Well, yes," said Raby thoughtfully. "A rather dusty chap—looked a good bit like Weary Willy or Tired Tim. Did you fellows notice that chap loafing along?"

"Yes, I saw him," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod.

"Looked like a tramp!" assented Newcome.

Snort, from Lovell.

"Then he had it!" he growled.

"You fellows were half-asleep, of course, and he pinched it right under your eyes. Let's get on; no good hanging about here doing nothing."

"Let's!" assented Lovell's comrades.

And they got on.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had quite an agreeable stroll that sunny afternoon, round about the ancient town of Bideford. They had lost an opportunity of having their minds improved, but did not seem to miss it very much. They strolled by the old streets, they looked at the old Ship, they surveyed the gleaming Torridge and the shining Taw, and the great estuary rolling seaward. And while they enjoyed that pleasant saunter, three members of the Co. felt that the dusty gentleman had earned his sixpence and really wished that they had made it a shilling.

When the August sun was sinking to the wide Atlantic in a blaze of crimson and gold, they turned their steps in the direction of Appledore to return to the yacht.

And then the unexpected happened.

They sighted Mornington at a little distance, and three members of the Co. started to join him. Lovell did not.

"Come on, Lovell!" called out Jimmy Silver. "There's Morny!"

"Blow Morny!" was Lovell's answer.

"Oh, don't be an ass, old chap! We're all walking back to Appledore together," said the captain of the Fourth. "Come on!"

"Rats!"

"Well, hang on a minute while we fetch him," said Jimmy.

"I'll wait just one minute!" grunted Lovell.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome crossed over to gather up Morny on the other side of the street. They were coming back with him to rejoin Lovell, when a terrific din smote their ears.

Arthur Edward Lovell was mixed up

with a dusty tramp, with arms and legs wildly flying.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Raby.

"Lovell in a row—as usual! Can't leave him for a minute without trouble!"

The juniors ran up.

"Leggo, you young cub!" the dusty man was roaring. "Leggo! Pitching into a bloke for nothink! 'Ands off!"

"Oh crums!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

He recognised the dusty gentleman who was struggling in the hefty grasp of Arthur Edward Lovell. So did his comrades.

"Lend a hand here!" panted Lovell.

"But what—"

"I've found the thief!"

"The—the—the what?"

"The rotter who stole my book!" gasped Lovell. "Actually offered it to me—offered to sell it to me for ninepence—my own book, you know. Lend a hand; we'll hand him over to the police."

"Great pip!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared blankly. There was a heavy bump as the dusty gentleman came down on the ground. And Arthur Edward Lovell sat on him to make sure of him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Rift in the Lute!

LOVELL panted.

It was a triumph for him, and he was greatly satisfied. He sat on the tramp's chest and

pinned him down, and the hapless man wriggled under him uncomfortably, with many ejaculations.

"Got him!" panted Lovell.

"Oh dear!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed on in dismay. Two or three people stopped to stare at the scene, and the Co. could only hope that a policeman would not arrive.

It is said that it is always the unexpected that happens, and it had happened in this case with a vengeance. The chums of Rookwood had naturally never expected to see the dusty gentleman again, or Lovell's volume, either. Both had turned up.

"Westward-Ho!" lay on the ground a few feet from the hapless man, pinned down under Lovell's weight. Arthur Edward released one hand and pointed to it triumphantly.

"There it is!" he gasped.

"Oh dear!"

"Pick it up, Jimmy. It's my book right enough; it's got my initials on it. This fellow pinched it under your very eyes!"

"Oh!"

"Came up and offered to sell it to me!" gasped Lovell. "Fancy that! Offered it to me for ninepence!"

"Oh!"

"Will you let a bloke up?" demanded the tramp sulphurously. "Gerroff of a cove's chest, blow yer! I ain't pinched nothink! I offered you that there book fair and square for ninepence, and cheap at the price! Blooming historical work for them as likes sich. If you don't want it, say so, and I'll hoffer it elsewhere. Get orf of a bloke's chest, you!"

"Oh crums!" murmured Newcome.

It was unexpected, yet there was nothing really surprising in it. Doubtless the tramp had been offering that book to everyone he came on that afternoon who looked like a stranger in the town seeing the sights. It was certainly cheap at ninepence. He had offered it

to Lovell in all good faith, thinking that the well-dressed schoolboy might take it off his hands. The sudden outbreak on the part of Arthur Edward had simply astounded the tramp.

"It's my book!" howled Lovell. "You sneaking rotter, it's my book, and it was stolen this afternoon—see?"

"It ain't, and it wasn't!" howled the dusty gentleman. "Get off a cove's chest, I say! That there book was give me by some young gents, and they give me a tanner along with it. Get off a cove's chest, I keep on telling you!"

The dusty gentleman squirmed, and saw Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Why, there they are!" he howled. "They're the young gents what give me the blooming book, and they'll tell you so!"

"What?" shrieked Lovell. "You tell this cove that you give me the book, young gents!" exclaimed the dusty gentleman. "You tell him, and make him get off a bloke's chest!"

Lovell stared at his chums. Valentine Mornington burst into a roar of laughter. But the Co. did not laugh. The expression on Lovell's face showed that the matter was serious.

"You—you—you gave him the book, you fellows?" hooted Lovell.

"Hem!" "They give it to me, they did, and a tanner!" howled the dusty gentleman. "Jest wanted me to take it away and get a few coppers for it if I could. You tell 'im so, young gents, and make him get off a cove's chest! I'll have the law on him!"

Lovell detached himself from the dusty gentleman's chest. He realised now that his valuable volume had not been "pinched" by that ragged wanderer.

The dusty gentleman staggered up. He was excited, and he was wrathful, as was not to be wondered at in the circumstances.

"So you gave him the book?" roared Lovell.

"Hem!" "You told me you hadn't touched it!" "We didn't touch it, you silly ass!" growled Raby. "I gave the man a tanner to pick it up and walk off with it!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Lovell. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mornington.

"Oh, cheese it, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver. "Here, my man, here's your ninepence, if that's what you want! You clear! Here's your book, Lovell!"

"I've been handled, I 'ave!" said the dusty gentleman indignantly. "I've been called names, I 'ave! There's a law in this country, I can tell you! I ain't being 'andled for nothink, and don't you think it! Knockin' a bloke hovey, and a sittin' on a bloke's chest!"

The dusty gentleman was wrathy. But a half-crown slipped into his grubby hand caused his wrath to evaporate. He grinned, touched his battered hat, and shambled away. The Rookwooders were glad to see the last of him, at all events. Unfortunately, they could not see the last of Lovell.

Lovell picked up his volume and shoved it into a pocket, with a set expression on his face. His comrades knew that expression. It meant that Lovell was taking up an attitude of offended dignity as he regarded it; which in the vernacular was called "the sulks."

Quite a little crowd had been attracted by the exciting scene. The entertainment being over, the crowd dispersed. Three very well-dressed fellows, who looked like schoolboys on holiday, were

among them, and they stared at the Rookwooders with supercilious smiles. One of them made a remark to the others, quite audible to Jimmy Silver & Co.

"What a crew! I've seen that lot before. They belong to Rookwood. They play cricket with our school. What a crew!"

Jimmy Silver glanced round, and recognised Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson of Highcliffe School. It was Ponsonby who had spoken.

"What a crew!" repeated Ponsonby deliberately, as he caught Jimmy Silver's glance. Evidently the nutty young gentleman from Highcliffe liked to make himself unpleasant, even to a fellow he hardly knew.

And then the three Highcliffians turned their backs and walked away; none too soon, for they were in danger of being collared and rolled on the ground; which doubtless would have intensified their impression of Jimmy Silver & Co. as a "crew."

"They're the Highcliffe cads!" observed Raby, with an extremely inimical glance after the elegant trio. "I've a jolly good mind—"

"Oh, let them rip!" said Jimmy. "There's been enough rowing for one afternoon!"

"They're coming on the Silver Cloud, you know," said Mornington. "They

don't seem to know that we're their jolly old fellow-voyagers. They're pally with Smythe."

"Let's get back," said Jimmy. "Come on, Lovell!"

Lovell did not answer.

He walked along with his chums towards Appledore, but he did not speak, and his face was grim. Evidently his dignity was seriously offended. The discovery of the true story of the mysterious disappearance of "Westward-Ho!" had put up Lovell's back to a very serious extent. He walked with his comrades; but he made it quite clear by his manner that he was with them but not of them, so to speak.

Valentine Mornington was smiling. He seemed to consider the whole affair in the light of an entertainment. But the chums of the end study did not smile. There was a rift in the lute now, and they all looked glum as they walked down to Appledore and went on board the Silver Cloud. There was only one solace for this unhappy occurrence. Lovell was not likely to corner his chums again to read "Westward-Ho!" to them. That, at least, was so much to the good.

THE END.

(There will be another rollicking long story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next week. See announcement on this page.)

NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL PROGRAMME!

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By Ralph Redway.

Another roaring long complete tale of the Wild West, in which the Rio Kid, boy outlaw, again plays the part of heroic rescuer to a damsel in distress.

"COKER'S REVENGE!"

By Martin Clifford.

A rollicking long complete story continuing the holiday adventures of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

"LIVELY TIMES ON THE SILVER CLOUD!"

By Owen Conquest.

A rousing long tale dealing with the thrilling exploits of Jimmy Silver & Co., the schoolboy yachtsmen. This story contains hundreds of laughs.

"TRAPPING A GUNMAN!"

A lively and full-of-surprise tale of the Four Chums of Crusoe Island, telling how they come up against a gang of tricksters in Sydney.

"TRACKED ACROSS THE SEA!"

By Frank Richards.

The further adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, on their voyage to Africa.

"SCOUTING DAYS."

The gentle art of tramping and rambling made easy by our special contributor.

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