

CHUMS ON THE OPEN ROAD!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



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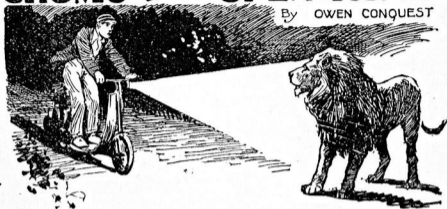
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CHUMS ON THE OPEN ROAD!

By OWEN CONQUEST



JIMMY SILVER & Co. of Rookwood School, meet plenty of fun and excitement on their holiday cycling tour. Join up with them!

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Edward Knows Best!

"DIRT cheap!" said Lovell.

"But——"

"Nine pounds! What's that?"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question in quite a contemptuous tone. He might have been speaking of nine shillings, or ninepence.

But Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked serious and thoughtful.

"What's that?" repeated Lovell.

"A hundred and eighty shillings," said Raby, "and a bob's a bob, especially in holiday time."

"I tell you it's dirt cheap! The man's practically giving away that motor-scooter. He told me it cost thirty guineas new," said Lovell impressively.

"And when was it new?" asked

Newcome, a little sarcastically. "There have been no motor-scooters made for years and years!"

"Look here, Newcome——"

"The fact is——" said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell interrupted. Arthur Edward Lovell always was liable to interrupt. His views being so much wiser than those of any other fellow, it was always best for them to be heard at once—or so, at least, it seemed to Lovell.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I tell you it's all right. We've decided on a bike tour for the holidays, haven't we?"

"That's so!"

"So there's the question of baggage."

"We needn't take much. And each of us can shove a light wire-carrier on his bike."

"That's all very well—but a motor-

scooter will carry all we want without feeling the weight. You can shove a decent-sized carrier on a motor-scooter, and take blankets and things."

"Yes—but——"

"You needn't be afraid of accidents," said Lovell reassuringly. "I shall be riding the scooter!"

Lovell's chums gazed at him. They did not need telling that if, by combining their cash resources, they bought the second-hand motor-scooter to take on their summer holiday, Lovell would ride it. But it was precisely because Lovell would ride it, that they anticipated accidents. Still, it was no use trying to explain that to Lovell.

"It's a handy little thing," said Lovell. "Runs as easily as a push-bike, and uses hardly any petrol. It wants cleaning up a bit, otherwise it's all right. Dirt cheap at nine pounds. We fix on a carrier, stack it, and there you are. Needn't load up you fellows' push-bikes. I'll carry all the stuff. Easy as falling off a form."

"Or a scooter!" murmured Raby.

"I suppose I can ride a scooter, Raby. I've had runs on my brother's motor-bike," said Lovell. "I took it out quite alone one day. There was a row afterwards, about the dashed thing running into a tree—I remember that. But if I can ride a motor-bike, I suppose I can ride a motor-scooter!"

"Into a tree?" asked Newcome.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Newcome! Look here, we want that scooter," said Lovell. "I've as good as told the man I'll take it. If you fellows don't want to whack out the cost, I'll buy it on my own—I can raise the wind by selling my push-bike."

Jimmy Silver & Co. reflected.

The midsummer holidays were close at hand, and most of the Rookwood fellows were looking forward to the break-up at the old school.

The Fistical Four of the Fourth, as

usual, were to spend their holidays in company.

They had decided on the bikes, hoping that the weather would not play them any tricks. A cycling and camping tour was an attractive scheme.

The chums of the Fourth were prepared to rough it. Roughing it would be necessary, for on their push-bikes they could carry only a minimum of baggage. Luxurious camping would be out of the question. Baggage would have to be confined to the barest necessities.

In fine weather they would camp out. In rainy weather they would put up at one of those old-fashioned, red-roofed, homely old inns, tucked away in a country nook among ancient beeches—one of those dear old inns which require so much looking for.

Arthur Edward Lovell, of course, had an improvement in the arrangements to suggest. He always had. On this occasion it was the motor-scooter, which he had seen at a cycle-shop in Latham, dirt cheap.

Really, it was not a bad idea.

The funds wouldn't run to a motor-car or a motor-bike. They would run to a little, old, out-of-date motor-scooter.

Undoubtedly the scooter would carry all the baggage that was needed for comfort. It would save a lot of weight on the push-bikes. The bill for petrol would be almost negligible.

But there were drawbacks. Nine pounds, though a low price, was still nine pounds. And running repairs might be needed, which might prove beyond the powers of the Classical juniors. And Lovell would want to take complete charge of the motor-scooter. That meant danger of accidents.

So three of the four hesitated; the fourth having quite made up his mind.

Arthur Edward Lovell slid off the corner of the table in the end study, where he had been seated while he

laid down the law to his comrades. He looked at the study clock.

"I can get across to Latcham before lock-up!" he said. "Is it settled?"

"You see——" began Jimmy Silver.

"It's two pounds five each, if we whack it out," said Lovell. "That's not much, to get all the baggage carried through a holiday tour."

"Sure it's in good condition?" asked Jimmy resignedly.

"I saw the man ride it to show me. He ran it up and down the High Street, at Latcham. It was all right!"

"Well, it's a go!" said Jimmy. "I can see you mean to have it, anyhow—and if we're going to have it, we'll whack out the cost. But you'd better let the man deliver it here."

"Not at all. That would cost money, and we want to save our bobs for the holiday."

"How will you get it here, then?" asked Raby.

"Ride it, of course."

"You're going to ride a petrol-bike from Latcham to Rookwood, without having ridden one before?"

"I've ridden my brother's motor-bike."

"Into a tree——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"You can't ride any petrol-bike without a licence," said Jimmy Silver. "You'll have to get a driver's licence and your 'L' plates."

"Well, I'm old enough to get a licence to drive a motor-bike," said Lovell. "I shall pay for that out of my own pocket, as I'm going to take charge of it."

"But it takes time—some days, at least; you haven't got the licence in your pocket now."

"That's all right," said Lovell cheerily. "Lots of fellows chance it. I'll chance it!"

Jimmy Silver glared at him.

"You jolly well won't chance it, you ass! You're not going to break the law, even if you want to break your

neck. You can get run in for riding without a licence."

"Who's going to know?" snapped Lovell. "The man has got some 'L' plates all ready to fix on for me."

"Suppose a bobby wanted to see your licence?"

"Why should he?"

"Look here——"

"The licence on the machine is paid up to the end of the year," said Lovell.

"The man told me so. All I need is my driver's licence to carry in my pocket. Well, any bobby I pass won't be able to guess that there isn't a licence in my pocket. It's all right."

"Suppose you run into a bobby?" asked Newcome. "You might run into a bobby instead of a tree this time."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"Don't you be a funny idiot, Newcome. Look here, I'm going. That's settled. The question is, are we whacking it out, or do I bag it on my own?"

Jimmy Silver sighed. He was greatly attached to Arthur Edward Lovell, who had been his chum ever since he had come to Rookwood School. But at times he found Lovell very trying. A fellow who always knew best was bound to try the patience of his friends at times.

"We'll whack it out," said Jimmy. "But we'll all have a look at the bike before we buy it. Let's get out the jiggers and run across to Latcham. There's time before lock-up."

And so it was settled, and the Fistical Four left the end study to get out their machines.

CHAPTER 2.

Lovell in the Lighthouse!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL chatted cheerily as the four Rookwooders pedalled away on the road to Latcham. Lovell was greatly pleased with the bargain he

had spotted at Latcham, and greatly pleased with his own perspicacity in discerning how useful it would be on the summer holiday trip. Also he was looking forward to joy rides on the motor-scooter. Undoubtedly he would have preferred a first-class motor-bike. He would have liked to feel a powerful engine under him and "let her rip." But that was not attainable—perhaps fortunately for Lovell. Even a one horse-power engine was vastly better than shoving at dusty pedals with weary legs. Lovell pictured himself sailing on easily and airily while his comrades ground away at the pedals, with the perspiration pouring down their brows. It was quite an attractive picture.

Not that Lovell was a selfish fellow. Far from that. He was going to take charge of the petrol bike because he could handle it. In the hands of his comrades he would have been fearful of accidents and mishaps.

Lots of the difficulties of a cycling tour would be removed by the acquisition of a petrol-bike as a baggage-carrier. It was Lovell's idea, and Lovell, as usual, was the right man in the right place. Indeed, he wondered a little how the end study would ever have got on at all without the brains of Arthur Edward Lovell behind them.

The Fistical Four arrived at Latcham and stopped at the cycle establishment. A chubby and rather greasy gentleman in overalls came out of a zinc garage to deal with them. Willingly he ran out the ancient scooter for their inspection, and showed off its points to them.

It had seen its best days, and certainly needed some furbishing. But it was in good condition, and the Rookwood juniors were rather taken with it. In construction it was simplicity itself. You poured petrol into a little tank, you pushed a little lever on the handle-bars to start, you sat in a roomy and comfortable saddle, and there you were! You stopped the

scooter with two brakes, or simply by turning off the petrol, and you slowed down or speeded up according to the quantity of "juice" you turned on.

Undoubtedly it was simple, and after a little practice very easily handled. The gentleman in overalls ran it up and down the road with great ease to show off its points. Each of the juniors tried it in turn, with the man running alongside, and they liked it.

"We're having it—what?" said Lovell triumphantly.

"We're having it," agreed Jimmy Silver.

"I'll ride it back to Rookwood. We can put it up in the bike shed there till the hols."

"Better have it delivered by carrier. You see—"

"Oh, rot!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"Bosh!"

The juniors had brought their available supply of cash with them. The price of the motor-scooter was whacked out, the nine pounds duly paid over, and the receipt duly stamped and signed and handed over. Then the scooter became the joint possession of the Fistical Four of Rookwood.

Lovell turned on the juice and wheeled it away. As he pointed out to his chums, it was less trouble to wheel than a push-bike. It simply walked of its own accord, with a modicum of the juice to help it.

"How are you getting your own bike back to the school if you ride that?" demanded Newcome.

Snort from Lovell.

"I suppose one of you fellows can wheel it? Don't be lazy!"

"You know jolly well that you oughtn't to ride that thing without a licence, you ass!" said Raby tartly.

"I shall ride it every day without one till I get one," said Lovell coolly. "I want to get some practice with it. You have to apply at the county town for a form, and fill in the form and

send your money, and then they will send you your bit of paper. Lots of red tape, in fact. I'm not going to wait. I'll jump on here."

"Here" was the market-place at Latcham. Latcham was not a busy town, but the old-fashioned market-place was always a little congested.

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell's arm.

"You won't jump on here, you dummy. You'll wait till we're out on the open road at least."

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell.

"Rot or not, you'll get out on the road first," growled Jimmy.

Lovell grunted impatiently. But as the captain of the Rookwood Fourth was quite determined on that point Lovell gave in, and the petrol-bike was wheeled out of the town. Lovell simply rested his hand on it to guide it as it wheeled of its own volition, while his comrades pushed their machines along the road, Jimmy Silver being burdened with Lovell's bicycle in addition to his own.

Outside the town, on the open, wide country road, Lovell was no longer to be restrained.

"Watch me start!" he said. "I'll show you how easy it is."

He pressed the lever a little to turn on more gas, intending to jump on at the same moment.

Unfortunately, he did not jump on quite quickly enough.

The buzzing scooter shot ahead, dragging Lovell after it at such a rate that he simply couldn't jump on.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Lovell, running his hardest to keep pace with the tearing scooter, went along the road like a racer. He grabbed over at the throttle lever to turn off the juice a little. In his hurry and excitement he turned it further on instead of off.

The scooter leaped forward like a wild thing, dragged itself from Lovell's hands, and shot away.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

He stood in dismay, panting, whilst the scooter ripped on. Unguided, it shot into a hedge a score of yards ahead, and stood plunging there, making frantic efforts to drive itself through the hedge, and buzzing at a terrific rate.

Lovell rushed after it.

Crash!

The scooter reposed on its side, still buzzing away like a million angry bees.

"He's done it now!" remarked Newcome.

Lovell came up with his scooter. He started dragging it up, and then, fortunately, remembered to turn off the petrol before he did so. After that the obstreperous scooter stood up quite submissively. Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived on the scene wheeling the bicycles.

"Damaged it?" asked Newcome.

Lovell glared at him.

"Certainly not, you ass!"

As a matter of fact, Lovell was not yet aware whether the scooter was damaged or not. Had it been damaged, Lovell would undoubtedly have taken the view that it was the fault of Jimmy Silver, Raby, or Newcome, or all three together. Fortunately, it was not damaged.

"Better wheel it back to Latcham and send it on by carrier," said Raby.

"That's the kind of piffle I expect from you," said Lovell. "Stand clear while I get on."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Give us a rest!"

Arthur Edward Lovell wheeled his steed into the middle of the road again. This time he was very careful. He started gently and sat in the roomy saddle and moved on with ease and grace. Jimmy Silver & Co. mounted their machines and kept pace with him.

Lovell was handling the petrol-bike easily enough now. In fact, it was easy enough to handle, unless from inexperience the rider forgot the use of some of the gadgets, or in haste

used the wrong ones. Arthur Edward smiled at his chums. There was a rise in the road towards a hill, and the cyclists had to grind hard at the pedals. Lovell was going up the slope without an effort.

"All serene, you see," said Lovell. "But, I say, there's no need for me to crawl like this!"

"I don't call it crawling!" growled Raby. "We're putting on a good speed up a dashed hill!"

"A good speed for a push-bike," agreed Lovell airily. "But it's crawling for me. I'll get on to Rookwood, and have tea ready for you fellows in the study when you come in—what?"

"Safer to keep in our sight," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Jimmy!"

"For goodness' sake, Lovell, chuck it. You don't want to go in for racing stunts your first time on a petrol-bike!" urged Jimmy.

"Well, I'd like to put it on a little," said Lovell. "I'll cut 'on, and then slow down—see?"

Lovell put it on. The motor-scooter leaped ahead with him and fairly walked away from the push-bikes. Lovell sailed on merrily and grew smaller and smaller in the distance ahead. His chums, following on behind, saw him making peculiar motions, and they wondered whether he was trying to slow down and had forgotten to do so.

At all events, he did not slow down. At a spanking rate Arthur Edward Lovell went over the crest of the hill and vanished from the sight of his comrades.

When the cyclists had laboured up the rise to the crest, Lovell was out of sight.

"Well, I suppose he's all right," said Jimmy Silver, with a breath of relief. "Blessed if I didn't half expect to find him lying about here somewhere! He must be more than half-way to Rookwood by this time. We'd better take the short cut by the footpath."

And the three juniors turned from the road and cycled by the footpath through Coombe Wood to the Coombe road and home to Rookwood.

CHAPTER 3.

What Happened to Lovell.

MORNINGTON of the Fourth was in the bike-shed when Jimmy Silver & Co. wheeled in four machines.

"Seen Lovell?" asked Jimmy.

"No. Wasn't he with you?" asked Morny.

"Hasn't he come in on a motor-scooter?" exclaimed Raby.

"Haven't seen anythin' of it. Is Lovell ridin' a petrol-bike?" yawned Mornington. "Poor old Lovell! We'll have a whip-round in the Fourth for the funeral expenses."

Jimmy Silver & Co. put up their machines and walked away to the House in a rather uneasy frame of mind.

On the petrol-bike Lovell should have reached the school at least half an hour before his comrades, allowing for the time they had saved on the short cut through the woods. Apparently he hadn't arrived, however; certainly the scooter was not in the bike-shed.

It was close on time for evening Roll, but Jimmy ran up to the end study in the hope of finding Lovell there. But in the end study in the Fourth he drew blank. Jimmy came downstairs again, feeling more uneasy than ever.

"Have you seen anything of Lovell, Tubby?" he asked as he came on Reginald Muffin on his way to Hall.

But Tubby Muffin hadn't. And Putty of the Fourth, and Erroll and Townsend and several other fellows whom Jimmy questioned hadn't seen anything of him. It seemed clear that Lovell had not yet got in.

What had happened to him?

There were some steep patches and

some dangerous curves on the road from Latcham. It was only too probable that the headstrong and over-confident Arthur Edward had come to grief somewhere along the road.

That he had not arrived at Rookwood was soon placed beyond doubt. Mr. Dalton, taking the Roll in Big Hall, called the name of Lovell without receiving the usual "Sum!" in reply.

The Fourth Form master glanced at the ranks of the Fourth and repeated the name.

"Lovell!"

But there was no answer, and Arthur Edward Lovell was marked down as absent from Roll.

It was not a very unusual circumstance for a junior to be late for lock-up on a summer's afternoon, and Mr. Dalton did not attach very much importance to it, besides making a note of Lovell's name for "lines." But it had a serious aspect to Lovell's chums.

"Where the thump is he?" said Jimmy, as the Classical Fourth came out of Hall. "What's happened to him?"

"Of course he fell off!" said Raby. "He would, you know!"

Jimmy looked deeply worried.

He would have been angry with Lovell, but anger was swallowed up in anxiety. Was Lovell at that moment lying injured on the Latcham road—with a broken leg or arm, perhaps? The bare possibility banished anger.

"We ought to tell Mr. Dalton," said Newcome. "If Lovell's had an accident, the sooner he's looked for the better."

"I know! But if he hasn't——"

"Then what can be keeping him?"

"Goodness knows! But if he hasn't had an accident we don't want to tell Mr. Dalton that he's riding a petrol-bike without a licence. It would mean a row for him."

"By Jove, it would! Still——"

"Better wait a bit," said Jimmy.

It seemed best to wait before taking a step which would have had serious results for Lovell. It was possible that nothing had happened; all sorts of reasons might have kept Lovell out of gates. He might even have taken the scooter for a long run forgetful of lock-ups, in his keenness for a joy-ride. That would not have been unlike Lovell.

At the same time, the possibility of a serious accident was there, and it deeply worried the three Classical juniors.

If there had been no accident they would get Lovell a punishment from his Form-master by reporting the matter. But if there had been an accident their silence was keeping succour from reaching the unfortunate victim of it.

It was an unhappy dilemma for Lovell's chums.

But for their anxiety they would have longed to punch Lovell's head for placing them in such a worrying position. But they could not feel wrath towards a fellow who might in those very moments be lying on a lonely road with a broken limb.

It was useless to think of prep in the circumstances. Jimmy Silver & Co. hung restlessly round the big door on the quad till Bulkeley of the Sixth spotted them and called to them.

"Why aren't you juniors at prep?"

"Just going, Bulkeley," answered Jimmy Silver. There was no help for it. From seven till eight-thirty the Fourth had to be in their studies at preparation, or give a good reason.

"Well, go!" said the prefect sharply.

And the trio went up to the end study. But they simply could not settle down to work. The gates of Rookwood had long been locked—and Lovell had not returned. With every passing minute the anxiety of his chums increased.

Where was Lovell?

The certainty grew in the minds of the juniors that there must have been

an accident. Even Lovell, headstrong and thoughtless as he was, would not willingly have stayed out of gates so late.

Jimmy Silver jumped up at last.

"We'd better tell Mr. Dalton," he said. "If Lovell's had an accident, he's got to know. If he's been stopped for driving without a licence, Mr. Dalton will have to see him through. I'd better go down and tell Dicky Dalton."

There was a heavy tread in the passage outside.

"Hallo! That sounds like Lovell's hoof!" said Raby.

The door of the end study was thrown open. Arthur Edward Lovell, dusty and weary, tramped in and threw himself into a chair. He looked tired, and he looked decidedly cross.

His three chums stared at him. Their first feeling was one of great relief; Lovell was safe and sound. Naturally, relief passed very quickly into exasperation. If he was safe and sound, why hadn't he come in before? Why had he given them so much anxiety for nothing?

"So you haven't smashed yourself up?" said Newcome.

"Silly ass!" was Lovell's reply.

"We've been thinking you'd had an accident, Lovell," said Jimmy.

"What rot!"

"Well, what the thump do you mean by staying out like this?" exclaimed Jimmy indignantly. "You were going to get in first and have tea ready. We've been in over an hour."

"Nearly two hours!" snapped Raby. "Where's the scooter?"

"I've put it up at Bundy's, in the village. Mr. Bundy let me garage it in his shed," grunted Lovell. "It will be easy to get at there, and no questions asked. Mr. Dalton would be sure to ask me about the licence if he saw it."

"It hasn't taken you two hours to garage the scooter in Bundy's shed, I suppose?" asked Raby sarcastically.

"Oh, don't be a goat!"

"You've been joy-riding, then, and letting us think that you'd got busted up in an accident."

"You shouldn't have thought so. I suppose I'm not likely to have an accident with a petrol-bike. You fellows might. But I haven't been joy-riding, of course. I've got two hundred lines from Dicky Dalton for cutting Roll and coming in late."

"But why were you late?" demanded Jimmy, mystified.

"I had to wheel the jigger nearly four miles."

"Couldn't ride it, after all?" asked Newcome.

"You silly owl!"

"Something gone wrong with the works?" grinned Raby. "Well, it needn't have taken you all that time to wheel it, especially as it gets along by itself with a little juice turned on."

"I couldn't turn on the juice when there wasn't any."

"Eh?"

"It's that man at Latcham's fault," snorted Lovell. "Naturally, I never thought of looking in the petrol tank. I supposed it was filled. But it seems that the silly owl only put in a little to show us the bike working. Didn't want to waste his petrol, I suppose—blow him!—though it's cheap enough nowadays. It ran out half-way home."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, I didn't know what was wrong at first; I kept on trying to start the blessed thing, and it would not start—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell, greatly incensed. "Nothing funny in wheeling a heavy bike up hill and down dale for miles and miles, I suppose? I had a jolly good mind more than once to leave it by the road!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the three.

"You cackling asses! One of you might have thought of the petrol when we started—but trust you to forget everything—"

"We weren't riding the bike!" chuckled Raby. "I should say it was the job of the giddy motorist to find out whether there was any juice in his tank. I know I should have looked into the tank before I started if I'd been riding it."

"I dare say it's all for the best," said Newcome comfortingly. "After all, if you'd ridden it all the way home, I dare say you'd have been killed before you got to Rookwood."

"Very likely," agreed Raby.

Lovell did not seem comforted by those comforting remarks. He looked at his chums as if he could eat them.

"Well, all's well that ends well, and I'm jolly glad you got back all right, old chap!" said Jimmy, pouring oil on the troubled waters, as it were. "Prep now."

"I'm too jolly tired for prep!" growled Lovell. "Lugging a thundering heavy jigger up hill and down dale—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you cackle again, Raby, I'll jolly well shy something at you!" roared Lovell. "All your fault for forgetting the petrol! I shan't be ass enough to rely on you dummies again! Set of cackling geese!"

And Lovell threw himself back in the armchair to rest and to scowl. It was not till nearly bed-time that he recovered his good humour—and then he would not have recovered it had not his chums, with great forbearance, been extremely careful not to smile any more.

CHAPTER 4.

A Lesson for Lovell.

"**B**LOW cricket!"

It really was not like Arthur Edward Lovell to make that remark. In the summer, as a rule, Arthur Edward worshipped the great game, and he was always emphatically down on slackers like Peele and Leg-

gett and Gower, who dodged games practice when they could.

But on this especial Wednesday afternoon, Arthur Edward Lovell was thinking of other matters. The joys of a motorist banished those of a cricketer. Lovell wanted to get down to Coombe and call for his motor-scooter at Mr. Bunday's, and take it out for a long, long run. This time, probably, he would not forget the petrol.

"It's not much of a match to-day," went on Lovell. "Only a Form match with the Shell. You fellows can beat Smythe and his crowd without me."

"Easily!" assented Jimmy Silver. "But—"

"I want to get some practice with the jigger," said Lovell. "I shall have to take charge of it during our holiday tour. It's simple enough, but a fellow wants to be well up in its gadgets. We don't want it to break down on the march. As I've got to take charge of it, I'd better put in some time getting into the way of it."

The new possession being the joint property of the Fistical Four, there really was no reason why Lovell should specially appropriate it in this way. As a matter of fact, each of the owners fully intended to take his fair share in the ownership. Lovell did not mean to be selfish at all. He thought he was being very unselfish. There was a certain amount of trouble and responsibility in taking charge of the jigger. Lovell was prepared to take it—being the only member of the Co. who had sense enough to manage a petrol-bike. That was how Lovell looked at it, and he regarded it as rather a sacrifice on his part. But he did not look for gratitude. His chums were thoughtless, and Lovell never expected them to realise the importance of all that he did for them.

"I don't like chucking up the cricket," he went on loftily. "But somebody's got to take on this job. Well, I've taken it on; and I'm the man for it, and I'm not grumbling.

You fellows play cricket, and I'll look after the jigger."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"What about the licence?" he asked.

"Blow the licence!"

"Look here, Lovell," said Jimmy seriously, "we're all going to ride that jigger, and we're all going to buy drivers' licences for the job. But it can't be ridden without a licence; that's asking for trouble to come."

"I'm not going to waste time."

"We've applied for the giddy forms, and now we've only got to wait till the licences come," said Jimmy. "Wait till then, and don't play the goat, Lovell!"

"When I want advice from a fellow who has as much brains in his head as I have in my little finger, I'll ask for it," said Lovell. "You fellows get on with the cricket. I'm going round by Latham and Rookham, and back by way of the Redmayne woods. If you fellows beat the Shell in time you can come out on the Redmayne road on your bikes and meet me coming back."

"Look here——"

"I'll look out for you this side of Redmayne about five," said Lovell; and he walked away to put an end to the discussion.

His three chums looked after him in considerable exasperation. They were not quite sure that Lovell's life and limbs were safe on the motor-scooter; but that, they conceded, was his own business. But it was no business of his to ride a petrol-bike without a licence; that meant a great deal of trouble for his friends, as well as himself, if any mischance occurred. What the penalty was his friends did not know; but they knew they would have to stand by Lovell if he had to face it. They pictured Lovell "run in" by a man in blue, and a policeman calling at Rookwood to ask the Head whether "this was one of his boys"—no end of a sensation, and then a fine to be paid—and

perhaps the motor-scooter confiscated by the Head as a punishment!

But there was no stopping Lovell. He knew best, and he was going his own way.

"Blow him!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I've a jolly good mind to take him by the ears and hold him in. But I suppose I couldn't hold on to his ears all the afternoon."

"Not quite!" grinned Raby. "All the same, he ought to be stopped. He's going to break the law, though he doesn't seem to have sense enough to understand it. Mr. Dalton would stop him fast enough if he knew."

"Fancy the Head's face if a bobby came here about it!" said Newcome. "A flogging for Lovell, at the very least."

Jimmy Silver nodded, with a troubled and thoughtful brow.

"It isn't as if it were only this once," he said. "He means to get on that dashed jigger every day, whether he's got a licence or not. It would serve him right to be stopped by a bobby."

Valentine Mornington came out of the House with a bat under his arm.

"You fellows comin' down?"

Jimmy Silver had been thinking as he stared after Arthur Edward Lovell's figure disappearing out of the gateway of Rookwood. He shook his head in reply to Morny's question.

"I'm thinking of asking you to captain the side this afternoon, Morny," he said. "You can make up a team to beat Smythe and his lot."

"Easily," said Mornington. "I'll take it on, if you like. You fellows cutting the cricket, then?"

Raby and Newcome looked at Jimmy. They did not want to cut the cricket. But Uncle James of Rookwood was unquestioned leader in the end study, so far as two of his chums were concerned, at least. Raby and Newcome left it to Uncle James.

"Yes," said Jimmy. "We've got something else on this time. Mind you beat the Shell, Morny."

"What-ho!" said Mornington. And he walked away cheerily to take up his new duties.

"Well, what's the game, Jimmy?" asked Raby, rather restively. "We don't want to waste the half-holiday."

"We're not going to waste it, old man. We're going to look after Lovell."

"Why, you silly ass!" exclaimed Raby indignantly. "Do you want to go butting after that silly ass——"

"Shush!" said Jimmy. "Lovell's riding without a licence. He will get into trouble soon. Well, the sooner he gets into it the better for him—it will teach him a lesson. I suppose you know he needs a lesson."

"He does, the ass! But——"

"He's coming back by Redmayne Lane," said Jimmy. "Well, there will be a police-trap in Redmayne Lane——"

"Wha-a-a-a-t?"

"Lovell will be stopped by a bobby!" explained Jimmy Silver. "It will be a warning to him."

Raby and Newcome stared blankly at the captain of the Fourth. They simply could not believe their ears.

"Are you potty?" ejaculated Newcome at last. "You can't be thinking of informing against a pal? Are you off your rocker?"

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver politely. "Lend me your ears—they're big enough—and I'll explain!"

Jimmy Silver proceeded to explain, and his chums listened, in blank amazement at first, and then with loud chuckles.

"If it works!" gasped Raby.

"It will work! Let's get out the bikes and ride over to Rookham for the things."

"Right-ho!"

When Adolphus Smythe & Co. of the Shell came down to Little Side

to play the Fourth that afternoon, four prominent members of the Fourth Form were conspicuous by their absence.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were far out of gates; Lovell, mounted upon the petrol-jigger, riding it unlicensed; and Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome, very differently engaged.

They cycled into the town of Rookham, and stopped at a shop where they had had dealings before on account of the Classical Players—the junior dramatic society at Rookwood. It was a barber's, a costumier's, a wig-maker's, and several other things. Mr. Boodle, the proprietor, hired out costumes for fancy-dress balls, and evening clothes for dances to the young bucks of Rookham. Many a time had Jimmy Silver & Co. hired Roman costumes from Mr. Boodle for their Shakespearean representations at Rookwood. Now they wanted to hire another costume—only one, and not at all Shakespearean.

Mr. Boodle seemed a little surprised by their request—but he had what they wanted, and was glad to do business.

After ten minutes or so the three left Mr. Boodle's little establishment with three bundles, which they fastened on the handle-bars of their machines.

They stopped for an early tea in Rookham, and then rode out of the town on the Redmayne road.

After passing through Redmayne village the road ran on between thick woods, undivided from the highway. Numerous paths ran up from the road into the woods.

At one of the loneliest of those little paths the Rookwood juniors stopped, and wheeled their machines into the wood. Then the bundles were unfastened and unpacked.

And then, for the next half-hour, while Newcome watched the road for Lovell, Jimmy Silver and Raby were

very busy in the thick shadow of the trees—and by the time a warning whistle came from Arthur Newcome all was ready.

CHAPTER 5.

In the Grip of the Law!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL had enjoyed his joy-ride.

The jigger played up well.

It was a fine sunny afternoon, and just the weather for enjoying a joy-ride. The jigger was in good order, and Lovell was able to handle it easily enough now, and he had taken care to have a supply of petrol with him. If something "went," and running repairs were required, probably Lovell would find himself up against it—but fortunately, on that fine afternoon, nothing "went."

Really, it was very enjoyable scooting up hills and rushing down declivities. Certainly, the scooter looked rather small fry in comparison with the motor-cycles that passed Lovell on the road. It looked like a toy in comparison. Lovell, who hated being passed on the road by anybody or anything, sometimes let out his scooter to the fullest extent, and fairly buzzed along to keep pace with some more powerful rival of the road. One or two motor-cyclists glanced at his scooter, and smiled in a slightly ironical way, which enraged Lovell.

But, on the whole, it was a joyous run. Lovell was quite regretful when he turned back for the scoot to Rookwood.

So far, he had had no difficulties on the score of his licence. He had passed numbers of gentlemen in blue, but evidently it had not occurred to them that the schoolboy mounted on the motor-scooter was defying the laws of the land by motoring un-

Lovell was not really a lawless fellow—his licence was applied for,

and it was only a question of time. Strongly indeed would he have disapproved of any other fellow motoring without a licence—doing what he was doing, in fact. Somehow, when he did a thing himself, it seemed right enough, if perhaps a little irregular. If another fellow did it, Lovell could see the irregularity without the rightness.

Still, he had escaped scot-free so far, and he came scooting through the village of Redmayne in great spirits, and entered on the shaded lane through the woods towards the school. He wondered whether his chums would come out to meet him on that road—and whether the cricket match was over yet. There was no sign in the long, shady lane of the Rookwood Juniors—and no sign of anyone else. It was a lonely road.

All of a sudden a figure stepped from the trees by the roadside. It was well ahead of Lovell, and his eyes fell on it at once. He saw the familiar blue coat and helmet of the police force, and thought he had never seen a more podgy and stumpy policeman in his life. The constable, who had appeared from the trees, was certainly not tall, though his helmet added to his height. He was stout, however—his belt was buckled round a considerable circumference. His face was red in complexion, he wore a short, reddish beard, and a reddish moustache, and his eyebrows were reddish in colour and very thick and bushy.

Lovell glanced at him carelessly at first—it was the sixth or seventh constable he had passed that afternoon, and he supposed that he was going to pass this one like the others. But on that point he was mistaken. The stumpy constable stepped into the middle of the lane, and held up his hand.

Lovell's heart beat a little.

The man was stopping him.

Lovell was not exceeding the speed

limit; it would have been difficult to do so on the scooter. What on earth was the man stopping him for? Unless his eyes were endowed with the powers of the X-rays, he certainly couldn't see that Lovell hadn't a licence in his pocket. But the raised hand stopped him in full career.

Lovell could not keep on without running the constable down. That was out of the question, annoyed as he was.

He "honked" emphatically on his horn as a hint to the man to get aside, but the representative of the law did not stir. In the middle of the road, with raised hand of command, stood the representative of the law, and Lovell had to jam on his brakes.

He jumped from the saddle as the jigger stopped.

"Look here," he exclaimed hotly, "what are you stopping me for?"

"I've 'eard about you, I 'ave," said the policeman in a deep, husky voice. "You're the young rip what rides without a licence."

Lovell stared at him. He had never had any great admiration for the perspicacity of the police. But, really, this seemed like magic. His lawless proceedings, apparently, were already known.

"I—I say——" he gasped.

"Where's your licence?"

"Can't you see it sticking on the machine?" snapped Lovell.

"I'm speaking of your driver's licence."

Lovell paused.

Many a fellow would have said that he had left it at home, but Lovell was not a fibber. He looked at the policeman and gauged him with his eye. Whether the police could be bribed was a problem Lovell had never had any occasion to solve. As a law-abiding and respectable youth, he naturally hoped that they couldn't. But on the present occasion, as a

motorist breaking the law, he rather hoped that they could.

He slid his hand into his pocket.

"The fact is——" he said slowly.

"Well, where is it? I've got to see it."

"The—the fact is, I haven't received it yet," stammered Lovell. "I've applied for it and paid for it. But it hasn't come along yet."

"I've 'eard that story afore," said the policeman, with a nod.

"It's true," exclaimed Lovell indignantly.

"I dessay. That ain't my business. My business is to take you into custody for breaking the lor."

Lovell shuddered.

"I—I suppose that will make it all right," he murmured. And he tried to slip a couple of half-crowns into the official hand.

The official hand was jerked back.

"You trying to bribe me!" exclaimed the constable.

"I—I——"

"The police can't be bribed, young man," said the plump constable, with a great deal of dignity. "I'm sorry, but I shall have to report this."

"For goodness' sake!" gasped Lovell.

"I—I—this will get me into a fearful row at my school. Go easy!"

"You'll have to come alonger me!"

"You've no right to take me into custody," snapped Lovell. "I'm jolly certain of that. You can take my name and address."

"Not arter you tried to bribe me," said the policeman stolidly. "I shall 'ave to take you to the station now."

"Look here——"

"Nuff said! You wheel that there bike along and come alonger me."

Lovell glared at the impassive man in blue.

"Wheel it yourself if you want to!" he growled.

The constable stepped to the scooter. He turned on sufficient petrol to move it at a walking pace, and started.

Lovell walked on the other side of the scooter, a prey to deeply troubled thoughts.

The constable did not speak a word as he tramped on. Apparently he was deeply offended by the offer of a bribe, and intended to make things as bad as he could for the offender.

Lovell's steps lagged.

What was going to happen to him? At the station he would have to give his name and address—Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood School. The charge would be motoring without a driver's licence and attempting to bribe the police. It would not be called "tipping a bobby," it would be called bribing the police—a very serious matter. What was the penalty? A fine—perhaps a heavy fine. Surely it couldn't be chokey! Lovell shuddered. After all, he was only a schoolboy, and a first offender. No, it couldn't possibly be chokey. But the Head of Rookwood, of course, would be referred to. A constable would call at the school, and Lovell fairly shuddered as he thought of the interview with the Head afterwards.

He lagged still more.

The policeman did not seem to observe it. Perhaps it had not occurred to him that the owner of the scooter might think of abandoning his jigger. But that was, in fact, exactly what Lovell was thinking of.

He worked it out in his excited mind. Nine pounds had been paid for the scooter. But the fine might be more than that—ten guineas, perhaps. It would be cheaper to lose the scooter than to pay the fine. And if he could get clear, that awful scene with the Head at Rookwood could be escaped.

Evidently Lovell's best move was to escape if he could, leaving the scooter in the hands of the policeman. He would have preferred to collar it and escape on it. But that was im-

practicable. The constable would not have given him a chance to mount.

Lovell dropped quite behind, his heart beating fast. At the station he would have to give his name and address. But so far he was unknown. This man could not even know that he belonged to Rookwood at all. Now was his time.

The policeman glanced round.

"Keep moving," he said. "You're wasting time. 'Ere, you, come back! Where are you going? My eye! Stop!"

Lovell did not stop.

He had turned from the road and was tearing up one of the little paths into the wood.

"Stop!" roared the policeman.

Lovell vanished into the wood.

He thought he heard steps behind him. Once, indeed, he thought he heard a sound of laughter. But that he supposed must be imagination. He ran on and on, desperately, into the very heart of the wood. He did not stop until he was quite breathless.

After that, secure now from pursuit and capture, Arthur Edward Lovell picked his way by devious paths to the school. And never had he been so glad to get safe within the gates of Rookwood.

A motor-scooter stopped at Mr. Boodle's little shop in Rookham, and a large bundle was handed over to Mr. Boodle by Jimmy Silver. In that bundle were contained the helmet and the uniform of the policeman who had stopped Lovell, as well as his eyebrows, his beard, and his moustache. His complexion had been washed off in a stream.

And Jimmy Silver, with a smiling face, remounted the scooter and scooted out of Rookham and rejoined Raby and Newcome on the Redmayne road, and the three chuckling juniors took their way to Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise for Lovell.

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL tramped rather wearily into the House and up to the end study. He was home much later than he had intended; his dodgings and windings in the wood had taken time, and he had had a long walk back. The cricket match was long over—not that Lovell gave it a thought. He was wondering dismally how he was going to explain to his chums. He expected to find them in the study—and there they were, gathered round the table at tea. Three smiling faces were turned towards Lovell as he came wearily in.

"Had a good time?" asked Jimmy Silver affably.

Lovell grunted and dropped into the armchair.

"Oh, yes! Fine!" he said.

"Where's the scooter?"

"The—the scooter?"

"Left it at Bundy's?" asked Raby.

"Nunno!"

"Brought it to the school, then?"

"N-n-no."

The three smiling faces were inquiring now.

"Well, where is it, then?" asked Newcome. "Had an accident?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, tea's ready," said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell was hungry, but he was not thinking of tea. How was he going to explain?

His face grew crimson under the glances of the three. He shifted uncomfortably in the armchair.

"I'd better tell you fellows," he blurted out at last.

"What's happened?" smiled Jimmy.

"I've lost the scooter."

"Lost it?"

"I—I had to let it go!" Lovell breathed hard. "Fact is, I—I was

stopped and asked to show my licence."

"My hat!"

"When did that happen?" asked Raby gravely.

"On the Redmayne road, as I was coming back. I—I tried to tip the beast, but it was N.G. I—I thought I'd better clear and let the dashed jigger go. Of course, I shall refund what you fellows paid on it—that's understood," said Lovell hastily.

"Oh, never mind about that!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "That's all right. Perhaps it would have been better to wait for your licence, after all, old man."

"I—I wish I had! But who'd have thought it?" groaned Lovell. "Look here, don't you begin saying 'I told you so,' or there will be a row in this study."

"Well, I like that!" said Raby. "You ride without a licence against our advice, and you lose our scooter and—"

"Jolly lucky we've found it, isn't it?" said Jimmy Silver affably.

"Found it?" ejaculated Lovell.

"Yes."

Lovell jumped out of the chair.

"You've got the scooter?"

"Yes. It's in the bike-shed now—and it's going to stay there till the licences come along!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

Lovell stared blankly at his chums.

"You—you—you've got the scooter?" he gasped. "You—you—you're pulling my leg! You—I—I—"

Lovell rushed from the study. Seeing was believing, and he sprinted away for the bike-shed, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckling.

Lovell was back in the end study in a few minutes.

"It's there!" he said. "It's all right. How on earth did you get it back?" I can't understand it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"It was easy enough—easy as motoring without a licence, or easier," said Jimmy Silver. "You see, we knew that policeman."

"You—you knew him?"

"Yes. He's a pal of ours!" grinned Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell stared at his chums in utter perplexity. His brain did not work quickly; indeed, there were fellows in the Rookwood Fourth who declared that it did not work at all. The motor-scooter was in the bike-shed, that was certain—but how it had got there was an impenetrable mystery to Lovell.

"Shut up cackling!" he howled at last. "Tell me how it happened! How did you know anything about it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see," gasped Jimmy Silver, "that policeman was a Rookwood chap—"

"What?"

"The bobby's uniform and whiskers came from Boodle's, and the bobby himself came from this study."

Lovell jumped.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Little me!" explained Jimmy Silver. "Just to give you a lesson, old fellow! Catch on?"

Even then it was a full minute before Arthur Edward Lovell caught on. And when he caught on he rushed at Jimmy Silver, hitting out right and left. Whereupon his chums collared him promptly and bumped him on the study carpet, and bumped him till Arthur Edward reluctantly consented to make it "pax"—and peace was restored in the end study.

And even then his chums received no thanks for looking after Lovell.

CHAPTER 7.

Lovell Asks For It!

"BUCK up!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"For goodness' sake," said Arthur Edward Lovell in a tone of in-

tense 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.

On their lowest gears Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome ground on manfully up the rise. Lovell sailed on airily.

He could have let out his machine and sailed airily away, but he was

kindly keeping pace with his comrades. But on the petrol-bike Lovell did not quite realise the steepness of the hill. He was an energetic youth, and he wanted to get on. It seemed to him that his three comrades were simply crawling.

So for an hour or so Lovell had been urging them to buck up.

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?"

"Brr-r-r-r!"

"Blessed if I think you chaps are quite fit for a cycling tour," remarked Lovell. "I'm beginning to think that you ought to have hired a London Transport omnibus for this trip!"

"You silly ass!" gasped Raby.

"You cheeky chump!" breathed Newcome.

"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.

As a matter of fact, the three juniors would have been wheeling their machines up the hill before this but for Lovell. Lovell was in a sarcastic mood.

But patience had its limits. Three

dusty and perspiring juniors started wheeling their bikes, and Lovell had to slow down still further.

"Look here, it's another mile to the top, at least!" he snapped.

"All the more reason for taking it easy!" growled Newcome.

"All the more reason for bucking up, I think!" said Lovell warmly. "We want to get to camp."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Dry up!"

"Look here, this dashed jigger will topple over if I have to slow down like this," exclaimed Lovell.

"Let it!"

"All the better, if you topple over with it. It may make you shut up for a minute or two."

"Hear, hear!"

Tempers seemed to be growing a little crusty.

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 petrol 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?"

Three juniors breathed hard. Arthur Edward Lovell was in danger, just then, of being collared by his exasperated chums and rolled headlong in the dust.

But he did not realise his danger. He was feeling very fresh and fit, and slightly contemptuous. It was one of Lovell's weaknesses that he was liable at any moment to take on an attitude of lofty superiority. With or

without reason he would do it—generally without.

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

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! Tired?"

"Yes. And if you say another word I'll jolly well punch you in the eye!" roared Raby. "I'm not too tired for that!"

Lovell laughed again. He wheeled the motor-scooter to the roadside, and leaned it against a tree. Then he stood with his hands in his pockets, regarding his three chums, sitting in the grass, with an ironical grin.

"Well, if you're fagged you'd better rest," he said. "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!"

Perhaps Lovell lacked imagination a little. He really did not seem to catch on to the fact that he was still fresh because he had been sitting at ease on a motor-scooter while his comrades were driving at obstinate pedals with tired legs.

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 collecting it!

CHAPTER 8.
And Gets It!

"O W, 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.

"I've a jolly good mind to bag that scooter, and let Lovell take his turn with a push-bike!" growled Raby.

Jimmy shook his head.

"It's Lovell's way," he said.

"Well, why can't the ass dry up?" growled Raby. "We shouldn't hear so much gas if he happened to run out of petrol."

"It's old Lovell's way," said Jimmy tolerantly. "We've all got our faults. That's Lovell's."

"Br-r-r!" grunted Raby.

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.

"I say——" began Jimmy.

Raby chuckled.

"Good!"

"That's a waste of good petrol, and it costs money, you know," said Jimmy, as the "juice" soaked away into the thick grass.

Newcome did not heed.

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.

"Sure you're rested enough?" inquired Lovell.

"Oh, quite!"

"Good! Let's get going again—and, for goodness' sake, buck up a little, if you can. This isn't a crawling match, you know."

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 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.

"Well, if you chaps don't mind," said Lovell.

"Not at all!" grinned Raby.

"Right-ho, then! It's rather rotten, crawling along like a dashed snail, waiting for you chaps! I'll buzz off!" said Lovell.

"Oh, do!" said Jimmy Silver.

"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."

"Sure?"

"I suppose I ought to know!"

"Very likely; but there's lots of things you ought to know, that you don't know, old chap!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

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 silly ass!"

"It's a bit rotten, crawling along like a dashed snail!" remarked Raby.

Arthur Edward Lovell ceased his frantic efforts with the scooter for a moment, to glare at Raby. Raby had only repeated Lovell's own words; but Lovell did not seem to like hearing himself quoted.

"You dummy!" he said.

"Eh?"

"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."

Lovell ought really to have been pleased at hearing himself quoted in this way. But he did not look pleased.

He gave Newcome a withering glare, and then, breathing hard and deep, turned his attention to the machine.

He did not think of looking into the tank. He knew that he had filled it,

and knew that it did not leak. So there was no occasion to look into it.

Something was wrong somewhere, but Lovell could not even begin to guess what was the matter with the scooter.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged smiles.

"Well, are you coming?" asked Newcome.

"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 got to Jericho, and the sooner the better!" howled Lovell.

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

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"We're off, then," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

And the three cyclists moved on up the hill.

Behind them, as they departed, they heard the snorting of the petrol jigger, exhausting the last drops of petrol in Lovell's frantic endeavours to get it started. They also heard Lovell addressing the jigger, and his remarks to it were frequent and painful and free.

From the top of the rise they looked back. Lovell, a speck in the distance, had given up trying to start the petrol-bike. He was wheeling it, crimson with exertion, and with perspiration streaming down his face.

"Dear man!" murmured Newcome. "I wonder whether he's thought of looking in the tank yet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not much use if he does, as he's out

of petrol," said Raby. "Dear old Lovell! He won't be quite so sarcastic by the time he gets to camp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And three cyclists rode down 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 Newcome 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.

CHAPTER 9.

A Friend in Need!

"**B**LOW!"

It said much for the way Arthur Edward Lovell had been brought up that he only said "Blow!" Motorists in Lovell's hapless situation

often said things to which "Blow!" was a trifle light as air.

Lovell had halted on the hill.

The scooter weighed a good deal. It seemed to Lovell now that it weighed some thousands of tons.

On previous occasions when he had had to wheel it up a steep hill he had had the help of the petrol. Now he had to barge on with the heavy vehicle without assistance. And the sun was like a ball of fire in the sky. 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.

Still, he was glad to know what was the matter. There was nothing wrong with the machine. Only he needed petrol, and he was nowhere near a spot where it could be obtained. He halted, leaned his jigger on a stone by the roadside, and sat down to rest, mopping his streaming brow. A passing motorist might oblige him with enough juice to carry him to Burney. He relied on the freemasonry of the road for that. It was only necessary to wait for a passing motorist.

But the road did not seem used much by cars. No motorist appeared in the offing as Lovell sat and waited.

"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 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 'arf 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.

If Mr. Parkins was called Honest John, those who called him so certainly did not judge by appearances.

"I'm much obliged," said Lovell, "but——"

He sat down again.

Honest John eyed him rather keenly. Perhaps he realised that he had no chance of being left in charge of the motor-scooter.

"Like me to fetch the juice for you, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, good! Will you?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Certainly, sir! Give me a can and a couple of bob to pay for it, and I'll do the trick."

Again Lovell hesitated. He was not a suspicious fellow, but he could not help having a misgiving. Suppose Honest John, once out of sight, threw the petrol can into a ditch, and cleared off to the nearest inn with the two "bob." It seemed only too probable.

But the situation was getting desperate. No motorist appeared in sight, it was many miles to Burney, and the sun was sinking. And Lovell would have run any risk, almost, rather than have attempted to wheel the scooter over the hill.

"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 John were tempted to d&camp 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 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 a whole canful, 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 blown 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 need for me to drag it up the hill again."

"I don't want it!" said Lovell, very loftily. "You can drag it up the hill 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!

CHAPTER 10.

Juice Wanted!

"WATER!"

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.

"The—the villain!" gasped Lovell.

He glared round him. Honest John had vanished somewhere beyond the trees. Lovell might have traced him, had he known the direction of the nearest inn. But he didn't know it.

"Oh dear!" groaned Lovell.

He glanced after Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was a score of yards away, wheeling his bike up the hill, and fastened to it was the can of petrol he had bought at Burney, and which Lovell had disdainfully rejected. The hapless Arthur Edward repented him now of his lofty disdain.

He opened his lips to call after Jimmy, and shut them again. He felt that he simply couldn't ask Jimmy for the petrol now.

"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

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

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

"Jimmy! I—I——"

"It's all right!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We all get waxy at times, especially in the hot weather. Get your jigger, old man, and let's get on to Burney together."

Lovell's face, already crimson, deepened a little in hue. He realised that there was a misunderstanding.

"The—the petrol——" he gasped.

"Yes, what about it?"

"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.

"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 chuckling, unfastened the can and handed it over to Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell took it gingerly enough.

"I—I suppose I ought to thank you for this!" he growled.

He did not look very thankful.

"Not if it gives you a pain, old chap," answered Jimmy affably. "Don't worry!"

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Lovell.

Having thus expressed his thanks, Arthur Edward Lovell walked back to the motor-scooter.

Jimmy Silver, still smiling, resumed pushing his bike up the hill. Soon afterwards he heard the throbbing of the motor-scooter, and Lovell came zugging up the rise of the road. He passed Jimmy Silver, and shot on ahead, without a word or a glance, and Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. This was Lovell's gratitude, apparently, for the trouble he had taken in coming back for him.

But a quarter of a mile on, Lovell wheeled round the petrol-bike in the road, and came whizzing back. He jumped off, and grinned at Jimmy.

"Get on!" he said.

"I'm walking to the top."

"Get on the scooter, I mean," said Lovell. "I'll wheel your bike for a bit." Jimmy Silver laughed.

"All serene, old chap! I'm about done," he said. "I'll wait for you at the top."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver gladly mounted the motor-scooter. His legs were feeling as if they would drop off from weariness. On top of a long day in the saddle, he had come back five miles for Lovell with the supply of petrol, and never had a bike seemed so heavy to push uphill. It was a welcome rest to sit in the roomy saddle of the motor-scooter, and glide on without an effort.

On top of the hill he halted for Lovell to come up. Arthur Edward joined him at last, and they mounted to ride down the slope to Burney Common.

"I shall be ready for supper when we get in," remarked Lovell, keeping pace with Jimmy on the scooter. "I suppose those asses will have the camp ready. Lucky you came back for me! I've got all the grub on the carrier, and

you couldn't have had any supper till I got in. I say, Jimmy——"

"Well?"

"We were thinking of getting on a long way to-morrow; but——"

"No reason why we shouldn't," said Jimmy. "We're rather fagged now, but it will be all right in the morning."

"Yes; but——"

Lovell evidently had some other reason in his mind.

"But what?" asked Jimmy.

"What about putting in a day or so at Burney?" asked Lovell. "I believe there's a giddy Roman ruin, or something——"

"Oh, bother the Roman ruins!"

"Lots of beautiful scenery, and all that——"

"You never look at the scenery."

"Well, it's fine, all the same."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Look here, Lovell, what do you want to hang on at Burney for? Out with it!"

"H'm! I'd like to look round a bit."

"At the scenery?"

"Well, you chaps can look at the scenery, and all that, while I look for that chap who sold me a can of water for petrol."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy.

"You can chortle," grunted Lovell, "but I want to find him. I want to give him a thick ear before we leave these parts, if I can."

"Bosh!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Let him rip! We didn't come out to go rooting about the downs after a tramp."

"I'm going to find him and give him a hiding," said Lovell doggedly. "I shall stay on if you fellows don't. There!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell.

"There's the camp," said Jimmy Silver, pointing.

In the distance, where a wood of beeches skirted the common, a silvery stream glimmered in the sun. That was the spot that had been selected

for the camp, and there Jimmy had left Raby and Newcome. The two riders changed machines, then turned from the high road, and followed a track across the common in the red sunset, both of them eager to get to camp and to supper.

CHAPTER 11.

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 had 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.

"Oot 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 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

"blue" 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 snapper-up of unconsidered trifles."

"Waitin' er 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 believe 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 suddenly. 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.

CHAPTER 12.

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. Leaving 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 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 a

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 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!"

"Whoooo!" 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 stream-

ing 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 gives 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 seven pounds."

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

"That's all right—I can begin again."

"Ere, I say! Yarooop! Help! Murder! Whoop" roared Honest John in anguish.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
"There's a ditch across the road," gasped Jimmy. "Roll him in and leave him."

"Good!"

"Ow! Oh lor'!Ow, wow! Chuck it! Ow!"

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. Jimmy Silver and Lovell were quite relieved to get out of hearing. They rode off, Jimmy riding his own machine and wheeling Raby's, leaving Honest John to crawl out of the mud and the stinging nettles. He crawled out, a horrid-looking object.

On the track on the common the juniors came on Raby, hot and breathless and spent. His face brightened up at the sight of his bike, however.

"You—you've got it back!" he exclaimed.

Lovell smiled genially.

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

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Raby.

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

from Lovell's memory. But that was one of the ways of Arthur Edward.

It was quite a cheery camp, after all, on Burney Common that summer night. Honest John, in his lair, wherever it was, probably was not in a joyful mood. But cheery contentment reigned in the camp of the Rookwood rambles.

CHAPTER 13.

The Stolen Scooter!

SLASH!
Jimmy Silver looked up from his breakfast.

The Fistical Four of the Rookwood Fourth were in camp on a slope of the Sussex downs.

Fields and meadows stretched away on all sides, with a pleasant-looking red-roofed farmhouse in the distance. Close at hand, a stream ran under an old stone bridge, the banks thickly clothed with willows and elders.

Three push-bikes, and Lovell's celebrated scooter, stood against a big tree. The Rookwood rambles were very careful not to leave their machines out of sight for a moment, since the occasion when a rascally tramp had nearly succeeded in bagging one of them.

Over breakfast, the chums of Rookwood were discussing that incident, and it happened, when the loud splash from the stream interrupted them. Jimmy Silver was of opinion that he had seen the tramp that day—the frowsy, unwashed gentleman whose name was Parkins, and who called himself Honest John. Being under the impression that he had seen the man, Jimmy suspected that Mr. Parkins was dogging the party, in his character of a snapper-of unconsidered trifles.

Arthur Edward Lovell pooh-poohed the idea. Mr. Parkins, in Lovell's opinion, had been too severely handled to want to have anything more to do with the Rookwood party.

The heavy splash interrupted the discussion. Something—or somebody—had fallen into the stream, beyond the thick willows that hid the water from the sight of the campers.

"Help!"

It was a loud yell from the stream.

"Hallo! That's somebody in!" exclaimed Raby.

Jimmy Silver sprang to his feet.

He dropped his teacup in his hurry. Fortunately, it was a tin cup. Unfortunately, the tea in it was hot, and Lovell's leg was in the way when it fell. There was a roar from Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yoooooop!"

"Help!" came in a yell from the stream. "I'm drowning! Oh, help! Help! Help!"

"Come on!" panted Jimmy.

He rushed away towards the stream, brushing hurriedly through the willows and elders. Raby and Newcome rushed after him. Arthur Edward Lovell stayed only a moment to rub the place where the hot tea had fallen, and rushed after the others.

The Fistical Four burst through the thickets, and came out on the water's edge, breathlessly.

They scanned the shining waters that rippled along in the summer sunshine, singing through the rushes and reeds. There was no sign of a swimmer in the stream.

"He's gone down!" muttered Raby, his face paling.

"Or the current's taken him along!" exclaimed Newcome. "Come on, quick!"

The four juniors ran along the bank of the stream, anxiously eyeing the rippling waters. The stream wound and turned and twisted, and they could not see very far along it, the banks being thick with willows. They ran through bush and briar, panting and breathless, anxious to help the unfortunate unknown who had cried for help.

But there was no sign of him to be seen.

"He's gone under," said Lovell.

"It's queer, though," said Jimmy Silver, knitting his brows. "We weren't a minute getting to the water, and——"

"Well, we can't see him."

"I—I wonder——"

Jimmy Silver paused.

It seemed impossible to believe that a terrible tragedy had taken place in those few minutes, in the bright summer morning—that a hapless man had gone to his death in the waters, with help so close at hand. Certainly, it was possible, but——

"We ought to see some signs of him," said Jimmy. "If he went under, he ought to rise again——"

"Might be caught in the rushes, or something."

"Or it might be some chap pulling our leg!" growled Jimmy Silver, "or——"

Chug-chug-chug!

Jimmy Silver jumped.

The chugging of a small engine came through the clear air, from the direction of the leafy lane close at hand.

It was not the powerful voice of a motor-bicycle. It was the well-known voice of the motor-scooter. Well the juniors knew that chug-chug!

"The scooter!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Sounds like ours, doesn't it?" said Lovell.

"It is ours!" roared Jimmy. "We've been gammoned, you ass! Come on, hop it!"

Jimmy Silver tore madly back towards the camp.

Raby and Newcome dashed after him at top speed. They understood the suspicion that had flashed into Jimmy Silver's mind—that the splash and the cry for help had been a trick to draw them away from their camp while the trickster pilfered their belongings. Arthur Edward Lovell stood and stared after them. Lovell's brain never worked very quickly.

"I say," he shouted, "what——"

The other three did not heed. Panting, they rushed back to the camp, tearing frantically through the bushes and thickets.

"Gone!" gasped Jimmy Silver, halting, breathless.

Three push-bikes lay sprawling on the ground. But of the motor-scooter there was no sign.

It had vanished.

Chug-chug-chug! came faintly from the distance, through the balmy air of the sunny August morning.

Jimmy Silver ran desperately into the lane. Far away, in a cloud of dust, he spotted the motor-scooter, going strong. A frowsy-looking gentleman, in a battered bowler hat, was mounted upon it. Jimmy Silver had only a back view of him, and only for a moment or two; but he knew that it was Mr. Parkins.

"That villain!" he gasped.

The motor-scooter vanished round a curve of the lane. For a minute or so a chugging of it echoed faintly from distance. Then the sound died.

The motor-scooter was gone; and Honest John was gone with it.

CHAPTER 14.

Nothing Doing!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL came back to the camp, frowning. His look was rather accusing, as he fixed his eyes on his comrades.

"Look here——" he said.

"The scooter's been stolen!" snapped Raby.

"I can see that! It's bad enough, but human life comes first," said Lovell severely. "Blow the scooter, if you come to that! We've got to save that man from drowning!"

"You silly ass!" roared Newcome.

"If you think I'm a silly ass to want to save a man's life——" hooted Lovell.

"Fathead!"

"Why, you're an unfeeling rotter,

Newcome!" exclaimed Lovell hotly. "Can jolly well tell you——"

"Oh, listen a minute, ass!" interrupted Jimmy Silver. "I'll try to explain in words of one syllable."

"Look here——"

"There never was a man drowning!" howled Jimmy. "It was a trick to get us away from the camp. While we were rooting along the stream that villain was sneaking through the bushes to the camp to get hold of the scooter——see?"

Arthur Edward Lovell shook his head. "I don't think so for a moment," he answered.

"You silly owl——"

"Look here——"

"It was Parkins!" yelled Jimmy. "I've just seen him. Getting off with the scooter. Don't be an ass, Lovell!"

"Well, my opinion is——"

"Bow-wow! Let's get going, you chaps. We may catch that villain yet," exclaimed Jimmy. "He may run short of petrol, perhaps. How was the scooter fixed for petrol, Lovell?"

"Full up!" answered Lovell. "I'm always careful, you know."

"You would be—at the wrong time," said Jimmy crossly. "Come on, you fellows! Quick! You look after the camp, Lovell. No time to pack anything now."

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome dragged round their bicycles. Pursued by a motor-scooter on push-bike seemed a rather doubtful proposition, but the chums of Rookwood were determined to make an attempt, at least, to recover their property.

"Look here, I'm not staying behind," exclaimed Lovell warmly.

"You haven't a bike."

"I'll take yours."

"Rats!"

"You fellows will never catch him," roared Lovell, in great wrath. "I'm the man to do that, if it can be done. Call me one of those bikes, you conceited asses!"

"Somebody's got to stay and look after the camp."

"Well, one of you fellows can do that. That's all you're good for, really."

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not heed. They ran their bikes from the camp into the lane, and mounted them. Arthur Edward Lovell ran after them excitedly.

"Look here, you chumps——"

"You can go and rescue that drowning nobody in the stream!" yelled back Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome pedalled away in hot haste. They left Arthur Edward Lovell standing in the lane, staring after them in great wrath and indignation.

Arthur Edward did not go back to the stream to the rescue of the mythical drowning man. Even Arthur Edward had realised by this time that it was a trick, and that there was nobody in the water. He went back frowning to the camp to finish his breakfast.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver & Co. were putting on their best speed. They went round the bend in the lane, beyond which Mr. Parkins had disappeared with the scooter, at a terrific rate. A few minutes later they came out into a long white high-road.

There they slacked down, and looked this way and that way, like Moses of old. But Mr. Parkins was not in sight on the road.

"Which way did he go, blow him?" exclaimed Raby breathlessly. "Might have turned to the right or the left. Which?"

"And you're a Scout!" said Jimmy Silver severely.

Jimmy jumped from his machine, and stooped to scan the dusty road. The thick, heavy tracks of the scooter's tyres were marked there, quite legibly, in the dust, and they showed that the cycle thief had turned to the right.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Newcome.

"This way! Come on!" said Jimmy, jumping on his machine again.

And the Rookwood trio rode on at full speed.

For two or three miles they rode on rapidly, and they passed a good many cars, carts, bikes, and motor-bikes. But they did not spot a scooter.

Jimmy Silver slowed down at last. He realised that now that Mr. Parkins was safely out of sight with the stolen scooter, searching for him on the wide countryside was a good deal like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay.

"Nothing doing, you chaps," said Jimmy. "He's dodged us, and he may be a dozen miles away by this time."

"Or lying low in the woods," said Raby. "Waiting for us to clear off, very likely."

"Well, we can't search all the dashed county, foot by foot!" said Newcome. "Let's get back to Burney Common. We can report the theft at the police station in Ockley."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"That's about all we can do," he said. "My hat! I'd like to be within punching distance of that scoundrel!"

"Wouldn't I—just!" grunted Raby.

And the three baffled cyclists started on their return, a kindly agricultural native giving them directions as to a short cut through the woods, which saved a mile on the way back to Ockley Common.

CHAPTER 15.

St. Jim's Fellows!

"MIND you don't forget——"
"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy——"
"Wubbish! I am not likely to forget things like you fellows, I twust."

The speaker was an elegant youth—no other than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

Seven fellows were in camp under the beeches and oaks, in a little wood a mile from the village of Ockley.

Three of them belonged to the Shell at St. Jim's—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther. Four of them belonged to the St. Jim's Fourth—Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy. The seven were on tramp, enjoying a walking tour in the hot days of August.

Their luggage was of the lightest. All they had they carried in rucksacks.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at least, contrived to keep up an elegance of appearance that was worthy of the swell of St. Jim's.

The campers had turned out early that morning, and already Arthur Augustus had spent an hour or more in removing signs of travel from his garments. The swell of St. Jim's was quite able to rough it. Indeed, he prided himself upon being able to rough it with anybody. But a speck of dust on his trousers distressed him considerably, and a soiled collar worried him deeply.

"It's all wight," went on Arthur Augustus. "I shall be back in about an houah. You fellows get a camp-fire goin', and be weady to cook the gwub when I turn up."

"Don't forget——" repeated Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, you know what you are," said Blake. "If you come back without the things, we'll scrag you!"

"Wats!"

"Cut off, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll get some bathing while you're gone. There's a lovely pool only a little way off, near the footpath."

"Mind you don't get ddowned."

"Fathead!"

"Well, I weally hardly like to twust you chaps out of my sight," said Arthur Augustus seriously. "You are wathah weckless kids, you know. I shall be at least an houah gone, I feah. As a mattah of fact, deah boys, we made wathah a mistake in not bwing-in' at least one bike with us. Walkin' is all vevy well, and a wippin' exhacise.

But we have cut the baggage wathah too fine. This is my last clean collah."

"You should have made the first one last," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Is that a wotten pun, Lowthah?"

"Not at all; it's a jolly good pun."

"Wats! The weal twouble is, that I may not find a collah shop in Ockley. I shall be able to get the gwub all wight, but I am vevy doubtful about bein' able to get any collahs. It will be wathah howwid to have to walk about in a soiled collah."

"Awful!" said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Howevah, I have got an ideah," resumed the swell of St. Jim's.

"You have!" ejaculated six voices, in an astonished chorus.

"Pway don't wor, deah boys! I weally think we had bettah get a bike or somethin' to cawwy the baggage, and then we can keep plenty of collahs and shirts in hand. One of you fellows could wheel the bike, see, with the baggage on it."

"Bow-wow!"

"I wegard that as a widiculous ejaculation, Blake. Or, pewwaps a twuck would do," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "A twuck would cawwy more baggage than a bike, and I could put a suitcase in it. Would one of you fellows like to push a twuck?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can see myself doing it—I don't think," remarked Manners.

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled. They could not quite see themselves pushing a truck on that walking tour, even to provide Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with necessary changes of garments.

"Weally, you fellows, there is nothin' to cackle at!" said Arthur Augustus. "What about a wheel-bawwow?"

"What about getting off to Ockley, if you're going?" suggested Blake. "We want the grub for brekker, not for lunch or dinner or supper."

"Just goin', deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus started at last.

He walked elegantly away by the footpath, and disappeared among the trees.

"He's actually got off!" yawned Blake. "I wonder whether he will buy a bike, or a truck, or a wheel-barrow, at Ockley? It would be like him. I was rather surprised at Gussy consenting to come on a walking-tour without a suitcase and a hatbox and a six-foot trunk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The old ass will be at least an hour gone," said Tom Merry. "Let's go and get a swim."

"Let's!" assented Lowther.

And the juniors of St. Jim's strolled away from their camp to the enticing pool in the midst of the wood, and in a few minutes were enjoying themselves in the water.

It was nearly an hour later that they came back to their camp under the beeches near the footpath; but there was no sign yet of the return of Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry & Co. were feeling cheery and refreshed after their swim. But they were also feeling extremely hungry.

Provisions had run out at supper the previous evening, and there was nothing for breakfast. Arthur Augustus had volunteered to fetch a supply from the neighbouring village. As that village was only a mile or so away, an hour seemed ample time.

But the minutes ticked away, and Arthur Augustus did not reappear.

"He's found a collar-shop!" groaned Blake. "Ten to one he's nosing over collars and ties, and has forgotten all about brekker!"

"Bother him!" grunted Herries.

"We'll bump him when he comes back!" said Digby.

The juniors nodded assent. There was solace in that prospect; but it did not alter the fact that they were very hungry.

Another half-hour glided by.

By that time Tom Merry & Co. were feeling not only hungry, but ferocious.

Bumping no longer seemed good enough for Gussy. Something lingering, with boiling oil in it, was nearer the mark.

"Look here, I'm getting fed-up!" said Blake at last.

"I wish I were!" sighed Lowther. "I feel as if it were weeks since I was fed!"

"Don't make rotten puns now, you ass!" roared Blake. "I'm hungry. We'd better strike camp and clear out for the village."

"We shall miss Gussy on the way," said Tom Merry. "He will turn up here with the grub and find us gone."

"Let him!" grunted Manners.

"Hallo, here comes somebody."

There was a sound of bicycles on the footpath through the wood. The juniors of St. Jim's looked along the path with a faint hope that it was Arthur Augustus returning.

Three cyclists came along the path. Arthur Augustus was not one of them, but the three fellows were quite well known by sight to Tom Merry & Co.

"Rookwood chaps!" said Blake.

Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome glanced at the six fellows standing by the footpath. They slowed down.

"Hallo, St. Jim's!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo, Rookwood!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped down. Cheery greetings were exchanged between the two parties of juniors, and then Jimmy asked:

"Seen anything of a frowsy-looking fellow on a scooter?"

"No," said Tom Merry. "Lost a scooter?"

"That's it."

"Rotten luck! How did it happen?"

Jimmy Silver explained. The St. Jim's fellows were sympathetic; but they had seen nothing of Mr. Parkins or the motor-scooter. The cycle-thief had not come their way.

"We'd ask you to join us at brekker," said Tom Merry ruefully, "only there isn't any brekker. We're waiting for

D'Arcy to get back with supplies, and he seems to have lost himself, or something."

"Then let us ask you to join us at brekker," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Our camp is only about a mile away. Lovell's there looking after it. We've got lots of stuff. We had our breakfast hours ago. Trot along with us."

"Good egg!" said Manners.

"But what about Gussy?" said Blake. "You know Gussy. He may be hours yet, but he is bound to come hopping in the minute we've gone."

"Yes, rather; that's Gussy!"

"Leave a note for him," suggested Raby. "You can stick it on a tree."

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. They were getting into a famished state now, and Jimmy Silver's kind invitation was really too good to be disregarded. And as Arthur Augustus had been nearly two hours absent it was obvious that something or other had detained him, so there really was no telling when he would appear.

"Good!" said Tom, at last. "He's bound to see the note, and he can come on after us."

"That's right."

"Give us the bearings of your camp, and I'll scribble a note," said Tom Merry.

And a note, scrawled on a leaf from Tom's pocket-book, was pinned on the trunk of the beech under which the St. Jim's juniors had camped. It ran:

"FATHEAD!

"We've gone on to Burney Common with some Rookwood chaps. You'll find us there by the stone bridge.—TOM MERRY.

"P.S.—Ass!

"P.P.S.—Chump!"

And, leaving that note for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to find on his return, Tom Merry & Co. walked away with the Rookwooders, the latter wheeling their bicycles; and the camp under the beeches was deserted.

CHAPTER 16.

D'Arcy Explains!

"I WONDAAH—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused to consider.

The swell of St. Jim's had arrived at Ockley village, and had carried out his shopping. Unfortunately, he had not found a hosier's or an outfitter's shop, and his failing supply of clean collars had not been replenished. But at the village store he had laid in an ample supply of provisions, and his rucksack was crammed with them. With that load on his elegant shoulders, Arthur Augustus had started to walk back to the beech wood.

Now he was at the parting of the ways.

He paused where three lanes branched off from one another, without the ghost of a signpost in view.

One of those lanes, Arthur Augustus knew, led back to the camp where he had left his comrades. But which of them it was, was a deep problem, which Gussy had now to solve.

Certainly he was not more than half a mile from the St. Jim's camp; and he had not felt the slightest doubt about his ability to find the beech wood again. But all the woods about him on the slopes of the downs seemed to look so much alike as he scanned them. And all the dusty little lanes had a strong family resemblance. And the hedges and trees were so high and thick that it was difficult to see any distance. Arthur Augustus was perplexed.

"It's no good goin' on without bein' suah of the wight way," he reflected sagely. "I wondah which of these beastly woods is the wight one, and whethah any of them is the wight one. Weally, it is vewy puzzlin'!"

Arthur Augustus took off his rucksack while he was puzzling out his problem. It was crammed with supplies, and it was very heavy. More than ever the swell of St. Jim's realised that the walking party had made

mistake in not bringing some sort of a luggage-carrier with them.

He laid the rucksack on the ground, and sat down on the grassy bank by the lane to rest and consider.

Behind him was a thick hedge, and near at hand there was a gap in the hedge. After a few minutes Arthur Augustus became conscious of the fact that someone was looking at him through the gap.

He glanced round.

An extremely shabby, not to say frowsy, gentleman, was looking out from the field, scanning the swell of St. Jim's.

As he caught D'Arcy's glance he touched his battered hat very respectfully, and came out into the lane.

"Mornin', sir!" he said.

"Good-mornin'!" answered Arthur Augustus politely.

He did not like the frowsy gentleman's looks very much. But the swell of St. Jim's was always courteous.

"Nice mornin', sir."

"Vewy nice."

"You don't 'appen to know of a job goin' in these 'ere parts, sir?"

"I am vewy sowwy, but I do not," said Arthur Augustus. "If you are lookin' for work, I twust you will find it soon."

"Lookin' for it for weeks, sir," said the frowsy gentleman. "Fair 'unting for it, sir. Wife and family at 'ome—seven children, sir—and a hold grandfather of seventy."

"Bai Jove, that is vewy hard cheese!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Name of Parkins, sir," said the frowsy gentleman. "Generally called Honest John, in my parts, sir. Any kind of work. It's all the same to me, so long as it's honest work, sir."

"That is a vewy pwopah pwinciple, Mr. Parkins."

"But it's 'ard to find in these 'ere times, sir," said Parkins, with a sigh. "I've been going round on my motor-scooter, sir, looking for work all over the country."

"Bai Jove! Have you?" said Arthur Augustus, still polite, but a little surprised. Even to Gussy's unsuspecting mind a motor-scooter seemed rather an expensive possession for an unemployed man with a wife, seven children, and an aged grandfather to support.

"You see, sir, I wasn't always so low down in the world," said Mr. Parkins. "I 'ad a good job, and then I bought that scooter. Couldn't afford a motor-bike, sir, but that scooter was a good one. I'd 'ave parted with it long ago, but it came in useful, going long distances looking for work."

"I quite undahstand," assented Arthur Augustus.

"But it will 'ave to go at last, sir," sighed Mr. Parkins. "It's a good scooter, sir. I've got it 'ere, in this field. The dealers is 'ard to do with, sir. I gave a lot for that scooter when I had the ready. Now I'd let it go for a five-pound note."

"That is wathah hard!"

"It's worth fifteen, if a penny. But the dealers is 'ard. I've been offered four pounds in Ockley. But I was in 'opes of finding somebody who'd spring a fiver on it. Like to 'ave a look at it, sir?"

"Weally, I do not think I have the time—"

"I'll run it out for you to see, sir," said Mr. Parkins.

For reasons best known to himself, Mr. Parkins looked very sharply up and down the lane and across the fields. Then he disappeared through the gap in the hedge, and a minute or two later reappeared wheeling out the motor-scooter.

Arthur Augustus knew something about petrol-bikes, and he was interested in them. He had handled his brother Conway's motor-bicycle, and was quite expert with it. So, when he looked at the motor-scooter, he could see that it was a good machine. It showed many signs of wear and tear, and was evidently far from new. But

it was in quite good condition, so far as its working powers went. Certainly it was worth nine or ten pounds, at least.

"Not a bad little jigger, sir, what?" said Mr. Parkins.

"Not at all," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vevy hard to have to part with it for a few pounds."

"Fact is, sir, I'd be glad of the money," said Mr. Parkins. Undoubtedly Mr. Parkins' appearance bore out that statement. "I want to get back 'ome with something for my poor old grandmother—"

"Bai Jove! You are supportin' a gwandmothah as well as a gwand-fathah!" said Arthur Augustus sympathetically.

Mr. Parkins coughed.

"I—I mean—yes, sir. Feller can't desert them what brought him up from a litle nipper, sir."

"Vevy wight and pwopah," said Arthur Augustus.

"Pr'aps you'd care to buy that there jigger, sir?" suggested Mr. Parkins. "It's a good machine. It's carried me many a 'undred miles, looking for work."

Arthur Augustus looked very thoughtful.

Undoubtedly the motor-scooter was good value for the money. And it would solve the difficulty of baggage for the walking-party. There was a carrier on it, and that carrier would convey all the many changes of raiment which Arthur Augustus required to make his noble mind really easy.

Mr. Parkins watched his face slyly.

"Only a fiver, sir, and it's yours," he said.

"Thank you vevy much," said Arthur Augustus. "But weally—"

"Make it four pound ten, sir," said Mr. Parkins generously.

"I did not mean that, Mr. Parkins. I have five pounds to spare; but I'm bound to say that the machine is worth more than that," explained Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not feel quite

justified in takin' it fwom you for five pounds."

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Mr. Parkins.

"On the othah hand," continued Arthur Augustus, "I do not think that I could spare more than five pounds."

"Make it a fiver, sir, and you'll be 'elping a pore man on his way," said Mr. Parkins.

"You are suah you will be satisfied?" asked Arthur Augustus:

"Oh, yes, sir—quite! More'n satisfied."

Arthur Augustus looked at the machine again. Certainly it would be an acquisition at the price. And it would be very useful. That heavy rucsack would go into the carrier. And as soon as he found the direction he would be back in camp in a few minutes on the scooter. And it was agreeable to think of the surprise of Tom Merry & Co. when he arrived on the scooter. They would jump to the conclusion that he had given about twenty pounds for it. And their astonishment would be great when they learned what a bargain he had made.

"Licence on it, sir, paid up to the end of the year," said Mr. Parkins. "throw that in for nothing, sir."

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus. "I can send home for my dwivah licence. You are quite suah that you will be satisfied to part with the machine for five pounds?"

"Only too pleased, sir."

"Then it is a go," said Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's took out his little Russia-leather pocket-book, and five pound notes passed into the possession of Mr. Parkins. That gentleman scarcely stayed to thank the purchaser. Perhaps he was in a hurry to get home to his wife, his seven children, and his aged grandparents, or perhaps he had other reasons for wishing to get to safe distance from the scooter with D'Arcy's money in his pocket.

At all events, he disappeared

promptly, and Arthur Augustus, in a very satisfied frame of mind, was left in possession of the motor-scooter for which Jimmy Silver & Co. were searching.

CHAPTER 17.

Lovell Takes the Matter in Hand!

"UTTER rot!"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell. Left to mind the camp by the stone bridge on Burney Common, Lovell was far from satisfied.

The motor-scooter had been stolen, and there seemed only a slight chance of getting it back. That slight chance practically vanished—in Lovell's opinion—when he was left behind. Without him, what chance had the Rookwood trio of running down the cycle-thief?

Exactly what Lovell would have done, had he been able to join in the pursuit, was not, perhaps, quite clear. But he was quite assured that without him nothing would be done.

He "mooched" about the Rookwood camp in a very discontented frame of mind.

Although the scooter was the common property of the Fistical Four, Lovell had practically taken charge of it; he always spoke of it as "his" scooter, and he generally handled it. So he felt the loss very keenly. And he felt that only a blind conceit could have led Jimmy and Raby and Newcome to leave him behind at the camp, instead of handing over one of the push-bikes to him. Jimmy or Raby or Newcome could have guarded the camp perfectly well. There was no need for Lovell's time to be wasted thus.

That was how Arthur Edward Lovell looked at it, and as the minutes passed on leaden wings he grew more and more impatient.

"Utter rot!" he said, a dozen times. "Piffle! Bosh! They'll never find the man. I should find it hard to run him down, I dare say, and those

chaps could never do it! I don't suppose it was that man Parkins at all. I'm certain he wouldn't have had the nerve to follow us, after the handling we gave him the other day. Jimmy's an ass! Raby's an ass! Newcome's a silly ass! And me kicking my heels here!"

Lovell was fed-up.

He resolved at last that he couldn't and wouldn't stand it. He gathered up the baggage of the Fistical Four, and found a place of concealment for it in the thicket. Having glanced round, to make sure he had left nothing in sight save the ashes of the late camp-fire, Arthur Edward Lovell cleared off.

On foot, certainly, it seemed a somewhat hefty task to track down a cycle-thief who had stolen a motor-scooter, well-supplied with petrol. Even Lovell did not hope to beat the thief in point of speed, especially as he had lost well over an hour "kicking his heels" at the camp.

But Lovell had thought the matter out. It was by no means sure that the thief would make a direct "break" for the far distance. Any policeman, seeing that frowsy tramp scudding along on a motor-scooter, would naturally become suspicious—that is, if it was Mr. Parkins who had stolen the jigger. If Honest John was the thief, he was scarcely likely to scud along high-roads in the broad daylight with his prize. He was more likely to hide somewhere, Lovell thought, and wait for dusk.

And the thief, whether Mr. Parkins or another, might have trouble with the scooter. Lovell had had engine trouble more than once. There might be a breakdown.

Perhaps the wish was father to the thought in Lovell's case; but, having thought it out, he decided that it was quite probable that the cycle-thief was lurking somewhere on the countryside within a radius of a mile or two.

Lovell was a keen Scout. He had great hopes of tracking down the cycle-

thief, and he started out in that hopeful mood. He dwelt with pleasure on the possibility of having the scooter back in camp by his own unaided efforts when Jimmy Silver & Co. came back, tired and discouraged, after a long, unsuccessful hunt.

If that happened, it would show that he—Arthur Edward Lovell—was really the man for a job like this; a fact which they seemed to doubt, so far.

True, it had not happened yet. Lovell was counting his chickens rather early.

He came across several natives as he went on, and asked every one of them whether he had seen a motor-scooter.

Nobody had, apparently. All the replies were in the negative.

This was discouraging; but Lovell drew from it confirmation of his theory that the cycle-thief was keeping out of sight, instead of scooting boldly off on the scooter.

As he turned into a rutty, dusty lane between two meadows, Lovell gave a sudden jump.

A man was crossing one of the meadows, towards a stile on the lane, at a rapid pace. He was not running, but he was walking very quickly indeed. And Lovell knew him!

It was Honest John Parkins—the man who, the day before, had sold him a can of water for petrol, and whom Jimmy Silver suspected of stealing the scooter.

Lovell dodged into the cover of a hedge at once.

Mr. Parkins was coming almost directly towards him, but had not seen him yet. Now he could not see him.

There was no sign of a stolen scooter about Mr. Parkins. He was on foot. Still, it was suspicious that he was there at all; it bore out Jimmy's belief that he had been following the Rockwood party.

"He hasn't got the scooter," murmured Lovell. "I don't quite believe he had it. Jimmy's an ass! Still, he may know something about it. He may have stolen it and hidden it some-

where. I'm jolly well going to know."

In cover, close by the stile, Lovell watched the tramp through the openings of the hedge.

By earlier experience, Lovell knew that he was not a match for Mr. Parkins in single combat. He had tackled him once, under the mistaken impression that he was.

This time he determined to take no chances.

Very strategically, he remained in cover, while Mr. Parkins came puffing and panting up to the stile, and clambered over it into the lane.

Just as he was coming over, Lovell leaped on him like a tiger.

Mr. Parkins was taken utterly by surprise.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Crash!

The tramp came down heavily into the dusty lane, in a breathless heap nearly all the breath knocked out of his beery body by the crash on the earth.

Lovell dragged him over, and planted a knee on his frowsy chest. Then he flourished a clenched fist over Mr. Parkins' dizzy, startled face.

"Now, you scoundrel!" panted Lovell.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! What the thump—ow!" gasped Mr. Parkins.

"Where's my motor-scooter?"

"Eh?"

"Did you steal my motor-scooter, you scoundrel?" demanded Lovell.

Mr. Parkins blinked up at him. He recognised Lovell now. He was at disadvantage; the Rockwood junior knee pinned him down, and Arthur Edward had the upper hand. But his question to the tramp implied a doubt which Mr. Parkins observed at once.

"I didn't!" he gasped. "I ain't never was! Don't you 'andle a me what hasn't done nothing, sir!"

Lovell stared down at him suspiciously.

"What are you hanging about the parts for, anyhow?" demanded Lovell.

"Looking for work——"

"Oh, cut that out!" snapped Lovell. "Jimmy thought he saw you when the scooter went, anyway. I'll jolly well give you in charge, and chance it!"

Mr. Parkins gasped. He could hear the sound of some agricultural machine at work in a neighbouring field, and realised that there was help at hand for the Rookwood junior if he chose to call for it.

"I—I say, sir, has your scooter been took?" he spluttered.

"I fancy you know it has!" snapped Lovell.

"I've seed a scooter jest like it, sir," said Mr. Parkins eagerly. "Own twin to it. I thought it was, not knowing that your scooter had been took. Well-dressed young feller had it, and not a hundred yards from this 'ere spot."

"Too thin," said Lovell.

"Sir, I'll p'int out the scooter," panted Mr. Parkins—"I will, honest! You can see it from t'other side of that medder—why, there goes the blessed ingin, this blessed minute!"

Chug-chug-chug!

Lovell started.

Well he knew the familiar chugging of his motor-scooter.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "That sounds jolly like it!"

"I saw it!" gasped Mr. Parkins. "Own twin to yourn. I thought it was, sir. You get a move on, or that feller will be off with it. Feller with an eye-glass, he was. 'Igh-class-looking' feller to steal a bike, but you never can tell, sir."

Chug-chug-chug!

From the lane on the other side of the green meadow came the sound of the starting engine.

Lovell released the tramp.

It was possible that he was being deceived—that it was some other motor-scooter that was chugging beyond the meadow. But at all events, it was plain that Mr. Parkins hadn't the scooter about him. On that point there was no shadow of doubt—no

possible, probable shadow of doubt—no possible doubt whatever. Leaving the frowsy gentleman sprawling in the dust, still gasping, Lovell jumped up, leaped over the stile, and started across the field at a rapid run.

Mr. Parkins picked himself up.

"Well, my eye!" he ejaculated.

He gasped for breath.

"Wot a go!" murmured Mr. Parkins, with a beery chuckle. "Lucky I got rid of that there scooter when I did to that silly young hass! My eye! I'd like to give that bloke one in the eye for 'aving a man down like that 'ere! I would that! But I think, John, my boy, that it will be better for your 'ealth to get out!"

And Mr. Parkins proceeded to get out at top speed.

CHAPTER 18.

"Stop Thief!"

"WIGHT as wain!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was highly satisfied.

He was testing his new purchase, the motor-scooter. The tank was well supplied with petrol. The machine ran smoothly. Arthur Augustus ran it up the lane, and ran it down the lane, chugging away gaily. Then he halted and jumped off.

"Wight as wain! This scootah will come in handy, and no mistake," murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "I weally think I am in luck, baggin' a wippin' scootah like this for five pounds! Bal Jove! I can wun back to the village in ten minutes, and ask the way to the beastly wood where I left the chaps."

And Arthur Augustus proceeded to load his crammed rucksack into the carrier. Then he prepared to mount the jigger again and depart. He became dimly aware of the fact that a youth was racing across an adjoining meadow towards him; but that was no business of his, and Arthur Augustus

took no special heed of the hurrying youth.

He wheeled the machine round in the direction of Ockley, and turned on the "juice." He ran lightly with the jigger, and mounted into the roomy saddle, just as Lovell came out of the meadow with a flying leap over a stile.

Lovell landed in the lane, staggering, a few yards behind the gliding scooter. He recovered himself, and bawled after the rider:

"Stop thief!"

Arthur Augustus heard that shout. But, naturally, he did not heed it. It did not even dawn upon his mind that such an opprobrious epithet could be applied to his noble and aristocratic self.

"Stop!" bawled Lovell, dashing desperately in pursuit of the scooter. "Stop thief!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he glided pleasantly on. "That sounds like somebody in twouble! I wondah if I had bettah stop?"

"Stop thief!"

"Somebody's been stealin' something," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Wotten! But I wathah think I'd bettah get on, as those fellows are waitin' for bweakfast till I get back. It will be a feahfully late bwekkah, anyhow, aftah the time I have lost, losin' the beastly way!"

"Stop thief!"

The bawling voice was fainter behind now.

Arthur Augustus was really quite concerned that he wasn't able to stop and render help to the unknown fellow, who, apparently, had had something stolen.

But he realised that his first duty was to Tom Merry & Co., waiting hungry at the camp in the beech wood for him to return with supplies for a very late breakfast.

So he kept on cheerily, and the voice of Lovell died away behind him.

He reached the village of Ockley,

and there he was able to get the right direction for the beech wood. And when he scooted out of the village again it was by a different road. In cheery spirits Arthur Augustus D'Arcy scooted away at a spanking speed for Tom Merry's camp.

Meanwhile, Arthur Edward Lovell of the Rookwood Fourth was in a frame of mind that could only be described as homicidal.

He chased the elusive motor-scooter along the lane till it vanished, and then he stopped, breathless, panting, crimson, and boiling with rage.

Actually, he had sighted the scooter—his own beloved scooter—and the cycle-thief—and both had vanished from his eyes—gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream!

He had not seen the cycle-thief's face, but from the back view he had seen that he was a well-dressed and rather elegant fellow—not at all the fellow one would suspect of being a cycle-thief.

He realised that such a fellow might ride the stolen scooter anywhere, without anyone feeling the slightest suspicion that it had been stolen.

"It's all up!" groaned Lovell, wiping the streams of perspiration from his face. "We'll never see it again. That fellow will get away with it all right. Oh dear!"

And in a dismal mood, Arthur Edward Lovell proceeded to tramp back to the camp on Burney Common, realising that there was nothing more to be done.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus sailed merrily along on the motor-scooter. This time he found his way without mistake, and he turned the scooter into the footpath that led to Tom Merry's camp.

"Bai Jove! Where are the fellows?" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's, as he jumped off the machine.

The note pinned to the tree caught his eye.

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy read Tom Merry's message, and the pink came into his aristocratic face. The post-scripts seemed to excite his wrath.

"The uttah ass!" he ejaculated.

He jerked down the note and reduced it to fragments. Then he remounted the jigger. As Tom Merry & Co. had gone on with the Rookwood fellows to Burney Common, there was nothing for Arthur Augustus to do but to follow on. So he followed.

"Bai Jove! This jiggah goes weally a tweat!" he murmured, as he let out the motor-scooter on the road. "It is an acquisition, and no mistake. I wondah what the fellows will say, when they heah that I picked it up for five pounds?"

And Arthur Augustus smiled with happy anticipation. Even the most carping fellow could scarcely fail to express appreciation of that bargain, he considered.

Burney Common spread before him at last, wide and green, with a path across it leading to the stone bridge on the stream that intersected the common.

Arthur Augustus turned cheerily into the path and sailed on merrily towards the stone bridge. At the some moment a tired and dusty fellow tramping across the common towards the bridge gave a sudden yell and started at a frantic run after the scooter.

"Stop thief!"

Lovell was on the track of the scooter again.

CHAPTER 19. Whose Scooter?

JIMMY SILVER grunted.

"Just like Lovell!"

"Oh, just!" said Raby and Newcome together.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome with Tom Merry & Co., arrived at the camp on Burney Common. Naturally, they had expected to find Lovell there, as he had been left in charge of the camp.

But there was no sign of Lovell—or of the camp, save the dead fire.

"Is this the place?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, this is the place right enough," answered Jimmy Silver. "But Lovell's gone off. Goodness knows why. I suppose he's put our baggage out of sight somewhere and we shall have to hunt for it."

"Never mind—so long as there's some grub when we find it!" said Tom.

Three Rookwooders and six St. Jim's fellows proceeded to root about the vicinity for the baggage. Perhaps it was a case of many hands making light work, or perhaps Lovell had not concealed the baggage so completely as he had supposed. At all events, the juniors were not so long in finding it, and breakfast at last was handed out to six hungry fellows.

Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed that breakfast. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome hospitably attended to their numerous guests, and took another snack with them. The hunt for the stolen scooter had made them hungry.

"I wonder where Lovell is?" Raby remarked, when the breakfast was finished.

"And I wonder where D'Arcy is?" remarked Blake.

Chug-chug! Chug!

"Hallo, that sounds like our jolly old scooter!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, jumping up. "Lovell can't have found it!"

"No fear," said Newcome.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake.

An elegant youth with an eyeglass gleaming in his eye came sailing merrily up the path to the stone bridge on a chugging motor-scooter. St. Jim's fellows and Rookwood fellows stared at him blankly. Jimmy Silver & Co. recognised the scooter—all the party recognised Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And then they became aware of a dusty, breathless, crimson fellow who was racing after the scooter with perspiration pouring down his face.

"Lovell!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"D'Arcy!" shouted Tom Merry.

"What the thump—"

"Stop thief!" Lovell's voice, husky with yelling, reached the astounded juniors at the camp. "Stop him! Stop thief!"

"What the merry thump——"

Arthur Augustus turned the scooter from the path, sounded his horn, and rode into camp, and jumped down. He raised his hat politely to the Rook-wooders.

"Heah I am, you fellows!" he said.

"Glad to meet you Wookwood chaps! I've got the gwub in the cawwiah, Blake. I found your cheekay note, and came on. I——"

"Where did you get that scooter?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Bought it, deah boy."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Bought it fwom a man for five pounds," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Wathah a bargain, what? He looked wathah a fwowsy fellow, but he'd a wife and seven children and two aged grandpawents at home, poor chap, so I was glad to do him a good turn."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell——"

Arthur Edward Lovell came panting up. Lovell was simply astounded to see the cycle thief turn into the camp and halt there. But the scooter was safe now, and Lovell came panting in, streaming with perspiration and covered with dust, but triumphant.

"I've run him down!" he gasped.

"Collar him! Hallo, you St. Jim's chaps! Fancy meeting you here! Lend us a hand to collar that scoundrel——"

"Wha-a-t?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"He's got our scooter! He's got it! He stole it this morning! Why, what—what—what——"

Hitherto Lovell had had only a back view of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the scooter. Now he had a front view, and he realised the swell of St. Jim's.

"You!" he stuttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you alludin' to me as a scoundwel?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with frigid dignity.

Lovell felt as if his head were turning round.

"That's our scooter!" he gasped.

"Weally, I fail to see how it can be your scootah, when I bought it for five pounds this mornin'," answered D'Arcy, calmly.

"You—you—you bought it?" stuttered Lovell.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, crumbs!" Lovell understood at last. "D-d-d-did you buy it from a frowsy, dirty, unshaven blighter in a battered bowler hat?"

"Yaas."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Trust Gussy!" gasped Blake. "Oh, my hat! Gussy, old man, you've done it now! You're going to be had up as a receiver of stolen goods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I——"

"We'll come and bail you out, old chap!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus stared blankly at the hilarious juniors. It was but slowly that the truth penetrated into his aristocratic brain.

"Bai Jove, have you fellows had a scootah stolen?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"And—and is that the scootah?"

"Ha, ha! That's it."

"Bai Jove! I've been done out of five pounds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The question arises," grinned Jimmy Silver, "whose scooter is it now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. spent that day in company with the St. Jim's fellows and they parted the following mor-

ing. The scooter went with the Rookwooders. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declined to receive any indemnity, but the Rookwooders insisted upon reimbursing him for half the amount, and so it was settled. And both parties, when they took to the road again, kept open a wary eye for Honest John Parkins, yearning to meet him once more and visit the punishment of his sins upon his frowsty head.

CHAPTER 20.

Which Way?

"SILLY Owls!" Arthur Edward Lovell was not addressing his comrades, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome.

He was referring to the local authorities of that part of Devonshire—probably, at that hour, comfortably asleep in their beds, and not dreaming of hapless cyclists for whom they had failed to provide signposts by the way-side.

It was a fine night. A crescent moon sailed over rich meadowland and deep, dusky woods. "Glorious Devon" looked as glorious as ever; but some of the glory was lost upon four tired and hungry cyclists, halted at a lonely cross-roads and looking for a sign that was not there.

Four shady lanes, deep-sunken between high banks of rich earth, met at that point. By one of them the Rookwood cyclists had arrived. By another of them they were to proceed. They had three to choose from. Which of the three to choose was the problem they now had to solve.

Three dusty bikes leaned on a tree. Lovell had shut off the motor-scooter, and its cheery "chug-chug" no longer awoke the echoes of the moonlit fields.

Right and left, up and down, and round about, the Fistical Four of Rookwood hunted for a sign. And they found it not. Doubtless the inhabi-

tants found their way about those perplexing sunken lanes with ease. But it was quite a different matter with cyclists from afar.

"Silly owls!" repeated Lovell. "Chumps! Fatheads!" He was still referring to the local authorities.

"Well, it's no good slanging," remarked Jimmy Silver. "One of these blessed lanes leads to Oke."

"Which?" grunted Raby.

"Goodness knows!"

"Toss up for it!" suggested Newcome.

"Chumps!" went on Arthur Edward Lovell. "If we take the wrong road we may land anywhere—perhaps in the middle of a thumping moor. Asses! Why can't they put up a signpost?"

"Keep smiling!" murmured Jimmy.

"Rats! Look here, there must be some sort of a sign somewhere, at a cross-roads like this," argued Lovell. "Even a rural district council must have some sense. Let's have another look."

"Go ahead!" said Jimmy. "You won't find one, but it won't hurt us to rest for a few minutes."

Lovell snorted, and unhooked the lamp from the motor-scooter. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome sat down in the grass to rest. Lovell prowled up and down, casting the light to and fro, still murmuring uncomplimentary remarks on the subject of rural district councils.

"Hallo, here's something!" exclaimed Lovell.

He stopped a dozen paces along one of the lanes and cast the light of the lamp upon a tall tree.

"What is it?" yawned Raby, without getting up.

"There's a board nailed on the tree, or fixed on somehow. It must be a sign. It wouldn't be put there for nothing."

"Well, what does it say?"

"I can't read it in the dark fathead. The lamp doesn't reach it, dummy. But I can see that it's a board."

Lovell seemed to be getting a little cross.

"May as well have a squint at it," remarked Newcome. "I don't suppose it's a sign-board, or Lovell wouldn't have found it. But let's have a look at it."

The three Rookwood juniors detached themselves from the grass, and followed Lovell. They stared up at the board he had discovered. It was high above their heads, and no doubt quite a prominent landmark in the daytime. At night it was quite impossible to read it; shady branches above shut off the moonlight, and Lovell's lamp did not illuminate it. Something was on the board—it looked like a printed poster pasted there.

"That's not a sign," said Raby. "Even the rural district council wouldn't put it there."

"It's something," said Lovell. "And there's never any telling what a rural district council will do. We'd better have a look at it and see."

"How?" asked Raby.

Lovell grunted.

"I'll stand on the scooter," he said. "Good!"

Lovell walked back to the cross-roads and wheeled the motor-scooter on. Standing on the roomy saddle of the scooter, he would be able to reach the high board with his light and read it. He was fairly certain by this time that it was a wayside sign. His chief reason for believing so was the fact that his comrades did not believe so.

"Don't bump it over while I'm standing on it," he grunted. "Keep clear! Mind you don't touch it!"

His three comrades backed away. Lovell stood the scooter under the tree, and let down the metal leg which kept it upright. Then, with great care, and a little help from the gnarled trunk of the tree, he proceeded to climb upon it.

His comrades watched him with interest. A light and active fellow could have performed that acrobatic

feat with ease. But Lovell was rather heavy-handed and heavy-footed. The scooter jerked and swayed, and looked every moment as if it would tumble over.

"Look out!" yelled Raby suddenly.

Crash!

Bump!

"Yarough!"

Fortunately, Lovell fell upon grass. The scooter sprawled out into the lane clanging.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. ought not really to have chortled. But the incident had its comic side, to the onlookers.

Lovell sat up and spluttered.

"You silly chumps——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" yelled Lovell. "If one of you fellows had held the scooter it wouldn't have gone."

"You warned us not to touch it," murmured Jimmy.

"Oh, don't jaw!"

Lovell picked himself up. Then he picked up the scooter and examined it for damages. Fortunately, there were no damages. Lovell had captured all the damages there were.

"I've got an idea," remarked Jimmy.

"Keep it!"

"But I think——"

"No, you don't—you can't! Get clear while I put this scooter into position."

"But we could——"

"Oh, dry up, Jimmy Silver! Are we going to hang on here all night while you wag your chin?"

"Oh, all serene!" said Jimmy. "Have your own way, old chap. An old thing."

Lovell set up the scooter again under the trees. This time he climbed very carefully indeed. He was, in fact, fairly mounted on the scooter, standing on the saddle, when the new catastrophe came.

"Hand up that lamp. Ow!"

Lovell leaned rather thoughtlessly for the lamp.

Crash!

Bump!

This time Jimmy Silver & Co. contrived not to chortle. The expression on Lovell's face as he sat up showed that matters were growing serious.

Slowly, savagely, Arthur Edward Lovell picked himself up.

"Trying it again?" asked Newcome.

Lovell glared at him.

"I'm not trying it again. With a set of dummies who can't even lend a fellow a hand, or do anything but chuckle like a lot of fowls, I'm jolly well not going to try it again. Go and eat coke!"

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Now we'll try my idea, as Lovell's finished. Suppose we ram the lamp on the end of a stick and put it up to the board? Then we can read what's there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Raby and Newcome. "That simple device might really have been tried instead of Lovell's heroic methods."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver groped in the thickets by the wayside for a stick. He soon found one that suited his purpose, and attached the lamp to the end of it. Holding the long stick high above his head, he cast the light upon the board on the tree.

And then the Fistical Four had the satisfaction—or otherwise—of reading:

**CHIGGERS' WORLD-FAMED
MENAGERIE!**

ASSEMBLY ROOMS, OKE.

TWO DAYS ONLY!

LIONS AND TIGERS!

LIONS AND TIGERS!

CHIGGERS!

CHIGGERS!

CHIGGERS!

CHAPTER 21.

Alarming News!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. looked at that interesting announcement, and looked at one another. Doubtless, to the inhabitants of that remote

quarter of Devonshire, the announcement was of interest. Doubtless, there had been quite a rush to see the lions and tigers in Chiggers' Menagerie, now showing for two days only in the Assembly Rooms at Oke. But the Rookwood ramblers weren't interested. They had never heard of Chiggers' Menagerie, world-famed as it was stated to be. They had not the slightest desire to hear of it, or to behold it. They wanted supper and bed, and nothing whatever in the menagerie line.

"Well!" said Arthur Edward Lovell with a deep breath.

"Do you still think that that is a signpost, old chap?" Raby inquired gently.

Lovell did not reply to that question.

Jimmy lowered the lamp. Nothing, evidently, was to be gained by the perusal of Mr. Chiggers' announcement.

Lovell put the lamp on the scooter again. The Fistical Four walked back to the cross-roads, to debate which route they should select.

"Hallo! Here comes somebody!" exclaimed Raby suddenly, and he pointed down a lane. "We can get a tip now about the road".

There was a faint sound of footfalls, and the juniors discerned a rather shadowy form coming up the lane towards the cross-roads—coming along in a strangely stealthy manner which surprised them.

The man looked like a burly countryman, with a plump, ruddy face. He was walking along the middle of the lane, and as he walked, slowly, he peered into the shadows on either side of him alternately. He looked like a man who feared that at any moment an enemy might spring into view from the dusky bushes and trees.

The juniors stared at him. He was so keen on watching his immediate surroundings that he did not look ahead, and so did not see the four

schoolboys standing in the moonlight where the roads met.

"What the thump's the matter with the man?" said Lovell, puzzled. "Can't be afraid of giddy, highwaymen or footpads here, I suppose?"

"He's afraid of something, by his looks," said Jimmy Silver. "Blessed if I can guess what."

"I'll hail him!"

Lovell put his hands to his mouth to form a trumpet, and shouted:

"Hallo!"

The result was startling.

The stranger gave a sudden, convulsive start, stared round him in terror, and then spun round and bolted.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell.

"What the dickens——"

The thudding of running feet echoed on the road. The juniors heard a crash in a hedge at a distance, and guessed that the man had plunged through into a field. Faintly they could hear the sound of running feet, dying across a meadow.

"Well, that beats the band!" exclaimed Newcome in great astonishment. "Did he take us for footpads, I wonder?"

"Might have thought it was a bull loose, from the way Lovell bellowed," suggested Raby.

"You silly ass!" hooted Lovell.

"Well, he's gone," said Jimmy. "May have been footpads round this part, or something of the kind. That chap had got the wind up, anyhow."

The man had vanished; no further sound was heard from him. The Fistical Four gave up the hope of getting any information as to their route.

It only remained to select one of the lanes, and follow it, unless they were to remain out all night.

In the fine summer's night, they would not have disliked camping out, but they had counted on supping at Oke, and they had nothing with them in the way of provisions. Supper was

a pressing necessity—they were all hungry; they had done many a long mile since their last meal, and a good time had already been spent at the cross-roads.

"Oh, let's chance it," said Jimmy Silver. "If we don't get to Oke, we may get somewhere else. And we may pass a cottage or something where we can get a tip."

His chums assented, and the party remounted their jiggers. Once more the chug-chug of the motor-scooter echoed through the night.

Taking a lane at random, the Fistical Four wheeled on their way, their lamps gleaming into the shadows on the road. According to Jimmy's calculations, they should have been within a mile or two of the village of Oke. But a mile glided under the wheels, and there was no sign of the village. But a light glimmering from a field close by the lane caught Jimmy's eye at last.

"That's a cottage," he exclaimed, putting the brake on. "Somebody's still up, from the light. Let's ask the way."

"Good!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver jumped down, and leaving his machine with his chums, lifted the latch of a little gate and walked up the garden to the cottage. It was past ten o'clock, but lights burned in both windows of the little cottage, upper and lower. The blinds showed moving forms within, showing that the household was in some sort of commotion.

Jimmy Silver knocked at the door.

There was a shout inside the cottage.

"Look out!"

"Now then, quiet!" said a deeper voice. "He can't get through the door, and if he comes to the winder, I've got the pitchfork."

Jimmy Silver fairly jumped.

That was not the sort of reception he had expected from a cottager in hospitable Devon.

It was evident that something extraordinary must have happened

recently to alarm that quiet countryside—something of which the Rookwood cyclists were totally unaware.

Jimmy knocked at the door again.

"Hallo, there!" he called out. "It's all right—I only want to ask you the way to Oke."

"Lor! It isn't him, after all!"

"You needn't open the door," called out Jimmy Silver. "We've lost our way, and want to know how to get to Oke. That's all."

There was a creaking, as the little cottage window was cautiously opened. The blind, pulled aside, allowed the dim candle-light to glimmer out into the night.

In the opening of the window, a man's broad shoulders and head were framed. Jimmy could see that the cottager was grasping a pitchfork. The man blinked round to the door.

"Lor! You bean't the lion, then!" he said in relief.

"The—the what?"

"I thought it was him at first, when you knocked."

"The lion!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"You be a stranger here, maybe," said the cottager. "You ain't heard that the lion has escaped."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You'd better get in somewhere, quick," went on the cottager. "He's about here somewhere—by Oke or Little Pudlip, or Pullen-by-the-Pond. They haven't found him yet."

Jimmy Silver remembered the advertisement of Mr. Chiggers' menagerie on the tree at the cross-roads. He understood now.

"A giddy lion escaped from the menagerie!" he said. "Oh, my hat!"

"You ain't seen him?"

"No," answered Jimmy.

"Which way did you come?"

"We came from Greenway to the cross-roads."

"Then it's a wonder you ain't run into him," said the cottager. "They

was hunting him towards Greenway this afternoon."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

He comprehended now why the countryman had bolted at the cross-roads, when Lovell shouted to him. That sudden hail had alarmed the startled man, who had been watching for the escaped lion as he trod cautiously along the middle of the lane. Certainly he could not have taken Lovell's shout for the roar of a lion, but he had been startled, and had fled without stopping to inquire, which was probably judicious with a lion roaming about in the vicinity.

"You'd better come in, young man," went on the cottager. "We haven't anywhere to put you to sleep, but you'll be safe within four walls. You're welcome."

"There's four of us," said Jimmy.

His chums, standing by the garden gate, heard what was said. They cast uneasy glances up and down the lane.

"Is it far to Oke?" called out Lovell.

"Half a mile, if you keep on, and turn to the left by the pond," said the cottager.

"Then we're on the right road, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "What do you fellows say? Keep on?"

There was a general nodding of heads. Sitting up all night in the tiny cottage was not an attractive prospect, and it was very probable that it would have meant missing supper. And as Lovell had pointed out, they would have had to clear in the morning, anyhow, and chance the lion.

"We'll keep on," said Jimmy.

"Thanks all the same. Good-night!"

"Good-night to you, zur."

The cottager closed the window—probably relieved that his kind and hospitable offer had not been accepted, for there was not much accommodation for four strangers in a two-room cottage, in which there was already a family.

Jimmy rejoined his comrades.

"We know the way now," he said. "Better hustle a bit, and get into Oke. Sharp's the word."

And the Rookwooders remounted their machines and rode hard and fast, Lovell chug-chugging ahead on the motor-scooter. And as they rode they kept wary eyes on the shadowy trees and thickets by the wayside.

CHAPTER 22.

At Close Quarters!

"LOOK out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The—the lion!"

Quite suddenly it happened. Watchful as the Rookwood cyclists were, they had had no real expectation of seeing anything of the escaped lion from Chiggers' Menagerie. It was likely that it had been already recaptured, and likely that it had gone deep into the woods to escape its pursuers. In spite of the alarming news they had received at the wayside cottage, the Fistical Four were thinking chiefly of supper as they pedalled on along the moonlit lanes.

They sighted the pond at the turn, glimmering in the moonlight. And then, as they came round the bend at a good speed, they sighted the lion.

A long, sinuous body, a great head adorned with a magnificent mane, loomed on their vision, with startling suddenness. The lion was lying by the water's edge, evidently having come to the pond to drink.

He raised his great head as the cyclists swept round the corner, passing within a couple of yards of him.

It was too late to halt, and practically impossible for four machines to turn in the narrow lane between the pond and a high, thick hedge.

Lovell, indeed, on the scooter, was already past the crouching lion before he was sighted. Lovell had not even seen him, and was scooting on

cheerily as the three fellows on push-bikes came following on.

A deep, resounding roar came from the great beast crouched by the pond. It sent the blood thrilling to the juniors' heart.

"Put it on!" panted Jimmy Silver.

The lion made a movement, whether to attack them or not the Rookwooders never knew.

They fairly flew past.

A deep growl was heard behind them, and the sound of movement, but they did not even look back.

They ground at their pedals, and the bikes scarcely seemed to touch the ground as they raced on.

"Put it on, Lovell!" roared Jimmy Silver, as the racing bikes overtook the scooter. Jimmy had to swerve to avoid a collision with Lovell's rear wheel.

Lovell stared round.

"Hallo, you fellows are spurting! You can't keep up that speed. Go easier!"

"Put it on, you ass! The lion!" panted Jimmy. "He was at the pond!"

"Oh, bosh! I didn't see him."

"Didn't you hear him, you dummy? He roared."

"Eh? Wasn't that a bull?"

"A—a—a bull!" stuttered Jimmy.

"No, you chump, it was the lion, and he may be after us, for all I know. Put it on!"

"My belief is that it was a bull."

"Fathead!"

"Just keep your nerves in control, you fellows," said Arthur Edward Lovell severely. "You'll be fancying you see lions and tigers in every blessed bush! You see——"

"Dry up and get on!"

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were accustomed to argument with Lovell. But they had no time of breath for argument now. Whether the lion was following them or not they did not know and could not guess, but they were not chancing it. The

drove furiously at their pedals and shot past the motor-scooter, leaving Lovell chug-chugging behind. Generally the petrol jigger could leave the push-bikes standing. But just now the push-bikes left it behind. With that savage roar in their ears, Jimmy Silver & Co. "put it on" with amazing energy, and the bikes fairly flashed along the shady lane.

Lovell stared after his comrades and sniffed.

He had not seen the lion. Consequently he did not believe that his comrades had seen it. Lovell put it down to nerves, and congratulated himself that his nerves were in better condition. He could easily have overtaken the trio by going "all out" on the petrol bike. Instead of which Arthur Edward Lovell shut off some of the power and slowed down.

"Silly asses!" he murmured. "Just nerves. As if the giddy lion could be there without my seeing him! Silly owls! I'll jolly well show them that there wasn't any lion!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell, with that laudable object in view, circled round, and chug-chugged back towards the pond.

Never dreaming for a moment that Lovell had turned back, Jimmy Silver & Co. sped on towards Oke, and never had they been so glad to see the lights of a village.

Meanwhile Lovell rode back towards the pond at the corner of the lane.

He looked this way and that way, scornfully unexpectant of seeing anything in the nature of an escaped lion.

Suddenly he jumped, and the scooter swayed.

Right in the middle of the lane a strange form was visible—a long, sinuous form, that moved stealthily with movements like those of a huge cat.

Lovell stared blankly at it. He knew that it was the lion now. Seeing was believing. And he was pushing right at it.

The lion ceased its stealthy movements and stood fast, glaring at the oncoming junior. Two greenish eyes blazed like balls of fire at Arthur Edward Lovell. He hardly saw, but he knew, that the fearful brute was crouching for a spring.

For a moment or two, so dazed was Lovell by the sudden and terrible encounter, that he rushed on helplessly towards the great brute. But he recovered his presence of mind and whirled round the scooter to flee back towards Oke.

But the lane was narrow and rugged, and it was not possible to turn the scooter, going at a good speed, so suddenly. Lovell found his machine trying to climb the hedge.

There was a deep, heavy, terrifying growl.

Crash!

Over went the scooter, chug-chugging like a buzzing bee, as it lay on its side in the grass.

Lovell leaped clear.

He did not even look towards the lion. He bolted through the hedge, leaving the scooter throbbing on the ground. Often and often on that cycling trip Lovell had told his comrades that he was the only fellow in the party who could look after the motor-scooter. But he did not stay to look after it now.

He crashed through the hedge, and found himself in a plantation of young trees. He bundled and dodged away through the trees, hardly conscious of where he went.

Stumbling and falling, and picking himself up again breathlessly, Lovell scrambled on, panting. The throbbing of the scooter died away behind him, and there was no sound from the lion. But Lovell scrambled and stumbled on without a halt.

Lights gleamed before his eyes. They came from a lane that bordered the wood. There was a low fence in the way, and Lovell scrambled over it,

heading for the lights. There was a shout of alarm.

"Look out! What's that?"

"The—the lion!"

"It's me!" yelled Lovell, recognising the voices of his comrades.

"Lovell!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward rolled and stumbled down the lane, panting for breath. Almost at the entrance of the village Jimmy Silver & Co. had realised that Lovell was not following them, and had stopped, uneasy for themselves and greatly alarmed for their chum. It was a surprise, but an immense relief, when he came sprawling out of the tress by the roadside where they stood.

"Lovell, what——"

"Quick!" panted Lovell.

"Where's the scooter?"

"Hang the scooter! Get on!" yelled Lovell.

And he ran towards the village. The lights of the Red Cow could be seen glimmering along the lane.

Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped on their machines and followed him. They could see and hear nothing of the lion, but evidently it was no time to inquire after the scooter.

"Jump up behind, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy.

And Arthur Edward mounted behind Jimmy Silver, standing on the foot-rest, with his hands on Jimmy's shoulders, and the cyclists rushed on into the village.

CHAPTER 23.

Lovell the Lion-Hunter!

THE Red Cow in Oke was shut up, bolted, and barred. Jimmy Silver & Co. clamoured at the door, which no one appeared to be in a hurry to open. Lights glimmered in the inn, showing that some of the occupants, at least, were still up. Jimmy Silver stared back into the moonlit lane as he banged at the inn door. If the lion was in pursuit, there was pressing danger every moment.

Bang, bang! Thump! Bang!

A window opened above.

"What's that? Who's there?"

"Open the door!" roared Lovell. "There's a lion loose!"

"We know that. Have you seen him?"

"He's behind us."

"Oh lor!"

There was a rattling of bolts and bars. The heavy door swung half open. An alarmed face blinked at the juniors.

"Quick!" panted the innkeeper.

The four Rookwooders squeezed in.

"The bikes!" exclaimed Lovell.

The innkeeper did not heed. He was not thinking of bicycles. Indeed, some innkeepers might have declined to open the door at all in response to information that an escaped lion was fairly on the spot. The man slammed the door hard and jammed a bar home, and then put on the chain and shot the bolts.

"Never mind the bikes," said Jimmy. "It's fine, anyhow. They can stay outside."

Ten minutes later the juniors were sitting down to a cold supper—cold but ample, and very welcome. The people of the inn wanted to know all about the lion, and the juniors explained as they ate. Arthur Edward Lovell did not mention that he had turned back to the pond to look for the lion. He felt that that was a circumstance he had better not refer to.

But when the juniors went up a bed a little later, his comrades began to inquire.

"Just where did you leave the scooter?" asked Jimmy.

"Eh? Somewhere near the pond," said Lovell.

"Then you turned back?"

"Ye-e-es."

"What for?"

"Oh, I say, I'm sleepy!" said Lovell. "Let's turn in, for goodness sake!"

"What did you turn back for?" hooted Raby.

"Because I didn't believe there was any lion," growled Lovell, "and I wanted to show you fellows——"

"You silly ass!"

"You burbling chump!"

"Look here——" growled Lovell.

"Well, of all the dummies, I think Lovell takes the cake!" said Jimmy Silver. "Goodness knows what will happen to the scooter before we see it again!"

"The lion won't eat it!" said Lovell sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver opened the window shutter and looked out. The moon glimmered on the village street, on the rugged cottages, and a haystack near at hand. He wondered whether the lion was lurking among the shadows. Faintly, from the distance, came a sound of throbbing. Chug-chug-chug!

"That's the jolly old scooter!" said Jimmy. "It's still pumping away."

The motor-scooter evidently was still a going concern. Lying in the grass, it was still chugging on.

"I've a jolly good mind to go out for it," said Lovell.

"Fathead!"

"Look here——"

"You've done enough idiotic stunts for one night," said Jimmy Silver.

"Go to bed and give your chin a rest!"

"And give us a rest," said Raby.

And Arthur Edward Lovell snorted and went to bed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were tired, and they slept rather late the following morning. They came down to a late breakfast, and found that the inn door was on the chain. A group of countrymen, armed with pitchforks and scythes, passed the inn, and the juniors guessed that they were going after the lion. Jimmy found that the scooter had been brought in and placed in a shed, and he was glad to find that it was not damaged. After breakfast the Rockwood party debated about continuing their journey.

"Blow the lion!" said Raby. "We shall soon be out of his reach, anyhow, on the bikes."

"I think——" began Lovell.

"You do?" asked Raby, with sarcastic surprise. "When did you begin that?"

Lovell glared.

"We may as well get on," said Jimmy Silver. "Can't hang about here all day, looking as if we're funky."

"I think," repeated Lovell, with emphasis, "that we ought to hang on here to-day and help catch the lion."

"And how are you going to catch him?" demanded Raby, still sarcastic. "Sneak behind him and put salt on his tail?"

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"Well, you had a chance of catching him last night," said Newcome. "You gave him a miss, though."

"We should be jolly useful, with our experience as Scouts," said Lovell. "We could pick up his trail."

"I don't think."

"I don't say you could, Raby, but I could. And the fact is, I'm jolly well going to," said Lovell. "It's up to us to lend these people a hand. The whole place is at sixes and sevens while that lion is loose. He may claw somebody."

"You, most likely, if you start trailing him."

"Well, I'm going to chance that!" snorted Lovell. "I'm not backing out of this. You fellows scud off as fast as you like. I'll join you again when the lion's caught."

"Suppose he catches you instead?"

"Oh, rats!"

Arthur Edward Lovell had made up his mind. The scooter reposed in the shed, its chugging silenced. Lovell grabbed up his hat and walked out of the inn, thus settling the disputed point. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked at one another.

"We can't leave the ass here by himself," said Jimmy. "I dare say the

lion's twenty miles away by this time, anyhow. Let's get after the duffer."

And the juniors joined Lovell. They found a good many people of Oke out of doors, in spite of the lion. Men were working in the fields, and some horse-looking fellows, apparently belonging to Chiggers' World-Famed Menagerie, were loafing about the village street.

Arthur Edward Lovell, as bold as brass, walked along the lane towards the pond at the turning, and stopped at the spot where the motor-scooter had spent the night. There he bent down to examine the grass and hunt for tracks. His comrades watched him. Certainly, there were plenty of tracks in the grass and the dusty road. The men who had fetched in the scooter had left the print of big, hobnailed boots, and there were plenty of other tracks. It would have puzzled a first-class Scout to pick out the lion's trail, but Arthur Edward Lovell never lacked confidence in his own powers.

A stout gentleman, in a morning-coat and a silk hat, came along the lane while Lovell was at work. He paused to stare at the juniors, apparently a little puzzled by Lovell's occupation.

"Morning, young gentlemen," he said. "Are you the fellers that I 'ear came on my lion last night?"

"We're the fellows," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I suppose you're Mr. Chiggers."

"That's me," said the stout gentleman. "My lion didn't 'urt you, I s'pose?"

"We didn't give him a chance."

"He's all right," said Mr. Chiggers. "He will feed out of my 'and. I keep on telling them that there's nothing to be alarmed about. But they won't believe me. That there lion dangerous! Poo-coo!" Mr. Chiggers sniffed.

"He looked jolly dangerous," said Raby.

"That's only 'is looks."

"And he had a jolly hefty roar," said Jimmy.

"Course he had," said Mr. Chiggers.

"He's made to roar in his cage, to make the audience believe he's frightful savage. But he ain't! That there lion would feed out of your 'and."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"The pore animal is frightened, that's what the matter with him," went on Mr. Chiggers. "All these coves getting arter him with pitchforks and things. I've just passed a farmer with a gun—looking for my lion! A gun—and loaded!" said Mr. Chiggers, evidently deeply aggrieved. "How would he like me to go out with a gun looking for his cows, I wonder?"

The three juniors chuckled. The terrible danger of the previous night seemed to fade out, as it were, in the light of Mr. Chiggers' remark.

Lovell did not hear or heed. He was at a little distance, trying to pick up the trail through the hedge.

"They won't believe that there's no 'arm in 'im," went on Mr. Chiggers. "You see, the pore old animal is stirred up in his cage to roar ferocious, in the way of business, and now he's sneaked off the 'ole place is fairly getting the wind up. They're talking about getting out the blooming Territorials with their blooming rifles! Nice for me! Why that lion's worth a 'undred pounds of anybody's money, though he ain't got no teeth left."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it ain't a larfin' matter," said Mr. Chiggers. "This 'ere is bad business for me. But I thought I'd tell you young gents not to be skeered. If you come on my lion, you jest pat 'im on the 'ead, and he will lick your 'and. He will that! 'Morning!"

And Mr. Chiggers rolled on his way leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckling.

* * *

Lovell soon got tired of trying to pick up the lion's tracks on the dry ground and the chums strolled back to the house—Lovell in a disgruntled mood.

The three bikes and the scooter were wheeled out, and Jimmy Silver

settled the bill, and the juniors left the Red Cow. They walked the machines through the village street, which was narrow and hilly. On the outskirts of the village they came on a large corrugated iron building, which they guessed was the "Assembly Rooms," especially as a large poster announced that Chiggers' World-Famed Menagerie was on view there.

"Bad business for them," remarked Lovell. "It will fairly bust up the show, I should think, if that lion kills somebody."

"Not likely," said Jimmy with a smile. "According to Mr. Chiggers, the jolly old lion is as tame as a bunny rabbit."

"Rubbish!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Bunkum!" snorted Lovell. "He would say that, of course. My belief is that the lion's a savage brute, and has very likely killed two or three people already. I'd jolly well go after it again, too, only I can see you fellows are keen on getting away."

"What!" roared the three together.

"As for the lion not being dangerous, that's utter tosh, and I don't believe a word of it," said Lovell in his most emphatic and positive manner. "Chiggers can pull your leg, but he can't pull mine. I've got a little more sense, I hope."

"Hallo! There's Chiggers!" exclaimed Raby.

"And the lion!" yelled Jimmy.

"Oh, my hat!"

The stout gentleman in the silk hat was coming up the village street. An excited crowd followed him. Mr. Chiggers desired to show the villagers that there never had been any danger. He was leading the lion with a cord attached to its neck, like a dog. The great animal lumbered along quietly and contentedly.

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Looks dangerous, doesn't he?"

stunned Raby. "Frightfully ferocious,

and all that! Killed no end of people, I dare say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell started up the scooter.

"If you fellows want to stand there and cackle, stand there and cackle," he said. "I'm off!"

And Lovell chug-chugged away at a great speed. And Jimmy Silver & Co., chuckling merrily, mounted their jiggers and pedalled after him.

CHAPTER 24.

The Good Samaritans.

"SOMEbody in trouble!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

The Rookwood cyclists slowed down.

If somebody was in trouble, the Fistical Four of Rookwood were quite prepared to lend a helping hand. And evidently somebody was in trouble on that sunny country road in Dorsetshire—quite bad trouble.

There was a deep, wide ditch along one side of the road. Two wheels of a caravan, painted red and yellow, were deeply embedded in the ditch. The other two wheels were still on the road. A horse, released from the traces, was contentedly cropping grass across the way.

Three fellows had hold of the caravan.

They were tugging.

Their efforts, apparently, were directed towards tugging the van back into the road. They hadn't the slightest chance of succeeding. They could not shift the tilted van half an inch. But they deserved credit for the beef they were putting into it.

They tugged, and their faces were crimson, and the sweat ran down their features.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome put on their brakes and slowed. Arthur Edward Lovell shut off the "juice" of the motor-scooter. The Rookwood cyclists halted.

As they did so the three caravaners ceased their frantic efforts, stepped back from the van, and mopped their streaming faces with their handkerchiefs. It was quite a warm afternoon, and the three caravaners looked extremely warm. Tugging at an immovable caravan was strenuous exercise.

"You can't move it, of course!"

One of the caravaners—a hefty fellow with rugged features—was the speaker. He spoke in accents of contempt. The other two caravaners glared at him.

"We've done our best, Coker."

"Fat lot of good your best is, Potter. I wonder what your worst would be like?"

"Well, you haven't shifted it, have you?" bawled the third caravaner, in rather excited tones.

"Don't yell at me, Greene!"

"Look here, Coker——"

"Better shut up," said Coker. "You're wasting your breath, and you'll need it all before we get the caravan out of that ditch."

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled. The names they heard were familiar to them. They had seen these fellows before. They recognised them as Coker and Potter and Greene, three fellows who belonged to the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not exactly know them, but they had seen them before.

"We'd better pile in and help, you chaps," murmured Jimmy. "Those fellows look as if they'll be scrapping soon."

Coker of Greyfriars looked round, as he became aware that there were spectators on the scene. He frowned at the four Rookwood juniors.

"What the thump do you want?" he demanded.

"Eh? Nothing," answered Jimmy Silver mildly.

"Take it and go, then!"

"Wrap it up for us!" suggested Raby humorously.

"For goodness' sake Coker, try to be civil!" exclaimed Potter. "These chaps may lend us a hand with the van!"

"Just what we were going to offer," said Jimmy Silver. "If you want help, here we are, ready and willing."

Coker gave the juniors a disparaging look.

"You wouldn't be much good," he said.

"Oh, very well! We'll get on, then," said Jimmy cheerfully. "Come along, old beans!"

He put his hand on his machine again.

"I say, stop, you chaps!" exclaimed Greene. "Do lend us a hand! Never mind Coker. He can't help his manners!"

"What's that?" roared Coker.

"Are we sticking in this ditch all day, and all night, too, because you can't be civil to chaps who are willing to help!" bawled Greene.

Coker looked at the Rookwooders again.

"I've seen you before somewhere," he said. "I believe you're some fags who came over from Rookwood to play cricket with the Greyfriars fags. Isn't that so?"

"Something like it," said Jimmy Silver. "Now then, let's all get hold, and we'll have your jolly old van out."

The Fistical Four came along to help.

"The van wants shoving up from the other side," said Coker. "You fags get down into the ditch, will you, and shove?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked.

In the ditch there was about a foot of water, and under the water five or six inches of thick mud, at the least. Getting into the ditch was not an attractive prospect.

"I think we'd rather tug from the side," said Jimmy drily.

"It's not a question of what you rather, but of what's necessary," explained Coker. "Get into the ditch."

"I'll see you blowed first!" said

Arthur Edward Lovell forcibly.

"What?" roared Coker.

"Blowed!"

"Do you want a thick ear, you cheeky fag?"

"Don't mind him, you chaps!" implored Greene. "You just tug away, and we'll get the beastly thing out! We've been at it for over two hours already. Don't leave us in the lurch!"

"Shut up, Greene!" said Coker. "I've already told you and Potter to get into the ditch and shove, and you're funky of it. You can see as well as I can that it's the only way!"

"Why can't you get into the ditch and shove, then?" asked Newcome.

Coker stared at him.

"I?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, you!"

"If that's meant for cheek, I don't want any more of it," said Coker. "I'm not likely to plunk knee-deep into mud, I suppose. But we'll try it on this side. Pull away!"

Seven pairs of hands were grasping the tilted van now. The three Fifth Formers of Greyfriars, and the four Fourth Formers of Rookwood, put all their beef into it, and the van shifted.

"It's coming!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Pull away!" gasped Raby.

Up came the van, inch by inch. The wheels sucked out of the mud, and slowly, inch by inch, the vehicle began to right. It was unfortunately just then that a fly settled on Horace Coker's nose. It was equally unfortunate that Horace Coker unthinkingly let go his grasp to brush the fly off.

The combined strength of seven had just shifted the van. The strength of six was not equal to the task.

"Look out!" roared Potter. "Hold on!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"She's going!"

She went!

Back toppled the van, the two wheels plunging deeper than ever into soft mud. The vehicle tilted over further towards the hedge beyond the ditch. The rescue-party let go, and stepped

back, panting. They looked at Coker expressively. Coker looked at them.

"Well," he said, "you've done it now!"

CHAPTER 25.

Stranded.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. did not answer Horace Coker. They really felt that there was no adequate answer to be made.

Potter and Greene, giving the job up in despair, sat down on a grassy bank across the road, and mopped their brows. The van had settled too deep now for even the seven to think of dragging it out. Nothing but a couple of stout horses, traced to the van could rescue it now from its resting-place.

"Of all the silly owls!" said Coker, in measured tones. "Of course, it's my own fault for letting you clumsy young duffers touch the van at all. I see that."

"It was you let go!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell. "We'd nearly got the thing out when you let go."

"Don't be cheeky!"

Coker crossed the road to his comrades. He gave them a withering stare of contempt as they sat and mopped their perspiring brows.

"Sticking here for good?" he inquired sarcastically.

"We're done!" growled Potter.

"One more effort, with you fellows down in the ditch shoving the van up

—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Why I ever came out caravanning with a pair of lazy slackers is a mystery to me," said Coker. "My good nature, I suppose. We're told we ought to suffer fools gladly; but I must say you fellows try my patience a lot. After getting the van into the ditch

—"

"Who got it into the ditch?" shrieked Potter. "You were driving?"

"Don't rave at me, Potter. Try to keep your temper, and keep cool, as

I'm doing. Little things like this are to be expected on a caravan tour."

"With you driving—yes!" said Greene.

"Shut up, Greene! The van won't come out now," said Coker. "We're only a few miles from Dorchester. We can easily get a motor or horses to come and tow the van out. I'll cut off into the town at once. I suppose even you fellows are able to look after the van while I'm gone?"

Coker turned his back on his followers, and walked over to Jimmy Silver & Co. Having done all they could—in vain—the Rookwooders were preparing to depart.

"Hold on!" said Coker.

"Yes. Anything more we can do?" asked Jimmy Silver politely.

"I've got to get into Dorchester, to get help to get that van out," explained Coker. "It's really lucky you stopped here with that motor-scooter. Is it in good order?"

"Eh? Yes. Quite."

"Good! Lend it to me!"

"Lend it to you?" repeated Arthur Edward Lovell, staring at Coker as if he could hardly believe his ears, as indeed he hardly could.

"Yes. It will serve my turn," said Coker, taking hold of the petrol jigger. "I shall be back in a couple of hours."

"In a kik-kik-couple of hours!" stammered Lovell.

"Yes. Stand clear!"

Had Jimmy Silver & Co. belonged to Greyfriars they would have known all about Horace Coker and his lofty, commanding ways. As they belonged to Rookwood, and had only a passing acquaintance with Coker, he came as rather a surprise to them. They blinked at him.

"We've got to get on our way, Coker," said Jimmy Silver, as soon as he recovered his breath. "We're due at Wareham to-night."

"You can't ride that scooter!" hooted Lovell.

"Well, it's a bit absurd to be riding

a scooter like a kid," conceded Coker. "I'd rather it were a motor-bike. But it's a case of any port in a storm, you see. I've got no time to waste, that's how it is. Stand clear! Do you want to be run over?"

"We're not lending you that scooter!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You see, we can't hang up here for a couple of hours!"

"You can!" said Coker cheerily. "You see, I want to borrow this scooter, and that settles it. I don't know what your Fifth Form are like at Rookwood; but they must be a lot of spooneys, to judge by the cheek of you kids. If you were at Greyfriars I'd jolly soon teach you not to argue with seniors, by Jove! Now, stand clear and shut up!"

Coker turned on the petrol, and the motor-scooter began chugging.

Potter and Greene looked on, and exchanged glances, and shrugged their shoulders. They were used to Horace Coker and his high-handed ways. But Jimmy Silver & Co. weren't. Coker, indeed, wanted some getting used to.

The Rookwood fellows simply blinked at Coker, scarcely believing their ears, and their eyes. But as Coker put a heavy foot on the scooter and lifted himself into the roomy old saddle with the machine chug-chugging away at a great pace, Jimmy Silver & Co. realised that it wasn't a joke, and wasn't a dream or a vision; but that this burly Greyfriars fellow actually was bagging the motor-scooter under their very eyes, regardless of refusal.

And Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed on Coker.

Coker was starting. The scooter had already a little pace on it when the Fistical Four collared Coker.

They collared him by a shoulder, an arm, an ear, and a neck. Each of the Rookwood juniors got a hold somewhere.

There was a roar from Coker. The scooter swayed wildly in the road. A motorist coming by at a good rate

yelled words full of ferocity at the group round the scooter. They did not heed him. Jimmy Silver & Co. dragged at Coker. Coker clung to the scooter's handlebars, and strove to keep a steady seat.

"Let go!" bawled Coker. "Do you want an accident? Let go! What's this silly game? Leggo!"

With a combined effort the Fistical Four dragged Coker over. He left the saddle of the motor-scooter with a jerk, like a fruit plucked from a tree.

The scooter ran on.

It ran for some yards up the road, then took a list to port, and crashed over with a terrific crash.

Coker was on the ground, struggling and roaring. Arthur Edward Lovell had him by both ears now, and he was banging Coker's head on the hard earth. Rap! Rap! Rap-rap-rap! Rap! Rap! One might have supposed that Lovell was trying to send a message, in the Morse code, through the solid earth to the Antipodes. A series of fiendish yells resounded from Horace Coker.

Still with the four grasping him he struggled up.

"Potter! Greene! Bear a hand!" he roared.

Potter and Greene stared at him stonily. They were not in the least disposed to bear a hand. They were tired, for one thing, and they were fed-up with Coker, for another. They gave no heed, and Coker, struggling valiantly and heftily, collapsed again under the odds, and went down to the earth. Then Lovell recommenced the Morse code with Coker's head.

"Ow, ow, ow! Stoppit!" shrieked Coker. "I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you! Ow! Wow! Whoop!"

"I think that will do" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Don't bust his napper, Lovell. There's nothing in it, but don't bust it. Let's look at the jigger."

Leaving Coker for dead, as it were, the Fistical Four hurried after the collapsed scooter and picked it up. Its

busy chugging had ceased. Something seemed to have gone wrong with the works. During the tour of the Rookwood cyclists the motor-scooter had had a good deal of hard usage, and had borne it nobly. But the last straw had broken the camel's back, as it were. The scooter was out of action now.

Arthur Edward Lovell propped it up on its leg by the roadside, and looked at it, almost with tears in his eyes. Lovell had grown fond of that scooter, and he felt its injuries almost as if they were his own.

"Well, it won't go," said Raby.

"I can do running repairs, of course," said Lovell rather loftily.

"Hem!"

"If you fellows think I can't do running repairs——"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Get on with it, and we'll go and kick Coker."

"Good!"

Arthur Edward Lovell devoted his affectionate attention to the motor-scooter. Lovell's confidence in himself was unbounded. He had no doubt that he could put in the necessary repairs, and make the scooter a going concern again. The comrades had doubts on the subject. Their view was that they were stranded until they could get hold of a motor mechanic. In the circumstances, kicking Coker seemed an excellent idea, as well as an attractive one.

Horace Coker was sprawling breathlessly in the road, quite winded by his struggle with the Rookwooders, and in a dazed and dizzy state. He was apparently trying to get his second wind. But he found breath enough to roar as the three juniors commenced operations.

"Oh, stoppit! Why, I'll smash you!" roared Coker. "What the thump—— Oh, my hat! Oh! Ah! Oooooop!"

"Give him jip!"

"There, you cheeky ass!"

"There, you swanking dummy!"

Coker struggled to his feet. It had

never occurred to Coker that the time would come when he, Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, would dodge away from fags—mere fags of a Lower Form in another school. But the time had come now. Coker was quite "done," and instead of falling on the Rookwooders and strewing the road with their shattered remains, he dodged away, and was only too glad to escape. He was quite thankful that they did not follow him up. Thus were the mighty fallen.

CHAPTER 26.

Running Repairs.

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL was busy.

On the stretch of grass by the side of the country road, he had the motor-scooter on its beam ends, and for some time he had been industriously detaching one part from another.

Lovell's idea was to do the thing thoroughly.

There was no doubt that his method was thorough. The motor-scooter was getting dismantled with extreme thoroughness. Whether Lovell would ever succeed in getting it together again was another matter. It was easier to dismantle than to assemble. This, however, had not yet occurred to Arthur Edward.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome watched him for a little while, perhaps nourishing a faint hope that Lovell, according to his own statement, was capable of executing running repairs. But the more he progressed with his repairs, the stronger grew their doubts that the motor-scooter would ever be in a state again for scooting. There had been something wrong with the works to begin with, and now their opinion was that there were a good many things wrong with the works.

Lovell had taken off his jacket and hat and waistcoat, and rolled up his sleeves. That gave him a thorough

workmanlike feeling. Besides, it was hot, and he was putting plenty of energy into his work. He was getting oily and greasy, oilier and greasier every minute.

"How long do you think it will take, old man?" asked Raby at last.

"Can't tell you yet," said Lovell, without looking up. "You fellows had better take a stroll."

"Can't we help?" asked Newcome.

"You'd be more trouble than you'd be worth, old chap. You can look for my spanner if you like."

The three juniors looked for the spanner. It was not to be seen. Lovell knitted his brows.

"One of you must have moved that spanner!" he exclaimed. "I had it here a minute ago."

"Have'n't touched it, old bean."

"Well, where is it, then?" demanded Lovell. He stared round him. "Where's that spanner? Where's that beastly spanner? Where's that rotten spanner? Where's that blighted spanner?"

Lovell's adjectives were growing in intensity as he inquired after the spanner.

"Blest if I can see it anywhere!" said Jimmy.

"Of course, you can't! You wouldn't," said Lovell. "Do you ever see anything? Where's that blinking spanner? Where's that——"

He jumped up, exasperated, to hunt for the elusive spanner.

"There it is!"

"Eh? Where?"

"You were sitting on it."

"Oh!"

"Anything else we can look for?" inquired Newcome, with a touch of sarcasm.

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted.

"You can jolly well clear off, and not interrupt a chap at his work," he snapped. "How's a chap to do running repairs with three silly ones grinning at him like Cheshire cheeks—I mean Cheshire cats? For goodness sake take a walk!"

"Come on, chappies!" said Jimmy Silver, smiling. "Let's go for a spin. We can camp here."

"We're not camping here!" exclaimed Lovell. "We're going on to Wareham to-night, you ass!"

"After you've done the running repairs?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Then we'll look for a camp."

"Fathead!"

Running repairs seemed to have a somewhat exasperating effect on Lovell's temper. His comrades wisely left him to himself, and strolled away. One of them could have pedalled away for help, but it was useless to suggest that to Lovell. His confidence in his own powers as a motor mechanic was, as yet, unabated.

"May as well camp here," remarked Jimmy Silver. "We're in no special hurry to get anywhere. I dare say we can find a place."

"Yes, rather!"

And the three pedalled away. They passed Coker and Potter and Greene. Coker was sitting on the grassy bank now with his companions, and they were engaged in a hot argument. The point in dispute seemed to be which member of the party should walk to Dorchester to get help to shift the caravan out of the ditch. Coker explained that they were only two or three miles from that ancient city. Potter declared that, according to the map, they were a dozen miles at least. Coker expressed contemptuous disregard of maps and map-makers, and wanted to know whether Potter and Greene were such rotten slackers that they funk'd stretching their silly legs a little. Stretching his own legs was an expedient that had not, apparently, occurred to Coker.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled as they caught some of the warm argument in passing. Coker shook his fist after the three Rookwooders. The Greyfriars caravanners were still arguing

when the Rookwood cyclists left them behind.

It was an hour later that the Rookwooders came back, and they found Arthur Edward Lovell still at his task.

The motor-scooter seemed to be in more pieces than ever. The juniors would hardly have guessed, indeed, that so many pieces went to the make-up of a motor-scooter. Lovell was crimson with exertion, and he was considerably grimy and oily.

"Not finished yet?" asked Raby.

"Does it look finished?" snapped Lovell.

"My hat! It doesn't. Looks like Wareham to-night—I don't think!" murmured Raby.

"You fellows can get on if you like. You've got your push-bikes," said Lovell surlily.

"That's all right, old chap," said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "We're camping here."

"Look here!" said Raby. "I could get away on a bike and bring a man to put that machine together——"

"Don't be an ass, Raby! I'm not allowing any clumsy mechanic to touch this scooter!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"If you keep on much longer a mechanic won't be able to stick it together again!" exclaimed Raby warmly.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"You silly, cheeky owl——"

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver hastily. "Keep smiling. These little things will happen. We've found a nice place for camping, Lovell, about half a mile from here."

"Rot! We can't move this scooter till I put it together," said Lovell. "When I get it fixed we can get on our way."

"When!" murmured Raby.

"What about borrowing a barrow to take it along in?" asked Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell did not reply to that facetious question. But he grasped a spanner with so ferocious a

look that his comrades decided to leave him to himself once more. It really was not safe to be too near Lovell when he was engaged on running repairs.

CHAPTER 27.

In Camp!

"WHERE will you have it?" Coker's powerful voice asked that question, and he addressed Potter and Greene. Coker's rugged brow was full of wrath. Apparently he had recovered somewhat from the effects of his tussle with the Rookwooders, and was his old truculent self again.

Jimmy Silver & Co. glanced towards the happy caravanners. The wreck of the caravan and the mishap to the motor-scooter had stranded both parties in the same spot. It looked as if both would have to make up their minds to make a night of it by that country road in Dorset.

"I'm fed-up with your slacking," went on Coker's powerful voice. "One of you has got to go into Dorchester and get a motor or a horse, or anything you like, to yank that dashed van out of that dashed ditch. I'll give you a minute."

"Look here, Coker!"

Coker pushed back his cuffs.

Potter and Greene eyed him and backed away.

"We'll both go," said Potter suddenly. "All right."

"We can't walk a dozen miles, Potter!" howled Greene.

"Oh, there's some place nearer than Dorchester," said Potter. "Come on, old man! I want a rest from Coker, anyhow!"

Greene grumbled, but he followed Potter. Coker gave a snort. Potter and Greene passed the smiling Rookwooders, who were sitting on the grassy bank, and paused.

"You seem to be stranded as well as us," remarked Potter.

"We are—we is!" agreed Jimmy.

"If you like to scalp Coker or lynch him or anything like that, we don't mind!"

"Ha, ha! Thanks!"

"The silly owl thinks Dorchester is just round the corner!" said Potter. "He doesn't believe in maps. But there's a village about a mile away, and we're going there. We're going to stop the night at the inn there, see?"

"Oh, jolly good!" said Greene.

"Coker thinks we shall be back in an hour or so with something or other to tow his jolly old van out of the ditch," said Potter. "It may amuse you to see him doing the 'Sister-Anne' bizney, watching for somebody to come. My impression is that we shan't be back till morning—and not early in the morning, either."

Greene chuckled.

"Don't mention that to Coker, of course," added Potter. "But I think his face will be worth watching presently. So-long! Much obliged to you for trying to help us!"

And Potter and Greene walked on and disappeared round a bend of the road.

Jimmy Silver & Co. glanced across at Coker who was nosing about the capsized van and chuckled. Coker's high-handed methods satisfied Coker, and he was quite pleased at having reduced Potter and Greene to a proper state of discipline and obedience. That they had walked off without intending to return that day at all did not as yet occur to Coker.

Three Rookwooders rested pleasantly in the grass, while Lovell went on with his running repairs. Coker loafed about the van and occasionally stared across at the Rookwooders with a threatening brow. But he did not proceed farther than that; apparently he had contrived to realise somehow that four Fourth-Formers were too much for him to handle on his own. After a time Coker made attempts to get into the

van—possibly to get at the food supply there. But the red-and-yellow caravan had sunk deeper and deeper into the ditch, and it was impossible to get the door open.

Coker gave it up at last and came across to Jimmy Silver & Co. They eyed him warily, quite prepared for war.

"I can't get into my van!" Coker announced.

"I've noticed that," smiled Jimmy.

"I can't get at the grub," said Coker. "It's jolly late for tea. I want one of you kids to cut off on your bike and bring me some things. You can see that spire over there? That must be a village."

"I can see it," assented Jimmy.

"There will be a grocery shop or a store or something," explained Coker. "I'll give you a list of things to get. I'm sure I can trust you with the money."

"I'm sure you could!" assented Jimmy.

"That's all right, then."

"Not quite," murmured Jimmy Silver. "You see, I'm not going. You see, there's nothing doing. Go and eat coke!"

Coker breathed hard.

"If I had you fags at Greyfriars I'd —" he said.

"Take your face away, old man!" said Raby. "It's a bit of a worry, you know! Take it away!"

Horace Coker glared at the Rook-wooders and clenched his hands. But he seemed to think better of it, and he turned and stalked away. The cheery Juniors chuckled.

"You fellows!" bawled Lovell.

"Hallo!"

"Have you seen a nut?"

"Eh? What sort of a nut?" asked Jimmy Silver. "There's some chest-nuts left in the bag."

"You silly ass! I mean a nut!" snorted Lovell. "One of the nuts seems to be missing. I unscrewed it and laid it down. You fellows had

better look for it, I think. I don't want to be all night over this job!"

The Co. detached themselves from the grass. They were quite willing to help, even to the extent of hunting for a lost nut amongst the grass roots round Lovell.

Arthur Edward sat down to take a rest. He was oilier and greasier than ever and had a black smudge on his nose which contrasted nicely with the crimson of the remainder of his countenance. The petrol jigger was still in many parts, and which was which it would have been a puzzle to Jimmy Silver & Co. to guess. They hoped Lovell knew. They hoped, but they doubted. However, they hunted industriously for the missing nut while Lovell sat in the grass and rested and fanned himself with his hat. Arthur Edward was finding running repairs a tough proposition.

For a quarter of an hour the three juniors searched for the elusive nut. Lovell watched them.

"Can't find it, of course?" he asked.

"Seems not!"

"Just like you, isn't it?" asked Lovell.

"All you can do is to sit in the grass while a fellow works! Well, I've got to have that nut. Keep on."

"Look here! Did you lay it down?" demanded Raby restively. "Sure you didn't put it into your pocket or something?"

Lovell started a little.

"Oh!" he said.

Raby's suggestion seemed to have jogged his memory. He slipped his hand into his trousers-pockets and produced a little iron nut.

"All right," he said; "I've found it."

Jimmy Silver & Co. controlled their feelings manfully. They had spent fifteen busy minutes in searching for the grass for the nut that was in Lovell's trousers-pocket. And Lovell evidently regarded it as a trivial incident scarcely worthy of note.

Ten minutes later Lovell called out again.

"Seen my pliers?"

"No!"

"Well, you might look for them! It's a bit thick that I should do everything, I think!"

"Look in your pockets," suggested Raby sarcastically. "Look down the back of your neck and behind your ears! I know I'm not rooting about for any dashed old pliers!"

Lovell opened his lips to utter an angry retort. But fortunately just then he discovered the missing pliers lying in the grass a foot away. He grunted, and resumed his running repairs.

While Arthur Edward thus laboured and his comrades sat and waited Horace Coker was pacing the road near the tilted caravan, his eyes continually turning in the supposed direction of Dorchester. It was high time for Potter and Greene to be back with help. But there was no sign of Potter and Greene.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned cheerily, wondering when it would dawn upon Coker that his pals were gone for the day.

The sun was setting in a rich red glow; a beautiful September day was drawing to its close. Jimmy Silver & Co. were getting very hungry. They unpacked the supplies from the carrier at last. Lovell's running repairs seemed as far from completion as ever—or a little farther. It was clear that the Rookwooders had to camp for the night by the roadside, and they made up their minds to it. Fortunately, as they had intended to camp out that night there was a good supply of provisions in the scooter's carrier.

Jimmy Silver set up the spirit-stove and filled the kettle from the water-bottle and put it on. Raby set up the paraffin cooker and greased a frying-pan. Newcome chipped potatoes and cut the sausages. Horace Coker, tramping up and down across the road, eyed them rather savagely. As the sausages and chips began to cook and send forth a savoury odour Coker grew more and more savage. He was ravenously

hungry himself by this time, and the scent of sosses and chips was tantalising.

More than once Horace Coker came over towards the Rookwood camp, but paused and turned back again. The lofty Horace would not ask a favour of the Rookwood fags. Probably he would have taken the drastic step of raiding their supper; but that was not practicable. Jimmy Silver called to Lovell when all was ready.

"Give it a rest now, Lovell! Come and have supper."

"I've got to get this job done," said Lovell doggedly.

"Life's too short, old man!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, finish after supper," said Jimmy hastily.

"Rats!"

Lovell went on with his job. He had just screwed on a nut and given it a last finishing twist with the pliers to make it indubitably secure and discovered that it was the wrong nut. And now he was wrestling with it to get it off again. This kind of thing occurred quite frequently when Arthur Edward was on running repairs.

The three juniors had their supper considerably keeping Arthur Edward hot for him on the stove. Shadows were lengthening now, and even Lovell realised that he would not get his repairs finished in time to take the road again that night. He rose at last with a sort of concentrated look on his smudgy face and came across to camp.

"I'll have my supper!" he grunted.

"Good!" said Jimmy. "Here you are nice and hot!"

Lovell looked suspiciously at his comrades as he ate his supper. Perhaps he expected chipping on the subject of running repairs. But the Co. mercifully forbore to mention the subject.

"We'd better camp here for the night," said Lovell abruptly.

"Think so?" said Jimmy sweetly.

"After all, what's the hurry?" asked

Lovell. "We're touring round to see the country, aren't we? Well, we can see it from here."

"Quite so."

"I'll finish these repairs after supper. I've got the hang of the thing now. You fellows can hold the lamps for me to work by."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If you're not willing to help——" bawled Lovell.

"Oh, all right! Anything for a quiet life."

After supper, Lovell, much to the relief of his comrades, decided to leave the rest of the repairs till the morning. He said that he would be up at dawn and would have the motor-scooter going by the time the others turned out. Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled, and hoped that he would. It was quite dark now, and a crescent moon was coming out with a silvery glimmer from behind the hills.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sorted out their ground-sheets and rugs and turned in. Through the silence of the summer night they heard the steady pacing of Horace Coker—waiting and watching the road for the help that did not come. And when Newcome playfully called out "Sister Anne—Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" Coker disdained to answer. He was still waiting and watching when Jimmy Silver & Co. went to sleep.

CHAPTER 23.

Not Coker's Lucky Day!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were up with the sun. Arthur Edward Lovell got busy on the scooter while his comrades got the breakfast ready. Lovell restarted after the interval, so to speak, with great energy. He ate a hasty breakfast while he worked. His look was quite sanguine, and his comrades almost hoped that he would succeed in getting the engine together again.

"We'll give him a couple of hours,"

Jimmy Silver remarked to Raby and Newcome. "If he does it in the time, well and good. But we're jolly well not putting in the rest of the vacation here while Lovell plays at shops with those bits and pieces."

"No jolly fear!" agreed Raby and Newcome.

Horace Coker was not to be seen. The red-and-yellow caravan still lay tilted in the roadside ditch, and seemed a little deeper down than the day before. The juniors wondered what had become of Coker. But a little later he appeared through a gap in a hedge. A considerable quantity of hay sticking to his clothes seemed to indicate that he had found refuge for the night in a barn.

His rugged face was decidedly cross in expression. He looked up and down the road savagely, and then came over to the Rookwooders.

"Seen those silly owls about?" he asked.

"We've seen only one silly owl this morning," answered Jimmy cheerily.

"Potter or Greene?"

"Neither, Coker!"

"You cheeky young scoundrel!" roared Coker. "I don't want any of your back-chat. I suppose that clumsy young ass isn't getting that scooter going again, is he?"

"There seems a slight doubt on the subject," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"Then I suppose I'd better borrow one of your push-bikes," growled Coker. "Potter and Greene seem to have lost themselves, the silly asses! I must go and fetch somebody to get that van out. Can't hang about here all day with a gang of fags. I dare say I could ride one of your jiggers if I shove the saddle up as high as it will go. I'll try."

"Better not," murmured Jimmy.

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because if you handle our bikes, the next thing that will happen is, that you'll be in the ditch along with your caravan. That won't improve matters, will it?"

A case of assault and battery appeared imminent. But Horace Coker contrived somehow to restrain his righteous wrath. He measured the Rookwooders with his eye, but he seemed to realise that it was not good enough. Perhaps a reminiscent ache or two in his bullet head reminded him of his experience of the day before.

He turned away with a grunt, and went to his caravan. He seemed to want breakfast, but the door of the van was more firmly stuck than ever now, and it resisted all Coker's infuriated efforts to get it open. He gave it up at last.

Where Potter and Greene could possibly be was a mystery to Coker. As a matter of fact, they were just then sitting down to a comfortable breakfast at an inn about a mile away. They had arranged with the innkeeper to send a man back with them, with a couple of horses, to drag the caravan out. But they were in no hurry to start. Coker's company, fascinating as it doubtless was, seemed to have palled on his comrades a little. Potter and Greene were not in the least disposed to hurry over their breakfast.

"Time's up!" Jimmy Silver remarked to his comrades, and they came over to Lovell.

"Finished?"

"No."

"How long?"

"Go and eat coke?"

"Then we'd better scud off and get a man here to handle the thing," said Newcome decidedly.

"Bring a man here to meddle with this scooter and I'll punch his head and yours, too!" said Lovell. Evidently the running repairs had had a deteriorating effect on Lovell's temper.

"Look here——" said Jimmy.

"Dry up!"

"We can't hang about here all day!" roared Raby.

"Cheese it!"

"Hallo! Look out! Coker!" exclaimed Newcome.

"My hat! Stop!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

Horace Coker had seen his opportunity. With masterly strategy he made a sudden swoop on the Rookwood camp and dragged out one of the bicycles that leaned against the hedge.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came tearing back as Coker rushed the machine into the road.

"Stop, you rotter!"

"Let that bike alone!"

"You cheeky cad!"

Coker put a long leg over the machine. He got the pedals going just before the Rookwooders reached him. The bicycle shot away from the clutches of Jimmy Silver & Co.

Coker glanced back with a grin on his rugged face.

"All right," he called out. "I'm only borrowing the bike, you know. I'll be back presently."

"Stop!" yelled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker chuckled and pedalled on. But it was not Horace Coker's lucky morning. A hundred yards down the road a field gate stood open, and a shepherd was driving out a flock of sheep. The sheep filled the country road from side to side.

"Hi!" yelled the shepherd as Coker came speeding up. "Hi!"

"Come on!" panted Jimmy Silver.

The Rookwooders tore on in pursuit. Coker was almost upon the sheep when he jammed on the brakes. The woolly heads surged round him as he jumped off the bike.

"Can't you keep your beastly sheep out of the road?" he shouted to the shepherd.

Apparently the shepherd couldn't. Coker glanced back. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, with fury in their faces, were coming on fast. Lovell had not even looked up from his running repairs. The Greyfriars senior wheeled the bike on, bumping among the crowding sheep, with loud bleating all round him.

"Collar him!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"Hi!" yelled the shepherd.

Coker struggled through the sea of sheep. But progress was almost impossible with the bicycle. Startled sheep plunged and bleated and bumped all round him. Coker shoved on desperately, till a grip on the back of his collar jerked him suddenly backwards. It was Jimmy Silver's grip, and he put his beef into it.

"Ow!" roared Coker. "What—Ow! Oh, crumbs!"

The bicycle went clattering as Coker disappeared among the sheep. Jimmy caught the machine and righted it. He dragged it away, clear of the flock.

Coker had disappeared from sight. Muffled yelling was heard, but for some minutes Horace Coker was not to be seen, as frightened sheep swarmed and surged and bleated over him. Coker did not reappear until the angry shepherd, diving among the sheep, grasped him and hauled him out, and hurled him away. Jimmy Silver & Co. wheeled the bike back to the camp, leaving Coker engaged in infuriated recriminations with the shepherd.

CHAPTER 23.

The Open Way!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL met his comrades as they returned with the recaptured bike. There was an expression on Lovell's greasy, oily, smudgy face that a Mexican bandit might have envied.

"I'm fed-up!" said Lovell, in concentrated tones.

"Same here!" murmured Raby.

"How's a fellow to do running repairs without a proper tool outfit?" demanded Lovell.

"Echo answers, 'how'!" agreed Newcome.

"Mind, I can repair the jigger all right," said Lovell. "If you fellows think I can't do running repairs—"

Lovell paused, like Brutus, for a

reply. But his chums were very careful not to reply. Lovell paused in vain.

"It's merely a question of time," he went on. "I can do it on my head—quite easily, in fact. But on reflection, I think it would save time if we got the machine to a garage."

"I think it might!" agreed Jimmy Silver blandly.

Lovell looked at him suspiciously.

"Mind, I'm quite willing to do the repairs," he said. "I told you when we started on this trip that I should take the scooter in hand, and do all the running repairs that might be needed. I keep to that. But if you fellows are keen to get on, it might save time—a little time—if we got it to a garage."

"Let's!" said Newcome.

"But how?" asked Raby. "We can't carry that dashed heavy old thing on our jiggers, and it won't wheel now."

"If Lovell takes it into a few more pieces, we can hand it round and carry it in our pockets," suggested Newcome.

Lovell breathed hard.

"If you're going to be a funny idiot—"

"Not at all, old chap—that's your job."

"Look here, Newcome—"

"Keep smiling, old beans!" urged Jimmy Silver. "It's a question of transport. 'How—'"

"We can pack it on a horse," said Lovell.

"What horse?"

"Coker's horse."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver heartily. "That giddy old gee-gee can carry it all right. It was Coker busted the scooter, so he can't grumble—and if he does, it doesn't matter anyhow."

The caravan horse was resting in the grass, blinking contentedly in the morning sunlight. Jimmy Silver unfastened the tether from the peg. Horace Coker, having concluded his argument with the shepherd, came

back to his caravan, in time to see the Rookwooders taking possession of his horse. He ran up breathlessly.

"What are you doing with that horse?" he bawled.

"Borrowing it, old bean."

"B-b-bub-borrowing it?"

"Yes—the same as you did with the bike."

"You—you—you—let that horse alone!" shrieked Coker.

"Keep smiling, old man! You shall have it back," said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "You can lead it for us if you like."

"You—you—you young scoundrels!" gasped Coker. "I—I—I—I'll——"

Words failed Coker. Forgetful of the undoubted fact that he was no match for the Fistical Four of Rookwood, he rushed upon Jimmy Silver & Co., hitting out right and left.

For five minutes after that Jimmy Silver & Co. were busy. So was Coker!

At the end of five minutes, Horace Coker was reposing against one of the slanting wheels of his caravan, with his wrists tied to the spokes.

He sat there, dazed and dizzy, and blinked at the Rookwooders.

They gave him no further heed.

Packing the disabled scooter on the broad back of the caravan horse was not an easy task, and it required all Jimmy Silver & Co.'s attention, so naturally they had none to waste on Coker. They put on the ground-sheets first, to save the horse's back, and then the rugs, and then the scooter. They tied it here, and they tied it there, but it still looked a little uncertain; and they decided to walk on either side of the horse and hold it on.

Coker watched them blankly.

The Rookwooders were ready to start at last. It was quite a procession. Lovell wheeled a push-bike with one hand, and led the horse with the other, Jimmy Silver walked on the port side, and Raby on the starboard side, holding the load on the horse, to save it from toppling either way.

Newcome brought up the rear, wheeling a bike with either hand.

Coker watched them go.

They were out of his sight soon; but they did not go unwatched. Everybody they passed on the road watched them till they were out of sight. The procession seemed to create intense interest among the native population of that part of Dorsetshire. Labourers in the fields stopped their labours to stare over the hedges—a ploughman halted his plough and stood up to gaze. Passing motorists stared, and grinned; several cheery cyclists gave cat-calls as they whizzed by. A holiday charabanc, careering by loaded with trippers, sent up a roar of merriment.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were quite glad when they arrived in the village, after a mile's slow and painful progress. They were still gladder to see the welcome word "Garage" over a building there.

They stopped.

Two fellows came sauntering out of the village inn as they halted, and stopped to look on.

"Hallo! Home they brought the warrior dead!" chuckled Potter.

"Why, that's our horse!" exclaimed Greene.

A mechanic in overalls came out of the garage. The scooter was handed over to him. He looked at it, and rubbed his nose, and looked at it again.

"Run into a motor-car?" he asked sympathetically.

"Not quite," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh! Been under a wagon, s'pose?"

"Hem! No! Just a tumble—but I had some repairs since then," said Jimmy Silver. "Can you fix it up for us?"

The man rubbed his nose again.

"Well, I'll try, sir," he said. "I'll do my best! You never know what you can do till you try, do you, sir?" said the mechanic brightly.

And the hapless scooter was taken into the garage.

"When will it be ready?" called out Lovell.

"I can tell you better to-morrow, sir."

"Eh?"

"Or the next day."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Did Coker lend you that horse?" asked Greene, as Jimmy Silver & Co. were leaving the garage.

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy. "We persuaded him."

"Blessed if I know how you did it, then," said Potter. "How the thump did you persuade him?"

"We tied him to a wheel of the caravan."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter. "Did you leave him like that?"

"Just like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can take your gee-gee back," said Jimmy. "Give Coker our love, and tell him we've done with it. Tata. Come on, you chaps, I dare say we can get some lunch at the inn, and beds for the night, while the scooter is recovering from Lovell's running repairs."

Jimmy Silver & Co. spent three days in that Dorsetshire village. It was quite a nice village, with a pleasant inn, and the surrounding scenery was well worth looking at. Each morning they paid a visit to the garage to inquire how the motor-scooter was getting on—inquiring after the health of the invalid, as Raby expressed it. The gentleman in overalls seemed very dubious at first, but he grew more hopeful with the passage of time. But the scooter's recovery was slow. Lovell had done his running repairs with a thoroughness that left his successor a hefty task to deal with.

Coker and his caravan were long gone on their way, while the Rook-

wooders waited patiently for the recovery of the scooter. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not see any more of Coker, which was a comfort. And at last—though it seemed too good to be true—the motor-scooter was restored to them in all its pristine glory.

Then, at last, the Rookwood rambles shook the dust of that Dorsetshire village from their feet and went on their way.

CHAPTER 30.

Accidents Will Happen!

WHIRR-R-RR!
"Oh dear!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Whirrrrrr!

"The jolly old scooter again!" sighed Raby.

"About time we scrapped it, I think!" grunted Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell knitted his brows. Lovell was mounted on the motor-scooter, his comrades were on the push-bikes. For a long, long time the motor-scooter had been giving hints that all was not well with it.

Exactly what wasn't well with it Lovell did not know. Many times he had propped it by the roadside and examined it. But the internal complaint of the motor-scooter eluded his powers of diagnosis.

It sounded asthmatic, if a motor-scooter could be supposed to suffer from asthma. Lovell was perplexed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were not perplexed at all. Lately there had been an accident to the scooter. Lovell had executed running repairs.

According to Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome it was the running repairs that had done it.

A motor mechanic had put the machine together after Lovell had finished his running repairs. He had made it run again. Considering the state to which Lovell had reduced it, Jimmy Silver & Co. had looked on that

motor mechanic as a remarkably clever fellow, and his performance as a wonderful one.

But it had not lasted.

And every time Lovell tinkered with it it seemed to run a little more uneasily, and it moaned and groaned almost like a living thing complaining of ill-usage.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had enjoyed their cycle tour in the summer vacation. The vacation was now drawing to an end. The motor-scooter, apparently, was doing the same.

Whirrrr! Clink-clink! Snap!

Weird sounds came from the scooter. Suddenly it stopped. Arthur Edward Lovell jumped off.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome dismounted. They were looking rather exasperated. For two or three days they had been worried by the scooter. It was an invalid that required constant attention. It had served them well. It had carried the baggage of the Rookwood cyclists many a long league. But really it seemed to have outlived its usefulness now, and three of the party, at least, were fed-up with it.

"For goodness' sake," said Newcome, "chuck the thing into a ditch and leave it there!"

"I have to do a few running repairs, I think," said Lovell, unheeding. "I'm sorry now I trusted the machine into the hands of a mechanic. Fumbling ass, you know!"

"The wonder is that he got it together at all, after the way you mucked it up, Lovell."

"Don't be a silly ass, Newcome, if you can help it."

Jimmy Silver glanced at the sky.

The shades of night were falling fast, as a well-known poet has already remarked. A few light drops of rain were falling, a foretaste of the wrath to come, as it were. It was not going to be a fine night.

Camping out that night was not attractive. But the juniors were still

several miles from the village where they had intended to put up, on a lonely road in Hampshire. The road they were following ran through deep, thick woods, dark and shadowy on either side. The woods belonged to some large estate, and two or three boards, peeping from the trees, announced that trespassers would be prosecuted.

"Rotten place to camp!" remarked Raby.

"No need to camp," said Lovell. "I shall have the scooter going again in a few minutes."

Generally, Lovell's chums were very patient with him. But there was a limit, and the limit had been reached.

"Rot!" said Newcome. "If you start tinkering with it it won't go again at all. We've had some."

"We have!" grunted Raby. "Too much!"

"If you think I can't do running repairs—"

"Well, you can't, and there's an end to it!" said Newcome. "Give us a rest. Look here, Jimmy, are we going to chuck that scooter away and get on, or are we going to camp here?"

"We gave nine pounds for this scooter!" bawled Lovell.

"Well, we've had our money's worth out of it, if you come to that. We've only got another week before we go back to school. Scrap it!"

"Fathead!"

A gust of wind swept down the road, bringing rain with it. Raindrops splattered over the Rookwood cyclists.

"We'd better get under shelter, if we can," said Jimmy Silver. "Wheel the bikes into the wood."

"Trespassers will be prosecuted!" remarked Newcome.

"Well, we don't want to get drenched. Come on, and chance it!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome wheeled their machines into a narrow path that wound among the trees by the roadside. Arthur Edward Lovell snorted as he looked after them.

A week before the Co. had spent a whole day by the roadside in Dorset while Lovell laboured with running repairs. That effort had exhausted their patience. They were not in the least disposed to repeat the experience, especially with the rain coming down more thickly every minute.

Lovell snorted and Lovell sniffed. But, obstinate as Arthur Edward Lovell undoubtedly was, he did not like rain any more than the other fellows. It dropped on him in large drops, and it trickled down his neck. And even Lovell was beginning to have some slight misgivings about his powers as a motor mechanic.

He snorted and sniffed, but he heaved the motor-scooter out of the road into the shelter of a tree a little distance in the wood. Then he called to his comrades.

"I can't work in the dark. I can't repair this scooter without a light."

"That's all right," called back Newcome. "You can't repair it at all, old chap. You won't do any more damage in the dark than in the light."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "Look here, will you fellows stand round with the bike lamps while I do the repairs?"

"No, we jolly well won't!" said Raby emphatically.

"Then it will have to be left till the morning."

"Bow-wow!"

Arthur Edward Lovell carefully covered a ground-sheet over the scooter, and joined the other fellows deeper in the wood. They had stacked the bikes against a tree, and put waterproof covers over them. The thick foliage overhead sheltered them, but as the rain increased it found them out. For the greater part of their tour they had enjoyed good weather. Now the weather was taking its revenge.

"Lovely place to put in a night!" groaned Raby. "Look here, this rain isn't going to stop! Let's get on. Lovell can have a lift behind one of

us. He can come back for the scooter in the morning, if he likes."

"That's a good idea," agreed Newcome. "Let's."

Snort from Lovell.

"I'm not leaving that scooter to be stolen by some dashed tramp!" he growled.

"Rats! No tramp would be silly ass enough to bag that scooter, after what you've done to it."

"You cheeky ass, Newcome!"

"It's a good idea, Lovell," urged Jimmy Silver. "The scooter will be safe enough, most likely."

"Most likely!" sniffed Lovell. "Well, I don't think so. You fellows can go on if you like. I'm not stopping you. I'm staying. I'm not afraid of a little wet."

"It isn't a little, it's a lot."

"Oh, rats!"

"Let's go on, then, and leave the silly owl here!" growled Raby.

"Do!" snorted Lovell.

But the three could not quite make up their minds to that. Lovell was exasperating; but it was sink or swim together with the Fistical Four of Rookwood School.

"Well, we're for it!" sighed Jimmy Silver at last. "But we can't stay here in the rain. Let's look for something better than this. There's a big house not far away, and we may get leave to camp in a shed, or a barn, or something. Come on!"

"What about the bikes?"

"They're all right here. Nobody can see them in the dark. Even that dashed precious scooter is safe. Come on!"

"I don't want to go too far from the scooter," grunted Lovell. "Some sneaking tramp—"

"Oh, rot!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. moved on along the narrow path in the wood, and Lovell, after some hesitation, followed them. The rain was getting serious now, and it was really necessary to find a shelter of some sort. So the Rookwooders proceeded to look for it.

CHAPTER 31.

The Chalet in the Woods.

"THERE'S a light!"

"Oh, good!"

It was a glimmer of light in the rainy wood, so high up that it evidently came from a window. Jimmy Silver & Co., wet and rather draggled, and not in the best of spirits, pushed on towards the light. They hoped that it shone from the window of the house to which the woods belonged, undoubtedly a country mansion of some magnitude. But they soon saw that they were nowhere near the mansion.

The light glimmered from a shuttered window in a little timber building in the heart of the wood, that resembled a Swiss chalet in construction. The shutter allowed only a glimmer of light to escape into the rainy darkness without. The trees grew quite close to the chalet, embosoming it in foliage.

"Come on!" said Lovell. "Blessed if I can make out what this show is, but there must be somebody there. This way!"

Lovell strode on.

A minute later he stopped, with a howl.

"Ow!"

"What the thump——"

"Wow! A dashed wire fence!"

Lovell had walked right into the wire fence, which was invisible in the gloom.

He rubbed his nose savagely. His nose seemed to have come into painful contact with the wire, which was barbed.

"The silly brutes!" muttered Lovell. "What the thump do they want to run barbed wire here for?"

"To keep out trespassers, perhaps!" chuckled Raby.

"Ow! My nose!"

The Rookwooders stopped, and then they moved on along the wire fence, seeking a gate. There was somebody in that lonely little building, chalet or summer-house, or whatever it was, in the heart of the wood, and they hoped that it was a hospitable somebody who

would give them shelter for the night.

"Here's a gate," said Raby at last.

"Locked!"

"Blow it!"

Jimmy Silver stared round him rather curiously. The barbed wire fence was a high one; it was impossible to get over it. The gate was narrow and strong, and was locked securely. Jimmy could see that all the windows of the chalet were shuttered, and only from one of the upper windows came that glimmer of light. He could not help wondering who and what was the denizen of this lonely retreat in a Hampshire wood.

"Suppose we stand here and shout," suggested Newcome.

"Isn't there a bell, or something?" growled Lovell.

There was no bell.

"My hat! There's a dog!" muttered Newcome.

A shadowy form loomed up on the other side of the closely netted barbed wire. Two bright eyes gleamed at the juniors, and a deep, savage growl echoed in their ears. A large, savage-looking mastiff was separated from them only by the wire fence—and they were glad that the wire fence was there to separate them.

"That beast would be glad to get at us," muttered Raby, jumping back from the fence.

The dog was thrusting his head at the wire, evidently desirous to sample the legs of the Rookwooders.

Finding it impossible to get at them, the brute started barking, filling the wood with echoes.

The door of the chalet opened, and a stream of light came into the gloom.

In the doorway stood a burly man, dressed as a keeper, with a gun under his arm.

"Toothy! What is it, Toothy?" asked the man, in a deep, surly voice.

The dog continued to bark.

The man muttered something the juniors could not hear, and came out into the enclosure.

"Hallo!" called out Jimmy Silver.

The keeper gave a start, and hurried down to the gate. He silenced the dog with an angry gesture.

"Who the dickens are you?" he exclaimed, staring through the bars of the gate at the Rookwooders.

"Cyclists looking for a shelter," explained Jimmy Silver. "We're hung up on the road."

"What?"

"Can you let us into a shed for the night? We shan't do any damage. We'll pay, if you like."

"Get out of it!" snapped the keeper. "This isn't a casual ward. Get out of it!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter——" exclaimed Lovell.

"Trespassers ain't allowed in Rutland Park!" snapped the man. "Ain't you seen the boards?"

"Yes; but——"

"Get out of it, then! I'll have you run in if you ain't out of these woods pretty quick."

Jimmy Silver eyed the man through the gate.

"You might be a little more civil about it," he said coolly. "As for getting out of the woods, we'll please ourselves."

"Will you, by gum! Here, Toothy!"

The dog came up, snarling.

"I give you one minute afore I open the gate," said the keeper. "If this 'ere dogs gets arter you, I'm sorry for you. He nigh killed a tramp the other day. I give you while I get this 'ere gate unlocked, and arter that look arter yourselves, my lads!"

He fumbled in a pocket and produced a key. The big mastiff watched the juniors with a savage intentness, waiting for the gate to be opened.

"Better clear!" murmured Raby.

"What-ho!"

The surly keeper evidently intended to be as good as his word. He was putting the key into the lock.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not linger.

A scrap with a big, savage mastiff in the dark woods was not what they

were looking for. They hurried back under the trees.

As they did so they heard the gate open.

"Find 'em, Toothy!" shouted the keeper.

The mastiff rustled out.

"My hat!" breathed Lovell. "The brute's actually set the dog after us! Hook it!"

"Hold on!" muttered Jimmy. "Get into this tree—quick! We could never dodge that dog in the wood."

"Quick!" breathed Newcome.

There was no time to lose; they could not see the dog now, but they could hear him bounding in pursuit.

In hot haste the four Rookwooders drew themselves into a tree and clambered up into the higher branches.

They were scarcely up when the dog raced by below, barking.

Jimmy panted for breath.

"Oh, my hat! We're well out of that! Quiet, you chaps; I believe I can hear that brute coming!"

They heard the click of the gate-lock. Then the heavy steps of the burly keeper were audible. He had come out and locked the gate after him.

The four Rookwooders were silent as they clung to the branches in the darkness. The man, calling to the dog, came to a halt almost under the tree.

"Go for 'em, Toothy! Fetch 'em—fetch 'em! Bite 'em!"

The mastiff was racing and plunging in the underbrush, barking furiously. Jimmy Silver & Co. were thankful enough that they were safe out of his reach. They had caught a glimpse of his teeth, and a glimpse was quite enough for them.

With beating hearts they clung to the wet boughs in silence. There was a sudden exclamation at a little distance, a loud barking, and then a growl. Then a voice again:—

"Down, you brute! Don't you know me? Down!"

The keeper called out:

"That you, Master Philip?"

"Yes, Brood! What's the row?"

A dim figure appeared under the tree. Jimmy Silver & Co., looking down, could just make out that it was the figure of a boy—a rather largely built fellow of about sixteen. He came to a stop close by the keeper, and the dog's savage barking died away.

CHAPTER 32.

A Little Mysterious!

JIMMY SILVER & CO., clinging to the boughs overhead, made no sound. Their only idea was to keep their presence undiscovered till the two were gone, with the dog, and there would be a chance of getting away unseen. By this time the Fistical Four regretted deeply enough that they had not heeded the notice-boards. They would have given a good deal now to be safely out of the precincts of Rutland Park. Evidently the owner of that estate was not hospitable to hapless strangers.

"What's the row, Brood? I heard the dog barking, and came along. Has anything happened?"

There was a note of anxiety in the voice.

"No, Master Philip—he's all right," said Brood.

Who the "he" was, to whom the keeper alluded, Jimmy Silver & Co. had not the faintest idea—not that they cared.

"Then what——"

"Some fellers have been trespassing in the wood, sir, and I set the dog on them," said Brood. "There was three or four of them, and they had the neck to ask for shelter——"

"My hat! At the chalet?"

"Yes, Master Philip."

"Are they gone?"

"Yes; and they must have gone pretty quick, or Toothy would have had some of them, Master Philip."

Master Philip laughed.

"There ought to be a paling put along the road to keep these dashed tramps out of the woods," he said. "It's never been wanted before, but it's wanted now, Brood. I'll speak to my father about it."

A match scratched in the gloom, and a scent of tobacco was wafted to the Rookwood juniors above.

The youth was lighting a cigarette.

As the match flared, and he puffed at the cigarette, the juniors above had a full and clear view of his face.

He looked about sixteen, or a little more, rather a handsome fellow, with strongly marked features and thick, dark eyebrows. His nose was slightly aquiline, and his lips rather thick. The whole face was heavy, though not at all ill-looking. It was not a face to be easily forgotten.

The match went out.

Master Philip blew out a cloud of smoke.

"You're sure they're gone, Brood?"

"Oh, yes, sir—they're scuttling down the road by this time, I fancy. I wish Toothy had caught one of them."

"How is he, Brood?" asked Master Philip, apparently alluding to the unknown "he" the keeper had already mentioned.

"Same as ever, Master Philip."

"Savage as ever, I suppose?"

"Yes, Master Philip. I thought he would jump at me when I took in his supper, only he knewed it was no use. He says we shall all go to prison for this before we're much older."

"That's enough, Brood!" snapped Master Philip. "You'd better get back, and take your dog with you."

"Yes, Master Philip!"

The keeper called to the dog and strode back to the gate of the wired enclosure, with the mastiff at his heels. The juniors in the tree heard the click of the lock as the gate was unlocked, and then locked again.

Below them they heard the footsteps of Master Philip. He was strolling

away through the rain, smoking his cigarette.

The footsteps died away into silence.

"Well," murmured Jimmy Silver at last. "This is a go!"

"There's something jolly queer going on here," said Raby. "What the thump does it all mean?"

"Somebody's in that chalet, where we saw the light at the window," said Newcome.

"Some invalid, perhaps," said Lovell thoughtfully. "That may be why they're so annoyed at strangers butting in. May be a consumptive or something, who's got to be kept quiet. Or—or perhaps a giddy lunatic that's being taken care of."

"Possibly!" assented Jimmy. "They seem to have cleared off now—and the sooner we get out of this the better."
"Yes, rather."

All the Fistical Four were agreed on that. The rain was better than the kind of hospitality they had experienced at Rutland Park.

They slipped down from the tree and turned their backs on the lonely chalet, where the light still glimmered from the shuttered window.

It was not easy to find their way back to the road in the darkness and the dropping rain.

But they reached the spot, at last, where they had left the bikes and the scooter.

Camping in the wood was given up now. A camp that was likely to be disturbed by a visit from Toothy or Mr. Brood was not attractive. In spite of the rain, three bicycles were wheeled out into the road.

"What about the scooter?" asked Lovell.

"Nothing about the scooter!" said Jimmy Silver. "Blow the scooter! We're fed-up with the scooter! If you can't wheel it, leave it there!"

"I can wheel it!" growled Lovell.
"But I can't ride it again till I've done some running repairs."

"Nobody could ride it after you've done that."

"Look here——"

"Better leave the thundering thing where it is!" growled Raby.

"Rats!"

"Well, wheel it, then, and be blowed to you!" said Raby forcibly. "I'm getting on out of this rain. It's two miles, anyhow."

And George Raby mounted his bike and started. He had reached the end of his patience.

Lovell snorted.

"No need for you fellows to hang on. You can clear, and I'll wheel the scooter. I'll join you at the White Lion—that's the inn at Draycott."

"Well, no good all of us getting soaked," said Newcome; and he put a leg over his machine and followed Raby.

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"I'll walk with you, Lovell, old chap," he said.

"You needn't!" snapped Lovell.

"Look here, Lovell——"

"If you like to stay and show a light while I get the machine running again, well and good! If not, clear off, and the sooner the better, and be blowed to you!" growled Lovell.

Evidently Arthur Edward was not in a good temper.

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

And he mounted his machine and followed Raby and Newcome. Arthur Edward Lovell plodded on wrathfully with the disabled scooter, which, like other obstinate creatures, could be led, but not driven.

An hour later Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were sitting down to a comfortable supper at the White Lion in Draycott village. It was more than an hour afterwards that Arthur Edward Lovell came in—wet and muddy and cross.

But an ample supper restored his good temper a little.

"It's all right about the scooter,"

he told his comrades. "I fancy I know where the trouble is. I'll have it in the yard to-morrow, and give it a thorough overhauling. That's what it really wants, you know. You'll see."

To which Jimmy Silver & Co. made no rejoinder. They had their own ideas about what was going to happen to the scooter on the morrow.

CHAPTER 33.

The Last of the Scooter!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were up early on the following morning—at all events, three members of the Co. were up early. Arthur Edward Lovell found his bed too comfortable to leave it in a hurry. Doubtless his walk with the scooter that could be led but not driven had tired him, and so he allowed himself an extra rest.

On occasions when any other member of the Co. showed a disposition to take an extra nap it was the way of Arthur Edward to shout "Slacker!" vociferously; and if that did not suffice, to give the bedclothes a hefty tug. Arthur Edward had no patience with slacking. But when Arthur Edward himself wanted a little extra nap the matter was, of course, quite different; and he would have been very much annoyed had his comrades shouted "Slacker!" in at his door, and quite infuriated if they had jerked the bedclothes off.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. had no desire to rouse out Lovell. As a matter of fact, they were pleased to see that he was taking an extra snooze. It left them at liberty to deal with the motor-scooter.

Three members of the Rookwood party had decided that the last scrap of the vacation was not going to be spent in hanging round while Lovell tinkered at the motor-scooter. They had looked on at as much tinkering as they cared for—more, in fact. The motor-scooter, and the repairing

thereof, was beginning to get on their nerves.

So while Lovell enjoyed his extra snooze, his comrades breakfasted rapidly and got busy.

When Arthur Edward Lovell came down they were absent from the inn; and Lovell sat down quite cheerily to an ample breakfast of new-laid eggs and home-cured bacon, and enjoyed it thoroughly. He was close on the finish when his three friends strolled in. Over breakfast Lovell had been chatting with the ruddy-cheeked country waiter; but that individual faded away when the juniors came in. Lovell cracked his fifth egg and nodded to the Co.

"You were up before me," he remarked. "Been for a stroll?"

"Yes, walking around, you know," said Jimmy. "We're ready to get on the road when you are."

"I hope to be ready pretty soon. The scooter won't delay me long, I think."

"I'm sure it won't!" assented Jimmy, closing one eye at his chums; and Raby grinned, and Newcome chuckled.

"You fellows can take another stroll, if you like," said Lovell. "I shan't want your help. You're not much use when it comes to handling machinery, you know. You haven't the head for it, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Not at all, old bean!"

"By the way, I've been asking the waiter about that show, Rutland Park," remarked Lovell, as he negotiated the fifth egg. "They know all about it here. Some of the local men were employed in building that chalet in the wood; it's quite a recent erection. The whole place belongs to Sir Harry Rutland—a kid of seventeen. Lucky bargee—what?"

"Jolly lucky merchant; but I suppose that means that he's an orphan, so I dare say he's got bad luck along with the good luck," said Jimmy. "But it's jolly odd for a kid to have a chalet built in his woods—rather an

expensive fancy, I should think. He must have a guardian, and the old gent ought to be looking after his money for him."

"It was the guardian had the chalet built," said Lovell. "He's a Mr. Packington, and he lives at the park along with his ward, and his son, Philip Packington. That must be the Master Philip that that keeper chap was talking to last night."

"I suppose so," assented Jimmy Silver, not very much interested. He was, in fact, thinking chiefly about the motor-scooter, and the surprise that was awaiting Arthur Edward Lovell.

"But it seems a queer sort of show, though," went on Lovell. "Mr. Packington used to be rich, but he lost his money in speculation, so they say. He's not popular about here. Master Philip seems rather a card—the waiter says he often comes along here to talk with sporting men and play billiards and smoke, and so on."

"He looked that kind of a shady waster," said Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"The other chap—the kid baronet—is in delicate health, and isn't seen about much," went on Lovell. "He has—or, rather, had—a tutor. He's going to a Public school next term."

"Is he?" yawned Newcome. "You seem jolly interested in them, Lovell."

"It happens to be Rookwood that he's going to."

"Oh, I see!"

"His father, the late baronet, was a Rookwood man," said Lovell. "The jolly old waiter here knows all about it, you see, and he's been spinning me the yarn over brekker. The old baronet seems to have been a good sort; but Packington, the giddy guardian, appears to be a crusty sort of johnny. They say in the village that he's so hard up that he wouldn't have much to live on if he hadn't been left guardian to young Rutland. Now he's got the Park till the kid comes of age, and so much a year for guardianing

him, and all that. Now, I've got an idea."

"Not really!" ejaculated Raby.

"Don't be an ass! They treated us in a rotten way last night," said Lovell. "But as young Rutland is going to be a Rookwood chap, and we are Rookwood chaps, you know, we could call on him if we liked. He's bound to be pleased to make some acquaintances belonging to the school he's going to, see?"

"Is he?"

"Of course he is, ass! We'll tell him we'll see him through at Rookwood, and all that—jolly good thing for him, too. You know what a new kid feels like at a big school. Then we'll ask him to sack that ruffian of a keeper—what?"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"If he's a minor, with a guardian, I don't suppose the sacking of servants is in his hands," he said. "And let the blessed keeper rip, anyhow. If we nose Rutland out he's more likely to think we're after him because he's a giddy baronet, than anything else."

"What rot! I'd jolly well punch his nose if he hinted anything of the kind!"

"Well, we don't want to walk up to a giddy mansion for the sake of punching the owner's nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, if he's seventeen, he won't be coming into our Form," said Jimmy Silver. "The Shell at least—perhaps the Fifth! If he goes into the Fifth he will be a senior; and he won't want to know Fourth Formers. We shan't have anything to do with him at Rookwood."

"I barked my shins climbing that beastly tree last night," growled Lovell. "That brute Brood ought to be sacked!"

"Well, we were trespassing, you know, and landowners don't usually glow with sympathy for trespassers," remarked Jimmy. "Young Rutland is most likely to tell you that it served

you jolly well right, for being on his land at all."

Lovell grunted.

"I'd jolly well punch him if he did——"

"My dear chap, we're not on a punching expedition. Let's get on the road and forget all about it."

Arthur Edward Lovell grunted again, but he acquiesced. The Fistical Four came out into the inn yard, where four bicycles stood ready for them. Jimmy's bike, Raby's bike, and Newcome's bike stood there; and with them was another push-bike, which had a rather second-hand look.

"I'll get the scooter going now," said Lovell.

"Impossible, old chap!"

"Eh, why?"

"You can't get the scooter going, because——"

"Because what, ass?"

"Because it's gone!"

Lovell blinked.

"Gone!"

"Yes. We're finishing this giddy tour on push-bikes all round," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You can push a bike as well as we can, you know. Jump on!"

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Lovell testily. "Where's the scooter?"

"Goodness knows by this time!"

"You've done something with that scooter!" roared Lovell.

"Yes, old bean."

"What?" shrieked Lovell.

"Traded it off for a push-bike," said Jimmy. "It's all right. The bike merchant gave us this push-bike in exchange. It's seen service, but it's still serviceable. Jump on!"

Lovell's face was a study.

"That—that scooter cost us nine pounds!" he gasped. "This—this old bike isn't worth four. Nine pounds was——"

"That was before you repaired it," said Raby. "My idea is that the bike merchant got the worst of the bargain.

Still, he was willing to take what you'd left of the scooter in exchange. Good-natured sort of chap!"

"You silly owls!" roared Lovell.

"My dear fellow——"

"You cheeky chumps! You—you blithering cuckoos! You—you've really parted with that scooter?" shrieked Lovell.

"Really and truly."

"I was going to repair it."

"Life's too short!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Three score years and ten isn't a sufficient allowance for your running repairs, Lovell."

Lovell fairly spluttered.

"You—you—you—— Where's that bike-man? I'm going to get that scooter back!"

Jimmy Silver smiled cheerily.

He had settled the bill at the inn, and nothing remained but to start. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome wheeled out their machines. Lovell did not touch the second-hand bike, which had now taken the place of the motor-scooter.

"You asses! You dummies! You chumps! Where's that scooter? I tell you I'm going——"

"Ta-ta, old top!"

Three cyclists rode cheerily away. Arthur Edward Lovell stood in the road, crimson with wrath, and shook an enraged fist after them, rather to the entertainment of some village lads who gathered round. It was not till the three were almost out of sight that Arthur Edward finally dragged out the second-hand bike, mounted it, and pedalled after them.

Three smiling faces greeted Lovell when he came panting up, overtaking the Co. at last.

"Look here——" began Lovell.

"Like your new bike, old chap?"

"Blow the bike! I'm going after that scooter! I——"

"Race you to the next village!" said Jimmy.

"Look here——"

But Lovell's chums did not "look

there." They put on speed, and whizzed away down the road. Lovell breathed hard and laboured after them. An hour had elapsed when he came up with the three again, and Draycott was left far behind by that time.

"You thumping asses!" he gasped breathlessly. "Haven't you a little sense? The scooter carried all the baggage, and now you've loaded up all the bikes with our stuff. The scooter would have carried the lot once I'd got it going."

"But we've got less than a week left," grinned Raby. "A week wasn't long enough for you to finish your running repairs, old bean."

"I tell you——"

"Oh, give us a rest, old chap!"

"No, let him keep on!" said Jimmy Silver considerably. "No harm in Lovell taking it out in slanging. Keep it up till lunch-time, Lovell, and then give us a rest. If you mention the scooter again after lunch we'll bump you!"

"That's fair," agreed Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell did keep it up. While the bikes glided on by sunny roads and lanes, he told his chums what he thought of them at great length and with great emphasis. His eloquence seemed really inexhaustible.

When the Rookwooders camped for lunch, Lovell was still going strong. With smiling patience they gave him his head, as it were.

But after lunch Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"Time's up!" he said.

"What do you mean, ass?" snapped Lovell.

"No more scooter!" said Jimmy tersely. "If you say scooter again we're going to bump you!"

"You silly owl, that scooter—— Here, I say, hands off! I'll punch your nose! I—I—— Yarooooh!"

Bump!

"You silly, cheeky chumps, I tell you that scooter——"

Bump!

Arthur Edward Lovell was frowning when the Rookwood cyclists resumed their way after lunch. But he did not mention the scooter any more. Perhaps, like Rachel of old, he still mourned for that which was lost, and found no comfort. But the subject was dropped. Arthur Edward ceased from troubling, and the weary were at rest.

CHAPTER 34.

Back to Rookwood!

ROOKHAM! Change for Rookwood School!"

"Here we are again!" sang out Jimmy Silver cheerily.

A swarm of Rookwood fellows—seniors and juniors, old boys and new boys—poured from the train.

Prominent among them were the Fistical Four of the Fourth Form. It was the first day of the term, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were en route for the old school in cheery spirits. School, perhaps, was not quite so attractive as holidays. Nevertheless, Rookwood had plenty of attractions for them. They looked forward to a great "brew" in the end study and to a rag with the Modern fellows; and there was the football coming along, too.

Jimmy Silver & Co. linked arms and progressed along the crowded platform. Four fellows could not walk abreast with linked arms on a crowded platform without collisions, and there were a good many collisions. Smythe of the Shell, resplendent in a magnificent topper, sat down suddenly as the Fistical Four walked into him, and his topper was far from magnificent when Smythe recovered it from a myriad feet. Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth—seniors and quite great men—came into collision with the four merry juniors, and both the Fifth-Formers sat down on the platform, with roars of indignant wrath.

"Order there, you fags!" shouted

Bulkeley of the Sixth, towering over the mob of Rookwooders.

And the Fistical Four moderated their transports a little, so to speak. They greeted Mornington and Erroll and Conroy and Putty Grace and Tubby Muffin, and other old acquaintances of the Classical Fourth. They exchanged cat-calls with Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern Fourth, and they packed themselves into a carriage of the local train that was waiting to take them on to Coombe, and hurled out three or four Shell fellows who tried to follow them in.

The local train was packed, of course. There was a second train in ten minutes, but nobody seemed to want to wait for it. Jimmy Silver & Co. and four or five others of the Classical Fourth were packed into one carriage. Hansom of the Fifth jerked the door open, and shoved his head and shoulders in. The next moment Hansom's hat was flattened on his head, and he found himself sitting on the platform, trying to extract his head from his hat.

"You cheeky fags!" gasped Hansom. "Full inside!" grinned Lovell. "Try again, Hansom."

But Edward Hansom sagely did not try again. He went farther along the train. The carriages filled fast, and the porters slammed the doors.

At the last moment a youth rushed across the platform, and caught at Silver & Co.'s carriage. Jimmy Silver held the handle inside.

"No room!" he said cheerily.

"Let me in, you young fool!"

Jimmy stared at him through the window.

He recognised the rather burly fellow, with his thick, heavy eyebrows, his aquiline nose, and his thick lips.

It was the fellow he had seen by the lighted match, under the trees at Rutland Park, a week or two before—the youth whom Brood, the keeper, had addressed as Master Philip.

"Hallo! You!" ejaculated Jimmy.

The youth stared at him. Jimmy knew him, but he, of course, did not know Jimmy, never having set eyes on him before.

"Stand back there, sir!" called out a porter. "She's moving!"

Master Philip stepped back with a scowl.

The train glided out of the station.

It was quite a merry party in the carriage as the train ran on to Coombe.

When they turned out at the little station at Coombe, Jimmy Silver ran his eyes over the Rookwood crowd. There were a number of new boys, joining the school at the beginning of term, and Jimmy wondered which of them was the "kid" baronet, Sir Harry Rutland. He remembered what the juniors had learned at Draycott, that Sir Harry was going to Rookwood that term. Jimmy supposed that "Master Philip" had travelled along with him to see him as far as his new school; or it was possible that Philip Packington was coming to Rookwood also. But in the crowd that swarmed at Coombe, Jimmy did not see any fellow whom he judged to be young Rutland.

He was not keenly interested in the matter, however, and he forgot both Rutland and Master Philip as he went on with his chums to Rookwood in the brake.

First day of term at Rookwood was a busy day for all hands. The school dame wore a worried look; the masters were busy and hasty and hurried. Health-certificates had to be handed in, bags and boxes sorted out, studies claimed, and the claims made good. Jimmy Silver & Co., of course, bagged the end study in the Classical Fourth, as usual. The most daring spirits in the Fourth would scarcely have ventured to attempt to deprive the Fistical Four of the study.

Tubby Muffin rolled in, with a cheery grin, when the Fistical Four sat down to tea.

"Glad to see you back, you fellows," he said brightly.

"Good!" said Lovell. "And we'll be glad to see your back, too, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby blinked.

"I was going to stand a ripping spread to-day," he said. "Sort of house-warming, you know. I was going to ask you fellows. But—what do you think?—I've left my purse at home!"

"Anything in it?" asked Raby sarcastically.

"But, as I can't ask you, you fellows can ask me. It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?" said Tubby.

And he pulled up a box to the well-spread table.

Lovell half-rose, but he grinned, and sat down again.

"All serene!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "After all, we should miss your fat old chivvy, Tubby, if you'd burst during the holidays!"

"You fellows have been on a bike tour—what?" asked Tubby, with his mouth full. "All right in its way. I hope you enjoyed it. I've had a ripping vac—round Switzerland in a Rolls-Royce. That beast Putty makes out that I put in the holiday at Southend-on-Sea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is a good cake, you fellows! Not like the cakes we had in the huge hotels we stayed at in Italy, of course."

"Italy?"

"I mean France—that is to say, Switzerland," said Tubby hastily.

"Sure you don't mean Southend?" chuckled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you've got another cake in the cupboard, you chaps?"

"No."

"I think I'll get along and see Morny. I saw him bringing in a big parcel from the tuckshop—I mean, Morny will be wanting a chat with me about the holidays."

And Tubby Muffin rolled out of the end study again.

CHAPTER 35.

A Surprise for Jimmy Silver!

"HALLO! There's that chap!" remarked Lovell.

It was the second day of term, and the Fistical Four were sauntering in Big Quad at Rookwood, looking over the old show again, as Lovell described it.

Three fellows came sauntering along by the path under the old Rookwood beeches. Two of them were Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth Form. The third was the youth with the thick lips and the aquiline nose, whom the juniors had heard addressed as "Master Philip," and whose name they supposed to be Philip Packington.

The Fistical Four glanced at him rather curiously.

"So he's at Rookwood," said Newcome.

"Looks like it," said Jimmy Silver. "I saw him at Rookham station yesterday, and thought that perhaps he was travelling with young Rutland. But it seems that he's for Rookwood, too."

"Can't say I like his looks much," remarked Lovell. "Hansom and Talboys seem to have made friends with him, though."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Oh, I dare say he's all right!" he said. "It really wasn't his fault that you barked your shins in that giddy tree, Lovell."

Lovell grunted.

"It's rather an odd thing," remarked Newcome.

"What is, old chap?"

"That fellow Packington being at Rookwood in the Fifth. He must be in the Fifth, as he's chumming with Hansom and Talboys."

"Nothing odd in it, that I can see," answered Jimmy Silver. "Fellows don't often go straight into the Fifth here, but they do sometimes. Why shouldn't Packington?"

"I mean, I've looked over the list

of new kids," said Newcome. "There was only one down in the Fifth, and that's Rutland."

"Oh, you missed his name, then!" said Lovell. "He can't be in the Shell, or those swanking Fifth Form asses wouldn't be seen walking in the quad with him. Must be in the Fifth."

"I don't think I missed the name," said Newcome. "You see, I should have noticed it, in the circumstances, as we happened to come across this Packington merchant in the vac."

"Well, you must have, you see," said Lovell, "because here he is. Any of you fellows seen young Rutland yet?"

The Co. shook their heads. They were slightly interested in Sir Harry Rutland, of Rutland Park, Hampshire, on account of their adventure on his property during the vacation. They had a faint curiosity to see him, and see what the young baronet looked like. The interest was not very keen, but they meant to have a look at him when he happened along their way.

Classes that afternoon drove the matter from their minds, however. But after classes, Jimmy Silver remembered, and he called to Tubby Muffin. Reginald Muffin knew everything that went on at Rookwood, and he was sure to know all about Sir Harry Rutland of the Fifth.

"Rutland!" said Tubby. "Yes, I've seen him. Rather a swanky sort of blighter, if you ask me. He's in the Fifth; the only new chap in the Fifth. He's digging with Hansom and Talboys in their study."

"Isn't Packington in the Fifth, then?" asked Jimmy.

"Packington!" repeated Tubby. "Haven't heard the name. There isn't any new chap named Packington."

"There jolly well is," said Lovell. "We've seen him."

"Well, I haven't." Tubby Muffin shook his head. "You've got it wrong, Lovell. There isn't any Packington at Rookwood at all."

"Bosh!" grunted Lovell. "Fellow

with rather a swanky air, and a rather hooky nose."

"That's Rutland."

"Eh?"

"Rutland," said Tubby.

"Rot!"

"Well, perhaps you know best," said Tubby sarcastically. "You can go and look at him if you like—he's in Hansom's study in the Fifth."

And Tubby Muffin sniffed and rolled away. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood in the passage and looked at one another in rather a curious way.

"Pat young duffer!" grunted Lovell. "He's seen Packington, and mixed him up with Rutland. They're both here."

"I—I suppose so," said Jimmy Silver slowly. It seems a little odd. I can't quite make this out."

"Nothing to make out, that I can see," said Lovell, with a stare. "Tubby's a young ass, and he's mixed them up."

"It's queer, though—there seems to be only one new fellow in the Fifth, and yet there must be two—and Tubby describes Rutland as a fellow like Packington! Blessed if I can make it out! I think I'll stroll along to Hansom's study and ask him how he enjoyed the hols."

"Better not," grinned Lovell. "Hansom will kick you out."

"I'll chance that."

Jimmy Silver walked away with a thoughtful frown on his brow. He was strangely puzzled.

The peculiar episode in the wood at Rutland Park came back into his mind—the lonely light glimmering in the chalet embosomed in the wood, surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, guarded by a savage dog and an almost equally savage keeper. It had struck Jimmy as strange, at the time; but he had dismissed it from his mind as no business of his. Now, somehow, it all recurred to his thoughts with a strange distinctness now that "Master Philip" was at Rookwood School, and Tubby Muffin, who always learned all that

there was to be learned about new fellows, did not know the name of Packington.

A half-formed thought, strange and startling, was in Jimmy Silver's mind. He smiled a little, so strange and impossible did it seem. All the same, he was quite resolved to have a look at the new Fifth Former, Rutland. A look at the Fifth Form baronet was the easiest way of settling the matter.

Jimmy sauntered along the Fifth Form passage, and knocked at Hansom's door.

"Come in!"

Jimmy stepped in.

Hansom and Talboys were at tea with their new friend—the youth with the thick lips and aquiline nose, whom Jimmy knew as "Master Philip." The three looked at Jimmy.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Hansom. I don't remember askin' any Fourth Form fags to butt into this study!"

Jimmy grinned cheerily.

"I've heard that you've got a baronet in this study," he said. "Can't a fellow have a look at him?"

"Cheeky young ass!" said Talboys.

Hansom laughed. He was a good-natured fellow, though he had rather a lofty way of dealing with the Lower School.

"Well, here he is," he said, with a nod towards the fellow with the aquiline nose. "There's the giddy baronet! Look at him, and clear!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath. He was so startled that he could scarcely help showing it. "Master Philip's" eyes were fixed on him rather grimly.

"Who may you happen to be?" he asked.

"I happen to be Silver, of the Fourth Form," said Jimmy, recovering himself. "All serene—we don't have giddy baronets dropping in every day of the term, you know. Are you Sir Harry Rutland?"

"Hasn't Hansom just told you so?"

grunted the Fifth Former. "Of course I am. What about it?"

"Shut the door after you, Silver," said Hansom.

Jimmy Silver left the study.

His brain was almost in a whirl.

What did it mean?

But for that odd adventure at Rutland Park in the vacation, Jimmy Silver would not, of course, have taken any interest in Rutland of the Fifth: he would have had no suspicion regarding him. Now he had something more than suspicion.

Outside the Fistical Four, nobody at Rookwood, apparently, knew anything about Master Philip Packington. He was accepted there as Sir Harry Rutland, of Rutland Park—a rich heir and a baronet. And he was nothing of the sort! Jimmy Silver knew that! What was Philip Packington doing at Rookwood in a false name—in the name of a fellow who was expected at the school, but evidently had not come to Rookwood?

What did it mean?

CHAPTER 36.

A Row with the Fifth!

"THERE he is!" murmured Raby. Jimmy Silver & Co., who were sauntering on the path under the old beeches at Rookwood, stopped and looked.

Rutland of the Fifth was coming towards the Fistical Four along the path.

It really was not very good-mannered to stand in a row and stare at a fellow as if with the intention of staring him out of countenance. But that was what the four Fourth Formers did.

They couldn't help it. Sir Harry Rutland, Baronet, the new fellow in the Fifth Form at Rookwood, had a peculiar interest for the chums of the Fourth. Whenever any member of Jimmy Silver & Co. came across Rutland of the Fifth he would look at him intently, as if there were something strangely fascinating in Rutland's rather unprepossessing features.

The Fifth Former glanced at the four and knitted his brows. Instead of passing them on the path, he came to a halt and fixed his eyes on the juniors.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver politely.

"Fine afternoon!" remarked Lovell. Rutland scowled.

"Look here, what's this game?" he demanded.

"Game?" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes. I've been only a few days at Rookwood," said the Fifth Former, "and I've come across you kids about a score of times. Every time you see me you stare like guttersnipes. What's the game? Haven't you ever seen a baronet before?"

"Oh, lots!" said Jimmy.

"Well, what do you mean by it?" demanded the Fifth Former angrily. "I'm not standin' it. If you want a jolly good lickin' you're goin' the right way to bag it! See?"

Arthur Edward Lovell sniffed.

"You can go ahead with the licking if you like," he said. "We'll take all the lickings you can give us!"

"And a few over," remarked Newcome. "Pile in!"

The Fifth Former eyed the Fistical Four, as if measuring them with his eye. He was a big fellow even for the Fifth, and doubtless could have accounted for a couple of the Fourth, but four was rather too large an order. So he kept his temper in check.

"I tell you I'm fed-up with it!" he said. "I want to know what you mean by it?"

Jimmy Silver looked at him curiously. The Fistical Four had a reason for being strangely interested in the baronet, but it was a reason they did not feel disposed to explain to him. Certainly it would have startled him had he heard it.

"I don't know you, and you don't know me," went on the senior. "I've got nothin' to do with you cheeky young cads in the Fourth; but two or three times I've been asked whether I

know you; fellows in the Fifth have noticed it. Why can't you ever come across me without staring, you young ruffians?"

"Put it down to your good looks, old bean!" suggested Raby.

The juniors grinned.

Rutland of the Fifth could not be considered quite good-looking, with his thick lips and heavy chin and shifty eyes.

Probably the senior was conscious of that fact, for his scowl became blacker and he clenched his hands.

"It's really a compliment, you know," grinned Newcome. "Don't you like being the giddy cynosure of all eyes?"

"Well, I'm fed-up!" said the Fifth Former. "You've got to chuck it! See?"

"A cat may look at a king," said Jimmy Silver mildly.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath. Jimmy Silver's answer was soft enough, but it did not have the effect of turning away Sir Harry Rutland's wrath.

Rather it increased it. The Fifth Former suddenly reached out and caught Jimmy by the ear.

"Ow!" roared Jimmy Silver, as his ear was pulled—or, rather, tugged. The Fifth Former put his beef into it, as it were.

"Now, you cheeky young cad——"

"Wow!"

"Rescue!" shouted Raby.

Three Fourth Formers rushed on Rutland of the Fifth. He was grasped on all sides and whirled over on the gravel path.

Bump!

Rutland went down; but he was still gripping Jimmy's ear with a grip like a vice, and Jimmy went down with him, yelling.

"Ow, ow! Leggo! My ear! Oh, my hat! Leggo!"

"Hands off!" roared the Fifth Former.

"Bump him!"

"Rag him!"

Sir Harry Rutland rolled over in the gravel in the grasp of the juniors.

Jimmy got his ear free at last, crimson and burning. He lent an eager hand in ragging the senior. The ear of "Uncle James" of Rookwood was not to be pulled with impunity.

Over and over went the Fifth Former, rolling, and gathering up a good deal of loose gravel. He roared and struggled and hit out wildly on all sides.

But the Fistical Four were too much for him.

Had not help arrived Rutland of the Fifth would soon have been reduced to a state of wreckage.

But Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth came along under the beeches, and beheld—to them—a shocking sight—a Fifth Former in the grasp of ragging fags.

They rushed to the rescue at once.

"Give 'em jip!" shouted Hansom.

"Oh, my hat! Hook it!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

The rush of the Fifth Formers fairly swept the juniors away. They were hurled right and left, and went sprawling in the gravel. Rutland sat up, dishevelled and panting.

"Collar them!" he gasped. "Hold them till I get at them! I—I—I—I—I'll——" He spluttered with rage.

But the Fistical Four did not wait to be collared or held. They scrambled up and ran for it. Hansom and Talboys did not deign to pursue them. They picked up the gasping Rutland and set him on his feet.

"Too bad, old fellow!" said Hansom. "Cheeky young rotters, handlin' a Fifth Form chap, by Jove! It's really about time we gave them a lesson!"

"I—I—I——" spluttered Rutland.

He grabbed at his necktie and collar, which were streaming down the back of his neck.

"Did those kids know you before you came to Rookwood?" asked Talboys.

"No!" snapped Rutland.

"I've noticed that they seem a lot interested in you!"

"What rot!"

"Well, I think——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

Rutland stamped away savagely. Hansom and Talboys stood and looked after him, not at all pleased.

"What manners, by gad!" murmured Talboys.

"Well, he's a bit ruffled," grinned Hansom. "But the fact is, old bean, he does seem a bit of a bargee, though he's a giddy baronet; and I'm not quite pleased that we've got him in our study, after all."

And Hansom and Talboys strolled on.

CHAPTER 37.

Lovell Knows!

THE Fistical Four, after their rather unlucky brush with the Fifth, had "hooked" it at considerable speed. In a quiet recess close by a buttress of the school wall, behind the beeches, was an old oaken seat, and to that secluded spot the Fistical Four had retired. They wanted a little tidying after their encounter with the seniors.

Then they sat down to discuss the matter.

"You see——" remarked Jimmy.

"Rot!" interjected Lovell. "Let it drop! The fact is, the fellow is naturally annoyed at being stared at as if he were a peep-show. We really ought to take no notice of him. I know it's odd, but there's nothing in it. Take my word for it."

That should have settled it!

But it didn't.

"You see——" repeated Jimmy Silver, just as if Arthur Edward Lovell hadn't settled the matter at all.

"How you keep on," said Lovell. "Let's talk about football. We've got to beat the Moderns next time we——"

"Never mind football just now," said Jimmy. "It's quite right that it's

rather fatheaded to stare at Rutland—though really a fellow can't help it, in the circs. A fellow who comes to Rookwood in another fellow's name—

"But he hasn't!" said Lovell. "I've thought it all out."

"What with?" asked Raby, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Raby! I've thought of something to account for it," went on Lovell. "We heard that a Mr. Packington lives at Rutland Park—he's Sir Harry Rutland's guardian, and Philip is his son. Well, they may be relations, for all we know, and that would account for Rutland looking like Philip Packington."

"It would," assented Raby thoughtfully.

"But it wouldn't account for Rutland being the same fellow," said Jimmy Silver.

"But he's not the same fellow, old chap."

"I think he is."

"Bosh! Mean to say that old Packington has sent his own son to Rookwood in the name of his ward?"

"I mean to say that it looks like it."

"Then where's the real Sir Harry Rutland all the time?" demanded Lovell.

"Something's been done with him, of course.

"Too thick!" said Lovell.

"You remember, when we were in the woods at Rutland Park, we came on a new building—a wooden sort of chalet," said Jimmy. "The keeper, Brood, and the mastiff were there. There was a light in an upper window—but the keeper was downstairs when we roused him out. If Sir Harry Rutland's name has been stolen by this chap Packington, Sir Harry is being kept a prisoner somewhere, and a likely place is that chalet in Rutland Park."

"It's too thick, I tell you," said Lovell. "Why, in the neighbourhood, Rutland must be well known, and Packington, too. Any man in that part of

Hampshire could give away such a trick."

"But it's a good ten miles from Rookwood, and nobody at Rookwood knew either of them."

"Oh, bosh!"

Raby and Newcome looked at Jimmy Silver. It was to "Uncle James" that they looked for guidance.

Jimmy's face was very serious.

He had had a startling shock in recognising the so-called Rutland of the Fifth as the fellow he had seen in Rutland Park, and who, he knew, was Philip Packington.

Several days had passed since then; Jimmy was taking his time to think the matter out.

But he was thinking over it very seriously. That some swindle was being practised he was assured; he was quite certain that Sir Harry Rutland, of the Rookwood Fifth, was not the real baronet at all. But to make so startling a statement in public was a decidedly serious matter; there was, at least, a bare chance that it was a case of a strange resemblance.

Jimmy was extremely unwilling to risk appearing in the limelight as the discoverer of a mare's nest.

But to leave the matter where it was was impossible. If the Fifth Former really was Philip Packington, it was obvious that Sir Harry Rutland was being wronged, and undoubtedly kept in imprisonment somewhere. The imposture could scarcely have been practised simply to borrow Sir Harry's name and title. The Rutland estate was the object of the swindlers. And that meant that the imprisoned baronet was never intended to see the light of freedom again. Indeed, there was the possibility of a darker and more terrible crime.

Lovell had disposed of the matter; but to Jimmy Silver's mind it was very far from being disposed of.

"I said bosh, and I mean bosh!" went on Lovell emphatically. "From what I've seen of this chap Rutland, he

seems to be rather a bad hat. But we've got nothing to do with the Fifth—let him rip! But we're not going to make the end study look ridiculous by finding out a giddy mare's nest, Jimmy. Sec?"

"I see that, of course," assented Jimmy.

"I—I say, we should be laughed to death if we said anything, and it turned out to be a mistake," murmured Raby.

"I should jolly well think so," said Lovell. "I admit it's odd, but there's an end of it. Let's give Rutland of the Fifth a wide berth, and forget all about it. That's what I think."

And Lovell rose from the seat.

Just as he did so, a leg appeared over the wall at the back of the old oaken bench, and Lovell stared at it.

Then he grinned.

The leg belonged to some climber outside the wall. From its size, it was evidently the property of some fag in the Second or Third Form. That venturesome fag had been out of bounds and was climbing in again in that hidden spot behind the beeches.

Lovell reached up and grasped the ankle belonging to the leg.

There was a startled gasp.

The other leg came over quickly, and then a startled face was turned down towards Lovell.

"Oh, you, Arthur!" ejaculated the fag in relief.

It was Lovell minor—Teddy Lovell of the Third Form.

CHAPTER 38.

Lovell on the Warpath!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL ceased to grin.

He frowned darkly.

"Get down, you young rascal!" he snapped.

"Leggo, my ankle, then, you ass!" said Teddy.

Lovell released Teddy's ankle, and

the fag clambered down to the seat, and then to the ground. Then he would have cut off under the beeches, but Arthur Edward grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him back.

"Hold on, Teddy——"

"Oh, rats!"

"You've been out of bounds," said Lovell sternly.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Teddy Lovell cheerfully. "Made me jump when you bagged my hoof, old man. I thought it was some dashed prefect for a moment. You haven't much sense."

Lovell frowned more darkly. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were grinning now. Lovell major had many little troubles with Lovell minor—being a dutiful elder brother. Teddy of the Third had no use for dutiful elder brothers.

"What have you been out of bounds for?" demanded Lovell.

"Because the gates were closed, of course. I don't climb over walls because I like climbing," answered Teddy flippantly.

"Don't be cheeky, Teddy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Have you been up to your old games?" demanded Lovell.

"What old games?"

"Have you got any smokes about you?"

"Find out."

"Look here, Teddy——"

"Oh, cut the cackle, old man," said Teddy impatiently. "Haven't I told you often enough to mind your own silly bizney. Can't you keep from butting in?"

Lovell breathed hard and deep.

"Have you been sent out by some senior—some smoky cad like Carthew of the Sixth?" he asked.

"Better ask Carthew."

"You went down to an inn once with a message from a senior," said Lovell. "I know that."

"Couldn't mind your own bizney, could you?" asked Teddy cheerfully. "How these fellows stand you is a mys-

tery to me. Will you let go my shoulder?"

"Not till you tell me where you've been, and what you've been for," said Lovell angrily.

"Then we'll stay here till prep," said Teddy. "I'm jolly well not going to tell you anything."

"That means that you've been kicking over the traces. It can't mean anything else."

Teddy turned to the grinning three. "Bright, isn't he?" he remarked. "You'd never guess it, to look at him; but old Arthur's brain does get going sometimes."

"Turn out your pockets," said Lovell.

"Shan't!"

"I tell you, Teddy——"

"Leggo, you interfering ass!"

"Will you turn out your pockets?" asked Lovell in a low tone of concentrated anger.

"No, I won't!"

"Then come along with me," said the elder brother. "You're not going to get sacked from Rookwood, Teddy, while I'm here to prevent it. I'm going to take you to your Form master. Come on!"

Teddy Lovell jumped. The flippant defiance faded out of his cheeky face as if by magic.

"Hold on, you silly idiot!" he gasped. "Have you gone off your rocker? Mr. Bohun would report me for a flogging."

"That's what you want!"

"Are you going to be a rotten sneak?" howled Teddy shrilly.

"I'm going to see that you don't get sent home in disgrace," said Lovell. "You can deal with me or with your Form master, just as you choose."

"You cheeky beast——"

"Come on!" said Lovell, gripping his minor's shoulder more tightly. "That's enough!"

Teddy clung to the oaken bench.

"You rotter! Leggo! I—I'll own up! There!" With a savage look, the fag flung a packet of cigarettes on the seat. "There, you beast!"

Lovell picked up the packet.

"Who sent you for this?"

"Find out!"

"They wouldn't serve a Rookwood kid at the tobacconist's. Where did you get these cigarettes?"

"You can jolly well guess," growled Teddy sullenly. "I got them from Stiggins at the Bird-in-Hand—and you know it."

"I guessed it," said Lovell. "Who sent you there?"

No answer.

"You'll tell me, or you'll tell Mr. Bohun," said Lovell. "I'm getting to the bottom of this. You weren't sent out after lock-up only for smokes. You've taken a message for some betting blackguard, I fancy, and brought the smokes back with you—same as you did once before. I want to know who it was?"

Teddy did not speak.

"Own up, Teddy," said Jimmy Silver kindly. "The fellow who sent you must be no end of a blackguard. Lovell's quite right to look after you."

"Rubbish!" snarled Teddy. "Why can't he mind his own business?"

"This is his business."

"Leggo!" howled Lovell minor, as Arthur Edward jerked him away from the oaken bench. "Where are you going, you rotter?"

"I'm going to take you to your Form-master," answered Lovell grimly.

"You beast, I—I'll tell you. It was Rutland of the Fifth," gasped Teddy. Lovell jumped.

"Rutland!"

"Yes, he's got a bet on a horse with Stiggins, and I—I took a message. No harm in it. And—and if you touch me I'll jolly well hack your shins, so there!"

Lovell did not touch Teddy. There was a deep and savage anger in his face; but Teddy was not the object of it. He released the fag.

"You can cut off, Teddy," he said quietly.

"Give me those cigarettes."

"That's all right. I'm taking them to Rutland of the Fifth," said Lovell.

"You! I—I say, he—he'll lick me for giving him away!" gasped the fag in dismay. "I—I say, Arthur, don't be a beast!"

"He won't lick you," said Lovell. "If he lays a finger on you I'll have him up before the Head!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Teddy.

"Now clear off!"

"But, I say—"

"Clear off, before I thrash you!" roared Lovell. And Lovell minor promptly obeyed. He disappeared through the beeches, leaving Arthur Edward with the packet of cigarettes in his hand, and Jimmy Silver & Co. looking at him curiously.

Lovell set his teeth.

"You fellows coming with me?" he asked.

"Where?" asked Raby.

"I'm going to see Rutland of the Fifth, and take him his cigarettes," said Lovell.

And he strode away without another word. Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We'd better get after him," he said. "Another giddy row with the Fifth—and we've had one already! What a life!"

And the three chums followed on the track of Arthur Edward Lovell. A Fourth Form junior who went looking for trouble among the Fifth Form studies was evidently in need of all the help his comrades could give him.

CHAPTER 29.

Accused!

"O H, forget it!" said Edward Hansom rather impatiently.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Talboys.

Rutland of the Fifth scowled. He was not so readily disposed to "forget" the way he had been handled in the quadrangle by the heroes of the Classical Fourth.

The three Fifth Formers were in their study; and Hansom and Talboys wanted to get on with prep. They really did not want to hear Rutland on the subject of his injuries; and they were not in the least inclined to go on the warpath against the Fourth. Certainly it was no end of a cheek for fags to handle one of the Fifth—Hansom and Talboys quite agreed as to that. But it was beneath their dignity to undertake a raid on the end study in the Fourth, as Rutland suggested; and they were fed-up with the matter, anyway.

As a matter of fact, Hansom and Talboys were not so pleased with their new study-mate as they had expected to be.

They had welcomed him with open arms. He was a baronet, and heir to a great estate. He had plenty of pocket-money. They had been prepared to like him. But in a very few days they had discovered that Rutland was not a very likeable fellow.

Hansom was captain of the Fifth, and he had his position to consider. Smoking cigarettes in the study was not a thing that a Form captain could countenance. Already there had been some unpleasantness on that subject. And Hansom had become quite cross one day on finding a pink sporting paper on the study table; and still more cross on another occasion, when he had come upon Rutland in the lanes, in conversation with one of the seedy characters who foregathered at the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe.

He realised that Sir Harry Rutland was a good deal of a blackguard, baronet as he was; and he was sorry by this time that he had asked Rutland to share his study.

So all was not calm and bright, by any means, in that study; and Rutland found a plentiful lack of sympathy in his study-mates. Moreover, in his savage ill-temper, he had used some expressions that did not please Edward Hansom at all.

"Forget it!" repeated Hansom. "What do these cheeky fags matter, anyhow? And don't swear any more, Rutland."

The baronet scowled at him.

"I'll do exactly as I choose," he snapped.

Hansom eyed him.

"You won't!" he said quietly.

"Bad form, old fellow," said Talboys. "Dashed bad form, you know. Swearin's caddish."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Better shut up yourself, I think," said Hansom. "There'll be a row in this study if you don't keep your temper a little better, Rutland. Now dry up and let's get on to prep."

Crash!

The study door flew open with a crash that made the three Fifth Formers jump.

Arthur Edward Lovell strode in.

Hansom was on his feet in a moment. His face was almost crimson with anger.

"You cheeky fag!" he bawled. "How dare you?"

"I've come here to see Rutland!" shouted Lovell. He hurled a packet of cigarettes on the table. "There's your smokes, Rutland, you cad."

Rutland sprang up.

"You're bringing smokes here for Rutland!" exclaimed Talboys in amazement.

"He sent my young brother for them—to the Bird-in-Hand!" bawled Lovell, his voice ringing along the Fifth Form passage. "I've taken them away from Teddy, and brought them here."

"Oh gad!"

"And I've come to tell the rotter what I think of him!" shouted Lovell. "A cad who will send a kid in the Third Form to the Bird—"

"Hold your tongue!" hissed Rutland, with an almost terrified glance at the open door. Lovell's powerful voice could be heard far and wide.

"Don't you want the Fifth to know?" jeered Lovell. "Well, I won't hold my

tongue—I'll yell it out all over Rookwood, if you ever speak a word again to my young brother, see!"

Hansom had picked up a cricket-bat, with the intention of rewarding Lovell therewith for his unceremonious entrance into the study. But he fixed his attention on Rutland now, with a black look on his face.

"Is that true, Rutland?" he asked.

The new senior shrugged his shoulders.

"You sent young Lovell to the Bird-in-Hand to fetch you smokes?"

"I sent him with a message," said Rutland sullenly. "I gave him a shilling for himself."

"Then I'll tell you what I think of you," said the Captain of the Fifth. "You're a low cad, Rutland, baronet or not."

"Thanks for your opinion," sneered Rutland.

"Dash it all, it's too thick!" said Talboys. "You really are the limit, Rutland, you know."

"All the same, you can't come kicking up a shindy in a senior study, Lovell," added the captain of the Fifth.

"Can't I?" roared Lovell. "I jolly well can, and I will! I'm going to tell Rutland what I think of him! I think he's a measly cad, and a rotten outsider. And I can tell him that if there's any more of it, I'll go to the Head about it. If Dr. Chisholm knew this, he'd boot the cad out of Rookwood."

"Hold your tongue!" shouted Rutland furiously.

"Rats to you! I tell you— Oh, my hat!"

Lovell jumped back as the Fifth Former rushed savagely at him.

But the next moment he was in Rutland's grasp.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Rescue!" yelled Lovell.

It was just then that the Co. arrived. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked in at the door.

"Keep out of this study!" exclaimed Hansom.

The chums of the Fourth did not heed.

They rushed in to the rescue of their chum. Lovell was torn away from Rutland's grasp, gasping and breathless, and rather damaged.

Five or six of the Fifth were gathering round the doorway now. They stared into the study in amazement.

"Hallo! Rowing with fags in your study, Hansom?" grinned Lumsden.

"Kick them out!" exclaimed Talboys.

"Come on, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, catching his chum by the arm. Lovell was apparently meditating an attack on Rutland, who had backed away across the study.

"Get out!" snarled Rutland. "Are we goin' to stand this, Hansom?"

"All your fault," snapped Hansom. "Still, we're not goin' to have fags raggin' here. Take that yelling fool away, Silver, or it will be the worse for him."

"I'm going!" roared Lovell. "But remember what I've told you—any more of it, and you'll be up before the Head, Rutland—if your name's Rutland at all!"

With that, Lovell turned and stamped out of the study, without a glance to note the effect of his last words.

But Jimmy Silver gave Rutland a quick look.

He was startled by the change in Rutland's face. The savage ill-temper had died out of it—the crimson flush of anger had given place to a deadly paleness. For a moment the Fifth Former stood quite still, as if rooted to the floor, with unmistakable terror in his whole aspect.

Then he sprang after Lovell, as the latter was stepping out into the passage.

"What do you mean?" he panted. "What—"

Lovell looked round.

"I mean what I say, Rutland—if your name's Rutland," he said deliberately. "My belief is that it isn't! So put that in your pipe and smoke it, you cad!"

And with that, Arthur Edward Lovell strode away, followed by his comrades. He left the group of Fifth Formers in a buzz of surprise.

"What on earth does the kid mean?" exclaimed the astonished Hansom. "Is he off his rocker?"

"What does he mean, Rutland?" asked Talboys.

The baronet did not answer. Without a word, or a look at his study-mates, with an ashen paleness in his face, he walked out of the study, pushing his way through the staring Fifth Formers there. They stared after him blankly till he turned the corner of the corridor and disappeared.

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CHAPTER 40.

Just Like Lovell!

"MY opinion is——"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the end study in the Fourth, and Arthur Edward Lovell was emphatic as usual. It was high time for prep to begin, but six or seven of the Fourth had come in to hear about the row in the Fifth Form passage, and prep had to be postponed.

Raby held up his hand.

"We know what your opinion is, Lovell, old bean," he said. "You told us in the quad. Don't sing it over again."

"My opinion is——" bawled Lovell.

"We've had it!" urged Newcome.

"My opinion is that that impostor ought to be shown up!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. simply stared at Lovell.

Only an hour or so before he had delivered it as his settled opinion that Rutland of the Fifth was no impostor, and that it was a case of a chance resemblance that had deceived Jimmy Silver on the subject.

Now, apparently, he had completely changed his mind on the matter. As no fresh evidence of any kind had been forthcoming the change of mind was a little startling, to say the least.

"That—that what?" ejaculated Raby.

"That impostor!"

"But you said——"

"Never mind what I said—it's what I'm saying that matters," said Lovell. "The fellow's a blackguard. He got my young brother to take a message to a betting man at the Bird-in-Hand."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

He understood now.

It was on account of the precious Teddy that Lovell had changed his opinion. Rutland's dealings with Teddy of the Third could have no imaginable connection with what might have happened, weeks or months ago, at Rutland Park, on the other side of Hampshire. But Arthur Edward Lovell was impervious to considerations of logic.

"I'm surprised at you fellows thinking of hushing it up!" went on Lovell hotly.

"What!" howled Jimmy Silver.

"What's become of the real baronet?" pursued Lovell. "That's a thing that wants looking into. Now, isn't it?"

"Well, my hat!"

"My opinion is that he ought to be shown up—a rascally impostor, masquerading in another fellow's name!"

"But you said——" gasped Newcome.

"For goodness' sake, Newcome, don't keep on arguing. I think he ought to be shown up!"

"Who, and what, and which?" asked Valentine Mornington. "Is Lovell wandering in his mind, you fellows?"

"Blessed if it doesn't sound like it," said Putty Grace. "Who's an impostor, Lovell?"

"Rutland of the Fifth!" hooted Lovell. "He's no more a baronet than I am. So that's that!"

"What utter rot!" yawned Mornington. "Sendin' your young rascal of a minor for smokes is caddish enough, but it doesn't deprive a giddy baronet of his title. You're talkin' rot, old top!"

"He's not Sir Harry Rutland at all!" exclaimed Lovell. "I tell you we know it. His name's Packington—Philip Packington."

"Draw it mild."

"His father's Rutland's guardian, and he's bagged Rutland's name to come here, and they're keeping young Rutland a prisoner somewhere!" shouted Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. sat silent. It was out now with a vengeance! It had been Jimmy's intention to go slow—very slow indeed—before risking anything like a public accusation of Rutland of the Fifth. The possibility of a mistake was always there, and the result of a mistake, in such a terribly serious matter, would have been very serious indeed. But it was too late to

think of that now. Arthur Edward Lovell had done it.

Morny cast a curious look at Jimmy Silver's grave face.

"What put this into Lovell's head?" he asked. "Has he been goin' to the films in the vac, and gettin' them on the brain?"

"Jimmy knows it's true!" snorted Lovell.

"Gammon!"

"I think it's true," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I'm not sure, but practically sure. I shouldn't have brought it out like this, but now it's out, it can't be helped. It will be the talk of Rookwood before dorm, and we shall have to tell the Head."

"You mean to say there's somethin' in it?" exclaimed Mornington.

"I believe so."

"Oh gad! You been goin' to the films, too?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, here comes Rutland of the Fifth!" squeaked Tubby Muffin from the passage.

There was a sudden hush among the juniors. Rutland of the Fifth, with a colourless face, was coming up the Fourth Form passage towards the end study. He did not look as if he were on the warpath. He looked like a fellow who had received a stunning blow from which he had not recovered.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances.

They knew why Rutland was coming to the study. Lovell's reckless words in the Fifth-Form passage had startled and terrified him with the terrible fear that his imposture was known or suspected. And he was coming because he dared not keep away—because he was horribly anxious to learn what, and how much, Lovell really knew.

"Well," said Lovell grimly, "what do you want, you humbug?"

Rutland licked his dry lips.

"I—I want to speak to you, Lovell, alone!" he stammered.

"Well, you won't then!" retorted Lovell. "You can speak to me before

my friends, or not at all. They all know."

Rutland drew an almost shuddering breath.

"They all know—what? What do you mean?" he said huskily.

Lovell's lip curled.

"They all know what I know, and I've just told all these chaps," he said. "If it isn't true, go to the Head, and ask him to have me up on the carpet. I dare you to do it!"

"You ass!" murmured Oswald of the Fourth. "You'll get a record flogging for spinning such a yarn about a Fifth Form chap."

"I'm risking it," said Lovell. "Packington's only got to complain to the Head if he's not satisfied."

"Packington! Who's Packington?" exclaimed Morny.

Lovell raised his hand and pointed at the wretched Fifth Former. Rutland of the Fifth had swayed as if about to fall to the floor. He caught at the study table to steady himself.

"Ask him!" said Lovell.

There was no need to ask. Every eye was on Rutland of the Fifth, every eye read guilt and terror in his face.

The blow had come so suddenly that the impostor had had no chance of guarding against it.

"Let him answer!" said Lovell.

"Who's Packington? Let him answer!"

But Rutland of the Fifth did not speak. Without a word further he turned and dragged himself from the end study. And the look on his face as he went made even Arthur Edward Lovell feel almost sorry for him.

CHAPTER 41.

Standing by Lovell!

"A BSURD!"
Dr. Chisholm frowned portentously.

The Head of Rookwood was annoyed, and he was angry. He was very angry indeed.

The Head was almost the last person at Rookwood to hear what was now the sole topic in the old school.

He heard it with amazement and utter incredulity.

From the Fourth Form passage the tale had spread. There was little prep done in any study at Rookwood that evening. The Fifth heard it; the Sixth heard it; the fags of the Second and Third heard it; the Shell discussed it breathlessly. Over in Mr. Manders' House, the Modern fellows heard it, and talked of it to the exclusion of all other topics. It was the sensation of the term at Rookwood.

And so it came to the Head. Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, brought it to him, as soon as he heard it, very justly considering that it was a matter for the headmaster to look into.

"Utterly absurd!" repeated the Head wrathfully. "You say that a Fourth Form boy started this absurd and discreditable story?"

"Lovell of the Fourth, sir," said Mr. Greely. "It is absurd, and discreditable, as you say, sir. I thought you should be informed——"

"Quite so—quite so! Rutland, of course, denied the imputation—or, rather, treats it with the scorn it deserves?"

"I have not seen Rutland; he is not in his study. I have asked Bulkeley to find him," said Mr. Greely. "It must, of course, be very annoying to Rutland. But Lovell is——"

"I will send for Lovell at once," said the Head grimly. "Lovell must learn not to let his imagination play him such tricks."

Dr. Chisholm touched a bell; and a minute later Tupper, the page, was on his way to the end study, to summon Arthur Edward Lovell to the presence of his headmaster.

A couple of minutes more and Lovell tapped at the door of the Head's study.

"Come in!" snapped the Head.

Lovell entered. But he did not enter

alone. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome followed him in.

The Head frowned at the four juniors.

"I sent for Lovell!" he snapped.

"We're all in it, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"What! Do you mean to tell me that you, the head boy of the Fourth Form, share in spreading this foolish story about a senior boy?" exclaimed the Head.

Jimmy felt a slight inward tremor.

"We think it's true, sir," he said.

"Absurd!"

"Nonsense!" boomed Mr. Greely.

"Lovell will be flogged," said the Head. "Indeed, I am not sure whether I ought not to expel him from Rookwood!"

"If you will let us explain, sir, I——" ventured Jimmy Silver.

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"I will hear you," he said. "I am bound to hear you. Be brief."

Quietly, and as briefly as he could, Jimmy Silver related the holiday adventure in Hampshire. Mr. Greely's eyes grew wider and wider as he listened, with growing astonishment. The Head stared at Jimmy with fixed attention while he was speaking, which was rather disconcerting for the captain of the Fourth. But Jimmy went on steadily to the end.

"And that is all?" snapped the Head.

"That's all, sir!"

"And on this—this fancied resemblance, you found an accusation of deceit—of imposture—indeed, of crime?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy in rather a faltering tone.

"Very well," said the Head in a hard voice. "You shall have your chance. Rutland shall be sent for, and questioned in your presence. If you make your words good, I shall be in your debt. If you fail to do so, I shall flog you, Silver, and Lovell will be expelled from the school. Mr. Greely, will you

have the kindness to bring Sir Harry Rutland, of your Form, here?"

Mr. Greely gasped.

"Certainly, sir."

The Fifth Form master quitted the study. Dr. Chisholm sat down at his writing-table, and took up a pen, turning his shoulder to the unhappy four.

The study door opened at last, to readmit the portly figure of Mr. Greely. Dr. Chisholm looked round, and frowned as he saw that the Fifth Form master came alone.

"Rutland of the Fifth is not in the school, sir," he announced.

"Has he been given an exeat?"

"No, sir."

"Then he has gone out of bounds without permission?"

"It appears so, sir."

"Let him be sent to me immediately he returns," said the Head sharply. "Silver, you and the others may go. I cannot deal with you until Rutland is here."

The Fistical Four left the study. In the corridor they paused and looked at one another.

"Now we've got to wait for the chopper to come down!" grunted Raby.

"Nice sort of a jolly evening for us!" said Newcome.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Rutland's gone!" he said.

"But when he comes in——"

"I fancy he won't come in again," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "He knows we know, and his game's up. Now it's come out, he's bolted!"

The remainder of that evening every study at Rookwood buzzed with excitement over the affair. The continued absence of Rutland of the Fifth added to the excitement.

When bed-time came, and Rutland had not returned, the excitement was intense.

And when, next morning, it was learned that Rutland had not come in, and that his bed in the Fifth Form dormitory had not been slept in, no one had a lingering doubt left on the subject. Even Dr. Chisholm had no

doubt left now; and that morning he was busy on the telephone, with an astonished police inspector at Rookham listening at the other end of the wire.

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited anxiously for news.

But news was not long in coming.

For when the police arrived at Rutland Park, to question Mr. Packington, and to inquire after the missing Fifth-Former, they found that both were gone. They learned that the Rookwood senior had arrived at Rutland Park by the last night train, and that within an hour afterwards he had gone again, accompanied by his father; and with them the keeper Brood had disappeared. They had fled together while there was yet time; and in the solitary chalet, in the heart of the park, once so carefully guarded, a prisoner was found. And suddenly, unexpected, Sir Harry Rutland found himself free, and learned, for the first time, the reason of his kidnapping and imprisonment on his own estate.

The Fistical Four were summoned to the Head's study. Dr. Chisholm coughed once or twice as he addressed them. It really was a little awkward for the Head, considering the nature of the last interview. But he complimented the Fistical Four very handsomely on having contributed to the discovery of a wicked swindle and imposture.

"You have done well, my boys—very well indeed," said the Head. "You have shown—hem!—great perspicacity. Hem! It seems that Mr. Packington actually schemed to pass off his own son as Sir Harry Rutland—a wicked and most amazing scheme. But for your holiday adventure the truth might never have been discovered. You have done well—very well indeed!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away feeling quite pleased with themselves, and with the way the affair had turned out.

CARGO!

AT first sight it would seem that to stow cargo into a ship needs no more skill than to pack clothes into your bag preparatory to going away. Beyond the obvious laws that if one puts steam-rollers on top of eggs it is pretty certain to be injurious to the eggs, and that the stowing of livestock in cold storage is probably going to annoy the livestock, it is hard to see where one could go wrong.

Not So Easy.

But the stowing of cargo has developed into little short of a science. There is a right and a wrong way to stow every conceivable article that might come into the hold of a ship, and a failure to follow these laws of lading may mean very considerable damage to the entire freight.

For instance, it is fatal to stow apples in the same hold as that used for eggs, for the scent of the apples penetrates the thin egg-shells and flavours their contents.

Hides, too, have to be packed in a way peculiar to themselves. They are heaped into a hold and entirely submerged in brine. When the ship eventually reaches its port of destination and the hold is again opened, a smell has accumulated which is, it is said, difficult to imagine.

Livestock offers increased difficulties, since the animals must be fed and must have fresh air to breathe. They generally take the form of deck cargo, and consequently great care has to be taken to make sure that they cannot escape.

Jumbo Objects.

An amusing story is told of an elephant which grew tired of its captivity and succeeded in getting out. Finding the path to freedom blocked

by some large bales, the animal proceeded to drop them over the side. One after another went the same way, while the crew stood at a respectful distance and shouted at the miscreant, but it was not until the last bale had gone that the animal allowed itself to be captured.

Many ships have sunk because their cargo has shifted in a gale, and thus overbalanced the vessel, and accordingly all goods have to be stowed in such a manner that they shall be perfectly immovable. Even if a ship with a loose cargo does reach its destination it is very rarely that its contents escape damage.

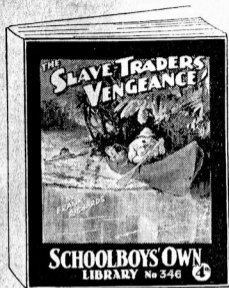
A case is told of a vessel whose cargo shifted on the way out to South America. She was carrying machinery, corrugated iron, and red lead when she left England, and apparently the machinery got adrift. At any rate, when the out-port was reached it was impossible to tell which had been the machinery and which the corrugated iron. There was just a twisted mass of metal, tastefully decorated with several coats of red lead.

Sadder and Wiser!

As is to be expected in this imperfect world, some stevedores are not the very soul of honesty. Some, in fact, are not above opening cases and extracting their contents, and the onus of casting the wary eye naturally falls on the shoulders of the officer in charge.

During a recent voyage an R.M.S.P. boat was carrying, among other things, several cases of Worcester sauce. While the officer in charge was at the other end of the hold one of the foreign stevedores broke into a case and took several bottles. Being unable to read the label, the man mistook the contents for alcohol, and, having uncorked the first bottle, drank off half of what it contained. When found by the officer shortly afterwards, he had relinquished all claims to the other bottles and was being violently ill.

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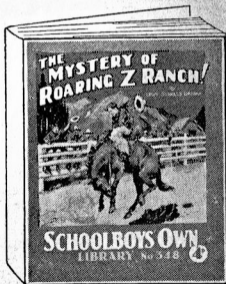


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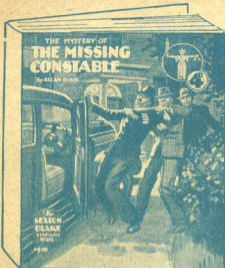
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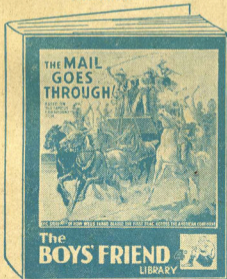


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