

LEFT To LOVELL



A Story of Rookwood School

by
OWEN CONQUEST

CHAPTER I

UP AGAINST IT!

“LEAVE IT to me!” said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver, captain of the Fourth form at Rookwood, looked at him.

He did not speak, though his look was expressive. “Uncle James” of Rookwood had a patient and placable temper. He seldom told a fellow what he thought of him.

Raby and Newcome were neither so patient nor so placable. They did not seem to be able, like Jimmy, to “suffer fools gladly”. They both answered at once:

“Fathead!”

That had no effect whatever on Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward had never needed to ask to be given a “good conceit of himself”. He had been born with it. Criticism rolled off Arthur Edward like water off a duck.

Jimmy Silver and Co. were in their study—the end study in the Fourth, on the Classical side at Rookwood.

They wore worried looks. They wore, of course, other things as well: but the worried looks predominated.

It was a gorgeous summer’s day. It was Wednesday, which was a half-

holiday at Rookwood School. In such weather the call of King Cricket was practically irresistible. And there was no reason—no reason whatever—why the Classical side should not turn out to play Tommy Dodd and Co. of the Modern side—excepting that the chopper had come down, in the shape of a stern command from their form-master, Richard Dalton.

It was Lovell's fault.

When things went wrong in the end study, it was generally Lovell's fault—his chums agreed on that. Lovell was the man never to lose a chance of doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. Lovell, in the opinion of his friends, was born to bungle as the sparks fly upward.

He had landed his pals, and the whole Classical cricket team, in a scrape. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome were trying desperately to think of some way out. And it was exactly like Lovell to tell them to "leave it to him". Left to Lovell, it would be all right, in Lovell's opinion. He had that opinion wholly and solely to himself.

"Look here—!" he recommenced.

"Oh, chuck it, for goodness sake," exclaimed Newcome.

"Things are bad enough without your chin-wag," said Raby.

"I said look here—"

"Leave it to you!" said Newcome. "I think you've done enough already. Who got the cricket match washed out?"

"Yes, who?" demanded George Raby, "who had to monkey about with a cricket ball in the quad, in break, and bang it right at Dicky Dalton?"

"Who got Dalton on the knee with that ball?" hooted Newcome.

"Who made him go dot-and-carry-one?" snorted Raby.

"That was an accident—!" said Lovell.

"You're the man for accidents, aren't you?" jeered Newcome. "Give you a chance of an accident, and you're not the man to let your chances like the sunbeams pass you by! No fear!"

"Fairly lamed him!" said Raby. "No wonder he went off at the deep end."

"He was limping, in third school," said Newcome.

"I saw him limping after dinner," said Raby.

"Accidents will happen—!" said Lovell.

"They will—when you're about," agreed Newcome. "You put Dalton into a fearful wax, and he came down on the lot of us like a ton of bricks. A cricket match barred, because you have a fancy for chucking cricket balls about in the quad, and catching a beak with them—"

"It wasn't fair of Dalton," said Lovell. "How could I know he was just coming by when I let that ball go—?"

"No eyes in your head?" asked Newcome.

"Or sense?" inquired Raby.

"Can't blame Dicky Dalton," said Jimmy Silver, "he's got an awful crack on the knee. I daresay he forgot that there was a match on this afternoon, when he told the lot of us not to touch a cricket ball again for the rest of the week."

"Making the punishment fit the crime!" groaned Raby. "Right as rain, if he'd picked out that ass Lovell—"

"Well," he thought we were all larking together," said Jimmy. "Dicky's a good chap, and the best beak at Rookwood—we're not going to blame Dicky Dalton."

"It's all Lovell, of course," said Newcome. "If he wanted to crock a man with a cricket ball, why couldn't he crock Greely, or Mossos, or old Manders of the Modern side? He had to crock our own beak!"

"I didn't want to—" shrieked Lovell. "Don't I keep on telling you it was an accident?"

"Well, that's that, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver, with a sigh. "We're barred from cricket for the rest of the week. I don't think Dicky would have done it, if he'd remembered that there was a match on—"

"I expect he was thinking about his gammy knee, not about our matches," snorted Raby.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jimmy, laughing. "Anyhow, that's that. I hoped he might alter his mind, and let us off. But—he hasn't."

"Leave it to me," said Lovell again.

"Well, what can you do?" demanded Newcome. "Crock Dalton's other leg?"

"If you leave it to me, it will be all right—"

"My dear chap," said Jimmy, patiently, "there's nothing to be done. We can't walk down to Little Side and play cricket against Dalton's orders. He's our form-master, and what he says, goes."

"Will you let a fellow speak?" hooted Lovell. "I said leave it to me, and I mean leave it to me. I've thought it out—"

"Oh, draw it mild," remonstrated Newcome. "If you were able to think, old chap, you'd think twice, or three times, before crocking your beak with a cricket ball on the knee—"

"He's thought it out!" said Raby. "I wonder what he's done that with! Not with his brains, as he hasn't any."

"Will you listen to a chap?" roared Lovell.

"Oh, run on," said Jimmy Silver. "Give him a chance, you men. It won't do any good, but it won't do any harm."

"Well, look here," said Lovell, "our match with the Moderns this afternoon is barred. We can't play cricket under Dalton's nose after what he said. But suppose he's called away suddenly this afternoon—"

"What?"

"That's what's going to happen," said Lovell.

Three fellows stared at Arthur Edward Lovell, blankly.

"Dalton will be called away suddenly!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"Just that!" assented Lovell. "He will get a telephone call, and will hop off quick to catch a train."

"And how do you know he will?" howled Newcome.

"Because I'm going to phone him."

"Wha—a—a—at?"

"That's the big idea," said Lovell, complacently, "that's what I've thought out. I shall bike down to Coomb, and put the call through from the post-office. I can spin him a yarn to make him rush off in a hurry, to catch a train."

"Holy smoke!"

"Fan me!" murmured Newcome.

"Help!" moaned Raby.

"Leave it to me, and it will be O.K.," said Lovell. "Dalton goes off for the afternoon—we play cricket while he's gone. I'm going to pull Dicky Dalton's leg on the telephone, and that let's us out all right. What about it, Jimmy?"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy.

"Ass!" said Newcome.

"Chump!" said Raby.

It was said of old that a prophet is without honour in his own country. Certainly Arthur Edward Lovell met with no appreciation in his own study. In three words, his chums expressed their opinion of his big idea, and of him! And Arthur Edward was just opening his lips to tell them, in return, what he thought of them, when the study door opened, and Tubby Muffin, the fattest Classical at Rookwood, rolled in.

CHAPTER II

LEAVING IT TO LOVELL!

"GET OUT!" roared Lovell.
Reginald Muffin gave quite a jump.

"Eh!" he ejaculated.

"Get out! Sharp!"

"Don't bother now, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, more mildly.

"Cut," said Newcome.

"Hook it!" snapped Newcome.

"But I say—!" bleated Muffin, staring round at the four exasperated juniors. "I say, Jimmy—"

"Travel!" bawled Lovell. And he jumped up, and reached for a cricket stump that stood in the corner of the study.

It was not polite. But the end study were not feeling polite just then. They were up against it—they were worried—they were bothered. First of all they were barred from playing cricket—next, three of them were shirty with Lovell, and Lovell was shirty with the three—and added to that, Lovell had propounded a scheme that seemed, to him, a tip-top one, and to his chums the last word in idiocy. No visitor to the study would have been welcome just then—least of all Tubby Muffin.

Tubby was not *persona grata* in any study. If Tubby looked into a fellow's study, it was generally, if not always, to borrow anything from half-a-crown

to a "tanner": or seeking, like a lion, what he might devour. Worried and bothered and exasperated, the chums of the Classical Fourth had no use for Tubby. He was, so to speak, the Thing-too-much.

Jimmy—the patient and placable "Uncle James"—would doubtless have given him a hearing. Raby and Newcome might have. But Arthur Edward Lovell was at boiling point, and at the sight of the intrusive Tubby he boiled over.

"Get out!" Lovell flourished the stump. "Now, then, sharp's the word—"

"But I came to say—!" gasped Tubby.

"I know what you came to say! We know it all by heart!" snorted Lovell. "Well, I'm not going to lend you half-a-crown, and the other fellows are not! Get out and stay out, see?"

"I wasn't going to borrow half-a-crown," yelled Tubby. "I was going—"

"You're going all right—or you're getting this stump! If it's a tanner, you're not going to borrow a tanner! Travel."

"It wasn't! I came—"

"I can see you came—I've told you to go! Hook it, will you?"

"I came to say—Yoo-hooo-whooop!" roared Tubby, as the cricket stump landed. Arthur Edward's patience, such as it was, being exhausted. "Wow! Keep that stump away, you mad ass—yooooop! I came to tell you—Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

Tubby dodged to the door.

He paused there, and turned. Even after two swipes from the cricket stump, he seemed to want to say his say.

"I—I say, Jimmy—!" he gasped. "Ow! Wow!" A lunge from the stump caught Tubby in his fat ribs, and cut him short. "Oooooogh!"

"Get out!"

"Yah!" yelled Tubby. "I jolly well won't tell you now, so yah!" And as the stump lunged again, Tubby Muffin bounded out of the doorway, and galloped away down the Fourth-form passage as fast as he could carry his weight.

Slam! Arthur Edward Lovell shut the door after him, not gently. Then he pitched the cricket stump into a corner, and snorted.

"I wish I'd given him a few more!" he growled. "That fat idiot, butting in to scrounge a bob, when we've got to settle about the cricket!"

"Might have let him speak, old chap," said Jimmy, mildly.

"Oh, don't be an ass—you know what he was after, as well as I do! Blow the fat chump! We're up against it—cricket match washed out—do you want to hear that fat chump bleating?" bawled Lovell. "If you do, I don't! I've a jolly good mind to go after him and give him a few more."

"Oh, let's get out," said Newcome. "If we can't play cricket, we can find something else for the half. What about the river?"

"We're going to play cricket!" snorted Lovell.

"Fathead!"

"I tell you we're going to play cricket. It all depends on getting Dicky Dalton away for the afternoon. Well, I can manage that. Leave that to me."

"Oh, give us a rest," said Raby.

"If you want me to punch you in the eye, Raby—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" interposed Jimmy Silver. Tempers seemed to be growing hot in the end study. "No good ragging—that won't get us anywhere."

Lovell breathed hard through his nose.

"Look here," he said. "I think I can wangle it. I'm going down on my bike to Coombe to try it on, anyway. That's fixed!"

"You won't get by with it, old chap," urged Jimmy.

"Rot! I shall disguise my voice—Dalton won't know it from Adam's. He will take it all like milk. Any fool could pull a man's leg on the telephone."

"Well, if any fool could do it, there's a chance that Lovell might pull it off," remarked Newcome, sarcastically.

"If you want a thick ear, Newcome, I'm ready to give you one."

"If I wanted a thick head, you could give me one, you mean. It wouldn't be much loss to you—there's nothing in it."

Jimmy Silver pushed Lovell back just in time.

"For goodness sake, don't rag," he said. "Look here, Lovell, old chap, it wouldn't work. Dicky Dalton is too fly to fall for it. He won't go hiking off to catch a train this afternoon just because we want him out of the way."

"Will you leave it to me?" hooted Lovell. "Look here, you fellows wait around and keep an eye open for Dalton, after I'm gone on my bike. If he doesn't go out, there'll be lots of time to go on the river after I get back. If he does—"

"He won't!"

"I'm saying if he does! If he does, we play cricket. I'm not thinking of playing cricket right under Dalton's nose! But if he does go out after I've phoned him, will you play up?"

"If he does—!" said Jimmy, hesitatingly.

"Is it a go?" demanded Lovell.

There was a pause. Newcome and Raby exchanged a look, which indicated quite plainly their belief that a spoof phone call from Lovell, or a dozen of them, would not induce Mr. Dalton to clear off from Rookwood School that afternoon. Jimmy Silver, no doubt, was of the same opinion. But the patience of "Uncle James" of the Fourth form was almost inexhaustible.

"It's a go," he said. "We'll look out for Dalton, and if he goes out, we'll fix up the cricket match. But—"

"Wash out the butts," snapped Lovell. "No need to waste time butting like a billy-goat. It's a go. You fellows make out that I've landed you in this—because of an accident with a cricket ball that might have happened to any chap. Well, if I've landed you in it, it's up to me to get you out of it—and I know how! Leave it to me, and it will be all right."

"O.K.," sighed Jimmy. "Go ahead."

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked, or rather stalked, out of the end study, to proceed to go ahead.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked at one another. Jimmy smiled, Raby snorted, and Newcome shrugged his shoulders. Their faith in Arthur Edward Lovell and his big ideas was absolutely nil. Still, the matter was settled now—it was left to Lovell.

“Let’s get out,” said Jimmy. “We’ll go over and see Tommy Dodd—we can keep an eye open for Dalton from Manders’ House. We don’t want those Modern smudges going out of gates in case the match does come off after all—”

“It won’t!” said Raby, “it’s a rotten idea.”

“And if it was a good idea, Lovell would make a muck of it,” said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

“Well, it’s left to Lovell now,” he said. “There’s a sporting chance he might get away with it. Let’s go and see the Modern chaps.”

The three left the study, and crossed over to Manders’ House, to see Tommy Dodd, the junior captain of the Modern side. Meanwhile, Arthur Edward Lovell was going down to the bike-shed, with long strides, and a determined visage. Lovell, at least, had faith in himself and his big ideas.

Near the bike-shed, he passed Tubby Muffin. Tubby—keeping at a safe distance—gave him a yell.

“Yah! I won’t tell you now what I came to your study to tell you! Yah! Wouldn’t you like to know!”

Lovell strode on unheeding. He was not in the smallest degree interested in anything that Reginald Muffin might have had to say. He wheeled out his machine, mounted it, and pedalled away to Coombe, and forgot the utterly unimportant existence of Tubby Muffin.

CHAPTER III

LOVELL’S LUCK!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL grinned over the telephone in the call-box at Coombe.

Arthur Edward was feeling pleased with himself.

He thought it all out.

Lovell was, in his own happy estimation, the brainy man of the end study at Rookwood. His chums never would admit it—but there it was! He had one of those clear, cool, planning minds—at least he had no doubt that he had. And his plans now were all cut and dried.

He was going to disguise his voice. He was going to ring up Mr. Dalton, as the butler at Devereux Lodge, near Latcham. Squire Devereux was a governor of the school: and there could be no doubt that Richard Dalton would go over to the Lodge, if he supposed that Squire Devereux particularly wished to see him, on a half-holiday.

If Dicky Dalton fell for it, he would walk down to Coombe, take the train to Latcham, call at the Lodge—and then take the train back. That would keep him occupied for the afternoon, while the Classical juniors played cricket.

It was so beautiful a little scheme, so beautifully planned, that Arthur Edward could scarcely fail to be pleased with it.

All he had to do was to play a butler's part, at the safe end of the telephone wire. That, he considered, he could do on his head. Had he not actually played a butler's part, when the "Rookwood Players" gave a show? He had! It was true that many critics declared that he had played it like a rhinoceros—some said a hippopotamus—and almost everybody had agreed that whatever Lovell had looked like on the stage, he hadn't looked like a butler—and whatever he had sounded like, he hadn't sounded like one. But carping criticism had no effect on Lovell. He knew what he could do, if other fellows did not.

With a cheery grinning face he rang up Mr. Dalton's number at Rookwood School.

But that cheery grin faded a little, as the deep, pleasant voice of Richard Dalton came through. Lovell's heart gave an extra beat.

He pulled himself together at once. He couldn't possibly back out now. His friends had left it to him, and he was going through with it. It meant a row, if it came out. But how could it come out?

"Hallo! Who is speaking?"

"Butler at Devereux Lodge speaking, sir!" Lovell assumed the butler-voice he had practised for that play in the junior theatricals. "Is that Mr. Dalton?"

"Speaking!"

"A message from Mr. Devereux, sir."

"Please go on."

"If you are not very specially occupied this afternoon, sir, Mr. Devereux would be glad if you could come over to the Lodge, as he desires to consult you about his nephew, sir."

"His nephew?"

"With reference to placing the boy in your form at Rookwood, sir."

"I shall be very pleased to call upon Mr. Devereux this afternoon, if he desires me to do so."

"Very good, sir."

"Can you put me through to Mr. Devereux himself?"

Lovell had half-expected that. He was ready for it.

"I am sorry, sir: Mr. Devereux is occupied with the Agricultural Committee in the library now. He will be free at three o'clock, if that time would be convenient to you to call."

"Quite!" said Mr. Dalton from the Rookwood end.

"Very good, sir. The master will be expecting you."

And Lovell rang off.

The grin returned to his cheery face. It had worked like an oracle. Dicky Dalton was booked to call at Devereux Lodge at three. That meant that he

had to start immediately. He would be gone before Lovell got back to Rookwood. Cricket would be the order of the day. Lovell not only grinned. He chuckled as he went back to his bike.

He would not, perhaps, have chuckled so gleefully, had he been able to see Mr. Richard Dalton, at that moment, in his study at Rookwood School. That young man was standing by the telephone, with a puzzled expression on his face.

It was barely possible that Lovell's critics were not wholly wide of the mark, in their judgment of Arthur Edward in a butler part!

Certainly there was a puzzled and curious expression on the face of the Fourth-form master at Rookwood, as he stood looking at the telephone.

Finally, he lifted the receiver again, and rang up a number. It was the number of Devereux Lodge, near Latcham.

A rather fruity voice came through in reply.

"Hallo!"

"Devereux Lodge?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"This is Devereux Lodge."

"Who is speaking?"

"Butler speaking. What is wanted, please?"

Richard Dalton smiled grimly. That fruity voice was nothing like the voice he had heard a few minutes ago.

"Mr. Dalton speaking from Rookwood School," he said. "A few minutes ago, I received a call purporting to come from Devereux Lodge. No doubt you can tell me whether the call was genuine."

"Certainly not, sir! No one has rung up Rookwood School from here to-day."

"Thank you."

Mr. Dalton put up the receiver. He remained in thought for a few minutes, and then left his study. A few minutes more, and he quitted the House, and walked down to the gates. He was not going to catch a train from Coombe to Latcham—he was going to discover, if he could, who had put through that spoof call. He could hardly doubt that it was some japing Rookwooder who had sought to pull his leg and send him off on a fool's errand: and if that was so, there was little doubt that the call had come from the nearest call-box—which was at Coombe. Mr. Dalton walked away to Coombe quite briskly, in spite of an occasional twinge from the knee where Lovell had landed a cricket ball that morning.

All this, happily, was quite unknown to Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward's face wore a cheery, satisfied grin, as he pedalled out of the village of Coombe, by the leafy lane back to Rookwood.

He drove merrily at the pedals.

Stumps were to have been pitched at two, if the cricket match had not been washed out by a beak's stern decree. It was not two yet—stumps could still be pitched at two, owing to Lovell's masterly plan. Jimmy Silver and Co. by this time, would have seen Dalton going out, and would know that all was well.

Even Raby and Newcome would have to admit that Arthur Edward was the man for an emergency—that things could be safely left to Lovell!

It was no wonder that Lovell felt pleased with himself as he pedalled back to the school—pleased and supremely satisfied.

And if anything could have intensified his pleasure and satisfaction, it would have been the sight of Richard Dalton, in the lane walking with long strides towards the village.

Lovell could have chortled.

If he wanted proof of the success of his scheme, there it was—Richard Dalton walking to Coombe, and putting on speed—no doubt to catch a train for Latcham!

Lovell did not chortle—but he was smiling, as he passed Mr. Dalton on his bicycle. He freed one hand from the handle-bars to “cap” his form-master as he passed—receiving a nod in return, and a very sharp and searching look.



He was walking with Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, and they were deep in conversation.

Searching looks did not worry Lovell, however: he careered on towards Rookwood, happy as the lark at morn.

Richard Dalton walked on to Coombe. Once he turned his head to glance after Lovell: then he walked on again, to the village. Lovell, happy and glorious, dismissed him from mind, as easily as he had dismissed Tubby Muffin, and careered onward without a care in the world.

CHAPTER IV

ALL CLEAR!

“GREAT PIP!”
“Oh, my summer hat!”

“There he goes!”

“Well, this beats it!”

Jimmy Silver and Co. were amazed. They were watching, from the window of Tommy Dodd's study in Manders' House. And they could hardly believe their eyes, when the athletic figure of Richard Dalton crossed the line of vision, going down to the gates.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle stared in equal astonishment. The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth had been told about Lovell's master-plan. They had put no more faith in it than the Classical juniors had. Tommy Dodd expressed the opinion that Lovell was a howling ass. Cook described him as a blithering idiot—Doyle as a dithering dunderhead. None of the three had the remotest expectation that Lovell would pull it off, or that Richard Dalton would be seen going out that afternoon. And now they saw him!

Six pairs of eyes watched Richard Dalton go out of gates. Then they gazed at one another.

“He's done it!” said Jimmy.

“Dalton's gone out, at any rate!” said Tommy Dodd. “I—I suppose it can't be just a coincidence.”

“Hardly! Lovell said he would make him buzz off in a hurry to catch a train—well, he looked in a hurry.”

“He did!” said Newcome.

“Beats me hollow, if Lovell's pulled it off,” said Raby, “but if he has—!”

“Let's make sure before we play cricket,” said Jimmy Silver. “We don't want Dicky Dalton to walk in, in the middle of a game we're playing against his orders. Let's go and see if he's clear.”

The three Classical juniors, and the three Moderns, all equally interested in Richard Dalton's proceedings that afternoon, hurried out of Manders' House, and down to the gates. They looked out—but Mr. Dalton was no longer in sight. Evidently he had been in haste.

"Looks all right," said Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver nodded. His face was bright. He was very keen indeed on playing cricket that afternoon. It could not be denied that Mr. Dalton had had just cause for coming down heavy and hard—Jimmy did not blame him for it. All the same, he wanted to play cricket: and now it looked like all clear.

"Here comes Lovell," said Newcome, as a figure racing on a bike came in sight, whizzing from the direction of the village of Coombe.

All eyes were on Lovell as he whizzed up, and jumped off his machine. He was rather breathless, but plainly full of beans.

"See Dicky go out?" was his first question.

"Yes: he's gone all right. Was it you—?"

Snort, from Lovell.

"Was it? Didn't I go down specially to the village to pull his leg! Didn't I tell you it would be all right if it was left to me?"

"You did!" confessed Jimmy Silver.

"And doesn't it look all right, what?"

"It does. But—"

"Well, how did you wangle it?" demanded Tommy Dodd. "Where's Dicky Dalton gone, if you come to that?"

Lovell chuckled.

"He's gone to Devereux Lodge, near Latcham, to see Squire Devereux about his nephew coming into the Rookwood Fourth!" he answered.

"Oh, great pip! You pulled Dicky Dalton's leg to that extent!" gasped Raby.

"I did! You see, I spoke as the butler, speaking for his master," explained Lovell. "Dalton lapped it up like milk. Not a suspish! Simply fell for it like a baby."

"Blessed if I make it out," said Newcome. "Dalton's no fool—I shouldn't like to try to spoof him over the phone."

"Well, it wouldn't be much good if you did," said Lovell. "I've pulled it off, but that doesn't mean that you could have."

"You silly ass—!"

"Look here, Newcome—"

"Peace, little ones!" said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell seems to have pulled it off—"

"No seeming about it! I have pulled it off."

"Well, the coast's clear," said Jimmy. "If Dicky Dalton's gone hiking off to Devereux Lodge, we've lots of time to beat the Moderns before he gets back."

"Will he be gone a hundred years, do you think?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Eh?"

"I mean, it would take you as long as that to beat us at cricket. Perhaps a little longer."

"Say a couple of centuries," suggested Tommy Cook.

"Faith, and I should put it at a thousand years, and then some," remarked Tommy Doyle.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, if it's going to take as long as that, the sooner we get going, the better," he said. "By gum, we'll pitch stumps at two, after all. Come on."

Every face was cheerful now. It was surprising—not to say astonishing and amazing—but there it was—Dickie Dalton was gone, the coast was clear, and while the cat was away the mice could play! And they lost no time about it.

Jimmy Silver gathered the rest of his team—Erroll, Mornington, Rawson, Conroy, Pons, Van Ryn, and Oswald, all good men and true of the Classical Fourth. Tommy Dodd gathered his band of Moderns. Every man in both elevens knew that it was Arthur Edward Lovell who had "worked the oracle"—that it was due to Arthur Edward, and to Arthur Edward alone, that cricket was the order of the day, after all. It had been left to Lovell, and Lovell had cut the Gordian knot, so to speak. For once, Arthur Edward Lovell was a great man in the eyes of his comrades. They did not, perhaps, admire him so much as he admired himself—that would have been expecting too much! But it was admitted on all hands that Lovell, if he was generally a fathead, had not been a fathead this time, and that he couldn't be such an ass as he looked! In fact Lovell, for once, was the goods.

His comrades were pleased with him—and Arthur Edward was still more pleased with himself. Tommy Dodd won the toss, and elected to take first knock: and when Jimmy Silver and Co. went into the field, Arthur Edward Lovell seemed to be walking on air. If he did not strut, he came perilously near it.

He had worked the oracle! Like Coriolanus, alone he did it! Another time, when there was trouble he proposed to his chums to leave it to him, no doubt they would be more amenable to reason! They could scarcely dispute, after this, that he was the brainy man of the end study. Instead of saying "Oh, cheese it, fathead!" they would say "Shut up, you fellows, Lovell's speaking!" That would be a very pleasant change—distinctly a change for the better.

These pleasant anticipatory reflections perhaps took Lovell's attention off the game a little: for when Tommy Dodd, who batted first, inadvertently handed him a perfect "sitter", Lovell's clutch at the ball was seconds too late, and the Moderns gained a couple of runs instead of losing a wicket.

"Butterfingers!" came a bleat from the distance, and Lovell, having picked up the ball, with a red face, gave Tubby Muffin a glare, and mentally promised him a kick when the game was over.

After which, Arthur Edward pulled up his socks, as it were, and gave more attention to the game, and less to the contemplation of his own superlative superiority to common mortals!

CHAPTER V

A SKELETON AT THE FEAST!

JIMMY SILVER stared.
"What—?" he began.

The Modern innings had ended, with forty-six for Tommy Dodd and Co. Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell left the pavilion to open the Classical innings. Lovell's face was merry and bright, and in his manner was the slightest suggestion of a strut. But all of a sudden, a strange and startling change came over Lovell. It was so strange and startling that Jimmy Silver stared at him in astonishment.

The self-satisfaction vanished from Lovell's face, as if wiped away with a duster. He came to a dead stop—his jaw dropping, his eyes wide open, staring. His bat dropped, unheeded, to the earth. He stood transfixed. Much the same Macbeth must have looked, at sight of the ghost of Banquo—or Priam, King of Troy, when that dread figure drew the curtains of his bed at dead of night, to tell him that Troy was burning. If ever anyone had looked utterly horrified, and petrified, Arthur Edward Lovell did at that moment.

"Lovell, old man—what—!" ejaculated Jimmy.

Lovell did not speak. It seemed that he could not. He could only stare, as if at a grisly spectre. And Jimmy turned his head, to look in the same direction, and see what it was that had so startled Lovell.

Then Jimmy jumped.

"Oh, holy smoke!" he exclaimed.

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth form at Rookwood School, was a quite handsome and pleasant-looking young man, not in the least likely to startle anyone, or cause horror and dismay to register in the face of an observer. But at that moment, Richard Dalton was more horrifying to the cricketers than the grisliest of spectres could have been. The ghost of Banquo was simply not in it with him—just then!

Jimmy Silver fixed staring eyes on his form-master, as Mr. Dalton loomed in the offing.

Lovell gazed at him as if hypnotized.

He dawned on the other cricketers. They all gazed at him. Cricket, for the moment, was obliterated. The whole field stood at gaze. The batsmen waiting at the pavilion gazed. A crowd of onlookers on Little Side gazed. Seas of eyes fastened on Richard Dalton—appearing like a skeleton at the feast!

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Newcome. "That ass Lovell—!"

"It's Dicky Dalton!"

"He's not gone after all—"

"Look out for squalls!"

"Oh, what rotten luck!"

"The game's up!"

"Oh, suffering crocodiles! That chump Lovell—!"

"That idiot Lovell—"

"We're for it now!"

"That ditherer Lovell—!"

Richard Dalton was not, after all, rolling about the country-side in railway trains, as Lovell had had no doubt. He was not calling at Devereux Lodge, to learn that he had been sent there on a fool's errand! He was doing neither of these things! His absence had been brief: and evidently he could have been nowhere near Devereux Lodge. Probably he had gone out for a walk! Anyhow, here he was—at Rookwood—and any moment now his eyes might fall upon his disobedient form, playing cricket in reckless disregard of orders!

"Oh!" Arthur Edward Lovell found his voice at last. "It—it—it's Dicky Dalton, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard and deep.

"Oh, you ass!" he said.

"I—I—I thought—"

"Don't tell me you thought! You couldn't!"

"He—he—he went out!" babbled Lovell. "He—he—he passed me in Coombe Lane, going to the village. Of—of course I thought—"

"Oh, you chump!"

"Something's gone wrong, somehow," mumbled Lovell.

That much, at least, was unfortunately clear!

Arthur Edward Lovell was no longer looking pleased with himself. He had now not the smallest inclination to strut! No longer was the brainy man of the end study bubbling with self-satisfaction! The glory had departed, so to speak, from the House of Israel! Lovell would have been rather glad, just then, had the cricket field opened and swallowed him up.

For a long minute, which seemed rather like a century, there was suspended animation on Little Side at Rookwood. Towle, the Modern wicket-keeper, called to Jimmy.

"Going in?"

"What's the good?" growled Jimmy. "Here comes Dalton, to clear us all off the field, and most likely bung us in Extra."

"Oh, dear!" murmured Lovell.

"He doesn't seem to be coming here!" remarked Towle.

"Oh!"

Every man on the field, for that long minute, took it for granted that the master of the Fourth was coming down to Little Side to call a reckless form to account.

But was he?

It dawned on the juniors, as they gazed at Richard Dalton in the distance, that they had a view only of his profile. It dawned on them too, that he was not coming nearer—he was passing by. He was walking with Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, and they were deep in conversation—doubt-

less on the subject of senior cricket, which was equally interesting to them both. Finally it dawned on the watching juniors that Richard Dalton was not even glancing in their direction. So far from heading straight for the junior ground, with the vials of wrath all ready to pour on their devoted heads, he was walking on with Bulkeley: and after that long minute, their view of him was on the port quarter, as it were.

Jimmy Silver caught his breath.

Lovell grabbed his elbow.

"Jimmy! He—he—he's got back—but—but—but he doesn't know! He hasn't noticed us—and nobody's told him—yet! Look! He's going."

"How long do you think it will be before he does know?" growled Jimmy.

"Look here, let's carry on—"

"He may spot us any minute—I only wonder that he hasn't already—"

"Carry on, all the same."

Jimmy Silver stood silent. Mr. Dalton was already disappearing in the distance with Bulkeley. Obviously, at the moment, he was simply walking and talking with the captain of Rookwood, and not thinking about his form. But, now that he was back in the school, could he fail to learn, and that speedily, what was going on, on Little Side? If he went to his study, he would be able to see them from his window, if he looked out. It was simply amazing that he had not noticed them already—if he hadn't! Still, if he had, surely he would have intervened! It looked as if he hadn't. But—

Tommy Dodd came up.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" he asked.

"Carry on!" said Lovell. "Dalton doesn't know a thing—he seems to be going about with his eyes shut! Carry on."

"You ass," said Tommy Dodd, "don't you jaw! What about it, Silver?"

"Jimmy can't make up his mind," snorted Lovell. "Look here, Jimmy, let's carry on—if you can't decide, leave it to me."

Jimmy Silver laughed—one of those sardonic laughs! Leaving it to Lovell was not an idea that appealed to him very much. Lovell had landed them in this—it was ten to one, a hundred to one, that any minute Richard Dalton might come striding down to Little Side, with thunder in his brow: order the juniors off the cricket field, and shepherd them off to Extra School as a punishment. Dalton was a cricketer and a sportsman: but he was not a man to be disobeyed by his form. That happy prospect was the outcome of leaving it to Lovell! And now Lovell, undeterred, proposed leaving it to him again!

Nevertheless, Jimmy considered that there was about a chance in a hundred that they might be able to finish that game: and, since they had started it, it was worth while to back that hundredth chance.

So he gave the Modern junior captain a nod.

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!" he said. "We've asked for it, by relying on that ass—may as well put in all the cricket we can, before the chopper comes down, and we get it where the chicken got it."

"Carry on, then?" asked Tommy Dodd.

“That’s it!”

And Tommy Dodd fell back to his place in the field, and Jimmy went to the batting end, Lovell to the other end, and Tommy Cook went on to bowl, and the Classical innings began—though how long it was likely to continue, not a man on Little Side could surmise.

CHAPTER VI

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES!

CRICKET IS a great game: and an enjoyable game under almost any circumstances. But it is more enjoyable under some circumstances than under others.

Probably the least enjoyable way of playing a cricket match, would be to play it under the suspended sword of Damocles, liable to fall at any moment!

That was somewhat the condition that now prevailed on Little Side at Rookwood.

Every man realized that it had been rather fatheaded to begin the game at all, relying on nothing better than having left it to Lovell to see them through—Lovell, who was now agreed on all hands to be the biggest idiot at Rookwood or anywhere else: not only as big an ass as he looked, but twice or thrice as big, and then some, and then some more. Arthur Edward’s brief glory had faded out. He had not, after all, seen them through—he had landed them good and hard: for how could anyone doubt that before long Richard Dalton would spot what was going on, and come down on them like a wolf on the fold?

Nevertheless, a faint hope lingered, that Dalton might be busy, or teaing with the Head, or “jawing” in Common-room with Greely and Mooney, an Bohun and the other beaks, or deep in cricket jaw with Bulkeley—or anything, in fact, that might keep him away from Little Side. And the game went on—under the poised sword of Damocles, as it were!

Fellows whose attention ought to have been wholly on the game, could not help an occasional glance over the shoulder, to see whether Dalton was coming. That did not make for the very best cricket! Lovell was taking one of those glances, when the ball came down from Tommy Doyle, and the clatter of a spread-eagled wicket reminded Arthur Edward where he was—a little too late to be of much service to him.

It was rather hard on Lovell, who had fully intended to knock up, off his own bat, as many runs as the Moderns had scored in their whole innings. Instead of which, the score-board showed a duck to his credit. Like the ploughman in the poem, he wearily plodded his homeward way—and from that moment, regarded the Classical innings with a pessimistic eye.

But Mornington, who took his place, did not look round for Richard

Dalton when the ball was coming: Morny concentrated on cricket, and between him and Jimmy Silver, the runs came.

They had just ten each, when Jimmy knocked the ball away: good for at least a single: but just as he was about to whiz along the pitch, he heard an exclamation from somewhere:

"There's Dalton!"

Jimmy spun round to look: he could not help it. There, undoubtedly, was Dalton, though in the distance—walking with Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth. Jimmy noted, with great relief, that he was not looking towards the cricket field—was he going to pass unheeding again?

He was—for he did! Unluckily, Jimmy's own moment of inattention did not pass unheeded by the Modern field. The round red ball whizzing in from the sure hand of Tommy Dodd apprised him that, his bat was a yard off the crease.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Jimmy, breathing rather hard, went quietly back to the pavilion, George Raby coming out to take his place. Playing cricket under the sword of Damocles was undoubtedly rather trying.

Two or three Classical batsmen, evidently feeling the strain, gave the field chances, and went bootless home. But Morny was still going on, and when Conroy, the Australian junior, came out to join him, Conroy proceeded to hit in quite a Bradmanical manner, and the score went up and up. And the sword of Damocles had not fallen, when the innings ended, with the Classics one better than the Moderns at forty-seven.

After which Jimmy Silver and Co. scanned the horizon—in the direction of the school buildings—as anxiously as ship-wrecked sailormen might have scanned it for a sail. But there was no sign whatever of Richard Dalton—apparently he had had enough walking and talking: and if he was in his study, he did not seem to be looking from the window.

"All clear, Jimmy, old man," said Tommy Dodd.

"Blessed if I make it out!" said Jimmy, perplexed. "We didn't expect Dalton back—"

"We might have—as it was Lovell that got him away," grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Yes—but we didn't! But we did expect that if he got back our game would be up! It's hard to believe that he doesn't know we're playing cricket against orders. But if he knew he would drop on us! I don't make it out."

"Very likely he's deep in form papers now—anyhow he's not giving us any attention! We carry on," said Tommy Dodd.

"Yes! But—" Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. It was all unexpected and quite incomprehensible. But the suspended sword had not fallen—and the game was going on—to a finish, if such amazing luck continued.

And strange to relate, it did continue. The Modern second innings lasted an hour, and thirty-six runs materialized. During that space of time, the

juniors almost forgot Richard Dalton—as he seemed to have forgotten them.

However, they were reminded of him, when the time came for the Classics to take their second knock. If Mr. Dalton had been busy with form papers in his study, as was probably the case, he felt the need by that time of a spot of fresh air: and anxious eyes from Little Side spotted him in the distance, taking a walk, this time in company with Monsieur Monceau, the French master. At least twenty pairs of eyes fixed on the athletic figure of Richard Dalton: and Jimmy Silver, and several other fellows, were convinced that he did actually look towards the junior cricket ground: in which case, he could hardly have missed the flannelled figures dotting the green. Jimmy felt a sinking at the heart! It was coming now!

But it wasn't! Mr. Dalton walked on with Monsieur Monceau, leaving the juniors staring at one another.

"Well, that beats it!" murmured Raby.

"He must have seen us!" said Newcome, "unless he's gone blind, or silly, he must."

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose.

"I suppose we didn't dream that Lovell crooked him with a cricket ball in the quad this morning, and that he jumped on us and barred cricket for us for the rest of the week!" he said. "He's the last beak at Rookwood to let fellows carry on against orders."

"Has he forgotten—!" hazarded Lovell.

"Does he ever forget anything?"

"Well, no! But—"

"No good trying to make it out," said Jimmy, "we're going to play out our innings—and if there's a row afterwards, we shall have had the cricket, at any rate. Get going."

Twice, during the Classical second innings, Richard Dalton was sighted in the distance. But he seemed quite oblivious of his form: and the innings went on, still under the sword of Damocles. But all the junior cricketers were finding it a little wearing, by this time: and there was a general feeling of relief when Jimmy Silver knocked up the thirty-sixth run, and with a total of eighty-three, and two wickets in hand, the Classics came off victors.

"Well, we've beaten them!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, with satisfaction. "Even if there's a row, we've jolly well had our game, and we've beaten the Moderns."

"Must be a row," said Jimmy. "I can't make out why Dalton never barged in—but he just must know—"

"Looks as if he doesn't," said Lovell.

"Think he's blind?" asked Raby.

"Well, if he knows why didn't he barge in?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Don't you worry!" said Lovell. "Dicky Dalton doesn't know a thing! Must be as blind as a bat, I know—but there it is! Take it from me!"

Arthur Edward was in high feather again. He said "Take it from me!" in quite his old style.

"And I think," went on Lovell, "that you fellows will own up that you couldn't have done better than leave it to me—"

"What?"

"Well, look at it!" said Lovell. "Dalton didn't stay away all the afternoon, as I planned—but after he came in, nothing happened. But for me, you wouldn't have played the match—well, we've played it, and licked the Moderns. That's how it's turned out—and if you hadn't left it to me, would it?"

To which, at the moment, there was no answer to be made.

CHAPTER VII

LIGHT AT LAST!

TUBBY MUFFIN insinuated a fat face into the end study—and, as nobody hooted to him to get out, or hurled a book or a boot at him, he proceeded to insinuate a fat figure after the fat face.

The end study was rather crowded.

Most of the Classical cricketers had gathered there for a late tea, and something like a celebration of their amazing luck that afternoon, added to a victory over the Moderns.

That match, certainly, had been played under somewhat trying circumstances—under the suspended sword of Damocles. But the Damoclean sword had not fallen—Richard Dalton had made no sign—and it really did look as if all was calm and bright.

Lovell, at all events, had no doubt of it. His face was bright and cheery: he was in the greatest of spirits: and when he sighted the fat face of Reginald Muffin, he did not yell "Get out!" as he had done earlier in the day—he gave the fat Classical a nod, and said "You can roll in, Tubby!"

Reginald Muffin did not need asking twice. He rolled in. Reginald had scented a spread in the end study, and had toddled along hopefully—now his hopes were realized. Crowded as the study was, Tubby wedged in, and reached the eatables. And if he was a little late, he showed every sign of making up for lost time. Lovell, now in the best of tempers, remembered that Tubby had had something to say, on his previous visit. It even occurred to him that he had, perhaps, been a little drastic on that occasion. True, the probability was that all that Tubby had had to say was that he was short of cash and would somebody lend him some. Still, now that everything had gone so swimmingly, Lovell realized that he needn't have been quite so drastic as to stump Tubby before he could get a word out.

"Help yourself to the cake, Tubby," he said.

Tubby was already helping himself to the cake.

"You came here to say something or other, just after dinner," went on Lovell. "You're a spot of bother, you know, when chaps are busy. But what was it?"

"Eh! I suppose somebody else told you," said Tubby.

"Not that I know of," said Lovell.

Tubby stared at him.

"But somebody must have told Jimmy," he said.

"Eh! Why?" asked Jimmy Silver, blankly.

"I mean to say, you played cricket," said Tubby. "Lovell wouldn't let me give you Dalton's message, but I suppose you must have known, or you couldn't have played cricket."

Every eye in the end study fixed on Tubby Muffin.

"Mean to say you came with a message from Dalton this afternoon, when Lovell stumped you out?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? Yes."

"You fat ass," roared Lovell. "If it was a message from Dalton, why didn't you say so?"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Tubby, indignantly. "Did you give me a chance to speak? Didn't I try to tell you, and didn't you jolly well land out with a stump?"

"What was the message, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver, quietly.

"Only that Dalton was letting you off—"

"What?" yelled the whole study.

"That's all," said Tubby.

"All!" gasped Newcome.

"Letting us off!" said Lovell, dazedly.

"Yes." Tubby gobbled cake. "You see, Dalton called me, and told me to take a message to Jimmy Silver. He said tell Silver he had remembered that there was a junior House match on this afternoon, and that of course he didn't want to stop a House match, so you were to go ahead and play the Moderns."

"Dalton told you to tell us that!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. That's what I came to tell you, only Lovell wouldn't let me speak—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"Lovell, you idiot—"

"Lovell, you chump—"

"Lovell, you lunatic—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mornington. "So we had leave to play, all the time, and that's why Dalton never took any notice—"

Lovell's face was a picture.

"You—you—you—you fat, foozling, footling fathead!" he spluttered. "If Dalton told you to tell us that, why didn't you?"

"You wouldn't let me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my summer hat!" gasped Newcome. "We thought that Dicky Dalton might let us off, if he remembered the House match—and he was bound to. And he jolly well did, and sent a message to tell us so, and Lovell wouldn't hear it—"

"And laid plans for getting Dicky over to Devereux Lodge, when all we had to do was to go ahead and play cricket, with Dicky's blessing!" gurgled Raby.

"Oh, ye gods and little fishes!" said Jimmy Silver. "If you'd let Tubby tell us that, Lovell—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How was I to know?" gasped Lovell. "I thought the bothering little beast was butting in to borrow half-a-crown as usual—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well' I tried to tell you," said Tubby, "you stumped me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But didn't you get it from somebody else?" asked Tubby. "You must have known you were let off, as you played cricket—oh, crumbs! Did you play without knowing you were let off?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The end study rocked with laughter. Only Arthur Edward Lovell did not laugh. The humour of the situation seemed lost on Lovell. The expression on his speaking countenance was quite extraordinary. But it did not indicate that he was amused.

Every other fellow roared. Dicky Dalton had let them off. He had sent a message to tell them so. Owing to Lovell, that message had not been delivered. Lovell had been too busy, laying unnecessary plans, to listen to a message which would have revealed that planning was unnecessary. He had gone ahead with his plans—and failed. His failure would have landed his friends in the soup, but for the fact that Dalton, having let them off, naturally expected to find them playing cricket that afternoon. No sword of Damocles had been suspended over the cricketers, after all—Dalton knew what they were doing, and supposed that they knew that he had given them leave. To everybody but Lovell it seemed excruciatingly funny—and the end study echoed with merriment.

In the midst of the merriment, there came a tap at the door. Tupper, the House page, looked in.

"If you please, Mr. Dalton wishes to see Master Lovell in his study," said Tupper.

Lovell quietly left the study. Perhaps, at that moment, he was rather glad to get away. Loud laughter followed him down the Fourth-form passage.

"But I say, what does Dicky want Lovell for?" said Newcome.

"That telephone call!" murmured Raby.

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"That's it!" he said. "Dicky knows! He's left it till after the cricket was over—and now—!"

"Is Lovell the man to ask for it?" grinned Newcome.

"Poor old Lovell!"

"Poor old fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was some minutes before Arthur Edward Lovell returned to the end study. His return was heralded by a sound of gasping in the passage. When he appeared in the doorway, he came wriggling, and seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

"Oh! ow! wow!" was his first remark, as he wriggled in. "Wow! Six on the bags—wow!"

The crowd in the end study gazed at him. They did not want to be unsympathetic. But they simply could not help grinning.

"Dicky Dalton knew—?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"About that spoof phone call—?" asked Newcome.

"Was that it?" asked Raby.

"Ow! Wow!" Lovell wriggled. "Yes! Wow! I thought he looked a bit suspicious when he passed me in Coombe Lane—wow! He—he—he wasn't going over to Latcham, as I thought—wow!—he was going down to Coombe Post Office—ow!—to inquire—wow! He found out that the call hadn't come from Devereux Lodge—ooooogh!—he wasn't taken in at all—ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wow! I—I think he guessed, when he saw me coming back on my bike from Coombe—wow!—anyhow, he found out at Coombe—wow!—that I'd telephoned—ooogh! And—and I've had six on the bags—"

"Does he know why you did it?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Oh! No! As he'd given us leave to play, of course he wouldn't guess that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He thought it was just a silly trick—wow!"

"Right on the wicket!" said Newcome. "It was!"

"If that fat idiot Muffin had told us—"

"You wouldn't let me tell you—you stumped me—," bleated Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" said Lovell, "wow!" He wriggled. "All my trouble for nothing—and six on the bags as well—and all we had to do was to go ahead, if we'd only known—"

"You mean, if you'd let me tell you!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, all's well that ends well," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

Arthur Edward Lovell could not quite feel, at the moment, that all had ended well. But everybody else seemed satisfied: and the grousing was left to Lovell.