

THE **WORLD'S BEST WILD WEST YARN** *inside!*

# The **POPULAR**

Complete  
Story  
Paper

**2<sup>d</sup>**

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THE **RIO KID** - *The Terror of the Plains!*

**TROUBLE BETWEEN CHUMS!** As one of the celebrated Fistical Four, Lovell expects to share the troubles and secrets of his chums. So when he discovers that a secret is being kept from him, he naturally resents it. Then big trouble begins!

# KEEPING IT

By OWEN  
CONQUEST.

# DARK!

ANOTHER TOP-NOTCH STORY OF JIMMY SILVER  
& CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.



## THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Startling Discovery!

"If he doesn't come soon—" murmured Newcome. "We'll scrag him!" hissed Raby.

Jimmy Silver made no remark. He was just as annoyed and impatient as his comrades; but "Uncle James" of Rookwood was something of a philosopher. Arthur Edward Lovell was keeping the Co. waiting, and there were unnumbered reasons why Lovell shouldn't keep them waiting. But it couldn't be helped. Grousing would not make Lovell any quicker.

"Isn't it just like him?" went on Newcome.

"Oh, just!" said Raby.

"He couldn't remember that he had a letter to post when we passed the post office."

"Of course he couldn't!"

"And he couldn't keep it a bit longer in his pocket, and post it at Rookwood?"

"Oh, no! Of course not!"

It was a duet between Newcome and Raby. Jimmy Silver smiled in the dusk. Raby and Newcome were growing more and more exasperated, as they had good reason to do.

The chums of the Fourth were late for call-over. There was a keen east wind blowing. The shades of night were falling fast. They were waiting under the tree near the entrance of the Bird-in-Hand Inn, and the trunk gave them little shelter from the wind.

They had reached that point, on their way back to the school after a long ramble, when Lovell had suddenly remembered that he had the letter to post. He had remembered that he had forgotten, so to speak. Raby and Newcome would have explained to him that, after carrying the dashed letter about in his dashed pocket all the dashed afternoon, he might as well carry it there a little longer. But Arthur Edward Lovell seldom or never listened

to reason. He had rushed back into the village without even waiting for his chums to expound their views on the subject.

Now they waited. With every minute of waiting the cold wind seemed to grow colder and sharper. On the other hand, tempers were growing hotter and hotter. It really looked as if Arthur Edward Lovell was booked for a ragging when he rejoined his chums.

Raby peered in the gloom towards the twinkling, dim lights in the village street. The Bird-in-Hand lay a little distance out of Coombe.

"Nice for us, if somebody should come along from the school and see us hanging about here," said Raby savagely. "Might be taken for merry blades, like that cad Peele!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at the lighted windows of the inn and frowned a little. The Bird-in-Hand was strictly out of bounds for Rookwood fellows. Peele of the Fourth had once been flogged for setting foot within the forbidden precincts. Fellows like Peele, who prided themselves upon being doggish, sometimes sneaked down the side way to the back of the place, to pass a stolen hour in Mr. Stiggins' smoky parlour or the billiards-room.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Jimmy Silver. "Nobody would suspect us of playing the giddy ox."

"I don't know," grumbled Raby. "I jolly well know I don't like hanging about here."

"Neither do I," said Newcome; "and I'm not hanging about much longer. That crass ass Lovell can go and eat coke!"

"Hallo! Here's somebody coming," murmured Jimmy.

The light was not good, but the three juniors recognised the newcomer at a glance.

It was Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

He stopped in the radius of light. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, in the deep shadow of the tree at a little distance, were invisible to him, and they took care to remain so.

Although they considered that they were above suspicion, even if they were seen hanging about in the vicinity of that disreputable resort, they had no

desire whatever to meet their Form master on the spot. Moreover, if Mr. Dalton had seen them he would have ordered them to Rookwood at once, without waiting for Lovell.

So they stood close round the trunk of the tree, and said no word, with their eyes fixed on the handsome, athletic figure standing at a little distance in the light.

For a couple of minutes Mr. Dalton stood there, looking round him, and the juniors wondered why.

Then, to their intense amazement, he turned into the path beside the inn and disappeared from sight.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood silent. They were too astonished to speak.

That path led nowhere but into the garden of the Bird-in-Hand, and Mr. Dalton's destination could only be the back door of the inn. Indeed, as they stood, there came to their ears in the silence the sound of a knock, and they thought they heard an opening door.

Jimmy Silver was the first to recover himself.

"Let's get away!" he whispered.

"But Lovell—"

"Blow Lovell!"

The three juniors left the sheltering shadow of the tree, and hurried on up the dark lane towards Rookwood. Richard Dalton, the master of the Rookwood Fourth, had gone into that disreputable inn—secretly, as it seemed, after looking about him—into the place that was "taboo for all Rookwood—a place that any junior would have been flogged, and any senior expelled for entering. The chums of the Fourth could scarcely credit it; but they had to believe the evidence of their own eyes.

Richard Dalton was popular in his Form. If Richard Dalton had fallen into bad company it was not for his Form to spy upon him. That was Jimmy Silver's first thought.

And so, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell to his own devices, Jimmy Silver hurried on with Raby and Newcome to Rookwood, only anxious to get away from the spot and to see nothing more.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### A Secret for Three!

"NOT a word!" Jimmy Silver made that observation in the end study, and Raby and Newcome nodded assent. The three juniors had gathered in the end study to a very late tea. But late as tea was, and

healthy as their appetites generally were, the trio did not enjoy the meal on this occasion. They were worried.

Lovell had not come in yet. But they were not thinking about Lovell. Richard Dalton, their popular Form master, occupied their thoughts.

They had had time to think over the matter now; and the more they thought over it, the more it worried them.

There were "bad hats" at Rookwood School, as everywhere else—fellows who did not play the game. Peele and Gower of the Fourth, Tracy of the Shell, one or two of the Fifth, and Carthew and some others of the Sixth; it was more or less known or suspected that such fellows as these were given to surreptitious dingy blackguardism.

But a master in the school!

It was unbelievable!

And of all masters, Richard Dalton; the most popular of the masters, the keen footballer and cricketer and boxer—the man of whom all Rookwood was proud!

Yet with their own eyes the three juniors had seen Richard Dalton sneaking in at the back way of the Bird-in-Hand.

"It's no bizney of ours, of course," said Newcome.

"Not in the least," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "Dicky Dalton may have had lots of reasons for going there. He's not the sort of man to play the goat like that footling ass Carthew, or a giddy ox like Tracy of the Shell."

"But why—"

"It doesn't matter why," said Jimmy firmly. "He may have no end of reasons we don't know about, and it's not our bizney to inquire."

"That's so; but it looks—"

"I know how it looks. The Head would be down on him like a ton of

bricks, unless he could give a jolly good explanation. Perhaps he could."

"Perhaps!" said Newcome doubtfully. "All we've got to do is to shut up," said Jimmy. "We're bound to think the best we can of anybody; and especially of Dicky Dalton, whom we know to be a white man."

"Hear, hear!" said Raby and Newcome heartily.

"So, not a word!" said the captain of the Fourth. "If the yarn got round the school it would be bad for Dicky. No doubt at all about that. Fellows like Peele would make capital out of it. We've hit on it by accident, and we're bound to keep it a dead secret."

There was full agreement on that point.

"But what about Lovell?" asked Newcome, after a pause. "Lovell will want to know why we didn't wait for him. I—I suppose we're not keeping secrets from Lovell?"

Jimmy Silver looked more worried than before.

There was always full confidence among the Fistical Four of the Fourth; they had no secrets from one another. Keeping a secret from one member of the Co. was not pleasant.

"I—I suppose we should tell Lovell," said Newcome dubiously. "He would be awfully waxy if we kept a secret from him and he found out."

"We've no right to tell anybody," said Jimmy.

"That's so. But—"

"That applies to Lovell," said Jimmy, after a long pause. "It's not a matter to interest him in any way. No concern of his any more than it is of ours."

"Yes; but—"

Jimmy Silver was not uttering the whole of his thoughts. As a matter of fact, though Arthur Edward Lovell's

loyalty was unquestionable, his discretion was by no means so.

Arthur Edward Lovell was, in fact, about the last fellow at Rookwood to be able to keep a secret.

Moreover, there was a strain of obstinacy in Lovell; he was rather prone to take a different view from other fellows, merely because it was different. That was one of Lovell's little weaknesses that his chums bore with patiently.

It was quite possible that Lovell, from that peculiar trick of opposition, might take the view that the juniors were not bound to keep the incident a secret at all. And once Lovell had an idea in his head, argument only fixed it more firmly there.

Jimmy Silver did not put this into words; but Raby and Newcome quite understood. They knew their chum's foibles as well as Jimmy did.

"Better say nothing at all," was Jimmy's decision. "Just shove the whole thing out of your heads, and carry on as if it had never happened."

And Raby and Newcome assented.

They felt that it was a case of the least said, the soonest mended; and that the sooner the whole thing was forgotten the better.

Tea over, the chums of the Fourth turned to prep, and nothing more was said on the subject of Richard Dalton's strange escapade. Lovell had not come in, and the three wondered where he could be. He should not have been long behind them; but they had been in an hour or more now, and he had not appeared.

Tubby Muffin put a fat face into the study.

"You four are wanted," he said, with a grin. "You've got to report to Dalton for missing call-over."

"Has Mr. Dalton come in?" asked Raby.

"Eh? Has he been out?" said Tubby.

"Oh, never mind! All serene," said Raby hastily.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome went downstairs to report to Mr. Dalton. They were feeling rather uneasy as they came into their Form master's study, and they could not help giving Richard Dalton quick, curious looks.

Mr. Dalton eyed them severely.

"I sent for four!" he said.

"Lovell hasn't come in yet, sir," murmured Jimmy.

"Was he not with you?"

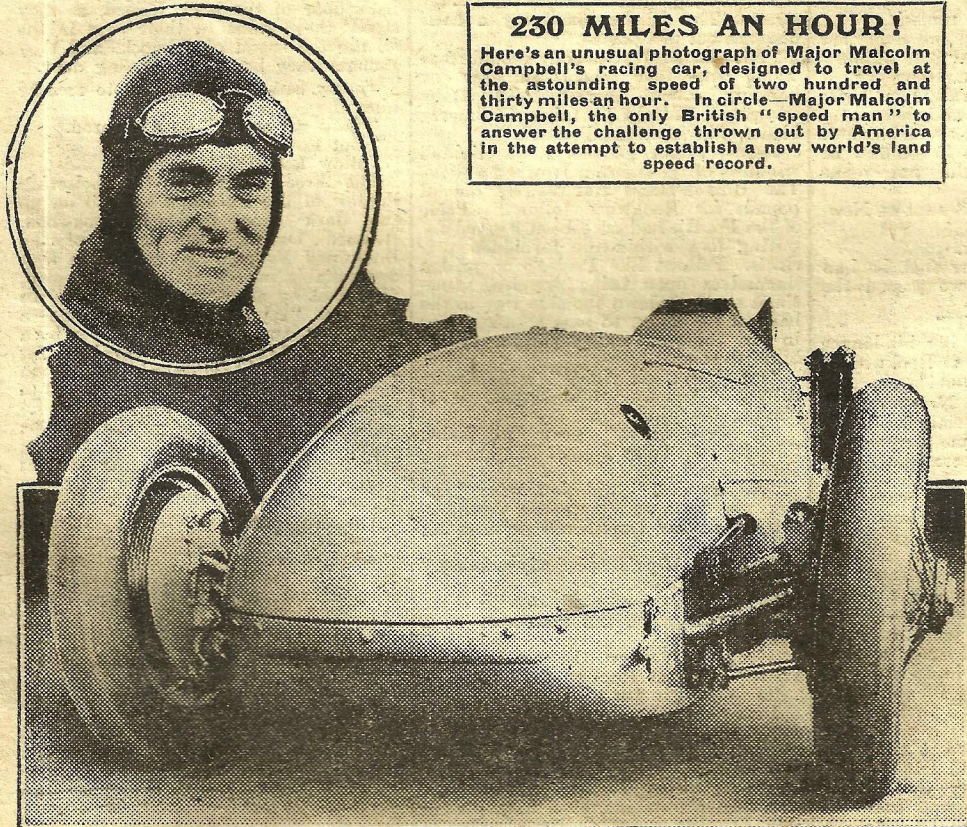
"He went back to post a letter."

"Why did you not answer to your names at roll?" asked Mr. Dalton.

Jimmy Silver explained meekly that the party had gone on a long ramble and had unfortunately not allowed sufficient time for return before lock-up. Mr. Dalton listened quietly, with his keen eyes on the juniors.

## 230 MILES AN HOUR!

Here is an unusual photograph of Major Malcolm Campbell's racing car, designed to travel at the astounding speed of two hundred and thirty miles an hour. In circle—Major Malcolm Campbell, the only British "speed man" to answer the challenge thrown out by America in the attempt to establish a new world's land speed record.



"Very well," he said. "It must not occur again. You will take fifty lines each."

"Yes, sir."

"Jolly cool!" murmured Newcome, as the delinquents left Mr. Dalton's study. "He was jolly well out of bounds himself. I wonder what he'd say if he knew we'd seen him?"

"He ought to let us off the lines for keeping it dark," grumbled Raby. "One good turn deserves another."

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver. "He doesn't know we're keeping anything dark. And he's not going to know."

The three returned to the end study to prep.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

**Lovell is Wrathful!**

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL strode up the Fourth Form passage, breathing wrath. Several fellows loafing about the study doors glanced at him and grinned.

"Hallo! You've come in!" said Putty of the Fourth.

Lovell grunted.

"Where on earth have you been all this time?" asked Morington.

"Looking for a set of silly chumps!" snapped Lovell. "I suppose they've come in?"

"He, he, he!" from Tubby Muffin. "They've been in for hours."

Another grunt from Lovell, and he strode on to the end study. The door of that celebrated apartment was hurried open, and Lovell strode in, with thunder on his brow.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked up from their work.

"Oh, you've come in at last!" said Jimmy.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" bawled Lovell.

"We did wait ten minutes."

"Why couldn't you wait another minute or two?"

Arthur Edward Lovell glared accusingly at his chums. Evidently he was in a state of great wrath and indignation.

As there was no reply to his question, he ran on:

"If you didn't want to wait, why couldn't you say you weren't going to wait? Then a chap would have known!"

"Well, you see—"

"I don't see!"

"Anyhow, you could have come on, I suppose?" said Raby tartly. "You knew your way to Rookwood without us to lead you, didn't you?"

"How was I to know you'd gone on?" roared Lovell. "I've never left you in the lurch, and I didn't think you'd left me. When I didn't find you at the tree, I thought you must have gone back to Coombe for me, and missed me in the dark, so I went back to look for you."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What else was I to think?" howled the indignant Lovell. "I couldn't guess that you'd just walked home and left me to find out what had become of you!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged uncomfortable looks. From Lovell's point of view, undoubtedly he was an injured party.

Knowing nothing of the urgent reason that had taken the three away from the spot, Lovell felt that he had been treated badly. Certainly, he might have guessed that his comrades had gone on. But he hadn't guessed that.

"Never even crossed my mind that you'd gone on, and leave me not know-



**LOVELL GETS IT HOT!** As if moved by the same spring, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome collared Lovell and proceeded to rub his head in the study coal-box! (See Chapter 4.)

ing where you were!" hooted Lovell. "If you didn't want to wait for a chap, you could have said so."

"Yes; but—"

"I've got a caning from Dalton for being so late. I don't blame Dalton! I blame you!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"I suppose you were anxious to get in and get lines instead of a licking," sneered Lovell. "You didn't care a rap if I rooted about looking for you, and got caned for it!"

"We had to go on!" snapped Raby.

"Why had you?"

That was a difficult question to answer. Raby was silent. Lovell stared angrily at three frowning faces.

"You left me in the lurch!" he snapped. "It was a dirty trick! You know it was. I've been hunting for you—I wouldn't come in and leave you out, looking for me, as I thought! Only at last I guessed you must have gone on and left me. I call it rotten."

"It's not like that," said Newcome. "We had to come on. We couldn't stay there any longer."

"Why couldn't you?"

"Well, we couldn't."

"Why not?" roared Lovell.

"You say you waited ten minutes. I was back in eleven or twelve. Why couldn't you hang on another minute or two?"

"We couldn't!" said Jimmy Silver.

"And you can't say why?"

"Well, something happened," said Raby desperately. "Something happened that made us clear."

"Do you mean a prefect rounded you up?" asked Arthur Edward, a little less wrathfully.

"Nunno."

"Then what do you mean?"

Lovell stared harder at his study-mates. He was perplexed now as well as angry. And his indignation was growing instead of diminishing. Any-

thing might have been annoyed by what had happened, as the three chums realised—and there was reason for Arthur Edward's wrath.

"You're making a mystery out of something," said Lovell at last. "If anything happened, I suppose you can tell me."

"No!" blurted out Newcome.

"What! Why not?"

"Because you're such an ass," said Newcome, irritated into unusual plain speaking. "You'd shout it all over the school."

"What?" roared Lovell.

"Shush!" murmured Jimmy Silver, in distress. "That isn't the way to put it, Newcome, old chap."

"Well, he would," said Newcome. "He comes in here bawling at us, without even thinking we might have had a reason for acting as we did. If we tell him, he's as likely as not to bawl it out to anybody who will listen."

Lovell's face was crimson now.

"So something did happen to make you clear off, and you won't tell me what it was, because it's a silly secret, and you can't trust me to keep a secret!" he spluttered.

"You know you can't keep a secret," said Newcome tartly. "You blurt out everything."

"You don't trust me with a silly secret, whatever it is? All right—don't!" said Lovell. "I don't want to know it. I'm pretty certain it's only some nonsense, and I shouldn't care to listen to it, anyhow. But if you think you can't trust me to keep a secret, that's enough."

With that, Arthur Edward Lovell tramped out of the end study, and closed the door after him with a slam that rang the length of the Fourth Form passage.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

## A Split in the Study!

**V**ALENTINE MORNINGTON met Jimmy Silver & Co. as they went down to the junior Common-room shortly before time for dorm.

"What on earth's up in your study?" he asked.

"Up!" repeated Jimmy vaguely. The captain of the Fourth had no desire at all to talk about the trouble that had arisen in the happy family circle.

"Lovell's done his prep in our study," said Mornington. "Of course, we didn't mind. But what's up?"

"Nothing serious, I hope?" said Erroll.

"Oh, not at all!" said Jimmy. "All serene, you know."

The three said no more than that; but they felt worried as they went into the Common-room. Lovell did not come there, and they did not see him again till bed-time.

In the Fourth Form dormitory they found him, and they looked at him—but he did not look at them. Lovell, apparently, had decided to ignore the existence of his three chums. He was labouring under a deep sense of injury, and he made no secret of his wrath.

Some of the fellows in the dormitory grinned as they noted the unusual state of affairs among the Fistical Four.

Peele and Gower and their friends seemed entertained by it; a split in the end study was very gratifying to them. But the general view was that Lovell's well-known hasty temper was the cause of the trouble, and that it would blow over by the morrow.

Jimmy Silver hoped so fervently. Lovell was generally forgiving enough, after he had blown off steam.

Jimmy had to admit that there was some ground for Lovell's resentment. But he was more disinclined than ever to tell him what had happened at the Bird-in-Hand.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had said nothing, or next to nothing, of the cause of the dispute. But Lovell had talked freely about it—airing his wrongs and his indignation. Nearly every fellow in the Classical Fourth knew that Lovell regarded himself as having been treated badly by his friends, and that he had "chucked" them in consequence.

A little discretion would have induced Lovell to keep silent, as his chums did; but discretion was not Lovell's strong point. His resentment and indignation were trailed up and down the Fourth, so to speak; and the effect they produced was usually amusement. Later on, probably, Lovell would regret that he had talked so much. But that would not alter the fact that he had done so.

And Jimmy could not help feeling that, had Lovell been told all, the secret would not have been safe. It was very doubtful whether Lovell would have promised in advance to keep it. He would have wanted to use his own judgment on that point. And his judgment was not to be relied upon.

So, whatever attitude Lovell took upon the matter, Jimmy Silver felt convinced that it was wiser not to tell him of Richard Dalton's mysterious visit to the Bird-in-Hand.

But the present state of affairs was very distressing. Jimmy called out good-night to Lovell, and received no answer. Evidently Arthur Edward was determined to slumber on his wrath.

Jimmy hoped for the best in the morning, and went to sleep.

But in the morning Arthur Edward Lovell was in the same mood. He paid

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no heed to his chums, and carefully refrained from catching their glances.

He went down from the dormitory with Oswald, and took another path when he came on the three in the quad before breakfast.

At breakfast he found a seat at the table at a distance from his chums.

After breakfast he ignored them, and when they came into the Form-room for class he still ignored them.

By that time all the Fourth, classical and Modern, were aware of the trouble in the end study, and rather interested and entertained by it. It was known that Lovell, under a sense of injury, had sent his former chums to Coventry, and dropped their acquaintance.

Many were the remarks made upon it, but Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome said nothing when they were questioned.

Lovell, on the other hand, was quite eloquent.

He saw no reason for keeping silent, and he did not keep silent. It dawned upon him, after a time, however, that he was making himself rather ridiculous. That discovery did not soften his wrath; it made him more reserved, but it made him more angry.

Jimmy Silver was puzzled and distressed.

He felt that this could not go on; the old friendship in the end study could not come to an end in this way. But what was to be done was rather a problem.

After class that day the three chums discussed the matter seriously; and Jimmy Silver declared that it would not do, and Raby and Newcome agreed that it wouldn't. But, as Lovell obviously did not intend to "come round," it was up to the trio to come round for Lovell's own sake—a test of friendship to which they were fortunately equal.

Only—and there was the rub—they couldn't "come round" and restore the old footing in the end study without letting Lovell into the secret regarding Dicky Dalton—and the reasons against doing so were as strong as ever.

"But it comes to this," said Raby crossly. "We're barring our own chum, or he's barring us, which comes to the same thing, because Dicky Dalton chose to 'butt into' an inn. If he does such silly things he must risk being talked about."

"And Lovell may keep his head shut," said Newcome, not very hopefully.

"He may!" said Jimmy, still less hopefully. "Not to put too fine a point on it, Lovell is a bit of an ass. Still, he's our chum; and Dicky Dalton, though we like him immensely, isn't."

"That's so."

"Well, then, do we tell Lovell and chance it," asked Jimmy.

"Leave it to you," said Raby; and Newcome nodded assent to that. It was for "Uncle James" to decide.

"Tell him, then," said Jimmy. "We'll try to make him understand how important it is to keep it dark. After all, he's got some sense."

That decision having been come to—the only possible decision unless Lovell was to be estranged for good—the three proceeded to act upon it. Jimmy Silver rounded up Lovell in the passage and put it to him plainly.

"Aren't you fed-up with this rot, Lovell?" he asked.

Lovell did not answer.

"Come up to the study, and we'll tell you the whole bizney," said Jimmy.

"I'm not asking you to!" said Lovell loftily.

"Well, I'm asking you, fathead!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Come on!"

And Lovell condescended to come. In the end study Jimmy shut the door, after a glance up and down to make sure that Tubby Muffin was not in the offing.

Then the three juniors explained together.

Lovell listened, his eyes opening wide.

Doubtless he wondered a great deal what the mysterious secret could be. Certainly, he had not guessed that it had anything to do with his Form master.

"You see, now," said Jimmy, when the story was told. "We couldn't hang on there, after seeing Mr. Dalton going into the Bird-in-Hand—we didn't want to see so much, and certainly not any more. That's why we didn't wait for you, see?"

"I see," assented Lovell.

"But you understand that this can't be mentioned. It would get Dicky Dalton talked about."

"Why not?" asked Lovell coolly.

"Why?" ejaculated Jimmy. "I suppose we don't want Peele and Gower and cads like that, to make out that Dicky Dalton is a giddy blade."

"They couldn't make it out if it wasn't true."

"Look here, Lovell—"

"Think of what the Head would say if he knew!" urged Raby.

"The Head ought to know."

"What?" shouted the three together.

"If it's true, the Head ought to know," said Lovell calmly. "If Dicky Dalton goes round to low inns, consorting with racing sharpers, the sooner he's pushed out of Rookwood the better!"

"It's not for us to judge him, or to take it for granted that he hadn't a good reason for going there!" said Jimmy hotly.

"Rot!" said Lovell. "If you fellows saw what you think you saw, it's a plain case. Only, of course, it happens to be all rot. I don't believe a word of it."

"What?"

"You think you saw him, I mean. Of course, it was only some resemblance, and it was dark, too. Dicky Dalton was probably a mile away at the time," said Lovell cheerfully.

"I tell you," said Jimmy Silver, breathing hard and deep, "that there is no doubt at all that it was Mr. Dalton who went into the back door of the Bird-in-Hand that evening."

"And I tell you that you were dreaming, and it wasn't," said Lovell. "I could have told you so at once, if you'd had sense enough to explain that evening and tell me what you were fancying. What you wanted was to have a little common-sense. But it was just like you fellows—making a mountain out of a molehill, and a deadly secret out of nothing. You're such kids!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had been very patient. Indeed, they felt that in that particular line, they could have given points to Job himself. But their patience was at an end now.

As if moved by the same spring they hurled themselves on Arthur Edward Lovell and grasped him.

Arthur Edward was swept off his feet, in the grasp of his indignant chums, and he smote the floor of the study with a loud concussion.

"Bump!"

"Oh!" roared Lovell. "Ow!"

Bump, bump!

"There!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I hope that's done you good!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

It had done Lovell no good at all. He scrambled up and fairly hurled himself upon his chums.

"Yaroooh!" roared Jimmy Silver, as Lovell's knuckles landed on his nose. Jimmy landed on the hearthrug.

"Chuck the silly ass out!" shouted Raby.

"Collar him!"

Jimmy bounded up. He had sought for peace, but it was war that he had found. And even "Uncle James" was angry now.

Three pairs of hands grasped the belligerent Lovell, the door was dragged open, and Arthur Edward shot into the passage.

Crash!

"Whooooop!"

There was a yell along the corridor. "They're chucking Lovell out! He, he, he! They're going it in the end study! Fancy that, you fellows! He, he, he!"

There was a rush of Fourth-Formers along the passage as Tubby Muffin yelled. Lovell was yelling, too.

Jimmy Silver slammed the door of the end study. Lovell staggered up, feeling exceedingly sore. His face was crimson with wrath.

"I—I—I'll smash 'em!" he gasped.

"What on earth's the trouble?" asked Oswald.

"What are they ragging you for?" inquired Peele.

Lovell spluttered with wrath.

"Because I don't believe they saw Dicky Dalton going into the Bird-in-Hand a few days ago!" he bawled.

"What!"

"Which!"

"Oh, gad!"

In the end study Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared at one another as they heard Lovell's bawling voice.

"That does it!" murmured Raby.

Undoubtedly it had "done" it. The dead secret was a secret no longer—that evening it was the one topic in the Classical Fourth.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Light at Last!

**M**R. RICHARD DALTON had always been an object of interest to his Form. He was popular, he was good at games, he had pleasant manners which inspired liking, and a resolute character which inspired respect.

The Fourth thought a great deal of their Form master. But never, even on the occasion when he had helped the Sixth to beat the Old Boys at football, had he been so great an object of interest to the Fourth as he had now become.

Richard Dalton had been seen—actually seen—entering the Bird-in-Hand. It was amazing! It was such a story as would have been scornfully disregarded at once had it emanated from a fellow like Peele, or a tattler like Tubby Muffin. But it came from Jimmy Silver, captain of the Form, and Mr. Dalton's most loyal admirer.

That it came from Jimmy Silver was clear evidence that it was true. In Lovell's lofty judgment it was all a mistake on the part of his chums. But nobody else in the Fourth believed that three fellows, together, could have made such a mistake. It was true, and it was amazing—almost unnerving.

In the class the next morning Mr. Dalton found his Form more inattentive to lessons than he had ever found them before. But they were not inattentive to Mr. Dalton himself.

They watched him, they hung on his

looks, his words, his gestures. He seemed to have a fascination for them. Some of them wondered whether he was going to drop into the Bird-in-Hand that evening. Some debated whether he had lost much money playing cards with Mr. Stiggins and his set. Some wondered whether he had really gone home last half-holiday, or whether he had gone to the races.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were utterly dismayed. This was the end of their secret. Telling it to Lovell had had more disastrous consequences than they had dreamed of anticipating in their most pessimistic moments.

Lovell, indeed, was dismayed also. He was dismayed to find that the juniors did not share his view that it was all "rot" and all "piffle," and that the three had made a ridiculous mistake in the dusk. He was dismayed and amazed to find that nobody shared that opinion of his.

So it was at length borne in upon the powerful intellect of Arthur Edward Lovell that he would have done more wisely to keep silent—to keep the matter a dead secret, as his chums had urged him.

He realised that—too late.

As soon as a prefect heard of it he would put Mr. Dalton on his guard. Mr. Dalton would have to squash the story at once, or leave Rookwood.

And how could he squash it when it was true? Lovell, unable to hold out against public opinion, began to realise that it was true—that Jimmy Silver & Co. had not made, as he expressed it, a silly mistake. And Lovell could have kicked himself for allowing the tale to pass his lips. For whatever Dicky Dalton might have done, his loyal admirers in the Fourth still backed him up, and assuredly did not want him to be turned out of the school.

Jimmy Silver waited in deep uneasiness for the chopper to come down. He knew that it must happen. Tubby Muffin had spread the story among the Shell, other fellows had talked of it to Fifth Form chaps. By the evening, it reached the ears of the Sixth. Bulkeley heard it, and knew, too, that the story had started from the end study.

The hapless four fully expected now a summons that evening to the Head's study, or to Mr. Dalton's. But no summons came. Bulkeley must have made his report, as in duty bound, but no move came from the master of the Fourth.

At the breakfast-table next morning Mr. Dalton was more than ever an object of keen interest to his Form. His calm face betrayed no sign of consciousness.

When the Fourth assembled in their Form-room Mr. Dalton came in as usual to take his class, and there was some suppressed excitement among the juniors when the Head followed him in a few minutes later. They guessed at once that Dr. Chisholm's presence was due to the story that had been circulating about Mr. Dalton.

The Fourth Form master glanced over the breathless class.

"Silver! Raby! Newcome! Stand up!"

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet at once. Slowly and reluctantly, Raby and Newcome followed his example.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his glasses severely on the dismayed three.

"It appears, Silver, that you and your companions, a few nights ago, saw Mr. Dalton enter an inn called the Bird-in-Hand, near Coombe?"

The three juniors glanced at Mr. Dalton. They would have faced the utmost wrath of the Head rather than

have betrayed him. But the young master made them an impatient gesture to answer.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Jimmy Silver.

"You seem to have drawn conclusions from this circumstance reflecting upon your Form master," said the Head sternly.

"No, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "We—we—we know that Dicky—I mean Mr. Dalton—is—is all right! We—we're sure—"

"As the story seems to have been made public in the school, I have come here to speak on the subject," said the Head. "Mr. Dalton did indeed visit that disreputable place—at my request?"

"Oh!" gasped the three. They could only gasp.

"On a recent occasion," said the Head—and his glance lingered on Peele of the Fourth—"on a recent occasion a boy belonging to this school was flogged for visiting that place. There was reason to suppose that others had done so. I requested Mr. Dalton to call upon Mr. Stiggins and warn him that if he allowed any Rookwood boy to enter his inn again he would be pursued and punished with the utmost rigour of the law. This duty Mr. Dalton very kindly performed.

"Oh!" gasped the three again.

They stood almost dumbfounded. Such a simple explanation as that had not even occurred to them.

They understood now. Mr. Dalton had walked down to the Bird-in-Hand at the Head's request. He had glanced round before entering, from a very natural dislike to being seen to enter such a resort. He had gone to the back door, because he did not care to walk through the crowd of loafers in the public rooms of the inn. It was all plain enough now—only too plain. The fact that Mr. Dalton had gone there at the Head's request explained everything.

"That is all," said the Head, and he swept out of the Form-room.

"Take your places, boys," said Mr. Dalton.

Jimmy Silver turned a crimson face on his Form master.

"We—we're sorry, sir!" he gasped.

"We never thought any harm of you, sir, really, and we meant to keep it a secret—a dead secret—only a silly fool let it out, sir!"

"There was no need to keep the incident a secret," said Mr. Dalton. "And had you not been late for roll-call that night you would never have been aware of it. However, there is no harm done, and you may take your places."

And the three sat down at their desks.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad that the explanation had been made—that they had no reason for changing their high opinion of Dicky Dalton, after all. Lovell, indeed, took credit to himself for having brought the explanation about. He pointed out to his chums that they would always have had a doubt about their Form master had the affair remained secret, and so he had, after all, been right all along the line, as he generally was.

Lovell pointed this out, and would have pointed it out at greater length, had not his chums collared him and pushed his head into the coal-box, after which Lovell dropped the subject, and Jimmy Silver & Co. dropped Lovell—hard.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's rousing story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, entitled: "STANDING UP FOR JUSTICE!")

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