

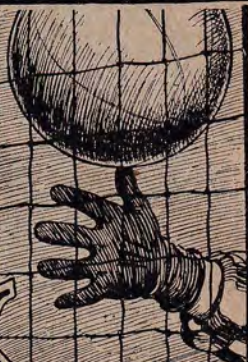
The "Boys' Realm"  
**FOOTBALL  
LIBRARY**

**1d.  
2**

**GOAL!**

**SIX  
GOALS  
TO NIL**

*A Tale of  
PELHAM  
SCHOOL.*



W. BRIDGE



# "THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LEAGUE.



This is a picture of one of the solid silver medals which are awarded the runners-up in each section of our Football League.

SOLID SILVER CUPS,  
SILVER MEDALS,  
and Hundreds of Match Footballs  
Given Away.



This is a picture of one of the solid silver medals which are awarded the runners-up in each section of our Football League.

ALL JUNIOR CLUBS  
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## Section 1.—THE BOYS' REALM London League.

TWO HANDSOME SILVER TROPHIES (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

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Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed sixteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed twenty-one.

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Open to any football club in the South of England, excluding Greater London.

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Open to any football club in the North of England.

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Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed sixteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed twenty-one.

Special awards of handsome footballs will be made in all sections each week throughout season.

**FILL UP THIS FORM AND SEND IT TO YOUR EDITOR.**

Date ..... Club .....  
 Playing Ground .....  
 Average Age of Members .....  
 Colours .....  
 The above club is desirous of entering THE BOYS' REALM League (Section .....), and the members agree to conform to the conditions governing the contest, and to abide by the decision of Your Editor, the Secretary, and a referee in any case of dispute.  
 Secretary's Name .....  
 Address .....



# SIX GOALS TO NIL.

A Fine Long, Complete Tale of Pelham School.



Straight at Evans the ball came, but his hand shot out, and his fist catching the ball, lifted it high into the air.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### The Villagers at Football Practice.

**"HALLO!"** cried Jack Noble, as he paused on the edge of the village green. "Football! Wonder who's playing?"

"Oh, the village chumps!" said Bob Russell, panting from a stiff run of a quarter of a mile which they had made along the level flint road which runs beside the green.

Evans, who, like his chum, was a member of the Third Form at Pelham School, looked inquiringly at Bob.

"Chumps?" he cried.

"Chumps! Chimpanzees! Blockheads! Anything you like! They're not renowned for their brains down in the village."

"Ring off!"

"I say," said Jack Noble, placing one hand on the railing that protected the green, "let's have a FOOTBALL LIBRARY.—No. 2

squint at 'em. What a jolly lark it would be if we could get these beggars to play the school!"

"Play the school!" cried Bob Russell. "They couldn't play the school! Lecky and the First'd lick 'em into a cocked hat!"

"Well, there's the Junior Eleven. They're smaller chaps. They'd give 'em a good game, if they're not class enough for Lecky's lot."

Russell and Evans followed Jack on to the green, and the three of them started briskly across the intervening ground to the place where the football match was in progress.

The rival teams seemed to be hard at it. There was a goodly crowd around them, too.

Hoarse shouts and cries and shrieks of raucous laughter came from the direction of the football ground.

"Listen to the brutes!" cried Bob Russell in disgust. "Did you ever hear such a row? No



wonder the Pelham boys never got on with the villagers. Must draw a line somewhere."

Bob Russell hesitated.

"Ought we to go, Jack?" he said. "You know there's a jolly lot of ill-feeling. I heard that some of our chaps had a stone-fight with the villagers the other day. Don't know who they were. One of the villagers got a nasty crack on the head, and complaint was made at the School House. There'll be ill-blood for that."

"Well," retorted Jack Noble, "none of us did it. So come along."

He led the way, quickening his stride, and did not pause until he had forced a passage through the ranks of the spectators, and stood on the chalk touchline of the football pitch.

The play was going on at the other end of the field, and amidst the scrimmage a shout went up of: "Goal!"

One of the sides had scored.

The players opened out. They came running along the field, and they took up their positions for the restart.

They were a big, hefty lot. There wasn't a small lad amongst them. They seemed all bone and muscle. Most of them carried too much flesh, as a matter of fact.

"By gum, they run to fat in Pelham!" muttered Evans, as he cast a critical glance over the players.

The ball was set on the move again, and the players plunged into the thick of the fray.

The way they bumped into one another was a sight to see. They charged with a will.

"Oh, if only we could arrange a match!" sighed Jack Noble.

"Think of their size!" muttered Bob.

"Rats! Size isn't everything. You've got to know how to play the game."

"Look at Fatty!" cried Evans.

"Fatty" was easily spotted by Jack and Bob. He was a half-back, and the way he galumphed down the field was a sight to see.

The chums burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The afternoon was drawing to a close. The sun was setting in a ball of fire behind the tall elms at the other end of the green. There was a touch of frost in the air.

"It can't want many minutes to time," said Jack, still grinning at Fatty's antics.

He was unconscious of the fact that the rustics around him were eyeing them with unfriendly glances, and that a good deal of whispering was going on.

The spectators began to form in a group about them, but behind them; they did not shut out their view of the football field.

The referee, a big, long-striding fellow, was racing after the players. Fatty was there in the thick of the fray.

All of a sudden a frenzied shout of triumph arose.

"Goal, goal, goal!"

"Fatty's done it!" said Bob.

Fatty had done it. His lazy foot had managed to reach the ball as it came bounding in front of goal, and he had rammed it home with good, sound judgment. The goalkeeper was down at full-length.

Fatty actually turned a handspring.

And then the ball was picked up, and the panting, perspiring players began to troop off the field.

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"That's the finish," said Jack.

Then he turned, and found that he and his two chums were surrounded by an unfriendly group of villagers.

"Hallo!" he cried. "What's this?"

Then arose the war-cry:

"Pelham boys! Pelham boys!"

At once the crowd began to hustle the three chums.

"Here, I say," cried Bob Russell, with flashing eyes, as he dug one big fellow in the ribs. "Chuck it! Don't crowd!"

"Pelham boys! Pelham boys!"

To the rallying cry the spectators came rushing from all parts of the green. The group of village lads about Jack and Bob and Evans thickened fast. The footballers joined them.

Jack surveyed their grinning faces, and his lips set.

Here was a nice to-do!

"Where's Bonson?" shouted one of the villagers.

"Here!"

A deep, bass voice answered, and then Fatty forced his way to the front.

"Pelham boys!" cried one of the villagers, pointing to them.

Fatty was carrying the football, which evidently belonged to him. He cast a keen glance at the three chums.

"Let's have a look at 'em!" he cried.

He bent down and glared insolently into Jack's face, then treated Bob and Evans in turn in the same way.

"Think you'll know us again, Fatty?" asked Bob. Fatty flushed.

"Shut up!" said Evans, nudging Bob.

"None of your cheek!" Bonson cried in a threatening voice.

The villagers crowded closer still.

"There's the pond near," said one of them. "Let's duck 'em!"

A shout of joy rang out.

Two of the lads caught hold of Bob.

In a moment he had shaken himself free.

"Don't you touch me, you louts," he cried, "or it'll be the worse for some of you!"

"Stand back there!" cried Jack firmly. "Let's hear what the row's about!"

There was something about Jack Noble which commanded respect; besides, he was one of the few boys at the school, outside the Fourth and the Upper Forms who had never taken any liberty with the villagers.

Some of the juniors were incessantly jeering at them, and getting the school a bad name, despite all the efforts of the Head to bring about friendly relations between the school and the village.

There was a threatening murmur. But Fatty held up his hand.

"Give 'em a chance," he cried.

His friends were silent.

"The other day," said Fatty, dropping the football, and placing his arms akimbo, "some of you kids from the school jeered at me. They shouted 'Fatty! I don't take offence, as a rule. I know I'm a bit fat—'"

"That's a fact," said Evans, sotto voce.

"And so I let it pass. Then one of them chucked a stone. I sent one back. The chaps I had with me made the schoolboys run. There was a bit of a battle, and I got this."



The fat boy turned his head on one side, and pointing with his finger, showed Jack a lump with a big discoloration around it. It was the spot where the stone had hit.

"By gum! I'm awfully sorry!" said Jack, flushing red. "It's a cad's trick to throw stones. But I didn't do it, did I?"

"Well, never mind if you did, or if you didn't," said Fatty. "One of yer's got to pay for it. Here, I'll give you a chance. Either one of you fights me—I don't care which one it is—or me and my pals'll give you all a ducking. See that?"

Evans looked round him. He was wondering whether it was possible to make a bolt for it. But no; the crowd hemmed them in too closely.

Jack Noble weighed up the chances. His face was pale. Fatty was ever so much too big and heavy for him. But he had the honour of the school to think of.

"Right you are!" he cried. "I'll fight you!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Fight.

**A**T Jack's declaration the villagers set up a shout.

As if by magic an open space of ground was cleared. The ring was formed in a trice.

Fatty, whose name was Bonson, was practically ready for the fray. He was clad in his football things, and wore little clothing to encumber his movements.

Bob Russell took Jack's coat and waistcoat. Jack rolled up his sleeves. His lips were set, his face was pale, his eyes glinted with an unnatural light.

"It was Clifford threw that stone," said Bob to Evans, aside. "I heard him bragging about it the other day."

Clifford was captain of the Junior football team at Pelham. He belonged to the Shell, or Fourth, and he was not very popular with the boys of the Third, whom he ignored, and looked upon as a lot of kids.

"Was it?" muttered Evans. "Then he jolly well ought to be made to pay for it."

"Ready?" asked Fatty abruptly.

"Yes," said Jack.

It was just as well to get the fight over; besides, they hadn't too much time. They would have to be back at the school before lock-up.

Bob Russell and Evans stood in Jack's corner. The whole of the villagers backed up Fatty.

"Go it, Bonson!" they cried. "Knock 'is blessed 'ead off! Show 'em what the village can do!"

"All right!" said Fatty, winking. "I'll knock some of the pride out of 'em!"

He suddenly put up his hands, and lashed out a furious blow at Jack's head, thinking to take him by surprise. But, quick as he was, Jack guarded. His left forearm was drawn across his face, and the force of Fatty's blow was expended there.

Then round came Jack's right arm with an upward swing, and the grunt the fat lad gave as Jack's fist landed on his ribs made the spectators start.

The counter had been perfectly timed, and Fatty recoiled from the force of the blow.

"Bravo, Jack!" cried Bob Russell. "Put your beef into it, man!"

Fatty came up more cautiously.

Jack noticed that he had his mouth open. That was an encouraging sign. Anyone who knows any-

thing about fighting would not have made such a mistake as that. Think of the danger there is of the teeth clashing together when a blow lands home on the jaw if the mouth is held open! Think of the danger of the tongue being almost cut in two by the teeth as they are jerked together!

Jack saw the chance. He availed himself of it. After all, all is fair in love and war. If Bonson didn't know enough to keep his mouth closed, Jack reckoned he had a right to take advantage of the slip.

They dodged round one another, feinting, Jack being much lighter and quicker on his feet than his adversary, and then, bang! home went Jack's left on the jaw, and Fatty's teeth shut together with a jerk.

He skipped back, with his face purple.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he howled, as he danced about in his agony. Then he held his jaw, and stamped upon the grass. He had bitten his tongue severely.

Fatty's eyes were filled with tears. He was suffering intense agony.

Bob Russell and Evans were grinning.

"It's a million to one on Jack!" said Bob.

But the fight was not over yet.

Bonson pulled himself together, and when he advanced to meet Jack again there was a determined light in his eyes. The smile had vanished. He kept his mouth closed now. His stern, cunning eyes were set on Jack's face; he watched Jack's every movement. Those two blows seemed to have steadied him.

Jack, thinking he had got the advantage, dodged and feinted, and then hit out with a will, using all his cleverness. He found his adversary slow, but, all the same, he failed to reach him, though he aimed left and right-hand leads at head and body in quick succession. Each blow was guarded, and Fatty, panting for breath, tried hard to counter.

He was a little slow, however, and Jack, watching the other with tremendous keenness, got out of distance every time.

Round and round they circled, and the fight began to level up.

"It's not all over yet," muttered Bob anxiously.

"Not by a long chalk!" said Evans. "Fatty's got pluck, after all."

Then at Jack came the fat villager with a rush. By sheer force of weight he drove him back, and hemming Jack in amongst the crowd, he gave him a vicious half-arm jab on the head. To Bob's consternation, Jack was knocked clean off his feet, and fell heavily.

Evans helped Jack to his feet.

"Are you hurt, old man?" he asked.

"No," gasped Jack. "But, by George, it was a hit! I thought I was kicked by a horse!"

Bob and Evans tended their chum. They wiped his face, and flicked their handkerchiefs at him.

Bonson would not accept any attention. He stood in the centre of the ring with his chest heaving, waiting until Jack was ready to renew the fight.

"Half-minute's up!" said somebody. "Time!"

Jack drew himself away from Bob and Evans, and the fight recommenced.

Jack, leaping in, got home on the head. He was out of distance of a slashing counter a moment later.

Encouraged by his success, he went in again, and succeeded in landing a heavy body-blow.

Bonson grunted.



He aimed at the head, but Jack Noble slipped beneath his outstretched arm, and as he went he landed a blow on the side of Bonson's jaw.

It was a well-timed blow, with any amount of force behind it, and it nearly dropped the big fellow.

Fatty wheeled heavily round, and found Jack ready for him.

They feinted, and then went in, both hitting furiously.

Whack! Smack! Thud!

The blows were hammered home with a vengeance. Jack's face was bruised, and both lads were bleeding a little.

"Jack!" shouted Bob. "Keep away from him! Don't go in for in-fighting, you juggins! He'll lick you if you do!"

It was all very well for Bob to talk like that. Fatty, realising that he had his man at a disadvantage when he came to close quarters, bore in on Jack. He forced him to a half-arm fight, and as hit for hit was landed at close quarters, his strength began to tell.

It was a critical moment for Jack. He tried to avoid punishment by clinching, but did not altogether succeed. Against his heavier and stronger opponent Jack's only chance was to make use of the ring and of his head, and hit whenever he saw an opportunity, and to escape the heavy swings and counters of the fat village lad.

This was good enough in theory, but he could not put it into practice. The crowd hemmed them in closer than ever.

Jack's chance of winning the fight began to diminish. Then, rendered desperate by a body-blow that hurt more than he liked, Jack suddenly wrenched himself free of Fatty's embrace, turned upon him like a fury, and, as the grinning and triumphant Bonson came sluggishly round, Jack managed to smash the right hand to the body. It was a terrible blow—such a blow as Jack himself had never before managed to deliver.

Bonson uttered a grunt of agony, his head shot backwards, and the whole of his unwieldy carcass came down with a thud to the earth.

"That ends the second round!" shrieked Evans, waving his cap in the air. "Hurrah, hurrah! Bravo, Pelham!"

"Pelham! Pelham! Pelham!" shrieked Bob Russell; and his cry went echoing across the green.

The villagers were thunderstricken. They could not believe that their champion was down. Some of them caught hold of Bonson, and helped him to his feet. They attended to him. One of them mopped his forehead with a handkerchief soaked in water from the pond near by.

"I'll be all right in a minute," groaned the village champion.

But his face was pale, and there were dark rings around his eyes. It did not look as if he would be ready to continue the combat when the half-minute was up.

Meanwhile, the cry of "Pelham!" had reached the ears of a fine, upstanding youth, a big, hefty lad, who was making his way with rapid strides in the direction of Pelham School, intending to reach it before lock-up.

He paused as he heard it. He caught sight of the crowd, and he guessed by the manner in which the crowd was grouped that a fight was going on there.

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"Some of the kids getting into trouble," he cried, as he broke into a run, reached the railings, vaulted lightly over them, and then swung at an easy trot across the green. "I must inquire into this."

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Honours Even.

**A** MOMENT later he reached the group, and with a show of authority he forced his way into the ring.

He saw two or three of the villagers attending to Robson; he saw Bob Russell wiping Jack Noble's face, and Evans rubbing Jack's arms; he noticed Bonson's pallor, and Jack's bruised face.

Then someone shouted:

"The half-minute's up! Time!"

And Bonson was forced into the middle of the ring again.

Jack Noble came up to the scratch, eager and willing, and looking more determined than ever. They put up their hands, but before the fight could continue, the schoolboy who had just arrived dashed in between the combatants.

"Here!" he cried. "You've had quite enough of this! Noble, stand back! Now then, villager, what's the trouble?"

"Lecky!" gasped Bob Russell, gazing at the newcomer in awe.

"The captain of the school!" ejaculated Bonson, looking surly, for he wanted to fight Jack to a finish.

Yes, it was Lecky, the captain of Pelham School, the leader of the First Eleven at soccer, a good all-round sportsman, and a fine fellow.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Noble!" said the school captain, frowning at Jack. "You know it's against the rules to fight with the villagers. What's the use of the Head trying to bring about better relations between the school and the village if you go getting yourself into trouble and creating bad blood like this?"

Jack Noble did not reply.

"And you," said the captain, eyeing Bonson sternly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You're twice as big as Noble. You've got a pretty nerve to stand up against him!"

"I don't care how big or small a man is," retorted Fatty sullenly; "I'm willing to fight 'un. I'll fight you, Mister Captain, if you've got the courage to stand up to I."

Lecky smiled.

"No thanks," he said lightly.

Then he turned to Bob Russell.

"What's the fuss about?" he asked.

In a few brief words Bob explained.

"Stone throwing! That was serious! And you and Noble and Evans were not to blame? Still, you might have kept away from the village green, knowing the ill-feeling that exists."

"Jack couldn't get out of the fight, sir," explained Bob. "They hemmed us in. They were going to duck us."

Lecky smiled grimly.

"Well," said the school captain, turning to Bonson, "you've had your fight, and it seems to have been pretty equal. Stop now, there's good fellows. I'm real sorry about the stone throwing. But Noble, here, is a good chap. Shake hands."

The villagers murmured.



They were not at all pleased at being robbed of their fun.

Fatty eyed Jack with a surly glance. Jack, on the other hand, was ready and willing to forget what had passed.

"There's my hand," he said frankly. "We've battered each other quite enough, Fatty."

The word "Fatty" angered the other. The "fat" was nearly in the fire again, as a matter of fact.

Jack smiled broadly.

"Well you are fat, you know," he said. "Didn't you tell us so?"

Bonson grinned at that.

"Well," he cried heartily, "there's my hand, schoolboy!"

Bob Russell picked up Jack's things, and helped him into them.

The crowd began to open out.

"It's time you chaps got back to the school," said Lecky, turning to Jack and Bob and Evans.

Then Jack was seized with a sudden idea. He went up to the captain, and looked up into his bronzed and manly face.

"Look here, Lecky," he said, "excuse me making the suggestion, but half the cause of the ill-feeling that exists between the village and the school arises from the fact that we will never play games with them. Years ago, I believe, the villagers asked for a match, but the school refused. They never got over it. Why shouldn't we play footer with them? I can't see any reason. It would do away with a good deal of the bad blood; and, besides, wouldn't some of the Juniors like to play the village at soccer?"

Lecky shook his head.

"Can't be done, Noble," he said, with a smile. "It's impossible."

"Why?" cried Jack eagerly. "We've got a lot of vacant dates. We shall have to play House matches if we can't fill in the Junior dates. Why not play the village? They could come up to the school. There's the football pitch quite idle sometimes when the First Team go away. I can't see why it shouldn't be arranged."

Jack spoke eagerly, breathlessly. He thought he had better get the words out quick, for it seemed such cheek making suggestions to the school captain.

Lecky smiled at Jack.

"Well, youngster," he said, "you've got cheek, and pluck too, it seems."

Then he looked at Bonson, who had picked up his football, and who had almost recovered from the effects of Jack's stunning blow.

"I wonder?" he muttered.

Then he looked around at the crowd. He noticed that there was a lot of footballers there. He had seen the game in progress when he had passed the village green an hour before.

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"Who's the captain of the football team here?" he asked.

Bonson looked round sharply.

"I be that," he said.

"Is this the village team?"

"All of us," growled Bonson. "We were playing trial sides to-night to get the best eleven for our big matches."

"Did you hear what Noble said about a match with the school?"

Bonson nodded.

"Ay!" he cried.

"What do you think of it?"

"Nothing we'd like better," vowed Bonson, "than to tan the school. They're so bloomin' high and mighty, it'd be a pleasure to lick 'em!"

"Would you be willing to play the match if it were arranged?"

"What-ho!" grinned Fatty.

"At the school, or down here on your own pitch?"

"Either. It don't matter much, mister; we'll win, anyway."

"The school pitch would be best. We shouldn't have such a partisan crowd there. The boys would yell for their side, but they would give them socks if they happened to get the worst of it."

"They'd get the worst of it right enough," said Bonson, with a grin.

The villagers standing round grinned also. A match with the school was jolly good business.

Lecky rubbed his chin thoughtfully as he considered.

"You'll play, then?" he said to Bonson.

Fatty smiled expansively.

"You bet!" he said.

"Would you mind giving me your address?"

The village youth smiled.

"Edward Bonson," he said, "son of Henry Edward Bonson, butcher, Market Street, Pelham—that's me!"

Lecky scribbled down the address.

"Very well," he said, "I'll see what can be done. I'll write you about the date. Meanwhile, can't you forget that rotten stone-throwing business?"

Bonson grinned again.

"All right," he said. "I'll keep our chaps in order. We won't 'ave no more fights if we can 'elp it."

"Good egg!" answered Lecky. "And the rest of you?"

"All right; we'll leave the boys alone!"

"Good!"

Then Lecky turned to the three chums.

"Noble, Russell, Evans," he cried, "you'd better get back to the school."

"All right, Lecky," answered Bob cheerily.

The next moment he and his chums had made their way through the crowd, and had started off at a trot towards the school. Presently their captain



joined them, running by their side with long, easy strides.

They had just time to enter the school grounds before the gates clanged to. But they did it.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### The Chosen Team.

**A**N eager crowd of boys had gathered in the hall at Pelham School. They were eagerly discussing a subject of the utmost importance.

The old traditions of the school were about to be disregarded; Pelham was about to embark upon a new policy. It was evidently the wish of the Head that the old feud with the village should be patched up.

Lecky and the athletic committee of the school had, after a long and earnest discussion, decided that a challenge should be sent to the village club, and that if possible a football match should be arranged between the villagers and a school football team.

The challenge was sent. Bonson, captain of the village team, accepted on behalf of his side.

The match was arranged. The First Eleven, whose fixtures were absolutely full, could not play the village. Therefore the Junior Eleven had to take them on.

Clifford, of the Shell, or Fourth, was captain of the Junior team. He had to decide who should play.

Prince, Marker, and Bayne, also members of the Junior Eleven, and toadies of Clifford, also had something to say in the matter.

The committee of the Juniors were shut up in Clifford's room, deciding the momentous question of the eleven at that very moment, and the crowd of boys gathered in the hall were wondering who would be picked.

There was a space on the notice-board waiting to be filled. The names of the chosen would be stuck up there presently.

Already a tremendous wave of enthusiasm had seized the school. Fancy! A match between school and village. "What a game it would be! With the bad blood and ill-feeling of years to urge the players on, the match promised to be one of the most strenuous in the history of the school.

They would want the very best eleven that could be picked to face the big, muscular villagers.

"Noble was the cause of getting the match arranged," said Bob proudly.

"Rats!" ejaculated one of Clifford's toadies. "As if a chap like Noble could influence Lecky! It was Lecky who did it, not Noble."

"What a time they are! The notice ought to have been put up half an hour ago," said Jack. "I wish they'd hurry up!"

At last a loud murmur arose, the door through which Clifford must come was dashed open, and a fag rushed in with a red face and beaming eyes.

"Here they come!" he shouted. "They've chosen a strong team, I bet!"

A moment later Clifford, followed by Bayne, Marker, and Prince, stalked majestically through the door into the hall.

Clifford held his head high.

"Conceited ass!" muttered Evans.

The captain of the Junior Eleven made his way through the surging crowd of schoolboys towards the

board. Behind him and his friends came Lecky, the captain of the school.

Lecky had an amused smile on his face.

Clifford approached the board. He held a piece of paper in one hand and some drawing-pins in the other. He stood directly in front of the board, obscuring the place on which he was about to fix the notice. He rammed the pins home. Then he stood away from the board.

Clifford glanced towards Noble and his chums with a smile.

"I'll make a bet," muttered Bob, "that neither of us has been selected. I know that cad Clifford."

Clifford, Prince, Marker, and Bayne stood back to allow the boys to get at the notice-board. They grinned at one another knowingly.

Then a cry of disappointment arose:

"Shame!"

"Rotten!"

"What a team!"

"Why isn't Noble down?"

"It's a put-up job!"

"What about Russell?"

"The committee ought to be boiled!"

"What's Evans left out for?"

"It's a rotten shame!"

"They're balmy! Clean off their rockers!"

"Clifford's a fool!"

Clifford glared round angrily, but he could not trace the offender.

"I knew they wouldn't like it," muttered Marker, with a grin. "But we've got to get our own back on that rotter Noble."

Noble, Russell, and Evans made their way to the board. They read the eleven names of the chosen team, and those of the three reserves who had been selected, but their own names did not figure there.

Jack Noble's face flushed.

"Well, I'm blessed," he cried, "if that don't beat the band! We're not even down as reserves, Bob!"

Bob crimsoned with indignation. Then he laughed.

"Well," he cried, "what can you expect?"

The hall was in a state of uproar. In the midst of the clamour Clifford and his chums edged away towards the door.

"Let's get out of this," said Clifford. "We've done our duty. They can fight it out amongst themselves. Anyway, Noble, Russell, and Evans don't play."

Lecky, the school captain, who was standing near, overheard the remark.

"Clifford," he said, "you've made a bad mistake. Jack Noble fought for the right of recognition of the Third Form by the Junior captain, and he and Russell and Evans have shown themselves worthy of the honour of playing for your side. Besides, it is due to Noble that the match with the village was made. For that, if for nothing else, he should have been picked."

"What's it matter?" answered Clifford, with a sneer. "We were out of form when the Third beat us. The Shell have bucked up since then; besides, we have only a lot of louts to beat. We shall lick 'em anyhow."

The school captain smiled.

"Are you quite sure of that?" he asked.

Clifford stared at him.

"Of course!" he cried.



### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. On the Playing Field.

**T**HE Juniors were in dead, sober earnest about the match. Clifford did not care much about playing a set of bounders, as they called the villagers, but the others sank their pride, and determined that they should meet the sons of the village tradesmen in the very best of trim.

The Juniors had "slacked" over the match with the Third, in which they "had allowed," as they put it, Jack Noble and his chums to beat them, but as Clifford had himself chosen the team to meet the village, and as it was on his advice that Jack Noble and his chums had been left out, they did not intend to leave anything to chance this journey.

The eleven were up and doing very early in the morning. Before breakfast they were down on the playing-field kicking the big ball about. They didn't mean to be licked if they could help it.

At last the appointed day arrived. The playing-field looked a perfect picture. The ground allotted to the First Team soccer matches was available, as Lecky and his brigade were away.

The pitch had been carefully rolled, the goals had been sanded, the white chalk lines had been freshly picked out, the nets had been attended to; a more perfectly-appointed ground could not have been imagined.

The visiting team arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon. The kick-off was timed for three.

They came up in a big waggonette decorated with the Town colours, and crowds of village folk, who had received invitations to attend the match, came crowding up, and passed through the sacred entrance to the school grounds. The villagers had not often had the pleasure of visiting Pelham School.

Long before the kick-off a crowd of schoolboys—from the First Form downwards, including the fags—lined the ropes. Men and women from the village had a specially-appointed place for them to sit or stand.

There was a marquee erected for the use of the Head and the masters. In the background could be seen the irregular outline of the fine, old school-house.

There was a pavilion for the boys to undress in. A wooden structure had been given over to the use of the visitors.

Bonson and his fellow-villagers changed. Fatty looked in wonderful trim. His cheeks were as red and rosy as a piece of his father's beef. He was fat, but he looked fit.

The others were all big lads. There wasn't one of them over twenty years of age, but many of them were not far short of that; and so they were considerably older than the Pelhamites.

Some of them had budding moustaches. More than one of them had a few stray hairs about his chin, though it would have been just as well for his appearance if he had shaven them off. They were loutish, dull, but intensely in earnest. Some of them were pale and silent as they undressed and donned their playing things. As the moment of the kick-off drew near more than one of them was attacked with nerves.

Fatty looked round him critically.

"In a blue funk, ain't you?" he cried. "Buck up, boys!"

"All right, Fatty," said one of them, grumbling.

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"Whose refereeing?" asked one of the villagers.

"Oh, one of the schoolmasters," said Bonson carelessly.

"They're our linesmen, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Bonson, with a nod of the head; "we've got both. That's to make up for the referee."

At ten minutes to three Fatty turned out of the dressing-room, and made his way at the head of his team towards the playing pitch, carrying the ball beneath his arm.

Dodging beneath the ropes, he drew himself erect, and sent the ball curving towards one of the goals. Then he started to run after it, and the rest of the eleven followed at his heels.

Of a sudden Fatty caught sight of Jack Noble, who was leaning against the rope. Russell was with Jack, and so was Evans.

Fatty gave his knickers a hitch, and then ran up to Jack.

"Hallo! You arranged this match!" he cried.

"Ain't you playing?"

"No," grinned Jack.

"Why not?"

"Not good enough."

Fatty scratched his head.

"I don't know that I like that," he said. "They wouldn't let us fight it out. I looked forward to having a rare good tussle with you this afternoon."

"Sorry I can't oblige. But the other chaps will. You're going to be licked clean off the field, Bonson."

The fat butcher's son grinned good-humouredly.

"If you beat us," he said, "we sha'n't grumble. We've done our best to get fit. If you lick us, it'll be because you're a better side."

"Spoken like a sportsman," said Bob Russell.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER. The School is Beaten.

**A**ND now a frantic cheer, in which the shrill treble of the fags was mixed with the deeper tones of the older boys, rent the air.

The school team had taken the field. There they came in a long string, headed by Clifford.

When they turned and faced their opponents it was seen that the villagers were very much the heavier team. And there was something disturbing about their mud-bespattered clothing.

The referee, a master named Hewitt, looked at his watch. It was time for the match to start. He blew his whistle.

Bonson and Clifford immediately advanced to the centre of the field.

The referee gave Bonson the coin. It was spun.

"Heads!" cried Clifford.

He looked down. He had lost.

Fatty pointed to that goal from which a steady wind blew.

The sides crossed over. Clifford set the ball.

There was a moment's pause, and then the match began.

With a rush the schoolboys went away, and so deft and clever were they with their passing that before one could say "knife" they had the villagers' goal in danger, and Jack Noble, looking on, shook his head.



The Juniors were opening with any amount of confidence, as if they were sure of winning.

And now the Pelham outside-right, taking steady aim after having tricked the villagers' left back, sent in a fine dropping centre bang in front of the goal. There was a rush and a scrimmage, in which schoolboys and visitors were all mixed up, in which the visiting goalkeeper went down full-length, and then a boot was seen to meet the ball, and the next moment the leather was at the back of the net.

Jack had watched it all in breathless excitement.

"Goal, goal, goal, goal!" screamed the boys, as they danced madly at the ropes. "Pelham, Pelham, Pelham for ever!"

Up went a shout which made the welkin ring.

Then the Pelham forwards came prancing back to the centre of the field, dragging one of their number with them, literally hugging him as they went. It was Clifford, the captain of the Juniors. It was he who had scored that opening goal.

Meanwhile the villagers' goalkeeper had picked the ball out of the net, and had slung it towards the centre of the field. The villagers were gathered in a dejected group. They were arguing and gesticulating. It had all been so sudden that they had been completely taken off their guard.

Bonson could be seen arguing with them.

The referee blew his whistle. There was not much time for argument; they had to get on with the game.

The ball was set in its place again, and Fatty Bonson, who played at centre for the village, gave his knickers a characteristic hitch. Then, at the signal, he punted the ball forward. His inside-right dashed at it, and backheeled it to him again, and Bonson, with his head down, went charging along the field like a mad bull.

"Look at Fatty!" gasped Evans.

Jack Noble stared.

As a matter of fact, Bonson dribbled well. His movements were sluggish and cumbersome, but he had command of the ball, and he seemed to know exactly what he was doing.

The school centre-half, winking at his comrades, set himself to tackle him. Bonson did not see the Pelham man coming until he was right on him, but no sooner did he see the twinkling boots of the Junior come into range of his vision than he flung himself forward to meet the shock, and the next moment the Junior was down, and Bonson was forging ahead towards the school goal.

He essayed a shot when he was twenty yards out, and an "Oooh!" went up as the ball shaved the crossbar. The goalkeeper would never have saved it had the shot been six inches lower.

"Dash!" said Bonson, making a downward motion of his fist.

"That was a narrow shave," said Jack. "I tell you what, boys. Fatty can dribble!"

The Pelham goalkeeper kicked off. The ball was rushed down the field, and Pelham attacked for a time. But the villagers gradually warmed to their work. They moved heavily, but the longer they played the more alert they became.

"Charge fairly," ordered Bonson.

The villagers soon discovered that they could lay these Juniors hors de combat with a fair shoulder-charge just as effectively as if the charge had been delivered from the front.

Rough usage began to tell. Clifford, who had been

downed thrice by Bonson, who grinned at him every time he laid him low, began to lose his temper. He lost his head too, just at the very time when he ought to have kept it.

"Pay 'em back in their own coin!" he cried. "Charge the brutes!"

It was a fatal mistake. If Clifford had ordered his eleven to play canny, and to rely upon their elusive powers, upon their fleetness of foot, and their ability to twist and turn rapidly upon the yielding surface of the field, he might have won the victory. Instead of which he played right into the hands of Bonson, as doubtless that fat but by no means dull-witted personage intended him to do.

Soon the Juniors were charging into the villagers as heartily as the villagers went crashing into them, and each time the heavier lad stood the shock the best. Down went the school players one after the other, and when the game had been in progress for thirty minutes the villagers broke through. They swarmed down, an unbroken line of forwards, upon the Pelham goal, and when the ball was turned to Fatty at ten yards' range, he had little difficulty in crashing it home.

The score was equalised.

Clifford was enraged.

"Play up, you beggars!" he cried. "Don't slack!"

"Who's slacking?" shouted Marker.

"You are."

"So are you."

"Steady!" cried Prince.

"You're no better, Prince," grumbled Clifford. "I thought I was going to have decent support."

"I'm lame. One of those hooligans trod on my foot."

"Well, anyway, play to win!" cried Bayne.

Ay, it was little use grumbling. They must play to win.

How the visiting spectators from the village yelled at that equalising goal!

When the ball was set in motion again it seemed as if only the villagers were shouting. What Jack Noble had predicted had come to pass.

The schoolboys had looked upon victory as certain. They had done all their crowing in advance. Now, when the villagers were outplaying the school, they hadn't a shout left. They were too disgusted to think that victory was slipping away from them, and that they might be beaten.

Clifford began to order the boys about in a domineering manner. They were all doing their best. They didn't like it, and it wasn't as if Clifford himself was doing extra grand.

They began to sulk. Their keenness vanished. They ceased to charge their bigger opponents, and they wouldn't combine. They relied for their success upon a series of individual rushes. In turn they tried to break through, and some well-intentioned efforts were made. But without avail. The villagers liked that sort of thing. They had a good goalkeeper, and they had stout backs.

Fatty Bonson set the centre-half to look after the Pelham centre; the outside halves looked after the extreme wing men; the two backs took the inside forwards; the goalkeeper simply stood waiting for the shots to come. He had plenty of them to handle, but he made no bones about disposing of them.

A minute before half-time the villagers broke



through with an irresistible rush, and Bonson scored his second goal from a low centre.

"Well done, Fatty!" cried Bob Russell glumly.

"It's all up!" groaned Jack Noble. "The school are beaten!"

"And serve the idiots right!" cried Evans indignantly. "I haven't any patience with the rotters! The goalkeeper ought to have saved that shot. They're all quarrelling, instead of trying to play the game. But there! It's always the way when Clifford's skipper!"

During the interval gloom and depression settled upon the members of the Junior Eleven. There was recrimination and fault-finding. Little was said by Clifford or anyone to help the team buck up.

They returned to the field with dejected mien.

For twenty minutes of the second half the Pelham Juniors managed to have the bulk of the play. Then they shot their bolt.

The villagers came with a rush, and in quick succession three more goals were snapped without reply.

The match came to an end at last, with the villagers the winners by the magnificent total of five goals to one.

Fatty Bonson, grinning with delight, lined his men up at the edge of the field.

"Three cheers for the losers!" he cried; and Clifford started. He had not even had the ordinary politeness to call for three cheers for the winners.

He led the doleful chorus now, but only half-heartedly; and Bonson turned away with a grin.

"It's a glorious day for the village!" he cried. "The school's licked, and they ain't 'alf sick, neither!"

### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Jack Noble Takes Matters in Hand.

**M**ARKER, Baynes, and Clifford were gathered in the latter's study. They had been discussing the disastrous match.

Clifford had been wondering where he could put the blame. The four of them had come to the conclusion, after a fierce discussion in which angry words had been said, that the blame would have to be shared amongst them all. And they would have to face it. There was no doubt that they were the laughing-stock of the school. It was anything but a pleasant come-down for the Shell.

Suddenly there came a loud and authoritative tap at the door.

"Come in!" growled Clifford.

Into the room, to his amazement and no small annoyance, walked Noble, Russell, and Evans.

"Well," cried Clifford, "what do you want here?"

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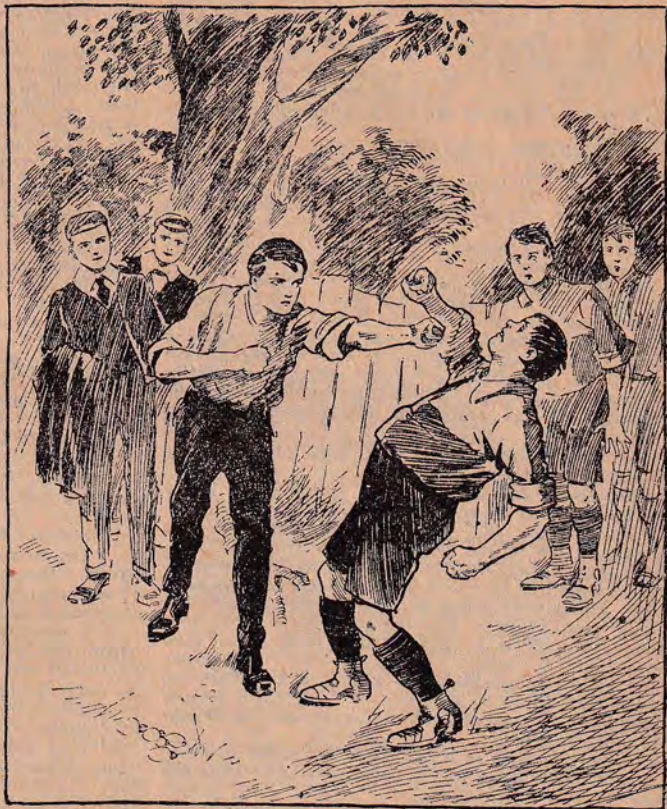
We don't want any rotten Third-Formers hanging about! Clear out—sharp!"

"Half a minute, old son," said Jack quietly.

"I've just been having a talk with Lecky."

"Oh, have you?" said Clifford. "Well, what's he got to say?"

"Just this. He ain't satisfied with the result of the match with the village. He agrees with me that they might have been beaten if we'd had our best side out, and been properly led. The thing was a



Bang! Home went Jack's left on the jaw, and Fatty's teeth shut together with a jerk.

blessed mess right from the start. That comes of you and Marker and Prince and Baynes being such rotten idiots!"

"What?" cried Marker, standing up, his face flushing, and clenching his fists.

"I've not come here to kick up a row," said Jack coolly, carrying matters off with a high hand; "nor has Bob or Evans here. We've come for the good of the school. Lecky's agreed to let the Juniors have another cut at the village if the match can be arranged. I've come to ask you to write a challenge to Benson. You know the address. The match will



be played on the village green, instead of at the school, if they're agreeable."

"Lecky sent you, a Third Form kid, to me, captain of the Junior Team!" said Clifford, flushing. "Why, it's a rotten insult! I won't write the letter!"

"Very good!" said Jack. "That's what I wanted to know. If you won't write, Lecky says I may. I'll arrange the match for the Juniors."

"You won't!" said Prince. "The Juniors'll refuse to play. Now buzz off. Your face annoys me."

"Very good, then," said Jack, not turning a hair; "the Third Form'll play them. You haven't forgotten that the Third Form licked you, have you? The Third'll make a better show against the village than you did, old son, or I'll eat my hat!"

"You'd better write the letter, Clifford," said Bob Russell.

"Shan't! Now clear out!"

"That is final?"

"Yes, you set of rotters! And now clear out, the whole boiling lot of you! Come on, you chaps; help me chuck 'em out!"

There was no necessity for that. Jack, Bob, and Evans gracefully retired. The door banged.

"A pretty nice state of affairs!" said Clifford gloomily. "What's the school coming to? There's no standing the cheek of those kids!"

Two days later the news was flashed through the school that a return match had been arranged with the village, and that the butcher, Bonson, or Fatty, whichever they cared to call him, had accepted the challenge of the school in really good sporting fashion.

The match was arranged to take place on the following Saturday.

After school a rush was made to the hall. There was an eager crowd round the notice-board.

Clifford sauntered up with his hands in his pockets. He looked angrily, defiantly round him. He expected them to jibe and jeer at him, and he was prepared to let go at the first show of attack.

The Third were going to play the villagers.

The humiliation of it! He could have written to Bonson himself if he had liked. Jack Noble had given him the chance.

He looked round him, and saw Jack and Bob and Evans over there in a corner. They were talking animatedly to one another. Jack seemed to be laying down the law.

Clifford felt that he hated the lot of them.

Of a sudden there was a sudden outburst from the fags:

"Hallo! Here's Lecky!"

Lecky, the school captain, had sauntered into the hall. He stood there, looking round him with an amused smile, and, catching sight of Clifford, he came across to him.

"Well, Clifford," he said, "you are going to play the villagers again, I see. I'm glad of it! The result of the first match was all wrong. Choose your team with discretion the next time, and you will win. I haven't a doubt of it."

"Choose the team, Lecky?" said Clifford, turning pale. "I—I shall have nothing to do with it!"

"I would if I were you," said Lecky, laying a kindly hand on Clifford's shoulder. "Your only mistake the last time was ignoring those chaps in the Third. I venture to state that Noble, Russell,

and Evans have shown such sound and reliable form throughout the season that they have deserved their places in the team. Choose those three, and let the rest of the team stand as it was."

Lecky passed onward.

Marker stared at Clifford.

"I can't understand this," said Prince.

"Let's have a look at the notice-board," said Baynes.

They forced their way amongst the crowd. They looked at the notice.

Why, it was not the Third who were going to play the villagers in the return match, it seemed! The Junior Eleven was set down for that.

Clifford's heart gave a sudden leap.

"Clifford," said a youngster, turning round, "who're you going to choose this time?"

"Don't make any more bloomers," said another.

Clifford's cheeks burned like fire. He forced his way to where Jack Noble stood.

"Noble," he cried, "what's the meaning of this?"

Jack smiled.

"I thought you wrote to Bonson?" said Clifford.

"I did—on behalf of the school, and for you, Clifford, captain of the Junior Eleven."

Clifford started. He felt resentful for a moment.

"What is it you mean?" he asked.

"I mean," said Jack quietly, "that we want you to captain the team, Clifford."

Marker and the others stared.

Jack Noble had scored with a vengeance. He had shown Clifford every consideration. He had paid him and the committee a compliment they little deserved. For a moment they all felt heartily ashamed of themselves.

Clifford thought for a moment.

"Noble," he said, of a sudden, "I won't be captain of the Juniors unless—in fact, I—I don't think I have the right to captain them at all."

"Unless what?" asked Jack, with a smile.

"Unless you and Bob Russell and Evans agree to play. Three of the team can stand down. I think you chaps will strengthen the eleven."

Jack smiled a little sarcastically.

"I don't want to force your hand, Clifford," he said.

"Will you play?" asked Clifford desperately.

Jack Noble nodded.

"All right," he said; "I'm agreeable."

"So'm I!" chimed in Russell.

"And I'll keep goal," said Evans, "if you want me. This time I reckon we shall win!"

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### The Return Match.

IT was a cold, blustering day when the Pelham School played their return match with the villagers. There had been a hard frost overnight, and a watery sun did little to soften the ground by the time the kick-off arrived.

A record crowd had gathered on the village green. The pitch was level, but the grass was tufty.

About the ropes an enormous crowd had gathered. Farmers had come from miles around, driving in so that they might see t' town whip t' school. The famous victory of the villagers at the school had whetted the public appetite.



And so they all came out to see the fun when the return match was played, and the excitement was intense when the school side turned out.

They were a smart-looking side, all spick and span. But so they had looked at the school, and the clumsy villagers had beaten them.

Bonson led his men on to the field. He held his head high. He hadn't any doubt whatever which way victory was to go.

Every Pelhamite who was able to come down to the ground had put in an appearance. Lecky, the school captain, was there. For the first time for many years the schoolboys were able to mix with the villagers, and be treated with a certain amount of respect.

The Head was not present, but he had sent a cordial message to Clifford, wishing the team good luck.

The Pelham boys had brought with them a brand new football. It was light, and tightly inflated. As Jack bounced it, it leapt upward as if there were some living power hidden within its leathern casing.

"We'll play with this ball, if you have no objection," said Clifford, smiling at Bonson.

Fatty laughed.

"That or any other is good enough for me," he said. "I like that one best, for it's a new 'un."

An error of tactics, Bonson! If you had been wise, if you had taken the trouble to study the conditions, you would have chosen your own ball; ay, and have argued until you had had it soaked, into the bargain. By such little things as these are big battles won or lost!

Jack Noble had put Clifford up to the wheeze. Clifford, humble now, had adopted it. The match showed how good it was.

Bonson tossed the coin on this occasion.

"Tails!" cried Clifford.

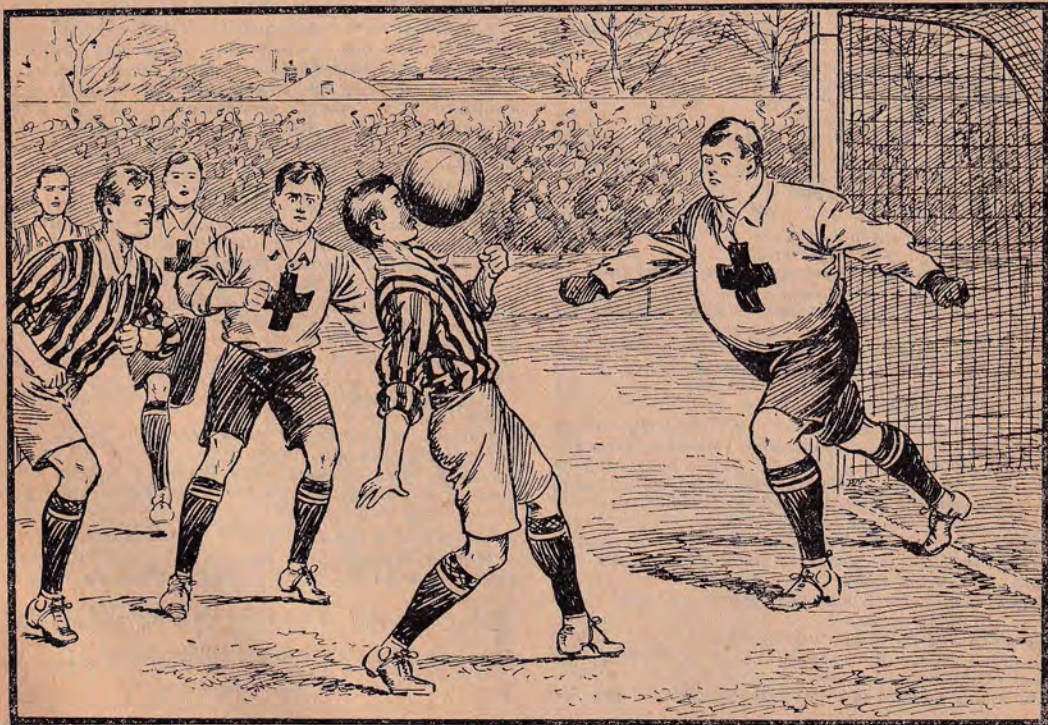
It was! Clifford was able to select his end. Winning the toss gave the schoolboys courage.

Clifford played centre-forward, Jack went in at inside-right, and Bob Russell was inside-left. They had asked for these positions, and had got them. Two weak forwards had been deposed. Evans, of course, was in goal.

The teams lined up.

Bonson gave his knickers a hitch. He was looking fatter than ever, and fitter than ever, too, for the matter of that.

The whistle went, and away went the players with



At that very moment, however, Fowkes's leg-of-mutton fist shot out to play the ball. It was a mighty blow, and the leather hurtled forward and struck Owen Meredith square on the nose.

(See "*THE BLUE CRUSADERS*," our Powerful Football Serial, on page 30.)



a rush. There was a fierce interchange of passes, and then the ball was headed into touch.

In came the ball from touch. Boof! and a lunge from a hefty half-back sent the ball bobbing dangerously in front of the Pelham goal. A big forward rushed at it. The school back slipped.

Bang!

Straight at Evans the ball came, but his hand shot out, and his fist catching the ball, lifted it high into the air, and the wind blew it to the half-way line. Clifford was standing there on the right side of the chalk mark. He touched the ball forward. Jack got it, and, running onward, he made a sign to Bob, and slipped it to him. Bob raced on. The Town goal was in danger now.

It was now or never! A chance of a lifetime! Bob shaped for an opening shot. The Town goalkeeper was only just in time, and his kick half missed its objective, sending the ball to Jack. Jack saw in front of him the yawning goal, and, taking aim at the widest part of it, he shot hard and true.

With a thud the ball struck the upright, and glanced into the net, and the next moment Jack found himself lying on his back, with the breath knocked out of him. Bonson, rushing up to protect his goal, had charged Jack down. But the charge had come too late!

How the school yelled!

Bonson, after one rueful glance goalwards, helped Jack up.

"Hope I didn't hurt you?" he said.

Jack brushed himself down.

"I'm all right," he replied.

Bob Russell rushed up to Jack, and shook him by the hand.

Clifford, after giving Jack one ungracious look, broke through his rampart of jealousy.

"Bravo!" he cried. "That was a good shot, Noble!"

"Noble shot," laughed Bob.

Evans waved his congratulations from the goal.

But there was no time for banter. The teams had lined up. The villagers were about to kick off again.

They rushed the ball desperately goalwards. But the manner in which it bobbed, breaking away at all sorts of unexpected angles, nonplussed them. They couldn't get the hang of it.

Bonson became desperate. He had the three half-backs up to help the attack, but even then the school were able to hold their own. They avoided the charges which had been so fatal at Pelham. They passed the ball instead, and, dodging their heavier opponents like slippery eels, they were always making ground. They understood the ball better, they controlled it better. Soon they drove the village avalanche back.

Then they were dangerous once more, and there were two lively forwards on either side of Clifford who were always doing something.

Clifford found himself fed much better than he usually was.

Jack slipped him the ball after drawing the backs.

"Go on!" he gasped.

Away went Clifford, bent on goal scoring. He tricked an opponent, and converged on the goal. The goalkeeper came out, but Clifford, cool as you please, slammed the ball into the vacant goal.

Two goals for the school!

Where was the Town now?

Bonson approached the referee. He objected to the ball.

"It's no use objecting now," said Clifford. "Besides, the ball's all right."

The referee examined it. He pronounced it sound. It was given to the linesmen. They could find nothing wrong. The villagers had to play with it.

And now the schoolboys had the upper hand. How the boys round the ropes yelled! It made Lecky good to hear them.

The school captain had a smile on his face which would not come off.

The villagers were making a last desperate effort before half-time came. They tried all they knew. But it was they, and not Pelham, who lost their heads now. They were too vigorous, too hasty. The chances went begging, and a packed goal did the rest. And then, just before the interval whistle blew, Bob Russell, breaking away, raced through on his own account, and scored a beauty.

The school were leading by three goals to nil!

The schoolboys round the ropes cut capers, executed war-dances—let themselves go, in fact.

Amidst a pent-up excitement the second half commenced. Soon it was obvious that the hard ground, as much as the ball, bothered the villagers. The light schoolboys dodged them effectively. Their charges went wrong. They could not move with ease on the frozen surface of the field.

Jack, Bob & Co. controlled the ball wonderfully. They dribbled it up, they rammed it in, and two more goals before the second half was fifteen minutes old put the issue beyond all doubt.

Bonson and his friends persevered to the end, but they could not even break their duck. The school notched their sixth before full-time, and as the cheers of the triumphant Pelham boys burst forth upon the air, and as the dejected and disappointed villagers turned away to seek the town, Jack and Bob grasped hands, and Lecky, strolling up to them, smiled on them, too.

"Bravo, youngsters!" he cried. "I knew the other form was all wrong, Clifford. Let this be a lesson to you. Make your team up of the best players available, no matter what Form they are in, and you won't go far wrong."

Clifford took the advice with a good grace.

Marker, Prince, and Baynes, who had also had their share in the victory, could afford to take it well, too.

They all smiled at the three grinning and gratified chums.

And so the match with the village was won!

THE END.

**Next Week: "FIGHTING MAC," another fine, complete tale of Jack Noble and Pelham School, will appear. Please pass your copy on to a friend, and oblige—YOUR EDITOR.**



## A STIRRING TALE OF LEAGUE FOOTBALL.



A Fine Football Yarn.

By A. S. HARDY.

## BOOK I.—"THE RISE OF THE CRUSADERS."

## INTRODUCTION.

HARRY EWING, DAVID MORAN, and ARTHUR DREW, the three central characters in this powerful football yarn, who, after leaving school, all become apprenticed to the engineering firm of Keith, Howse, & Co. There they fall foul of

STEPHEN CRANE, a gentleman apprentice, mean-spirited and sneering, who, aided by his band of toadies, does everything in his power to humiliate the three new arrivals. Crane and his companions are members of the Browton Athletic Football Club. Ewing, Moran, and Drew seek to join this team, but, thanks to Crane, they are refused membership.

FOWKES, a good-natured young workman, who soon makes friends with the three new apprentices. Fowkes is a lad of enormous build, and had once captained a football team, which had, however, fallen through. At the suggestion of Moran and his chums, it is decided that this club shall be resuscitated. This decision is carried out, and the new team is called "The Blue Crusaders."

The Blue Crusaders enter for the Local Cup Competition, and, strangely enough, are drawn in the first round against Browton Athletic. Stephen Crane is greatly enraged on hearing of this, and on the day of the match, just as the referee is about to start the game, he raises an objection against the Blue Crusaders, declaring that Moran, Ewing, and Drew are not eligible to play.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

## Winning the Cup-tie.

**A**S Stephen Crane advanced to the centre of the field, and placed his objection to Harry Ewing, Arthur Drew, and David Moran playing for the Blue Crusaders against Browton Athletic before the referee, a murmur of astonishment ran round the enclosure, while, for his part, the official—Mr. T. Jefferies, of Blackburn—looked not a little surprised.

"Really, sir," he said, as his brows knit themselves together in an ominous frown, "you are delaying the game."

"I can't help that!" cried Stephen Crane. "Those three men are not entitled to play for the Crusaders. I must have them withdrawn from the field, or I claim the match!"

The referee beckoned Fowkes from his goal.

"I have an objection laid against three of your players," he said. "Have I your word that they

are properly qualified to play for your club? Remember, it means that you will lose the game if such is not the case."

"They are three old Brampton College boys, sir," answered Fowkes quietly. "They were duly elected at our last meeting. They have played for no other team except the school side this season, sir."

"Then the game must proceed," said the referee.

"Back to your place, Mr. Crane!"

"But," protested Crane, blustering, "it's not fair! I—"

Mr. Jefferies, however, cut him short by blowing his whistle, and the game commenced, the Blue Crusaders at once getting possession of the ball, and making tracks for the Athletic's goal. The left back, miskicking, put the ball over the line, and from the resultant corner-kick the leather was dropped right under the bar, the Athletic's goal being almost captured in the first minute of the game.

A mighty shout went up from the knot of enthusiasts who had come up from the works to see the Blue Crusaders play their first great Cup-tie. It looked as if they had a chance of winning, after all.

Stephen Crane's face was a study as he lunged and kicked, and rushed back to keep the Crusaders' forwards out. Foiled in his attempt to prevent the three chums from playing in the match, he was determined that he should get a chance, and desperation infused an enthusiasm into the Browton Athletic defence which sent the opposition back, baffled and beaten, and, ten minutes from the kick-off, the home side had the visitors penned in their own half.

That in itself, however, did not mean victory. There was the gigantic Fowkes, eagle-eyed, and as cool as a cucumber, beneath the bar, and though they tested him again and again, he saved, kicking and punching the ball away with the assurance of a First League goalkeeper. The air fairly rang with applause as the young giant displayed his prowess, and one of his saves off the very toe of the inside-right, and at great personal risk, saw the Athletic forwards staring open-mouthed at the empty goal, wondering how it was they had not scored.

Then, when the pressure was at its height, Harry Ewing ran back, and, tackling the half, who was about to transfer the ball to his forwards, he turned and dribbled down the field, until, faced by Stephen Crane, who hustled him off the ball, he kicked into touch for safety, midway between the half-way line and the Athletic's goal.



"Art, old man," said Harry, "we must keep them out—we must! If we can do that for sixty minutes, I think we might wear them down and win."

Harry had been quick to notice, during momentary lulls in the game—they were few—with that sound judgment that had served him so faithfully at college, that the Athletic were exhibiting symptoms of wear and tear, and as the minutes flew by, he began to hope for the best.

The Blue Crusaders' team was not too strong at half and back, but there was little wrong with the forwards, and Fowkes was a tower of strength between the posts. It was ordained, however, that the Athletic should open the score before half-time, and the first goal of this memorable match was scored in this way:

Stephen Crane secured the ball, dribbled down the field, and, seizing his opportunity, fed the outside-left of the Athletic with a swinging pass. That player—one of the diminutive, wiry sort—carried the ball to the corner-flag, cleverly tricked the Crusaders' back, and swung the ball to the centre.

The rest of the Browton forwards rushed through, and had the Crusaders' defence beaten—all except Fowkes, who rushed out to meet the ball as it fell. Owen Meredith, who was at hand, eagerly leapt to head the ball past the young giant. The Browton secretary remembered how Fowkes had locked them in the committee-room at Braithwaite's Coffee-house, and he meant to beat him at any hazard. It looked, too, as if he would succeed. The crowd already shouted "Goal! Goal!"

At that very moment, however, Fowkes's leg-of-mutton fist shot out to play the ball. It was a mighty blow, and the leather hurtled forward and struck Owen Meredith square on the nose.

The secretary fell as if shot. He lay on his back in the mud on the edge of the goal area, dazed and stunned, and before the ball could be played again the referee's whistle blew.

The Blue Crusaders' goalkeeper was himself the first to rush to Meredith's assistance, and, bending down, he carefully raised the unhappy player from the ground.

"My word!" Will Fowkes cried. "I didn't mean to do that!"

It was some minutes ere Meredith revived sufficiently to retire from the field, and as he was helped off, with his nose bleeding freely, and rapidly changing hue, Mr. Jefferies, of Blackburn, picked the ball up.

He beckoned the players to gather round, and as they did so he threw down the ball almost outside the goal area, and nearly in front of the goal. When play had ceased the Browton Athletic forwards had run through the Crusaders' defence, and one of them now dashed quickly to the goal side of the ring of players, and obtained possession of the ball.

Quickly turning, he drove hard and low at the goal. Fowkes, with the spring of an antelope, flung himself across the goal-mouth. But he was the fraction of a second too late, and, as his body met the earth with a stupendous thud, the ball flashed into the net, and ran up the "rigging" at the back.

A frenzied shout went up from the crowd. Stephen Crane danced a wild Highland fling, and grinned his triumph at Harry Ewing, whilst Fowkes, who was but human, after all, took the ball from the back of the net, and flung it viciously to the centre of the field.

The word then went out for the Athletic to play on the defensive until half-time whistle blew; orders which, with Meredith receiving the attentions of a doctor in the dressing-room, were sound policy.

The Athletic went off then to their pavilion to take their well-earned breather; but, having no shelter to go to, the more plebeian Crusaders sucked their lemons in the centre of the field the while they discussed their plans of campaign for the second half.

"It was rank bad luck losing that goal!" cried William Fowkes gloomily. "I'll stake my life they won't beat me again! We'll have the wind next half. So play up, boys! Don't forget combination—combination—combination!"

"They'll go off with a rush at the restart," said Harry Ewing. "Boys, let us pretend we're beaten, as they think we are. When we break away we shall stand a much better chance of scoring. And thanks, Fowkes, for catching Meredith on the nose. It was a beauty!"

"The mean hound deserved it!" added Arthur Drew.

Fowkes's eyes twinkled, but he said nothing.

At the restart, five minutes later, the Athletic went off with the expected rush, and, so dangerous was it, that they came within an ace of scoring. For ten minutes they held their own, and the goal was saved with the utmost difficulty. The Blue Crusaders had cut off just as much as they could chew, and it became evident that the Athletic were as good a side as they had been represented to be.

Harry Ewing's face grew graver and graver as the minutes went by, and yet, despite the stupendous efforts of himself, Arthur Drew, and David Moran, at half, they did not look like getting on equal terms with their opponents. The shouts of their democratic supporters from Keith, Howse & Co.'s works grew more and more feeble, and the attitude of the Athletic supporters more and more hostile.

Stephen Crane beamed with delight, and, though Secretary Owen Meredith was playing nothing of a game now, and running about with a bruised and distorted face, he gleamed triumph and satisfaction from his cunning, beady eyes.

The time drew on. The Browton Athletic had not added to their score, but neither had the Blue Crusaders equalised, and the match, for them, seemed as good as lost.

At last, in sheer desperation at the efforts of his forwards, all speedy, individually clever, and daring enough, but sadly out in combination, Harry rushed to Captain Fowkes in goal.

"Let me have David Moran up from the half-back line to play inside-right to me," he pleaded. "We are used to each other's play. It's the only chance we've got of scoring."

"Do anything you think best," said Fowkes earnestly, "only score, laddie—score!"

Harry raced back. A few words, and the change was made. Its effect was electrifying. No longer were the forwards five separate units, but one combined force, and the manner in which they transferred the ball from one to another, and beat the opposing halves and backs all along the line quelled the shouts of the Athletics' supporters, and raised desperate cries of:

"Time, referee—time!"

And nearly time it was. That official took his



watch from his pocket, and gazed earnestly at the dial. Harry Ewing bit his lip until he drew the blood in his excitement.

The ball came his way, and he slashed it out to his wing. The winger and Moran tricked the left back, and then a melee ensued right in front of the Athletic's goal. The ball was passed to Arthur Drew, who prepared to shoot, but Stephen Crane loomed up, and intervened.

"To me, Arthur—to me!" cried Harry.

The ball was passed. Harry took it on the run, and shot clean and hard. By a wonderful effort the goalkeeper saved, and the leather came back. Harry secured it again, but as he tried to play it once more, his legs were shot from under him by his old enemy, Crane.

The referee blew his whistle for a penalty, and, even as he did so, Arthur Drew netted the ball. The goal was disallowed, however, as Mr. Jefferies pointed to the penalty-spot. Arthur's face fell. There was time for the kick to be taken, and no more. If they should miss—if they should miss!

Then out of the goal came Fowkes, drawing off his gloves as he ran eagerly down the field. The giant meant to take the kick himself.

"Quick, Will—quick!" gasped Harry.

For time was up, and if Fowkes missed, Harry meant to have a try on the rebound if he could beat the whistle.

With a fast, lunging movement the right foot of Fowkes struck the ball. It rose. It hit the under side of the crossbar. It plumped down, but wide of the Athletic goalkeeper's reach, and it rolled sweetly into the corner of the net. The Blue Crusaders had equalised right on the call of time!

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

##### The Crusaders Obtain a Ground.

**O**N the Saturday evening after their famous draw in the Cup Competition, a little party of the Blue Crusaders met at William Fowkes's house—or, rather, the house in which he lived, for Fowkes had a father, who kept a small newspaper and tobacconist shop in the town—to discuss the all-important question of securing a ground.

That the club would have to obtain a ground somewhere was apparent. During their time of inertia the old pitch on the public playing-ground of Browton Green had been handed over to a smaller organisation, and now the Blue Crusaders found themselves with a Cup-tie replay to settle, and no ground to settle it on.

A fierce wrangle had followed the conclusion of the match, the Browton Athletic claiming that the replay should be on their ground, as the Crusaders were minus a pitch. But to this Fowkes would not agree, declaring that they would have a field by the following Saturday well fitted for the game, and on this understanding the affair had gone no further.

It was a huge responsibility that Fowkes had taken on his shoulders, and he was very quiet and grave when the last of the boys—Jack Reynolds, who played at left-back—entered his cosy parlour.

"Now, the question is," said Fowkes, going right to the point, "where are we to get a ground? We've got no money, and we draw no gate. One thing is certain. We must find a ground, or scratch for the Cup."

"And give the Athletic a walk-over?" queried Moran.

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"Yes," said Fowkes. "You don't think we could play on their ground after what passed after the match to-day, do you?"

"I suppose not," said Harry slowly. "And yet I think I would rather do that than give them the match," Fowkes. "Everyone would say we were afraid."

"Well, what's to be done?" said Fowkes, knitting his brow anxiously. "I know every piece of land within miles of Browton, and I can't think of any likely spot. You've been to college, Harry Ewing, and ought to know more than an ignorant lad like me. Can't you think of anything?"

"I was just wondering," said Harry, "whether it would be of any use asking Sir Ralph Driffield to lend us a ground for the season. He owns heaps of acres round Browton, and lots of good grazing-land, some of which is never used. Sir Ralph was a pioneer of Association football in Browton thirty years ago, and captained the Town Rovers. They only played a kind of Rugby game then. They say he's lost all his interest in the sport since the game became professionalised, and only goes in for politics now. Still, he was a footballer, and a real good sportsman. All I can suggest is that we appeal to him."

"By Jove!" commented Fowkes. "I didn't know the baronet ever was a footballer! But it's no use. He's up in London agitating about the coming election."

"He's not!" cried Arthur Drew. "As I came up here his carriage drove out of the station-yard, and I saw him reading his paper. He's up at the Hall now."

"Then," said Fowkes, rising, "let's strike while the iron's hot. We'll make an appeal to him in force. He'll have had his dinner by now. He'll be playing a game of billiards, perhaps, or else resting in his study."

The rest of the Blue Crusaders caught some of Fowkes's enthusiasm. They never paused to think of the madness of their scheme. They were young, and obstacles, however insurmountable older heads might have thought them, were nothing in their way.

The meeting was hurriedly adjourned, and in a body they walked briskly through the heavy white mist, en route for Sir Ralph Driffield's home, Holden House, in the picturesque Bowes Park suburb of Browton—the one pretty spot in the neighbourhood.

Here there were trees, fields, several farms, haystacks, large, rambling barns, outhouses, stables, and plenty of paddocks and grazing-grounds where football-pitches could be marked out ad lib.

The soul-destroying smoke of Browton seemed to pass this almost rural district by, leaving it natural and untouched. There were trees growing beside the road, one or two fine orchards, and at the great entrance-gates, which led up through an avenue of Spanish chestnuts, planted here in the time of King James I., to the old Hall, the black, dew-beladen boughs stretched in a high arch across the road. A light gleamed in the gatekeeper's lodge hard by.

"You ring the bell, Fowkes," said Harry nervously. "It's such cheek, I haven't the nerve to do it."

Fowkes gave the iron-handled bell-pull a jerk. A rude summons clanged deep-toned into the night, startling the group of boys, and when the gatekeeper thrust his head out of the lodge door, and, seeing



them, growled out a surly inquiry as to what they wanted. Fowkes alone had the coolness to make the most of the situation.

"We're the committee of the Blue Crusaders' Football Club," he said, in bold accents, "and we've come to see Sir Ralph Driffield about the field he promised to let us use."

Will Fowkes's directness of speech, his towering figure, left the gatekeeper amazed and silent, whilst the rest of the Crusaders exchanged meaning glances. At length the gatekeeper spoke.

"Sir Ralph Driffield is in London," he said, hoping to check Fowkes that way.

"He isn't," said the young giant. "He came down by the 6.30 train."

Fowkes knew exactly what time the London expresses landed folk in Browton, and he hit the target first shot. The lodgekeeper said no more, but, with a face full of misgiving, opened the gate and let them through.

"I don't know whether I'm right in letting you in," he said. "Only, for goodness' sake, be careful! It's as much as my place is worth to make a mistake."

Fowkes led the boys onward through the avenue, and, when out of sight of the lodge, he cut a few steps on the gravel path.

"All right so far," he said; "only I'm blessed if I know what will happen when we see his lordship."

A ring at the hall door brought out a pompous butler, a resplendent servitor of the old-fashioned English type, all ceremony and style, with mutton-chop whiskers and a bald head complete. He eyed the boys in surprise, but they were in the hall before he could deny them admittance.

"May I ask," he cried, "what you boys mean by invading his lordship's hall in this manner?"

Harry Ewing removed his cap, and his cheerful, ruddy face, good-looking and good-humoured, with a stamp of good breeding upon it, insensibly impressed the butler.

"We're a deputation from one of the town's athletic clubs," said he, "and would like to have a few words with his lordship when he is disengaged."

"Wanting alms, of course!" said the butler. "You must apply by letter. Sir Ralph has given orders that he is not to be disturbed."

"Will you please tell him that a deputation of the committee of the Blue Crusaders Football Club—an amateur club—would like to speak to him for a few minutes? If he refuses to see us, of course we shall have to submit and go."

The butler, after demurring a minute or so, went off to convey the message. The boys scarcely dared to hope for success, but when the pompous servitor returned, it was to tell them that Sir Ralph would see them in the library in a few minutes.

Thither they were conducted, and shown in with much ceremony. The baronet, a finely-preserved man of fifty-three, sat in a luxurious lounge-chair dictating letters to his secretary. It was some minutes ere he turned and glanced frowningly at them.

At the sight of the youthful deputation standing in a row, with the giant Fowkes standing in the centre, a magnificent specimen of athletic manhood, his frown changed into a smile.

"Well," he said, condescending to adopt a friendly tone, "and what can I do for you, my lads?"

The youngsters glanced from one to another in some trepidation. Who should take upon himself the responsibility of spokesman?

At length Harry Ewing stepped forward, and very earnestly and rapidly ran through the brief history of the newly-named Blue Crusaders Football Club, culminating with the story of their resurrection, and their fight with Browton Athletic in the Junior Association Cup Competition, and the urgent need of a field.

"Are you the same lad who captained the school side against the Old Bramptonians this season?" asked Sir Ralph.

"Yes, sir," answered Harry.

"H'm! I saw the match. I was the guest of Dr. Absolom. You played very well, my boy. And now, may I ask what it is you want of me?"

"Well, sir, we are most of us apprentices at Messrs. Keith, Howse & Co.'s, and only earn small wages. We wished to know whether you could let us have a field for the rest of the season, sir."

The baronet was silent for a minute or more.

"A very cool request," he said, at length. "May I ask why you came to me?"

"Because," said Harry boldly, "you were a very fine player in the old days, sir, and one of the pioneers of football in Browton, and I thought you would be able to sympathise with us more than anyone else, sir."

"It is seldom that my services on behalf of the game are remembered in Browton in these days of professionalism," said the baronet a little bitterly. "Fry"—to his secretary—"have I any ground available?"

The boys' hearts beat high with hope.

"I'm afraid not, sir," was the secretary's reply. "There is only the grazing-paddock behind the farm stables and barns, and that, as you know, is broken up by a number of trees."

"You hear?" said Sir Ralph. "I have many acres of land, but all are put to a fruitful purpose, and help to earn my income. Why should I turn a paying property into a football-ground to please you?"

The boys were silent. Over Fowkes's face came such a look of dejection that Sir Ralph was forced into a smile in spite of himself.

"However," he went on, "I am willing to let you have the field my secretary mentions on condition that you undertake the work of removing the few trees that stand in the centre, put the place into ship-shape order for playing, behave yourselves like gentlemen, respect my servants and my property, and do not trespass beyond bounds."

The boys' delight knew no bounds. Their faces were radiant in an instant, and they returned thanks in a general chorus. Sir Ralph cut them short with a gesture.

"Put the necessary permission in writing, Fry," he said, "so that they may show their authority when they wish to enter the ground."

The secretary took up his pen, and indited the permit. The baronet signed it, and handed the slip to Harry Ewing.

"There you are, my lad," he said. "Only remember that I have the right to withdraw my permit upon any misbehaviour at the ground. The permit is for the season only, and, when leaving, the

(Continued on page 3 of cover.)



ground must be restored to its original condition, with the exception of the trees which you will remove. There must be no suspicion of professionalism or rowdiness, no interference with my servants or my property."

"There shall not be, sir," said Harry respectfully; and a few minutes later the four departed.

That night a letter was written to Owen Meredith, the Browton Athletic secretary, telling him that the match would be played at Holden Park the following Saturday. The Blue Crusaders Football Club seemed established indeed.

#### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

**The Blue Crusaders Put Their Ground in Order—A Protest—The Secretary Approves—Foul Play—Like Thieves in the Night.**

**A** SURVEY of the new ground was made by the members of the Crusaders' committee on Sunday afternoon, and at dawn on the Monday twenty enthusiastic youths, members of the Blue Crusaders Club, might have been seen at work putting the field in order for the coming match.

Fowkes, Harry, Arthur, and David Moran issued orders for the work, and whilst the three chums set to work planning out the field, Fowkes, with a borrowed hatchet, commenced to fell the trees which dotted the field here and there. There were over twenty of them, of fair size, and it meant earnest and energetic labour on the part of the club if they wished to get the field ready for Saturday's match. When the time came for them to make their way down to the works they seemed not to have progressed a bit.

It was there and then decided that they should labour each day from daybreak to worktime on the task of putting the pitch in order.

Harry Ewing met Stephen Crane on the Tuesday morning as he entered the great gates of Messrs. Keith, Howse & Co.'s works.

"You think you're clever, Ewing," said Crane, with a sneer, "but we went up to see your field this morning. It's quite unfit for Cup-tie football, and we've lodged an objection with the Association. You'll have to play on our ground, after all, or scratch."

"I don't think so," responded Harry. "Our field will be ready. We have already notified Mr. Adams ourselves. Rules are rules. If the field is ready you will have to play. I suppose it is the gate you want. You will get nothing as your share of the replay on our ground, but you'll have to play there, Stephen Crane."

"Will we?" muttered Stephen Crane darkly, as Harry hurried on. "We'll see! I'll find a means to checkmate you, Mr. Harry Ewing!"

The next morning, as the twenty odd boys were labouring in the field, with the hoar-frost still lying thick upon the ground, an athletic figure made its way quickly along the public footpath from the high road, and, climbing over the style, entered what was to be the Blue Crusaders' playing-ground.

It was Mr. Adams, the secretary of the Browton and District Junior Association. Fowkes, with his coat off, was hacking away with his hatchet at the last and stoutest of the trees which obstructed the future playing-pitch. Some of the others were digging up the roots of the elms which had already fallen before the axe of the destroyer. Harry Ewing, Arthur

Drew, and David Moran were busy fixing up one of the goals which had belonged to the Howton Hall Club at the northern end of the ground. The five-foot flags already marked off the four corners of the playing-pitch.

One glance of the official eye told Mr. Adams that the field was quite full regulation size, with wide margins on either side of the touch-lines, and ample room behind each of the goals. There were lumps and bumps here and there, and a slight incline of the whole playing-pitch, but the grassy surface was excellent, this having been used for grazing-ground for a number of years, and the grass was close cut. A few weeks' special treatment and rolling would have done it a world of good, but when those tree-roots were removed, the holes filled up, an excellent field would be the result.

The boys watched the secretary make his inspection somewhat nervously. It amazed them that he should be astir so early in the morning.

At length he crossed to Fowkes, who, having brought down the tree with a final mighty sweep of his axe, paused, leaning on the butt for breath.



"Such industry as this is amazing, my lad!" said Mr. Adams genially. "It does you credit. And with such enthusiasm behind the club you are bound to succeed. I dare say you marvel why I am here? Well, I received a formal protest from Mr. Owen Meredith, the Browton Athletic secretary, against your ground, and so I came along to see it. I preferred to come at this hour, as I had heard that you were hard at work every morning at day-break."

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"And what is your verdict, sir?" asked Fowkes anxiously.

"There can be but one," said Mr. Adams, with a smile. "After the generosity shown to you by Sir Ralph Driffeld, and your own energy and industry, it would be cruel to check you. I am satisfied that the field is in every respect suitable for the replay with Browton Athletic. I take it that it will be in readiness by Saturday next?"

"Everything will be ready by Friday at the latest, sir," answered Fowkes.

"Then your assurance is sufficient. I will notify Mr. Meredith that his protest cannot stand. Good-morning!"

Mr. Adams turned away, and Fowkes, carried away by a feeling of elation, flung his heavy axe high in the air, and cheered loudly.

Friday morning came, and with it the finishing touches to their new enclosure were made by the boys. The goalposts and nets were in position, the dimensions of the field (full size) had been carefully marked out, the penalty and goal-areas defined, the half-way line drawn, and the ten-yards circle made in the centre of the field. Nay, more! By means of the trunks of the fallen trees, and a liberal supply of earth, temporary grand-stands had been made—elevations, rather, it should be said—which were ranged along the field at the furthestmost points from the touchlines, so that in case of a large attendance, the spectators behind should have a chance of seeing the game.

The work was accomplished! By dint of almost superhuman exertion the boys had transformed the chaotic field they had found into an up-to-date playing-pitch, and when they went to bed that night it was with feelings of great content and self-satisfaction. They were as happy as kings—nay, happier, for there were few monarchs breathing in the world who could lay their heads upon their pillows and rest with such perfect soundness as did the members of the Blue Crusaders Football Club that night.

Little did they dream, however, as they so soundly slept through the small hours of the night, that their work was being undone by ruthless hands.

The broad acres belonging to Sir Ralph Driffeld were enwrapped in a thin, grey mist, and the hoarfrost lay thick on bough and blade. In the big house itself, and the farm-buildings, the inhabitants had long since been asleep, and yet six figures were moving about the stable-yards, flitting from barn to barn, pausing at the big doors of each building, and examining the padlocks by the aid of a dark-lantern, whose shutter was opened when necessary, and as quickly closed again.

Once a dog barked, and his low-toned voice awakened every canine within hearing, until the night re-echoed with the noise. Out of a kennel a few yards from the group, a big black retriever leapt to the full length of his chain, lashing his tail with fury. Five or six youths sprang back, afraid. The sixth took a step nearer the dog, and snapped his fingers.

"Carlo, you old fool," he cried, "don't be silly! You know an old friend, don't you?"

The dog's barking was cut short. He sniffed at the stranger, then fawned down on his belly on the stones. In a few moments all was quiet again.

"It's all right now, boys," said Stephen Crane—for the leader of the party was he—"I know all the

dogs in Sir Ralph's stable-yards. We need fear nothing. Quick! This is the barn we want! Let's get the doors open!"

One of the others held the light near, so that Crane might see what he was doing. He held in his hand a bunch of keys. By the aid of these he unlocked the padlock, pulled it out of the staple, and hauled the big door open. Going inside, he undid the two bolts which secured the other, and the four entered.

Ploughs, hand and horse-harrows, seeders, grain-drills, harvesters, weeders, cultivators, all were there, and Crane's practised eye soon sought out what he wanted. It was a shoe-furrower, with a single wheel, such as could be easily manipulated by hand, with a knife that cut deep down into the earth.

"That's the one we want," said he. "Quick! Let's waste no time! Out with it!"

Within two minutes they had wheeled it into the yard. The barn doors were quickly closed again, the padlock replaced, and Crane flung the keys into a water-butt near.

"It cost me two quarts of ale before I could get those from the old fool, Monteith," he said. "He'll have to hunt a long time before he finds them there."

The six, having accomplished their mission, now made their way by devious paths to the field which the Blue Crusaders had prepared at such great pains for the big Cup-tie on the morrow. One of them carried a long, flat brown-paper parcel under his arm. Its use was quickly made apparent when the lads had entered the Crusaders' field.

"Now saw those goalposts down—quick!" directed Crane.

Two large hand-saws were produced, and with these Owen Meredith and one of his scoundrelly companions set to work to destroy the only pair of goals the Crusaders possessed. The fell work was accomplished in wonderfully quick time. Crane himself cut the net-strings to bits, and the iron supports to the nets were wrenched from the woodwork, and the ends of the posts uprooted. The woodwork was sawn into bits. So with the second goal. In less than an hour both goals were in fragments on the ground.

"Now for the furrower!" cried Crane. "Two of you lay hold of the handle—one at each side. I and Meredith will push behind."

His meaning was quickly defined. Two of the Browton Athletic lads caught hold of the front handle, the steel blade was dug deep into the earth, and off they started across the Crusaders' playing-pitch, the furrower running easily and noiselessly on its well-greased wheel, and ploughing up the turf in merciless manner.

From end to end of the playing-pitch the villains went, then across and across, tearing up the turf, and carrying destruction with them everywhere.

It was a full hour ere Stephen Crane was quite satisfied that they had done enough. At last he paused, panting for breath, almost exhausted.

"That will do!" he cried. "Heave that furrower into the hedge, and let's get home."

It was done, and, five minutes later, the six hurried guiltily away, like thieves in the night. Up beyond the mist the stars winked and blinked. Even they had not seen the fell work done, for the damp, grey curtain had blotted the earth from their twinkling gaze. There was not a single witness—not one.

(Another fine long instalment next Thursday. Are you reading "Captain Jack," by A. S. Hardy, now appearing in our Saturday companion, "The Boys' Realm"? It's great!)