



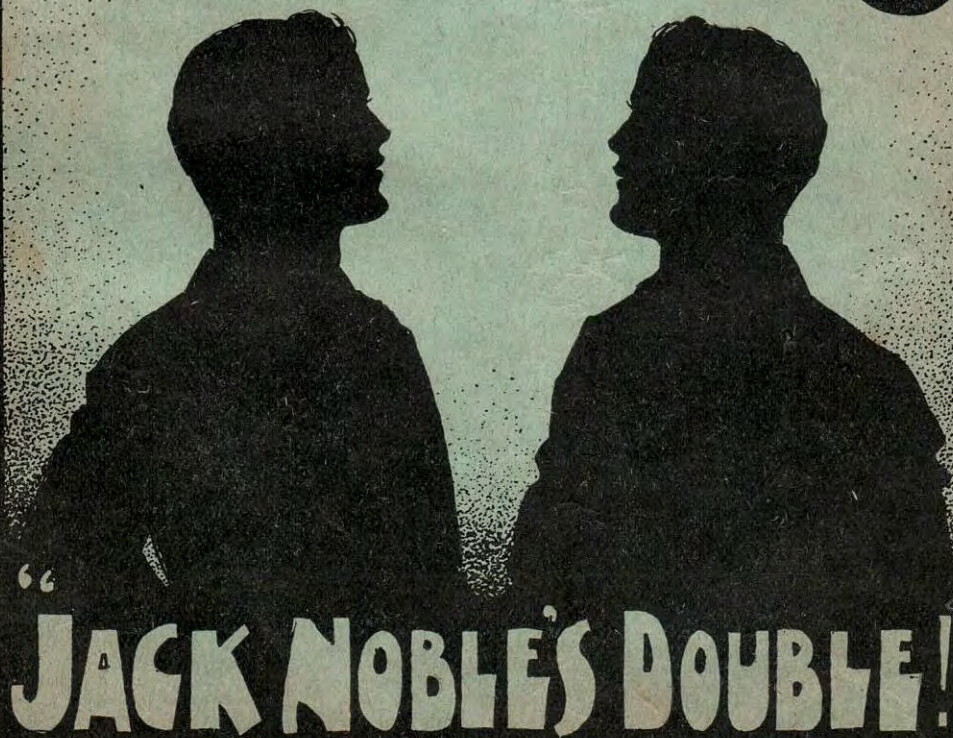
THE ALL-FOOTBALL STORY PAPER.



The "Boys' Realm"

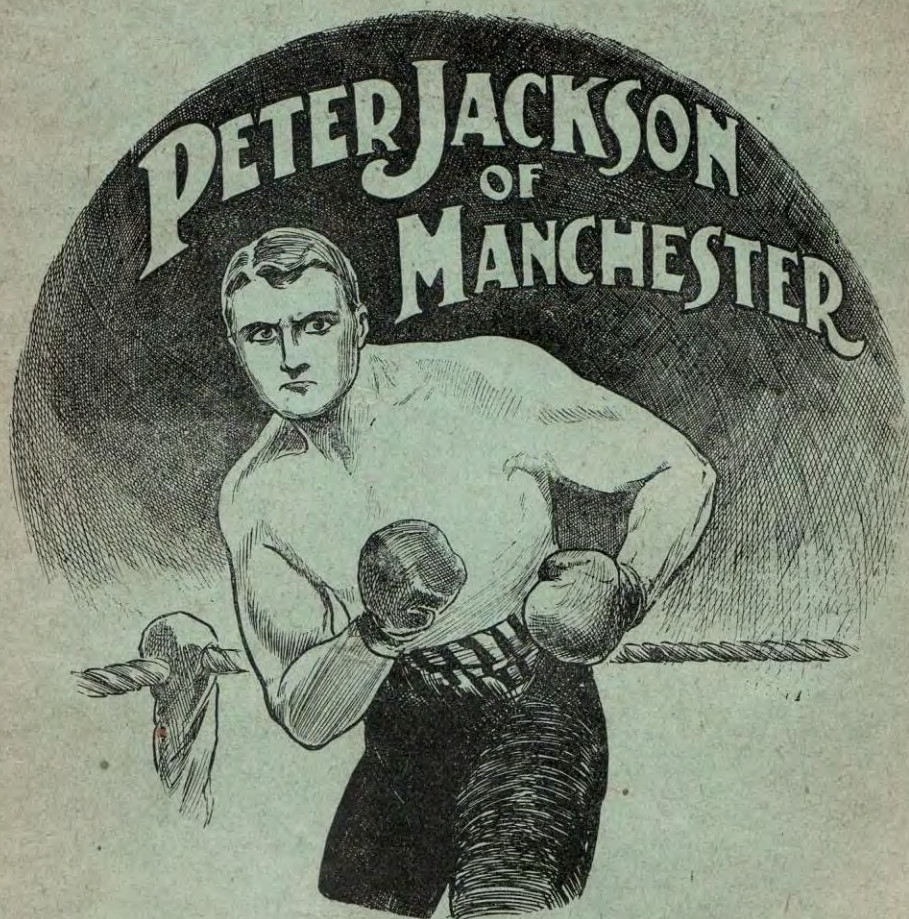
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A TALE OF PELHAM SCHOOL

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The Favourite Paper for Athletic Boys and Young Men.

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JACK NOBLE'S DOUBLE.

Another Splendid, Complete Tale of Pelham School.



Kelly was off with the leather, and Herbert, racing after him, charged him from behind and sent him spinning. "Foul!" yelled the Blatchfordians.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jack Noble H's an Appointment.

JACK NOBLE, of the Third Form at Pelham School, uttered a sudden exclamation.

The Third Form had just been dismissed, and most of them were pouring out into the Close. Jack Noble and Bob Russell had paused in the hall. There was a letter for Noble in the rack, and Jack had stopped to take it, and Bob was waiting for his chum.

Noble opened the letter carelessly enough. Then he uttered that exclamation that drew Bob's gaze upon him inquiringly.

"Bad news?" asked Bob.

Jack was staring at the letter.

"N-n-no, not exactly."

"What's the matter, then? What are you looking like a boiled owl for?" asked Bob Russell.

"I—I wasn't aware that I was looking like a boiled owl, Bob," said Jack mildly. "There's a bit of a surprise in the letter, that's all. It's from my cousin."

"Well, I've had letters from a cousin before, without getting the jumps," remarked Bob. "Come down to the footer field."

"But—"

"Come on. We can get in half an hour's practice before dinner, and we need it if we're to meet the

Blatchford lot on Saturday with any sort of a chance."

"It's from my cousin Herbert," said Jack, looking at the letter again. "Blessed if I can understand it! He's down here."

"Down where?" asked Bob, glancing about the old oak floor as if he expected to see his chum's cousin Herbert about there somewhere.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Bob! He's down here—in the village—and he wants to see me."

"Well, let him see you. You don't make any charge for it, do you?"

"He wants me to go and meet him, I mean."

"When?"

"Now—before dinner."

"Rats!" said Bob warmly. "You're jolly well not going to miss your footer. Blow your cousin! After all, he's nobody!"

"Well, we haven't been on very good terms," said Jack thoughtfully. "You see, we were born to get on each other's nerves. We're as like as two peas, and Herbert used to get me into lots of scrapes on that account before I came to Pelham. He was never above allowing the blame of a trick to fall on me, and he was as mischievous as a monkey, too. I was jolly glad he never came to Pelham with me."

Bob Russell snorted.

"And that's the kind of chap you want to miss footer practice for!" he ejaculated.

"Well, he says he's in a fix, and wants me to help him."

"You're not on good terms——"

"Oh, blood is thicker than water, you know. I expect he'd help me if I were in a fix. I shall have to go and see him."

"Rats!"

"You see, Bob——"

"You jolly well sha'n't!" said Bob determinedly. "Have you forgotten the Blatchford match, you ass? Here, Mac!"

A sturdy, freckled Scottish junior was passing, and he looked round with a smile as Bob Russell called to him.

"Hallo!"

"Noble wants to cut the practice. Lend me a hand to get him to the ground, will you?"

Alister Macdonald Macalpine Macalpine grinned.

"Right you are!" he exclaimed.

Jack Noble sprang back.

"Look here, don't play the giddy goat!" he exclaimed. "I've got to go out to meet my cousin——"

"You've got to come to practice."

"Look here——"

"Collar him, Mac!"

And the two juniors linked arms with Jack Noble. Jack, captain of the Third Eleven, and champion athlete of the Lower Forms at Pelham, was not an easy customer to handle. He began to struggle, and Mac and Bob were whirled round the hall.

It was at that moment that Clifford, of the Shell, came along. Clifford, of the Shell, was captain of the Junior Eleven at Pelham, a team composed of the Shell and the Fourth Form. It had always been a thorn in Clifford's side that Jack Noble had formed a Third Eleven, and a still more painful thorn was the fact that the Third Eleven had licked the Junior team in the sight of all Pelham. Hence the majestic frown which Clifford, of the Shell, usually bestowed upon Jack when the two happened to meet.

Clifford was something of a dandy. He was dressed for going out now. He wore a beautifully-polished silk hat, lavender gloves, and the whitest and highest of collars. He looked with great disfavour on the wrestling fags.

"Will you kindly let me pass?" he exclaimed.

"Bring him along, Mac!"

"Yank him out, Bob!"

Clifford stamped his foot impatiently. The Third-Formers did not seem to see or hear him—Clifford, of the Shell!

"Get out of the way!" he roared.

Jack Noble made an effort to wrench himself loose. He went struggling across the hall, with Bob and Mac clinging to him like limpets to a rock. The three whirled round upon Clifford, and before he could save himself, they had crashed into him.

Clifford gave a wild yell.

The collision sent him staggering, and he went down on the floor with a bump. In a second more the three juniors were sprawling over him.

"Ow!" gasped Clifford. "Ow! Yow!"

"Yaroo!" murmured Bob breathlessly.

Jack Noble was the first on his feet. He looked down at the three struggling forms, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye!"

The next moment he was gone.

Bob and Mac struggled up. They were bruised.

FOOTBALL LIBRARY.—No. 12.

and breathless, but they looked round for the captain of the Third.

"He's gone!" muttered Bob wrathfully.

"After him, mon!"

They raced out of the house.

Clifford sat up, gasping. He had come off worst of all. He had been undermost, and every ounce of breath had been knocked out of his body. He sat and gasped.

"Oh! Ow! Gerroooh!"

"My word!" said Marker, of the Shell, coming up. "What's the little game, Cliff, old boy? Are you doing that for lung exercise?"

"Gerroooooh!"

"Here, get up!"

Marker gave him a hand up. Clifford gasped weakly.

"I'll—I'll be the death of those fags!" he panted. "Where's my hat? I was just going out. Give me my topper, Marky."

Marker picked up the topper with a grin, and handed it to his chief. Clifford had fallen on it, and it looked less like a topper than a concertina.

Clifford raved as he saw it.

"The—the beasts! I'll pulverise them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, Marker?"

"N-n-nothing!" gasped Marker. "You'd better go in a cap."

"The young sweeps!"

And Clifford went in a cap—and a portentous scowl.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Rascally Proposition!

JACK NOBLE was out of the gates of Pelham before his exasperated chums were out of the house, and he did not slacken speed even when he had left the school gates behind. He knew that Mac and Bob were both resolute, and it was quite on the cards that they might pursue him.

Noble was sorry to miss the footer practice. The next day was Saturday, and on Saturday afternoon the Third Eleven were to meet Blatchford.

Blatchford was a neighbouring town, and it had a young amateur eleven which thought no small beer of itself. That junior eleven had met Pelham Juniors, and defeated them by the broad margin of four goals to one. When they were challenged by the Third Eleven of Pelham the Blatchfordians simply smiled.

They had beaten the Second Eleven, and now the Third had the cheek to challenge them. But when they heard something of the late doings of Jack Noble's team, they ceased to smile, and finally their captain, Kelly, accepted the challenge.

They were to visit Pelham on Saturday afternoon, with the confident intention of sweeping up the Third Eleven there as they had swept up the Second. Only Jack Noble & Co. were to be on the scene when the sweeping started, and they meant to show Blatchford something about football.

"It's blessed unlucky having to cut the practice to-day," Jack murmured to himself, as he dropped into a walk at last. "Can't be helped, though. I can't go back on Bertie if he's in trouble—though he never treated me very well. I wonder what the row is?"

Jack halted at last. He had reached a footpath that branched off from the lane, and ran through a thick wood in the direction of Blatchford town. This was the spot his cousin had selected for their meeting, explaining that he was coming down by train, and would only have a certain time to stay, which made it impossible for him to come up to the school.

Jack glanced at his watch. It was not yet one o'clock, and the meeting was not till a quarter past. In his haste to escape from the detaining hands of his chums Jack had arrived at the rendezvous nearly twenty minutes early. He sat down in the footpath on a projecting root of a great tree, and pulled a "Boys' Realm" out of his pocket to read to while away the time.

A footstep on the path startled him five minutes later. He looked up quickly, hoping to see his cousin, but it was Clifford, of the Shell at Pelham, who was coming towards him.

Jack could not help grinning at the sight of him. Clifford was looking unusually ruffled for so well-dressed a youth, and he was wearing a cap instead of the silk hat he almost invariably sported when he went outside the walls of Pelham School. Jack could guess what had happened to the silk hat.

Clifford caught sight of him at the same moment, and stopped.

"So you're here," he said.

Jack Noble nodded.

"What are you hanging about for?" Clifford demanded.

"Mind your own business!"

The reply was short and sharp.

Clifford looked grimly at him, and then went on his way. He disappeared down the footpath.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and leaning against the tree, resumed his "Boys' Realm." He looked up several times—once when he heard a rustle in the wood behind him, and, finally, when a youthful figure came along the path.

"Herbert!"

And Jack Noble stepped out into the footpath to meet his cousin.

"Hallo, Jack!"

It was strange to see the two of them together. They were almost exactly the same age, the same size, the same build. Their features were alike, line for line. Their eyes were the same colour, Herbert's perhaps a shade the lighter of the two. The only difference was that Herbert's chin was a little weaker, betraying the fact that he did not possess the strong, resolute nature of his cousin.

Jack held out his hand, and his cousin took it in a perfunctory manner.

It was only in looks that the cousins resembled one another. The frank heartiness and cordiality of Jack's nature were very much wanting in Herbert Noble.

"Well, Bertie?"

"You got my letter?" said Herbert, his eyes meeting Jack's in a shifty way.

"Yes; here it is."

"I suppose it didn't put you out, coming here—eh?"

"Well, yes; I've had to cut the footer practice."

"Oh, the footer!" said Herbert carelessly. "I remember you were always crazy about that. Are you keeping it up at Pelham?"

Jack laughed good-naturedly.

"Yes, rather! I'm captain of the Third Eleven."

"Oh!" said the other indifferently. "Well, I

didn't come here to talk footer. I want you to help me, Jack, if you will?"

"Anything I can do—"

"It's on account of the likeness between us, you know," said Herbert. "You remember the rows that used to cause? You remember the time I set fire to the hay in old Dalton's field, and—"

"And let me take a licking for it," said Jack, a trifle sternly. "Yes, I remember."

Herbert laughed heartily.

"You weren't sharp, Jack, you see."

"Well, never mind that. What do you want me to do?"

"Well, listen. I haven't long before my train goes," said Herbert, looking at his watch. "I want you to help me. Of course, you have a half-holiday here to-morrow afternoon, the same as I do at St. Freda's?"

"Of course!"

"I'm going on a lark with some fellows," said Herbert. "We're getting a drag, you know, to go to the races. It will be awfully ripping fun!"

Jack started.

"St. Freda's fellows!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no; fellows outside the school—friends of mine," said Herbert testily. "If a St. Freda's fellow were known to go to the races he would be expelled."

"And serve him right!"

"I remember you were always a bit of a Pharisee," grinned Herbert. "But never mind. I'm going in the drag. There isn't much chance of my being seen, but the result would be so serious if anything came out, that—that—well, I don't care to go unless I can establish an alibi in case of accidents."

"I don't quite understand," said Jack, puzzled.

"I want you to help me. You will be free to-morrow afternoon, and you can come over to St. Freda's. I'll give you a St. Freda's cap, and you can take my place there while I'm gone to the races. I shan't be away more than four hours, and you can have the run of the place and play footer to your heart's content—see? Then, if anybody should ever say that I was seen in the drag—you never know—it will be all right, because dozens of fellows will be ready to swear that I was at the school all the afternoon."

Jack stared at his cousin in blank astonishment. He had always known that Herbert was a shifty, unreliable fellow, who never followed a straight path if he could find a crooked one. But he had never expected anything like this.

There were hot words on Jack's lips, and it was as much as he could do to restrain himself from uttering them.

Herbert Noble looked at him anxiously.

"Well, what do you say, Jack?" he asked. "You'll do me this favour?"

"I can't."

"You needn't be afraid of being bored at St. Freda's. They'll take you for me, of course, and you can play footer."

"It isn't that. In the first place, we have an important match on for to-morrow afternoon, and I couldn't possibly get away."

"I should think you could cut a rotten football match to oblige a cousin."

"I couldn't. I'm skipper of the Third, and they rely on me. But apart from that, I couldn't have a hand in such a business."

Herbert sneered.

"Oh, I forgot you were a preacher!"

"I'm not a preacher!" said Jack hotly. "I hope there's nothing of the prig about me. But I won't have a hand in any dirty game like that. I jolly well won't back up any fellow in going to the races, for one thing. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Thank you! I didn't come here for a sermon!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Jack angrily. "You call anything decent a sermon. You're asking me to stand up and tell lies for a whole afternoon, while you go and do a blackguardly thing you deserve to be sacked for. Blessed if I can understand your cheek! Anyway, I couldn't come, as we're playing Blatchford, and I'm wanted in the team."

"Say you won't come."

"Well, I won't come, then, if you prefer it that way."

Herbert gritted his teeth.

"So that's how you answer a chap who asks a favour of you, you—you cad!" he said. "I suppose the long and the short of it is that you're afraid. I shall have to give up the races—"

"And a jolly good thing, too!"

"But I shan't forget you, my dear cousin. I'll remember this, and I'll remember what you've done me out of. Wait till I get a chance to get my own back, that's all!" said Herbert, his voice trembling with rage. "I'll make you sorry then!"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"If that's all you've got to say I may as well clear," he remarked.

Herbert clenched his fist. But he held his hand back. Certain recollections of earlier boyish days made him aware that it was not good business to strike Jack Noble.

"I'm sorry," said Jack quietly. "You had no right to ask me to do such a thing, and I'm sorry to see that you've fallen so low. Good-bye!"

And with his head very erect, Jack Noble strode away. His cousin gazed after him with a black brow and glittering eyes. The young footballer's athletic figure disappeared, and a burst of savage words broke from Herbert's lips.

"Oh, I'll make him sorry for it! I don't know how yet, but I'll make him squirm!"

He turned away, and was about to stride from the spot, when a voice came through the thicket close by him.

"Hold on a minute!"

Herbert started violently, and swung round again as a boy in a Pelham cap stepped out of the bushes.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Clifford's Scheme.

"WHO are you?"

Herbert Noble changed colour. He saw at a glance that the stranger must have overheard his talk with Jack, and in that talk he had given himself away completely enough to earn him the "sack" from St. Freda's, if his little schemes should get to the ears of the authorities there.

The new-comer looked at him with a strange expression between a grin and a sneer.

"My name's Clifford," he said.

"Oh!"

"I belong to Pelham."

"Well?"

"I heard what you said just now to Jack Noble."

FOOTBALL LIBRARY.—No. 12.

Herbert gritted his teeth.

"You—you cad! You were listening!"

Clifford nodded coolly.

"I saw Jack Noble hanging about here, and smelt a rat," he said. "I doubled back through the thickets to see what the little game was. I wondered—but I didn't expect exactly this."

Herbert breathed hard.

"And now you know are you going to tell tales?" he demanded. "I warn you that you won't find it easy to make anybody at St. Freda's listen to you."

"I'm not going to tell tales."

"Good! Then what have you stopped me for?"

"I want to speak to you," said Clifford quietly.

"Look here, you were saying something about getting level with your cousin. Do you mean it?"

Herbert shot him a quick, sudden glance of comprehension.

"Oh, you don't like him, then?"

"I detest him!"

"Good!" said Herbert, his manner becoming more friendly. "So do I. I never liked him—he was always preaching like this. Now he has refused to do me a little favour, and completely mucked up an excursion I had set my mind upon. I don't dare to go to the races unless he helps me with an alibi; and he won't."

"He's playing in an important match to-morrow—important for the Third Form at Pelham," said the Shell fellow, with a sneer.

"I hope he will get licked, then!" said Herbert venomously.

"You do?" said Clifford quickly.

"Yes, of course!"

"You can get them licked if you like," said Clifford, coming a step nearer to the other, and lowering his voice cautiously.

The St. Freda's fellow stared at him.

"How? I don't understand."

"That is if you're game."

Herbert grinned.

"I'm game to spoil his afternoon as he's spoiled mine; but how, I don't see."

"Do you play footer?"

"Sometimes—not very much."

"Good! You are Jack Noble's double—"

"That's why I came here to see him to-day," growled Herbert. "It makes it easy for him to help me if he liked."

"He won't come to St. Freda's and pass for you," said Clifford, in the same low, cautious voice, "but there's nothing to warn you coming to Pelham and passing for him."

"My hat!"

"You catch on? Suppose you turned up on the football ground instead of Jack Noble—in his clothes, you know, his colours. Who'd know the difference?"

"Jack would, of course."

"Jack wouldn't be there."

"Why not?"

"Because I should see to that," said Clifford coolly. "I can manage to keep him off the ground; I know that. The question is, would you have the nerve to come in his place, play the Blatchford team, and generally muck up the match?"

Herbert burst into a gleeful chuckle.

"I'd just enjoy it!"

"Then it's done!"

"But how can you keep my cousin off the ground?"

"I've got a dodge for shutting him up in the old tower of Pelham," said Clifford. "It's as easy as winking, and he'd never know who did it. That's simple enough. You see, the Third Eleven at Pelham have been swaggering a lot about their footer lately, and cheeking the Fourth and the Shell. I've stood about as much of their cheek as I mean to."

"Why don't you lick 'em at footer?"

Clifford coughed.

"Well, I want to show Noble up, you know—make the Third think he isn't such a big gun at footer as he makes out, and as they believe him. You see? When he comes on the scene, and says he was in the tower all the time, and another chap played in his place, he'll be laughed at. Nobody would believe it. Are you game?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Jolly good!" said Clifford, with great satisfaction. "It will be about the roughest knock you could give Noble, to take him down in the eyes of the Third Eleven."

Herbert chuckled.

"I'll play an unholy game of footer," he grinned.

"Offside and shoving the other fellow off the ball, foul charges, penalties to the other side—ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I rather think my beloved cousin will wish he had come to St. Freda's for the afternoon, after all," grinned Herbert.

"What—ho!" said Clifford. "Let's have a talk over the details, then, and settle—"

Herbert Noble looked at his watch.

"I shall have to buzz off to get the train back to St. Freda's," he said. "I shall be late if I miss it. You can walk down to the station with me, if you like, and we'll have a jaw as we go."

"Right you are," said Clifford. And the junior of St. Freda's and the captain of the Pelham Shell walked away together through the wood on the best of terms.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Trapped!

"**W**HERE'S Noble?" Bob Russell and several other fellows asked that question in the quadrangle at Pelham. Bob was in the highest possible spirits. Bob was always optimistic, and he never doubted what the result of a match would be. When his team was licked it always came to him as a great surprise, but it did not happen often. Bob had just been sketching the probable result of the Blatchford match in a loud voice for the benefit of several Shell fellows who were standing near, when it occurred to him that Jack Noble had not been seen for some time.

"Where's Jack?"

"I thought he came down to the ground with us," said Macalpine.

"So did I," said Lawson minor, looking round. "Anybody seen our cat—I mean, anybody seen Noble?"

"Faith, and I saw him!" said Murphy. Murphy was out of the team this time, but he was a good sportsman, and was taking his exclusion with perfect good humour, only thinking of speeding up a little and getting in again at the first opportunity. "He was talkin' to a gossoon from the village a few minutes ago."

"A kid from the village?"

"Yes. He gave him a note."

"Oh blow!" said Bob. "This isn't a time to be thinking of notes—even banknotes. The Blatchford crowd will be here in a quarter of an hour. Some of you go and call Noble. I dare say he's in the study, then."

"I'll go," said Mac; and he went.

But Jack Noble was not in the study, and Mac looked along the passages and into the form-rooms for him in vain. Jack Noble, as a matter of fact, was at some distance from them at that moment, and in a place where they were far from likely to look for him.

Jack had been coming down to the ground when a note was placed in his hand by a ragged urchin from the village, who immediately vanished. Jack opened the letter in some surprise. Who could be sending him a message from the village was a puzzle to him.

The letter caused him still more surprise. It was a hasty scrawl in pencil on rough paper, and it ran as follows:

"Dear Jack,—I must speak to you for a few minutes. It's important—more important than I can write down. I'm waiting for you in the old tower. Come at once. I won't detain you more than a minute. I must have your advice. I've got into an awful fix.

HERBERT."

Jack's brow clouded over. He had not expected to hear from his cousin again after that interview yesterday, yet how could he refuse an appeal like this?

The old tower, a relic of the ancient buildings which had once occupied the site of Pelham School, was on the other side of the college, and only a few minutes' quick walking distant.

Jack had plenty of time to spare for a walk there and back, and still he would have a quarter of an hour left before the arrival of Blatchford.

"The ass," muttered Jack, crushing the note in his hand—"the ass! What trouble has he got into now? And what a cheek to ask me to fish him out of it! I won't have a hand in any underhand game, that's certain!"

And with a moody brow he walked away towards

the old tower, instead of following his chums down to the Junior football ground.

The mass of school buildings hid him from sight in a few moments. He walked on moodily, his eyes on the ground. He did not like Herbert, and they had never agreed, but blood was thicker than water. He would help his cousin all he could, yet he could not help feeling that most likely Herbert was about to make some demand which honour would not allow him to concede.

He strode on quickly towards the tower—a massive ruin clad in thick ivy. The top of the tower had fallen in ruins, but the lower part, built of great masses of stone, was almost intact, standing as it had stood, defying the storms of centuries.

Jack entered at the great portal, from which all trace of the old oaken door was gone, save a fragment of rusty hinge in the wall. The place was silent and deserted.

"Herbert!"

The silent old tower echoed strangely to Jack's ringing voice. But no voice replied—nothing but the echo of his own.

Jack ascended the spiral stair in the centre of the tower. At the foot of the stair was an oaken door, clamped with iron, which was never shut. Had it been shut anybody on the staircase would have been a helpless prisoner, for there were no windows in the tower, excepting narrow loopholes, and the top, which was open to the weather, was not reached by the stairs, which had fallen in ruins half-way up.

Jack was considerably puzzled. He thought that Herbert must have occupied the time in exploring the old tower while waiting for him, yet it was curious that he did not answer his call. However, it would take only a few moments to ascend the steps.

Crash!

Noble started violently. As he passed the first wind of the spiral stone steps, the crash below rang through the tower, and it was followed by the shrieking of rusty bolts.

"My hat!" ejaculated the junior.

He ran quickly down the stairs. The oaken door at the bottom was closed. He hurled himself against it, but the iron bolts on the outside held it fast.

It was a trick!

But even then the purpose for which it had been played did not dawn upon Jack's mind. He thumped sharply on the door.

"Herbert! Herbert!"

The echoes of the old tower rang back his voice. But there came no reply from without.

"Herbert!"

No answer. Was Herbert gone? What did this trick mean? Was it in revenge for Jack's refusal to help him yesterday? Good heavens! If he were not released soon he could not play in the Blatchford match!

Jack hammered at the door and shouted. There was no reply. The door did not budge. His hands sore, his throat husky, he desisted at last. His brain was in a whirl. What did it mean? What could it mean?

He ascended the stairs and looked out of one of the narrow loopholes. No one was in sight. In the distance appeared the mass of the Pelham School buildings, too far off, however, for him to hope to make his voice heard there. Would somebody come to the tower? He gave a groan at the thought. All

FOOTBALL LIBRARY.—No. 12.

the fellows would be gathering on the footer field just then; no one was likely to stray that way!

"My hat!" murmured Jack, aghast. "Can Herbert have planned to muck up the Blatchford match for me? It is impossible!"

He looked at the note in his hand again. Then he gave a start. He had not noticed it before—he had not thought of noticing it—but it was not in Herbert Noble's hand. The rough pencil scrawl might have been written by anybody.

Jack's brain whirled.

The note was not—probably not—written by his cousin. It had been brought by a village lad. Jack had rivals in the village—rivals whom defeat had made bitter. Was this a trick of a village fellow to spoil the Blatchford match? Some of them might easily have overheard his talk with Herbert in the wood, and taken this advantage of it.

Jack groaned aloud.

He looked at his watch. Five minutes to three! The kick-off was at three. The Blatchford team must be already on the ground. What were the Third Eleven thinking of his absence? Had anybody noticed him coming here? Evidently not, or he would have been sought ere this!

He had been trapped, who had done it mattered little now. He had to remain there, helpless, chafing, while the Blatchford match was played! He ground his teeth furiously at the thought. He squeezed close to the narrow loophole and shouted. But even while he shouted he knew that it was hopeless.

The minutes crept on. There came no answer to his shouting, and at last, exhausted, he ceased. He looked at his watch again.

Three o'clock!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Cheat.

"I—I—I feel a bit—a bit nervous, you know."

It was Herbert who spoke. The cad of St. Freda's was in a shed a stone's-throw from the Pelham football ground—a shed in a field, used for a cattle shelter. It was used now as a shelter by the plotters against the Third Eleven of Pelham.

Clifford and Herbert Noble had met there. Clifford carried a bag, in which, as his confederate saw when it was opened, was a suit of clothes belonging to Jack Noble, with a Pelham cap belonging to him also.

It did not take Herbert long to array himself in the clothes, his own being fastened up in a bundle and concealed in the roof of the old shed.

In Jack's clothes—a second suit of Jack's, and well known to the Pelham fellows—Herbert was exactly his cousin's counterpart. There had never been anything different in their appearance, except a slight flashiness which Herbert allowed to creep into his attire. In Jack's clothes he was Jack himself.

Clifford gazed at him in wonder. After seeing the cousins together he had had no doubts, but Herbert's appearance surprised him all the same.

"It's amazing!" he declared.

But Herbert was not feeling wholly easy in his mind. But when Clifford drew a small mirror out of the bag, and he looked in it, he grinned.

"My hat! It's Jack!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But where is Jack?" asked Herbert.

Clifford chuckled.

"Fastened up safely enough, till somebody chooses to let him out. He's in the old tower of Pelham—the one I told you of."

"Good! I'd better be getting along, then," said Herbert. "I shall see whether I pass muster before I get to the footer ground."

Clifford nodded.

"I'll wait a bit. We don't want to be seen together," he remarked. "It's well known what terms Jack Noble and I are upon. Good-bye, and good luck!"

Herbert grinned, and walked out of the shed. He walked quickly towards the Pelham playing-fields, and before he was near the footer ground he heard himself hailed.

"Hallo! Noble—Noble!"

Herbert looked round. Macalpine and Bob Russell were dashing towards him at top speed. The moment they reached him they seized him by the arms, and dashed him off at a sprinting pace.

"Here, hold on—"

"What do you mean by wandering off just before a footer match?" demanded Macalpine indignantly. "Shall we bump him, Bob?"

"Not now, Mac; there's no time. After the match."

"Ha, ha! Bring him along!"

Noble allowed them to hurry him along, inwardly chuckling.

The cheat had been put to the test suddenly enough, but it had stood examination. Neither Mac nor Bob had the slightest suspicion that this was not their football captain—Jack Noble, of the Third Eleven.

Clifford had given the impostor as many points as he could, to prevent him from making mistakes, and Herbert knew now that he was with Jack's two best chums.

"I'm not late, Bob," he said; and even his voice was the reproduction of Jack's, and only a little less manly and ringing.

"No, but you might have been," said Bob. "What on earth possessed you to wander off like that?"

"I—I was strolling—"

"You'd better stroll after a match next time, and not before," growled Bob. "Missing the practice yesterday, nearly missing the match to-day. Bah!"

"It's all right—"

"Rats! Come on!"

They arrived on the ground at a good speed. Most of the Pelham fellows had changed into their football rig, and Herbert, Bob, and Mac proceeded to do the same. The Blatchford fellows were due on the ground.

All, or nearly all, the Lower Form fellows of Pelham were on the ground. Many of the Fourth Form and the Shell had turned up to see the Third Eleven licked. Most of them, in spite of Form rivalry, would have been glad to see Noble's team beat the visitors. But if they did not win, the middle school meant to jeer at them most mercilessly for their cheek in challenging such a strong side.

The young footballers soon changed. A roar of voices outside warned them that the Blatchford team had arrived.

"Buck up, Jack!"

"Right-ho!"

Herbert had another horribly uncomfortable moment as they went out. He knew that the Blatchford captain was named Kelly, but he had never seen him. However, the manner of the visiting

captain enlightened him. He came up to Noble with a broad grin, and shook hands with him.

"Well, we've come to give you that licking," he remarked.

Herbert laughed.

"Or to take one," he remarked. "We are going to show people this afternoon what the Third Eleven can really do. What would you say to six goals to nil?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Bob Russell, who did not understand his chum at all that afternoon. Jack was odd in many ways, the junior thought. "You'll make us look asses if we're beaten."

"Mind your own business!"

Bob jumped.

"What! Jack!"

"Don't bother your skipper. Stick to your business and play up, or I'll jolly soon have you out of the team!" said Herbert.

Bob Russell could only stare. Then he turned quietly on his heel, and said never another word. If Jack chose to speak to him like that, and in public, too, it would make no difference to Bob in the matter of backing him up on the footer field, but it would put an end to chumming with him.

"I don't quite understand Jack this afternoon," Macalpine whispered.

Russell nodded shortly, without speaking.

The Blatchford fellows were all grinning. They had thought it like the cheek of the Pelham Third Eleven to challenge them. The Pelham skipper's bragging manner added to their conviction that the match would be a walk-over for them.

The school side, in the red jerseys and white knickers of Pelham, went into the field, looking a very fine and fit team. The Blatchford fellows followed them, in blue and white.

Round the ropes were more than a hundred fellows, looking on eagerly.

The referee looked at his watch. There was a buzz from the Third Form.

"Play up, Third!"

Clifford joined a group of Shell fellows at the ropes. There was a curious lurking smile on his face.

"Hallo!" said Marker. "I wondered where you were. Thought you were going to miss the match, after all."

Clifford laughed.

"I'm not likely to miss watching the Third Eleven make asses of themselves," he remarked.

"Faith, and we've made asses of your team, anyway," said Murphy, who caught the words.

Clifford loftily took no notice of the Third-Former.

"Who's won the toss?" he asked.

"Blatchford. They're going to kick off."

"Go it, Jack!" sang out a score of voices.

The skipper of the Pelham Third Eleven kicked off.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Traitor.

EAGERLY the Third-Formers of Pelham watched the field. Bigger and older as the Blatchford crowd certainly were, yet the Third Eleven looked at the top of their form, and Noble and Mac and Bob were known to be towers of strength to their side. Almost all Pelham hoped for victory. And the kick-off was followed

by a Pelham rush that gave promise of good things to come.

"Good old Jacky!" shouted the Third-Formers. "Jacky's up to snuff! Give them beans! Go for their scalps! Bravo!"

Herbert was playing up for the start in fine style. He was an indifferent footballer, but he could play when he chose. He bore the ball before him right into the enemy's territory, getting through the Blatchford forwards and halves.

Clifford wrinkled his brows. For a moment it seemed to him that his plot, his cunning scheme, was all a dream and a vision, and that it was really Jack Noble playing there, beating the opposing halves and backs in his usual masterly manner.

But he remembered that Herbert would undoubtedly begin by the best possible play in order to avoid any possible suspicion.

And that burst of Herbert's did not last long.

He kicked for goal, but not such a kick as was expected of Jack Noble. The goalie grinned as he lifted it out easily, and a back cleared, sending the leather right out to midfield.

That gave the Blatchford forwards a chance. They were soon away with the ball, and then the school defence was put to the test.

Bob Russell, at centre-half, and Macalpine, at left-back, were not easy to pass, and, indeed, some League players would not have found them easy to pass. But Kelly, of Blatchford, beat Bob, and was robbed by Mac, who sent the ball out to the forwards, and gave them a chance again.

In the sharp play that followed Noble was edged off the ball several times when his chance seemed good, and there was a murmur of wonder among the spectators.

"Faith, and pawat's the matther with him intirely," murmured Murphy. "He's right off his form, the gossoon!"

Clifford laughed ill-naturedly.

"I always said he was cracked up too much," he said.

"And now he's crocked up, too," grinned Marker.

"Oh, look there!" groaned a dozen juniors.

Herbert had captured the ball again, and was making for goal. Kelly was after him, and, passing him with a spurt of speed, calmly took the ball away from his toes, and left Noble running with nothing to kick.

Kelly forged on, whirled round, and passed out to his left, and the Blatchford wingers brought the ball hustling down to the Pelham goal.

Evans, in goal, was on the alert. All his alertness was wanted now. Blatchford were concentrating in a determined attack, and the weakness of the Pelham skipper had opened the way for them.

The shots rained in. Twice, thrice Evans saved, and the Pelham fellows cheered him. But then his foot slipped, and the leather sailed in over his head. "Goal!"

It was a general gasp from the crowd.

Kelly grinned as he walked back to the centre of the field with his merry men. It was not the goal that made him grin, but the easy way in which it had been got, for the Blatchford team could truly say that they had hardly exerted themselves yet.

"Faith," murmured Murphy, "and that's the skipper who put me out for not being up to the mark! Howly mother av Moses!"

Clifford chuckled.

"What did I tell you, Marky?"

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"My hat!" said Marker. "Why did we ever let that team beat us? We'll challenge them again next week."

"Hum! I don't know about that."

Pelham kicked off again. Some of the team were looking curiously towards their leader. He had not played up as they had expected. But that was not all. The game had not lasted ten minutes, and he was getting blown.

There was no doubt about it. Noble, who had always lasted out the most gruelling game, and finished in fine form, was getting groggy.

The fellows couldn't understand it. But Mac thought he knew now why Noble had cut practice yesterday. It was to avoid giving away his rotten form to the team. Mac was unjust in that, as we know, but the thought was a natural one. Mac's face was as glum as Bob Russell's, except when he remembered that it was a footballer's business to look cheerful, however matters were going, and then he cheered up a little. But the game was so different to what they had hoped and expected it would be.

Soon after the kick-off the Blatchford fellows were all over the school territory. But the Pelham defence was sound, and the ball went ahead again, and Kelly slipped and fell at a critical moment, and left the leather at Noble's mercy.

There was a roar.

"Buck up, Jack!"

"On the ball!"

Noble was away in the twinkling of an eye, in something like the old style. The Blatchford defence fell back and the halves rushed in. Noble tricked one of them, and got past. And then the other charged. Herbert was bowled right over by the charge, and went sprawling helplessly, and the next moment the Blatchford men were rushing the leather up to the home goal.

There was a general murmur of disappointment.

"What's the matter with Jack?"

"He's right off colour!"

"Fancy his going over like that!"

"Oh, he can't play for toffee!"

"The game's up!"

It looked like it, for the Pelham skipper was growing worse instead of better. Ten minutes later Valence brought the ball up, and passed in to Lawson minor as he was tackled. Lawson minor was rolled over by a charge, but not before he had passed to Noble, who ran on with the ball and kicked.

Right in at goal soared the leather, bumping into the net. But instead of the cheer that was expected possibly by Herbert, there rose a howl.

"Offside!"

"Ass!"

"Duffer!"

"Yah! Offside!"

Herbert had been palpably and flagrantly offside; there wasn't the slightest doubt about that. He didn't appear to have any acquaintance with the offside rule at all, to judge by his play.

The goal, of course, was disallowed, and Noble's own men were grinning at him, with the exceptions of Mac and Bob. They had exchanged a significant glance. There was something wrong with their captain that afternoon, and their resentment gave place to anxiety.

But surprises and shocks for the Pelham crowd were not over yet. Herbert was growing fagged, for he was far from being in a state of fitness for a

gruelling game of football, and his temper was not of the best.

Kelly charged him off the ball again—a perfectly fair charge, and one that would never have bowled over the real Jack Noble.

Then Kelly was off with the leather, and Herbert raced after him, and charged him from behind, and sent him spinning. Kelly went to the ground with a crash that dazed him, and the referee's whistle rang shrilly.

"Foul!" yelled the Blatchfordians.

It certainly was a foul, if ever there was one. Kelly was looking dazed, almost stupefied, and his followers looked decidedly angry. But what made the Pelham fellows groan was the fact that the foul had occurred right in the dreaded penalty area.

"Foul!"

"Penalty!"

The referee awarded the penalty kick. The players stood round with grim faces while it was taken. Kelly collected himself with an effort to take the kick. He meant to avenge that foul in the best possible way—by taking the goal to which it had entitled him, if he could get it.

There was a hush as he took the kick.

Evans, in goal, was all eyes and hands. But the Blatchford skipper was a little too many for him. The leather whizzed in, on the side of the goal where Evans didn't expect it. He was tricked and beaten.

"Goal!"

The ball was in the net.

"My hat!" said Clifford. "Two up, and the half only thirty minutes old! Rather a fall for the giddy Third Eleven!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

The Third-Formers were silent. Lecky, of the Sixth, had walked away to join his Form-fellows on the Seniors' ground. He was puzzled, and he no longer thought that the Third Eleven had a chance. Nobody else thought so, either; even the members of the Third Eleven had given up hope.

At the top of their form, with Noble leading them in the old style, they might have beaten Blatchford—they felt that they could have beaten them. But now—Even Bob Russell had ceased to expect victory, and was only concerned to reduce as much as possible the margin of goals Blatchford would win by.

In that mood Pelham were not likely to play a great game. By the time the whistle sounded for the interval Blatchford had a total of four goals to nil.

"My only chapeau!" said Bob Russell, as they came off the ground. "No wonder they're cackling! I never expected the Third Form to start in business as funny merchants."

"Are you blaming me?" demanded Herbert, as he sucked a lemon.

"No good blaming anybody."

"Well, I——"

Herbert broke off suddenly.

There was a sudden roar outside the tent—the roar of a hundred voices in wild amazement.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Mouse and the Lion Over Again!

JACK NOBLE moved to and fro in the old tower like a lion in a cage. His face was white with rage and anxiety, his eyes burned. He knew that the match would commence at the time fixed for the kick-off, whether he was there



The collision sent Clifford staggering, and he went down on the floor with a bump. In a second more the three juniors were sprawling over him.

or not. The Blatchford fellows could not be kept waiting; besides, the early dark forbade leaving the match till later. The side would play a substitute for him. What would the result be? Jack had, of course, not the faintest suspicion that Herbert was on the ground. The barest idea of the plot of impersonation never even crossed his mind.

It might be Herbert, it might be some village practical joker who had imprisoned him in the old tower. That mattered little. In any case he was missing the match. And what were the side doing without him?

It was not conceit that made Jack feel that without him the side would go to rack and ruin under the Blatchford attack. The Third Eleven was the work of his own hands. He had formed it, trained it, and with him it had conquered many times. But without him? There was no forward in the Pelham Third to take his place. It meant a licking for the Third, but how complete and disgraceful a licking it was proving, Jack did not guess.

He had shouted from the little loopholes till he was hoarse, but his voice had not been heard. He had hammered on the door till his hands were aching—in vain. Now he was tramping to and fro, silent, furious.

At intervals he looked out of the slits in the thick stone walls in the faint hope of seeing someone near the old tower. He knew the hope had little to found itself upon. On that afternoon, of all afternoons, no one was likely to come near his prison.

Yet every few minutes he stopped in his restless, savage pacing, and looked out. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

Round the angle of the distant school buildings came a well-known figure—a plump figure with a fat face and red cheeks, and a parcel in its hand.

Jack gave a jump.

"Tubby!"

He could have danced in his delight. It was Tubby Trimble, the glutton of the Third. The parcel in his hand told why he was coming to that deserted spot. Probably Tubby was coming to a quiet corner to enjoy a feed, untroubled by greedy fags who would want a share of his treasures.

"My only hat!" Jack's voice trembled with eager hope. "He's—he's coming straight in this direction."

Straight for the old tower came Tubby Trimble. He had evidently selected that very place for the scene of his feed—for the same reason that Clifford had selected it as Jack's prison—for its loneliness that afternoon.

Jack did not call out. Tubby was not very bright, and suspecting nobody to be in the tower, he might look in another direction for the voice and clear off.

The fat junior arrived at the tower, and disappeared from Jack's sight. Jack ran down to the door at the foot of the stairs. On the other side of it he could hear Tubby Trimble moving about.

"Tubby!"

"Who—who's calling me?"

Jack tapped on the door.

"It's I—Jack Noble. I'm shut up here."

"My Aunt Maria!"

"Open the door, will you, Tubby? There's a good chap!"

There was a gasp of astonishment from the outer chamber.

"How did you get there, Noble?"

"I was shut in here for a joke."

"But—but how can you be there, and on the footer field, too?" demanded Trimble, in amazement.

"I'm here, you ass!"

"You're on the footer field, too?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I didn't see you come off," said Tubby, coming towards the door. "I'll swear you were on the field when I came by."

"I've been shut up here for nearly an hour!" roared Jack. "Why don't you undo the door?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know. Do you mean to say you haven't been playing in the Blatchford match, and playing jolly rottenly, too?"

"Are you mad, Tubby?"

"No; but I jolly well think you are!" said Trimble, fumbling with the bolts. "I—I suppose you're not dangerous."

"Unfasten the door!"

"I'm doing it as fast as I can."

The bolts were obstinate. Tubby Trimble strained over them, hurting his fingers. Jack chafed with wild impatience on the inner side of the door. Rescue had come unexpectedly, and now every second seemed an hour.

He rapped on the door.

"Buck up, Tubby! I say, who did they play instead of me?"

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"You young ass! I suppose they played a substitute, as I wasn't there!" exclaimed Jack. "As I was kept away, Kelly ought to agree to my playing till the finish instead of the substitute. He will, when I explain, I know."

"Oh, you're mad!"

"How has the match gone so far, Tubby?"

"Four to nil against Pelham."

"Oh!"

"You ought to know, as you threw them away," said Tubby, as he dragged open the door at last.

"Why—why—what—what have you done with your football clothes?"

A sudden and terrible thought flashed into Jack's mind. Tubby's words bore only one interpretation. He grasped the fat junior by the shoulder so sharply that Trimble uttered an exclamation of pain.

"Tubby, has anybody like me—anybody supposed to be me—played in the match?"

"Why, of course!" said Tubby dazedly. "You played—"



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"I didn't, you ass! I've been shut up here! Somebody like me—"

"My Aunt Maria!" said Tubby, in amazement. "He must be your twin, then!"

"Oh, my scoundrel of a cousin!" panted Jack Noble. "This is his revenge! He is throwing away the game!"

He tore off, leaving Tubby Trimble rooted to the ground with astonishment. It was a full minute before the fat junior could sit down comfortably and begin eating his tarts. Jack was tearing off like a madman for the football field.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Shown Up!

HERBERT looked out as the roar grew and grew, wondering what it was. The truth did not occur to him. A breathless figure had dashed up, and stopped, panting.

"Jack Noble!"

The name was shouted out in amazement, and it smote upon Herbert's ears as he looked out.

"Jack!"

Yes, there he was; and the impostor turned deadly pale. Jack—at liberty!

Clifford, of the Shell, turned white. He did not move—a movement to go might bring suspicion on him. He stood quite still, his heart beating like a hammer. Fortunately for him, his companions were staring too hard at Jack Noble to have any eyes for him.

"Noble!" muttered Marker. "Then who—"

Bob Russell gave a yell.

"Jack!"

"Yes, here I am."

"But—but—what—who—how—"

"Where is that scoundrel?"

"What—who?"

"I've got him," said Macalpine quietly.

Herbert had made a movement to go, thinking only of saving his miserable carcase from Jack's vengeance, but the Scottish lad's grasp had closed upon him. Herbert struggled furiously.

"Let me go!" he panted.

"Oh, come this way," grinned Mac; and he dragged the miserable wretch towards the panting captain of the Pelham Third Eleven.

The crowd gathered thickly round in blank amazement. Jack's cousin had never visited him at the school, and Herbert was a stranger to all save Clifford, of the Shell.

"My word!" said Kelly, of Blatchford. "What does this mean?"

Jack pointed to the trembling rascal.

"That hound has personated me," he cried.

"I've been shut up in the old tower. I've only just got out. That rotter has played in my place to spoil the match."

There was a loud murmur.

"But who is he?" cried Bob Russell.

Jack's head sank a little.

"My cousin!"

"Oh!"

"It—it was only a joke—a practical joke!" panted Herbert, looking wildly from one vengeful face to another. "I—I—"

Mac had released him, and he made a movement to fly. Jack stepped up to him.

"Put up your fists!"

"I—I—"

"Do you hear?" said Jack Noble fiercely. "Put them up, or—"

His eyes were blazing, his fists clenched. Herbert instinctively made a motion of defence.

"The hound!" muttered Bob. "I—I thought of — Go for him, Jack! Knock him into the middle of next week!"

Jack's face was grim and hard.

"I mean to!"

And his fists played like lightning.

Herbert could box, but he had no chance against his incensed cousin. Jack's fists dashed again and again in his face, and he went to the ground with a crash.

"Get up!"

"Hang you!" muttered Herbert. "I'm done!"

Jack smiled scornfully.

"That's for your joke, you cur!" he exclaimed.

The referee tapped him on the shoulder. The referee was Wilson, of the Pelham Sixth. He was looking as amazed as the rest.

"Noble, it's time for the second half. What's going to be done? That worm can't play again, that's certain."

"Not much!" said Bob Russell.

Herbert staggered to his feet. His face was white—white as chalk, save where the black bruises were beginning to darken it. Not a hand was raised to stop him as he left the scene.

And Clifford, of the Shell, breathed a deep sigh of relief to see him go. Nothing had been said to betray him, and Clifford felt safe again. His plot had gone wrong, but the exposure he had at first dreaded had not visited him, as he deserved.

Jack Noble looked at Kelly.

"Are you willing for me to play in the second half?" he asked. "That rotter has nearly thrown our game away!"

Kelly wrinkled his brows in thought.

"You're entitled to call the match off, I suppose," he said. "I've never heard of such a happening before."

"I don't want to do that; it wouldn't be fair to you. If you like to allow me to take my place for the second half, that's all I ask."

"Of course, I'm perfectly agreeable."

The referee nodded.

"That's the fair thing," he said. "Get into your football things, Noble; there has been too much delay already."

"Right-ho!"

Jack was soon arrayed, and he led his men into the field. A tremendous cheer greeted him, in which the Fourth and the Shell joined. All on the ground knew now the trick that had been played, and were rejoiced to see the real Jack Noble at the head of his men. Yet, as they saw him, they rubbed their eyes and looked again. There was no difference in appearance, except that the Pelham Third Eleven captain was now evidently in the pink of condition.

The teams lined up, and Kelly gave Noble a grin and a nod.

"Go in and win, if you can," he said. "I'm sorry you were done like this, though I don't suppose it will make any difference to the result."

Jack laughed.

"We'll see," he remarked.

And Blatchford kicked off for the second half.

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Winning Goal!

"GO it, Noble!"

"Buck up, Jackie!"

"On the ball!"

Such were the shouts from the Pelham crowd that followed the kick-off for the second half of that memorable match. Pelham's hopes had risen again. With Jack Noble, at the top of his form, leading the Third Eleven, it might be possible yet to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

He was as keen as mustard, at the top of his form, and ready for anything, as the merry men from Blatchford soon discovered.

Jack's leadership put new life into the Third Eleven. The players who had regarded defeat as a foregone conclusion now bucked up, with a new hope of victory—a hope and a determination that were worth goals to them.

"On the ball, Pelham!"

"Hurrah!"

For ten minutes there was sharp work in mid-field, neither side gaining an advantage. Then the press went surging towards the visitors' goal.

Suddenly from the crowd of players the leather came out like a cork from a ginger-beer bottle, and it took the goalkeeper quite by surprise.

He clutched at it a second too late, and it reposed in the net. There was a tremendous roar from the Pelhamites.

"Goal!"

The goal had come from Jack Noble. But that was only a beginning. Barely five minutes had elapsed when Jack, with a brilliant run up the field, beat the Blatchford defence almost unaided, and sent the leather whizzing in.

Kelly looked serious.

"My hat!" he muttered to his men as they lined up again. "This chap isn't much like the other! You want to keep him marked."

And they marked Jack well, and for some time his Bloomer-like performances were stopped. But he soon showed that he was good for other work beside kicking goals. His passing was a surprise to Blatchford, too. The Pelham forwards had worked the ball as far as the penalty mark, and Jack, completely deceiving the defence, sent it out to his left wing, and Drake took it on, and passed out to MacIlvaine, who sent it in with a long shot.

Three in twenty minutes! No wonder the Pelham crowd roared! Jack's arrival had put quite a new face upon matters.

Clifford watched with a moody brow.

Blatchford were fighting desperately now, but they never knew where to have the Third Eleven captain.

Kelly, after a long struggle, scored a goal, and Blatchford were five up—five to three!

But it was only a transient gleam of success. Two goals to Pelham followed in quick succession—one from a corner-kick which gave Bob Russell a chance to score, a chance he made the most of, and the other brought off by Jack Noble by a sudden shot that found the goalie very much wanting.

Five to five!

And when the score was level a tremendous cheer burst from all Pelham.

Time was getting near now—ten minutes more to play. The game had been hard and fast, and both sides showed signs of the gruelling they had received.

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But Jack, naturally enough, as he had played only in the second half, was as fresh as paint.

Five minutes. The referee glanced at his watch. The fellows crowded round the field hushed their breath. Was that obstinately contested match to end in a draw, after all?

To Pelham, after the beginning of the match and the way it had gone, a draw would be as honourable as a victory. But, after all, a draw is a draw, and they wanted to win.

There was a yell from the Pelham fellows.

"Go it, Noble! One goal more!"

Jack's eyes were flashing. One more goal he meant to get if he could, and at all events he was determined that Blatchford should not have another. Whatever happened, the Pelham Third Eleven would not be beaten.

Again and again the visitors strove to pierce the Pelham defence—in vain. Again and again they were defeated. And now, at last, the Pelham forwards were breaking away. A chance at last! They went through their gasping opponents like a knife through cheese. But the halves and the backs defended desperately. Back goes the leather—no! it comes on again. A lithe figure dribbles it fairly round the feet of the backs, and a roar goes up to the sky.

"Well dribbled, Noble! Kick, you beggar—kick!"

For if Jack does not kick that instant he won't have a chance. But he does kick—a kick in the nick of time that beats the goalie hands down, and the buzzing ball is in the net.

"Goal!"

"Goal! Hurrah!"

Six to five! There are still several minutes to play, but nothing can be done by either side, and the referee's whistle goes, and the Blatchford match is lost and won. Pelham Third Eleven have beaten their redoubtable opponents by six goals to five, after a record game—or, rather, a record second half!

And Jack Noble has kicked the winning goal!

Clifford strode from the field with a sullen brow as the wild cheers rang in his ears. He had failed—worse than failed.

Afterwards, when Jack told his chums more fully the story of the trap he had fallen into, Macalpine said quietly:

"It wasn't only your cousin, then; he must have had help here. There's a Pelham chap at the bottom of it."

Jack nodded.

"I know it," he said quietly.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing!" echoed Bob and Mac simultaneously.

"Nothing—for the honour of Pelham! All's well that ends well, and we don't want to disgrace the old school!"

And Bob and Mac, after some hesitation, agreed. Jack said no more on the subject, but it was long before there ceased to be talk in the passages and Form-rooms of the Blatchford match and Jack Noble's Double!

THE END.

("The Pelham Prattler," another Laughable, Long, Complete Tale of Jack Noble and Pelham School, will appear Next Thursday.)

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During the first two seasons they meet with wonderful success, and eventually they embrace professionalism, and join the Second Division of the Football League.

The first match of the next season finds the Crusaders heavily defeated. The prejudiced management have stood down Drew and Moran, substituting for them professionals.

Fowkes runs across a poor, half-starved ticket-of-leave man, named King, and gets him a situation as groundsman to the club.

James Jarvis and Stephen Crane, two ruffians who cherish a bitter hatred against Fowkes & Co., bribe a ruffian named Jasper Crane to make an attempt to interrupt the match between Chesterfield and the Blue Crusaders. Jarvis also has a spite against King the groundsman, and plots for the latter to fall under suspicion of being a thief.

Stephen Crane and Crane are present at the above-mentioned match, and wait eagerly for the chance to carry out their plan.

The Crusaders have just equalised, the score being one goal all.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

An Interruption in the Game—Who is the Thief?

FROM the goal-kick the play was transferred to the other end, and Stephen Crane's eyes shone with delight as he saw the Chesterfield players again test Fowkes to the uttermost. The giant, however, was in invincible form, and at length the attack wavered, broke, and was beaten.

Gradually the Blue Crusaders' halves got the upper hand, and no sooner had they reduced the opposition forwards to a state of subjection than they began to feed their own forward line, and the home quintette had the bigger share of the attack.

The Chesterfield goalkeeper became anxious. He moved anxiously up and down his goal-line. He rose twice to almost Fowkes's pitch of excellence in repelling successive shots from Welsh and Quinn. Then Harry Ewing, receiving the ball from Hinton, who had put in a lovely centre, broke right through the backs and came straight for goal.

The goalkeeper rushed out, slipped in his effort to tackle Harry, and fell prostrate on the ground.

"Now!" cried Crane, with an oath. "Quick, or you'll be too late!"

He gave his rascally companion a shove as he spoke, and, thus urged, the ruffian leapt the palings.

He ran as hard as he could across the goal-mouth before the startled policeman could stop him.

"Hi! Come back, there!" cried the policeman, as he went hot-foot in chase.

Unheeding, the fellow ran on. Harry Ewing, rushing up, let fly at short range at the goal. It was a ball well placed, certain to score, but as he watched it fly straight for the open net, to his amazement he saw the figure of a man dart forward and beat the ball out with his hand.

It was a deliberate action, and the crowd, which had begun to shout "Goal!" set up a howl of rage and disappointment which sent the man's heart leaping into his mouth. The next moment the policeman had seized him.

He was not a second too soon. The irate and disappointed crowd had already begun to climb the railings, and were threatening the man on every hand.

"Lynch him! Give it him! Down with him!"

The angry shouts daunted the man. He was genuinely sorry for what he had done—but only for his own sake.

"Save me from the crowd!" he cried, as he writhed in the iron grip of the stalwart policeman. "It was him! He told me to do it!"

As he spoke he pointed towards the spot where Stephen Crane had stood. But the scamp had disappeared; he knew too much to remain in such a crisis.

Some of the crowd who had leapt the palings struck at the ruffian as the police tried to get him away, and it was only in the nick of time that other members of the force came to the rescue and marched the wretch off the field by way of the players' entrance gate.

Their intended victim having escaped them, the crowd loudly clamoured for a goal.

"What's to be done, sir?" asked Will Fowkes of the referee, for the game had been stopped during the incident.

"Oh, the goal will count," said the referee, blowing his whistle and pointing to the centre of the field.

There was some grumbling, but there was no going against the decision, and from the restart the Blue Crusaders played like a team revived. For the first time that season they found their form. The tip-tap, short passing was for once abandoned, and the nearest way to goal was taken, and when the final whistle blew the local team had won their first match.

FOOTBALL LIBRARY.—No. 12.

in the Second Division of the League by three goals—Ewing two, Quinn one—to one.

By this time the man who had interfered with the match on Crane's behalf had been conducted from the field and told to get out of Browton if he were wise. Stephen Crane thought fit to leave early, too. But he hung about the entrance gates, and it was not until the crowd began to stream forth at the conclusion of the match that he suddenly espied Jasper Carne coming from the direction of the Half-Way Inn yard.

"Well," he said, "did you manage it?"

Jasper Carne winked.

"Did I?" he cried. "You leave that to me: Do you think I was born without brains? I'm as artful as a wagonload of monkeys, I give you my word. I managed it beautifully. Nobody saw me. Things are stowed away in the right place. I reckon I've put a proper spoke in Mr. Albert King's wheel!"

"Well, then," cried Crane, "don't stop jawing here! You don't want to be seen by more people than you can help—neither do I. Let's cut across the fields, and reach Browton town by the long way round. Not many people go that way."

Jasper Carne nodded, and turning, they walked along the Moor Road some little distance where, finding a stile, they crossed it, and walked quickly along the footpath over the fields.

By this time the players had gained the dressing-rooms, and were disporting themselves in either the ordinary, the shower, or the big plunge-bath, whilst their respective trainers and assistants were attending to them as if they were thoroughbreds home from a canter on the heath.

Aglow with health, delighted at their victory, the Blue Crusaders donned their things, delightfully tired from their exercise.

"Has anyone seen King?" asked Fowkes, as he drew on his nether garments.

"Yes," responded Harry. "He's just come in."

"Hallo! Who's been at my locker?"

It was Hilsden, the Welsh International, who spoke; and his comrades stared at him in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" asked Fowkes.

"I've lost my watch and chain," said Hilsden seriously, "that's all; and there's two Cup Final medals attached."

"And someone has been at my clothes, too," said Quinn, from the other side of the dressing-room.

"Hallo! My week's money's gone; every blessed penny of it!"

"Nonsense!" said Ramsden, the right-half. "You're joking! Why, hang it!" he ejaculated a second later, as he felt in his own overcoat pocket. "My watch and chain are gone, too! I always put them in my coat, and someone's taken them! What the deuce does it mean?"

At this a perfect panic seized the players. They examined their clothing, one and all, and various were the expressions of dismay that filled the dressing-room a minute later.

"Hang it!" said Will Fowkes seriously. "I don't carry many valuables about with me, and I have the good sense to leave my money at home, but they've taken my scarfpin that Mr. Wentworth gave me at the beginning of the season, and the medal I won in the Junior Cup Final last year has gone, too!"

"Here, I've lost my watch!" It was Hinton who shouted now.

"This is all very fine, but I want to know what it

all means," said John Smart, the trainer, coming forward. "I don't like the look of this. There's a thief in the place—amongst us now, maybe—unless it's a hoax."

"Have any of you been practical joking?" asked Will Fowkes, raising his voice. "If so, let him own up. It's a stupid thing to do!"

There was no answer.

Albert King Suspected.

WHAT'S the matter here? What's all the noise about?"

Through the dressing-room door came Edgar Wilson, the manager, and Mr. James Wentworth.

"We've all been robbed, sir," said Hilsden.

"Robbed! Who by?"

"That's what we want to know, Mr. Wilson," said the trainer.

At this moment the manager espied Albert King standing silent and pale by the side of the plunge-bath.

"King," he said sternly, "do you know anything about this?"

The groundsman started.

"Me, sir? No, sir!" he replied.

James Wentworth gazed fixedly at the groundsman.

"Your manner is suspicious, King," he said. "I must ask you again whether you know anything about the loss of these valuables?"

Albert King's manner became more agitated than ever.

"I don't know nothing about it at all, sir," he said; "I swear I don't!"

"I don't believe you!" said Mr. Wentworth sternly. "I was inquiring for you during the match, and you were not to be found. One of the gatesmen told me that you left the ground soon after half-time. Where did you get to?"

The groundsman turned pale, then a deep flush mounted to his forehead. He looked embarrassed, guilty, if ever a man did.

"I had a letter sent to me from the town, sir," he said. "It was from someone in Browton I used to know before I—that is, some time ago, sir. It was making an appointment at the inn for a quarter to five. I left the ground to keep it."

"Where is the letter? Let me see it!"

The groundsman stammered, then hesitatingly replied:

"I haven't got it now, sir; I tore it up."

"Frankly, I do not believe a word of it! Your record is a bad one. I have had my suspicions of you ever since you joined the club. I believe you are the thief. If you are wise you will give up the stolen things without further trouble."

At this Albert King fired up.

"I am no thief, sir!" he said. "It seems, though, that my old offence will stand against me for ever. I made a clean breast of it when you took me on, Mr. Wentworth, and I thought that would give you confidence in me. I don't know where the stolen things are, sir. I only wish I did!"

"I have seen you with my own eyes talking to a suspicious character. Only last week you had a man in here in the players' dressing-room. I believe you and he planned the robbery together. The man was here to-day."

"Here to-day, sir?" asked Albert King eagerly. "Are you sure of that? Did you see him?"

"Yes," was the quick reply.

"Ah!"

After the half-muttered exclamation the groundsman relapsed into a brown study. He was quickly aroused from it, however.

"King," said Manager Wilson, "if you are innocent you won't mind us searching your rooms at the inn, I suppose?"

"Search it, and welcome, Mr. Wilson!" replied the groundsman. "You will find nothing there!"

"Then," said Mr. James Wentworth, "it shall be done at once! You come with me, Wilson, and those who have lost their property had better come, too."

The players hurried into their clothes, and a few minutes later joined their manager and Mr. Wentworth in the groundsman's room at the Half-Way Inn.

Albert King followed them leisurely. He was not troubling in the least about the search. He was convinced in his own mind that Jasper Carne was the thief.

"If I only knew where to lay my hands on him!" he muttered. "It would have been better, perhaps, if I had been more friendly towards him. I should have known at least where to send the police to arrest him."

He entered the inn full of thought, and Peter Simple, the landlord, coming downstairs, catching sight of him, seized him by the arm.

"King," he said, "they're searching your room! Don't you think you ought to be there to see what happens?"

The groundsman nodded, and followed the landlord up to his room, which was situated at the back of the house, beneath the gabled roof, and overlooking the stable yard.

The western horizon was aglow with the setting sun, and there was just light enough to reveal the searchers at work. They had made a thorough job of it. In the space of a few minutes the place had been ransacked, the bed-clothes turned over, the cupboards raked out, every piece of furniture examined.

"I'm afraid King must have the benefit of the doubt," said Manager Wilson, "and we'd better apologise. There's nothing here."

"Wait a minute!" cried Mr. Wentworth, who had been looking at the fireplace. "Some soot has fallen here. There's been no rain or wind for several days. What about the chimney?"

Hinton put his hand up on the instant, and he withdrew it with a sharp cry. He held in his hand an object that glittered in the half light. It was a watch and chain.

Hilsden made a grab at it.

"Why, it's mine!" he cried.

Once again did Hinton thrust his hand up the chimney, and again he produced a watch and chain. The chimney was like a lucky bag. It seemed full of articles of jewellery, and in a screw of paper was the stolen money. Fowkes's scarf-pin, however, could not be found.

When the missing articles had all been produced, Mr. Wentworth turned to Albert King, who stood, as pale as death, gazing with horror-stricken eyes up the chimney.

"Are you satisfied now?" said Mr. Wentworth coldly. "Have you anything to say?"

"Only this, sir," said the groundsman, with faltering accents. "That I know no more how these objects came here than the babe unborn!"

"Oh, of course you don't!" said Manager Wilson sarcastically, as he held forth the wash-hand basin for inspection. "Look here! There are traces of soot in the basin now! After hiding the stolen things there, he had the cool audacity to stay and wash his hands before returning to the ground. It was a carefully-planned affair, to my mind. King, we are going to hand you over to the police!"

"I am innocent, sir!" said Albert King, in heart-broken tones. "I swear I am! But my previous convictions will go against me. No one will believe me. I shall be ruined—utterly ruined!"

"No, Wilson," said Mr. Wentworth, interposing, "we won't charge him. The property has been recovered, and he has been shown up in his own colours. We are to blame for employing a ticket-of-leave man. It stands to reason he could not stand against a temptation to steal. King, you can go—that is, unless any of the lads would like to charge you."

He put the question to them, but they one and all voted for King's freedom.

"On condition," said Mr. Wentworth, "that you leave Browton without delay."

Albert King made a gesture of despair.

"I am innocent!" he cried. "And if I leave Browton, where am I to go? I haven't a friend in the world excepting here!"

"You either go," said Mr. Wentworth, "or we will give you in charge. Make your choice, and be quick about it!"

The groundsman was silent for a moment, then he bowed his head in submission.

"I'll go," he said humbly—"I'll go!"

"And to-night," said Peter Simple, "I'm not a hard-hearted man, but I hate ingratitude! We were all kind to you, King, and you've ill-repaid us. You shan't stay a minute longer under my roof than I can help!"

"Isn't there one among you who believes me innocent?" cried the groundsman, raising his head and looking from face to face. "Are you all against me?"

Fowkes took a stride towards him. The giant towered above the little groundsman, and he laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder as he gazed into his eyes.

"I did think that we understood one another," he said. "And I'm not the sort to kick a man when he's down. Remember how I found you in the street, dying that night, man, and answer me truthfully. Is it true what you say? Are you guilty? Was it you who stole the things?"

"No, it wasn't!" answered the groundsman earnestly. "I know nothing about it! I did receive the letter I spoke about, and I suppose it was while I was over here that the thief entered the dressing-room and broke open the lockers. Why they were afterwards placed here I can't say, unless it was they wished to ruin me!"

"You did not take them? You swear it?"

"I swear it!" said the groundsman solemnly. "As I hope for mercy!"

"And," said Will Fowkes heartily, "though all the rest are against you, King, I believe you!"

Albert King Speaks Out—For His Brother's Sake— An Interview with Mr. Willoughby.

WILLIAM FOWKES had declared his belief in Albert King's innocence with regard to the theft of the things from the Blue Crusaders' dressing-room, but yet, as he walked back towards the town with the downcast King by his side, serious doubts assailed him.

How was he to reconcile the groundsman's innocence with the finding of the stolen things in his room, when all was said and done?

They trudged on for half a mile or more, and neither spoke a word. Time and again did King cast a furtive, almost frightened glance at his companion. At last he could bear the silence no longer.

"If you believe me guilty with the rest, Mr. Fowkes," he said at length, "it will break my heart. It is hard not to be believed. I would rather toil within a prison than be free and regarded with suspicion by all my fellow-men."

"I was thinking it over, King," said the Blue Crusaders' goalkeeper frankly, "and, truth to tell, it does seem black against you. If you didn't steal the things, who did? And what motive could the man have?"

"Revenge," was the quick reply. "It was Jasper Carne, the man you saw leaving the dressing-room the other Saturday. I know it was. I am as certain of it as that I am alive!"

"And why should this man revenge himself on you?"

"He was a fellow-convict. We both served our time at Holbeach Prison. I never liked the man, but as we were both being released at about the same time he took particular notice of me. We got to know each other pretty well in the way that prisoners have. He remembered that I had told him that I was coming to Browton as soon as I was free, and he followed me here. He discovered that I was engaged at Moor Field, and so he turned up there, demanding money. I refused to help him, so he revenged himself by stealing the things, and trying to plant them on me."

Fowkes looked at his companion, only half convinced.

"It doesn't seem a very strong motive to me," he said. "One would think that a man would require a stronger incentive than that to go to such lengths. Look at the risk he ran himself. Then there is that letter you say was sent to you, making an appointment outside the grounds. Doesn't that shed some light on the mystery?"

Albert King gave vent to a sharp exclamation, almost of agony, his face turned deathly pale, and he stopped in his stride.

"Ah—ah!" he breathed.

"Oh, you've discovered something?" said the giant.

"Yes," answered the groundsman, hesitating. "Can it be that? No, no!" he went on hurriedly. "I can't think he'd stoop to such a cowardly trick, bad as I know him to be."

"What are you talking about?" said Fowkes irritably. "There's some mystery here, and as I've stood your friend, and intend to stand by you again if you convince me you're innocent, I think I've a right to know it."

"Wait—wait!" cried Albert King, hurrying on at a feverish pace. "I'll tell you the whole truth before long. Maybe all Browton will ring with it!"

There was a vindictive, steely look in his eyes, a

firm set of his lips that showed determination. He did not speak again until they were in the town, and then he turned hurriedly into a side-street and increased his pace, walking quickly on.

"Where are you going?" asked the giant.

"To see my brother," was the determined reply.

Down one street, and up another they went, until, turning a corner, Albert King gave vent to a cry of surprise, and clutched Fowkes by the arm. He pointed with a shaky finger to a man who had entered a doorway near, and was in the act of knocking.

"There is the thief!" he cried. "That is Jasper Carne!"

A moment later, before Fowkes had time to run the rule of his eye over Jasper Carne, the door opened, and the man disappeared within.

"But, good heavens," said the goalkeeper, "that's where James Jarvis, the overseer, lives! What on earth can this villain, this convict want with him?"

Albert King was very pale. His face wore an expression of agony.

"I believe," he said, choking as he uttered the words, "that it was he who set Carne to commit the robbery. He wanted the guilt to be fastened on me. He wished me to be sent to prison again, or else forced to leave Browton. I see it all as clearly as though I had heard them plot together!"

"You must be mad!" said Fowkes contemptuously.

"What motive could James Jarvis have? What is he to you?"

"My brother," answered the groundsman slowly.

Fowkes uttered a cry, started back, and regarded his companion critically. It was some time ere this amazing truth could force itself home to him. At length he uttered a reflective whistle. King was very grave and sad.

"And do you mean to tell me that after you left the prison and tramped all those weary miles without food or rest into Browton to see your brother, that he turned you from his door into the streets to starve?"

"Yes," said Albert King hoarsely. "He didn't give me even a single penny, not one kind word. His self-righteousness made him a man of iron. He told me all Browton knew how I was sent to gaol for stealing at the works, and that it would ruin him to befriend a gaolbird. Yes, my own brother, of all men in the world!"

Fowkes seemed stunned by the groundsman's statement.

"Why, I can dimly recollect you at Messrs. Keith, Howse & Co.'s works," he said, "and can just remember the sensation your arrest and conviction caused. But there was one hand there who knew you to be James Jarvis's brother. Why, even his evidence was right against you at the trial!"

"It was!" groaned Albert King. "He wanted me convicted. A victim had to be found, so that if the innocent were punished, the guilty might escape."

"Innocent!" said Fowkes, amazed. "Do you mean to tell me you were innocent of the charge of stealing the firm's goods and materials also?"

"Yes," said King solemnly, pointing to the room which James Jarvis occupied on the first floor, in which a light was burning. "I was innocent. My brother was the thief. I was his dupe. But I was a wanderer, a ne'er-do-well, while he had established a position at the works. I thought I could stand the prison life better than he could, and so I kept my

(Continued on page iii, of Cover.)

The Blue Crusaders.

(Continued from previous page.)

lips closed and served my time. When I came out, what gratitude did he show me? He turned me into the street. He wished me dead. You can see now that it's quite possible he employed Carne to plant the robbery on me."

"He thought you might be dangerous. He wanted you out of the way," said Fowkes. "But how did he come to know this convict, Carne, King?"

"I don't know," said the other. "Perhaps he has engaged in some other shady transaction than that of robbing his employers. I can believe anything of him now."

"I can't quite understand your sacrifice," said Fowkes, with a shake of his head. "You should have exposed him at your trial, King. No one would believe your story now."

"Would they then?" queried King, looking up into Fowkes's face. "Besides, I'd been abroad, knocking about the world, before I came to Browton to see my brother, without a shilling to my name, and I was grateful to him for getting me employed at the works. He insisted on me taking the name of King; my real name is Albert Jarvis. When he asked me to remove all those things from the works that were stolen, I had no idea that they were not his property. When the truth leaked out, and I was arrested for stealing my employer's things, I was so stunned that I could not say a word in my defence. Then, when I might have done so, I thought of all it meant to him, and I remained silent. Believe me, I was innocent of stealing even so much as a screw. It is true I sold the stolen things to the dealers, but at my brother's request. That was where he was so cunning. He did not appear as a principal in the transaction at all. There were over three hundred pounds' worth of engineering tools, electrical appliances, raw material, and a heap of designs. How did you think I could remove them from the works without some authority behind me? The authority was my brother's. He helped me to load up the barrows himself, and the orders, which were signed by him, and declared to be forged by me at the trial, were written by his own hand. But I held my tongue, and went to prison for his sake."

"And now," said Fowkes, "what do you intend to do?"

"Expose him!" cried the groundsmen, with flashing eyes, as he shook his fist at the house wherein the unconscious overseer was closeted with Jasper Carne. "Let all Browton know him for what he is! I'm going to Manager Willoughby's to tell him the truth. The limit has been reached. I could have forgiven him everything else; but when he tried to ruin me when I had a chance to rise again in life, he did more than I can forgive, and he shall suffer for it!"

"Is all you've told me the truth?" asked Fowkes.

"The truth, and nothing else!"

"Well, then," cried the giant heartily, "you've got to come with me straight to Mr. Willoughby's. He would never see you by yourself, but if I can see him I can arrange the interview; only, mind, you're

not to spare the villain. You've got to show him up in his true colours."

"I will," cried the groundsmen—"I will! Have no fear of that!"

Twenty minutes later they were both seated in Mr. Willoughby's study, where Albert King again narrated his astounding story.

At first the manager refused to believe it, but as he put question after question to him, King's replies put all doubts aside, and Mr. Willoughby, at last rising from his chair, walked agitatedly up and down the room.

"It seems hard to believe," he said. "He was so attentive to his duties, so regular with his chapel-going, so eager that justice should be dealt to evil-doers, so strict in business. Good gracious! If he is such a man as that, what might we not have lost during the last two or three years?"

"Eh—what, sir?" echoed Fowkes, with a grim smile. "I never did believe in the man myself. The way in which he treated the men under him was enough for me. Look how he got Ewing, Drew, and Moran dismissed from the works! Look how he refused to allow me to leave for an hour or two, when it meant so much to me, and so little to the firm! He's a bad lot! He deserves to be punished, sir!"

"And if he is guilty," replied the manager resolutely, "he shall be punished. I shall have to proceed with caution. He shall be forced to betray himself, and then I will have no mercy!"

"You believe me, sir?" asked King eagerly.

"I don't know what to believe," answered the manager, with a worried look. "The whole thing seems so impossible."

"But there is one thing, Mr. Willoughby," said Fowkes, as he rose to go. "I saw Jasper Carne, the ex-convict, enter his house with my own eyes. Even if every word of King's story was a concocted lie, how can that be explained away?"

The manager was silent, and so they left. Mr. Willoughby was more distressed and worried than he cared to admit, even to himself.

Which was the honest man, which the villain—Albert King or James Jarvis?

James Jarvis Receives a Shock—Preparation for Flight—Stephen Crane and His Tempter—The Downward Path.

ON Monday morning, when James Jarvis arrived at the works, he was told that Mr. Willoughby wished to see him. The overseer smiled. He walked along the corridors humming a tune. How secure he was in his position here, he thought, and how successful! Even the manager could not do without him, and sent to consult him on almost every point.

James Jarvis's heart swelled with pride. He looked more contented than he had of late. And well he might, for his plan to ruin his brother had succeeded, and he had Jasper Carne's assurance that Albert King had been discharged from his position at the Moor Field ground, and was probably under arrest.

He had one great fear ever since his brother had been sent to prison—that was that he might some day tell the truth. He did not think even then that it would be fatal to him, but it would at least be awkward.

(Continued on page iv. of Cover.)

Smiling to think how he had succeeded in driving his brother away, he was still humming his tune and smiling when he opened the door of the managerial office and entered. He smiled at Mr. Willoughby, but the manager looked coldly at him.

"Will you please close the door," he said.

Hallo! What did this mean? What was in the wind? Where was the manager's customary courtesy?

Still smiling, the overseer faced him, rubbing his hands.

He loved the managerial sanctum. It was here that his greatest personal triumphs had been gained. It was here that his brother had been accused and arrested by the waiting detectives. It was here that many a poor fellow who had fallen under the ban of the overseer's displeasure had received his dismissal from the works. It was here that he had sent William Fowkes, Harry Ewing, David Moran, and Arthur Drew about their business. It was here, also, that he had come at the bidding of his manager to receive promotion and salary many a time during his career; and he smiled as he gazed vacantly out of the window, thinking that his great merit was so to be recognised again this bright autumn morning.

"Mr. Jarvis!"

The stern ring in the manager's voice recalled him to earth at once.

"Yes, sir?" he said humbly.

"I am not satisfied," Mr. Willoughby went on, "with the manner in which the records are kept of the materials that pass from one workshop to another, and I am going to have a systematic examination made of everything within the works. I have reason to believe that large quantities of stuff have been stolen, and want to make sure. You will be prepared to submit a list, of all tools, materials, plant, etc., that have passed through your hands during the last six months within the course of the next day or so."

James Jarvis's face was white. His lips felt cold and clammy, and he moistened them with his tongue.

Why was it that his words were halting when he spoke? Why was it that his hands shook as if with palsy, and his knees trembled? Was it because he was an honest man?

"It will—it will take three or four days, sir," he said.

"You have the books handy, I suppose? Everything is entered?"

"Yes, sir," said the overseer humbly. "But they will have to be systematically checked, and a note made of everything we have in hand."

"When can you have the total ready?"

"By the end of the week, sir."

"Very good. You can go."

"Is that all, sir?"

"Yes. You can go."

The manager did not look up again, but went on with his writing. James Jarvis turned, and slowly made his way out of the office. When he had closed the door and had gained the passage outside, he reeled against the wall like a drunken man.

(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!)

Club Notices.

These are inserted free of charge, either here or in "The Boys' Realm."

WALHAM GROVE F.C. require away match for Boxing Day, radius 20-25 miles of Charing Cross. Private ground and dressing accommodation required.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Windus, 35, Adeney Road, Fulham, S.W.

CASTLETOWN JUNIORS F.C. (average age 14-16) require home and away matches within a radius of 18 miles of Penrith (Thursday afternoons).—Apply to H. Rawlings, 65, Brougham Street, Penrith.

BARKING CELTIC F.C. (league team) require two good players, back and half-back. No player over 18 need apply.—G. A. Webster, 51, King's Road, Barking, Essex.

GRAVEN PARK ATHLETIC F.C. (average age 18, medium; affiliated L.F.A.) require home matches, April 16th; away, January 29th, February 5th. Ground, Tottenham Marshes.—Apply to Martin, 82, Dongola Road, Tottenham.

THREE LADS (aged 16) would like to join football club in neighbourhood of Camberwell or Walworth; can play forward.—Apply to H. Salrin, 97, Westmoreland Road, Walworth, S.E.

BOY (aged 14-15) wishes to join a suitable football club in the vicinity of Dukinfield (2 mile radius); full-back or goal.—Apply to J. Moores, 54, Coronation Terrace, Furness Street, Dukinfield.

LAD (aged 15) would like to join a respectable football club within three miles' radius of Kensal Rise; can play in forward or half-back line. Willing to pay small subscription.—Apply to E. M. Bratchell, 98, Wakeman Road, Kensal Rise, S.W.

CLAUDE ELIOT 4TH XI. (average age 15, weak) require away matches on December 11th, January 29th, March 19th, 26th; and at home on March 25th (Good Friday).—Apply to C. Crouch, 32, Salisbury Street, Hoxton, N.

LAD (aged 15) wishes to join respectable football team in or around Penarth, S.W. Can play in any position. Willing to pay subscription to join and weekly subscription.—Apply to A. T. Brinkwater, 49, Dock Street, Cogan, Penarth, S. Wales.

ALEXANDRA PARK ATHLETIC F.C. (average age 16, strong) require away matches in neighbourhood of Wood Green for rest of season. Prompt replies given.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, L. Jackson, 537, Green Lanes, Harringay, N.

MANCHESTER UNION MEDAL COMPETITIONS.—The above are now open to receive applications for the above competitions. Matches arranged to suit clubs in leagues or without grounds. Division 1, open age; 2, workshops only; 3, average age 19; 4, age 17; 5, age 15; 6, age 13.—Apply for particulars to Secretary, B. Ducker, 62, Everton Road, C.-u.-M.

WOODVILLE F.C. (average age 16) require home and away matches, within three miles' radius of Liverpool. Red shirts, white knickers.—Apply to Robert Lang, 25, Denton Street, Liverpool.

A LAD (age 15) would like to join a football club within easy distance of Hackney Station.—Apply by post to C. Thompson, 30, Gore Road, Victoria Park, South Hackney.

ROYAL VICS. F.C. (average age 15) have open dates. Teams residing in Liverpool are acceptable.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, L. Pritchard, 7, Royal Street, off Walton Road, Liverpool.

HARDINGS JUNIORS F.C. (average age 14½) require dates, both home and away, within five miles' radius of Leeds.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Church, 18, Crossland Street, Bridge Road, Holbeck, Leeds.

WHITWICK AMATEURS F.C. (average age 18) require a match in Leicester for December 27th.—Apply early to Hon. Secretary, E. Higgins, North Street, Whitwick, near Leicester.

LAD (age 15) desires position as half-back or back; will pay small subscription.—H. D. Power, 3, Clifton Villas, Camden Town, London, N.W.

DINGLE ROVERS F.C. (average age 15) require away matches only for Saturday afternoons. Colours are black and white shirts with blue knickers.—Apply to A. Jones, 282, Park Road, Dingle, Liverpool.

(See "The Boys' Realm," 1d., every Saturday, for a further list of challenges.)