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The Best Football Serial Ever Published!

Start To-day.

FOOTBALL FORTUNE!

A Fine Story of the Great Game. By CHARLES HAMILTON.



“FOU! FOUL!” CRIED THE ONLOOKERS AS NUGENT TURNED UPON THE STONEHAM FELLOW, AND LAID HIM FLAT ON HIS BACK. LED BY BELTON, THE EXCITED AND ANGRY CROWD POURED INTO THE FIELD OF PLAY. WHAT WOULD BE THE RESULT OF THEIR ONSLAUGHT? (See “Football Fortune” in this issue.)

FOOTBALL FORTUNE!

Our Fine New Serial by C. Hamilton.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS RE-WITTEN BY THE AUTHOR.

WING to a sudden financial failure. Pat Clare's father has been obliged to remove that lad from Blackdale School. Mr. Clare attributed the disaster which he had suffered to his erstwhile friend, Abel Darrell, who had advised him to invest in a company which had gone smash. The man's name continually occurred in the wretched story which Mr. Clare told his son, a story of heartless villainy, poor Pat's father being the dupé. The blow was too much, and Mr. Clare's mind became unbending. Abel Darrell had a daughter, of whom Pat was very fond. He did not know whether Darrell was really a villain, and when he offered Pat a post in his office, the boy began to think that what had happened could not be his fault after all. "Perhaps he also had been misled," thought the boy.

Pat began his new life with the determination to be cheerful and contented, and to win his way upward by hard and steady work. It was not a pleasant change after his life at Blackdale.

With his new associates he was soon on good terms, as he usually was with everybody—with one exception. That was Glyn Elmhurst, Mr. Darrell's confidential secretary.

Elmhurst seemed to take a dislike to Clare from the first day of his coming to the mills; and although he made no open show of hostility, Clare could not fail to be aware of the feelings with which the secretary regarded him.

The fact was that Elmhurst looked on Pat as his rival for the hand of Madge Darrell. Hence his hatred of the boy.

The Blackfield Ramblers asked Pat to play for them on an occasion soon after his change of life. He, of course, was only too willing to accede to the request.

In the middle of the game he scored a goal for his side. He sent in the ball with a low, rapid shot that puzzled the goalie, and the next moment he was bowled over like a ninepin—but the ball was in the net. And there was a roar of cheering from the delighted onlookers.

"Goal! Goal!" Clare, unable to save himself, went rolling along the turf, while the joyous shout was ringing round the field. The charge of the Nomad had sent him flying.

Oakley ran to him and bent over him anxiously. "Hurt, old fellow?"

Clare gasped. "N-no. It was only a tumble."

"A pretty rough tumble," said Oakley.

The Defeat of the Nomads.

THE back who had charged Clare came towards him. "I say, I'm sorry if I've hurt you," he said. "I didn't mean to; but I had to save that goal if I could, you know. You've got it, though. Hope you're not hurt."

"That's all right," said Pat cheerfully. "It's all in the game, and I don't grumble. I'm all right!"

And, with a helping hand from Oakley, he rose to his feet.

Although he made light of it, it was really a pretty severe shock that he had had, and he was looking white and shaken. Oakley looked at him a little anxiously.

"Will you stand out for a bit?" he said. "We shall miss you; but I don't want to knock you up. I'll play one back while you take a rest."

Clare shook his head decidedly.

"Not at all. I shall soon be all right, and I am quite fit to play."

"All right; you know best."

And Pat lined up with the rest, feeling somewhat seedy, but resolute, and quite ready for the fray.

The Nomads kicked off, and the game recommenced.

They repeated their former tactics, rushing the ball into the home half, Belton leading a combined rush goalward.

Oakley robbed the Nomad captain of the ball, and passed to Clare, but Pat was now marked by the enemy, and immediately he was tackled.

In spite of his pluck and grit, he was not yet himself, and not up to his usual form, and a Nomad forward robbed him of the ball and rushed it away.

The next minute Belton had it again, and was away with it, sending it right into the home goal with the speed of a bullet.

And a roar rose from the Barkley sympathisers round the field:

"Goal!"

Barkley had equalised. The game was not yet twenty minutes old. Oakley cast a rather anxious glance at Clare. Pat had done his best, but he was not playing as he had played before the Nomad back charged him over.

But his old form was coming back, and when the game was resumed, he threw himself into it with new vigour.

The offensive tactics of the Nomads were baffled right at the start, and the Blackfield forwards swept on in line, working the ball right down the field. Belton, with rather an ugly look, charged Clare off the ball, but Pat saved himself from falling, and it was the Nomad captain who went sprawling on the turf.

Meanwhile, a Rambler forward was on the ball, speeding it onward to the visitors' goal. He, too, was charged over by a Nomad back, but that did not save the visitors, for Oakley rushed in and fairly slammed the leather into the net.

"Goal!"

The rest of the first half was barren of incidents, but all the time the play of the visitors was growing rougher, as the home team baffled all their attempts to get away. The ball was frequently in touch, and the whistle went for the interval with the score at two to one.

"All right so far, Clare," said Oakley, as he sucked at a lemon. "We've got two goals to their one with the wind against us. That looks all right for the second half, when we shall have it in our favour."

Pat nodded. "But the Nomads are getting a bit wild," he said.

"They can't stand being licked," chuckled Oakley. "They came here intending to make only one mouthful of us. It surprises them a bit to find us in such form."

"I believe we shall pull it off."

"So do I. But I am afraid they will begin fouling. They have always been rather a rough lot from the ironworks. I don't care. We'll give 'em as good as they send."

The brief interval ended, the players entered the field again. The Nomads were looking very grim and determined, and from the restart they showed that they did not intend to stick at trifles.

The Blackfield footballers, however, were not the fellows to complain. They faced the music with steady pluck and resolution.

The referee's whistle began to go pretty frequently, in spite of the black looks of the Barkley contingent. He was an old professional himself, and he meant to see a fair and sportsmanlike game, or know the reason why.

At last the visitors succeeded in working their way up to the home goal, and a regular scrimmage ensued in front of the posts, the Rambler goalie looking on with eagle eyes, ready to save as soon as the leather came whizzing in.

In it came, only to be fisted out again, and a Rambler back skied it, and the forwards collared it and took it gaily up the field.

Away went the rush of the players, but not all of them, one of the home backs being left writhing on the ground. He had received a kick, accidental or not, and had to be helped off the field, his playing ended for the rest of the match.

Oakley looked rather grave.

There were twenty-five minutes yet to go, and for that space of time he would have to play a single back. The Ramblers drew close, and began to play a defensive game. If they could keep their goal intact until the whistle went, they would finish the game victors, as they were one goal ahead in the first half. That was Oakley's intention, and it was the intention of the Nomads to baffle it.

Heavy and hard were the charges of the visitors, but for a long time they failed to break up the stubborn defence of the Ramblers.

Presently, however, Belton came on with the ball at his feet, leaving two of the home forwards lying on the ground behind him.

He cleared through the halves, but Clare was racing on to get in his path, and he seemed to move like a lightning-flash. Before Belton realised that the home inside right was near him, Clare had robbed him of the ball, and was away with it. With an ugly look the Nomad captain made for him. Pat guessed rather than saw what was coming, and he let Oakley have the ball ere the Nomad skipper reached him. The next moment he was down before Belton's charge. It was a foul of the most transparent kind, and the referee, who had been watching Belton, blew his whistle instantly and stopped the play.

"Foul! Foul!"

It was a roar from the crowd, and some furious Blackfielders seemed inclined to swarm over the railings and take vengeance into their own hands.

The visitors were inclined to be unruly, but the look of the Blackfield crowd warned them that they had best mind their P's and Q's.

The referee did some plain speaking, and was listened to in angry silence.

"That was a deliberate foul," he said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Belton. I have heard why you left the ranks of professional footer, and I'm not surprised at it."

Belton scowled, and did not reply. Clare had risen to his feet, looking shaken, but making light of it. Belton gave him a look which Pat had occasion to remember afterwards.

Oakley looked at Clare.

"You'll take the kick, Pat."

Clare nodded.

He took the kick, the players watching him almost wolfishly. The "booming" had died down, and the spectators were watching with eager eyes.

The ball flew from Clare's foot, and a lively rush of the Ramblers followed. They were deeply exasperated by Belton's tactics, and their blood was up, and they were not to be denied. A minute later the ball was in the net.

The Blackfielders cheered lustily.

Three to one, and only ten minutes more to go.

But the visitors had not given up all hope of equalising, and the fighting continued to be hard and fast.

Again and again the Nomads attempted to get away with the ball, but the home defence was impossible to beat.

Taking no risks, and playing a purely defensive game, the Ramblers baffled every attempt of the enemy to get through, and the home goalie was left almost idle.

At last the whistle went, and the game ended, the Ramblers winners by three goals to one, a

better finish than the most sanguine of them had dared to hope for.

As they went off, Clare was heartily cheered, and in the dressing-room Oakley gripped him by the hand.

"You've saved the match for us, old fellow," he said gratefully. "Scott! It was a regular licking for the Nomads. Belton is wild. He came here expecting it to be a walk-over you know, and so he's bound to get a bit ratty. Not much of the sportsman about him, but the others are all right. But look here, Clare. Now you've shown what you can do, we are not going to let you go. You are going to become a Rambler. Now, don't say no, for I won't listen to it."

"I don't mean to say no," said Pat, laughing.

"If you want me—"

"Want you? I should say so."

"Then I'm your man."

And so it was settled.

Pat Clare had made many friends that day, but he had made one bitter foe. He was far from thinking of that, however, as he said farewell later in the evening to the Ramblers.

It was a clear, cold evening, and Pat, not feeling inclined to go home yet to his lonely lodgings in Blackfield, set out for a stroll across the moor, in the direction of the distant college of Blackdale, once his home.

He did not guess that evil eyes were watching him, and did not hear the stealthy footsteps that followed in pursuit. He had reached almost the middle of the lonely path over the moor, when a sound behind made him turn, just in time to see a dim figure springing at him with clenched fists lifted to strike him down.

He sprang back, but too late. In a flash his assailant was upon him, and with a savage grip upon his throat bore him backwards.

A Cowardly Foe.

BORNE backwards by the fierce attack, Pat Clare went with a crash to the ground, his assailant falling heavily on top of him.

His senses reeled with the shock, and he struggled blindly to throw off his cowardly foe. He had not the faintest idea of whom it might be, and in the darkness and mist he saw nothing but a dim outline. As the man's head came close to his, a hot breath, laden with the vile fumes of liquor fanned his face. He struck wildly upwards, and heard a yell of pain. Then a heavy fist was dashed into his face, the back of his head struck the earth violently, and a thousand lights danced before his eyes.

The ruffian's fist was rising for another blow, when a running figure loomed up out of the mists.

"Hallo, what's up? Why, you cowardly hound!"

It was Philip Nugent's voice.

With a bound he was upon Pat's assailant, sending him reeling with a right-hander behind the ear.

The ruffian went sprawling on the ground, and Nugent, planting a knee in the small of his back as he lay face downward, pinned him there.

"Keep still, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed, as the man wriggled desperately to get loose, "You can't get away, so you may as well give in!"

And, inserting his fingers into the fellow's neckcloth, he gave it a twist that soon quieted him.

Pat staggered to his feet. His head was buzzing from the concussion upon the ground, and he was gasping for breath.

"Is that you, Phil, old fellow? Don't let that brute get away!"

"I've got him safe. I didn't know it was you, Clare. I'm jolly glad I came along in time to chip in. I've been over to Blackdale. Was he trying to rob you?"

"I don't know what his game was. Let's have a look at him."

The ruffian made a fierce effort to break loose as he heard the scratch of a vesta. It was evident that he feared to be recognised. But Nugent held him fast, twisting his neckcloth and throttling him till he gave in.

A match flared out, and Nugent jerked the man's head round to show his face to the light.

Pat uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It's Belton!"

The ruffian muttered an oath.

"Who's Belton?" said Nugent.

"He captained the Barkley Nomads. I played against them this afternoon for the Ramblers, and Belton—"

"I—I didn't mean to hurt you," whined the rough, his rage changing to fear as he realised that he was in a tight corner. "I had been drinking a good deal, and the chaps got chipping me about the game, and—"

"And you deliberately followed me across the moor," said Pat sternly. "You came here on purpose to attack me, like a cowardly cur, from behind!"

"Better give him in charge," said Nugent. "He's a dangerous brute, and a few months in prison would do him good."

"Don't, don't!" gasped Belton, now thoroughly frightened. "Don't do it! It would cost me my job at the ironworks, and I should be ruined. I would never have done it if I hadn't been drinking. I swear it! I didn't know what I was doing. Let me off this time, Mr. Clare, and I swear I'll never touch you again!"

"There's no doubt he's been drinking," said Nugent, with a sniff of disgust. "But that's no excuse for what he's done."

But Pat, always generous, to a fault, had already made up his mind to let the fellow go unpunished.

"Let him get up, Nugent," he said. "It would make a lot of ill-feeling with the Nomads if we gave him his deserts. I don't want that. The other fellows are decent enough. He's a disgrace to his club and to the game. You can go, Belton; and you had better let this be a lesson to you to play the game in future."

Nugent allowed the ruffian to rise, which he did, with a muttered oath. He scowled blackly at Clare, and then, without a word of thanks, slouched away into the darkness.

"A precious bad egg, that chap," said Nugent. "I predict that he'll go for you the next chance he gets, Clare."

"Well, if he gives me a chance of tackling him fairly, I don't care if he does," said Pat. "I'd like to have a round or two with him; and knock some of the rudiments of fair play into the brute. Thanks for coming to my aid like that, old fellow. It was jolly lucky for me, for he meant mischief."

"I'm glad I came along," said Nugent. "They kept me rather late at Blackdale. Which way are you going—home?"

"Yes," said Pat, who did not care to prolong his stroll after what had happened. His head was buzzing like a hive of bees.

The cousins walked on together towards Blackfield. Their talk ran in a friendly strain, mainly about football.

"So you've joined the Ramblers?" Nugent remarked. "I was thinking of getting into the team myself. What do you think Oakley would say?"

"I should think he would be glad to have you," replied Clare heartily. "Since dad's bad luck, some of the Ramblers who were in his employ have had to leave Blackfield, and Oakley has told me that the team is not up to its usual strength. The chaps here are as earnest about footer as we used to be at Blackdale, and I believe the whole club would welcome a sound player."

"Then I'll speak to Oakley. We shall see a good deal of him in the future," Nugent remarked. "He's got a job now as a nule over-looker in Mr. Darrell's employ."

"Yes," he told me so this afternoon. I'm glad of it."

The cousins passed Fern House before entering Blackfield. The house showed tall and dark above the leafless trees, and as they danced towards it they fell into silence, which was not broken again till they reached their lodgings in the town. They had quarters in the same house in Blackfield, not far from the work.

As they passed Fern House the thought of Madge Darrell had come into both minds. Neither mentioned her, yet each knew of what the other was thinking. Long ago Pat had guessed that Nugent cared for Madge, the girl to whom all his own boyish love was given.

Pat Hits Hard.

THE "buzzer" had buzzed on Monday morning, and the great factory presented its usual scene of activity and animation. Clare reached his mill-office to the minute; he was never late Glyn Elmhurst was the last to arrive this morning, as upon all other mornings.

"I hear you have been doing wonders on the football-field," he said to Pat, with a sneer. "It seems that we have been entertaining an International unawares."

Elmhurst played inside-left for the Blackfield United, and he made no secret of his opinion that what he didn't know about football wasn't worth knowing. As it happened, Clare's performance on Saturday afternoon had been a good deal talked of, and Elmhurst had heard more than one Blackfield citizen express the opinion that United would do well to secure the services of so promising a player. It was gall and wormwood to Elmhurst to see praise given to the young fellow he so bitterly disliked.

Clare glanced at him, but made no reply to his remark. Elmhurst, with a very unpleasant look, passed on into Mr. Darrell's private office.

"I say, Clare, Elmhurst seems to have his knife into you," one of the larks remarked. "What have you done to raise my lord's dander?"

"Nothing that I know of replied Clare. "He seems determined to dislike me."

"A bad look-out, my boy," said the other, with a shake of the head. "Elmhurst twists the boss round his little finger."

Pat did not answer. He did not need to have that pointed out to him. From the time of his first coming to the Blackfield Mills he had observed that Mr. Darrell seemed strangely under the influence of his secretary.

And yet he was certain that the mill-owner did not like Elmhurst. The secret of the secretary's influence was a mystery.

Pat, however, did not think much about it. He reflected that it was no business of his. He might have changed his opinion upon that point if he had known more of its facts.

The secretary's ill-humoured little impression upon him. He was in specially cheerful mood that day, for he was 'see Madge."

It was well for his peace of mind that he could not hear the talk in the private office of the mill-owner.

Mr. Darrell looked up itably as Elmhurst came in, but his expression changed when he saw who it was. Elmhurst noted it, and smiled grimly.

"What do you want, Elmhurst?"

"A few words with you, sir," said the secretary calmly. "You are not able to listen to me yesterday, so I left it till this morning."

Mr. Clare shifted uneasily in his seat. It was plain that he knew what was coming, and that he dreaded it.

"It's quite useless, Elmhurst," he broke out. "I have told you that Madge does not even like you, and, besides, she is too young yet to think of anything like an engagement."

"You have told me so," assented the secretary, "and if that is the case, there can be no possible harm in my ascertaining for myself."

Mr. Darrell bit his lip.

"It will be useless, I warn you."

"I will take my chance of that. Have I your permission to speak to Miss Darrell?"

"I suppose so," grunted the mill-owner.

"Very well! There is another matter I wanted to speak about. Don't you think it a little injudicious to allow the intimacy between Pat Clare and Miss Darrell to continue? It may put foolish ideas into the boy's head."

"They have known each other from children," said Mr. Darrell weakly.

"All the more reason why they should be separated now that they are no longer children," retorted the secretary. "You had better put the fellow in his place."

A blaze came into the mill-owner's eyes for a moment.

"Don't drive me too far, Elmhurst," he said, in a low voice. "I know that I am in your power, but there are limits to my endurance."

"Would you prefer that I speak to Clare?" said the other, with a sneer. "I could tell him many things he would like to know. The true history of the Sonora Copper Mine, for instance, and the name of the man into whose pockets his father's fortune found its way."

"Hold your tongue, confound you!" snarled the mill-owner, with an uneasy glance round, as if he thought the walls might have ears.

The secretary laughed grimly.

"Well, I have told you what I expect," he said, and he walked out of the room without another word.

Mr. Darrell cast a look after him of mingled disquietude and hatred.

"He will go too far some day," he hissed. "But how am I ever to get out of his clutches? There is no way, unless—" He turned pale, and an uneasy shiver ran through him. "He may drive me to that, if he is not careful."

Glyn Elmhurst, who seemed to keep pretty much what hours he liked, left the mill early, and walked out of Blackfield on the side towards the moor. It was dusk when he drew near to Fern House and caught sight of a figure on the path.

His eyes sparkled. It was Madge, and she was coming slowly towards him. She had looked up and quickened her pace for a moment, as she saw him, and then slackened again. The meaning of that was very plain to Elmhurst.

"Who was she expecting to see on this road? Clare, I'll be bound. I know the game; she happens to walk here, and he happens to do the same, and they happen to meet; quite an accident, of course." He gritted his teeth savagely. "Well, I shall spoil sport this time. This is my chance to speak to her."

And he quickened his pace, and, stopping when he reached the girl, raised his hat. Madge gave him the slightest inclination of the head. But Elmhurst did not pass on, as she plainly wished him to do.

"This is a most fortunate meeting, Miss Darrell!" he exclaimed genially. "I was coming to Fern House to see you."

"Indeed!" said the girl coldly. "I cannot imagine why you should take so much trouble."

He bit his lip.

"I have your father's permission to say what I am about to say, Miss Darrell."

"Is it something that concerns me?" asked Madge, raising her eyebrows in wonder.

"Certainly," he smiled. "I have thought that you might have seen my devotion, my—"

"I don't understand you."

Surely a wooer never fronted a more difficult task. But Elmhurst went on:

"I love you, Miss Darrell." And, for once, the cynical, worldly look was gone from his face, and he was deeply in earnest. "May I hope—"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Madge, colouring. "I have never given you any reason to presume to speak to me on such a topic, Mr. Elmhurst, that I am aware of. Please say no more!"

"But I must say more!" broke out Elmhurst, his face flushing with anger. "I have asked you to be my wife, and—"

"That I will never be. Please leave me."

"Not yet," he said mockingly. "You must hear me to the end. I am not a man to lightly relinquish what I have set my heart upon, and I shall not allow your foolish fancy for a lad to stand in my way."

Madge's face was scarlet.

"How dare you?" she panted. "If Pat Clare were here now you would not dare to insult me."

"Ah," he said mockingly, "I have guessed correctly. It is Pat Clare. Let him look to himself. Listen to me—"

"I will not listen to you."

And she turned abruptly away. Elmhurst, stung to the quick by the biting scorn of her look, muttered an oath, and caught her by the wrist.

"But you shall listen. I tell you, it is in my power to drive Pat Clare from the mills—ay, and from Blackfield, and if—"

"Help! Pat, help!"

Madge had caught sight of the tall figure of Pat Clare swinging along the road over the moor. As she cried out to him, Elmhurst instantly released her wrist and turned to face Pat. At the sound of her voice, Pat quickened his pace, and he was on the scene seemingly in a flash.

One look at Madge's agitated face, and at the red mark on her wrist where Elmhurst's fingers had compressed it with unconscious force, was enough for Pat. And the bitter sneer upon Elmhurst's face did not tend to allay his wrath.

"I am here, Madge. And as for you, you scoundrel—"

His right lashed out, and Elmhurst rolled in the dust. He was upon his feet in an instant, however, and springing at Pat like a tiger.

Madge gave a cry. But the calm confidence in Pat's look reassured her. Elmhurst was five or six years older than he, and bigger in proportion, but the champion athlete and boxer of Blackdale College had nothing to fear from him.

And Elmhurst found his furious rush stopped in the most unexpected way. Instead of going down under his assault, or attempting to dodge, Pat Clare stood like a rock. His perfect guard swept the secretary's blows aside with ease, and then his right lashed out again, and his assailant staggered back before a terrible drive on the point of the chin, and before he could recover his balance Pat's left followed it up with a crashing blow, and for the second time he measured his length upon the ground. He rose more slowly this time.

He was hurt, but he was more astonished than hurt. He had never dreamed that the quiet, good-natured Pat Clare was such a terribly hard hitter.

He stood, his face working with fury, his handkerchief in his hand, mopping the red that was streaming from his damaged mouth.

"I shall not forget this, Pat Clare," he said, his voice hoarse and shaken with hatred.

"You had better not," said Pat disdainfully. "If Miss Darrell were not present I would give you the biggest hiding you ever had in your life. And if you don't clear jolly sharp, I'll give it to you now."

Elmhurst stopped back quickly.

"I am going," he said, between his teeth. "I have said that I shall not forget this, Pat Clare. And you shall have reason to remember it. I will have you kicked out of Blackfield. Wait till—"

Clare's eyes flashed, and he made a step towards the threatener. Elmhurst broke off, and, with a glare of menace, turned and hurried away.

Half an hour later he was in the presence of Mr. Darrell. He had washed some of the traces of the encounter from his face, but there were some that would not yield to soap and water, and the mill-owner gazed at him in astonishment.

"What has happened, Elmhurst? Have you had an accident?"

"Pat Clare has dared to lay hands upon me!" said the secretary, hissing out the words. "He has got to be discharged from the mills and sent adrift."

"It must have been your own fault," said Mr. Darrell nervously. "Clare never quarrels with anybody. What did you do?"

"Never mind what I did. Are you going to discharge Clare?"

"Don't be a fool, Elmhurst," said the mill-owner. "You know perfectly well that it is safer for me to keep him at the mills under my own eye. It would be folly to discharge him. I cannot consent to do it."

"Then you know the consequences," said Elmhurst, turning upon his heel.

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Darrell. "Are you really determined upon this?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then—then I will do as you wish," muttered the mill-owner. "Pat Clare—"

At this moment Madge entered the room. She had caught the name of Pat Clare, but no more, for Mr. Darrell paused abruptly as she came in.

She gave Elmhurst a glance of contempt and dislike, which brought a flash of rage to his eyes. Then she looked at her father.

"I could not help hearing you speak Pat's name, papa," she said. "What has Mr. Elmhurst been telling you about him?"

With quick feminine intuition she guessed at once how the land lay.

"Clare has been very—very unruly, Madge," faltered Mr. Darrell. "He has assaulted Mr. Elmhurst. I am afraid he will have to leave my employ."

"He has told you that?" cried the girl, with flashing eyes. "Has he told you also that he was annoying me, and that I called to Pat for help, which was the reason Pat knocked him down? Father, will you discharge Pat for defending me from a coward and a ruffian?"

Elmhurst writhed with rage. But Mr. Darrell was on his feet now, a blaze of wrath in his face. For the time all weakness and vacillation was gone.

"So that is the truth?" he thundered. "You did not tell me that! You—you cur, Pat Clare shall remain in my employ, and you—"

Gladly the mill-owner would have added the words: "And you shall leave it!" But recollection came in time, and they died upon his tongue. "Get out of my sight!" he cried. "I shall do something else that I may be sorry for."

"Are you prepared?"

"Not a word more. Go!"

And Elmhurst, biting his lips, swung round on his heel, and went.

He realised that he had gone too far, and that there comes a time when even the worm will turn. It was a defeat for him.

"But only for the time," he muttered, between his teeth. "Let Pat Clare look out! I will crush him to the very dust for the blows he gave me."

From Football to Fisticuffs.

PAT wondered a little how Elmhurst would meet him the next day at the mill. To his relief the secretary made not the slightest allusion to what had passed the previous evening, and, in fact, he did not speak to Pat at all if he could help it. Pat was glad enough for the affair to be passed over in silence.

He waited for Oakley when he left business that night, and the two walked together into Blackfield. They had a good deal to discuss, especially football.

"I suppose you know we go over to Stoneham on Saturday to play the Cherubs," remarked Oakley. "They are a rather older lot than we are, and rougher than the Barkley fellows we met last week. We shall have all our work cut out to lick them, and then—"

He paused, and Pat looked at him inquiringly.

"What then?" he asked.

"There's a pretty rough crowd at Stoneham," explained Oakley. "A lot of fellows there bet money on the game, and you know the humour they get in when they lose their tin. At a match there the other day the referee was mobbed for giving a penalty against the home side, and they pretty nearly scalped him. As a matter of fact, I was in two minds about going, but if we stayed away they would crow over us and say we had funk'd it. Still, it's no joke to have a free fight on your hands after a stiff football tussle."

Pat laughed.

"Hardly," he agreed. "It's a pity that fellows of that sort can't see what disgrace they are bringing upon themselves and upon the grand old game. It's a rotten crowd like that which makes people run down footer, without reflecting that such cases are really very few in number."

Oakley nodded.

"You're right. But perhaps the row there was about the affair the other day, will have taught the Cherubs a lesson. I hope so. Anyway, we are going, and with our new right wing I reckon we shall be able to make them sit up. I am going to put Nugent in as outside-right, so that he'll be your neighbour. If you're in as good form next Saturday as you were last, we shall give the Cherubs more than they bargain for."

Pat looked forward to the Saturday all through the week. He was too fond of the great game not to prize all the opportunities that came in his way of playing it. More than anything else he regretted in leaving Blackdale College were the playing-fields and the daily footer practice.

He did a good deal of sprinting in the evenings, and upon the whole he kept in very good form. He was certainly one of the strongest players in the Blackfield side, if not the strongest. When Saturday afternoon arrived, he was feeling very fit as he took his place with the rest of the team for the drive over to Stoneham.

The Stoneham ground was in a field outside the town, and there were a good many spectators on the scene when the visitors arrived. Clare ran his eye over the crowd as he went to the dressing-room assigned to the Blackfielders, and he did not like their looks. They were certainly a rough lot, and did not seem the kind of fellows to take a defeat in a sportsmanlike spirit.

Suddenly Clare gave a start. He had caught sight of a face he knew in the crowd. It was the face of Belton.

Belton saw him at the same time, and nodded his head with a mocking grin. Pat took no notice of him, beyond the first glance, but his face was grave as he went in, and Oakley observed it.

"Anything wrong, old chap?" asked the Ramblers' skipper. "Don't say you don't feel fit."

"Fit as a fiddle," answered Clare cheerfully. "I've just seen a fellow in the crowd who will make trouble for us if he can. I told you about Belton."

"So Belton's there!" exclaimed Oakley, looking a little worried. "What's he doing in Stoneham? The Nomads are playing at Underhill, and he ought to be there with them."

"It looks as if he means mischief," said Nugent. "I imagine we shall have a high old time if the Cherubs get the worst of it."

That was the general opinion, but all were agreed upon one point; they were going to do their level best to win, whatever came of it.

The crowd had grown in size when the time came to kick-off. A good many friends of the Ramblers had come over from Blackfield to watch the game, but the vast majority of the spectators were natives, and a large proportion of these were rowdies.

The Cherubs, as the Stoneham men were called, were a heavier team than the visitors from Blackfield, but Oakley believed that he had the better players. Their captain, Spence, tossed with Oakley for choice of goals, and lost. A sort of groan came from the crowd as Oakley chose his end, giving the home team a rather strong wind to play against. It was the first sign of unsportsmanlike ill-humour.

Stoneham kicked off against the wind, and the game commenced.

It was soon seen that the Cherubs relied more upon dash and force than finesse.

Their heavy rushes were hard to meet, and they took full, or more than full, advantage of the rules permitting charging.

And every advantage gained by a home player was greeted with roars of delight from the crowd, while at the best the visitors had chilling silence.

This, however, instead of dispiriting the Ramblers, had the effect of rousing their temper and putting them upon their mettle.

From the first they played up well and strong, animated by the example of their skipper and Pat Clare.

As often as Stoneham rushed the ball towards the visitors' goal, a Blackfield back sent it again to midfield, and for some time they could not even take a shot at goal. And when at last Spence sent the ball whizzing in, Doolan in goal fisted it out with ease, and a back got it and drove it away to Clare before the Cherubs could touch it.

Clare did not miss his opportunity.

He was away with the leather like a streak of lightning, beating the home halves as easily as he pleased.

Nugent and Oakley were speeding down the field, and as the home backs tackled Clare, he let Oakley have the ball.

After a feint that completely deceived the goalkeeper, Oakley sent in a fast low shot, and lodged the ball in the net.

From the Blackfielders round the ropes came a shout:

"Goal!"

But the Stoneham men were silent and glum, and there were even a few groans and hoots.

"Let 'em groan till they're black in the face," chuckled Pat. "That goal's ours, Oakley, and they can't groan the figure off the board!"

Oakley grinned.

"No. And we'll give 'em some more goals to groan over before we've finished."

"What-ho!"

There was a rather unpleasant look on most of the Cherubs' faces when they lined up again and faced the visitors.

They were an older team, and had reckoned upon having matters much their own way, and it was distinctly annoying to their self-love to see the Blackfield lads score the first goal.

They kicked off viciously, and followed it up by a determined rush into the visitors' territory, and at first carried all before them by sheer weight and determination.

They came right through the Blackfield forwards, and charged the halves away with little ceremony; but even as their inside-left was on the point of shooting in, a Blackfield full-back robbed him of the ball cleverly, and skied it, and Nugent headed it as it came down right past the half-way line.

The next moment Nugent rolled over, one of the home forwards having hooked him by the leg, only a shade too late to prevent his getting rid of the ball.

The fall was a nasty one, and Nugent hurt his wrists considerably as he came down upon his hands.

He was up again in a moment, however, and turned a glare of wrath upon the grinning forward who had brought him down.

But it was useless to utter the hot words that sprang to his lips, and he could only mentally resolve to get his own back at some further stage of the game.

Meanwhile, the rest of the visiting forwards were away with the ball, working their way right down the field, passing from one to another and back again in a really brilliant manner which hopelessly beat the slower and heavier Cherubs.

It was only by a desperate effort that the home backs made good the defence of their goal. The Blackfield men in the crowd were cheering wildly.

The red-shirted forwards seemed to be here, there, and everywhere. The home defence was demoralised, and the attackers rained in shots at goal. The goalie did his duty well between the posts, but after heading out a ball he suddenly slipped and sprawled his whole length upon the turf.

It was a splendid opportunity for Blackfield, and Oakley had the ball at his feet.

He was in the act of taking the kick, which would assuredly have been a goal, when one of the home forwards, racing up, charged him from behind, and he fell right on top of the ball.

It was a foul of the most glaring kind within the penalty area, and from all the Ramblers an indignant shout rose:

"Foul! Penalty!"

It was answered by a yell from the Stoneham crowd of angry derision.

"Where's the referee?" cried Nugent.

"Look here, what do you say to that?"

A Stoneham man was refereeing the match. He had begun with the intention of seeing fair play, but he had not the grit to carry it through.

He gave one look at the faces round the ground, while a thundering "Boo!" echoed in his ears.

Then he shook his head.

"I didn't see any foul," he replied.

"Where were your eyes?" cried Pat sharply.

"Do you mean to say that that was fair?"

Oakley staggered to his feet.

"We claim a penalty-kick!" he exclaimed hotly.

The referee looked round him helplessly, and wished himself anywhere else, making a mental vow never to be found in that position again.



YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

FROM YOUR EDITOR'S CHAIR.

Your Editor is always glad to hear from you about yourself or your favourite paper. He will answer you by post if you send a stamped addressed postcard or envelope. Write to him if you are in trouble, if you want information, or if you have any ideas for our paper. All letters to be addressed to the Editor of THE BOYS' REALM, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C. If your letter is not replied to here, it may be answered in "The Boys' Friend" next Tuesday, or "The Boys' Herald" next Thursday.

Your Editor also controls the destinies of "The Boys' Friend"—Tuesday, and "The Boys' Herald"—Thursday.

THE BOYS' REALM Football League—An Important Question.

THE following important question comes to me from one of my friends, and as it must necessarily be of interest to every member of the teams which are competing in THE BOYS' REALM League—and I am glad to say that the applications are coming in in very gratifying numbers—I deem it well that this question should be answered definitely and promptly in this number.

"Legge's Mount,"
"Tower of London."

"Dear Editor,—As our club is about to compete for your challenge cup this season on the terms mentioned in THE BOYS' REALM, we should be obliged if you will decide which boy should hold the cup in the case of a club having no committee-room.—Yours faithfully,"

"S. GIBBS."

Naturally, the fortunate club which becomes the possessor of either the Senior Division Cup or the Junior Division Cup will want to know what is to be the ultimate fate of the trophy.

Properly, of course, it belongs to the club, and should be held by the committee, who should appoint among themselves one of their officers to be the caretaker of the cup. It seems to me that there are three responsible persons from among whom the choice should be made, and these are the treasurer, the secretary, and the captain.

I must leave it, however, to the committee of the winning club to decide which member shall be the caretaker of the club's treasure. Naturally, of course, it will always remain the property of the club, but he upon whom the choice falls will have to take care of it for his fellow-members, and be responsible for its safety. It is an important post to fill, and one which should be considered very carefully by any member who is called upon to undertake the task.

They Made Me Laugh Very Much.

I CANNOT help quoting this remark from the letter of an Oxford reader, whose initials are T. W. H. He says that he has bought both of the threepenny Jack, Sam, and Pete books, and they made him laugh very much; in fact, he was so delighted with these three great characters that he wants me to put them in THE BOYS' REALM.

This, I am afraid, I cannot do at present; but if my reader wants to read more about Jack, Sam, and Pete, let him buy the Christmas "Marvel," which contains the third of the threepenny Jack, Sam, and Pete tales. This is incorporated in the Special Christmas Double Number of "The Marvel," so that my reader

will get his full threepennyworth in this story alone, and in addition the Christmas Double Number of that famous paper. The Christmas "Marvel" will be on sale December 20th.

Good Football Stories.

THERE is no doubt in my mind that some of my footballing chums must at some time or other have witnessed a humorous incident in connection with their own particular clubs when on the football field. This being the case, I want my lads to send me an account of the most laughable experience they can remember. A really funny story is what I want, but I do not desire my lads to make these up. I want them to be real accounts of actual occurrences, and the name of the club concerned must be sent with each story, together with the signature of the secretary as to the authenticity of the facts.

Each week it is my intention to award two prizes of half-a-crown each for the best football yarn sent in, these being published in the columns of our paper. Now, my lads, put your thinking caps on, and try and recollect the most amusing incident you can remember in connection with your club when playing the good old game of football.

A Would-be Plumber's Mate.

ONE of my friends, who lives in the South-East of London, asks me to give him some advice on this question. He says he is desirous of becoming a plumber's mate, but as he has had no experience he would like to know how to set about getting this job.

The simplest plan which my young friend can adopt is to make application to some plumber in his own district, asking him for employment in the capacity which he mentions. It may be that his father knows a man who follows the trade of a plumber, and will speak for him in this connection.

Making a Bargain.

ONE of my friends, who signs himself W. D. R. L., and who lives in Yorkshire, wants me to make a bargain with him. He tells me that he has been asked to a party on Christmas Day, and he is expected to do something, either to sing a song, play the piano, or do something else to amuse the rest of the guests; but as he can neither sing nor play the piano, he wants me to tell him of some simple conjuring tricks, and he makes me a sporting offer by guaranteeing to give away a copy of THE BOYS' REALM for each trick I tell him.

My young friend is very business-like, and I feel inclined to take advantage of his offer. In THE BOYS' REALM next week he will find some simple conjuring tricks and games to amuse his

friends, and in "The Boys' Friend" and "The Boys' Herald," published next Tuesday and Thursday respectively, he will find other tricks which, if he learns, he will be able to provide his friends with a good deal of amusement and acquit himself with credit.

A Great Experiment.

NOW, my young friends, just a line on a subject of some importance. This is a word in connection with "The Marvel Library," which, as some of you must know, is under my control. A special threepenny Christmas Number of "The Marvel" will be on sale everywhere on Wednesday, December 20th.

The reason why the Christmas Number of "The Marvel" is so much increased in price is that it contains, among other things, a 70,000-word novel dealing with Jack, Sam, and Pete.

Jack, Sam, and Pete, the invention of that clever and popular author, Mr. S. Clarke Hook, have won favour in the hearts of thousands and thousands of boys, young men, and even grown-up men all over the country. Even in music-halls and other places of public amusement fun is made out of Jack, Sam, and Pete. This is a sure sign of the widespread popularity of these three amusing characters; so the fact that a grand, long, complete story, about 70,000 words in length, is appearing in the Christmas Number of "The Marvel" should be incentive enough for any boy to buy a copy.

But this giant story is not the only attraction I am giving to my friends in the Christmas Number of "The Marvel." In it there will also be a long ghost story, by Reginald Wray, a fine, long detective story, by Cedric Wolfe, and a clever, long school tale, by Edgar Pickering.

Another attraction will be the fact that the immortal Pete will edit the Special Christmas Number of "The Marvel."

Altogether, "The Marvel" will contain one hundred and fifty thousand words of healthy, interesting reading matter for the small price of threepence.

Next to the Christmas Number of THE REALM, I am sure that this Special Christmas Double Number of "The Marvel" will be the greatest success of the season, so I hope all my friends who follow the fortunes of Jack, Sam, and Pete will make a point of getting this Special "Marvel" Number, out December 20th, price threepence.

A Fine New Story.

I AM sure that all my friends will be sorry that Mr. Cecil Hayter's grand story, "The Quest of the Ruby Scarab," has now come to its natural conclusion. However, they will be pleased to hear that Mr. Hayter is busy on another magnificent adventure tale, the opening chapters of which will appear shortly.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

A Special Christmas Number Next Week.

NEXT week's issue of our paper will be a special Christmas-week number, living up to the traditions which have made THE REALM so popular a journal amongst my friends, and I am laying myself out to make next week's issue a particularly attractive one.

In it I am publishing two specially good Christmas tales, one of them by the popular creator of "Paddy Leary," entitled

"BOB ARMSTRONG'S CHRISTMAS."

The other is by a gentleman who has written many splendid complete stories for THE BOYS' REALM, and it is entitled "The Hair of Archdale," by Mr. Tom Oliver.

There is another feature in this number which, I am sure, all my friends will read with intense interest, but which modesty forbids my enlarging upon in this paragraph. It is an article entitled

"HOW YOUR EDITOR SPENDS HIS CHRISTMAS,"

and I think all my friends take sufficient interest in the man who presides over the destinies of THE BOYS' REALM to welcome some facts about his private life. "How Your Editor Spends Christmas" will be a special article for the Christmas-week number of our paper, and will let my friends into some of the secrets of Your Editor's private life at this festive season of the year.

Fattening Thin Arms.

A. P. is a Bedford reader, who wants me to tell him how to fatten his thin arms.

The best method of improving poorly developed arms is to go in for light dumb-bell exercises.

Let my friend A. P. get a pair of two-pound dumb-bells and practise with them for five or ten minutes every night and morning. After a few weeks he will find his muscles begin to improve, and if he persists in working with these light dumb-bells he will soon possess a pair of arms of which any lad might well be proud.

FOOTBALL FORTUNE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

The crowd gave a yell, as he was seen to waver, as if to warn him what to expect if he decided against their favourites.

Then he made up his mind. He wasn't of the stuff that heroes and martyrs are made of.

"I have given my decision," he replied. "No penalty will be awarded."

And he turned his back.

Now, though the decision was manifestly unfair, as some of the home team themselves did not disguise, the Blackfield lads were too true sportsmen not to play the game, and part of the "game" was to obey the decisions of the referee, however absurd or unjust.

"All right," muttered Oakley to Pat; "let them have their way. We'll beat them yet."

"By Jove we will!" said Pat, setting his teeth.

And the rest of the visiting team were in the same humour.

The referee threw down the ball, the signal for hostilities to recommence, and as neither Oakley nor Nugent was in very good form after the fouling, the Blackfield forward line was weak, and the home team got away with the ball.

They brought it rapidly into the visitors' half, and made a determined attack on goal; but the

Blackfield backs put up a good defence, and before the enemy had a chance to shoot the whistle gave the signal for half-time.

The pace had been hot, and both sides were glad of the respite.

The score was one goal for the visitors, against nil for the home eleven, so that, though the Ramblers considered they had been "done" out of a goal, they were ahead, and likely to keep there.

"This is the last visit we shall ever pay to Stoneham!" exclaimed Oakley, as he sponged his face. "I don't much blame the ref. Even a professional referee might have been daunted by the looks of that crowd of roughs. We are not out of the wood yet. If we beat the Cherubs there will be a howl, depend upon it."

"There's no if about it," declared Pat. "We've got to beat them, and we're going to beat them."

"Well, I feel pretty sure we can do it," assented the Blackfield skipper. "It's no good looking for fair play, but we'll win, in spite of fouls."

"I don't see why all the fouling should be on their side!" exclaimed Nugent, who was rubbing his wrists, still aching from his fall.

"We are not a ninepin team, I suppose, to be knocked about at their own sweet will."

"We could give them as good as they send," remarked a Blackfield half.

Oakley shook his head decidedly.

"We're in the enemy's country," he said. "It won't do. Those roughs outside only want half an excuse to go for us if we beat their men, and a foul would be more than enough for them."

"That's right!" said Pat. "We'll play the game, if they don't!"

"You haven't been hurt!" growled Nugent.

"I have, then," exclaimed Oakley; "and I say the same as Clare—play the game."

It was time to reappear in the field, and the Blackfield fellows turned out, and once more faced their adversaries.

During the interval the crowd had not improved in temper. Pat caught a glimpse of Belton's grinning face as he went on, and saw that the Barkley man was in a group of brutal-looking Stoneham roughs. He was more certain than ever that the man designed mischief.

Blackfield kicked off. The change of ends brought them against the wind, a fact of which the home team took full advantage.

Stoneham played their old game, making heavy rushes, with less and less regard for fair play; but Blackfield, knowing how useless it was to complain, bore it, even if they did not "grin."

But their tempers were getting sharper, as was only natural. The temptation to give back as good as they received was too much for some of them.

Presently, after a dozen transparent fouls by the home players, a home forward was tripped, and a Rambler captured the ball; and then the crowd shouted lustily enough:

"Foul! Play the game!"

The referee, like a wise man, had taken French leave in the interval, so that Stoneham's shouts of "Where's the referee?" were left unanswered.

The home backs stopped the advance of the Ramblers, however, and there was a tussle in the Cherubs' half, which soon showed signs of degenerating into a scuffle.

Spence, the Stoneham skipper, extracted the ball from the press, and was off with it; but Nugent was after him in a flash, and, being lighter and a far superior sprinter, he got abreast of the Cherub, and took the ball away from him.

Before he could escape with it a Stoneham winger was upon him, attempting to trip him

in the most barefaced way. Nugent's temper had been at boiling-point for some time, and this was the last straw.

Turning upon the Stoneham fellow like a flash, he struck out straight from the shoulder, and laid him flat upon his back.

There was a terrific roar round the field.

"Foul!"

"Go for him!"

"Come on, boys!"

The last words were in Belton's voice. Led by the Barkley rough, the excited and angry crowd poured into the field of play.

"Cut it, you fellows!" exclaimed Spence warningly.

And he did his best to keep back his over-zealous partisans, while the visiting team made a wild stampede for their dressing-room, their only refuge in that emergency.

Shoulder to shoulder, the Blackfield lads rushed off the field, all idea of finishing the game being now, of course, abandoned. They hit out right and left at all who sought to bar their path, and were almost in safety when there was an ugly rush of the roughs, with Belton at their head.

Belton had singled Pat out, but it was not needed, for Pat was rushing to meet him. The young footballer caught upon his left arm the blow of the ruffian's stick which was meant for his head, and then his right fist crashed like a sledgehammer full in the savage, spiteful face.

Down went the ruffian like a slaughtered ox, and the feet of his friends passed over him.

Then Pat bounded after his comrades, and was the last to leave the field. Round the door the roughs howled and boomed, but did not venture within.

(This fine football serial will be continued in next Saturday's Special Christmas Week Number of THE BOYS' REALM—1d.)

ANSWERS
ONE PENNY
Every Tuesday.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS WEEK ISSUE. Next Saturday. Two Complete Yuletide Stories and Splendid Interesting Articles.