

ENTHRALLING STORY OF THE "ALL BLACKS." (SEE BELOW.)



A BRIGHT AND UP-TO-DATE PAPER FOR ALL BRITISH BOYS AND YOUNG MEN.

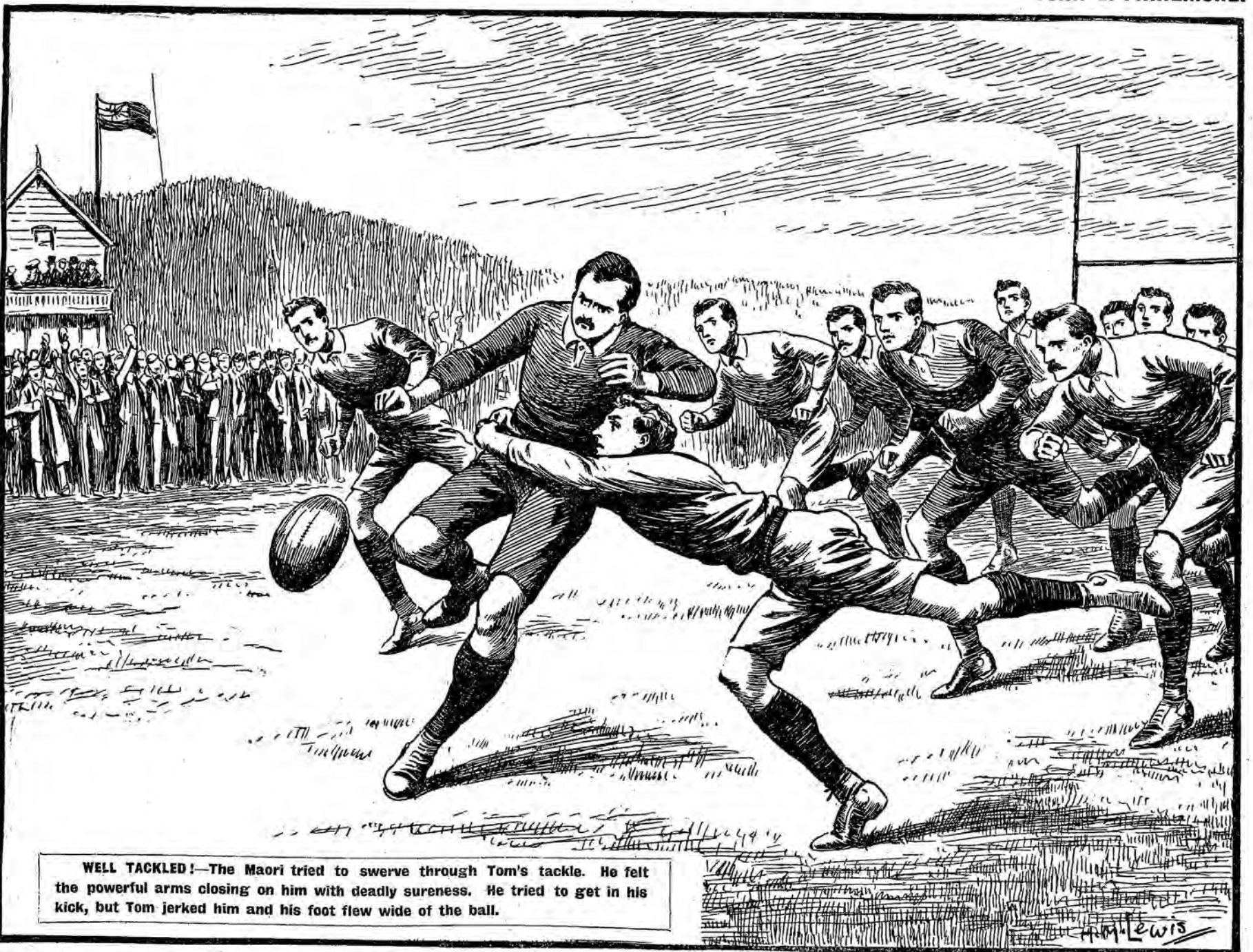
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EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30TH, 1905.]

BAFFLING THE MAORIS!

Being Another Magnificent Story of Slapton School by JOHN E. FINNEMORE.



WELL TACKLED!—The Maori tried to swerve through Tom's tackle. He felt the powerful arms closing on him with deadly sureness. He tried to get in his kick, but Tom jerked him and his foot flew wide of the ball.

THE 1st CHAPTER. The Trial Game.

ON a Monday afternoon in November, Tom Sandys, Arthur Digby, and Teddy Lester were seated round a cheerful fire in Study Number Ten. They had just come up from the playing-fields, and, like everyone else, were deep in discussion of the great Rugger game which had been played the Saturday before—Scotland v. New Zealand.

The marvellous tour of the mighty New Zealanders was being followed by every boy in Slapton School with deep and burning interest.

As the Colonials scored one crushing victory after another, Rugger players began to look at each other, and wonder what would happen with the Internationals. Would the home counties be beaten one after another in the smashing fashion in which the New Zealand fifteen had laid out the big clubs and counties?

"Well," cried Tom, as he finished reading once more an account of the great game, "at any rate, the New Zealanders haven't smashed Scotland flat, that's one comfort! Instead of being all over them, they only just managed to scrape a win!"

"I don't believe in their style of play," said

Arthur Digby. And then a long argument broke out over "five-eighths," one half-back, "wing-forwards," and the like.

"Hallo," said Teddy Lester, in the midst of the discussion, "someone's rapping at the door!"

"Come in!" sang out Tom. The door was opened, and they saw the tall form of Slater, captain of football.

"Sit down, Slater! Glad to see you!" cried Tom hospitably. And the great man took a chair.

"I could hear you fellows in the passage,"

said Slater. "Hammering at the New Zealand style of playing Rugger—eh?"

"That was it!" replied Tom. "What's your idea of this wing-forward business, Slater?"

"Doesn't suit our style of play at all," replied the football captain. "But everything must be judged by results. If the New Zealand style means winning games, it will be adopted. Just the same as, years ago, we were driven by the Welshmen to play four three-quarters. By the way, Sandys, you belong to this county, don't you?"

(Continued on the next page.) G

FOOTBALL



A FINE NEW FOOTBALL SERIAL, By CHARLES 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 dupe. The blow was too much, and Mr. Clare's mind became unbalanced. 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 first half of a game played against Bentham, Pat was badly fouled and had to be carried off the field, much to the sorrow of Madge Darrell, who was watching the game. In the second half of the game Phil Nugent, Pat's cousin, scored a clever goal, and the onlookers cheered vociferously.

Nugent's Triumph.

It was a goal, finely taken, and it raised the spirits of the Ramblers. Playing without Clare, they had forged ahead, and their anticipations were now high. All thought of a draw was now disdainfully banished, and nothing less than a win would satisfy them.

But when the ball was kicked off again a change came over the spirit of their dream. Bentham had made up their minds to avenge their defeat, and play was hard and fast, the visitors gradually forcing their way forward.

The red shirts of the Ramblers were soon massed in front of their own goal, which they had all their work cut out to defend.

The Bentham attack gave them no rest. Again the goalie was called upon to save, and once, twice, and thrice he did it, but the fourth shot, sent in by Price, found him wanting. He lost it by a foot or more, and it lodged in the net. With a grunt he threw it out into the field.

It was two all now, and still ten minutes to play.

The game had been so finely contested on both sides that even Colonel Darrell, than whom a better judge of football did not exist in the three kingdoms, would not have cared to predict which side would pull it off.

"Have you marked Phil Nugent's play, Madge?" he observed. "It is the best on the field. He would be by no means a bad recruit for United, I'm thinking. I wish I could have seen more of Clare's play. But I shall take an opportunity of seeing it again."

"Phil plays very well," said Madge, "but nothing like Pat, I think."

"He is in good form now," exclaimed the colonel. "Look, they're away again, and Nugent in the lead! He'll beat that half, see if he doesn't! There, what did I tell you? Now, pass, pass, you duffer—pass! If he sticks to the ball—Ah, no! There, he's let Oakley have it! Now to the left-wing! That's right! Shoot—shoot!"

The colonel was on his feet now; his eyes sparkling.

The outside-left sent in the ball to the centre, and Oakley drove it in, but it came out again,

fisted by the goalkeeper, who was defending right merrily, glad to be at work again after his long rest.

"Shoot—shoot!" roared the crowd, as the ball fell almost at Nugent's foot.

He had but a second to decide and to kick, and the goalie was watching him like a hawk—waiting and watching for any kind of shot that he sent in.

And Nugent kicked, and the ball seemed to curl round the outstretched hand of the goalkeeper, escaping him by certainly not more than half an inch.

But half an inch was as good as half a league, for the ball was in the net, and the delighted cheers of the Blackfielders announced the fact.

"Bravo!" shouted the colonel.

The goal had been taken almost on time. The whistle went as the discomfited custodian picked it up.

The Ramblers trooped off the field in gleeful humour.

"I don't need to ask who won," smiled Pat, as he looked at them. "Who kicked the winning goal?"

"Nugent."

At this moment a note was brought into the dressing-room from Colonel Darrell. It was for Phil Nugent. He took it with a flushed cheek and a trembling hand.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Oakley, as Nugent looked at the brief message.

"Nothing," replied Nugent, with assumed carelessness; "only Colonel Darrell has asked me to call upon him about playing for United."

And then a cheer rang through the dressing-room, in which Pat Clare joined as heartily as any.

Father and Daughter—An Act of Treachery

MADGE! Mr. Darrell's tone was hesitating, his manner nervous. He made an effort to appear at his ease as the girl's large, clear eyes turned upon him inquiringly; but he did not succeed.

"Yes, papa."

"Mr. Elmhurst has complained to me—"

He broke off. "I wish you would try to be a little more—more civil to him, Madge."

Madge's eyes flashed.

"You know that he insulted me, papa."

Mr. Darrell shifted uneasily.

"Yes, yes; but he did not mean—that is to say, he forgot himself, and he is very anxious to apologise. He has expressed his regret very sincerely, and—and I should like him to be upon his old footing here."

Madge's hands were clasped, the fingers twining together nervously. More than once she had been upon the point of speaking on the subject that was uppermost in her mind, but she had refrained. Now, almost unconsciously, the words passed her lips.

"Father, what is this strange influence Mr. Elmhurst seems to possess over you? You do not like him any more than I do. I believe you dislike him. Yet you seem to yield to him in everything."

She half regretted the words as soon as they were spoken. She expected to see a frown of anger upon her father's face. Instead of that, he turned deadly pale, and sank back in his chair.

"Madge, what are you saying?" he said huskily. "Has Mr. Elmhurst said anything to you about possessing power over me? Answer me instantly."

"No," said Madge; "but he has thrown out hints. And—and his conduct speaks for itself. I am sure it was Mr. Elmhurst who caused you to forbid Pat—"

"Nonsense! Pat Clare's position is very different now, and, of course, he cannot expect to be treated the same as formerly. Mr. Elmhurst, Madge, is in all my secrets—business secrets, I mean—which I naturally do not wish to be made known to my competitors in Blackfield. I cannot, therefore, afford to part with him. That is all. You see, you are making a great mystery out of nothing."

Madge was silent.

It was possible that the case was as her father stated it, but she had an inward feeling that he was far from telling her the whole truth.

"Therefore, Madge," continued Mr. Darrell. "I wish you to be a little more agreeable to Mr. Elmhurst. You need not fear any further transgression on his part. As for Pat Clare, I have no objection to your seeing him when there is any reason for so doing. I did not stipulate that your acquaintance should wholly cease. And now, my dear girl, leave me. I have some letters to write."

Madge went slowly to her room.

She was thinking deeply. More than ever she was certain that Glyn Elmhurst held some mysterious power over her father. His conduct had shown it upon a dozen occasions; and now Mr. Darrell's request that she should receive the secretary on a friendly footing at Fern House after what had occurred, was a proof of it to her mind.

But that her father could have a guilty secret did not occur to her. She dimly realised that Mr. Darrell was shifty, that in some matters he had a mean spirit. But a crime—that never entered her mind at all. If he was in the secretary's power, it was through some cunning trickery of Glyn Elmhurst's, and if the whole truth came to light, he would be released from Elmhurst's baneful influence. That was what the girl thought, in her innocence, and she had often longed for someone to counsel her, to help her to save her father.

And now she had made up her mind. There was only one person in whom she felt that she could absolutely confide, and that was Pat Clare.

"Pat will help me," she said to herself. "It is more than a week since we have met, so there can be no objection to my seeing him to-morrow. He will help me; or, at least, he will give me counsel."

And so the next morning, when Pat Clare came down to breakfast, he found a little note lying beside his plate. He knew the handwriting, and a flush of pleasure stole over his cheeks. The next moment he caught Philip Nugent's burning glance fixed upon him.

Nugent had seen the note, and he knew from whom it came. The cousins were still sharing the same diggings, though that arrangement was about to end. Since their late quarrel, Philip had given notice, and on the following Monday he was to move into new quarters.

During breakfast he did not speak a word, and Pat did not care to open the letter in his presence. The unsociable meal ended, he put Madge's note in his pocket, donned his overcoat, and went out. He opened the letter on top of the electric tram which bore him towards the Blackfield Mills.

Nugent, whose heart was on fire with jealousy, had boarded the same tram, and sat a few seats away, watching his cousin like a cat.

He saw Clare read the note, give a slight start at the opening line, and then read it twice again. Then he replaced it in the envelope, and put it in his pocket.

What had Madge written?

That question haunted Nugent. Jealousy and rage had dulled his sense of honour. He began to turn over in his mind schemes for seeing the contents of the letter.

It was a sharp and windy winter's morning. Clare had buttoned his coat to the chin, and he had naturally placed the letter, after reading it, in an outside pocket. Nugent's eyes gleamed as a thought came into his mind. Clare would remove the overcoat at the office, and if he did not transfer the letter to another pocket, it should not be difficult to find an opportunity of abstracting it.

Nugent accordingly did not lose sight of Clare for a moment. His eyes glittered when he saw that Clare hung up his coat without removing the letter. Pat, of course, had not the faintest suspicion of what was in his cousin's mind.

For the next hour or so Nugent gave little attention to his work. The thought of the letter possessed his mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. What had Madge written to Clare? Was his old suspicion correct, that she had given Pat her love, and that there was no chance for him? At all events, he would see what she had written. But the risk of purloining it daunted him. If Clare should suspect—if he should be caught in the act! The thought made his face scarlet as he bent over his desk.

Luck seemed to favour him, for presently Clare was sent on some matter into the work-rooms, and it was pretty certain that he would be absent at least ten minutes. Nugent felt that his opportunity had come. His heart beat hard, and his breath came quickly. But it was with an appearance of calmness that he went out a few minutes after Clare.

There was the coat—and the letter! In a moment more his hand was in the pocket where he had seen Clare place it, and the letter was in his grasp. He drew it out, and after a quick glance round he opened it swiftly and ran his eye over the contents.

"Dear Pat—I am in great distress, and I think you could help me. Will you come to the old gate this evening after you have left the mill?—Madge."

That was all.

But it was enough.

It was a rendezvous, Nugent thought, grinding his teeth. He stood for a moment with the letter in his hand, white with rage, and then hastily replaced it where he had found it.

A slight cough fell upon his ears. His heart almost stood still as he swung round, for he knew he had been seen.

Glyn Elmhurst stood within a half-dozen paces of him, regarding him with a smile, half contemptuous, half amused.

Nugent drew a breath of relief.

It was only Elmhurst. There is a sympathy in hatred, and these two had been drawn

together lately by their animosity towards Clare, especially since the compact on the moor. Nugent felt that the secretary could not afford to betray him.

"Your cousin would be pleased, no doubt, if he knew the deep interest you take in his correspondence," said Elmhurst drily. "That is Clare's coat, I believe." Then something in Nugent's face told him the truth. "Was that letter from Madge Darrell?"

Nugent nodded sullenly.

A flash blazed in Elmhurst's eyes, and he made a quick step forward. At the same moment there was a sound of approaching footsteps.

"Come with me," muttered the secretary. He passed through the counting-house into the private office. Mr. Darrell had left the mill, and he had the room to himself. Nugent followed him in and closed the door.

Elmhurst's face was white with passion.

"Tell me what was in that letter," he said abruptly—"every word, mind!"

Nugent sullenly repeated it. It had been brief enough for him to remember every word. Elmhurst listened quietly.

"The old gate," he muttered grimly. "I know it. So he is to meet her there this evening—a meeting by moonlight. Ha, ha!" He laughed disagreeably. "Let him go! There will be another there whom he will not expect to see—"

Nugent was startled by the murderous light that leaped into the man's eyes, and he shrank back. Elmhurst's manner immediately changed.

"You can go, Nugent. Take these papers with you. You had better appear to have had some reason for coming here."

Nugent nodded, and left the room without speaking.

An Unexpected Meeting—A Thief in the Night.

ASILVER crescent of moon sailed in a steely sky, and a sharp wind blew over the moor when Pat Clare strode along Blackfield Lane. The lane was almost as light as day, save where the shadows of the trees barred it with black.

A man passed him in the moonlight, and gave him an evil look as he passed. It was Belton, the ruffian he had so severely handled at Stoneham.

Clare gave him a careless glance and went on. Belton stopped and stared after him with a look of bitter hatred. The way of the transgressor is said to be hard, and Belton had found it very hard. The Barkley Nomads had turned him out after hearing of his conduct at Stoneham. He did not take his dismissal quietly, and a series of "rows" with his former comrades followed, and the result was that the man was discharged from his employment at the ironworks. He was now without a job, and with very little prospect of finding one, and with perverted malice he persisted in regarding Pat Clare as the cause of his misfortunes.

Pat, thinking of Madge, forgot the ruffian a moment after he had passed him. He came in sight of the "old gate," which gave upon a secluded part of the grounds of Fern House.

A figure was visible by the gate in the moonlight, but it was not Madge Darrell's.

Pat slackened his pace as he saw it. His astonishment was extreme, for it was a man who stood by the gate, and the man was Glyn Elmhurst.

Elmhurst gave him a mocking smile.

"I am afraid you are disappointed, Mr. Clare," he said.

Clare stopped and looked at the secretary without speaking. It did not yet occur to him what had happened.

Elmhurst burst into a laugh.

"You do not seem to understand. Miss Darrell has been unable to keep her appointment, and I am here in her place."

Pat's eyes glittered dangerously.

It was clear that Elmhurst knew the reason of his coming there, though how he knew it Pat could not guess. It was equally clear that he had contrived to prevent Madge from keeping her appointment. The disappointment was keen, especially as Madge's letter had made Clare very uneasy on her account.

But far deeper than even his disappointment was his anger at Elmhurst's insolence.

The secretary watched him keenly, ready for a hostile movement. His right hand was hidden behind him with what it held.

He went on speaking in his cool, deliberate voice, as if his special object were to madden the young man before him.

"I've spoken to you before on this subject, my man. I've told you that it is useless for a needy fortune-hunter to seek—"

"Hold your tongue!" grated Clare. "You will repent it if you carry your insolence too far, I warn you!"

Elmhurst shrugged his shoulders.

"It's my way to call a spade a spade!" he replied. "You are a needy fortune-hunter. You think you have a claim on Miss Darrell for the sake of auld lang syne, and so forth. You may be able to fool a girl, but you cannot fool me. You are on the make, and you know it!"

The veins stood out on Clare's forehead.

"You cowardly hound, I'll make you eat your words!"

He sprang forward.

The secretary's hidden hand flashed out into view, and there was a loaded cane in it. With a savage curse he aimed a blow at Clare's head.

Clare was taken by surprise. He threw up his arm to guard his head, barely in time. The

FOOTBALL FORTUNE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

blow fell upon his arm and his head together, and he reeled back. His arm dropped to his side, numbed by the shock.

With a click of the teeth Elmhurst sprang towards him to repeat the blow.

But it had not taken Pat an instant to recover himself. The presence of mind, the rapidity of thought and action, learned on the football field, stood him in good stead now. With a swift movement he eluded the descending came, which grazed his shoulder, and then flung himself upon his assailant.

His left arm was useless, but his right fist came into play with terrible effect.

Before Elmhurst could strike again the iron-like knuckles smote him fairly on the mouth, and he staggered back.

"You coward!" cried Clare.

And he followed up his first blow with a second, which sent Elmhurst to the earth with a crash.

The cane had fallen from Elmhurst's hand. Pat picked it up and flung it over the gate. He stood looking down on the fallen man with blazing eyes.

"You coward! You deserve to be thrashed within an inch of your life! And, by Jove, I'll give you what you deserve, if you don't instantly tell me by what mean trick you learned that I was coming here to-night!"

"Stand back!" gasped Elmhurst. Those two terrible blows had taken all the bravado out of him. "It was Nugent told me."

"How could he know?"

"He read the letter."

Pat turned away without another word.

He strode back the way he had come, his eyes still ablaze with wrath. A moving shadow in the moonlight caught his eye; he ran swiftly forward.

"Nugent!"

His cousin faced him sullenly.

"Well?"

His tone was defiant, but his eyes did not meet Clare's.

"So you came to see me fall into the trap," said Clare scornfully. "It was worthy of you, after reading another fellow's letter."

Nugent turned deadly pale.

"I—I did not—"

"It is false. You purloined my letter and read it, and told Elmhurst that I was coming here. You are a cur!"

Pat was too enraged to measure his words just then. With a glance of contempt that stung Nugent to the very soul, he strode on.

Nugent stood quivering with rage.

"Oh, how I hate him!"

"You hate him?" He turned at Elmhurst's voice. There was blood upon the secretary's face, and his nose was swollen. "You hate him? And I hate him! Listen, and I will tell you how we shall take a full and fearful vengeance upon him. Are you with me?"

"To any length," replied Nugent recklessly. "Show me a way to humiliate him, to ruin him, and I am your slave for life. You hinted at something of the kind once before. Have you a plan? Speak! I tell you I am game for anything!"

"For anything? Think!"

"For anything, I tell you!" snarled Nugent.

"What is the plan?"

"A plan that will ruin him, that will brand him for life, that will drive him from Blackfield stained and disgraced, if it does not send him to herd with thieves in prison!" hissed the secretary, his voice vibrating with passion.

And Nugent answered, with savage emphasis:

"I'm game, whatever it is! Go on!"

"Take this pocket-book. It contains fifty pounds in Bank of England notes. Take it. Now come, and as we go along I'll explain my plan."

They walked together down the lane, Elmhurst speaking eagerly.

From the dense shadow of a big elm a man came creeping out, his face aflame with greed, his eyes agleam.

It was Belton.

He had seen Nugent coming up the lane, and had stepped into the shadow. He remembered the meeting on Blackfield Moor, when Nugent had struck him down, and for Nugent's hatred was almost as fierce as for Clare. And he did not fear Nugent as he feared Clare. In the shadow of the elm he unhooked his belt, with a savage purpose in his heart. But what had followed had changed his intentions.

He saw Nugent place in his breast the pocket-book handed him by Elmhurst. His whole face was aflame with cupidity as he came from his lurking-place.

"Fifty pounds—fifty pounds! And me out of work, all through him and his cousin! Fifty pounds, and this time next week I may be without the price of a drink. Fifty pounds! I'll have that pocket-book if I have to out him for it!"

And he cautiously followed the two figures down the lane.

He did not venture near enough to hear what they said, but he could see that they were in deep and earnest talk.

He muttered an oath. Would they keep together until they reached Blackfield? Until they separated he had no chance. Yes, it was not until they were entering the lighted streets that they parted, Nugent keeping on alone to his lodgings.

The ruffian still followed him. Nugent had not the remotest suspicion of it; he seemed immersed in thought.

Belton gritted his teeth. If he would only turn into a dark and quiet street! Even as the thought passed through the shadower's mind Nugent did so. Belton quickly followed, and saw him enter a garden gate, evidently the back entrance to the house where he lodged.

The garden was a long one, with a couple of trees in it, and very dark. Belton hesitated a moment, and then he, too, passed the gate. Keeping in the shadow, he saw Nugent push open a half-glass door, which gave admission to a small but cosy sitting-room. It was a room which Pat and his cousin shared in common, but Pat was not there now.

Nugent closed the door and drew down the blind which covered the glass in the upper half. As he did so, Belton saw his face in the light, and saw that it was ashy white, with large drops of perspiration glistening on the forehead.

The blind was a Venetian, and had long ago seen its best days. When it was down, there were two or three rifts through which shafts of light gleamed out into the dark garden. Belton actuated now almost as much by curiosity as by the thought of the banknotes, had his eye to one of the rifts in an instant. He could see almost the whole of the room's interior. He saw Nugent stand for two or three minutes quite still, his hand resting on the table, evidently deep in thought. Then, with a sudden movement, as of one who has made up his mind,

pocket-book was in his hand, and the drawer closed again. He thrust the prize into his pocket and quitted the room as silently as he had entered it. A few moments more and he was clear of the garden, and hurrying away with his prize.

A Well-Fought Match—"I Arrest You!"

PAT CLARE appeared at the mill as usual the following morning, which was Saturday. He looked a little pale, and there was still a dull ache in his left arm, resulting from the blow of the loaded cane. He did not feel in the best form, and he thought, with some doubt, of the afternoon's match.

The Ramblers were booked to play Brandley Athletic, on their own ground. Brandley were a strong team, and Clare did not feel fit to do his side justice. He waited for Oakley when he left the mill and told him frankly how matters stood.

The captain of Blackfield Ramblers looked deeply concerned.

"You think you won't be able to play?"

"Well, not so bad as that," replied Pat, with a smile. "I think I shan't be able to do our side justice. I'm awfully sorry."

"Of course, you can't help it. But I don't know what we shall do. You see, we lose Nugent to-day. Dixon is in his place, and, as a matter of fact, he isn't nearly up to your cousin's form. If you go we may as well give Brandley the game."

"Of course, if you think it best to play me,

team, and was supposed to possess some influence with the management.

If Elmhurst could prevent it, it was pretty certain that he would never play for United, and Pat was well aware that his enemy would stick at nothing to injure him.

Elmhurst had not appeared at the mills that morning. There was a rumour that he was ill, and it was certain that he was not playing for United in the afternoon. Pat smiled grimly, as he thought of it. He had no doubt that the secretary felt seedy after the encounter of the previous evening. Pat wondered a little what would come of it. Elmhurst was the last man in the world to take his punishment "lying down." With his influence over Mr. Darrell, whatever the source of it, it should not be difficult for him to have Clare turned out of the mills, as he had more than once threatened.

But Pat did not allow the prospect to trouble him. It was useless to meet troubles half-way. And he had the football match to think about now. As the train steamed into Brandley, he forgot all about Elmhurst, little dreaming of the terrible plot which was even then working against him in Blackfield.

They left the train and made their way to the football ground. Brandley was not a large place, being, in fact, an off-shoot of Blackfield. But its football enthusiasm was as keen as that of the larger town, and it took a great interest in the fortunes of the local team. A big crowd had gathered at the athletic grounds, augmented by a swarm of the Blackfield mill hands, who had come over to watch their champions play.

The kick-off was timed for half-past two, so there was no time to waste. There was a cheer as the teams scampered into the field. Oakley tossed with Rafferty, the home captain, and lost. Rafferty pointed to the goal from which the wind was blowing, and there was another cheer.

The wind was sharp and cold, and Brandley started with a great initial advantage. The afternoon was somewhat dull, with a threat of snow in the air, but none had as yet fallen.

With the strong wind behind their backs, Brandley started with a vigorous attack, and the struggle was soon all on the visitors' side of the half-way line. Pat Clare was playing his level best, but he was, in fact, not nearly up to his usual form, and the effect was apparent.

The Brandley forwards, too, were enterprising, and they gave the visitors no rest. Rafferty, who was a big, powerful fellow, but as nimble as a cat, brought the ball through the Blackfield halves, and passed out to his right wing as the backs tackled him. The inside right sent it whizzing in, but a Rambler's head interposed, and the danger was averted, but the ball was behind the flag, and Brandley claimed a corner.

There was a hush on the field as a Brandley player prepared to take the kick. His comrades were all ready to rush the leather into the goal as soon as he gave them the chance, while the Ramblers were watching like hawks to baffle them.

Plunk! The leather flew, and again a Rambler's head caught it, and it went up the field. Rafferty pounced upon it in a second and drove it in with a huge kick, but the hasty attempt did not materialise, for a Blackfield foot was in the way, and the ball was stopped dead.

The next moment a splendid kick sent it right up the field past the half-way line, and the Ramblers rushed impetuously on as the home team fell back. For the first time in the game the play was now in the home half.

Blackfield had no chance to recapture the ball, for a home back was on it in record time, and it rose in a long curve over the heads of the Rambler forwards, to fall in the midst of the Brandleyites.

The Brandley crowd cheered in their relief. They had for the moment expected to see the visitors score in spite of the disadvantage of the wind, which would have been a bad look-out for the home players in the second half, when the goals were changed.

If, indeed, Blackfield got ahead in the first half, the chances were that the second would be simply a walk-over for them.

The home players had not been slow to seize their advantage. They were away down the field in no time, and the red shirts of the Blackfielders seemed hopelessly behind.

The Blackfield defence put up a good fight, but Rafferty and his men, with a fine combined movement, went through them, and a roar greeted the first goal kicked in the game—kicked by Rafferty himself for Brandley.

A few minutes after came the interval, and the teams adjourned for the respite.

Although the enemy were one up, the Blackfield lads were far from being discouraged. They had fought a good fight, with everything against them, and they had done well in limiting the opposing team's success to a single goal in forty-five minutes.

"The wind is blowing harder than ever, that's one comfort," grinned one of the Ramblers. "If we found it stiff, the Brandley chaps will find it stiffer. I fancy there will be some snow down before the match is over."

The wind was indeed blowing hard. They could hear it howling over the roof of their dressing-room, and the dull sky had become more overcast.

"It does look rough," Oakley remarked, as he led the way back to the field. "Come on, you chaps. Time!"

And the teams lined up again.

(Another instalment of this fine football serial will appear on Saturday next, when a new Tom Tartar story will commence.)



Pat was upon the ball like a flash. A Brandley back drove heavily against his injured arm, and he could hardly repress a cry of pain as he staggered and fell upon his knees.

he drew from his breast the pocket-book Elmhurst had given him.

He opened it, and the hidden watcher caught a glimpse of the crisp banknotes within. But the young man only glanced carelessly at the contents, and then closed the pocket-book again. He stepped to a large mahogany desk that stood in a corner of the room, and opened the largest drawer in it. It was nearly full of papers of various kinds. Nugent lifted them up, and in the extreme corner of the drawer, underneath everything else, he placed the pocket-book containing the banknotes.

The desk was a prize Pat Clare had received long ago at Blackdale College, and used by no one but himself. Belton had no suspicion of that. He simply thought that Nugent had chosen a place of security for a considerable sum of money. He chuckled to himself at the thought.

Nugent closed the drawer, and breathed a sigh of relief. He came towards the window again and pulled up the blind, Belton crouching back behind the angle of the wall. The light streamed out into the garden. Then it was turned down to a mere glimmer, and there was the sound of a closing door.

Belton drew a deep breath. The room was empty, and the money was at his mercy. He had never dreamed of a chance like this.

He stared through the glass door. The gas, turned low, glimmered sufficiently for him to see that there was indeed no one in the room. He wasted no time. He opened the door silently and stepped in with the stealthy tread of a cat. It was not the first time he had been dishonest, and he was perfectly cool. In a moment he was at the desk; in twenty seconds the

I'll do my level best," said Pat. "Only I thought I'd warn you, in case you had somebody in better form you could put in."

Oakley shook his head.

"The fact is, Clare, you are far and away the best man we have, and I don't want to leave you out. If you feel up to the game I shall play you. If you don't, I'll do my best to find somebody."

Pat laughed.

"I feel quite up to the game, and I should be sorry to miss it. I spoke for the sake of the side. Then it's settled; I play."

And when the Ramblers took the train for Brandley, Pat Clare was there with his comrades. The absence of Nugent was not unpleasant to Clare. After the late passages between them, he felt that the less he saw of his cousin the better. The most forgiving disposition can be tried too far, and Pat found it hard to pardon Nugent's act of treachery. His disappointment at not seeing Madge was still keen. The girl had said that she wanted his help, and he had not been able to speak to her, the result of Nugent's action. He was glad, therefore, not to see his cousin in the team.

On the other hand, he was far from grudging Nugent his success. Philip was playing that afternoon with the United Reserves, to show what he could do. If he satisfied the colonel, there was no doubt that he would sign on to play for United for the rest of the season, and Pat sincerely wished him luck.

Of his own prospects of ever playing for United, Pat had some doubts. He knew that his football was better than Nugent's. But luck had hitherto been against him; and he knew that Glyn Elmhurst was a member of the