

W. I. BASSETT (SIXTEEN TIMES AN INTERNATIONAL) WRITES FOR THIS NUMBER.

The Boys' Realm 1d

Football Series

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

No. 190. Vol. IV.]

EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH, 1906.]

SAVING HIS SIDE. By Popular A. S. HARDY.

AN ENTHRALLING COMPLETE STORY OF THE GREAT WINTER GAME.

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THE 1st CHAPTER.

A Hopeless Position—A Board-room Quarrel—The Captain Has His Way.

A GROAN! A cry of dismay, broken by a discordant, derisive laugh here and there. A ball taken from its resting-place at the back of the net, whither it had been sent by the directing toe of a Nottingham Nomad forward. The sharp, shrill shriek of a referee's whistle. The match was over, only just in time, for a grey mist was sweeping rapidly up from the surrounding fields, and West Wappington Rangers retired a beaten team—hopelessly beaten by the convincing margin of four goals to nil.

If the reader is an eager partisan of a football club he will readily understand the dejection that followed this defeat—the more severe because West Wappington were now absolutely

at the bottom of the League table, and their prospect of escaping relegation to the Second Division was small.

Slowly, sadly the crowd passed out through the gates, and the visitors who had come to see the Nomads defeat Wappington refrained from cheering, for many of them knew that the Wappington club was fighting for its very existence, and, as the Nomads had been through the mill themselves in the past a fellow-feeling made them wondrous kind.

Four goals to nil! In the board-room the directors met together in council after the match, and angry eyes flashed, angry faces reddened as rough, unruly words were bandied here and there, as is the case with men when they find their good money being thrown away, and their efforts ending in failure.

At last one of them—Stephen Haines, the son of Mr. Haines, the proprietor of the Hotel Royal—rose to his feet. A bitter smile curved his lips.

"Recrimination is useless, gentlemen," he said. "I think you'll agree with me there. It is the fault of no one here that the club has done so badly. We have more talent in the team even now than have Dark Moor Vale, who look like winning the championship, but the men have so lost heart that they can't turn out a decent game. However, if we quarrel and fight we sha'n't do any good at all, and one chance yet remains to us. We have two games to play, and if we can win them both we can save the club, after all."

"If!" laughed the chairman, Mr. Arthur Reynolds, J.P., who had stood by the club for years. "Why, man, both games are away from

home, and against Dark Moor Vale, who head the League, and Preston. A dog's chance. No! We go down to the Second Division. The club is ruined. The company will be wound up after the season closes, the ground sold for building purposes and there's an end to first-class football in Wappington."

Ring! Ring! Ring! The telephone bell ran fiercely. "Wait!" cried young Haines as he sprang to the instrument. "There's the result of the matches between Stockport and Middlesbrough and Manchester and Bury." He listened intently for a few moments. Then he replaced the receiver and turned to the group. Every face was dull and uninterested. Haines was the only member of the directorate present who possessed the slightest faith in the
(Continued on the next page.)



Ben sprang upwards. It was the leap of a lifetime. He headed the ball, and the next moment it was seen to curl in under the bar of the Preston goal. Ben Jones had saved his side.

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. He left the mills and became a professional footballer.

The last instalment showed how Elmhurst tried to get Pat's dismissal from the Blackfield Club, and was not successful.

A League Match—Black Treachery.

PAT was naturally somewhat excited that Saturday. That afternoon he was to play in the first League match of his life, and the prospect gave him a thrill whenever he thought of it.

To play for his town in a match with the giants of the football world! It was indeed something to have lived for!

He had been rather anxious during the week as to whether he would be quite fit on the great day when it arrived. He felt that Colonel Darrell was running a certain risk in playing him, and he was intensely desirous of doing the United manager credit. As a matter of fact, he was feeling quite up to his usual form when the day came. And, though the prospect was an exciting one, he lost none of his usual calmness; he knew that he would want it all when the tussle came.

"I can see you are feeling fit," Colonel Darrell said, with a smile. "You've quite got over last Saturday's mishap?"

"I think so, sir—quite."

"I won't tell you to do your best," the colonel continued, "because I know that you always do that. But I may tell you that if you make your mark in this match your future as a footballer is assured. And my belief is that you will."

"Thank you, sir!" Pat said gratefully. "I should do my very best, if only to repay you for your kindness."

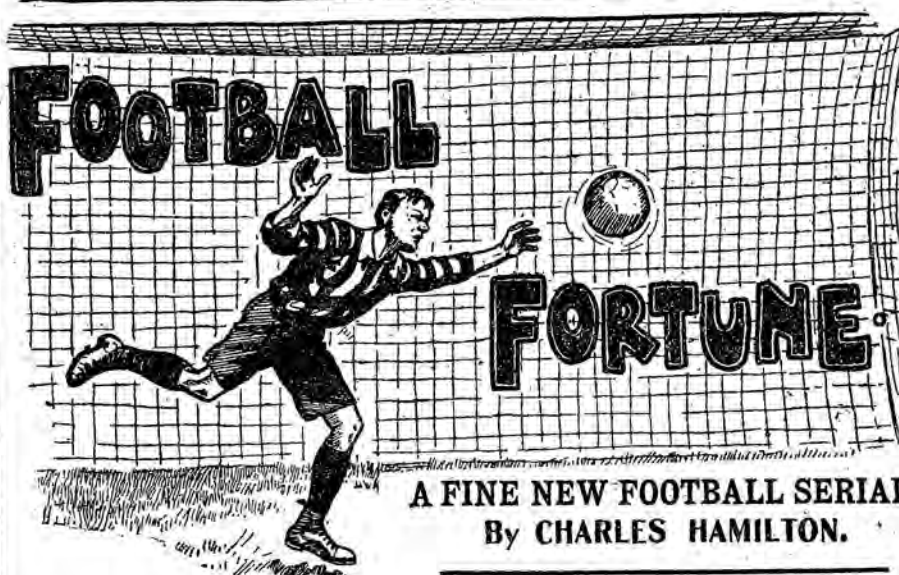
"Tut, tut! Do your best for Blackfield, my boy, that's all I ask."

Pat was in a happy mood when he joined his new comrades in the dressing-room. He was even willing to be cordial to Glyn Elmhurst. He wanted to be on good terms with all Blackfield United if he could.

Somewhat to his surprise, Elmhurst was civil. Any good feeling between them was, of course, out of the question, after what had happened. But it was necessary to keep up appearances, and Pat was relieved to see that Elmhurst understood as much.

Stevenson, captain and centre-forward of the United first team, gave Pat a hearty welcome. He made the youngest recruit feel at home at once.

"I've heard about your play with the reserves last Saturday," he said. "But you didn't have half a chance, when Nugent knocked you out in the middle of the first half. We shall see you do better to-day, I hope. Colonel Darrell is



enthusiastic about your play, and I have never known him make a mistake. We shall have a tussle to-day."

"The Boltons are a strong lot?" asked Pat.

"Rather! They drew with us in the away match, and they are coming here to-day expecting to do better still."

Pat smiled.

"Then we will send them home disappointed."

"That's the idea," said Stevenson, with a nod.

"We have got to lick them. As a matter of fact, we can't afford to throw away any points at this time of day, if we are to keep up our position in the League. So buck up for Blackfield for all you're worth!"

And that Clare had already resolved to do. He changed into his playing garb, eager for the fray. As the time drew near for the kick-off he heard the sounds of the rapidly filling enclosures. He listened with a beating heart to the comments of his comrades on the probable number of people present.

"Fifteen thousand, I reckon," Elmhurst remarked.

"Or more than that," said Stevenson. "Well, I like a good gate, for one. Not feeling nervous, laddie?" he added, with a laugh, glancing at Clare.

"No," said Pat, shaking his head, "not a bit nervous. But I was wondering what it was like to play before so many people."

"Just the same as playing before a few," smiled the captain. "You've simply got to take no notice of them. Forget they're there, if you can."

"I'll try," said Pat, laughing.

It was getting near time. The players in the dressing-room could hear the deep buzz of talk from the crowded enclosures. Pat glanced out, and felt a throb at sight of the sea of white faces. In spite of Stevenson's excellent advice, it would not be easy to "forget that they were there."

His throat felt dry. He was more excited than he wished to be at that moment. He filled a glass with water to drink a little.

"Take a squeeze of lemon in it," said Elmhurst. "Here, chuck over one of those lemons, Murphy."

"Catch!" said Murphy, the United goalkeeper.

Elmhurst caught the lemon, gashed it, and squeezed the juice into Clare's glass, which the lad held out to him.

"Thank you!" said Pat.

He was surprised at Elmhurst taking any interest in him, and a little grateful. He reflected that nobody is so black as he is painted. No doubt the feeling of comradeship towards a fellow-player was as strong in Elmhurst's breast as in his own. He did not yet know Glyn Elmhurst.

"Come on, laddies!" said Stevenson suddenly.

Clare set down his glass, having drunk half the contents of it. A strange glitter shot into Elmhurst's eyes as he followed Stevenson. He had succeeded in his object more easily than he had dared to hope. Nobody in the dressing-room had the slightest suspicion that, under cover of squeezing the lemon, he had let fall a tiny pill into Pat Clare's glass, which had instantly dissolved. And the strong flavour of the lemon had disguised any taste it imparted.

He would have been better pleased to see Clare empty the glass, but he knew that enough had been swallowed to make pretty sure of effecting his purpose. He could scarcely keep a grin of exultation from his face. He had chosen a safer method than Nugent, and he had succeeded where Nugent had failed.

As for what the result of his treachery might be to his side he never gave it a thought. His hatred of Clare, and his desire to spoil his first League match, dominated every other feeling. If Blackfield United lost this match it might easily mean the club taking a lower position on the League table at the end of the season. But the traitor did not care.

In fact, it added to his secret glee to think of the feelings of Colonel Darrell if the match should be lost by the failure of his protégé. There was not much of the sportsman about Glyn Elmhurst.

Bolton Rovers were already in the field. The band had marched off, and the crowd in the enclosures were looking eagerly for the United. A

burst of cheering greeted them as they ran lightly in, and was repeated again and again. It was easy to see how enthusiastic Blackfield was about its representatives in the football field.

It was a clear afternoon, very cold, with a keen wind. The visitors won the toss, leaving Blackfield to kick off against the wintry breeze.

The whistle sounded, and the ball rolled from the foot of Stevenson. Play had commenced.

Sixteen thousand pairs of eyes were watching the teams as the game began. Among them Pat Clare had caught a glimpse of a fair face and a bright glance from the grand stand, and he knew that Madge was there to see his first League match.

And he was feeling so fit! He felt that he was about to play the finest game of his life, so far. He was on the watch for chances, and they were not long in coming.

The Boltons brought the ball along in good style, at first, and it was Pat Clare who robbed them of it and took it away across the half-way line. It was Pat Clare who beat the halves in a masterly manner, and gave Stevenson a pass when he was tackled, which the captain returned with excellent judgment at the psychological moment, enabling Pat to send in a lightning shot which took the goalie by surprise.

"Goal!"

A goal in the first seven minutes, and scored by the new recruit!

Blackfield shouted itself hoarse. Round the rails men waved their hats and stamped and cheered, till the air seemed to shake with the roar.

Colonel Darrell, jumping to his feet in delight, cheered with the loudest.

"Scott! You will be a tough handful for them!" Stevenson muttered to Pat as they went back to the centre of the field. "Where the deuce have you been hidden all this time? You are fit for a final!"

Praise from the United skipper was praise indeed, and Clare smiled with pleasure. The storm of cheering, coupled with his own name, brought the colour to his cheeks. He felt in the mood for great things.

But as he lined up with his comrades a strange dimness for a moment passed over his eyes and blurred his vision. It was gone in a moment, but it puzzled him. He was dimly conscious that he was not feeling so fit as at first. What was the matter with him?

The Bolton skipper kicked off, and, favoured by the wind, the Boltons came on with a rush that looked like being irresistible. Their forwards had the ball, and were passing it one to another, and in a twinkling, as it seemed, they were right up to the home goal. But Wright, at centre-half, skied the leather, and as it came down Glyn Elmhurst drove it right across to Clare.

Now was the time for one of the lightning rushes for which Clare had become famous in Blackfield. To the amazement of the crowd, and the stupefaction of his comrades, he fumbled with the ball, and before he could get away a Bolton forward had robbed him of it, and was driving it goalward again. He had lost only a second, but it was not safe to lose a second with the lads from Bolton, as they speedily proved, for goalward they went, with a rush, this time breaking up the Blackfield backs, and the leather was in the net before Murphy knew that it was coming.

Bolton had equalised.

"You fool!" yelled Elmhurst, glaring at Pat.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Hold your confounded tongue!" said Stevenson angrily. "The lad's done better than you're likely to do, anyway. But, I say, Clare, is there anything wrong?" he added, in a kindly tone, looking at the young winger rather anxiously.

Pat shook his head.

"There's nothing wrong with me," he said. "I don't know how I came to muff that. You needn't reproach me, Elmhurst. I feel bad enough about it."

"Don't worry," said Stevenson kindly. "Take no notice of him. Play up, and do your best, lad, for all our sakes."

There was no time for more. The men were in their places, and the referee had his whistle to his lips.

"Pheep!" it went, and Stevenson rolled the

ball over. Play recommenced, and it was watched with keen interest by the crowd, and with tense anxiety by the colonel.

Darrell was puzzled. What on earth had made Clare muff a chance like that? Had he been mistaken in the lad, after all? Had he over-rated him? What a reflection, when he knew only too well how little Blackfield could afford to give away points! If the home team lost through his playing so young a recruit—But he would not follow the reflection; it was too painful. It will easily be understood with what keenness the old soldier watched the resumption of play.

Blackfield's forwards were going in grand style. They had the ball, and had it through the visitor's defence in next to no time. The Bolton backs made a desperate effort to stop them. Stevenson and Elmhurst drew the backs, and the ball went to Clare, who had a splendid chance.

"Shoot—shoot!" shouted the colonel, in his excitement.

Pat miskicked!

A groan went round the crowd as the failure became apparent. There was no time for anything more, for the Bolton left back was on the ball in a second, sending it whizzing out to the forwards.

They buzzed away with it, and the game went up the field, and after that the home side had no chance of scoring before half-time. They managed to defend their own goal, however, and when the whistle went the score was still level.

Pat hung his head as he went off with his comrades. He could hardly keep the tears back from his eyes. What was the matter with him? Twice he had failed to do what was required of him. Why? What was the cause of that sudden dizziness which had spoiled his play at the critical moment? Why was it that his decision and judgment had seemed to leave him when he needed them most?

It was his first League match, and he desired so intensely to do well, to do the colonel credit. What was the colonel thinking of him? What did his comrades think?

"I say, Clare, ain't you well?" said Stevenson, in the dressing-room. "What's come over you? You played up like an International to begin with. Is it the crowd that made you lose your head?"

"No; it isn't that," said Pat heavily. "I'm ashamed of myself, Stevenson. I ought to have done better. I've thrown away a goal, if not two."

And, in spite of himself, there was a suspicious glimmering on his dark eyelashes.

"Don't take it to heart so," the captain said, kindly enough. "I suppose you are not so fit as you thought you were."

"I suppose not," said Pat slowly. "Yet I felt as right as rain when we first went on. I can't understand it. If you lose the match through me I shall never forgive myself. But that shan't be!" he cried, with a sudden flash in his eyes. "We will win!"

"You feel up to going on again?" said the skipper doubtfully.

"Yes. It's no good denying that I feel queer. I don't know what's the matter," said Pat, passing his hand over his brow. "I dare say it will pass off."

Elmhurst laughed disagreeably.

"Perhaps it will, by the time you have lost us the match!" he sneered.

"You needn't rub it in," said Pat quietly.

"It's bad enough for me."

"If you can't shut up, Elmhurst, I'll see if I can shut you up!" said Stevenson.

"Oh, keep your wool on! But you know as well as I do that Clare oughtn't to have played. Either he's unfit, or he's nervous, and he ought to have given us a chance to play a better man. Why couldn't he speak out?"

"I tell you I was quite fit when we started," said Pat, who saw in the faces round him that most of the others agreed with Elmhurst.

The amateur winger shrugged his shoulders.

"In that case, there's only one explanation, and that is that Colonel Darrell was deceived in you, and overrated your form as a player," he said. "For my part, I never could imagine that a kid could be picked out of a mill office to teach us old hands lessons."

"That's enough," said Stevenson quietly. "At any rate, the lad's done his best; and he took one goal for Blackfield, which you couldn't have taken in a hundred years."

The signal to re-enter the field stopped the unpleasant discussion. The players took their places again, this time with the advantage of the wind in favour of Blackfield. The kick-off was followed by some lively passing, the Blackfield forwards almost immediately getting away.

The crowd cheered as the scarlet shirts were seen going down the field. Clare seemed to be himself again now. It was by sheer force of will that he kept back the strange dizziness that seemed to increase rather than diminish as the minutes fled by. He helped to beat the Rovers' halves, and joined in the combined attack upon the visitors' goal. Stevenson in a shot which the goalie fished hastily out, dropping the ball fairly at Pat's feet. Pat drove it in, but with a slow, uncertain shot, and the goalie grinned as he kicked it out to his comrades, who sent it up the field.

Clare had lost a chance again. After that he found himself left out in the cold, to a great extent, but he was not sorry, for he felt less and less able to do his side justice in the second half wore on. His brain was no longer clear, and he played mechanically, and more than once he was rolled over helplessly by a Rover's charge.

The Rovers scored another goal, making them

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two to one. And, struggle as they would, the home side found that they could not equalise. They fought hard, and harder, and if Pat had been anything like what he had been at the beginning the fight would not have been in vain. But by this time he was useless to his side, and Blackfield was practically playing four forwards. Grim and disappointed were the looks of the crowd. The game had begun so well, and it was finishing so rottenly. And when the whistle went, and the home team went off, beaten by two goals to one, there was a grim silence, in which a hiss or two became audible.

Pat entered the dressing-room with the rest. He had kept up, somehow, till now; but, the strain once over, he sank down upon a seat, feeling as if his head was turning round. What was the matter with him? He felt as if he had been drugged.

The thought brought light with it. Drugged? Yes, that was the explanation, the only possible explanation. He started to his feet, with a cry. Every eye was turned upon him.

"I have been drugged!"

He panted out the words. And, as a murmur of amazement rose from the rest, the lad reeled in a dead faint, and Stevenson sprang forward and caught him as he fell.

Pat's Plain Talk.

HERE was a murmur of amazement in the Blackfield dressing-room as Stevenson caught Pat Clare's falling form in his strong arms.

"Drugged?"

"Impossible!"

Glyn Elmhurst broke into a sneering laugh.

"He's shamming!" he said.

"He is not shamming," said Stevenson quietly. The captain's eyes were fixed anxiously upon the lad's white, unconscious face. "This is real enough. Some of you fetch the doctor, and buck up."

The doctor was upon the scene in a couple of minutes. The footballers stood round with looks of tense interest as he examined Clare.

The news had quickly reached Colonel Darrell, and he hurried to the dressing-room. The colonel did not know what to think. That Pat Clare had been drugged seemed beyond the limits of probability, and yet that would certainly account for the game he had played, which it was difficult to account for otherwise.

He waited eagerly for the doctor's verdict, tugging at his grey moustache.

"Well, doctor?"

"The lad certainly appears to be suffering from the effects of a drug," said the medical man. "What it is I am not prepared to say at present."

"Yet, when he went on the field, he appeared to be in the best of condition," said the colonel, wrinkling his brows in a puzzled way.

"Perhaps in the interval."

Colonel Darrell shook his head decidedly.

"No, he went off colour before half-time."

"Then I should say that he swallowed the drug just before going on," said the doctor, "and it had not had time to work till he had been playing a little time. Did any of you notice him drink anything?"

"He had a glass of water, with a squeeze of lemon in it," said Stevenson.

"Is the lemon here?"

"What did you do with it, Elmhurst?"

"Chucked it down there," said Elmhurst carelessly. "There it is," he added, pointing.

It was picked up and handed to the doctor, who examined it attentively.

"There is nothing wrong with this," he said, "yet I should certainly say that it looks as if there was something harmful in that glass of water Clare drank. Of course, it may have got there by accident."

"Of course," assented the colonel, with a look of relief. "There were no outsiders in here then, or for some time previously, and it is obviously out of the question to suspect a Blackfielder of such a cowardly outrage as drugging one of his own side."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Elmhurst warmly. "Still, the matter ought to be strictly investigated. It's an occurrence which really casts a shadow of suspicion upon us all until it is cleared up."

Pat's unconsciousness was not of long duration. But when he came to himself, he was far from well. The colonel forbore to question him then, but told him to come over to the Bungalow on the Monday if he felt fit. Pat drove home to his lodgings in a hansom, feeling more thoroughly rotten just then than he had ever felt before.

A good night's rest, however, worked wonders, and in the morning he found that the effects of the drug had quite worn off. On Monday he was as fit as ever.

He was glad enough to pay the promised visit to Chutney Bungalow. He knew that there was a chance of meeting Madge there.

Colonel Darrell received him cordially, and immediately began to speak upon the subject of what had happened the day before. His questions placed Clare in an embarrassing position.

He knew that he had been drugged, and there was only one man he could suspect. Glyn Elmhurst must have dropped something into the glass of water at the same time that he squeezed the lemon into it. His friendly act had surprised Pat at the time, but he knew the motive for it now.

But to bring an accusation against the amateur winger of Blackfield United, without a particle of evidence to support it, was impossible. His replies to the colonel were therefore slow and somewhat hesitating. The old soldier was quite keen enough, however, to divine something of what he was thinking.

"You feel sure that you were drugged?" he said abruptly.

"Yes," said Pat; "there is no other way of accounting for what happened."

"And you suspect who did it?"

"You must answer me plainly, my boy."

"I do suspect, sir," said Pat frankly. "In my own mind I feel certain. But it would not be fair to mention a name when I have no shadow of evidence to adduce."

"That can only mean that you suspect a member of the team?"

"Yes," said Pat reluctantly.

"I will ask you no more," said the colonel, with a dark shade on his brow. "If there is, as you say, no evidence in favour of your suspicion, it is probably nothing more than a suspicion. I hope that that will prove to be the case. It would be a blow to me to discover that Blackfield had a traitor in its ranks."

And the subject dropped. The matter was left in a very unsatisfactory state for both.

The colonel was deeply disturbed by the thought of finding a traitor in the club; and Pat could not help thinking that, as Elmhurst had escaped so easily this time, he might renew his attempt at the first opportunity. The explanation of Pat's failure in the Bolton match had so far satisfied the colonel that it was arranged that he should play again for Blackfield in the match with Leicester the next Saturday. If he should fail again then, from whatever cause, would the colonel trust him further—would he be able to do so if he wished? Pat thought very deeply about the matter, and the outcome was a determination to give Elmhurst some plain speaking as soon as he met him again.

Pat was disappointed in his hope of seeing Madge at the bungalow. She did not visit her uncle that day. Pat saw the hand of Glyn Elmhurst in that. He knew that the secretary was again on an intimate footing at Fern House, and he wondered more than ever what was his mysterious power over the mill-owner.

He wondered, too, if it was about that that Madge wished to see him and ask his counsel.

He walked home from the colonel's late in the evening. It was a sharp, frosty night, and the sky was spangled with stars. As he strode along, Pat was thinking of his intended interview with Elmhurst, and about ten minutes after leaving the bungalow he caught sight of the man who was at that moment in his thoughts standing by a stile and talking to another man whose back was turned to Pat.

Elmhurst's companion left him just as Pat recognised the former. The secretary remained alone, lighting a cigar in a leisurely way. He gave a slight start as Pat, quickening his pace, joined him.

"I want to speak a few words to you, Mr. Elmhurst," said Clare quietly.

Elmhurst stared at him.

"You will see me at the ground to-morrow," he said. "I suppose you can speak then?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Clare.

"But it will be difficult to speak there without being overheard by the others, and what I have to say is something I think you would prefer should not be said in public."

"Really!" said Elmhurst, with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders. But he stopped all the same, and his eyes were glinting. "Well, what is it, anyhow?"

"I want to warn you. On Saturday you drugged me and spoiled my play against Bolton."

The accusation came like a blow straight from the shoulder, and in spite of his nerve Elmhurst was a little staggered. He changed colour.

"You are dreaming," he said thickly.

"Dreaming or not, I want to warn you not to let anything of the kind happen again," Pat said coolly. "Colonel Darrell knows that I suspect a member of the team, but I have, so far, not mentioned your name to him. But I tell you plainly that if there is another attempt upon me, I shall speak out, and expose you before all Blackfield. The affair of the bank-notes is not forgotten yet, and I do not think that there is much doubt whose word will be taken—yours or mine."

"So that's your game, is it?" said Elmhurst.

"You intend to malign me to Colonel Darrell because I have put a stop to your fortune-hunting projects?"

"You lie!" said Pat contemptuously; "and you know that you lie. I don't want to bandy words with you, however. We can never be friends, but so long as we both play for Blackfield I am willing to keep on outwardly civil terms, and you will be wise to do the same. But I tell you plainly that any further breachery—"

Elmhurst came a step closer to him. His eyes gleaming with hatred.

"You have forced yourself into the Blackfield team," he said, between his teeth. "Well, I will drive you out again. I will lower your colours in football as I have lowered them in another way."

Pat started. There was a significance he could not mistake in Elmhurst's manner.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Madge Darrell is to be my wife!"

Pat turned pale. There was a tone of triumph, of exultation, in his enemy's voice that sent a chill to his heart.

"I do not believe it," he said, but his voice was unsteady.

"You will soon have proof," said Elmhurst significantly. "So ends your dream of fingering Abel Darrell's wealth!"

Pat's fists clenched convulsively. The gleam in his eyes made Elmhurst start back a pace. But at that moment there was a swift step behind Pat, and his arms were seized from behind and held fast, and a savage voice cried:

"I've got him fast, mate! Now, paste him!"

It was the voice of the ruffian Belton. Elmhurst, with a savage grin, sprang forward, and dashed his clenched fists full at Pat Clare's face.

Even as Elmhurst sprang to attack him he

Pat's Advice.

PAT was taken by surprise by the sudden clutch from behind, but it was only for a moment. The presence of mind and the prompt decision learned on the football field served him well now.

Even as Elmhurst sprang to attack him he

flung himself violently backwards, with an impact that hurled Belton to the ground, Pat falling on top of him with a thud. The ruffian's grip was of course torn away in his fall, and Pat sprang instantly to his feet, with fists clenched and eyes flashing.

Elmhurst was received with a fierce blow which stopped him like a bullet, and Pat followed it up with a "postman's knock" on the jaw, which sent his assailant crashing into the hedge, dazed and gasping.

Then like a flash Pat turned upon Belton, who had jumped up, cursing savagely. The rough's defence availed him little before the young footballer's resolute attack. In a few seconds a right-hander between the eyes sent him heavily to earth.

"You cowards!" said Pat contemptuously.

"You cowards!"

He turned on his heel and strode away towards Blackfield. Neither of the men he had so roughly handled made any motion to follow him. They had had enough—more than enough—of the young footballer's quality at close quarters.

But Pat's heart was very heavy as he walked home. He could not drive Elmhurst's words from his mind. Was it possible that it was true—that Madge Darrell was to be sacrificed to that scoundrel?

That she would ever marry him of her own choice Pat knew was impossible. If what Elmhurst had declared was true, it had been brought about by the secretary's mysterious influence over the mill-owner; he had demanded what Abel Darrell had not dared to refuse.

If Madge had consented to marry Elmhurst it could only be the result of a direct command from her father, and Pat's blood boiled with indignation at the thought.

But had she consented?

He felt that he must know—that he must see her and learn the truth.

As a professional footballer Pat had a good deal more time at his disposal than when he was employed in the office at Blackfield Mills. Morning and afternoon he had to put in a certain amount of time for practice at the club grounds, and he was rather inclined to overdo it, than otherwise. He loved the game with his whole soul, and his natural ambition was to keep himself as fit as possible. Dick Nesbitt, the trainer, noted his keenness, and appreciated it, and made quite a pet of him.

"You'll see Pat Clare the crack player of Blackfield United before the end of the season, you mark my words," Dick Nesbitt said to everybody who would listen to him, and the trainer's opinion was very gratifying to Colonel Darrell.

To do them only justice, most of the team, whether they concurred in the trainer's opinion or not, viewed Pat's progress with cordial good will, the only exceptions being Elmhurst and Nugent.

On the Thursday following his meeting with Elmhurst, Pat left the football ground at twelve o'clock, as usual, and walked home to his lodgings.

He found a note there awaiting him, and his heart gave a throb as he recognised Madge's hand.

He opened it hastily. It was a brief note, hurriedly written.

"Dear Pat—I must see you. I have no one else to counsel me. Come to the old mill on the Weare at half-past one. I must see you—MADGE."

Pat's face lighted up. After a hasty lunch he left Blackfield and made his way to the old mill on the River Weare.

It was a lonely spot. The mill was old, and almost in ruins. Ten years before the miller had been found murdered there, and a story had grown up in the neighbourhood that the place was haunted. It was generally avoided, especially towards night. Pat guessed that Madge had chosen so secluded a rendezvous from fear of being watched.

He was early, and he waited some time before the girl appeared. When she came he was startled by her looks. Her face was pale, her eyes heavy, and her sweet mouth drooping. He could see the traces of recent weeping.

"Madge!" he exclaimed, in deep concern, as he took her hand. "Dear Madge, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Pat!" He drew her to a seat on an old bench near the door of the mill. She sank down with a half-sob. "It was good of you to come. I don't want to do!"

"What has happened?"

"Glyn Elmhurst has asked me to marry him."

Pat breathed hard for a moment.

"You refused?"

"Of course. And then my father—"

She broke off. The hard-held tears were wet on her cheeks now.

"What did your father say?"

"He said that I must reconsider my answer, that he had promised Mr. Elmhurst a favourable reply from me, and that he could not allow me to make him break his word."

Clare gritted his teeth.

"In plain words, you are to be forced into a marriage with that scoundrel," he said, in a low voice. "Why?"

The girl's hands were clasped, her fingers twining and untwining restlessly.

"I don't know, Pat. He has some power over my father. What it is I cannot understand. I said as much when papa told me that—that I must marry Mr. Elmhurst. He was angry, but it seemed to me, Pat, that he was frightened, too. What can it mean? How can that man wield so great a power over him?"

Pat was silent. To his mind there was but one explanation—that there was a crime in the mill-owner's past of which his secretary knew the



THE END OF A GREAT GAME!
The whistle went at last, and the teams streamed off the field, the home players loudly cheered for their victory by two to one! (See next week's instalment.)

PLEASE GIVE YOUR CHUM THE TIP that Mr. W. I. Bassett, the famous International, is writing every week for THE REALM.

secret. But it was clear that this explanation had not occurred yet to Madge.

"Pat, can you advise me? I do not know what to do. What can I do?" said the girl, in a low, broken voice, full of misery.

"You must never marry Glyn Elmhurst. He is a scoundrel—a blackmailing scoundrel!" said Clare between his teeth. "Let nothing force you to that."

"But—but my father has said that I shall; that if I refuse he will no longer regard me as his daughter!" the girl faltered. "How can I disobey him?"

"You must be firm!" cried Pat. "Yet I am the last person in the world to advise you now," he went on miserably. "I cannot help thinking of myself!"

Madge looked at him, and a flood of colour went over her face; her eyes drooped before his.

"Madge," said Pat, taking her hand, "I never meant to speak to you yet, but now I must speak. You know that I love you, Madge; you must know it. Madge, if you care for me a little bit you will be firm, for my sake as well as your own, and refuse to marry that villain!"

If she cared for him! Her heart had long been his, and she knew it.

"I know that my poverty is a bar between us," said Pat heavily. "But you know that I loved you before I was poor. Now I am—what I am, and you are the richest heiress in Blackfield. But I cannot help loving you!"

"And I love you, Pat," she said simply. "I tell you so now, and we must never speak of it again, for my father would never consent."

"I know it," Pat said miserably. "I ought not to have spoken. I should not have done so but for that—"

"I understand. I am glad you spoke, dear Pat; you have helped me to resolve."

"You have decided?"

"Yes. I will never marry Glyn Elmhurst!"

"You are right, Madge. Even if I did not love you I should say the same."

"I will obey my father in everything but that. That he has no right to ask. I will never marry Glyn Elmhurst!"

Little did they dream that, hidden in the old mill, a man was listening, drinking in every word they uttered. The hidden listener ground his teeth as he caught Madge's last words.

"Never!" he muttered. "Never is a long word! You shall marry me when Pat Clare is dead!"

Trapped.

PAT CLARE was somewhat late in turning up for practice that afternoon, but Glyn Elmhurst was later still. Nugent noticed that his cousin was preoccupied, and, with jealous instinct, he at once guessed what was the reason of his tardiness in arriving at the ground. He was, consequently, more than usually aloof in his manner; but Pat did not remark it. He was thinking of Madge.

Although his thoughts sometimes wandered to the meeting at the old mill, Pat played up well in a six-a-side match, and showed himself to be in splendid form. There was no doubt that he would make his mark in the away match on Saturday, as Dick Nesbitt declared. The trainer spoke with an open admiration that made Philip Nugent grit his teeth as he listened. Nugent was still in the reserves, with very little chance of emerging into the first team. After Clare's failure in the Bolton match his hopes had risen, only to be dashed to the ground again by the announcement that Pat was to accompany the team to Leicester for the away match there. If Pat should fail again then there would be an opening. But he would not fail.

"What do you think of him?" asked Elmhurst, joining Nugent as he left the club ground soon after four o'clock, when practice for the day was over.

"Him? Whom?"

"You know whom I mean! Clare is going with us to Leicester on Saturday. Everybody says that he will distinguish himself there, and it looks like it. Colonel Darrell seems to be wrapped up in him. No chance for a reserve in the right wing while Clare is fit."

"You needn't tell me that!" growled Nugent. "It looks as if I sha'n't have a chance of playing in a League match at all this season!"

"You would have an excellent chance—or, rather, a certainty—if Clare disappointed us again on Saturday. After another experience like that Bolton affair Colonel Darrell would not be able to put him in again. Everybody would be against it."

"You had better drug him again, then!" said Nugent roughly.

"That is a game which cannot be played twice. But there are other means. If Clare failed to turn up you would be played, that is certain. If you made your mark you could not

be set aside, again, even if Clare re-entered. You see that?"

"Yes; but Clare won't fail!" said Nugent impatiently.

"He may be made to. Are you game?"

"I am game for anything to spoil his chances," said Nugent recklessly.

"Very well. You know the old mill on the Weare. I happened to be there to-day, and happened to see a lovers' meeting. I need not tell you who the lovers were."

Nugent went white.

"That was why Clare was late! I guessed it!"

"You guessed right. But what I was going to say is this. There is a cellar underneath the mill, from which it would be impossible for anyone to escape if he were once shoved into it. If Clare could be decoyed to the mill on Friday night, I and someone else would be waiting for him there, and—you understand?"

Nugent's eyes gleamed. He was, as he had said, ready for anything.

"But how is it to be done?" he asked.

"That is where you come in. You haven't been very good friends lately, but Clare is the most unsuspicious fellow I have ever known, and it will be the easiest thing in the world to deceive him. Get him to the mill with some yarn—"

"But afterwards?" said Nugent uneasily.

"That would see us over Saturday. But he would have to be released some time, and then he would accuse me. I should be kicked out of Blackfield United. I don't mind taking a risk; but that isn't a risk, it's a certainty. It's not good enough, Elmhurst."

"Suppose he never turned up again?" said Elmhurst, lowering his voice.

Nugent gave a violent start.

"You—you don't mean—" he faltered.

"Never mind what I mean. I don't ask you to have a hand in it. You decoy him to the mill, and leave the rest to others."

"I—I can't!"

"You prefer to let him triumph over you all along the line?" sneered Elmhurst. "You prefer to pass the whole season in the reserves, while Pat Clare is kicking goals for Blackfield, and making a name in the football world? You prefer to submit while he makes his way upward by football fortune, when Madge Darrell will fulfil the promise I heard her give him to-day at the old mill—"

"Enough!" said Nugent, in a gasping voice.

"I must think! I'll give you my answer to-morrow!"

"Better decide now. You hate him as much as I do. He stands in your way. He has always stood in your way. Why should you spare him? There's no time to lose, either."

"To-morrow!" repeated Nugent thickly. And without another word he abruptly quitted the tempter.

The next day was Friday. Pat arrived on the football-ground at ten o'clock, and met Nugent as he went in. Nugent was pale and disturbed; so much so that Pat noticed it at once.

"Don't you feel well, Phil?" he asked.

"I am well enough," said Nugent sullenly. Then, as Pat, rebuffed by his manner, turned away, he added: "Come into the gym for a few minutes. There's no one there, and I want to speak to you."

Pat followed him wonderingly into the gymnasium. Nugent stopped abruptly, looking his cousin full in the face.

"Did you meet Madge Darrell at the old mill yesterday?"

The question startled Clare. He had not the faintest idea that his meeting with Madge was known to anybody. His face flushed with anger and his lip curled.

"You have been spying again!" he said contemptuously.

Nugent turned livid.

"I have not been spying. I was told so. Is it true?"

"You have no right to question me, and I shall not answer."

And Pat turned upon his heel and left him. Nugent stood quivering with passionate rage.

"So it is true!" he muttered. "Elmhurst was not deceiving me! She loves him. He has ousted me there, as in everything else. Curse him!"

His last scruple was gone. From that moment remorse was banished, and he was in Glyn Elmhurst's hands as clay in the hands of the potter.

(This magnificent story of football life will be continued on Saturday next. Your Editor has much pleasure in announcing that a new football serial, by Mr. A. S. Hardy, will start shortly.)



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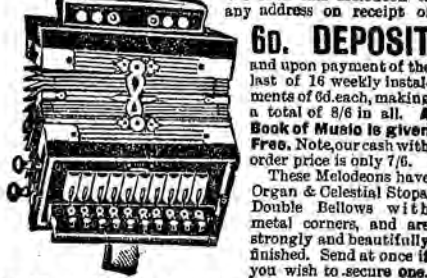
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