

IN THIS ISSUE : 4 Enthralling Serials. | 2 Magnificent Complete Stories. | Bassett's Corner. | Interesting Articles, &c.

The Boys' Realm

Football Series

1

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

No. 191. VOL. IV.]

EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, JANUARY 27TH, 1906.]

TOM TARTAR'S SCHOOL DAYS.

OUR MAGNIFICENT STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE.

(The opening chapters, specially re-written, will be found at the foot of the next page.)

THE 10TH CHAPTER.
Wooden Jerry Curious—The Ice Carnival—Rather a Jolly Time—An Interruption and a Chase.

"What was in it," said Tom, with a set face. "That is going beyond a joke, and when I meet Snacks I'll give him something to remember me by. Have you any idea, Mrs. Blake, how many letters were put in?"

"I always shuts my eyes and never looks at what is being done," replied the widow tearfully, "for it isn't lawful; but just for once I saw that there were three letters put in by the tallest and prettiest young lady, and she says to the others: 'Oh, won't they be glad!' and they

did seem so pleased, and went away laughing. And just to think that a terrier like Goggle-eyes—"

"Never mind, Mrs. Blake," said Tom, "we don't blame you; we will settle the matter. Please don't say anything about it."

Tom had never been more exasperated in his life, and yet there was sufficient of the element of the ridiculous in it to mingle a smile with his frown. Sam Smith's face was a sight, so rueful was it; and Lawrence and Johnny, knowing that the third letter must be for one of them, looked sour. Suddenly George Hamerton burst out laughing.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I can't help it. Your faces are a study."

"I should laugh, I dare say," said Tom, "if I were not the victim of the little joke. But we can't stand that kind of thing. It has to be

stopped. Confound the beggar! I reckon he doesn't know the sort of fellows he is running against."

"Let us go and look for him," said Sam Smith.

They went on to Bouncer's place, to which access could only be gained by a high wooden gate, and could neither hear nor see anything of the offender, or any of his aristocratic brethren. It was getting dark, and being now tired and rather sick of the outing, they went back home.

There was a fire in the school-room; and they sat by it until the other boys came in by twos and threes. Pubsey Wrasper was one of the first to return, and he brought news that was a slight solace to those who had been robbed of their love-letters.

"Freezing harder and harder," he said,

"and one end of the pond is having a marquee put up over it. It's to be lighted up, and lots of people are coming. There's to be dancing on skates, and a procession, with torches, round the pond outside; and what do you think about dresses?"

"We shall have to wear something warm, of course," said Sam Smith.

He was still thinking of "that goggle-eyed beast, Snacks," and answered rather moodily.

"Warm!" said Pubsey; "better than that. Sir Claude has hired a lot of fancy dresses from some costumier in London, just about the size, or sizes, for us. Oh, it will be fun, I can tell you! Perhaps they will be sent down here for us to put on. I think I shall go as a jester."

"And I," said Sam, "will go as the secret avenger. That beggar, Snacks—"

(Continued on the next page.)



JERRY'S GREAT FRIGHT!

Into the midst of the gay throng there dashed a wild-eyed, hatless man. "The hearse! the hearse!" he shrieked in horror-stricken tones.

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 Blackfield 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 joined the Blackfield Football Club as a professional. In the same club were Philip Nugent (his cousin) and Glyn Elmhurst. Both of these latter had fallen in love with a girl whose heart Pat had won, and Elmhurst was continually egging Nugent on to make away with his cousin.

Decoyed!

ELMHURST turned up at the football-ground in the afternoon for practice, but he did not find Nugent there. Dick Nesbitt informed him that Nugent had pleaded a headache, and was not coming back after lunch. Elmhurst went on to Nugent's lodgings when he left the ground. He found Philip there.

"Have you come from the mills?" asked Nugent.

"No; from the football-ground. I have been there for practice. Why did you not come this afternoon? Has anything happened?"

"I spoke to Clare this morning."

"About what I told you?" said Elmhurst, frowning.

"Yes. He as good as admitted it."

"You fool! You have put him on his guard now!" growled Elmhurst. "I suppose you have had high words with him? Now, how are you going to get him to the haunted mill? Why did you stay away this afternoon?"

"Because if I had gone there I should have betrayed myself," said Nugent hoarsely. "I do not want a row between Clare and me to precede what is to happen to-morrow."

"It will not happen now you have muffed it."

"Yes, it will. Clare will receive a note to-morrow from Madge, asking him to meet her at the haunted mill before the time for appearing at the football-ground. He will not find Madge there; but—you understand?"

There was amazement mingled with the satisfaction in Elmhurst's look.

"Good! I never thought of that. But can you manage it?"

"I will do my part if you will do yours."

"Rely upon me," said Elmhurst significantly. He smiled sardonically as he left Nugent's quarters.

"Gad, there are the makings of a very pretty villain in that fellow!" he muttered. "I wonder what he will say when he discovers that he has been only my catspaw—that he has got rid of Clare only to throw Madge into my arms? Ha, ha!"

On Saturday morning Pat Clare received a note in Madge's hand. He opened it eagerly, and read the brief message:

"Dear Pat,—Come to the old mill before you go to the football-ground. I must see you. Burn this note, and keep it a secret. Do not fail me. MADGE."

There was not the least suspicion of trickery in the young man's mind. If there was any slight unfamiliarity in Madge's writing, he attributed it to haste or agitation. He burned the note, took the electric-tram to the end of the town, and walked across the moor to the old mill by the Weare.

It was a dim, misty morning, and a coppery sun glimmered faintly through the vapour that hung over the moor. Pat could not see the mill till he was close to it and heard the ripple of the water against the old, disused wheel. There was no one in sight outside the mill, and he walked to the door.

He heard a movement inside, and stepped quickly in.

"I am here, Madge."

The next instant there came a crashing blow, and he reeled, with a thousand lights dancing before his eyes. He caught a glimpse of a face—a face he knew—as he fell, and then darkness seemed to rush upon him, and he knew no more.

Pat Missing—The Leicester Match.

W HERE is Pat Clare? That was the question the United were asking each other as the time drew near for the journey to Leicester.

Where was Pat Clare?

He had not appeared at the club ground that morning, nor sent word. About eleven o'clock Stevenson had walked over to the house where he lodged, and inquired for him. He was informed that Clare had gone out at about half-past eight, after reading a letter which had arrived by the first post, and had not since been home.

That was all the information the United captain could glean to take back to Colonel Darrell, who was fretting and fuming at the ground. The old soldier heard him, and tugged

A FINE NEW FOOTBALL SERIAL,
By CHARLES HAMILTON.

at his grey moustache, and burst out into a torrent of anger.

"How dare he fail us? The unparalleled impudence, when he knows that I depend upon him for the Leicester match! By Jove, it's the last chance he shall have of playing for Blackfield. I've had enough of him!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Stevenson remarked, "but I don't think Clare would cut the match if he could possibly help it. Something must have happened to him."

"What can have happened to him? People don't disappear in broad daylight, I suppose? You say he left home at half-past eight. He couldn't have been coming here so early as that, as he lives only ten minutes from the ground. He was going somewhere else, and he has not yet returned."

This seemed unanswerable, and the United captain had nothing to say.

"He has placed his own private affairs before the honour of his club!" exclaimed the colonel angrily. "I put him in after what happened last Saturday, against a great deal of hostile criticism. This is how he repays me. I shall know how to depend upon him again."

But while he fretted and growled, the colonel was in reality hoping against hope that Pat would turn up at the last moment, with some explanation, or even with no explanation—anything, so long as he came in time to accompany the team to Leicester.

But the precious moments glided by, and he did not appear.

What could have happened?

There were various theories, more or less favourable to Clare, but all agreed in condemning the player who failed his club, for any reason short of death or disablement. And what accident could have happened to Clare, in daylight in Blackfield, without some news of it reaching the anxious inquirers into his whereabouts?

Dick Nesbitt, the trainer, was the only one who obstinately held to the theory of an accident.

"If Pat Clare were on his legs now, his legs would bring him here," said Dick, with a conviction there was no shaking.

Glyn Elmhurst laughed disagreeably.

"It's plain enough to me what's happened," he said. "Clare knows well enough that he's not up to league form. He made an exhibition of himself last Saturday, and spun a yarn to account for it. This time he simply dares not take it on."

And as Clare failed to appear, Elmhurst's opinion gained ground. After all, it seemed a likely supposition that the young player's nerve had failed him at the last moment, and that a feeling akin to stage-fright was keeping him away from this duty.

The colonel could scarcely contain himself. He was wild with anger; and yet there was a secret uneasiness in his heart as to Clare's fate. His faith in the young footballer's honour had been complete, and Pat's strange absence alarmed almost as much as it exasperated him.

But the time for the departure was close at hand, and it was becoming certain that, whatever the cause of Pat's failure to appear, his place would have to be filled.

"I suppose you will play Nugent, sir?" Elmhurst suggested, after listening to a tirade from the angry manager.

"I was thinking of him," replied Darrell. "But Nesbitt tells me that he was seedy yesterday."

"He is all right to-day, I fancy. He looks very fit."

Nugent was, indeed, looking very fit. There was, at moments, a peculiar expression in his eyes, which only Elmhurst understood. But he was fit and well, in good condition for the fray. The colonel looked him over, and was satisfied.

Nugent's eyes sparkled when the colonel told him that he was to play at Leicester. It was the chance of his life. He resolutely banished the black thoughts that haunted him.

Up to the last moment the colonel continued to hope, but Pat did not come. When the United took the train to Leicester, Philip Nugent went as inside right.

There were ten thousand people on the ground to see Blackfield United play Leicester. The day was somewhat misty, but the sun came

out brightly, as if on purpose, in time for the kick-off. It had an inspiring effect upon both teams as they took the field.

A train-load of loyal Blackfielders had followed their team, and they gave the scarlet shirts a yell of encouragement, which, however, was but a faint pipe compared with the roar which greeted the home team from thousands of throats. Stevenson won the toss, and chose his goal, and the referee, with his eyes on his watch, put his whistle to his lips. The signal went, and the ball was set rolling.

Colonel Darrell watched the commencement of the game with anxious eyes. Madge was not with him. The news of Clare's strange failure to appear had taken from her all heart to see the match, and she had stayed at Blackfield. She, at least, was firmly convinced that something serious must have happened to Pat.

From the start the teams seemed to be pretty evenly matched. Nugent at inside right was doing very well, though lacking the brilliance the colonel would have expected of Pat Clare. Play was very even for most of the first half, but towards half-time the Leicester crowd broke into a shout of enthusiasm as their favourites were seen besieging the visitors' goal. Blackfield's defence was strong and determined, but the Leicester men were not to be denied, and Murphy, after several marvellous saves, just missed a low fast shot which went right into the net.

"Goal!" yelled the crowd in delight.

Flushed with their success, the Leicesters went for the ball resolutely from the restart. The scarlet shirts were seen falling back, but presently centre-half got the ball and drove it out to Stevenson. The United skipper was charged off the ball by a Leicester man, who, however, slipped on the turf and went down also, and at the same instant Nugent had the ball and rushed it away like lightning.

The colonel's eyes sparkled as the Blackfield winger went streaking through the home halves. But the backs tackled him in earnest, and Nugent was stopped. After a brief tussle he sent out the ball, but outside-right had no time to capture it, for a Leicester half rushed in and drove it up the field.

Nugent's attempt had failed, and the ball was in mid-field again, and the colonel tugged his grey moustache in disappointment.

"They would not have got the ball away from Clare like that," he muttered. "Nugent is good, but he is not in the same street with Pat Clare. There's the whistle; one to nil. What beastly luck!"

The first half had ended in favour of Leicester.

The crowd were in high good-humour. They fully anticipated the victory of their favourites. Leicester were not only one up, but they seemed to be ahead of the visiting team in form. The Blackfield contingent still hoped, but they were beginning to feel doubtful.

But it was soon seen that, if Leicester were to win, it would not be without a hard struggle. When play was resumed, the Blackfield men were in a resolute mood, and they baffled all Leicester's attempts to get away. And presently Stevenson led a determined attack on the enemy's territory, and the home custodian, for the first time in the match, was called upon to save. But he saved, amid loud cheers, and the ball went up the field again, and Blackfield's brief hope died away.

Then followed a long and determined tussle, between the Leicesters, determined to advance, and the United, determined to keep them back. The Leicesters came on steadily, however, and at last a Blackfield back had to play the ball behind the line. The corner-kick was instantly claimed and taken, and a deafening shout from the spectators followed. For the Leicester skipper had received the ball, and sent it right in with a shot Murphy could not save.

Leicester were two up.

And then fortune for a while seemed to smile on the brave lads from Blackfield. Working well together, they broke through the home defence, and with some brilliant passing, brought the leather right up to the home goal. Stevenson sent in a sure shot into the corner of the net, just escaping the desperate clutch of the goalkeeper.

Then it was the Blackfield contingent's turn to yell, and they did it with right good will. There were still twenty-five minutes to go, and their hopes revived.

But that success was as the last flicker of a candle. The Blackfield men put in some good work, but they could not get past the Leicesters. There had not seemed, at first, a pin to choose between the two teams, but Leicester had gradually pulled ahead. It was just the difference, as the colonel realised, on the Blackfield side, between an average player and a first-class one, which gave them the disadvantage. With Pat Clare in the forward line, they would have beaten Leicester.

There was no question of beating them now. Stevenson realised it, and, like a sensible skipper, devoted himself to defending his goal instead of thinking of the unattainable. For the last quarter of an hour the ball was not once on the home side of the half-way line, but the Blackfield defence was grimly resolute, and all the efforts of the Leicesters failed to materialise into a goal. The whistle went at last, and the teams streamed off the field, the home players loudly cheered for their victory by two to one.

When the train bore the Blackfielders homeward, they were in a somewhat disconsolate mood. Nugent's brow was black. He had not had the success he had hoped for, and he knew that the team might have won had Pat been there in his best form. Nugent was quite sportsman enough to feel keenly upon that point. The defeat of Blackfield was a bitter blow to him.

The defeat of his team fully engrossed Colonel Darrell's thoughts during the homeward journey. If he thought of Pat Clare at all, it was with anger. But when they arrived in Blackfield, and learned that no news had yet been heard of Clare, it became clear to all that something must have happened to the young footballer. And it was now with sinister forebodings that they pondered over the question—where was Pat Clare?

In Darkness and Despair.

SLOWLY, painfully, Pat Clare struggled back to consciousness.

There was a terrible aching in his head, and his limbs were benumbed with cold. To his eyes, as he opened them, came not a gleam of light. Blackness and the silence of the tomb surrounded him.

He lay for some time in a state of dull, semi-unconsciousness; but at last he roused himself, and strove to rise.

There was a splashing sound as he moved. He was lying in two or three inches of water, and his clothing was soaked through. The effort to rise cost him exquisite pain, but he persevered, and gained his feet.

Where was he?

He had not the faintest idea. He remembered entering the old mill, he remembered the fearful blow upon the head and the glimpse of a face. How many hours had elapsed since then? Where was he now?

Dragging his feet through water and clinging mud, he felt his way through the darkness with outstretched hands, and his fingers touched a slimy wall. He felt his way along it, and in a few minutes had made the circuit of the four walls that enclosed him. Nowhere did he find a trace of an opening.

Then he understood. He was in a cellar, and the only opening was from above. It was a cellar which existed under the ruined mill, and the water which flooded it was from the adjacent river. He had been flung down there after the blow which had stunned him, and the intense darkness showed that the trapdoor above was closed. As he stared upward, only impenetrable blackness met his view.

He pressed his hands to his aching brow, and tried to think. Elmhurst had laid that trap for him; it was Elmhurst's hand that had struck him down. What, then, did Madge's letter mean? Had she come to the mill? Like a flash of light the explanation came to him. The letter was a forgery; it was a part of the plan to entrap him. Madge knew nothing of his coming there, and no one but his enemy possessed a clue to his whereabouts.

The cold was bitter, and his limbs seemed frozen. He moved mechanically to keep himself warm, but with a slow and languid motion. It was as much as he could do to keep himself from sinking down with weakness.

It was not only physical pain and exhaustion that assailed him, there was the terrible thought that he had, in all probability, looked his last upon the light of day.

It was possible that he had been hurled there simply to force him to miss the Leicester match. But it was not likely that the malevolence of his enemy would stop there. He knew who had attacked him, and if he were released, Elmhurst had everything to fear. Was it possible that he intended to face that? Was it not certain, in fact, that Pat Clare had been hurled into the flooded cellar to die?

It seemed only too certain, and the chilling thought that he was doomed to die there in the cold and darkness almost overcame the young footballer. He felt over the slimy walls for any projection that might aid him to climb, but found none. He was a prisoner, and escape was impossible.

Yet while his own fate seemed to be sealed, it was not wholly of himself that he thought. His thoughts went to the Leicester match. He had no notion of time, but he knew that he must have been a considerable time in the cellar. His watch had stopped, either run down or damaged in the fall. He could not even tell whether it was day or night, but he

could not doubt that the Leicester match was over long ago.

How had Blackfield United fared without him in the forward line? What did his comrades think of his absence? Had Nugent played in his place?

That question brought another in its train. Had Nugent had a hand in this cowardly outrage?

The young footballer moved restlessly about the cellar. It was horrible to wait there in the darkness till weakness should overcome him, and he should sink down again into the slime—in an insensibility which could have but one ending!

Yet what could he do?

The haunted mill was a spot avoided in the neighbourhood, and if he shouted for help there was little, or, rather, no chance that his voice would be heard. Even in the daylight there was little chance, and he had a feeling that it was now past nightfall.

It was better, however, than doing nothing, and many times he shouted, his voice filling the cellar with strange, weird echoes. But the effort added to his exhaustion, and after a time his shouts died away into silence.

He was weak—worn down with cold and hunger and pain. And presently he lurched drunkenly, and fell, and could not rise. Then slowly, with more than one effort to rouse himself, he sank into oblivion.

Silent and still, he lay in the dense darkness.

And at last there came a sound in the old mill, of footsteps, of a voice calling. And still he did not move.

A Late Repentance.

WHERE was Pat Clare? That question was soon puzzling all Blackfield, after the return of the defeated team from Leicester. It was a question which everyone asked and no one could answer.

But no one could doubt any longer that there had been foul play, and the aid of the police was called in to seek the missing footballer.

High and low through Blackfield they sought for a trace of Pat Clare, without success. He had disappeared as completely as if he had vanished into thin air.

Colonel Darrell was deeply disquieted, and all the Blackfield team were anxious—with the exceptions, of course, of Glyn Elmhurst and Philip Nugent. They knew only too well what had become of the missing lad, but they kept their own counsel. Elmhurst could hardly hide his secret satisfaction under a mask of concern. In his callous soul was no trace of remorse. But the case was different with Nugent.

He had not gained the distinction he had hoped to gain by playing in his cousin's place. His action had cost him a victory, and not all his self-love could blind him to that fact. If Pat Clare had played in the Blackfield forward line, the team would have come home victorious, and Philip Nugent knew it.

His bitter disappointment, and that unlooked-for result of his wickedness, quite sufficed to destroy whatever satisfaction he had felt at the success of the plot. And now that he had time for calm reflection, remorse woke in his breast. Nugent was not a bad fellow in the main, though uncontrolled jealousy and evil influence had made him a party to a crime. Now that the black deed was done, now that there was a stain upon his soul which nothing could efface, he began to regret. He saw into what depths of baseness his un-governed temper had led him, and he shuddered as he saw.

But it was too late now for retreat. The die was cast, and he could not go back. He must face the future with what heart he could.

Glyn Elmhurst kept a keen eye upon his confederate, and he was not wholly easy in his mind as he saw Nugent's looks. He had a talk with him before Nugent went home.

"I advise you to take care that your face does not betray you," he remarked. "I know exactly how you feel, but you are in too deep to get out now. A forgery and a murderous assault are serious matters, and you cannot afford to give yourself away."

"I know that as well as you do," said Nugent, with a haggard look. "I shall take care that nothing is suspected, so far as I am concerned. But I am not made of iron, as you seem to be, and I cannot help thinking—"

He broke off abruptly.

"Better not," said Elmhurst coolly. "My advice to you is to go away for a few days, and find something to occupy your mind. Good-night!"

Philip Nugent walked about restlessly for some time before returning to his lodgings. When he arrived there, Mrs. Jebbs informed him that a young lady had called to see him, and was still waiting in her little parlour.

The thought of Madge at once came into Nugent's mind. Was it possible that the girl had come to speak to him about Pat's disappearance? He trembled at the thought, and for a moment was inclined to go away again, without seeing her. But, he reflected that she must have heard him come in, and after some minutes of painful hesitation he entered Mrs. Jebbs's little parlour.

It was Madge who rose to meet him. He was startled by the sight of her face. It was extremely pale, and the eyes showed traces of recent tears. Had she been weeping for Clare? Nugent asked himself, and his teeth set hard.

"I am sorry you have had to wait," he said.

"I had no idea—"

"You are surprised to see me here, naturally. I have come to speak of Pat."

"It is a very mysterious affair," said Nugent, avoiding her eyes.

There was something in her look he could not quite understand—something that seemed to hint that she saw through him, and read the secret of his heart. The thought troubled him, and he could not meet her clear, steady glance.

"Can you throw any light upon it?" He started violently, and the colour rushed to his face.

"I—I don't understand you, Madge."

"Do you know anything about Pat Clare's disappearance?"

"Madge!"

She remained standing, one hand resting upon the table. Her gaze never faltered for an instant, and, try as he would, Nugent could not raise his eyes to meet it. There was a short silence.

"You have not answered me," she said at last.

"The question is an insult!" he said.

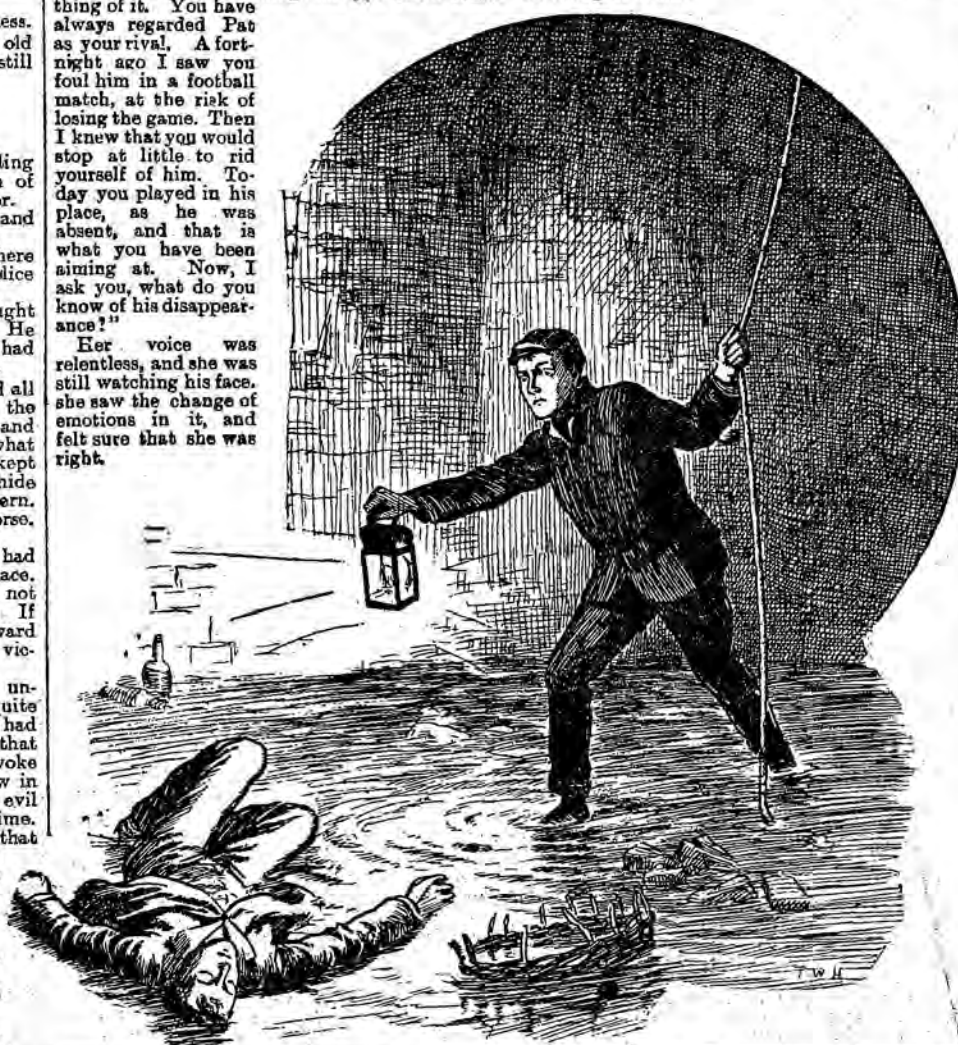
"Listen! You have always hated Pat, you have always been jealous of him. Lately you have been the associate of Glyn Elmhurst, his bitter enemy. If harm has come to Pat, Glyn Elmhurst has had a hand in it. Of that I am certain."

"Possibly, but I—"

"I cannot help thinking that you know some-

thing of it. You have always regarded Pat as your rival. A fortnight ago I saw you foul him in a football match, at the risk of losing the game. Then I knew that you would stop at little to rid yourself of him. To-day you played in his place, as he was absent, and that is what you have been aiming at. Now, I ask you, what do you know of his disappearance?"

Her voice was relentless, and she was still watching his face. She saw the change of emotions in it, and felt sure that she was right.



Standing in the glimmering water, Nugent flashed the lamp round in search of Pat. A dark, inanimate form lay almost at his feet. With an inarticulate ejaculation he bent and turned the light upon the deathly face.

He did not speak, and his eyes were still on the carpet. He had never dreamed of anything like this. That Madge might suspect, that she would question him, had never even crossed his mind.

What had rendered her perceptions so strangely keen? Her love for Pat Clare; there was no other explanation. She loved Pat. And he—what had he gained by his villainy? Her scorn, her contempt—nothing but that.

The misery in his heart was visible in his pale face. Madge's face was kinder as she went on.

"Phil, if you have allowed that wicked man to lead you away, in spite of your better nature, it is not yet too late to do right. If you hate Pat—"

"Yes," said Nugent, bitterly. "I hate him, for the same reason that Elmhurst hates him—because you love him, Madge!"

The colour flushed over the girl's face.

"That is no reason why you should injure him. And cannot you see that you are playing into Glyn Elmhurst's hands? Do you know that Pat is the only obstacle to the accomplishment of his designs? You do not know that he possesses an unbounded influence over my father. You do not know that my father has commanded me to accept Glyn Elmhurst, and that it was only the thought of Pat that made me firm to resist."

Nugent started as if stung. He had thought that, with Pat out of the way, he would have a fair chance, and he had thought with contempt of Elmhurst's rivalry, knowing how Madge disliked her father's secretary. He had had no idea of the secret card Elmhurst had to play.

"I—I did not know!" he stammered. "Why should Mr. Darrell command you—"

"He has done so," said Madge. "I have told him that I cannot obey. But—but if Pat is lost to me—"

The girl's firmness gave way for a moment, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I see," Nugent said between his teeth. "I have been his catspaw. My eyes are opened now. Oh, blind fool that I have been!"

Madge came a step towards him.

"Where is Pat?"

"I can find him! I will save him—"

He paused, struck by a terrible thought.

What if it were too late?

"What—what are you thinking of?" cried Madge, in terror. "He is not dead! You do not dare to say that he is dead!"

"No," cried Nugent hastily—"no! Heaven forbid!"

"Where is he?"

He did not reply to the question.

"Go home, Madge, and say nothing. You may rely upon me."

The next moment he was gone. Madge, like one dazed, heard the street door close behind him. He was gone, to save Pat Clare!

She left the house, and a cab bore her back to her home. There she waited, in burning, feverish anxiety, for news of Pat Clare. Was he living or dead?

in his hand he swung himself down the rope, and his feet splashed into the ooze below.

Standing in the glimmering water, he flashed the lantern round in search of Pat. A dark, inanimate form lay almost at his feet. With an inarticulate ejaculation he bent and turned the light upon the deathly face.

The eyes were closed, the whole face seemed to bear the seal of death. With a trembling hand Nugent felt the heart to see if it still beat. He breathed a prayer of thankfulness as he found that it was beating.

Pat Clare lived, but he was sunk deep in an unconsciousness that could only end in death if he were not speedily restored. Nugent lost no time. He fastened the end of the rope round his cousin, under the armpits, and then with some difficulty climbed again through the trap-door, taking the lantern with him.

Then, exerting all his strength, he drew Pat up, passing the rope round a beam, and fastening it as soon as the young footballer's shoulders were on a level with the floor. Then it was easy for him to seize Pat and pull him out.

And then he strove to restore him, and his heart beat hard when he heard a faint moan from the pale lips. Pat's eyes opened, and blinked in the lantern light.

It was some time before he realised what had happened. Nugent had wrung the water out of his clothes, and wrapped him warmly in his own coat.

"You have saved my life!" said Pat.

"I placed it in danger," answered Nugent.

"You helped Elmhurst to entrap me?"

"Yes."

"Why have you saved me, then?"

"Because I am not so great a villain as I thought myself."

There was a long silence. Pat was still weak and faint, but the consciousness of life and safety re-animated him, and he felt something of his strength returning.

"Do you think you can walk?" said Nugent presently.

"I think so, if you help me."

"I can go and fetch help, if you don't mind waiting here alone."

"I can manage, I think, with your help. This will have to be kept dark."

Nugent's heart gave a painful throb.

"You mean that you will keep the secret?"

"Of course. I suppose I cannot betray you after you have saved me," said Pat simply.

"Come, I think I can walk now."

Leaning heavily upon his cousin's shoulder, he passed with slow and feeble steps from the old mill, where he had so nearly found his grave.

Neither spoke a word more as they made their way into Blackfield.

The question which had agitated Blackfield the previous evening was answered in the morning. Pat Clare had been found, and was lying ill at his lodgings, and the police were seeking certain "persons unknown" who had attacked him and left him senseless in the haunted mill.

Madge had learned the truth overnight, by a wire from Nugent. But Colonel Darrell did not know until Sunday morning that Pat had returned to Blackfield. He at once drove over to the young footballer's lodgings to ascertain what was true among the conflicting rumours that were circulated.

Pat was ill, and had not risen, but the doctor allowed Colonel Darrell to see him. The lad's worn and haggard face at once touched the old soldier's heart.

"How did you come to miss the match yesterday, Pat?" he said, gently enough. "I know now that it was not your fault."

"It was not, sir," said Pat eagerly. "But the true story must be kept a secret. I shall tell you what I have not told the police, and when you know all I think you will agree with me to keep the secret for the honour of Blackfield United."

The colonel's face changed a little.

"I don't understand you, Clare."

"It was Glyn Elmhurst who struck me down in the old mill."

"You are sure?"

"I saw his face; but I should have known it if I had not seen him."

"Why should he do it?"

"For the same reason that he accused me of a robbery—for the same reason that he drugged me on the eve of a football match."

"It was Elmhurst?"

"I was certain of it at the time, but I could not speak without proof. This time there is no lack of proof. I saw his face. He stunned me, and shut me up in a cellar under the old mill—to die!"

"To die?"

"There is no doubt of his intention, though he lacked the courage to finish the work with his own hand. I should have died if Phil Nugent had not saved me."

"How did Nugent know that you were there?"

Pat was silent.

"I will not question you," said Colonel Darrell. "If you are willing to keep silent for the honour of the club, be it so. Blackfield United has never disgraced its colours yet, but a story like this would drag them through the mire. As for that scoundrel, I will see that he does not escape scot free. Buck up, Clare, and get well as soon as you can; we want you in the team."

And, shaking Clare's hand, the colonel took his leave.

(This fine story will be concluded shortly. Look out for A. & Hardy's fine new football yarn, "The Blue Crusaders.")

The Rescue—Elmhurst Resigns.

PAT! Strangely, eerily, the echoes of the old mill answered the tremulous cry.

Philip Nugent was kneeling by the open trap-door. The rays of a lantern glimmered through the gloom, but hardly seemed to penetrate the blackness beneath, as he turned them downward.

"Pat, if you are alive, for mercy's sake answer me!"

But no sound came from the gloomy depths. A shudder shook Nugent from head to foot. Was he too late?

He had left Madge hastily; he had rushed out of Blackfield with hardly a second thought. He was determined to save Pat Clare, be the consequences what they might. The resolution once taken, he was eager to carry it out, to assure himself that it was yet possible to undo his evil work.

He had stopped only to obtain a rope and a lantern at a shop he passed, and then he sped over the moor under the damp mists of the winter night. The silence and loneliness of it struck a chill to his heart. He had torn up the trap, and called again and again to Pat. But only the echo of his own voice answered him.

Was he too late?

With hands that shook and trembled he fastened the end of the rope to a beam, and let the coil drop into the cellar. With the lantern