

SOLID SILVER MEDALS FOR GOAL-SCORERS!

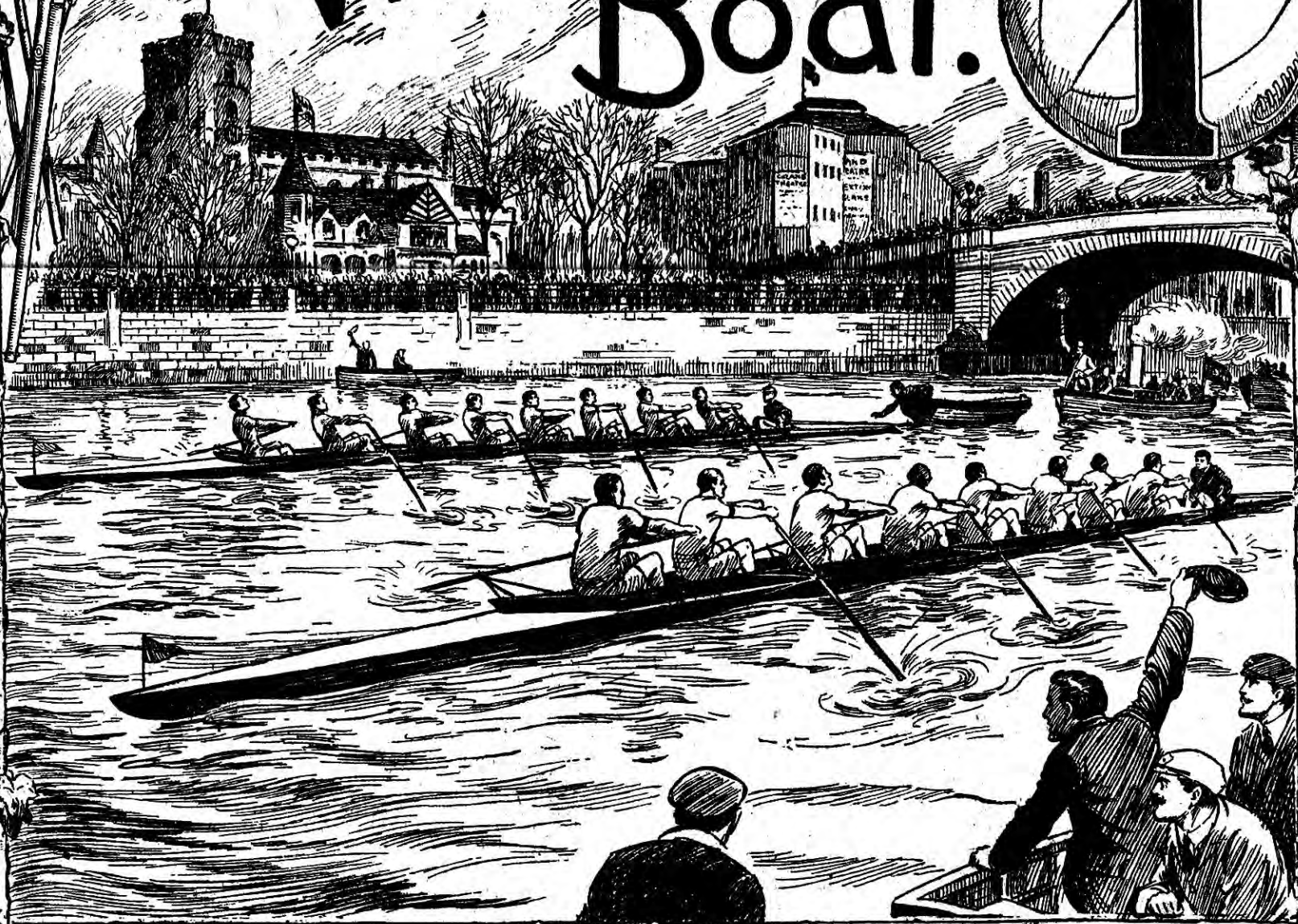
(SEE YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT.)

The

Boys' Realm.

The Winning Boat.

19



BOAT RACE & INTERNATIONAL NUMBER

THE WINNING BOAT.

A Tale of the 'Varsity Race.
By CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE 1st CHAPTER.

A 'Varsity Blue.

"HALLO, Lascelles! What's the row?" Frank Russell looked up in amazement as his chum Lascelles burst into his room at Dormer College, Oxford, breathless with excitement. His amazement was increased when Lascelles, instead of replying to his question, seized him by the shoulders, jerked him off his chair, and began to whirl him about the room in an impromptu war-dance.

"What on earth's the matter?" gasped Frank, struggling in his friend's muscular grip. "Have you gone right off your rocker, Lascelles? Don't be an ass!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Lascelles, finishing the dance with a whirl that sent a bookcase and a writing-table flying. "Hurrah! Good news, Frank! Glorious news! But here's old Bertie to tell you himself."

An athletic figure appeared in the open doorway. The kindly, good-humoured face of Herbert Clyne, the president of the O.U.B.C., looked into the room.

"I see Lascelles has broken the news to you, Russell!" he exclaimed, with a laugh.

"Not at all," said Frank. "He's broken nothing but my furniture. You don't mean to say that—that—"

The undergraduate's look became very eager, as he left the sentence unfinished, and fixed his eyes inquiringly upon Clyne. The latter nodded with a smile.

"I see, you guess, Russell. Yes, you're right. You've been chosen to stroke the 'Varsity boat, and I may say I've had my eye on you for a long time."

"You—you mean it?" gasped Frank.

He had hoped for it, longed for it. Often he had dreamed that the time would come when Herbert Clyne would say those words to him. Now it had come, and it seemed to him unreal and strangely unreal.

Clyne laughed. "Of course I mean it," he said. "I shouldn't be likely to say it for a joke, should I?"

"No, no; of course not," said Frank, laughing, too; "but—but it seems too much good luck. I hoped for it, of course, but I hardly dared to expect it."

"I quite understand. But it's a fact, my boy—a hard, solid fact. And mind, we're going to beat Cambridge hollow this year, and we're going to pull to win."

"By Jove," said Frank, "I shall pull my level best. I won't thank you, Clyne, but I can say this much—that if Oxford lose, it won't be my fault."

"And that's enough!" said the president cheerily. "Mind, I depend upon you."

And he shook hands with the young undergraduate, and left the room.

"Hurrah!" cried Lascelles. "Didn't I tell you so all along, Franky?"

"Well, yes, you did," admitted Russell; "but it seemed too good to be true. There's such a lot of really good oars among the wet-bobs that I thought I hadn't a real chance."

"You're too modest," grinned Lascelles. "Hallo, here come the fellows! I gave them a hint in passing, and I expected them as soon as Clyne was gone."

There was a sound of many footsteps and voices on the staircase. Frank looked a little alarmed.

"It's all right, old fellow!" exclaimed Lascelles. "They're only going to celebrate. Here he is, with his blushing honours thick upon him. Seize the modest hero before he can escape!"

Frank, indeed, looked a great deal inclined to escape; but there was no time. The laughing crowd of undergraduates threw themselves upon him, and he was lifted up bodily and carried off, faintly protesting.

Down the staircase they carried him, and out into the quadrangle, bright in the sunshine of the spring afternoon.

"Here, I say," expostulated Frank, "drop it! Let me down, for goodness' sake!"

But the undergraduates, laughing and cheering, took no notice of his appeals. They carried him shoulder-high round and round the quadrangle, and more fellows poured out of their rooms on all sides to join the joyous throng.

All Dormer College was proud of the fact that a Dormer man had been chosen to stroke the University boat on the historic Putney to Mortlake course, and they meant to celebrate the occasion in a proper manner.

Frank was the hero of the hour, and, finding that there was no escape, he submitted to his fate, and entered into the spirit of the thing.

Round and round he went to the tune of a boating song, punctuated with cheers, and the uproar called forth no remonstrance from don or principal, for they knew the cause of it, and sympathised, for once at least, with the exuberant feelings of the undergraduates.

They set Frank down at last, flushed and breathless, on his own staircase, up which he fled before they had a chance to break out again.

He bolted into his room, and "sporting the

oak," in case any fresh deputation should come to celebrate the occasion.

"By Jove," he gasped, sinking into a chair, "that was why—Father!"

He made the sudden discovery that he was not alone in the room. A gentleman was sitting in his armchair near the fire, and he rose and looked at Frank. The undergraduate started to his feet.

"Father, I did not know you were here. Have you been waiting for me? There's been a celebration in the quad. You must have heard it."

Mr. Russell, whose face looked very pale and worn, smiled faintly.

"Yes, I saw it, Frank, as your scout was showing me in here. They seem to be making much of you, my boy."

"I've been chosen to stroke the 'Varsity boat in the Boatrace!" explained Frank, not without an unconscious ring of pride in his voice. "I don't say I deserve it; but isn't it glorious, dad?"

"I am glad for your sake, Frank. I am sure you deserve it. My dear lad, I am more pleased than I can say."

There was a falter in the old gentleman's voice. Frank looked at him anxiously. He noted the lines in his father's face with a strange pang at his heart.

"Father, you are ill! Why are you in Oxford now? Has anything happened?"

Mr. Russell did not reply, but he sank again into the chair he had risen from on Frank's hurried entrance, and, though his face was turned from the light, the young man saw the tear that rolled down his pale cheek. He gazed at his father in amazement and consternation, a vague, undefined fear gripping at his heart.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

Bad News.

MR. RUSSELL was quick to recover his composure.

"I am sorry—more sorry than I can say—to bring you bad news at such an auspicious moment, Frank."

I have staved it off as long as possible, but the end has come."

"What has happened?"

"I am at the mercy of a man who will show me none, Frank. You know Abel Denver?"

"Abel Denver, the millionaire—Len Denver's uncle?" asked Frank, in wonder.

"Yes, I believe you have met Len Denver?"

"I have met him," said Frank, with a shade on his brow. "I did not like him. I've some good friends at Cambridge, but Len Denver is—well, I won't say an enemy, but we don't like each other. Of course we don't often come in contact."

"You think he dislikes you?"

"I know he does; and I don't exactly love him. But I haven't seen him for some time. Surely he has nothing to do—"

"It is possible that that has something to do with the line Abel Denver has taken. I know he is very fond of his nephew. Leonard is the son of his younger brother, now dead, to whom he was greatly attached, and as he is unmarried, his nephew is his heir. He certainly cares very much for the lad, and honours him in every way, and—"

"But what have you to fear from Abel Denver, father?"

"I am in his debt," said Mr. Russell, his voice sinking miserably. "I have been very unfortunate, Frank, and perhaps foolish. What seemed to me an absolutely safe investment has failed me utterly, and—and I fear we are ruined."

Frank looked at his father with a suddenly white face. He knew what this would mean to him—leaving Oxford, the shattering of his college career. But it was not of himself that he thought now, but of the unhappy man before him.

"Bear up, dad!" he said. "We'll face it together!"

"I knew you would say that, Frank. God bless you, my brave boy!"

"But is it so bad?" asked Frank slowly. "Is there no chance?"

"Yes, there is a chance, my boy, and that is why I am here to-day. You have five thousand pounds left you by your mother. I have come to my son as a beggar. If you hand that over to me I can stave off ruin for a time—perhaps for a couple of months."

"It is yours, of course," cried Frank.

"And then," said Mr. Russell, "we may emerge from this difficulty, after all. There is a chance. If Mr. Denver could be induced to be a little less hard, I have no doubt that I could weather the storm—with this assistance from you, Frank. But he seems to be as hard as adamant, and will make not the slightest concession. But I shall strain every nerve to pull through, and I may succeed yet."

Long the father and son sat and talked over their changed prospects. Frank learned all the details of the wretched speculation in which Mr. Russell had found ruin, but from which Abel Denver had drawn a great addition to his already huge fortune. When at last Frank ac-

companied his father to the railway-station, he was in a very depressed mood, though he strove to conceal it from Mr. Russell.

Lascelles met him at the gate of Dormer on his return.

"Hallo! Where have you been?" asked the little undergraduate. "What do you mean by disappearing like that, you bouncer?"

"It was my pater came down to see me," explained Frank.

Lascelles looked at him curiously.

"He's brought you some bad news, then. You ought to be looking the happiest chap in Oxford, and instead of that I find you looking in doleful dumps. What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"Rot!" said Lascelles laconically. "Of course, if it's anything you'd rather not tell me—"

"Oh, not at all! Come to my rooms."

Lascelles accompanied Frank to his rooms. Frank sat down with a sigh.

"Hallo! That won't do!" exclaimed his friend.

Russell smiled faintly. In a few words he explained what news Mr. Russell had brought him. Lascelles, the cox of the Dormer College boat, was Frank's bosom friend. They were both enthusiastic rivermen, and had been public-schoolboys together.

Lascelles whistled expressively when he heard the news.

"I say, that's bad!" he remarked. "I can't say how sorry I am, Frank. But it may not be so bad as you fear. And your pater himself said it may turn out all right, now he has the tin to tide over immediate difficulties. You mustn't let this weigh on your spirits and spoil your form. Oxford looks to you to stroke the boat to a win."

"And I will!" said Frank resolutely between his teeth. "I promise you this won't make any difference in that way."

"If you let it, Frank, you'd be playing into a rival's hands—Len Denver's."

"How so, Jim?"

"Haven't you heard? He's to stroke the Cambridge boat!"

Frank started.

"Len Denver stroke the Light Blues! No, I hadn't heard. By Jove, Lascelles, we'll beat Cambridge if we've got it in us! I don't know whether he has anything to do with his uncle's hardness to my father. I shouldn't wonder. But if so, it will be revenge enough to leave him at the winning-post."

Lascelles chuckled.

"Right-ho, Frank! The Cantabs are counting on a win, I hear. They're delighted with young Denver at stroke, and I know he's been making a big name among Cambridge oarsmen. You know, my cousin's at Cambridge, and I got the news from him. Len Denver fancies himself greatly, and I imagine it will be a deep cut to his pride if the Dark Blues win."

"And we will win!" cried Frank.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.

Practice at Putney—Len's Uncle.

A KEEN spring day on the banks of the Thames at Putney.

The Oxford crew had been quartered for some time at the London Rowing Club boathouse, their usual training quarters, while the Light Blues were their neighbours at the Leander. With the Oxford men, of course, was Frank Russell, and, to Frank's delight and his own, Jim Lascelles had come with the eight to cox in the great race.

Both crews were putting in steady daily practice now, on the river where the race was to take place, since leaving the Isis and the Cam for Father Thames. Both were in good condition, and keen on winning.

Frank Russell had watched the Cambridge eight at practice more than once, and especially he had taken note of the form shown by Leonard Denver, the Cambridge stroke.

It could not be denied that Denver was a splendid oarsman, and his comrades had every confidence in him. He was a strapping fellow, with a cool, clear head and a steady eye, and strong, lithe limbs, and he had a great name as a rowing man. He was a rival to be feared. At the same time, Frank, without conceit as to his own powers, felt that he was fully Len Denver's equal, and not likely to be outclassed by the Cantab.

On this keen spring afternoon the Oxford eight had just returned from a spin over the whole course from Putney to Mortlake, having done the distance in just under twenty-one minutes. After the return to the quarters at Putney, Frank Russell helped to carry the slim, trim shell up the shore. A stout gentleman in a fur-lined overcoat, with a keen, hard face and flinty grey eyes, stood among the crowd that watched the Oxonians bring the boat ashore. His glance was fixed upon Frank Russell with peculiar interest.

Frank happened to glance his way, and met his eyes. The stout gentleman nodded with a peculiar smile, and a shade crossed the young Oxonian's brow. He recognised Abel Denver, the millionaire, the uncle and guardian of the Cambridge stroke. He guessed that the mil-

lionaire was at Putney to see his nephew with the Cambridge eight, and did not guess that Mr. Denver's presence had anything to do with himself. He was to discover that later.

As the Oxford men disappeared from view, Mr. Denver left the crowd, and sauntered in a leisurely way down the pleasant bank of the river. Ten minutes later he was joined by an athletic fellow in a light-blue muffler.

"You've been watching the Oxford crew, uncle?" asked Len Denver, with a laugh.

The millionaire nodded.

"Yes, Len. I had a talk with a Pressman, too; and the opinion seems to be that they are in fine form. They have done the distance in twenty-one minutes, and these are early days yet. If they improve much on that, Len, you will have a tussle before you."

"Twenty-one minutes!" said Len, his brow darkening. "We did it yesterday in twenty-two."

His uncle looked serious. Mr. Denver was very fond and very proud of his handsome nephew, and he had been delighted beyond measure when Len was chosen to stroke the Cambridge boat. He had set his heart upon Cambridge winning, even more than the oarsmen themselves. He knew what a bitter blow a defeat would be to Len; and he imbibed some of Len's personal dislike for the Oxford stroke.

"Speak right out, Len!" he said abruptly. "What do you think of your chance? I've come down here to-day about that, really. Men who know something about rowing have told me that, while Oxford are improving daily, Cambridge are nearly at the top of their form, which means that on the day of the race the Dark Blues will be well ahead."

"Oh, that's all rot!" said Len uneasily. "The fellows who talk like that don't know what they're talking about!"

"You think you will win?"

"I hope so. It's impossible to say. If Herbert Clyne hadn't picked up young Russell, I should have been certain. I admit that Russell is first-class, and it will be a close fight—a fight to a finish. Of course, I'm telling you this in confidence. We shall do our best. I should hate to be beaten, especially by Frank Russell!"

Mr. Denver nodded slowly. He read more in his nephew's look than in his words, and he knew that the grim shadow of defeat was looming before Len's imagination. He would not admit how much he really feared Frank Russell on the river.

"A pity they ever picked him up," said the millionaire reflectively. "I want you to win, Len, my boy. Still, there's many a slip, you know. You may outclass Russell."

"I don't like him," said Len abruptly; "but it's no good blinking the truth. He's the finest oar Oxford ever turned out, I believe. His style is perfect. We shall do our best, uncle, and that's all I can say."

"Of course, it's always possible that something may happen to an oarsman," the millionaire remarked. "Russell might crack up before the race."

"No such luck!" said Len, with a rueful laugh.

Mr. Denver's face was very thoughtful when he parted with his nephew. He strolled to the hotel, and despatched a note to Frank Russell. Half an hour later the young Oxford oarsman entered the millionaire's room.

THE 4th CHAPTER.

Mr. Denver Makes Terms.

FRANK RUSSELL looked with cold inquiry at the millionaire, who nodded affably. His glance rested keenly on the young man's face.

"Please sit down, Mr. Russell," he said. "As I told you in my note, I have something to say to you concerning your father's affairs."

Frank sat down.

"It seems peculiar that you should wish to discuss them with me, sir," he said; "but here I am. What is it?"

"Are you aware that Mr. Russell is in difficulties, and that I am his principal creditor—for the large sum of twenty thousand pounds?"

"Yes."

"As I choose, he sinks or swims. The other creditors he can deal with; me he cannot satisfy without time, and unless I choose to give him time he is ruined. Given time, he will probably weather the storm, for his resources are really sound at bottom."

"Yes, I understand all that," said Frank, wondering what this explanation was to lead to.

"Well, it depends upon you whether I give him time or not."

"Upon me!" ejaculated Frank, in utter amazement.

"Yes, I am a business man, of few words. This is the case in a nutshell. Oxford look like winning the Boatrace—"

"What on earth has that to do with it?"

"Much. You are stroke of the Oxford boat. If you lose the race, and Cambridge wins, your father is safe. If Oxford wins, I will crush him without mercy. Do you understand?"

Frank looked at him dazedly.

"You—your scoundrel!"

The millionaire shrugged his shoulders; he was an unscrupulous man, and hard words counted for less than nothing with him.

"Think, he said. 'If you win, I crush your father without mercy. You have to leave Oxford, and break up your career. If you lose, I stand by Mr. Russell in this crisis. I give him time to pay me, and I help him with his other creditors. I will give a written engagement to that effect if you like. It means the difference between poverty and wealth, between prosperity and ruin to you. Think before you decide.'"

"I don't need to think," said Frank, with biting scorn. "Oxford are going to win, if I can stroke them to victory—and you can tell Len Denver so!"

"My nephew knows nothing whatever of this," said the millionaire harshly, "and I rely upon your honour to tell him nothing."

"Don't speak that word; what have you to do with honour?" cried Frank. "Do you know what I would do if you were a young man? I would give you the thrashing of your life, for daring to make such a rascally proposal to me. As it is, I can only tell you that I think you are a cad and an utter scoundrel!" And he turned to leave the room.

"Wait," said the millionaire, gritting his teeth—"wait! If you leave this room without giving me your word to lose the race, your father is ruined! I will strain every nerve to ensure his bankruptcy—not that it will need much effort on my part. I have only to demand my strict legal rights. Think!"

Frank did not reply. He could not trust himself to speak, and he left the room without another word, and strode from the hotel.

Mr. Denver smiled grimly.

"So he refuses," he snapped his teeth. "I half expected it. But, knowing that his father's ruin hangs upon his oar, is he likely to pull his best and win? Hardly; he will be off his form on Boatrace day, and that is all I want. With such a weight hanging on his mind he cannot pull to win."

And so Abel Denver was satisfied. He felt that he would gain his point.

Frank Russell left the hotel with his brain in a whirl. He did not feel inclined then for the company of his comrades, and he set off for a rapid walk along the river's bank to collect his thoughts. The millionaire's proposition filled him with rage, but under that was a fear of what Mr. Denver would do. He could save his father and his own prospects, but at what a cost.

To give away the race! To be guilty of the foulest treachery possible to a man trusted by his college and his Varsity. No, better ruin, better death! Better a thousand deaths! If it were only himself. But it was his father he had to think of. He remembered the bowed head, the grey hairs, the dark, sad brows, and his heart ached. His father was ruined, and he must commence life over again at fifty—and Frank could save him by saying a word.

Was ever a man placed in such a terrible dilemma? He strode along the towing-path, his face white and hard, his eyes on the ground. He started at a footstep near him, and looked up to see Len Denver.

The young Cambridge oarsman was looking hard at him. As a matter of fact, he was wondering what made Frank look so white and worn. But Frank, naturally, was not in the mood then to do justice to the millionaire's nephew. He thought he saw a sneer on the face of the Cantab, and his fury boiled up within him. He strode towards Len Denver with a black brow.

"You cur!" he said savagely. "So you think you'll win by foul play, do you? I promise you that you won't!"

He got no further. Len had looked at him in astonishment at first, then, with a face flushed scarlet, he struck Frank in the face with his open hand.

Frank reeled from the blow, which cracked on his face like a pistol-shot. But only for a moment. Then he sprang at the Cantab like a tiger.

"Come on, then!" he cried. "I could not strike an old man—but you—you are my match, and by all that's sacred you sha'n't leave this spot till you've given or taken a hiding!"

"I'm quite ready for you!" hissed Len. "I don't know what you mean by foul play, but it's a lie—a foul lie, and I'll drive it back down your throat!"

Frank hesitated a moment.

"Do you mean to say you didn't know—"

"I want no words with you!" cried Len Denver hoarsely. "Come on!"

He followed up the words with a blow that sent Frank with a crash down on the towing-path. Frank sprang up, and rushed at his foe, and in a moment they were fighting like tigers. Both had forgotten that they were training, that it was their duty to keep themselves fit, they had forgotten everything but their mutual animosity. They fought fiercely, with blow on blow, on the solitary towing-path beside the shining river. Gradually, Len Denver got the worst of it. Good athlete as he was, he was no match for Frank, though for a long time his rage upheld his failing strength.

But at last he went down beneath a terrible right-hander, and did not rise again. He gave Frank a look of fury as he turned away.

"Go!" he hissed. "I will be even with you some day, Frank Russell!"

Frank gave a scornful laugh and strode from the spot.

THE 5th CHAPTER.

Lascelles Has an Idea.

"RUSSELL! What on earth have you been doing?"

It was Herbert Clyne who asked the question as Frank entered the London Rowing Club quarters. He stared in amazement. Frank's face was cut and bruised. He had washed away some of the signs of conflict in Thames water, but there were many he could not hope to conceal.

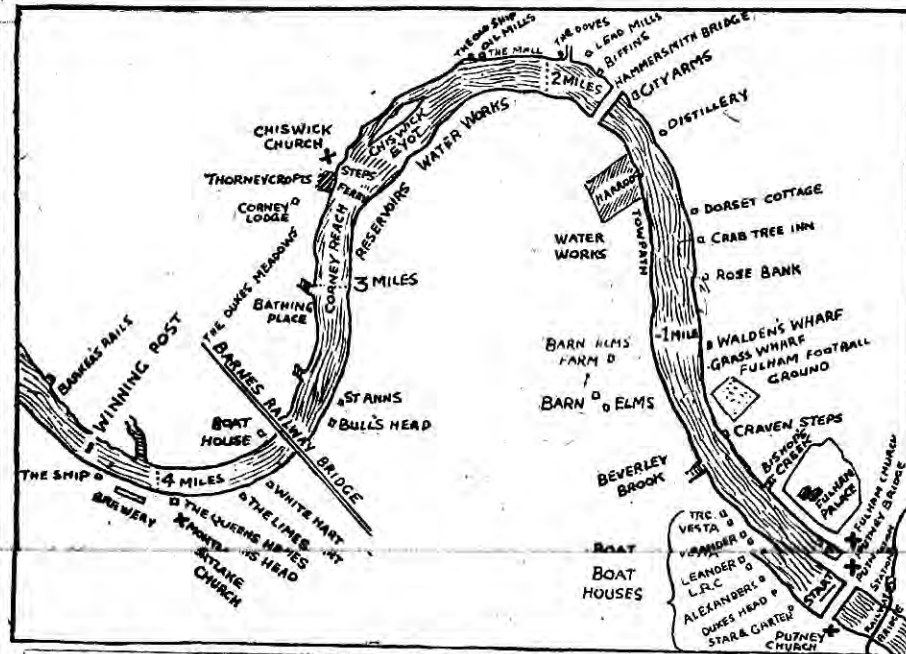
The young oarsman flushed painfully. "I'm sorry, Clyne," he said awkwardly, "I got into a row up the towing-path—but it's all right, I'm not hurt."

"Well, you look hurt, and I'd advise you to steer clear of rows, Russell—till after the Boatrace, at least," said Clyne stiffly, as he turned away.

Frank did not explain further; it would have been useless, and besides, it would have made more trouble if it had been known that his "row" had been with a Cantab. He felt pretty sure that Denver would say nothing.

Frank did his best to hide his despondency during the following days, but he was not always successful. He practised continually with the eight, and the coach seemed to be satisfied with his improvement. As the March days wore on, the Oxford eight did the distance in twenty minutes on a trial spin, which was more than good enough for a win, the coach thought. Frank resolutely put his despondent thoughts from him when his oar was in his hands. But at other times moods of black depression would seize upon him. His father's ruin stared him in the face. He alone could save Mr. Russell—and honour stood in the way.

What was he to do? To give away the race was impossible; better anything than that. To resign his place in the eight; that was the alternative. But, without vanity, he knew that the University could not replace him. He was wanted, and no other would do



Map of the Course, from Putney to Mortlake, over which the Oxford and Cambridge Boatrace will be Rowed To-day.

equally well. Yet, with this terrible drag upon him, would he be able to pull to win on the great day? He could not help feeling doubt. He would try hard, and do his best, but with the knowledge that victory meant desolation to his home, surely he would fall off from his best form.

But at a hint of resigning from the eight, Herbert Clyne was down on him like the proverbial hundred of bricks.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he demanded. "Resign? If you say that again I'll chuck you into the Thames."

"But—"

"I see what it is," said the other, more kindly. "You've been training a little too hard, and you've got into a fit of the dumps; a kind of stage-fright—eh? Not an uncommon thing among oarsmen just before the Boatrace, I assure you. You're all right, my boy. No, not another word. You're all right, and we can't spare you."

And so the subject was dismissed. It was impossible to approach it again. Meanwhile, Frank had another meeting with the millionaire. He came upon Mr. Denver during a stroll on the towing-path, one morning just before the great day.

"Have you thought over my proposition?" asked Mr. Denver.

"No. Don't speak to me."

"Remember what it means to your father, and don't be a fool. After all, what is a boat-race? Nothing to ruin a life's prospects for."

"Have you ever heard of such a thing as honour?" asked Frank scornfully. "Go! If you speak to me again I may not be able to keep my hands off you."

"Good. Win the race, and on the following day your father is a bankrupt."

And he strode away.

The days were passing quickly now. Bright, spring sunshine heralded Boatrace day. On the day preceding the great event, Jim Lascelles, who had long uneasily noted his chum's strange moods, spoke out plainly.

"What's the matter with you, Frank?"

"Nothing," said Frank, startled; "what do you mean?"

"I mean that you can't deceive me, if you can the others. Is it your father's affairs you are thinking about? I can see you're awfully worried over something, and have been for weeks."

A strong impulse came to Frank to tell his friend the whole story. Lascelles could not help him. But it would be a relief.

"I'm in the power of a scoundrel!" he cried huskily. "I'll tell you all, Jim, but you must keep it dark."

And he told of the millionaire's terms. Lascelles listened with a face pale with anxiety and anger.

"The hound! The utter hound! The beast!" he ejaculated.

"He's all that," said Frank bitterly. "But I'm in his power. To-morrow's Boatrace day, and if Oxford win, my father's to be driven into the Bankruptcy Court. You don't doubt me, Jim? I shall pull my hardest, and win if I can. But the thought of what is to follow—well, I'm afraid it will unnerve me, Jim, and put me off my form. It's too late now to resign. I hinted at it once, but Clyne wouldn't listen, and I couldn't explain."

"So that was your reason?"

"Yes. I shall do my best. Len Denver shall not triumph if I can help it."

Lascelles started.

"Hang it, Frank, you don't think Len has a hand in this?"

"It's being done for his sake. His uncle dotes on him, but for himself, he can't care a rap whether the Cantabs win or lose—he's no sportsman. It's for Len's sake he's doing it."

"Yes, I don't doubt that; but I'm certain young Denver has no hand in it," said Lascelles, with conviction. "He's not that sort. He's no more like his uncle than chalk is like cheese. Depend upon it, he knows no-

thing."

"Then I've done him an injustice and slogged him for nothing."

"That row was with him, then. I half suspected it."

"Yes. I met him on the towing-path just after the millionaire made his proposition. We came to blows. I fully believed he was in the plot."

Lascelles sprang to his feet.

"Frank, I think I can see a way out of this!"

"If you only could—"

"I believe I can. Do you give me a free hand, to do as I like?"

"Yes; but—"

"Nuff said. I'm off."

And Lascelles dashed away. He went directly to the Leander quarters, where the Cambridge crew were, and where Len Denver was to be found.

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Mr. Denver was looking very self-satisfied. He had come down to see the start, and to follow the launch, and he was certain of a Cambridge win.

"Hallo, you are looking glum, Len!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with the young Cantab. "Nothing happened, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Len.

The millionaire looked vaguely alarmed. There was something in Len's look and manner which caused him great disquietude.

"What is the matter, Len?"

"Matter!" broke out the young oarsman bitterly. "The matter? Oh, I'll tell you! I'm a disgraced man, if you want to know, and you've disgraced me. That's all."

The millionaire's lips set in a tight line. "Does that mean that Russell has been chattering?"

"Russell has said nothing. I met him a couple of weeks ago, and he said something about foul play. I didn't understand, and I struck him. I understand now. His friend Lascelles has told me. You have tried to make him give away the race."

"Well, he has refused, so there's no harm done."

"Yes; but you know that with so much at stake he's certain to be off his form. Oh, uncle, why did you do it?"

"I did it for your sake, Len. You were so bent upon winning—"

"Yes, winning; but a win by foul play is not a win. What's the good of beating a man by foul play? It's not a win—it's a swindle."

"Len!"

"What else is it?" said the young man gloomily. "I'd give a hand to win, and beat Frank Russell fairly; but I'd die sooner than beat him by foul trickery. I'd never hold my head up again among decent fellows. I couldn't! Uncle, it's not yet too late. You must undo what you've done."

Mr. Denver flushed crimson.

"Never!" he rapped out. "Russell shall pay for his defiance of me, if for nothing else. I tell you you shall win whether you like it or not, you ungrateful boy!"

"I shall not! If you won't do as I ask, I shall resign from the Cambridge eight."

"What! Resign! You won't be allowed to!"

"If necessary, I'll state the reason to the president of the C.U.B.C."

"Are you mad? Will you disgrace yourself and me, and play into Frank Russell's hands?" gasped Mr. Denver hoarsely. "I think you have taken leave of your senses."

"I think you have when you fancy that a Varsity man would win the Boatrace by foul play!" cried Len. "I mean what I say. Make it all right for Frank Russell to pull his best, and I'll go in and win, if I can. Otherwise, I step out, and the spare man takes my place."

Mr. Denver paced the room in great agitation. He had never refused his nephew anything, and in his heart of hearts he was half pleased by this unexpected stand he took. Unscrupulous and hard-fisted himself, he was proud that Len should be otherwise.

"Uncle," said the young man, in a softer voice, "I suppose you've done this for my sake; but it's horrible to me. Don't make me the most miserable wretch in England to-day. Promise me that you'll spare the Russells and let Frank know."

"I'll do as you like," said the millionaire, drawing a deep breath. "You're a—you're a confounded fool, Len, and—I'm proud of you. Go in and win if you can; perhaps you're right. And you can go and tell Russell he has nothing to fear."

Len grasped his uncle's hand with tears in his eyes.

"God bless you, uncle! You don't know how much this means to me. Now I can row with a light heart."

He ran from the room. Ten minutes later he was at the London Rowing Club, asking for Frank Russell. The Oxford stroke came to him with a rather dubious look. Len Denver drew him aside. It was an awkward moment for both.

"Russell," Len seemed to choke for a moment, then he went on steadily. "We've never been friends. You licked me the other day, and now I know what you thought of me, I don't wonder at what you said and did. But you might have done me more justice. I had no idea of my uncle's intentions till Lascelles told me last night."

"Lascelles told you?"

"Yes, and I'm glad he did. He has saved me from disgrace. He came to appeal to me. It was only necessary for me to know the facts. I've just seen my uncle. I have his word that he will spare your father; neither you nor Mr. Russell have anything to fear from him. Mind, that's on my word of honour."

Frank's face brightened.

"By Jove, Denver, I don't know what to say to you! I've done you an injustice. You're a better fellow than I ever believed, and I've been to blame."

With a sudden impulse the Cantab held out his hand.

"We've never been friends," he said, "but there was really nothing between us. If you choose, after what's happened, to take my hand, there's my friendship with it."

Gladly enough the Oxonian grasped the outstretched hand.

"With all my heart!" he cried. "Friends ashore, and rivals on the river, Denver! That's a compact. And when the race comes off, may the best crew win!"

"May the best crew win," repeated Len, And so they parted, cordially enough.

THE WINNING BOAT.

(Continued from the previous page.)

THE 7th CHAPTER.

The Boat Race—Oxford Wins.

"FF! They're off!"

It was a roar from a vast crowd.

Oxford had lost the toss, and the Cantabs had chosen the Surrey station. The two shells had taken up their positions, and the bang from the umpire's launch gave the signal for the start. Thousands of eyes were bent upon the crews as the race started.

Splendid fellows all of them looked as they bent to the oars. Sixteen long blades struck the water at once, but in a couple of seconds eight of them were a few inches ahead. The Oxonians had a lead at the very start.

A roar of confused cheering followed them, and was taken up by the crowds lining the banks of the old river in a continuous volume. Little heed, however, the rival Blues paid to the cheering.

All their attention was given to their work.

The light racing shells flew through the shining water. At the Duke's Head, Oxford were a foot ahead, and the crew had settled down in splendid time. Stroke was doing his duty nobly. His heart was light. The long dread that had lain on his heart was removed. The grim shadow that had made the future dark to him was lifted. He was free to do his best.

The terrible price of victory was not, after all, to be paid. He was free to pull and win, and he was in a mood to perform miracles.

But, fine as the Oxford performance was, that of Cambridge was not far behind it. Len Denver was doing well—very well; and seven good men and true were backing him up manfully.

The race would be close, that was certain. A huge crowd in the Fulham Football Ground sent forth deafening cheers to greet them. Oxford was now three men in advance of Cambridge. But at Walden's Wharf, a mile from the start, Cambridge, with a fine effort, pulled nearly level. Jim Lascelles pursed his lips.

"How are they, Jim?" muttered Frank, not daring to look.

"Gaining," said the little cox. "But it's only a spurt. They're level, by George! But keep it up, and I'll eat the rudder if we don't drop them before another hundred yards!"

On went the race. Oxford, with thirty-four strokes to Cambridge's thirty-two, crept ahead

again, and kept the lead. Len Denver quickened his stroke, but Frank was ready for him, and the Dark Blue craft went gaily ahead. Again Oxford had three men ahead at the Crab Tree. They were more than half a length when Hammersmith Bridge rose before them.

At the two-mile point Oxford were a length to the good, and Jim Lascelles was grinning with delight. Cambridge were pulling like demons to get level, and behind came the umpire's launch, puffing and blowing. It seemed for a time that Cambridge might make up their loss, for when Chiswick Eyot was reached, Oxford's gain had diminished to three-quarters of a length.

With this gain the Oxonians remained long contented. Great crowds along the bank took up the roar of cheering as the boats came in sight.

"Oxford wins!"

"Buck up, Cambridge!"

Opposite Thorneycroft's works, Cambridge had won another inch or two. But they could not overtake Oxford, try as they would. So went on the hard tussle right up to Barnes Bridge, and then Oxford slowly but surely dropped her rival.

"Oxford wins!"

A full length ahead at the White Hart. Oxford are sure of victory now, but never for a second do they relax their efforts. Cambridge

are coming gallantly on, straining every nerve as the winning-post draws near.

At the Queen's Head, Mortlake, a length and a quarter. Louder rose the shout from the banks, music to the ears of the winning oarsmen and a spur to Cambridge.

"Oxford wins!"

Yes, Oxford was winning. Abreast of the brewery, Frank Russell, with lightning strokes, called out the best effort of his men, and Oxford shot ahead like an arrow. Right ahead, past the winning-post, with Cambridge toiling two lengths and a half behind!

"Oxford wins! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Oxford!"

Pretty well spent by a gruelling race, the rival crews paddled to the shore. There Len Denver left his friends for a minute to grip the hand of the Oxford stroke. Cordially Frank Russell returned his friendly grip.

"We gave you a tussle!" exclaimed Len cheerily. "But the best crew won, there's no doubt about that. And that's as it should be."

And the hearty words of the Cantab gave more pleasure than the ringing cheers of the crowd to the stroke of the winning boat.

THE END.

(Look out for a fine new Cricket Serial by Mr. Charles Hamilton shortly.—Your Editor.)

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