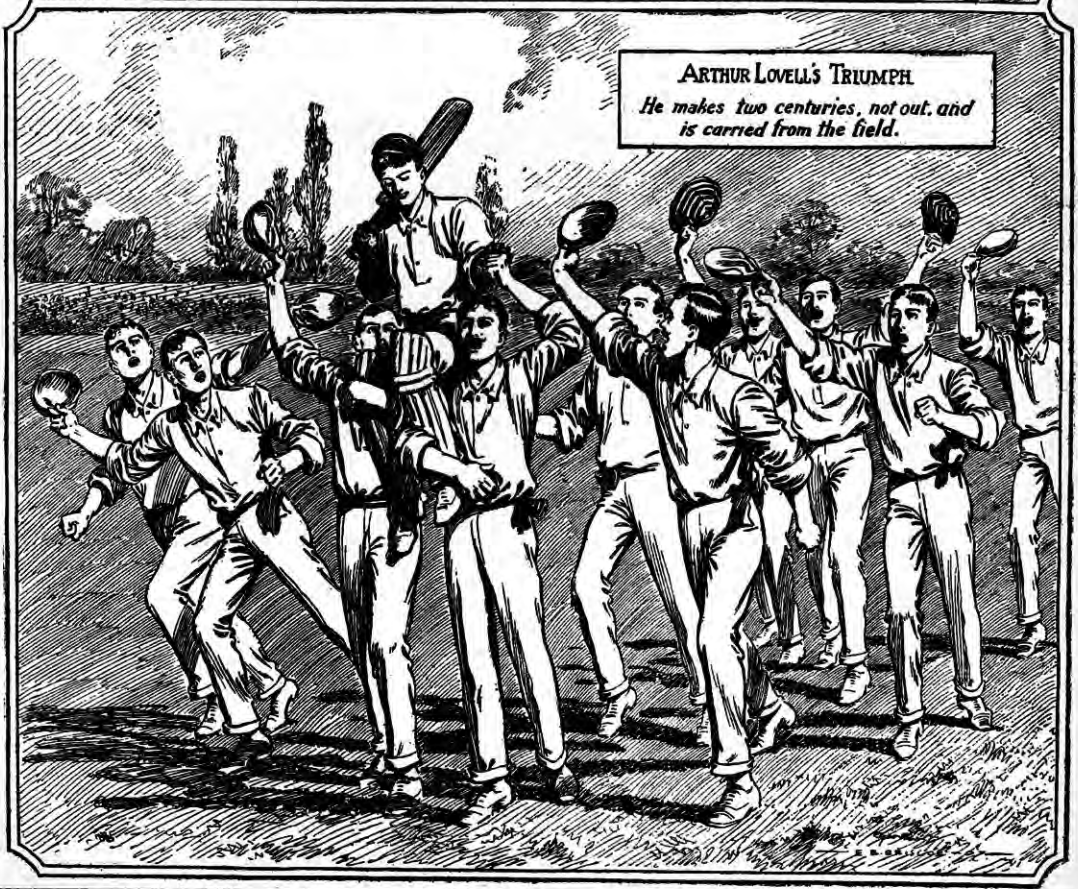
POWERFUL NEW TALE OF SLAPTON SCHOOL.

The Boys' Realm

of Sport & Adventure. 1d

KING CRICKET!

By Charles Hamilton.



ARTHUR LOVELL'S TRIUMPH.

He makes two centuries, not out, and is carried from the field.

No. 274. Vol. VI.] EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY. [Saturday, August 31, 1907.

New Football Story Starts Next Week.

KING CRICKET!

A Fascinating Story of County Cricket.

Specially Written for THE BOYS' REALM by One of Our Most Popular Authors.

*****

The Chief Characters in this Fine Story.

ARTHUR LOVELL, Loamshire's champion bat. He becomes a professional. His uncle is ruined by James Lagden.

KIT VALANCE, Loamshire's best bowler. He first comes to notice in the Colts' match, where he takes Arthur Lovell's wicket. Later he becomes Arthur's firm chum.

LEN VALANCE, Kit's twin brother.

GEOFFREY LAGDEN, an amateur and a good bat. He is bitterly jealous of Arthur Lovell, whom he hates and endeavours to injure. He is Arthur's rival for the hand of Molly Hilton. A snobbish character.

JAMES LAGDEN, who has ruined Arthur's uncle.

BLANE, Captain of Loamshire, and the steady friend of Arthur and Kit. He is Molly Hilton's cousin.

PONSONBY, Geoffrey Lagden's friend, and a man of similar character—snobbish to a degree.

Arthur Lovell, owing to the ruin of his uncle, has to forfeit his status as an amateur player for Loamshire and turns professional.

Kit Valance, Arthur's bosom chum, has a twin brother named Len, who is not a credit to his family. Lagden bribes Len Valance to injure Arthur in such a manner as to make it impossible for him to play in the next match against Yorkshire.

Len makes a bad blunder, and strikes down Blane, the captain of the Loamshire team, with a foul blow in the ribs, mistaking him for Arthur. Blane is unable to play in the coming match with Yorkshire, and Ponsonby is appointed in his place as captain. Ponsonby is not a success, and has to resign his captainship. Arthur Lovell is offered the post, but refuses the honour, much to Colonel Hilton's chagrin.

Later, Colonel Hilton again offers the captaincy of Loamshire to Arthur Lovell and prevails on him to accept. On hearing of his acceptance, Lagden hints to Arthur that his duties will not be obeyed.

The following day the match with Kent starts, and Lagden, by his insubordination and faulty play, rouses Lovell's anger. Lovell orders him off the field.

After the day's play Kit Valance overhears his brother Len and Lagden discussing a plot they have arranged, the object of which is to disable Lovell and prevent him from playing the following day. Kit rushes off to save his old chum, but is too late. Arthur attempts to cross a plank-bridge which has been loosened. And falls twenty feet into a cutting below, badly spraining his leg.

This injury prevents Arthur Lovell from playing for Loamshire for two or three weeks, and in the meantime the team fare more or less badly. Kit and Lovell decide to hush up the details of the foul plot concocted by Geoffrey Lagden and Len Valance.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

An Angry Blow.

IN many respects, however, the illness of Lovell had not "panned out" for Lagden in the way he had hoped and expected.

Ponsonby retained for the present the captaincy of Loamshire, having apparently turned over a new leaf, and acquitted himself to Colonel Hilton's satisfaction in his treatment of the professionals.

And the hope Lagden had entertained of shining as the champion bat of Loamshire seemed destined to be continually disappointed.

The fact is, in truth, was, that Lagden was a very good and sometimes even brilliant bat, he would never be a great master, and he had not in his composition the makings of a Jessop, a Fry, or a Hayward.

This fact he was very slow to realise.

He hated and affected to despise the young professional batsman who had done so much for Loamshire, and was obstinately convinced that, given a fair chance, he could outshine Lovell in his own line.

He had been given a chance, for a better chance than Lovell's absence gave him he could not have desired.

And he had not succeeded.

He had done well, very well, but there was nothing that could be called uniformly brilliant in his batting, and he knew that no one considered that he filled Lovell's empty place.

It was very bitter to Geoffrey Lagden to realise that, given every possible chance, he could not come up to the form of his rival, and his hatred of Arthur Lovell deepened and intensified in these days in consequence.

When Lovell began to be keen about the Loamshire pavilion again, he carefully avoided Geoffrey Lagden.

He had made up his mind to say nothing of the true story of the "accident" in the chalk pit, but he felt that it would be difficult for him to meet the cowardly schemer without giving some expression, either in word or look, to the scorn and contempt he felt.

A quarrel with Lagden would serve no useful purpose, yet it was not easy to keep on civil terms with a man who had planned a cowardly injury to him, and caused his disappearance from first-class cricket for a considerable portion of the season.

The next match on the Loamshire ground was with the Marylebone Cricket Club—the famous M.C.C.—monarchs of the cricket world.

Lovell was now at something like his old form, and the Loamshire committee turned it over in their minds whether to play him, but upon the whole it was deemed advisable to leave him out of the team till he was quite fit again. It was possible that too early a strain upon his injured leg might lead to bad results.

The colonel had had a talk with Lovell on the question of the Loamshire captaincy when he should be ready to take his place in the team again.

It could not be said that Lovell's captaincy had been a success.

He was certainly in himself an ideal captain for a cricket side, but a team like the Loamshires, full of class pride and strongly tainted with snobbishness, could not be successfully captained by a professional.

Lovell himself had said so from the first, but the colonel had overruled his better judgment. But the experience on the Tonbridge ground had made the old county cricketer wiser.

Still, he left it to Lovell to decide whether he would resume the captaincy.

It did not take Arthur long to make up his mind.

He had taken the position in the first place simply because it was pressed upon him. He had made his best to make a success of it, but he had failed, by no fault of his own, but by the faults of the team that was under his orders.

It was useless to repeat the disagreeable experiences of the Kent match.

"Ponsonby seems to keep the team together pretty well, sir," he said, when the colonel broached the subject to him. "I fancy that experience has made him wiser, and he will not be in a hurry to repeat his blunders in the Yorkshire match. I am quite content to drop back into my former place in the team. For every reason it is better that I should not be captain of Loamshire."

"Very well, Lovell," said the colonel. "It shall be as you wish."

In his heart he was not sorry for Lovell's decision.

Under more propitious circumstances, Arthur Lovell would have made a splendid county captain, but it was the circumstances that actually existed that had to be considered.

Lovell was in the pavilion on the Loamshire ground when the M.C.C. team came down to do battle with the Loamshires in their own territory.

The M.C.C. eleven was a very strong one, with some of the finest county players of England in it, and from the first it was seen that Loamshire had little chance.

Loamshire batted first, and were all down for 150 runs, Geoffrey Lagden's share being a big round 0.

The M.C.C., in their first innings, knocked up 250.

When Loamshire batted again, the wickets went down at a rapid rate before the bowlers from Lord's.

Before the innings was half through it was certain that the M.C.C. would not have to bat again.

Loamshire were seven down for 40 when Geoffrey Lagden was clean bowled for 0, and thus achieved the distinction of the dread "pair of spectacles"—a 0 in each innings.

Lagden strode from the wicket in a savage temper, and flung his bat down in the pavilion.

"Thank goodness Lovell will be batting in our next match, with Sussex," Colonel Hilton remarked to Molly, who was with him watching the match. "Loamshire has very seldom made a poorer show than this. I am half sorry that I did not risk playing Lovell after all. Our batting seems to have gone all to pieces before the M.C.C. bowling."

Lagden heard the remark, and he ground his teeth.

Arthur Lovell—always Arthur Lovell!

He strode from the pavilion with a savage anger in his breast, and a savage gleam in his eyes.

In the next Loamshire match Arthur Lovell was to bat, and Lagden's last chance of earning distinction in the absence of his rival had failed him, resulting in the worst score he had yet made in first-class cricket—the pair of spectacles.

Next week Lovell was playing, and his name would be on every tongue, and success would once more follow the colours of Loamshire.

Lagden ground his teeth at the thought.

As ill-luck would have it, he came upon Lovell as he left the pavilion. Lovell averted his look, and would have passed him without a word. But Lagden was in too bitter a mood to let him pass thus.

"So you are coming back into the team next week?" he said, in a sneering tone.

"Yes," said Arthur quietly.

"How much has Sharp, the bootmaker, paid you for malingering all this while, and standing out of the matches?" asked Lagden pointedly.

Arthur's face went scarlet.

This deliberate insult, from the man who had caused his injury, was too much for the most patient temper to endure.

"You—you cad!" broke out Arthur. "You dare to say that—you, who plotted with a cowardly ruffian to injure me by treachery? You coward!"

Lagden started, and turned deadly pale. He had known that someone had overheard his talk with Len Valance and the plot against Arthur, but as nothing had been said for so long, he had not dreamed that the knowledge had come to Arthur Lovell's ears.

"What do you say?" he cried.

"I say that you plotted with Len Valance to injure me and keep me out of the team, you coward!" cried Arthur, with flashing eyes.

"You lie!"

Lagden hurled the words at Lovell; but he had gone too far. Arthur's clenched fist shot out like lightning, and Geoffrey Lagden went flying. He went to the ground with a crash, and at the same moment Colonel Hilton came out of the pavilion.

"Lovell!" he said sternly.

To Leave Loamshire.

"LOVELL!"

Colonel Hilton rapped out the word in angry amazement.

He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Geoffrey Lagden was sprawling on the turf, and Arthur Lovell stood over him with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

"Lovell!"

Arthur Lovell did not answer; he did not look at the colonel; did not even hear him at that moment. His eyes were fixed upon his traducer, whom his angry blow had stretched on the ground at his feet.

"Get up!" Lovell's voice was sharp and savage. "Get up, Geoffrey Lagden! You have been trying to drive me to this for a long time, and now that you have succeeded you had better stick it out. Get up, unless you are a coward as well as a liar and a slanderer!"

Lagden staggered to his feet.

His face was white with rage, and although at a cooler moment he would not have cared to come to blows with Arthur Lovell, he had forgotten all prudence now.

He sprang savagely towards the young cricketer.

"Stop!"

Colonel Hilton fairly shouted out the word as he sprang between them, and forced them apart. Bitter as the anger was on both sides, they obeyed him.

Lagden's eyes were burning.

"You saw what he did," he said thickly. "That paid player—that rank outsider has struck me!"

"I saw it. Stand back!"

"I am not—"

"Stand back!"

Geoffrey Lagden clicked his teeth, but he obeyed.

Colonel Hilton faced Arthur, with frowning brows.

"What have you to say, Lovell?"

Arthur's eyes met his.

The young cricketer was somewhat pale now, as the flush of anger died out of his face. He realised his position, but he was calm and cool.

"Nothing, sir."

His voice did not falter.

The colonel's frown grew darker.

"You have nothing to say in defence of your outrageous action, Lovell?"

"Geoffrey Lagden could tell you what called forth that blow," said Arthur Lovell. "If he does not choose to do so, I shall not."

Colonel Hilton looked at Lagden.

The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"I have nothing to say."

"Very well," said Colonel Hilton, gritting his teeth. "You refuse to explain, Lovell?"

"What is the use?" said Lovell wearily. "It's only the same tale over again. Geoffrey Lagden will probably deny using the words he used. What is the use of talking? He has tried to drive me to this ever since I have played for the Loamshire Club as a professional. He and his friends have hardly made any secret of their intention to make the club too hot to hold me."

"Is there any truth in that, Lagden?"

"None," said Lagden, with cool effrontery. "We have made no secret of our dislike, some of us, of a paid player who swaggers about as if he were monarch of all he surveys. Some of us don't like him in the club. That's all."

"That's a lie!" said Arthur Lovell, with quiet scorn. "But a lie comes very cheaply to Geoffrey Lagden. Ever since I have played as a professional in the Loamshire ranks, he has been against me, and has stirred up strife. My captaincy of the team might have been a success but for him. He has sought time and again to drive me into some action which would make it impossible for me to continue to play for Loamshire. He has succeeded. I am ready to leave the club."

Colonel Hilton bit his lip.

Although a thoroughly good-hearted man in the main, the colonel was something of an autocrat, and once or twice before Lovell's independence had caused friction.

Dismissal from the Loamshire County Cricket Club was, in the colonel's eyes, an awful doom, to be thought of with bated breath, and not faced so coolly and calmly as Arthur Lovell faced it now.

"I dare say it will come to that, Lovell!" he rapped out sharply. "There has certainly been more friction in the team since you played for it as a professional than I ever remember before."

Lovell bowed his head.

"I am ready to get out, as I said."

"You seem anxious to leave us," said the colonel, gnawing his lip, "and at a time when you know that we need you badly."

"I am not anxious to leave," said Lovell, in a low voice. "It will be a bitter blow to me. Even a professional player may have had his hopes and ambitions, you know. I have always done my best for Loamshire, and for the sake of the county, and for your sake, sir, I have put up with more than most men would have endured in my place. But it has come to the end at last. My patience could not hold out for ever. I suppose I was wrong to knock Lagden down; but he would have provoked me into it sooner or later."

"I think you might have had more command of your temper, at least."

Lovell was silent.

The colonel's words were true; he ought to have commanded his temper better. But what would have been the use? The end must have come!

There was a long pause.

Had Arthur Lovell been a less valuable member of the Loamshire eleven, it is very probable that the colonel would have bidden him go there and then.

But to part with the best bat in the Loamshire team—the man who was to Loamshire what Hayward was to Surrey, or Fry to Sussex—was as good as saying good-bye to the last chance of winning the county championship.

And that was an object dear to the colonel's heart.

For the sake of the county he had endured much on all sides; from exacting amateurs, from financial backers, from criticising members.

And for the sake of the county he swallowed his pride once more now.

"I dare say you have both been to blame," he said. "You must admit that you had no right to strike Lagden, Lovell. Considering your position in the club, it was an outrageous action. I know——"

Lovell's bitter laugh broke in.

"Our positions!" he exclaimed. "Yes, a paid player, I suppose, must have no feelings of his own; he must simply be a machine to bat and bowl. He cannot be insulted. A five-pound note for a cricket match buys him up, body and soul, and he is the sport of the insults of every cad in the team. But you are mistaken, sir. These are county clubs in England where the professional is treated as a man and a cricketer, and if Loamshire does not want me, I dare say I can find employment elsewhere."

Colonel Hilton's brow darkened.

"Would you play for a rival county against your own, Lovell?"

"How has my own treated me?" said Lovell bitterly.

The colonel made an effort to be pacific.

"I cannot believe that you seriously mean what you say, Lovell. Let this matter end here; it has gone far enough. You have struck Lagden. If you care to apologise to him for the blow, he will say no more about it, I am sure."

Lagden smiled vindictively.

"Certainly, sir."

To humble Arthur Lovell in such a way would have been a greater gratification to Lagden than to drive him from the club.

"You hear, Lovell?" said the colonel. "Lagden is willing to look over the matter. What do you say?"

"That I do not owe Lagden an apology, and certainly will not make him one," said Arthur quietly.

The colonel's eyes gleamed.

"You understand what you are saying?"

"I understand that I must either apologise to Lagden or leave the club."

"That is the case."

"Well, I refuse to apologise."

"You are your own master," said the colonel. And he turned upon his heel.

Arthur Lovell slowly turned and left the spot.

He had no regrets for his decision. He had endured too many humiliations already; this last one he had been quite ready to refuse.

But to leave the Loamshire Club!

That was bitter.

He had stood so much for the sake of the county; and now, if he remained a cricketer, he had no prospect but to play for some rival club.

It was a blow to him in other ways.

For a residence of two years was required to qualify for another county, and during that time he would have to seek employment as a groundsman for his future club, as he had no other prospect of support.

The name of Arthur Lovell, for a time at least, would disappear from first-class cricket!

For a long time Arthur Lovell had "faced the music" pluckily, determined that he would keep his end up in despite of the repeated blows fickle Fortune had dealt him. But now it seemed at last as if he had reached the end of his tether.

Molly Hilton Steps in.

COLONEL HILTON was silent and gloomy as he drove home from the cricket ground to Lincroft. His interview with Arthur Lovell, and the young cricketer's decision, worried him, for he knew that without Arthur Lovell Loamshire's chance of the championship was gone.

But he was not in the least inclined to recede from the position he had taken up.

The cause of the dispute between Lovell and Geoffrey Lagden he did not know, but he set it down to an ebullition of bitterness, the outcome of the friction that had long existed between amateur and professional.

Arthur Lovell must either apologise or leave the club!

Upon that point the colonel was determined, but he still had a faint hope that Lovell would see what was best for himself, and tender the required apology.

In this faint hope; but the colonel nourished it, not caring to consider the county's prospects with her best bat gone for ever.

The result of the M.C.C. match had not cheered the old cricketer, either.

Loamshire had been hopelessly and thoroughly beaten by the M.C.C., who had an innings and a heap of runs to spare at the finish.

The "pair of spectacles" achieved by Lagden had contributed very materially to that undesired result.

The M.C.C. team had been a pretty strong one, but not so strong as some that the Loamshire men had to meet before the season was over, and their crushing defeat seemed like a foretaste of the wrath to come.

Molly glanced at her father several times during the drive to Lincroft, without speaking, wondering whether it was only the defeat at the hands of the men from Marylebone that brought the dark shade to his brow.

He caught her glance presently.

"It is bad luck for Loamshire, Molly," he said, guessing her thoughts. "Lovell is going to leave us, I'm afraid."

The girl started.

"Mr. Lovell leave us?"

"Yes; I fear so."

"But why, dad? You mustn't let him go!" exclaimed Molly. "I remember what you said at the beginning of the season, when Mr. Lovell's uncle was ruined, and he left the club. You said we should finish up almost as badly this season as last if Mr. Lovell did not return."

"I know I did, Molly."

"And when he came back, to play as a professional instead of an amateur——"

"I thought we were in luck, my dear," said the colonel, with a faint smile. "But there has been friction ever since—more of it than I suspected at the time. Some of them say that Lovell cannot forget that he was once an amateur in the team, and that he puts on airs unsuitable to a paid professional——"

"That is not true, dad."

"They are saying so, and it has come to my ears. Personally, I never saw anything in Lovell's conduct to complain of in the least," continued the colonel. "His idea is that the amateurs have made a dead-set against him—and it's no good denying that there's a strong snobbish element in the club, Molly. That's why we finished nearly at the bottom of the table last season."

"But why is Mr. Lovell going? I heard a rumour before we left the ground about a quarrel outside the pavilion——"

"It was a quarrel between Lovell and Lagden, and Lovell struck him."

"He must have been very much provoked."

The colonel smiled.

Like a true woman, Molly Hilton could see no wrong in the man who was a hero in her eyes.

"Unfortunately, it is difficult to get at the exact rights of the matter, Molly," he replied. "But Lovell has the choice of apologising to Lagden or leaving the club. I hope that he will elect to apologise, but I have my doubts."

"But if he leaves——"

"It will be bad for Loamshire. But discipline must be maintained," said the old soldier. "I cannot alter my decision. Lovell must give in or go."

The arrival of the carriage at Lincroft put an end to the conversation, but the matter did not leave Molly Hilton's mind.

The girl was deeply concerned by what her father had told her.

In the old days, before misfortune and poverty fell upon Arthur Lovell—through no fault of his own—Molly had learned to care for the handsome young cricketer, and his fall from his previous station had made no difference to her.

She seldom saw him now, save on the cricket-ground, for there could be little in common between the professional cricketer and the daughter of a county magnate. But the old regard remained in her heart unchanged.

But it was not merely her regard for Arthur Lovell that prompted her now.

The girl took as deep an interest in Loamshire's cricket success as the colonel himself, and the thought of Lovell being lost to the county dismayed her.

To seek Lovell out was impossible, though she longed to speak to him and urge him to stand by his county in the time of need. The secret of her heart—which had been hardly a secret in the days when it had seemed possible for her to give her hand to Arthur Lovell—would between them now. She cared for Lovell, and she believed that, although no word had passed his lips since his fall from fortune, he cared for her. And so she shrank from asking him to see her.

But there was Kit Valance.

Molly had always liked and respected the young bowler, and she had a regard for him as Arthur's chum. With him, at least, she could speak freely, and discover if there was any way of changing Arthur's decision, or of making the colonel aware that the required apology was not called for. For Molly was convinced that Lagden had been flagrantly in the wrong, though Lovell had been too proud to explain.

The result of the girl's reflections was a little note that Kit Valance received. The young bowler read it, and wondered; but he lost no time in doing what he was asked to do. In the sunshine of the afternoon, before the time for appearing on the Loamchester ground, the young cricketer entered Lincroft Park, and stopped on the bridge that spanned the little stream meandering among the old trees.

Kit raised his cap as the graceful form of Molly Hilton came from the trees and joined him. The girl nodded cordially.

"You had my note, Mr. Valance? Or, rather, I need not ask, since you are here."

Kit bowed.

"Yes, Miss Hilton. How can I serve you?"

"You know what happened yesterday on the cricket-ground," said Molly Hilton, plunging into the subject at once. "Mr. Lovell has no doubt told you?"

"Yes; he told me all about it," said Kit, wonderingly. "Is that what you wish to speak to me about, Miss Hilton?"

"Yes. My father has decided that Arthur Lovell must either apologise to Mr. Lagden or leave the club, and he has resolved to leave."

"That is correct."

Molly coloured a little.

"Loamshire cannot spare him, Mr. Valance," she said. "He must not leave me like this. I am certain that all the facts were known, Mr. Lovell would be proved to be in the right, and Colonel Hilton would change his decision. Will you help me to bring the truth to light?"

Kit understood.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Lovell's decision is a blow to me, and I have urged him to tell the colonel the whole truth, but his pride has been bitterly wounded, and he will not say a word. He has already thinking of approaching the colonel on the matter."

"And the truth—what is that?"

"Geoffrey Lagden and—and another caused the accident to Lovell at Tonbridge, which laid him up for so long. It was done deliberately to keep Lovell out of Loamshire cricket."

Molly drew a deep, quivering breath.

"Can that be true?"

"I could prove it! I knew it all along; and Lovell, I believe, knows it, too."

"For your sake! I do not understand."

"You will understand when I tell you that Geoffrey Lagden's confederate was my brother, Len Valance."

Kit spoke quietly, but his face was very pale, and a look of quick sympathy flashed into the girl's face. She knew that it must have cost him much to tell her this.

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Valance."

"It is not the first time he has brought shame upon the name," said Kit quietly. "It is nothing! But that was not all. Yesterday Lagden, not knowing that Lovell was aware of his villainy, taunted him with malingering—with pretending to be ill for the sake of not playing for the county, and with being bribed by a bookmaker to do it."

The girl flushed hotly.

"No wonder Mr. Lovell struck him down!" she exclaimed. "He would have been less, or more, than a man had he not done so."

There was a short silence.

"Can this be proved?" asked the girl at last.

"Lagden would deny everything, of course," replied Kit. "I suppose it could be proved if my brother were arrested and charged."

"That must not be."

"I would rather Len came to his deserts at last, than that Arthur Lovell left Loamshire," said Kit quickly. "I've told him so."

"But there may be another way."

"I cannot think of one."

"I will see Mr. Lagden," said the girl firmly. "I will tell him how much is known, and tell him that it shall be made public if Arthur Lovell leaves Loamshire."

Kit smiled.

"I did not think of that. It is quite possible that you will succeed, Miss Hilton."

"I thought I shall."

She gave Kit her hand, and left him. The young bowler turned and walked away in the direction of the Loamshire ground, with many thoughts in his mind.

Little as Molly dreamed it, Kit guessed her secret—that she was as much concerned for Lovell the man as for Lovell the cricketer. He knew that she loved his chum, and that Fortune had made it impossible for them to meet, except as mere acquaintances.

And a new idea came into Kit's mind.

He remembered the declaration of his brother, who was in Mr. James Lagden's employment in the City, that he could find proof that James Lagden had swindled Arthur's uncle—that he could find proof that James Lagden was a rogue, and force him to restore fifty thousand pounds to the man he had robbed.

Lovell had refused to have a hand in the matter; the methods Len had proposed had offended him, and it was his refusal as much as anything else that had exasperated Len, and made him the willing tool of Geoffrey Lagden.

Yet, if the truth were made known, and restitution compelled, then the bar between Arthur Lovell and the girl he loved would disappear, and two lives would be made happy.

Kit would lose his chum to some extent, but he knew that, rich or poor, Arthur Lovell would never change in his true friendship. And if he played again for Loamshire as an amateur, and probably as county captain, Kit would still be his chum. But even if Kit lost him to some extent, surely he could not allow selfish considerations to stand in the way of helping his friend.

The young bowler turned the matter over in his mind very carefully. The result was a letter to Len Valance, which the scapegrace received with great satisfaction.

The Match with Sussex.

GEOFFREY LAGDEN entered the drawing-room at Lincroft with a beating heart.

Molly Hilton, in a brief note, had asked him to call. Why, he could not guess; but he allowed his imagination to run riot.

Did this mean that the girl's long and unrelaxing coldness towards him was to end at last, that she had at last forgotten Arthur Lovell, and was willing to smile upon his rival? It was hardly likely, but Lagden allowed himself to picture it. He erred as much in Molly Hilton as his hard, cold nature was capable of erring for anyone, and he would have dearly liked to cut Arthur out in this direction, even if he could not oust him from his position as champion cricketer of Loamshire.

He waited, after he was shown in, impatiently for Molly to appear. She did not keep him waiting many minutes.

Lagden started forward eagerly as the girl swept into the room.

But a single glance at her face was sufficient to show him that his hopes were groundless, and that he had nothing in the shape of kind words to expect from Molly Hilton.

Her face was hard and cold, and there was a metallic light in her eyes. Never had Lagden seen her look so cold and scornful.

"You asked me to call, Miss Hilton," he said awkwardly.

"Yes," said Molly, looking him straight in the eyes; "I asked you to call, Mr. Lagden, because my father is not here this morning, and I wished to speak to you upon an important matter."

He wondered what was coming.

"I am listening, Miss Hilton."

"Owing to a dispute between you, Mr. Lovell is leaving the Loamshire County Club."

He nodded.

"He could not go, Mr. Lagden!"

"Indeed! I should hardly have thought that you would be so keenly interested in the affairs of a paid player," said Lagden, with a sneer he could not conceal.

Molly coloured.

"I am Mr. Lovell's friend, but I am not speaking because of that," she said. "I speak because Loamshire cannot afford to lose Mr. Lovell, especially at this time."

He gave a horrible smile.

"But I shall not discuss that with you," said Molly haughtily. "My motives are nothing to you. Mr. Lovell is not to leave Loamshire through your act."

"He will leave through his own act."

"Nothing of the kind! I have learned all, Mr. Lagden, and I know that you deliberately provoked him."

Lagden shrugged his shoulders.

"I have learned all," repeated the girl, with marked emphasis—"all that happened at Tonbridge. Kit Valance has told me all—of your plot with his brother, whom he is willing to send to his deserts rather than permit Arthur Lovell to be turned out of the Loamshire Club."

Lagden started violently.

"I—I do not understand."

"You know that you plotted against Mr. Lovell!" the girl said scornfully. "You know that if the truth were made known you would be compelled to resign from the Loamshire Club."

But I—I——"

"You can take your choice. It is to tell you to that I have sent for you. Make it possible for Arthur Lovell to remain in the club, without the humiliation you have exacted of him, and I will say nothing. But if Arthur Lovell goes, you go, too, Mr. Lagden."

Lagden was pale to the lips.

He knew well, he dared not be obstinate. Exactly how much his enemies could prove he did not know, but they could certainly prove enough to ruin him with the club.

But that was not what maddened him so much as to see Molly so openly taking the part of his rival, and championing the cause of Arthur Lovell.

Her eyes were fixed steadily upon him.

"Have you made up your mind?"

Her tones were cold and cutting as a knife.

Lagden gritted his teeth.

"I hardly thought Lovell would tell you——"

She cut him short without ceremony.

"Mr. Lovell has told me nothing. What I know I have learned from his friend, Kit Valance. I do not desire to talk further with you, Mr. Lagden. I never desire to see you again! If you do not promise to make amends to Arthur Lovell, I shall tell Colonel Hilton the whole story as soon as he returns."

"Lovell is fortunate in his champion," sneered Lagden. "Perhaps the colonel would not be exactly pleased by the deep interest you take in this outsider."

"That is no business of yours! Have you decided?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Mind, there must be no double-dealing!" said Molly icily. "Mr. Lovell remains in the club, or else you are exposed as you really are to all Loamshire."

"I quite understand, Miss Hilton. I shall not forget this, I assure you," said Geoffrey Lagden, taking up his hat. "Lovell shall remain, but perhaps in the long run he will wish that he had gone."

He passed from the room.

A scornful smile was upon Molly's face as she watched him go. Never had Geoffrey Lagden looked smaller or meaner in a woman's eyes than he did at that moment.

He knew it, too, and his heart was burning with rage as he left Lincroft and walked down the drive. He had had to surrender; and it was to Molly Hilton that Arthur Lovell owed so much. That was the keenest cut of all.

As chance would have it, he met Colonel Hilton walking up the drive. The colonel stopped. Lagden endeavoured to conceal his chagrin from the old cricketer's eyes.

"I wanted to see you, sir, to speak to you about that matter with Lovell," he said, with an affectation of great frankness. "I don't want you to be too hard upon Lovell."

Colonel Hilton stared.

This was an entirely new line for Geoffrey Lagden to take.

"I don't quite understand you, Lagden."

"What I mean is, that there are faults on both sides, sir, and that I spoke hastily, and so there is some excuse for Lovell," said Lagden. "I don't want to cause any apology. Better let the matter rest where it is, I think."

"But——"

"We are playing Sussex immediately, sir, and we want Lovell," said Lagden. "We don't want Lovell, of course, but I could not think of that all the amateurs in the team are against him. Perhaps my forbearance in this instance will have a good effect upon him. Anyway, I'd much rather the affair didn't go any further."

"This is very decent and generous of you, Lagden," said the colonel, shaking the young man warmly by the hand, his whole manner showing how relieved he was. "I didn't want to part with Lovell, of course, but I could not give in. This alters the case entirely. I am very glad you have spoken out in this way—very glad, indeed."

And the colonel walked on, his face considerably brighter than it had been before he met Lagden in the drive. Colonel Hilton lost no time in letting Arthur Lovell know how matters stood. Lovell opened his letter in the presence of Kit Valance, and gave a whistle of surprise as he read it. Kit looked at him inquiringly.

"It's from the colonel," said Lovell. "Lagden forgoes the apology, and I am to stay in the team, and nothing more is to be said. I don't understand it. That's not like Lagden."

Kit laughed.

"Perhaps I could explain," he remarked.

"You!" ejaculated Arthur, in astonishment.

"Yes—I."

And Kit explained about his meeting with Molly Hilton, and the step the girl had taken. Lovell listened with surprise at first, and then his face grew very tender.

"She is a noble girl!" he said. "The best, the truest a man could ever love, Kit! I had a chance once. I have lost it——"

"It may return," said Kit quietly. "If justice is done, and James Lagden is compelled to disgorge his plunder, there will be another chance for you, Arthur."

Lovell's eyes sparkled for a moment; but then he shook his head sadly.

"I have very little hope of that, Kit; but I owe a lot to you, old fellow. I am glad—more glad than I can say—to remain with the Loamshire team. I shall be wanted in the Sussex match."

"You will be wanted badly," said Kit. "I am very glad it has turned out so well."

Arthur Lovell was quite in his old form when the Loamshire men set out for Brighton to meet C. B.'s gallant team. And it might have been noticed that there was something of a change in the manner of the Loamshire men towards Arthur. The change had come during his long illness.

Loamshire's record while he had been out of the team had been decidedly one not to be proud of, and all of them knew that his return meant new life to the county's prospects in the championship.

While he was absent, his comrades had learned his value, as they had never realised it before, and they know how much his presence meant to the team. During the strife and stress of a hard cricket season, they had learned to rely upon Arthur Lovell, and there were few, amateur or professional, who were not glad to welcome him into the ranks again; few who were not glad that the dispute with Lagden had not ended in the dismissal of Loamshire's best bat!

Lagden and Ponsonby were probably the only ones who still kept up the old rancour, and the influence was passing from these two, the leaders of the snobbish set in Loamshire cricket.

Glorious weather awaited the Loamshire men

FROM YOUR EDITOR'S CHAIR.

Latest Portrait of YOUR EDITOR (H. E.), Controller of THE BOYS' REALM—Saturday. THE BOYS' FRIEND—Tuesday. THE BOYS' HERALD—Wednesday.

Your Editor is always glad to hear from you about yourself or your favourite paper. He will answer you by post if you enclose a stamped addressed postcard or envelope. Write to him if you are in trouble, if you want information, or if you have any ideas for our paper. All letters to be addressed to the Editor of THE BOYS' REALM, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C. If your letter is not replied to here, it may be answered in "The Boys' Friend" next Tuesday, or "The Boys' Herald" next Wednesday. THE BOYS' REALM will be sent post free to any part of the world on the following terms: 12 months, 7s.; 6 months, 3s. 6d.; 3 months, 1s. 9d.—payable in advance by British stamps. Postal Orders or Money Orders to be sent to the Publisher, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.

Two New Serials.

ON Saturday next the first grand football number of THE BOYS' REALM will appear. It will contain the opening chapters of Mr. A. S. Hardy's wonderful new football story, about which I have already spoken to my friends. The title that Mr. Hardy has chosen for this new yarn is

"A Lad of the League,"

and I want every one of my chums to make a point of reading the opening chapters, and when he has done so, I want him to pass his copy of THE REALM on to some lover of football who does not at present take in our paper. Let my friends give the new story a word of commendation at the same time, and I am certain they will in this way secure for our paper quite a host of new readers.

But that is not the only attraction of next week's number. I shall also publish a long opening instalment of yet another new story next week. The title of this other serial, which will be written by one of our most popular authors, is

"Plucky Phil Farren."

It is a tale of adventure and peril which I know cannot fail to appeal very strongly to all of my chums.

Then there will be a long, complete football story by Mr. Jack North in this special football number of THE BOYS' REALM, entitled "The First Match of the Season." Also some clever football articles by Mr. W. I. Bassett, and other famous internationals. Altogether, the next issue of our paper will be a bumper one, which no boy or young man should miss.

A Cycling Question.

ONE of my Dulwich chums has written to ask me what was the record time for the journey from Land's End to John O'Groat's by bicycle, before the present record was established a few weeks back. G. A. Olley previously held the unpaced record by covering the distance in three days, twenty hours, fifteen minutes, on July 18 to 21, 1905.

On the best authority, I hear, too, that this champion long-distance cyclist has announced his intention of attacking this unpaced record between Land's End and John O'Groat's in the near future. He will use the Rudge-Whitworth bicycle which carried him successfully through his phenomenal 1,000 miles ride in June last. Olley is in strict training, and, given normal weather conditions, is confident of improving on the previous figures.

It is a noteworthy fact that whilst Tom Peck, the present holder of this classic record is employed in the Birmingham meat market, Olley is a vegetarian.

Bob Smith, Go Home!

FROM the grandmother of one of my readers, who is named Robert Smith, and who, until he foolishly ran away from home, lived at Catford, I have received a letter asking me to use my best endeavours to persuade the erring Bob to go home to his distressed parents.

This lady, Mrs. Smith, of Hackney Downs, London, N.E., thinks that her grandson is sure to see the notice that I put on this page, because he is a regular reader of THE BOYS' REALM. I am surprised that one of my chums should so thoughtlessly cause distress to his parents and relatives, and I sincerely hope that Bob will at once let them know what has become of him the instant he reads this paragraph.

Can He Lengthen His Legs?

"MY one ideal in life," writes W. H. B., of Limehouse, to me, "is to grow tall, and to play a church organ well." My chum goes on further to tell me that he is just over seventeen years old, is 5ft. 4½in. in height, but though he has a long body, he has short legs. And his object in writing to me is to find out whether there is any way whereby he can make these shorter legs of his long. He has heard that cycling is a good form of exercise to take to lengthen the legs.

So it is, W. H. B., and I advise you to take up the exercise. It will not serve to reduce your leg proportions, I cannot promise you that you will make your legs very much longer, because by the time a lad has reached the age of seventeen, the bones of the legs are fairly well set, and though most of us continue to grow until we have reached the age of twenty-one, our whole bodies grow in proportion, and consequently only a small amount is added to the length of the legs.

Cycling certainly will lengthen them, as it loosens the cartilage or gristle that binds the bones of the ankles together. The reason why old men seem to grow shorter year by year, is because this cartilage that connects the various bones that make up the framework of the human body as times goes on, shrinks in size, and loses its elasticity, with the consequence that the bones are drawn nearer together, and the height gradually decreases.

Of course, a lad cannot make himself shorter, but by encouraging this cartilage or gristle to extend and become flexible by exercise, a short lad can do something towards making himself taller. Other good exercises besides cycling are hopping upon the toes of each foot in turn, skipping, clog-dancing, high and long jumping, and swimming.

Which Is Better—Football or Cricket?

A GLASGOW reader, whose initials are J. E., has set me this question to answer. He tells me that he is learning to play cricket from an old amateur, who is of opinion that cricket is a more manly game than football. My Glasgow chum finally adds that, though a very good football player, he has chosen cricket because he has not seen any brutality in it.

J. E. has given me a question that it is impossible for any person to decide. Whether cricket or football is the better game, from whatever point of view it is looked at, is merely a matter of opinion. If I were to go to each one of my chums who wore caps and were to ask them why they did not wear bowler hats, the vast majority of them would say at once "Because I prefer to wear caps."

Very much the same sort of answer would be given me if I were to question the footballers and cricketers who read our paper. Some would say that they like cricket best. The others that they like football best. Very possibly they would say that they like that game best in which they succeeded most.

Both are splendid games, there is no doubt of that. One is an ideal for the summer as the other is for the winter.

Football is certainly a more vigorous game than cricket, and it is for this very reason that so many young men appreciate it and follow it.

Now, in my chum's letter he tells me that once he got his leg badly hurt with a kick. And I should say that this is his reason for giving up football and for his remark that he has seen no brutality in cricket. This remark is an inference that he has seen brutality in football. There may, of course, occur cases where a player who owes a grudge against another works off his spite in a cowardly kick, but they are, fortunately, very rare.

The same kind of coward, if he played cricket, would find opportunities just the same in that game to pay off scores against the person he disliked.

In the heat and excitement of the game accidents occasionally happen, I am ready to admit, but deliberate brutality amongst amateur football players is so rare that it is practically nonexistent, and even in professional football, where the success or failure of his team is so important to every player, it is a thing almost unknown.

True, I have seen deliberate tripping and fouling in our big League games, but that is a very different thing from deliberate brutality. So that as to whether cricket or football is the better game, I reply it is a matter of opinion, and as to football being a brutal game, I reply —rubbish!

Advice on Bowling.

WHAT sort of ball would you bowl to a batsman who comes out of his crease every time, and hits the ball before it reaches the ground?" asks J. G., of Bucksburn. He mentions this matter in writing to say how interesting he has found our cricket articles.

Well, J. G., an expert player would have little difficulty in getting such a batsman out. Obviously, the best thing to do is to vary the length of the ball. By this I mean that if you have been bowling to him in such a manner that the ball falls, say, three yards before the popping crease, you must vary the distance, making it either shorter or longer.

Supposing, now, that this batsman finds that by leaving his crease a ball that falls three yards short of the block-hole, can be hit pretty accurately every time, then I should bowl him a ball that falls four yards before the popping crease. Possibly he would play forward again to this, and if he hadn't calculated the length exactly, the ball would perhaps go under his bat, and even if it failed to hit the wicket, the wicket-keeper would have an excellent chance of stumping him.

If, on the other hand, he played back to it, he would probably, after having played forward so successfully, bungle the hit, and an easy catch would result.

Now, supposing again, that he could still play a ball pitched four yards short with success, I would pitch up one five yards short. But, if after all these endeavours it failed to get him out, and he still played forward with confidence, I would give him a few full tosses yorkers, and so on.

The best method of all, however, and one which a professional bowler would adopt under the circumstances, would be to keep on bowling balls of the same length, but varying the rate of delivery, thus making the batsman believe that the ball was travelling at the same speed as before, while, in reality, it was slower, or faster. The batsman would, of course, be prevailed upon to strike at the moment too soon or too late. To acquire this ability is rather difficult, for the batsman must have no suspicion that the rate of bowling has been changed in any degree.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

DAILY MAIL.

KING CRICKET.

(Continued from the previous page.)

at Hove, Brighton, where they were to meet C.B. Fry and the man of Sussex.

The Hove ground was crowded, to a large extent, with Brighton holiday-makers when the two teams met for the match. Loamshire won the toss, and elected to bat first, the turf being in splendid condition.

Ponsonby was still captaining Loamshire; but he had not a free hand, and, having nothing of the independence of Arthur Lovell, he never ventured to oppose the will of the colonel, which was fortunate for Loamshire, as it happened. On his own account, he would gladly have left Lovell and Valance in the background; but with the old cricketer's keen eye upon him, he did not venture to do so.

Molly Hilton had come down to Hove with her father for the match, keenly eager to see how Lovell would shape in his first match after his long illness. She sat in the crowded pavilion with her father, and watched the men of Sussex go out to field, led by the famous Fry.

Arthur Lovell's name was first on the Loamshire card, and the girl's eyes followed him as he left the pavilion with his bat under his arm. He looked very handsome and fit. Lovell was opening the innings with his chum, Kit Valance. Dwyer, the Sussex "Coronsair," had the ball, and was bowling a few feints down to the wicket-keeper. He ceased, and took the leather in hand in a businesslike fashion, as Arthur Lovell went to his wicket.

The bowling started from the pavilion end against Arthur's wicket, and thousands of pairs of eyes were fastened upon the young batsman.

Dwyer sent down the ball. Arthur Lovell opened his shoulders to it, and sent it on its journey, and, while cover-point raced off, the batsmen ran, and ran again, and twice again, ere the ball came whizzing in to the wicket-keeper; and then it came in seconds too late to be of any use.

Arthur Lovell was evidently in form. He punished the rest of that over in the same style, making sixteen in all. Then Relf bowled from the other end against Kit Valance. Kit, though at his best as a bowler, knew how to keep his end up at the wicket, and he kept his wicket intact from Relf's bowling, and added six to the score.

And now Lovell was batting again. There was a flush in his cheeks, still somewhat pale, before he started batting, and a sparkle in his eye that only came to him on the cricket-field. Leach took the next over against Arthur, but he faced no better than Dwyer. His fast bowling could not touch the Loamshire batsman's wicket. Arthur simply made hay of it.

Some of the balls came down like lightning, but it was all the same to Arthur Lovell, and he cut them all over the field. The fieldsmen of Sussex began to realise that they were in for a spell of leather-hunting such as seldom fell to their experiences.

The Loamshire score stood at 60, when Kit Valance was caught by C. B. Fry, the Sussex captain, and dismissed for 15.

His place was taken by Tunstall. Tunstall was dismissed for a duck's egg by a lightning ball from Leach, and Chichester came in, and after him came Ponsonby, skipper of Loamshire. And when Ponsonby went out, leg before wicket, for 2, Arthur Lovell was still batting in splendid form. His individual score was now ninety.

Lagden took Ponsonby's place. Geoffrey Lagden was not in a pleasant mood. Once more he had been baffled, and Arthur was playing again for Loamshire, and apparently on the way to making one of his biggest hits of the season.

Lagden played up pretty well, but the Sussex Coronsair sent down a swervy ball a little later on, which dismissed him for 30 runs.

Simpson, Maynard, and Wentworth came in, and when Arthur came off for lunch and a rest, Colonel Hilton gripped Lovell warmly by the hand, and Molly gave him her brightest smile.

"Keep that up, my boy!" said the colonel, with unwonted warmth. "Keep that up, Lovell, and we shall do! By Jove, I never saw anything finer!"

At two o'clock batting was resumed, Arthur's partner at the wickets being Fortescue, the cheery young amateur who had always backed him up, in spite of adverse criticism. Fortescue was stumped by the wicket-keeper for 20 runs; but in the meantime, Arthur Lovell had added 40 more to his score.

200 for nine!

Tweedie, the Scottish professional, was last man in. Tweedie was a fine man as a stonewaller. That was all he tried to do now. If he could keep the wickets up while Arthur Lovell made the running, he was quite content. And he did it well.

A roar of cheering round the match-ground greeted the completion of Arthur Lovell's second century. Colonel Hilton turned to Molly with a beaming smile:

"How's that, Molly?"

The girl was clapping her little hands, and adding her voice to the roar of cheers.

"Splendid, dad—splendid!" she cried, with sparkling eyes.

Arthur was still batting. The wear and tear of that long and splendid innings had had hardly any perceptible effect upon him. Like Hayward, of Surrey, in the first Test Match with the South Africans, he had gone in first, and was to come out last—"not out." For when the Loamshire score stood at 310, Tweedie's wicket fell at last to a fine throw-in from C. B. Fry.

All down for 310!

The Loamshire innings was over, and Arthur Lovell, red and flushed, was turning towards the pavilion, when Fortescue and Simpson made a rush for him, with half a dozen more of the Loamshire men, and, amid the hurrahing of the crowd, he was carried shoulder-high off the field!

It was a day of triumph for Arthur Lovell! Truly, a new day seemed to be dawning for him in the Loamshire County Cricket Club!

(To be continued on Saturday next, when the opening chapters of Mr. Hardy's powerful football tale will appear.)

A Fine New Series of Complete Tales.

By the author of "Paddy Leary's Schooldays."

No. 1.—The Mystery of Cross Covert.

THE 1st CHAPTER
Jack Visits His Old Home.

EVERYONE in the county was sorry when the Bellamys went to smash and had to leave Brockworthy Hall. Old John Bellamy had been liked and respected as the finest sportsman in Devonshire, the best rider to hounds, and as pretty a shot as you'd find in the most sporting county in England.

Quite why he came to grief no one seemed to know. Of course, land values had gone down, but the Brockworthy property was fine farm land, and the rents ought to have been enough to keep the place up. There were rumours of speculation, of a dishonest lawyer, all sorts of stories. No one knew for certain, and old Mr. Bellamy never told. But it broke his heart to leave the home of his fathers. He was dead within six months of leaving Brockworthy, and Jack, his only son, whose mother had died twenty years before, was left to make the best he could of things.

Jack had been at Oxford when the crash came. He left at once, and went back to his father at Fratton, a little barren farm on the Cornish coast, the last morsel of property left to the Bellamys, and worth a bare fifty pound a year.

Jack and his father had always been great pals, and it hit the boy terribly hard when the poor old man died. Jack had never done a day's work, apart from sport, in his life, but he had no idea of eking out an existence at Fratton. He made up his mind to do something for a living, and by the interest of an old friend got work in a shipping office in Plymouth. But he soon made up his mind that this was not his job.

Jack was a first-class shot, a good man with a horse. He could put a trout fly on the water as prettily as any man in Devon, and hunt a pack of otter hounds in first-class style. He knew how to set a wire for a rabbit, and how to break a setter to the gun. He was an open air man pure and simple, and no manner of use with his pen. He hated towns, and figures worried him. He stuck to the office for six months, and then one day went to his friend and said:

"I'm very sorry; I've done my best, but I can't stick it. I'm going to chuck this job, and take a place as a gamekeeper."

"I don't know but that you're right, Jack," answered the other. "You'd make a better gamekeeper than clerk; but you must remember it's cutting yourself loose from all your friends. Do you think you can stand it?"

"My best friends are dogs and horses," said Jack. "I can't be unhappy while I'm with them."

So it was settled, and a month later Jack Bellamy, who now called himself Jack Ball, found himself installed in a small cottage on the estate of Mr. Herbert Stanton at Yeoncore, about ten miles from his old home. His wages were a pound a week, and as the place was small he was single-handed. His new master was a middle-aged bachelor, and a very good sort, and Jack found himself busy all day in the open air, and fifty times happier than he had been since his father's death.

Mr. Stanton did not know who his new gamekeeper was, but he recognised that he was a cut above the usual type, and treated him accordingly. So things ran very smoothly all the summer, and it was nearly autumn before Jack had his first adventure.

One hot day late in August, Mr. Stanton told Jack to go over to Brockworthy and see a setter which he thought of purchasing from Mr. Wray, the present tenant of the hall. Naturally, Jack would rather have gone anywhere else on earth, but there was no help for it, and about three in the afternoon he found himself tramping up the familiar avenue of great beeches, with his terrier Nell at his heels.

As Nell figures rather largely in this story, she deserves a word to herself. She was one of that fine old Devonshire breed of rough-coated terriers known as the Jack Russell, because they were originated by the celebrated hunting parson of that name. These terriers are small, and, as a rule, white with a patch or two of black. They are the gamest little creatures on earth, and will face anything from a bull to a badger. Nell was a specially fine specimen of her race. She had a close, wiry coat, a beautifully shaped head, and large, prominent brown eyes. Though barely a year old, and not yet arrived at her full strength, she was wonderfully intelligent, and she and Jack were the best pals in the world. Jack valued her more than anything else he possessed, and she was absolutely devoted to him.

Instinctively Jack turned up the front drive, and then realising who he was now and how things were changed, he turned and took his way to the back door. With disgust and sorrow he saw that the new tenants were altering the place, lopping the timber, and building an ugly electric light plant on the site of the old rose garden. He had not heard much of the Wrays, but he knew they were rich people from London who were making a great effort to get into country society.

He rang, and sent in his name and business by a maid to Mr. Wray. She came back and told him the master was out, but she thought young Mr. Wray was somewhere about the place. Jack was hot and thirsty, and in old days no one came to the hall without being offered refreshment, but the maid did not even suggest a glass of beer.

Just then a great row broke out in the stable-yard close by, men shouting, dogs barking, and a scuffling of feet.

"That's him!" said the maid, with a curl of her lip. "That's Mr. Edgar. You'll find him in the stableyard."

"Thank you. I'll go there," said Jack. When he turned he found that Nell was not with him. "Nell!" he called, and whistled. But she did not come. "Must have found a rat," muttered Jack, and he wasted a minute or two looking round the backyard. Meantime the noise in the stableyard was tremendous, and thinking it might have attracted Nell he hurried off there.

For a moment he could not make out what was happening. A dozen or so stable helps, grooms, and gardeners were bunched round a big box in the far corner, and an over-dressed young fellow in baggy riding breeches, yellow gaiters, and a loud check coat, was in the middle in front of the kennel, apparently directing operations. Some of the men were laughing, some shouting, while a number of dogs were barking furiously.

"Loo in there! Fetch him out! Good dog!" Jack heard the overdressed man shouting above the din. "What's the matter with the dog? Funking it?"

"No, sir; she's all right. Plucky as they make 'em. But I reckon he's a bit too much for a little 'un like that," answered an elderly man, whom Jack recognised as George Dawe, a gardener in his father's time.

Then Jack saw what was doing. They had a badger in the kennel, and were drawing him with dogs. Indeed, a second glance showed that several of the dogs were bleeding badly. It's a cruel business, drawing a badger, pretty much on a level with coursing sacked rabbits and shooting live pigeons. The badger is a powerful beast, armed with tremendous teeth in long, narrow jaws, and he is amazingly quick in his movements for such a heavy-looking creature. A full-grown badger will weigh twenty-five or even thirty pounds, and very few dogs have any kind of chance against such a hefty fighter in the narrow confines of a kennel.

Jack stood where he was. He could not, of course, interfere, but the business made him sick. He loved dogs, and to see them ill-treated was pain and grief to him. He made up his mind that Edgar Wray was a cruel-minded bounder, and heartily wished that he had not had to see work of this kind going on in the stableyard of his dear old home.

"She's got him!" came a shout. "She's a good plucked 'un! My word, but he's bit her bad!"

A small, white terrier came backwards out of the kennel. She had the badger by the throat, and though he was twice her size and weight, was actually lugging him out of his retreat. It was a marvellous exhibition of strength and pluck, and the men roared applause. The terrier, poor little beast, had suffered fearfully. Her whole head and chest were dull red and dripping. Indeed, she was just about done, for at that moment she lost her grip, staggered, fell over sideways, and lay on the flags quite motionless.

"Reckon she's done," said Dawe, and stepped over to pick her up. The man moved aside for him, and Jack, for the first time, saw the dog plainly.

It was Nell!

For a moment the whole yard danced before his eyes. He saw red. Then he was in the middle of the throng.

"Give her to me," he said to Dawe, and he hardly knew his own voice as he spoke. "Nell was dead! Nell, his best and dearest, his only friend. Murdered to give a moment's brutal pleasure to Edgar Wray and his mob of stablemen! "Who is responsible for this!" he asked, not loudly, but in a voice which must have showed what he was feeling, for a dead and uncomfortable silence followed.

Then Edgar Wray spoke up. "Who are you, and what do you mean by interfering in my yard?" he began, in a loud, blustering voice.

"Did you set her on the badger?" inquired Jack, and his tone was deadly. He remembered Wray now. The fellow had been at Oxford in Jack's first year—a wealthy toady and tuft-hunter.

"Confound you! What do you mean by talking to me like that?" roared Wray in a fury. "Get out of this at once!"

"Did you or did you not set my dog on the badger?" demanded Jack again.

"I did, and I'll set the dogs on you if you don't clear pretty quick, you insolent blackguard! Here, turn him out, you fellows!"

There was a slight stir among the crowd, but no one seemed anxious to be the first to lay hands on this clean-built young man in the well-cut but shabby tweeds.

Jack swung round and laid poor Nell's mangled body in the arms of Dawe. Then he turned on Wray.

"Put up your hands!" he said.

Wray cursed him furiously.

"Why don't you obey my orders and turn him out?" he roared at his men.

"Put up your hands!" said Jack once more, and stepped forward. Wray had a riding-crop in one hand. He swung it and aimed a vicious blow at Jack's head. But Jack, expecting something of the kind, sprang aside and saved his head. Next second his hard, brown left fist caught Edgar Wray on the point of the chin with a crack that was heard all over the yard.

It was a tremendous blow. It seemed to lift the young cad clean off his legs. He went backwards against the badger's kennel, fell right over it, and tumbled in a limp heap on the flags on the far side. There he lay groaning, with the blood running from his mouth and nose.

Utter silence followed. No one stirred. Dawe was the first to recover himself. "Here's the dog, sir," he said quietly. "She ain't quite dead. Best take her and go quickly. There'll be trouble about this."

Jack took the little, mangled animal tenderly in his arms, turned on his heel, and, as a buzz of excited talk rose behind him, swung out of the yard.

Next second Jack's hard, brown left fist caught Edgar Wray on the point of the chin with a crack that was heard all over the yard.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
Poachers.

DAWE was right. Nell was not dead. Before he had reached the drive-gate she was trying to lick her master's hands. But she was in a shockingly bad way. One cheek was ripped so that a flap of flesh hung down, and there were deep rents in one shoulder and in her throat. She had lost a terrible deal of blood.

Jack made all speed for the Brockworthy village inn. He had not much fear of being recognised in his rough kit, and he knew he had changed a lot in the eighteen months since he had left the hall. He got milk, mixed a few drops of brandy in it, and fed Nell with a spoon. Then he bound up the worst of the wounds with soft rag, and spent the best part of a week's income on the hire of a sogcart to drive home. He carried Nell in his arms all the way, and as soon as ever he reached his cottage he set to work in earnest.

The cheek wound had to be sewn up. A horrid business, but Jack was as good as the average vet. at this kind of thing, and plucky little Nell never so much as whimpered during the operation. The other wounds he washed with a weak antiseptic and tied up carefully. Then he put the little dog on a soft cushion in a quiet corner, and fed her with beef-tea in an egg-spoon.

She was too weak to eat. She just lay, a poor little, helpless rag of a dog, with her eyes half shut, and, except for her slow breathing, looking about as nearly dead as any creature could look.

Jack never went to bed. He sat up with Nell all night long. More than once he thought she had gone, but each time one drop of brandy in a spoonful of milk revived her. Now and then, when he looked at the wreck of what a few hours before had been the liveliest, healthiest little dog for miles round, Jack fairly ground his teeth. It quite frightened him to realise how he hated Edgar Wray.

Jack was too honest to neglect his work, even for Nell's sake. He sent for a man who sometimes helped him, and paid him out of his own pocket to do what was necessary. By next evening the little dog was distinctly better, and her master saw, with intense relief, that she would probably pull round.

This had all happened on the Tuesday. On

(Continued on the next page.)

THE GENTLEMAN GAMEKEEPER.

(Continued from the previous page.)

the Friday Mr. Stanton sent a message for Jack to come and see him. Jack would not leave Nell alone, so carried her with him, and left her in the kitchen, where the stout cook petted her and fed her with dainties.

Mr. Stanton was looking severe. "What's this I hear, Ball? You failed to do your errand, and, I hear, knocked down and half killed Mr. Edgar Wray."

"It's a pity I did not quite kill him, I think, sir!" was Jack's surprising reply.

Mr. Stanton stared. "May I tell you?" continued Jack very quietly.

"Yes; if you can explain your amazing remark!" answered the other. It was plain that he was very much annoyed.

"Wait one moment, sir. I must show you something," and Jack left the room and fetched Nell.

As soon as he set eyes on the dog, Mr. Stanton exclaimed at her condition. He was nearly as fond of dogs as his keeper was.

Then Jack told his story—very simply. He kept back nothing, and when he had finished the other jumped up.

"You are right, Ball, you did quite right! It was blackguardly cruelty to set a mere puppy like that at a badger! The young ruffian! And his father came here and told me that you were drunk, and wantonly assaulted his son! He wanted me to dismiss you on the spot, and was furious because I said I would first hear what you had to say. I'll take care you don't have to go to Brockworthy again, and I shall write to Mr. Wray and tell him my opinion of his son's conduct."

As Jack left the house, he smiled a little to himself at the thought of Wray's feelings when he got Mr. Stanton's letter next morning. He had an idea that the latter would not mince matters. And Mr. Stanton, although a bachelor, and nothing like so wealthy as the Wrays, was a power in the land from a social point of view. So Wray would not dare to retort.

Time passed, and Nell mended. Slowly at first, but afterwards more rapidly. Fortunately no bones were broken, and her eyes were not injured. The scar on the side of her head was a bad one, but with the aid of comb-nut oil Jack got the hair to grow again. By the middle of September, Nell was herself again, ready for rat or rabbit, or a game with her master.

Partridge shooting began, and Jack had so much to think of that he almost forgot Wray. He was too busy with his pheasants. Pheasant poachers become active in September. They do not begin to take birds till the last week in the month, for the birds cannot by law be exposed for sale until October. But you get the professional poacher mooching about the coverts earlier in the month, finding out where the birds roost preparatory to a grand coup just before the first of October.

Jack's chief enemy was a man named Ezra Worth. Worth was a long, lanky fellow, with a beaky nose and red hair. He never stuck to any regular job, but would cut peat or faggots, or work at haymaking and harvesting. What he did not know about woodcraft was hardly worth knowing. A bold, daring, reckless poacher, he gave Jack more trouble than all the other invaders of the coverts put together. He was always rabbiting, and he was a wonderful hand at netting hares. Jack knew he meant to have his share of the pheasants later on, and took measures accordingly. In the end, it came to be a sort of duel between him and Worth, and at last Jack scored a point. Very early one misty September morning he caught Worth taking a rabbit out of a wire in a hedge not a hundred yards from the home farm.

Worth showed fight. But this was foolish on his part. Jack had taken the middle-weight boxing championship at a big public school, and Worth, though plucky as they make them, was only a rough-and-tumble fighter. Jack knocked him out inside sixty seconds.

When the poacher came round, he lay there sulkily. Of course, he expected to be run in. But Jack had been thinking. "Look here, Worth!" he said. "I ought to take you to Mr. Stanton, but I'm open to make a bargain."

Worth stared.

"Give me your word you'll let my pheasants alone this autumn, and I'll let you go."

Worth thought a moment. "All right!" he growled. He picked himself up and slouched away.

Jack watched him as he went. "Wonder if he'll keep his word!" he said thoughtfully.

A week later—it was the 28th of the month—Jack was roused about two in the morning by Nell jumping on his bed and whining. "Oh, little lady! So Worth's broken his promise!" was Jack's first remark, as he slipped into his clothes, picked up a heavy stick, and went out into the night. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and the stars bright. He stood a moment and listened. Yes; there was a sound of twigs cracking somewhere in the wood.

"Find him, Nell!" he whispered, and the little dog, who by this time knew almost as much about poachers as her master, slipped away among the trees.

Jack followed cautiously. He had walked nearly across the wood, when he caught sight of a pale gleam of bluish light in the distance. At the same moment, Nell stopped with a little whining sound.

"Smoking them, by Jove!" muttered Jack. He meant that the poachers were using a sulphur fire to suffocate the pheasants as they roosted. He did not want to risk Nell in a fight, so he took off his cap and laid it on the ground. "Trust, Nell!" he said, and the terrier at once lay down on the cap. Jack, stick in hand, crawled forward very cautiously.

Yes; he was right. There was the unmistakable blue flame of sulphur. The odd thing was that it seemed to be burning out in the open. Poachers usually use an old tin biscuit-box, with the bottom knocked out, to hide the flame. Had they heard him, and cleared?

Jack bent double, and wormed his way silently through the bushes. His heart was beating a little faster than usual. There would be two, if not three, men on this job. Heavy odds to tackle—especially if they had guns.

He could see the flame quite clearly now. Yes; there was no doubt about it! The poachers had taken alarm. There was no one to be seen within the little circle of light cast by the small, blue, flickering fire, from which a column of smoke rose straight into the branches of the big beech-tree above.

The ground was open between him and the beech. It was a little natural glade in the very heart of the wood. In the centre of the glade was a spring, and all round hazel and bramble were matted in a tangle.

Jack was a good deal puzzled. He could not imagine how the poachers had heard him, for his approach had been absolutely noiseless, nor why the men had left their smoke fire burning when a mere stamp of a hobnailed boot would have put it out.

He waited for some minutes on the edge of the glade. All was deathly still. Not a bird moved; not a breath of wind rustled a leaf.

"They must have gone," said Jack to himself, and getting up, he walked across to the fire.

At that moment a shot crashed out from the dark bushes behind. Jack flung up his hands and fell forward on his face, close beside the ashes of the dying fire.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
The Clue.

THE next thing that Jack knew was finding himself lying in a most comfortable bed, in a large, airy, well-furnished room. He couldn't imagine where he was, nor remember what had happened. He tried to move, only to find that his body was rolled in bandages, and that the attempt was extremely painful.

But his movement was heard. Next instant Nell was on the bed, licking her master's face, and positively squealing with delight.

Someone got up from a chair at the far corner of the room, and came to the bedside. It was Mr. Stanton's stout cook.

"So you've come round, Mr. Ball? Well, if I ain't glad! We thought you were dead, sure enough. I'll go and tell the master," and off she bustled.

Presently in came Mr. Stanton.

"How are you, Ball?" he said anxiously. He liked his gamekeeper's young gamekeeper.

"Stiff, sir; but not very bad!" answered Jack.

"'Pon my word, you're wonderful for a man who's just had a charge of number six picked out of him!" returned the other. "Do you know who did it?"

"Who shot me—not I, sir! It was done from behind."

"The Blackguard! Was it Worth, do you think?"

"I hope not!" said Jack earnestly. "I think better of him than that. More likely some of that gang from Newton. But who found me, sir?"

"She did!" said Mr. Stanton, stroking Nell's rough head. "You owe your life to this little beast, Ball. She came here barking like mad, at four this morning. Tyrrell, the butler, heard her, and when he went out she began to whine and run towards the wood. He called me, and she took us straight to Mab Dingle, in Cross Covert. We couldn't see anything at first, but Nell went burrowing into the bushes, and I followed, and there you were, bundled up in a deep hole, under the roots of a big, dead oak."

"Why, I was in the glade when they shot me!" exclaimed Jack.

"Were you? Then they took the trouble to bury you. You were covered up with leaves and brush. If Nell hadn't scratched them away from your face, you'd have been suffocated, for a dead certainty."

Jack stretched out weakly, and patted Nell's head. She licked his hand delightedly. For a few moments neither of the men could trust themselves to speak.

"It's good of you to have me here, sir!" said Jack at last.

"Nonsense! You're to stay here till you're quite well! You'll be properly looked after, and fed up. The doctor says you'll be all right in ten days. You had a wonderful escape. The charge struck you in the back instead of the head, and that heavy tweed coat of yours saved you. All the same you had about thirty shot in you. And look here, Ball, I'm killing two birds with one stone. No one knows you're here except my servants and the doctor. We're much more likely to find out who did this thing if you're supposed to be fussing. You're to stay here quietly until you are quite fit, and then we'll see what's to be done."

The doctor was right. In a week Jack was almost well. In ten days he could go about as well as ever. But meantime nothing occurred to give any clue to the would-be murderer.

On October 10th Jack quietly took up his work again. It had been given out in the village that he had been away on a holiday. No one outside Mr. Stanton's house, except the doctor, knew what had really happened. Almost the first thing that Jack did was to visit the glade in Cross Covert, and do a bit of detective work on his own account. He found the place where the man who had shot him must have stood, and saw where the charge had cut some twigs. But rain had washed away all footmarks, and he could find no empty cartridge-cases.

Then he went to the dead oak. There was the hole in which he had been buried, and he got down on his hands and knees, and began burrowing in the dead leaves. Nell thought this was some new game, and scratched away furiously. And it was she who found the clue.

Some small, shining object flew up under her busy paws. Jack seized it. When he examined it, the young gamekeeper gave a gasp of astonishment. He got up slowly, put it in his pocket, walked back to Venmere, and asked for Mr. Stanton.

* * * * * * *

Next morning Jack was up early, and did his necessary work about the place, then changed to his Sunday tweeds, got on a pony, which Mr. Stanton's groom had ready for him, and cantered off to Newton.

The autumn races were on, the smartest function of the whole year, and the roads were packed with vehicles. Jack took quiet, cross-country routes, put up his pony at a little public-house on the outskirts of the town, had some lunch and made his way to the course, which is in a large meadow near the railway-station.

It was a fine day, and the crowd was enormous. The whole county was there, and drags, and brakes, and motor-cars were drawn up in long rows, while the stands were packed with smartly-dressed people.

Jack kept well in the background. It was not his cue to be seen yet. Nell trotted close at her master's heels.

Ah, there they were at last! A big, red motor had whirled up, and half a dozen people got out, and walked up to the grand stand entrance. When they had passed in, Jack also bought a ticket, and followed them.

He looked a gentleman at all times, and that in spite of rough clothes, which is more than can be said for the gorgeously got-up party who had preceded him.

Half a dozen horses came pounding by amid a roar of cheering, and the race over, the crowd on the grand stand left their seats, and came strolling down into the paddock. Now was Jack's chance, and he followed.

The Wrays were in the middle of things. There were the stout, red-faced father, the over-dressed mother, a couple of vacuous-looking youths from town, and young Edgar Wray—the latter got up in the very latest effort of a Bond Street tailor, but looking, in spite of it, like the underbred cad he was.

You could see at a glance how keen they were to see and be seen. As Jack came close he heard fat Mr. Wray whisper:

"Look, there's the Mount Edgecumbe party. Can't you get an introduction, Edgar?"

Then Jack stepped forward, and as he did so he heard Nell growling softly to herself behind him. He touched Edgar Wray on the arm.

The man started. Then, when he saw who it was his prominent eyes goggled, and his jaw dropped, while his face went a sickly yellow. Next instant he made a big effort, and pulled himself together.

"What do you mean by speaking to me, fellow?" he gasped out.

"I have found something which I think belongs to you, Mr. Wray," said Jack, speaking very quietly, but very distinctly. By this time quite a number of people were looking at the group. The Wrays showed their embarrassment pitiably, but Jack was as cool as a cucumber.

With great deliberation he took a small packet from his waistcoat pocket, and unwrapped it, Edgar Wray staring at him all the time in a sort of fascination. The people about were too well-bred to crowd round, but every moment more eyes were directed at the Wrays. Somehow, all felt that something out of the common was happening. Nell knew, too. She stood like a little statue, but her throat vibrated with deep growls.

Finally Jack finished unwrapping his find, and held it up. It was a small, gold seal.

"Is this not yours, Mr. Wray?" he asked, in the same tone as before.

Edgar Wray gulped out:

"No!"

"But is this not your crest?" inquired Jack, still with the same intense politeness. "It is the same as that on the ring which you are now wearing."

Young Wray was beyond speech by this time.

"Would you like to know where I found it?" continued Jack. And he felt the rustle of curiosity in the crowd, which seemed to have distinctly thickened in the last few moments. "It was in Cross Covert, on the property of my employer, Mr. Stanton, and Jack raised his voice a little so that all could hear. "I found it in a hole under the great dead oak. A curious place, was it not, Mr. Wray?"

Edgar Wray's face was simply ghastly. If the fellow had had the pluck to speak out, to say, to deny it all, he might have carried it off. But he could not. Jack had accurately sized him up beforehand.

"Then it is not yours?" went on Jack again. "I am sorry to have troubled you, but, of course, I thought it must be, because of the crest. It is the same as yours, is it not? I thought that perhaps it might have come off your watch-chain. Well, I must try to find the real owner. Again, let me apologise for having troubled you." And, with a slight bow, Jack turned away, leaving Wray standing, apparently rooted to the ground, and the centre of hundreds of inquisitive eyes.

Later that afternoon, Jack felt a touch on his arm. There was Mr. Stanton, with a smile on his thin, clever face.

"You did that extraordinarily well, Ball! If you wanted to you could have it. The wildest stories are about, and the Wrays have left. I confess I have put in a few words myself. I hardly think they will stay on at Brockworthy."

"I'm thankful for that, sir!" said Jack, with such emphasis that his employer looked at him anxiously.

And as Jack touched his hat and turned away, Mr. Stanton said, half aloud:

"There's some mystery about that chap! How he did let Wray have it! I couldn't have done it so myself. Well, I like him, and I only hope he won't leave me."

But as Jack trotted quietly home his face was thoughtful.

"They may leave Brockworthy," he muttered, "but I very much doubt if I've done with Edgar Wray yet. If he hated me enough to try to murder me, he's not likely to take what he's had to-day lying down."

(Next week a long, complete football story by Mr. Jack North, entitled "The First Match of the Season," will appear. Don't miss it.)

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TEDDY LESTER'S CHUMS.

A Rattling New Tale of Slapton School.

By JOHN FINNEMORE.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

TEDDY LESTER, a pupil at Slapton School, in Mr. Jayne's House. A popular character well known to readers of THE BOYS' REALM.

JIMMY WEST, nicknamed the Bat. A new boy at Slapton. He is an old chum of Teddy's.

DIGBY, SANDYS, and ITO NAGAO (a little Jap), chums of Teddy Lester at Slapton.

CURZON, GIBSON, and PALMER, three bullies of Slapton School; also in Jayne's House.

The opening of a new term at Slapton School is made conspicuous by the arrival of Jimmy West. In appearance he is guileless and a little bit soft, but beneath this deceptive exterior he is as sharp as any inmate of Slapton. Curzon, ever ready to bully a new boy, attempts to make him carry his cricket-bag when the boys alight at the station, but the Bat, roseating his overbearing manner, drops the bag and its contents under the wheels of the train.

When the boys reach the school Gibson, a sneaking and underhand fellow who toadies to Curzon, attempts to play a practical joke on the Bat, but he has the tables turned upon him, and in the fight which follows he gets more than he bargains for.

Gibson and Curzon, filled with wrath, endeavour to capture the Bat and make him "sit up." Wise seeks refuge in Teddy's study. He tells to and Teddy what is in the wind, and they decide to hold the study against Curzon and his gang. Curzon tries to break the door down, but he and his satellites are repulsed by a volley of wet waste. They retire for a time, and during their absence Mr. Jayne enters Lester's study, attracted by the uproar. Curzon returns enveloped in a rug as protection against further douches, and cannoning against the study door stumbles over the rug and hurtles in, falling bellowing at the feet of Mr. Jayne.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

THE 6th CHAPTER.
Curzon and Mr. Jayne.

"LAID a trap for me, did you, you sly, young beast!" howled Curzon, his voice muffled in the rug which had enveloped still more closely his head about his head in his fall. "I'll jolly well break every bone you've got!"

He bounded to his feet, brandishing the cricket-bat in one hand, and with the other tearing aside the rug covering from his head. Then, to his horror and amazement, he found himself looking straight into the grim, quiet face of Mr. Jayne.

Curzon could do nothing, say nothing. He remained silent and nerveless under the influence of his astonishment and dismay. Behind Mr. Jayne were the three occupants of the study, their faces one huge, unconcealed grin.

The master at last broke the silence.

"So this is your idea of the conduct of a big fellow in the Fifth, is it, Curzon?" he remarked in biting tones. "Will you be good enough to explain what you mean by bursting into this study in that manner, and also why you intend to break every bone in Lester's body?"

"He threw hot water on me, sir," growled the big bully sullenly. "I am burned severely on the neck."

"I was trying to break into the room, sir," put in Teddy.

"Why was he trying to break into the room?" asked Mr. Jayne.

"He wanted to get hold of West, sir, and whop him. I mean before him, sir."

Mr. Jayne looked round at the Bat, and the latter was splendid. He rolled his squinting eyes behind his big glasses, his mouth hung vacantly open in his white face, he didn't look more than half his age. The idea of an attack upon so weak and inoffensive a youth seemed utterly preposterous in its brutality. Mr. Jayne turned to Curzon.

"Will you explain to me why you wished to assault this new boy, to whom you, as an older boy, were bound to show every tenderness and courtesy?"

The master's tones were thin and icy, and Curzon felt very uncomfortable. He tried to better himself by blurting out an account of the smash at the station, but he made a very lame story of it, and Mr. Jayne interrupted him.

"You make it worse and worse for yourself, Curzon!" he exclaimed. "There has been some accident by which you were the loser, and you wish to vent your ill-humour on this boy, who had some share in it. Most disgraceful, sir, most disgraceful! You will be gated for a fortnight, and will write me one thousand lines. Now go and put that rug down at once, and do not let me hear of your returning here any more."

Curzon slunk off without delay, the rug from the doorway still draped over his shoulders like the blanket of a Red Indian chief. Then Mr. Jayne spoke a few kindly words to the Bat, whom he figured to himself as a poor, lonely, new boy, and went his way also.

Teddy closed the door respectfully after the housemaster, and then he and the Bat did a war-dance of delight, while Ito looked on with a smile.

"Just about done 'em all brown!" cried Teddy joyfully. "The merry little squint laid it into him all right for one!"

"Yes," said Ito. "we've done all right, so far. But we've got to get to bed to-night."

"Right you are, old chap!" said Teddy, seeing what his chum meant. "And Curzon's in our dorm. There'll be lively times in Dormitory No. 10. Well, we'll polish off the rest of the grub, and hold a council of war."

"Now," said Teddy, "how many chaps can we count on in the dorm. to lend us a hand, if there's trouble in the wind?"

Ito reflected awhile.

"Only Fowkes to depend on," he replied.

Teddy nodded.

"You're about right, old chap!" he said. "And Curzon and Gibson are pretty strong there."

"B-b-but, Teddy," said the Bat, "w-w-what about the p-p-pre-fect? You've t-t-told me all s-s-sorts of y-y-yarns about what the p-p-prefect can do."

"That's all right, Bat, my son," replied Teddy. "A strong prefect can hold a dormitory down so that it doesn't squirm. Any chap who doesn't behave has to bend over and take six thick 'uns, and when he's had one dose he's not going in search of another. But you see it all depends on the prefect. Our old one left at the end of last term, and a new chap tries his hand to-night. His name is Tom Pole, but everybody calls him 'Polly.'"

"He's no good, and he won't be any good," remarked Ito quietly.

"Think not?" said Teddy.

"Not enough pluck to deal with a rough lot like Curzon & Co," said Ito.

"Then we'll see stars," remarked Teddy, and began to scrape out the jam-pot.

THE 7th CHAPTER.
The New Prefect.

WHEN our three friends went up to the dormitory that night they found that several boys were already there, preparing busily for bed. The Bat was shown his quarters, and was about to throw off his jacket, when Teddy stopped him.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry to peel," remarked Teddy. "Let's be sure whether we're going to have a quiet night or not, first."

At this moment up came Foulkes.

"Hallo, Teddy," he said, "how did you get on this afternoon?"

Teddy related the story of Curzon's discomfiture, and Foulkes roared with delight.

"Serve the cheeky bounder right!" he said. "He wants a bit of his side knocked out of him! I shouldn't wonder if he started some of his games in here. I don't think much of old Polly."

"Ito doesn't, either," said Teddy.

"Right you are, Nagao!" said Foulkes, nodding to the little Jap. "His upper lip isn't stiff enough to keep No. 10 in order. He's in the Sixth, and that's all you can say for him."

"Hallo, here he is!" said Teddy.

The new prefect came in, a slight, timid-looking little fellow, very red and nervous. He was not one who had sought authority. It had been thrust upon him by his position in the school, and he looked far from happy under the burden. Behind him, half a head taller, and much bigger and stronger, came swaggering in Curzon, followed by Gibson, and a couple more cronies.

Curzon made no secret of his intentions. He marched in behind the prefect, banged the dormitory door to, and said in a voice of savage glee:

"Got 'em!"

"What do you mean, Curzon?" asked the prefect, glancing over his shoulder.

"That's all right, Polly!" said Curzon with a chuckle. "You tumble into bed, and leave me alone! I've got a score to settle with one or two young brutes who dose up in that corner."

The prefect flushed, and replied in a tone of weak anger:

"Now, Curzon, you must not make an uproar here. I don't mean to have the dormitory get a bad name."

"Shut up!" said Curzon curtly. "If you put on any airs because you've been made a prefect, we'll make your life a burden to you, and everybody grinning at you and your authority."

Now these big words were not backed up by any great amount of pluck. The fact was that Curzon was trying at once to get the upper hand of the new prefect, and so he let off this blustering, swaggering talk. But secretly he was very uneasy. A strong prefect would have cornered him at once for such language, however big he might be, and Curzon dared not have refused to take the punishment, for he was already in bad odour with the authorities.

But Pole did not know the weakness of Curzon's position, and was more than a trifle afraid of a brawl with the big, domineering fellow. So he tried the soft answer.

"Come, come, Curzon," he said, "don't talk nonsense! Let's have quietness in No. 10, I beg of you."

But this soft answer did not turn aside wrath. Curzon's face lit up with evil joy. Pole was afraid of him. He had brought it off. He had won in the struggle of will. Now he was openly contemptuous of the other's authority.

"There'll be all the quietness you want," he returned, "when I've settled a score or two."

He strode across to the corner and seized the prefect's cane.

"Put that cane down this moment, Curzon!" said the prefect.

"When I've done with it!" said Curzon carelessly, making it hiss and hum through the air as he launched imaginary swishing cuts.

"Get ready to stand together, my merry men all!" muttered Teddy, at the end of the room. He was keeping the corner of his eye on Curzon, and saw that the signals stood at "Danger."

"If you defy my authority, Curzon," cried Pole, "I shall appeal to Mr. Jayne."

"Not you," replied Curzon drily. "You'd be the laughing-stock of the school if you had to go whimpering to the beaks within ten minutes of taking charge!"

The truth of this remark threw the unlucky prefect abroad for a few instants, and he had nothing to say.

"Muster the new fellows, Gibson," said the big bully. And Gibson, Palmer, and a third boy named Benson started a round of the dormitory.

There were three new boys in the room, the Bat, and two small boys named Rivers and Ward. The two latter were dragged up before Curzon at once. The Bat was left alone for the present.

"What are you going to do with those boys, Curzon?" demanded the foolish figurehead of a prefect, who was now seen to have not a scrap of pluck or backbone.

"Nothing much, Polly," said Curzon. "Only make 'em sing a song, and you know as well as I do that's the custom in every Form. A new boy always has to sing a song first night to pay his footing."

"Well, don't make too much row about it," said the faint-hearted Polly. "I've remembered something I've left in my study." And he beat an instant retreat.

"Well, I'm blessed! Ito, my son," murmured Teddy, "you'd just about sized up Polly all right. He's in a blue funk at the thought of running foul of Curzon. By jingo, don't I wish I was prefect! I'd whop into any chap, if he was as big as a mountain, who gave me lip like that!"

With the departure of the prefect Curzon leapt to his feet. He had been sitting in a chair. Now he sprang up, and grinned so as to show all his teeth. He felt that the dormitory was completely in his grasp, and that the last emblem of lawful authority had departed.

"Three new fellows are there," he said; and again showed his teeth in a cruel grin. "Well, we've got two here, and we'll get hold of number three when we want him." And he shot a sharp and crafty glance to the corner where Teddy and his friends sat quietly on their beds.

"Now, you pale chap, Rivers is your name, is it?" said Curzon. "Just hit up a song, and let us have it, or I shall be obliged to tune you up with this yellow joker!" And he swished the cane twice through the air.

But for once the bully met his match, for Rivers was not in the least afraid of him. He was a bright, open-faced youngster, with a steady eye and heaps of pluck. He rubbed his chin for a moment, as if thinking, then rising, then raised it, and, with a voice as sweet as a blackbird's, he carolled out "Off to Philadelphy in the Morning."

He sang it so well that the whole dormitory cheered him to the echo when he had finished, and demanded an encore. He gave them a second song, and then Curzon roughly ordered him to go back. A complete success was not at all to the bully's taste. He wanted a breakdown and the chance of whopping somebody. The chance came when it was Ward's turn to sing. The poor youngster made a good effort. He struck up the famous old ditty "Hearts of Oak," but did not sing more than a couple of lines. He became very nervous, his voice choked in his throat, and he could not get on.

"Impudent young scoundrel!" said Curzon. "Thinks he'll sing or not, just as he fancies, does he? We'll soon show him! Swing him up, you fellows! Hold him over Gibson's back!"

Gibson bent down as if he was making a back at leapfrog, and Ward was seized and flung over him. Palmer held the small boy's head down on one side, Benson held his legs on the other, and now Curzon delivered, with vicious relish and delight, six swinging cuts on to the person of the unhappy youngster.

Ward howled with the cruel pain, and his tormentors chuckled with delight to hear his cries. When the punishment was over, Palmer and Benson released him, and Gibson sprang suddenly upright. This caused Ward to roll on the floor in a heap, banging his head severely on the boards. He gathered himself up as quickly as he could, and scuttled towards his bed, assisted by a hearty kick from Gibson.

"I s-s-say, T-Teddy," murmured the Bat, "these are l-l-lively times! Whose t-t-turn next?"

"Ours, for a guinea," replied Teddy. "Well, we've got to stand up against this sort of game. Britons never will be slaves!' And slaves we shall have to be if Curzon's allowed to run his own ideas of the show."

"There's another new fellow who hasn't sung yet," called out Benson. "What about him, Curzon?"

"I'm coming to him now," said Curzon slowly. "I'll make him sing in half a dozen different ways."

Now the Bat spoke up.

"I-I-I don't think you w-w-will," he remarked, "for I c-c-can't sing at all. B-b-but I can r-r-recite p-p-poetry!"

There was a shout of laughter at this answer, then Curzon snarled:

"Oh, you can recite poetry, can you?"

"R-r-rather!" stuttered the Bat.

"Recite away!" said Curzon grimly.

Then the Bat stood bolt upright, and rolled his eyes towards the ceiling, and recited in a loud, shrill voice the following impromptu verse:

"There once w-w-was a f-f-fellow named C-C-Curzon,
Who w-w-was a most un-p-p-pleasant p-p-person.
But w-w-with all his sadly t-t-tricks,
He w-w-was oft in a f-f-fix.
This b-b-bully and b-b-bounder named C-C-urzon!"

The whole dormitory, save one, burst into a roar of laughter. Even Curzon's own toadies were compelled to laugh, so inimitably comic was the style in which the Bat made his little recitation.

But Curzon himself was in a furious and deadly rage. He was white with fury. He darted forward, cane in hand, and hurled himself upon the daring Bat.

"Dodge him, Jimmy!" sang out Teddy.

Jimmy dodged nimbly, and the cane fell with a swish on to the side of the bed where the Bat had sat down again. The latter ran nimbly up the room, and Curzon darted after him in pursuit.

Benson thrust out a foot to trip up the fugitive, but the Bat's squinting eyes missed nothing. He tripped as nimbly as a goat over the outstretched foot, and as he passed his long arm shot out and his fist landed full on Benson's mouth, splitting the upper lip clean through.

The Bat doubled round a washstand and came down the long room again, with Curzon still in hot pursuit, when suddenly the race was checked. It was Ito who now took a hand in the game. He dropped upon one knee almost full in Curzon's path. The big fellow dashed past him, heedless of him, because for his mind was full of catching the Bat and beating him till he yelled for mercy.

But as he passed Ito the little Jap shot out a hand and laid it on Curzon's knee. Then, with all the wonderful skill of the famous jiu-jitsu wrestler he utilised the furious rush of the maddened Curzon to bring about the bully's own downfall. Curzon whirled to one side, as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt, and went down full length, striking his head with a tremendous crash against the iron frame of a bed.

The Bat pulled up and looked over his shoulder, and Teddy sang out: "Well thrown, Ito, old chap! Good business!" But Gibson and Palmer ran to the side of their discomfited leader, and cried out in alarm when they saw how still he lay.

"Nagao has done for him!" cried Gibson. Teddy went across to the spot and turned Curzon over.

"Not a bit of it," said Teddy. "He's all right. He's only landed his head a jolly good crack against the bedstead. Chuck some cold water on him."

This advice was followed, and soon Curzon began to move. He sat up and looked round him in savage anger. He was dizzy and confused, and when he tried to get on his feet, he stumbled and sank down again.

At this moment the prefect came in.

"What's the matter, Curzon?" he asked.

"That little yellow beast of a Jap chucked me," replied Curzon, "and tried to break my neck!"

"Look here, you fellows," said the prefect, "let's have no more of this ragging. Tumble in, all of you. It only wants a few minutes to Lights out."

For a wonder Polly's words were obeyed. Curzon got to his feet and went off to his own quarter of the room. The bully had received so severe a shock that he was cowed for the present.

"I s-s-say, Nagao," stuttered the Bat, "I'm aw-aw-awfully obliged to y-y-you. You've knocked the f-f-fight out of him f-f-for a b-b-bit."

"Rather!" said Teddy. "He hasn't any real pluck, has that Curzon; but we've got to look out for him. He can be a nasty enemy, for he'll hit you any way he can, under the belt or anywhere. Now, we'll tumble in."

And tumble in the three friends did.

THE 8th CHAPTER.
A Run to Oakford.

THE crack which he had received on his head seemed to teach Curzon a little caution. Day after day and night after night slipped by, and he made no further attempt to molest Teddy or his friends. But Teddy knew that his enemy had not forgotten the hot water or the smashed cricket-bag, or the bang on the head, and was only watching his chance to get level with one or all of the three boys who had routed him.

As for the Bat, he was in the seventh heaven of delight. Slapton suited him down to the ground. He got chaffed a good deal about his queer looks, but when his chaffers found that he could use his hard, bony fists to good purpose, and was quite willing to bring them into action, they soon began to leave him alone. Then, he was under the protection of Teddy and Ito, and this saved him a lot of trouble, for Teddy and the little Jap were the most popular couple in the Lower School.

No cricket this afternoon," groaned Teddy, one morning at breakfast.

"N-n-not ll-likely," agreed the Bat. And Ito nodded assent.

There had been tremendous rain for a couple of days, and still it was pouring down in long, level lines, which showed no signs of ceasing.

"The pitch will be too jolly sodden for anyone to go near it," said Teddy. "A wet half-holiday is enough to make a saint growl."

"Perhaps it won't be a wet half-holiday, after all. Bad as it looks, I've heard that the glass is rising," said Ito.

During morning school the clouds thinned, and the rain gradually stopped. By midday it had ceased, and a watery sun was trying to enliven the soaked earth.

"It isn't a wet half-holiday, after all," said Ito, putting away his books on a shelf in the study after morning school.

"No," said Teddy, who was oiling his favourite bat; "but it's no go for cricket."

"It's leave-day for Oakford," went on the little Jap. "Let's go along to the town and take the Bat. He'll like to see Oakford."

"Good idea, Ito, my son!" said Teddy. "So we will."

When the idea was put before the Bat, he flopped his long arms in pleasure. He was keen on seeing the little town to which the boys were allowed to go on fixed days to make any purchases they wished.

The rain had quite stopped when they started, and they enjoyed the three-mile swing across the heath and along the main road which ran into the town. As they entered the place they met Foulkes, who had started half an hour before them.

"I say, you chaps," said Foulkes, "go down to the bridge and have a look at the river. It's a bit of a sight, I can tell you."

"Big flood?" asked Teddy.

"Rather," replied Foulkes; "all the bottom part of the town is flooded. They're fetching people out of bed-room windows with boats."

Teddy and his friends went at once to see this interesting sight. They ran to the bridge bonneath which a broad river flowed through Oakford to the sea. The parapets were thronged with people, watching the tremendous brown flood, which was pouring in wildest fury through the wide arches.

Heavy as the rain had been in the neighbourhood, it must have been heavier still in the uplands thirty miles away. So vast was the volume of water poured down from the hills that the banks could not contain it. One bank was a little lower than the other, and over this the water had poured and entered a low-lying part of the scene of the flooding. The water had already filled the lower rooms of the cottages ceiling high, and the inhabitants were calling for help from the upper windows. Boats were busily plying along the flooded streets, and family after family were rescued from their water-logged homes.

For an hour or more the boys watched the busy and exciting scene; then the Bat looked at his watch and announced:

"T-t-time for the s-s-spread!"

In honour of his first visit to Oakford the Bat meant to treat Teddy and Ito to the finest tea which the famous pastrycook, Mr. Septimus Coddle, could supply.

The three boys went up the High Street, and paused outside the splendid shop, and looked in at the windows piled high with toothsome delicacies.

"Now w-w-we'll have a j-j-jolly good b-b-buster!" remarked the Bat.

At this moment the cheerful sounds of a band sounded from the top of the street.

"Hallo!" said Teddy. "Here come the Volunteers! They're out on a practice march. Let's wait and see 'em go by."

"We w-w-will," said the Bat.

And Ito nodded.

"C-c-eat in and t-t-tell 'em to get things ready, T-Teddy," went on the Bat. "Y-you know the p-place, and it w-w-will save t-t-time. Then w-w-we can g-g-go back and s-s-see the flood."

"Right-ho!" said Teddy. And shot into the shop, at the back of which a number of tables stood ready for customers.

"William," said Teddy, to the stout waiter who knew him well, "just rig out this table in the corner with a jolly good tea for three, and start in and get it at once. We'll be in in a few minutes."

"Yes, sir!" said William, and Teddy returned to his friends.

Now, in his hasty rush in and out, Teddy did not see that Palmer and Gibson were already seated at a table near at hand to the one he had chose; but so it was.

With a malignant eye, Gibson watched William spread the table with a splendid supply of the best the shop could afford.

"Those three beasts are going to sit down to that spread, I expect," he muttered to Palmer. "I wish I could put a dose in the grub that would make 'em jolly sick."

Palmer grinned and nodded.

"And I will," said Gibson suddenly; "at any rate, I'll have a bit of fun with 'em."

He waited till William was out of sight at the farther end of the shop, then made a swift stride to the table, and took a couple of small pies from a plate. With the edge of a knife he neatly lovered the top half off, and took out its contents. The latter he replaced by a mixture of salt, pepper, and mustard from the cruet on the table he was sitting at. Then he carefully fitted the tops of the pies on again, and restored them to their former places.

Three minutes later in came Teddy, Ito, and the Bat. The waiter bustled forward, and showed them to the table, and brought the tea. Keen after their walk, the three boys pitched into the toothsome feast, and Gibson and Palmer waited eagerly to see one of them trapped into biting the stinging mixture with which the two pies were loaded.

Now, Teddy and Ito had their backs to the enemy, and saw nothing of them; but the Bat had had one of his wandering eyes on them from the moment he sat down at the table. Thanks to the squint, he could watch them while they believed him to be staring thoughtfully at the clock on the wall; and the Bat did watch them.

"Those chaps have got a bit up their sleeve," said the Bat to himself. "They've done something so clever that they're just about tickled to death. What is it? By the way they're watching the table it must be some rag on us."

He was still watching them, though they did not suspect it, when he reached out his hand and seized one of the doctored pies. The Bat saw a grin of unholy joy pass over the faces of the conspirators, and at the same moment his sense of touch warned him that the top of the pie was loose.

This was enough for the wide-awake Bat. He put the pie on his plate, carefully slid aside the top, and saw the queer-looking mixture inside. Teddy and Ito were too busy with their own share of the feast to notice how slow he was in starting on the brown and toothsome-looking morsel.

Then the Bat leaned over the table, and whispered to them:

"I'm going to start a little performance," he whispered. "Don't get rattled at the exhibition. I'm going to frighten a couple of chaps

"Look here, William," said Teddy, "you've served us with an uncommon queer pie. What have you been putting in it?"

Gibson and Palmer were in hysterics of delight in their shady corner. Their little joke was panning out ten times as rich as they had expected. It would involve the whole shop now.

"That pie, sir," said William, in surprise, "there ain't nothing wrong with that! Nice little pie that, sir!"

At this moment the Bat let out an awful hollow groan, which went to the hearts of all who heard it.

"Oh-o-o-oh!" he moaned. "I f-f-feel queer! I feel horribly qu-qu-queer!" This was quite true, for in his bite he had really taken a little of Gibson's mixture. "Oh, I'm p-p-poisoned!"

"Poisoned!"

The word rang through the shop, and thrilled everyone. Mr. Coddle rushed forward, and gazed in horror on the pale face of the Bat, who had fallen back in his chair, his squinting eyes rolling up in his head till little more than the whites were visible.

"He thinks he's poisoned!" chortled Gibson, in a gleeful whisper to Palmer. "What fun! Never mind, let him think so! He must be in a jolly funk!"

But little did they know the wily Bat. He was planning how to turn the suspicion of being the poisoners on the two enemies, when the matter was taken clean out of his hands, and brought about in a most effective fashion.

At the opposite side of the room, a stout, elderly lady had been placidly taking her tea. Her table was in shade of a large screen, and neither Gibson nor Palmer had noticed her. Now she hustled forward full of excitement.

"Poisoned!" she cried. "Is that poor boy poisoned? Oh, how dreadful he looks! Then that's the one who did it!" She shot out a fat hand, and pointed an accusing forefinger straight at Gibson. "I saw him myself go to that table, and put something on one of the plates. He did it when the waiter's back was turned."

Gibson tripped up and came to the ground with a crash. A huge bowl of custard dropped on his head and distributed its contents over his person.

"My word, Mrs. Pettifer," cried Mr. Coddle, "that's a frightful thing you're saying."

"But it's true, Mr Coddle!" cried Mrs. Pettifer. "As sure as I've got two eyes in my head, I saw that boy do it, and what's more I've seen him laughing since this poor boy was took ill. He did it on purpose, and you ought to fetch a policeman at once to take him up."

Gibson had been utterly dumbfounded by the appearance and accusation of Mrs. Pettifer, but now he bleated out:

"Nonsense, that's all wrong! I've never moved out of my chair."

"That's a lie!" cried the irate countrywoman, who was the wife of a well-known local grazier. "I saw you with my own eyes! Over to this table you came, and something you put on one of the plates. That I can swear to. Just look at this poor lad!"

This brought all eyes on the Bat, who now let out a most awful sepulchral groan, and then followed it up by assuming an attitude of rigid stiffness, varied by jerks of his limbs.

"He's in convulsions!" screamed Mrs. Pettifer. Oh, that wicked villain's poisoned him!"

"Run, William!" shouted Mr. Coddle. "Fetch a policeman and a doctor!"

There was no more merry giggling from the wretched Gibson. At the mention of a policeman he turned green with fright. Was he to be dragged through the streets of Oakford to the lock-up, on a charge of poisoning? He tried to gasp out an explanation, but the words would not come. He knew that the Bat was shamming illness in a most wonderful fashion, unless the cruet was poisoned, and that was not likely.

His mind turned swiftly to escape, and he turned, and made a mad rush for the door.

"Stop him!" yelled Mr. Coddle. "Hold him!" and Mrs. Pettifer yelled:

"Police! Police!" with all her might.

But the honours of the situation were carried off by Fat Bill. He had gone to the other side of the shop, and he was far too stout to catch a nimble boy whose sleeve stood wired with fear. But he whipped up one of the light, cane chairs, and flung it with such dexterity that it dropped exactly in the path of the fleeing Gibson. The fugitive, unable to check himself, set one foot between the rungs, tripped up, and came down with a crash.

He seized a table near at hand to save himself, but only succeeded in dragging it over, and bringing its contents on top of himself. The chief thing was a huge bowl of cup-custard, and this dropped on his head, and its contents were distributed over his person.

At this instant a policeman hurried in at the shop-door. He had been passing on the other side of the way, and had been called in by the young lady who served at the counter.

"Seize that rascal, constable!" shouted Mr. Coddle in a fury, and the policeman pounced on Gibson, had him by the collar in a second, and dragged him to his feet.

Gibson's appearance would have made an owl laugh, plastered as he was from head to foot with streams of yellow custard. Now he found his tongue.

"I tell you it's all a mistake!" he screamed. "I put nothing in the pie but stuff out of the cruet!"

"Oh, then you did put something in!" cried Mr. Coddle. "Now we're getting towards the truth."

Hitherto, Palmer had been a very uncomfortable spectator. He spoke up at last.

"It's quite true what Gibson says!" he blurted out. "He mixed some salt, pepper, and mustard, and put it in the pies, for a joke. Look at the cruet! See, the stuff's all gone!"

"Ah!"

The Bat heaved a long-drawn breath of relief. It was time to give up his performance, and resume ordinary life in order to enjoy the joke. Mrs. Pettifer was carefully examining and smelling the mixture in the pie.

"I don't know," she said doubtfully. "It might be that, or it might not! How do you feel, my poor boy?"

"I begin to feel all right again," said the Bat, in a feeble voice. "But it frightened me so much, you see, to taste that funny stuff in a pie."

"Of course it did, poor lad!" said Mrs. Pettifer. "No wonder it gave you a turn."

"Then it ain't poison, Mr. Coddle?" said the policeman, who had had a slightly coloured account of the affair from the young lady.

"Seems not!" said Mr. Coddle. "It's this 'ere Gibson who thinks he's very clever at his tricks. But you ain't so clever as usual, Mr. Gibson. For one thing, you've got yourself into a very pretty mess. For another, you've got to pay for the damage you've done; and for another, I'm going to write to Dr. Balshaw, your headmaster, about this game. And I'm going to send the bill to him, so that I shall be sure to get my money. Now, you clear out of my shop at once!"

"But look what a mess I'm in!" whined Gibson. "I must clean myself before I go into the street."

"You won't do it here, anyhow," said Mr. Coddle. "Put him out, constable!"

The constable did so at once, and thrust Gibson into the street. A crowd of idlers and children had gathered at the door, and these howled with delight when the custard-plastered Gibson was pushed into the middle of them.

The unlucky Gibson started to waddle down the street, attended by a crowd of small boys. At last he was compelled to take to his heels to escape them, and he fled from Oakford amid a volley of jeers and gibes.

Inside the shop the Bat returned to his interrupted tea, with a will which showed that he had quite recovered.

"I-d-d-don't think J-J-Jeremy T-T-Titus had much change out of me this t-t-time," said the Bat.

"Not this time, Bat old man!" grinned Teddy. "You were simply great!"

When the tea was over Teddy looked at his watch.

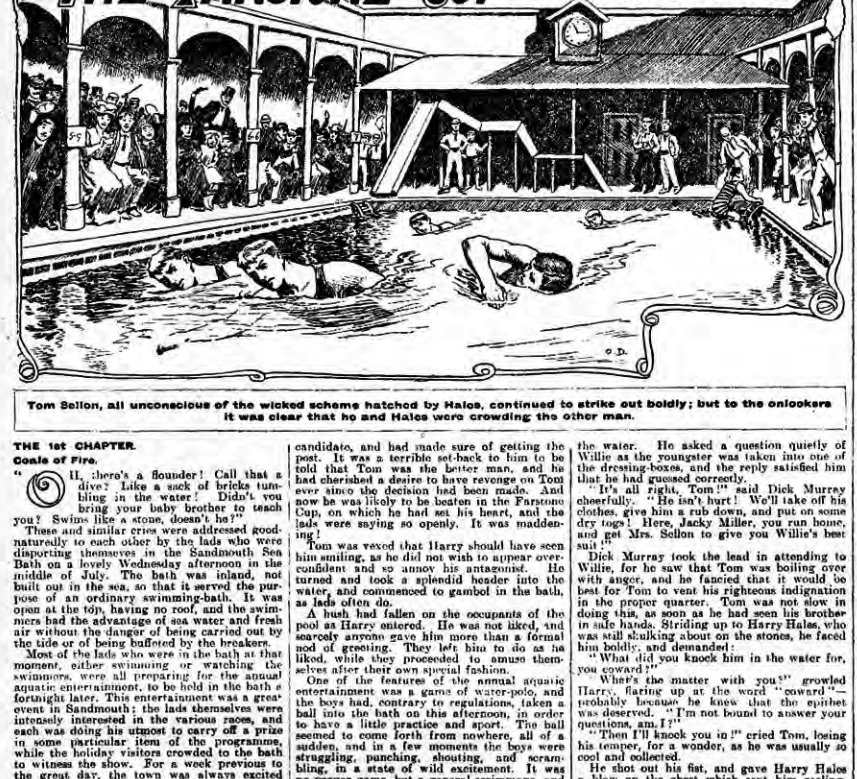
"Plenty of time for another look at the flood," he said.

The bill was settled, and the three comrades left the shop, and went towards the swollen river. They expected to turn their faces towards the school in another half-hour. Little did they dream that a most exciting adventure lay before them, and that they would never see the school that night.

(To be continued on Saturday next.)

THE FARSTONE CUP

A SWIMMING STORY BY BRUCE HOWARD



Tom Sellon, all unconscious of the wicked scheme hatched by Hales, continued to strike out boldly; but to the onlookers it was clear that he and Hales were crowding the other man.

THE 1st CHAPTER.
Coals of Fire.

"Oh, there's a flounder! Call that a dive? Like a sack of bricks tumbling in the water! Didn't you bring your baby brother to teach you? Swims like a stone, doesn't he?"

These and similar cries were addressed good-naturedly to each other by the lads who were disporting themselves in the Sandmouth Sea Bath on a lovely Wednesday afternoon in the middle of July. The bath was inland, not built out in the sea, so that it served the purpose of an ordinary swimming-bath. It was open at the top, having no roof, and the swimmers had the advantage of sea water and fresh air without the danger of being carried out by the tide or of being buffeted by the breakers.

Most of the lads who were in the bath at that moment, either swimming or watching the swimmers, were all preparing for the annual aquatic entertainment, to be held in the bath a fortnight later. This entertainment was a great event in Sandmouth; the lads themselves were intensely interested in the various races, and each was doing his utmost to carry off a prize in some particular item of the programme, while the holiday visitors crowded to the bath to witness the show. For a week previous to the great day, the town was always excited over the aquatic sports, and to be absent from the bath on that eventful afternoon was to miss a treat.

Wednesday afternoon was the weekly half-holiday, and the lads spent it in the sea-bath, practising for the races. There were about twenty of them there when Jacky Miller took his so-called "header" into the water, and he made such a terrible splash and flounder that he started the cries, and then they became general and good-natured, as one after another of the lads entered the water.

In spite of their interest in their own special exertions, the boys found opportunity to watch the evolutions and efforts of one of their number, who was a general favourite, as well as one of the most expert swimmers in the town. Tom Sellon gave abundant proof of good form and staying-power as he shot swiftly and easily through the water on his trial of speed and endurance, and, when he had completed the sixth length of the bath in excellent time, they could not refrain from giving him a hearty cheer.

"You'll win it, Tom! Harry can't beat that! You'll get the Farstone Cup!" cried the other swimmers, one after another, as Tom placed his hands on the stone edging of the bath and drew himself out of the water.

He was pleased to find that his companions had such a high opinion of his chance of success against the only competitor who could hope to win in a contest with him, and he could not resist a smile of gratification, but it was unfortunate that Harry Hales pushed open the door at that juncture and saw the smile. He had heard the shouts and the remarks, which were unflattering to him; they had reached his ears as he turned the handle of the door which gave access to what the boys called "the pool," and there had come over his face a scowl that was not agreeable to behold. The scowl deepened when he noticed that smile on his rival's countenance, and his heart throbbed more quickly as the desire for revenge took possession of him.

Hales had cherished vengeful feelings against Tom Sellon for a long time, owing to the fact that Tom was very popular in the town, and he was not; but the sentiment had deepened very much during the preceding months, because Tom had obtained a capital situation in the town clerk's office. Hales had also been a candidate, and had made sure of getting the post. It was a terrible set-back to him to be told that Tom was the better man, and he had otherwise a desire to have revenge on Tom ever since the decision had been made. And now he was likely to be beaten in the Farstone Cup, on which he had set his heart, and the lads were saying so openly. It was maddening!

Tom was vexed that Harry should have seen him smiling, as he did not wish to appear over-confident and so annoy his antagonist. He turned and took a splendid header into the water, and commenced to gambol in the bath, as lads often do.

A bush had fallen on the occupants of the pool as Harry entered. He was not liked, and scarcely anyone gave him more than a formal nod of greeting. They left him to do as he liked, while they proceeded to amuse themselves after their own special fashion.

One of the features of the annual aquatic entertainment was a game of water-polo, and the boys had, contrary to regulations, taken a ball into the bath on this afternoon, in order to have a little practice and sport. The ball seemed to come forth from nowhere, all of a sudden, and in a few moments the boys were struggling, punching, shouting, and scrambling, in a state of wild excitement. It was no proper game, but a general scrimmage, and the shrieks of laughter which burst from the lips of the players showed how immensely they were enjoying it. Tom Sellon was one of the foremost, and he was so engrossed in the play that he paid no further heed to Harry Hales.

The latter, brooding over what he had heard and seen, undressed, and got into bathing costume. He was a tall, strong young fellow, and would have been prepossessing in appearance had it not been for his surly disposition, which impressed upon his otherwise good-looking features a forbidding expression which made most of the town lads fight shy of him.

He walked about on the stones and surveyed the players with an ill-natured air. His attention was directed towards Tom Sellon in particular, and a keen observer would have said that he was meditating some evil designs against his popular rival.

So intent was he on what Tom was doing that he did not notice where he himself was going, and he came into violent collision with a smaller lad, who was standing, fully dressed, on the edge of the water, gazing with evident amusement at the scramble that was going on. This was Willie Sellon. Tom's much younger brother, who had been forbidden by the doctor to indulge in the exhilarating exercise of swimming because he was not strong enough to remain in the cold water.

Like a flash of lightning, Harry saw one opportunity of spiting Tom Sellon, and, before anyone could see what he did, before he himself could really understand how it happened, Harry had given him a push that sent him flop into the water!

It was the deep end, but there was no danger in that fall, as Harry Hales well knew, for the lads were by Willie's side in an instant, and had raised him between them so as to keep him above the surface. Nevertheless, it was a shock to the nervous little fellow, who could not swim, and the sudden immersion in the sea water was not calculated to do him any good. It was a mean action, and Harry knew it; but it pleased him greatly to be able to work off his spite on someone connected with Tom Sellon, and he did not care what harm it might do to Willie.

Tom did not see what had taken place, but it did not require much cleverness on his part to guess how his brother had come to fall into the water. He asked a question quietly of Willie as the youngster was taken into one of the dressing-boxes, and the reply satisfied him that he had guessed correctly.

"It's all right, Tom!" said Dick Murray cheerfully. "He isn't hurt! We'll take off his clothes, give him a rub down, and put on some dry togs! Here, Jacky Miller, you run home, and get Mrs. Sellon to give you Willie's best suit!"

Dick Murray took the lead in attending to Willie, for he saw that Tom was boiling over with anger, and he fancied that it would be best for Tom to vent his righteous indignation in the proper quarter. Tom was not slow in doing this, as soon as he had seen his brother in safe hands. Striding up to Harry Hales, who was still skulking about on the stones, he faced him boldly, and demanded:

"What did you knock him in the water for, you coward?"

"What's the matter with you?" growled Harry, flaring up at the word "coward"—probably because he knew that the epithet was deserved. "I'm not bound to answer your questions, am I?"

"Then I'll knock you in!" cried Tom, losing his temper, for a wonder, as he was usually so cool and collected.

He shot out his fist, and gave Harry Hales a blow on the chest which sent him reeling. He threw up his arms in a vain effort to retain his equilibrium, and then fell backwards into the pool with a loud splash. Tom jumped in after him without thinking, and when Hales regained his feet they were facing one another in water up to their armpits.

Then ensued a novel "scrapping match," to quote Dick Murray's description of what followed. The two lads squared up to one another, and commenced a pugilistic encounter, which was carried on under difficulties.

Everyone knows that water offers great resistance to a stroke from the arms or legs, and so it proved in this encounter. Blows were aimed with the arms almost hidden by the briny fluid, and they lost much of their force in consequence. When either of the young combatants tried to deal a blow by raising the arm clear out of the water, the effect was spoiled by the awkwardness of holding the arm so high. To dodge one another in the impeding water was also very difficult, and both the young fellows became tired before they had had a chance of doing much damage to each other.

The queer boxing-match was settled for the time being by Tom getting in a whack at Harry's left eye which sent that individual down under the surface with a gasp. When he came up, he was too busily engaged in choking and spluttering to come up to time before the bath attendant entered with a bustle of importance, and insisted on all the boys leaving the bath.

"If you ain't able to behave yourselves like gentlemen," he declared loftily, "you'd better stay outside!"

"All right, Cherry-face!" said one of the little ones cheekily; but he took good care to keep behind a bigger boy while he said it.

The bath-attendant was speechless with indignation and astonishment at this reference to his very red countenance, which was not all due to wind and weather, and he tried to discover the culprit, but without success.

There was no chance for Harry Hales to continue the fight until he was dressed and outside the bath, but by that time he had grown calmer, and did not attempt to renew the struggle.

"He's more nimble than me, and he'll give me what for!" he thought, with an evil frown.

"I'll take it out of him for that in some other way, and it'll be a way that'll hurt him, too, or my name ain't Hales!"

So he scurried off without a word, and Tom Sellon went home with his brother and put him to bed, lest he should have taken cold. Willie had to be guarded against taking cold, for it was feared that he might develop pneumonia.

For the next seven days Harry Hales avoided a meeting with Tom Sellon, who took his practice in the early morning and in the evening after working hours. Harry would have done the same in ordinary circumstances, but he purposely obtained leave in the middle of the day, working later to make it up. It was not, therefore, until the following Wednesday afternoon that the lads even so much as saw one another, and then it was on the cliffs above the sea, where some hundreds of people, visitors and townsmen, had assembled to witness the practice of the crews who were to take part in the regatta.

It was a dull, cheerless day, with occasional showers of rain that seemed to chill the spectators, but they remained on the beach and the cliffs to watch the crews with a determination that showed how intensely they were interested in manly, health-giving sports and pastimes.

Many of the lads were there, as only a few could resist the attraction and go to the bath. Tom saw Hales and Dick Murray, while Jacky Miller and some of the others were to be seen on a neighbouring cliff. Some of them seated themselves on the grassy or rocky heights, while others, like Tom, roamed hither and thither from one spot to another point of vantage.

It was through this restless moving about that Tom suddenly discovered that he was quite close to Harry on a point of the cliff that stood high above all others. Only about half a dozen people, besides the two rivals, were on that point, which was generally regarded as somewhat dangerous in consequence of the crumbling of the earth and the very uneven and slippery surface.

"Well, I don't want to have any quarrel with him just now," muttered Tom under his breath, "so I'll edge! This sport is too good to be lost through a scrap with him; besides which, I don't want to have anything to do with him!"

He moved away, but forgot Hales in the very next moment as one of the boats made a fine effort. It commanded the admiration of all the spectators, and a cheer of approval went up from some hundreds of throats.

"That was good!" cried Tom excitedly. "Hurrah!"

Moving hastily about, he found that his view was spoilt by a man who had got in front of him. He turned to the left, and then stood transfixed with horror as he saw a figure tumble over the cliff and heard a scream of agony and fear!

In a moment everyone was on the alert. The boats' crews stopped work, and gazed up at the cliff in consternation; the people on the neighbouring cliffs either ran down in their direction or stood still in sheer helplessness. The ladies clasped their hands, some screamed, and others wept silently.

"He's gone! He's killed! He's dashed to death! No; he has been caught by a bush! Look, he's hanging by his coat! Good gracious, he'll drop! Can't be saved!"

Tom heard most of the cries, and he gathered that the wretched human was the old verger, or that the earth had given way under his feet, and had gone down the side of the cliff until, by rare good luck, his coat had caught on a bush, and held him suspended between life and death! Tom's face flew downwards on the cliff, and peered over the edge. He could see the man, hanging by his jacket. Who was it? Why, it was Harry Hales!

Tom's breath seemed to stop as he recognised that the wretched human was his enemy! He could not see his face, for Hales was suspended in such a way that his features were hidden from the view of those on the top of the cliff, but Tom had not the slightest doubt of his identity.

"Here, we must save him!" cried Tom Sellon, springing to his feet unthinkingly, and thereby narrowly escaping a similar fate. "What can be done? Hi, Harry!" he called aloud to Hales. "Keep up your pecker! We'll save you!"

He was full of excitement now. Dashing down the cliff, he made his way to a spot where he knew that a boatman kept a rope. Hurriedly explaining his errand, he quickly enlisted the assistance of the old man, and together they toiled up again with the coil that was to be used in trying to rescue Harry Hales.

That coil was heavy, and their progress would have been slow indeed had it not been for a dozen of the lads, who had come rushing from other parts of the cliff to this one. They rapidly uncoiled the line, and shouldered it among them, so that it was easy and quick work to get it to the spot.

The boatmen had taken their little crafts to the nearest point at the bottom of the cliff in the hope of being of some assistance, but it was clear that the rescue must come from the top. Tom made no ado about it. He proceeded to tie the rope round his waist as soon as he reached the edge, and called to the others to secure the rope to some convenient point, and then lower him gently down the face of the cliff.

He made the request in so determined a tone that no one thought of contradicting, and a minute later he was dangling against the wall of earth, while the boatmen and the spectators on other parts of the beach and cliff almost held their breath in suspense.

Nearer and nearer! Ha! Tom Sellon has

The Farstone Cup.

(Continued from the previous page.)

the unfortunate youth by the waist, and is passing a hanging end of the rope round his body! Hurrah! There they are, both hanging by the rope, and the strong arms on top are pulling them up, inch by inch, to safety.

"Bravo! Hurrah! Brave fellow! Give him three cheers! He's at the top! Look, the men have them, and are raking the rope off! Hurrah, hurrah!"

And, in the midst of all this excitement, what did Hales think?

"Confound him! I wish it had been someone else! Never mind, I know what I'll do! This gives me a good opportunity of pretending to be great friends with him, and that will give me the chance to upset him next week, and send him into disgrace! Good idea, and I can do it all right! That will make things square for the town clerk job, which he did me out of! I'll pay him!"

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
A Dastardly Trick.

HALES lost no time in putting his scheme into practice. He took Tom's hand, and shook it fervently.

"Tom, I owe my safety to you!" he said, with every appearance of gratitude and frankness. "I'm sorry if we've been bad friends, and I'll do all I can to make it up, old chap!"

"That's all right!" returned Tom modestly, feeling quite taken aback by Hales's candour and offer of friendship. "Don't mention it! I'm sure we can be good friends, if we understand one another! It will be different in future, won't it?"

"It will!" rejoined Harry Hales decisively. "And if there's anything I can do for you, you can rely on me!"

"Thanks!" said Tom heartily. "And it I can do anything for you——"

"Look here!" said Hales, as a thought struck him. "Shall I keep out of the Farstone Cup?"

He knew well enough that Tom would not accept the proposition. He was right, for Sellon shook his head vigorously, but could say nothing, because people were now crowding round the pair.

Tom was overwhelmed with congratulations on his bravery, which made him anxious to get away, and caused Hales to harbour still more bitter feelings against his rescuer. After having to submit to many handshakes and expressions of commendation, Tom managed to slip away and go home.

During the succeeding week, Hales was constantly in Tom Sellon's company. They were to be seen in the baths—swimming in friendly rivalry—in the streets, or on the beach. The townspeople smiled and nodded. It was surprising, yet very pleasant, to see the two young fellows on such intimate terms. Hales was playing his part well, and Tom was completely deceived.

Dick Murray began to be noticed as a prominent competitor in the great 240 yards event. Dick was a good swimmer, but was generally considered that he had no chance against Sellon and Hales, if those two were in good form. Hales, however, seized every occasion that presented itself in order to praise Dick, and express doubts of the chances of Tom and himself against this competitor. Hales went to work very skilfully and cunningly, and within three days, there was a common opinion that Tom Sellon and Harry Hales were not in such good form, after all, and that Dick Murray was certainly in the running. One wag said "in the swimming," but his joke was voted extravagant, and he was promptly bonneted by Jacky Miller.

On the morning of the great day, Hales took care to let it be known that Dick Murray was regarded as a prime favourite by Tom and himself, but added he thought they could do the trick for Dicky. In that artful way he prepared the people for what he intended to do against Tom Sellon, and he went to the baths in the afternoon with a glow of satisfaction pervading his being.

Dick Murray was also exhilarated. He had entered for the Farstone Cup in order to make a good time record for himself, rather than with the hope of winning. If either Tom or Harry should not be in good form, he would win a prize, rather than did not appear probable when he entered his name. Now, however, it seemed that both were out of form. Why, he might win the Farstone Cup!

Tom Sellon had said very little. He had heard all Hales's assurances, and he began to have some misgivings about his own powers. Nevertheless, he determined to strain every muscle to win. He had a good reputation as a swimmer in Sandmouth, and it would be a blow if he did not win the cup, which was being given for the first time by Lord Farstone.

The bath enclosure was more crowded on that occasion than ever before. In order to provide accommodation for guests it was necessary at all times to bring forms, stools, and chairs to be ranged along three sides of the water; but on the present occasion there was not enough room, either sitting or standing, for the number of people who came to witness the different events. Steps and short ladders were requisitioned from a neighbouring builder, and the younger visitors used these as seats or stands. It was a quaint sight to see the bath enclosure crowded in that manner, and a glance at the spectators revealed the fact that they included all sorts of people, townsfolk, and visitors, from the highest to the lowest, with Lord Farstone, the lord of the manor and owner of half the town, in a prominent seat.

The dressing-boxes were at one end of the enclosure, and that was the part which had been kept clear of spectators. Only the officials who were arranging the sports were on that end.

The entertainment commenced punctually at half-past two, and the minor events went off first. They were interesting, and the style and prowess of the competitors received their due measure of praise. One after another the items of the programme went off, and it was noticeable that Tom, Harry, and Dick preserved themselves, to a great extent, for the Farstone Cup. Dick Murray came out the winner in the 120 yards, however, and that made everybody take a still more favourable view of his chances in the bigger race, although it was admitted that he had no Tom Sellon or Harry Hales to meet in that shorter struggle. Tom and Harry both participated in the obstacle race and in the endurance test, which latter meant fishing for pig plates thrown into the water by the steward. Tom won the prize in this test, for he remained under water longer, and fished up more plates than either of the competitors. This success on Tom's part, with the corresponding defeat for Harry, served to increase the latter's determination to carry out his wicked scheme.

"That's the last time he'll crow over me!" he muttered savagely, although Tom Sellon had really behaved with the utmost modesty, and had not exhibited any undue sign of pleasure at the result. "He beat me in getting the situation," he went on, hugging his old, fancied grievance, "and he'd most likely beat me for the cup, but he won't have the chance of winning it. I'm going to be glad to slink out of Sandmouth when it's over!"

He was recalled to a sense of his surroundings by a warning word from the steward. It was time to prepare for the great event, for only one item now remained before Tom would be called for the Farstone Cup race. Harry disappeared in one of the boxes to undress.

Tom was also preparing, and, although he could not tell why, he felt uneasy.

"I fancy I'm going to come out of this rather badly!" he muttered, as he slipped off his things and got into the bathing-costume. "I don't know why I'm like this to-day, but I don't seem to be able to shake it off! I say, it will be a blow, even if I lose, for everybody seems to reckon that I ought to pull it off if I am as good a swimmer as they have supposed me to be all along. Oh, bother! I mustn't funk it, or I shall lose!"

Time was at last called, and the competitors came out. Tom gave a quick glance round the bath, and shut his mouth firmly. He meant to make a desperate effort to get in first. There were six competitors in all, and three of them, not being regarded as extra good swimmers, had thirty or forty seconds' start. Harry Hales and Dick Murray also had a start, for Tom Sellon was the best man. Dick had ten seconds' start, and Harry had five.

Only the immediate friends of the three outsiders paid any attention to their efforts; the general interest was centred in the remaining three. All waited rather impatiently until the seconds had been ticked off, and Dick Murray made the plunge. That was the real beginning of the great race, and every spectator became alive.

Dick made the most of his time, and then a splash told him that Harry Hales was coming after him with a powerful overarm stroke. Five seconds more, and Tom Sellon went into the water in grand style, and forged ahead with a strong breast-stroke. He was not only a powerful swimmer, but also showed grace of movement, which was not so noticeable in the others.

Steadily, but surely, the last three swimmers overhauled the first and passed them. Dick Murray was the first to do it, as one might expect, but Harry Hales was close behind, having decreased the distance gained by Dick during the five seconds. Tom Sellon, however, showed the greatest improvement in that way, for he was nearer to Hales than even that worthy individual imagined.

The three lads, now well in front, had done two lengths of the bath, which meant eighty yards, or one-third of the entire length as ranged for the race. The bath was wide enough to allow all the swimmers to pass one another without inconvenience, so they did not hamper their less fortunate competitors by forging ahead.

During the third length the excitement augmented considerably. Slowly the three had changed their original positions, and, as the end of the bath was reached, all three touched the stone at the same time. A shout rose from the townspeople, and a murmur from the more fashionable visitors, as the young fellows commenced the fourth length abreast.

"Go it, Tom! Keep it up, Harry! Pluck on you, Dick! You'll win if you stick! Go it —go it!"

From all sides came encouraging cries that made the blood tingle in the veins of the three chief swimmers. A laugh that rippled through the ranks of spectators told that one of the other three had given up. The remaining two hung on pluckily, but they had no chance.

Tom now felt that a great effort was to be made. Dick was swimming in good style, and keeping up the pace. Harry Hales was also doing well, but he made more splash in the water than the other two. He tried all kinds of strokes, and showed good form in the overarm; but did not cut much of a figure with the trudgeon and other styles.

"Bravo, Tom; you're in front! Keep there!" shouted some of Tom's friends, as he crept away from Dick and Harry. Hales made a terrific spurt, and also got in front; and then the three turned for the fifth length.

Tom Sellon swam for all he was worth, but he felt that he was not doing as well as ought. His wind was not so good, and he felt just a little fagged; nevertheless, he kept on as hard as ever, although the judges could see that the race was taking more out of him than they could have expected. He kept in front, and that was the great thing.

Hales also kept in front, but the judges began to knit their brows as the lads went along the bath for that length. Harry was making a great splash, and Dick Murray seemed to be trying to pass him without being able to do so.

As each second went by, it became more and more apparent to the spectators, as well as to the judges, that something was wrong. Every time that Dick Murray made an attempt to get past Hales and Tom Sellon were in his way, or they edged him in the way of the other two swimmers, who were toiling along bravely, but hopelessly. What was the matter? The bath was wide enough!

Round for the final length, the last forty yards. Tom Sellon, all unconscious of the wicked scheme hatched by Hales, continued to strike out boldly; but to the onlookers it was clear that Hales and he had tried the old trick of crowding a man so that he could not forge ahead. Hales had executed his plan with a skill that was thoroughly wicked. That Dick Murray would actually have won the cup is exceedingly doubtful, for Tom would have spurted at the risk of breaking a blood-vessel; but Hales made this supreme effort unnecessary on Tom's part. He was killing Dick's chance.

As they neared the end of the length the cries of "Bravo!" and other shouts of encouragement to Tom, fell off, and gave place to murmurs of indignation. As Tom, breathless and scarcely able to pull himself up, scrambled to his feet on the paving-stones, and expected to hear the customary applause, he was staggered by the prolonged hissing, and by the indignant cries of "Shame!" which greeted him. In a dazed kind of manner he saw Hales and Murray get out of the water; he heard the judges make acusations of foul play that tingled in his ears, and made his cheeks flush red and hot, and then he heard Hales speaking.

"I'll own up! Yes, we did play the trick! We didn't intend to let him win! Sellon and I agreed to do it; but we played the game too clumsily, and we've spoiled ourselves. And what of it?"

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
A Gallant Rescue.

THE roar of anger which followed this brazen-faced confession was enough to annihilate with shame even the most hardened rascal, and Hales felt small enough; but what of innocent Tom Sellon? It came upon him like a bomb, and he was speechless with horror at Harry's downright wickedness. Like a flash he saw through it. Hales had deliberately ignored Tom's daring rescue, and had planned to damage his career, because he had won the situation, and would have won the cup against Hales.

Tom was unable to utter a word in his own defence, and he would not have been believed had he spoken. All the circumstances were against him—the great friendship of the past few days, the belief that he was not in first-class form, the rumours of Dick's chance of success, and Harry's own admission of inferiority—all were against him! How artfully it had all been planned! Sick at heart, Tom almost fell into the dressing-box and shut himself in. He hastily changed, and left the bath by the simple method of getting out at the back of the dressing-box and clambering over the enclosing wall.

He could imagine what had taken place, although he had not seen it. Dick Murray had been declared the winner of the cup, Hales had been ordered out of the bath, and both Hales and himself had been warned not to enter again. His mother and father—what would they think? Luckily, neither was present, for his father was away, and his mother too ill to go to the entertainment. Poor Willie was there, and he shrank within himself, and covered his face with his hands.

Tom Sellon wandered aimlessly about at the far end of the beach, among the rocks. He dared not show himself at home until he felt calmer and could think.

"I can't stay in the town unless I can clear myself, and I don't see what I can do in that way," he told himself wearily. "Hales made a confession, so they won't believe me, and I have no proof. I shall lose my position in the town clerk's office, and——"

He could not pursue his meditations in that direction; it was too terrible! He sat down on a rock, and, covering his face with both hands, tried to think of something else.

He did not remember how long he had thus sat on the rock when he thought that he heard a cry for help. He paid no heed at first, but the cry was repeated, and he stood up and glanced round him. Gracious! The tide was in; he was surrounded; but he also saw that someone else was in a worse plight.

An elderly man was standing on a piece of

(Continued on the next page.)

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220 " " - - 4 m. 0 secs.	220 " " - - 3 m. 40 secs.
440 " " - - 8 m. 30 secs.	440 " " - - 8 m. 0 secs.

SECTION 2.—RUNNING.

Age 12-15. APPLICANTS MUST RUN—	Age 16-18. APPLICANTS MUST RUN—
100 yards in - - - 14 secs.	100 yards in - - - 12 secs.
300 " " - - - 44 secs.	300 " " - - - 38 secs.
440 " " - - - 60 secs.	440 " " - - - 57 secs.
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higher rock, much larger in extent, about twenty yards farther out. The water at that point, as Tom knew, was deeper than where he himself stood, and it was evident that the man was in a very anxious state of mind. He was waving his arms as he stood erect, and shouting for assistance.

Tom plunged into the sea without hesitation, all dressed as he was, and swam out to the man. The lad was not unaccustomed to swimming in full dress, as that had been one of the experiments occasionally made in the bath. He was soon at the man's side on the slippery rocks.

"My lad, I thank you!" said he gravely, and with old-fashioned courtesy. "I was poking among the pools left on this stretch of rock by the last tide, hunting for specimens of shellfish and other things, and I forgot to notice the way the tide was coming in. I can't swim!"

"That's all right, sir!" returned Tom cheerily. "Here," he added, turning towards the land again, "hold on to me!"

"I didn't hear all you said!" cried the elderly gentleman. "I am deaf. I should have understood if you had not turned your face in the other direction just then."

Tom stared; but he repeated his words in a loud voice, and dropped into the sea. The stranger did not hesitate to follow, and Tom struck out for land, the gentleman just keeping himself above water by holding Tom's coat.

As soon as they were near enough to the beach to be able to stand and wade, the stranger breasted the waves, and they walked from the breakers to dry land. With just a couple of words, the stranger led the way to a house only a few yards off, where he lodged, and they were both accommodated with rooms in which to undress and dry themselves.

"I'll do as I was told till I get fresh togs," said Tom, so he jumped into the bed and made himself comfortable.

It was about half an hour later when the deaf gentleman entered; he was beaming with a benevolent smile as he seated himself by the side of the bed.

"So you are the celebrated young swimmer of Sandmouth—eh?" he remarked pleasantly. "My landlady recognised you, and spoke of the afternoon entertainment in the bathe. I suppose you won—eh?"

That was almost too much for poor Tom, and he flushed to the temples.

"They played me a trick!" he blurted forth finally, but in an ordinary tone. Then he remembered that his new acquaintance was deaf, and was about to shout an answer, when the stranger stopped him by raising his hand.

"I know what you said," he returned, just a trifle more seriously. "Ha, you have something on your mind! Tell me all about it, my lad. I often set things straight. He, he! That's part of my mission in life. I have money and influence, and they help me to set a great many things right."

He laughed and rubbed his hands. It seemed to be a veritable pleasure to him to set things straight, as he called it, and Tom could fancy that he was one of those kindly persons who are always on the look-out to aid those who are in trouble. So Tom let himself go, and told the whole story in as few words as possible.

The elderly gentleman listened attentively When Tom had concluded the recital of the wrong done to him, the stranger laughed and rubbed his hands.

"You can call me Mr. Sternbridge," he said kindly. "This is just the sort of thing I want to make my little holiday pleasant. He, he! I have a trouble to get straight, and that's part of my mission, you know. Let me see. How can I manage to get you out of this, now?"

Tom could not help feeling more cheerful. Mr. Sternbridge seemed to be bubbling over with good intentions.

"I don't understand how it is, sir, that you can tell what I am saying, and yet you don't hear," he queried suddenly. I can't——"

"Oh, easily enough!" was the smiling rejoinder. "I may miss a little, but not much. Well, it's like this—I have learned the lip language. I know by the movements of your mouth, assisted by the expressions that pass over your face and by your gestures, what you are saying. It sounds strange, but it's true, and deaf persons learn it. Now, just notice one example, and you will begin to believe. When I say 'mother,' I shut my lips, first of all, and then open the mouth rather wide. If I say 'other,' I don't press the lips together at the start, but I open the mouth wide."

Tom was intensely interested; but he could not ask any more questions, for Mr. Sternbridge continued:

"I've thought of a way to help you. You must try to meet your enemy, and have it out with him, so to say. You must ask why he did it, and so on. You must get him to stand, so that I can see him from a distance. He will sneer at you and triumph over you; he will be so elated that he will say many things to spite you. "I shall have a detective with me, and I will tell him what Hales is saying. He will put it down. Then we will confront Hales with his own confession. He will not dream that we shall know what he has said, because there will be nobody within hearing. He will be so surprised that he will own up."

"Wonderful!" cried Tom, scarcely able to believe it.

There was a knock at the door, and a servant brought in a dry suit for Tom. A messenger had been sent to his mother for the clothes.

Tom hastily dressed himself, while his strange acquaintance waited in another room. A plan was quickly arranged; it was to be carried out that evening, if possible.

"I have satisfied your mother that all is well, and that she is not to believe all she hears until she sees you. Your brother has not said anything at home yet; he was waiting for you to return. He is outside, so you can send him with a message to Hales, to say that he must meet you at the spot you mentioned."

That was done, and Tom went to the place, and waited with beating heart for Hales. If he came, all might yet be well; but suppose he did not come?

Mr. Sternbridge was right in his surmise, Hales went to the place because he thought he could crow over Tom and make him mad.

"Well," he sneered, as he came up, after looking to see if anyone was near enough to hear, "what is it?"

"I want to know why you acted the rascal this afternoon," demanded Tom, pretending to be very wrathful, in order to excite Harry to talk. "What harm have I done to you?"

Hales laughed and sneered alternately, but finally launched out into a tirade in which he gave himself away completely. Tom did not know whether to be angry or pleased; but ultimately pleasure gained the upper hand, for he felt that Mr. Sternbridge could now clear him.

"Is that all you wanted me for?" asked Hales, with a wicked smile. "Well, I have had my revenge, and have told you so! Ta-ta!"

He hurried away, and Tom hastened to his friend.

"That will be all right, my lad," chuckled the stranger. "He, he! I can set things straight. The prizes are to be distributed to-morrow afternoon, and I shall be there. You must come."

Tom would not have gone alone, for even now he could not face the people who did not know the truth; but his friend called for him.

They entered the hall together, and everybody stared. Lord Farstone, who was to distribute the prizes, stared more than anyone else.

"I say, Jack, what's the matter?" he cried, addressing Sternbridge familiarly. "What on——"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Sternbridge, standing by the side of Lord Farstone, "my old schoolfellow, Lord Farstone, asks for an explanation. I will give it. A great wrong was done publicly to yo ng Sellon yesterday, and I have been able to right it. I think that the redress should be as public as the scandal."

And then he told the story, while Tom stood, with a very red face, and watched the effect on the assembled people. Nobody appeared to have any doubt about it. All the townsfolk were glad, because Tom was a favourite, and they liked to think that he was a sterling fellow. The audience stood up and cheered, and the enthusiasm was raised to its highest pitch when Dick Murray went up to Tom Sellon and shook his hand heartily.

"I couldn't believe it, old chap, and I'm glad it isn't true!" he cried warmly.

And then how everybody cheered! It really seemed as if the roof would be lifted! But that was not all, for when he could get a hearing Lord Farstone said:

"I am sure I'm very pleased that my old friend, Lord Sternbridge, has cleared up the mystery, and I think I shall have to give two cups this year, one to Sellon and one to Murray!"

Then the cheering became almost unbearable.

Tom Sellon went back to his desk in the town clerk's office, and there is little doubt about his being town clerk himself one day. As for Hales, he left the town; but it is pleasing to record that he was afterwards very sorry for what he had done, and resolved to strive to build up a good name for himself in the future. The latest reports about him from South Africa show that he is carrying out this resolve.

THE END.

Next Week the

FIRST GRAND FOOTBALL NUMBER

OF

THE BOYS' REALM

will be published, containing the Opening Chapters of Mr. A. S. HARDY'S

ENTHRALLING NEW FOOTBALL TALE.

ORDER YOUR COPY TO-DAY. PRICE ONE PENNY.

THE BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

All about our STARTLING NEW PROGRAMME for 1907-8.

SOLID SILVER CUPS, SILVER MEDALS, AND HUNDREDS OF MATCH FOOTBALLS TO BE GIVEN AWAY!

Your Editor is prepared to present a Large Number of Solid Silver Challenge Cups to Certain Bona-fide Football Leagues throughout the country. Secretaries of Leagues desirous to possess one of these handsome Trophies should make application now. Form of application will be found below.

The following are the Conditions under which the Cups will be given:

I. The Leagues must play the game according to the Rules laid down by the Football Association.

II. Each League must be a properly constituted League in which the clubs engage in a genuine competition.

III. Each form of entry must be accompanied by full particulars of the competition, which must be of one season's standing, or if formed this season must be accompanied by proof that it is a genuine competition.

LEAGUE RESULTS.

In connection with these great League Competitions for The Boys' Realm Challenge Cups we intend to publish records of the positions of the clubs in the various Leagues as the season progresses, and to award weekly prizes of footballs for good performances.

Football Club Secretaries are requested to draw the attention of their League Secretaries to this announcement of Your Editor's splendid offer.

THIS FORM FOR FOOTBALL LEAGUES ONLY.

Name of League .....

Year of Formation .....

Number of Clubs in League .....

Secretary's Name and Address .....

.....

.....

This form, together with full particulars of the League, to be addressed to the Secretary, The Boys' Realm League, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.

The following Leagues are being formed for the benefit of Unattached Clubs throughout the country—

Section 1. "THE BOYS' REALM" LONDON LEAGUE.

TWO HANDSOME SILVER TROPHIES (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

DIVISION ONE—NORTH. *DIVISION TWO—SOUTH.*

Finalists (Senior and Junior) in each Division to play each other at Close of Season for the Cups. The losing teams in the Finals to receive Solid Silver Medals.

Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed fifteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed eighteen.

Section 2. "THE BOYS' REALM" SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

Open to any football club in the South of England, excluding Greater London.

TWO HANDSOME SOLID SILVER TROPHIES (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed fifteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed eighteen.

Section 3. "THE BOYS' REALM" NORTHERN LEAGUE.

Open to any football club in the North of England.

TWO HANDSOME SOLID SILVER CUPS (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed fifteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed eighteen.

Section 4. "THE BOYS' REALM" SCOTS LEAGUE.

Open to any football club in Scotland.

TWO HANDSOME SOLID SILVER TROPHIES (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed fifteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed eighteen.

Section 5. "THE BOYS' REALM" IRISH LEAGUE.

Open to any football club in Ireland.

TWO HANDSOME SILVER TROPHIES (Senior and Junior) for open competition.

Average age of teams in Junior Division not to exceed fifteen. Average age of teams in Senior Division not to exceed eighteen.

N.B.—These Trophies are only to be put up for competition on condition that a certain number of clubs make application to competo for them, such number to be decided by Your Editor at an early date.

RULES AND CONDITIONS.

(a) Only clubs which have been established at least one season (exclusive of 1907-8) are eligible for entry, and the respectability and standing of each club must be vouched for by some responsible person.

(b) Clubs desirous of entering one of the above contests must fill in the form below, and send it, together with a list of their engagements, with the average age of members of the opposing clubs, and a letter from the president of the club, to the Secretary, Boys' Realm Football League, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C., as soon as possible.

(c) The cups will be presented at the end of the football season to the clubs in each section which Your Editor, the Secretary, and another referee, consider to hold the best records in the first twenty-four matches actually played. It does not matter on what date the first match is played. Wednesday and Thursday clubs may compete. Points to be awarded as follows: Two for a win, one for a draw; the points to be counted as in the First and Second Divisions of the Football League. If two or more clubs finish with an equal number of points, the goal average shall decide the winners. The decision of the referees (Your Editor, the Secretary, and another) on any question of dispute in this competition shall be final.

(d) After the contest has started we shall, from time to time, publish tables showing the positions of the clubs at the time of going to press. Secretaries must, therefore, send in each week the full result of their matches. Each result must also be accompanied by a notification from the Captain of the opposing team signifying that the report is quite correct. These results must reach the Secretary of The Boys' Realm League at the above address not later than the Tuesday morning following the match.

(e) Secret investigation will be made by the controllers of the League into the bona-fides of the entering clubs and their fixtures.

(f) All matches to be played under the Rules of the Football Association.

(g) The Cups to be won outright. No club which has previously won a Cup will be allowed to compete again for a period of three years, although they may send in their reports in order to participate in our weekly award of Prize Footballs.

(h) Opposing teams must, in every case, be of the same average age.

THIS FORM FOR SINGLE UNATTACHED CLUBS ONLY.

Date..... Club.....

Playing Ground .....

Average Age of Members .....

Colours .....

The above club is desirous of entering The Boys' Realm League (Section .. ....), and the members agree to conform to the conditions governing the contest, and to abide by the decision of Your Editor, the Secretary, and a referee in any case of dispute.

Secretary's Name .....

Address .....

THE SCHOOL ON THE CLIFF.

A Magnificent Story of Stirring Adventure.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE.

The Meeting on the Cliff.

A KIND of litter was made up by the boys, who tore down some branches for the purpose, and sorrowfully enough they wended their way back to the school.

They chanced to meet with the inspector of the police, who ran off and summoned some men who were working in a field.

"Take the body up to the Ten Bells," he said to the men. "The inquest can be held there."

Jack bestowed a thankful glance upon him, and then turned sadly away with his chums. School was just over as they entered the house, and the boys shouted "Any news of Ricketts?" as they scampered into the open air.

"Yes," Jack replied; "the very worst of news. Where is Mr. Bonnington?"

"I am here, Jaunty," replied the headmaster, opening his study door. "Come in. What of Ricketts? Has he returned with you?"

"He is dead, sir," said Jack; and told the headmaster all he knew.

The news spread like wildfire, and nothing else was talked of that day but the fate of Mark Ricketts. The next day the magistrates met, and Pinnick was brought before them. To the surprise of everybody in court no prosecutor appeared, and, after some delay, the magistrate discharged the prisoner. The surprise increased when Mr. Belton met him outside and walked with him to his cottage.

"Pinnick," he said, "I have kept my word, and now you must keep yours."

Pinnick fetched a crowbar from a little back room, and began loosening the hearthstone.

"I put the bundle of letters here for safety's sake," he said. "I found them—— Hallo!" he cried, as the stone fell back with a crash, "somebody has robbed me! I hid the letters away with my own hands, but they ain't here now!"

Mr. Belton was inclined to think that he had been duped, but the suspicion left him when Pinnick, falling upon his knees, tore at the earth and rubbish like a terrier, frantic with excitement.

"I've been robbed, swindled, cheated!" he bawled. "I meant to keep the letters until the Jaunty chap was of age, and then strike a bargain with him."

Hearing a footstep, Mr. Belton turned, and saw the Stranger standing in the doorway.

"I have just run over from the Bowl," he said, "to give Baxter a few commissions to perform, and thought I would look in to tell Pinnick that he need not trouble to find the letters, as they have been in my possession for a long time."

"What!" roared Pinnick, starting to his feet. "Are you the thief?"

"The thief!" the Stranger repeated contemptuously. "Dare you speak to me in such terms, you robber of the dead, you monster in human form!"

"I'll have my rights!" Pinnick cried hoarsely. "Those letters were worth a thousand pounds to me. Trapin would have found the money, I know, but I kept the secret——"

"Which is the only good thing you did," the Stranger interposed. "You talk of your rights, and you shall have them! You have had a lucky escape in being discharged from gaol. Take care, my blustering friend, that you don't go there on another charge!"

Pinnick cowered before him like a cur under the lash.

"How did you know that I had the letters?" he asked.

"I saw you take them. I caught you at your work rifling the dead, and you fled, thinking you heard a footstep. It was mine, but I let you go, determined to thwart you in my own way. The lightning revealed your form to me as plainly as I see it now, and just a month after, when you were making merry at the Mermaid, I paid a visit to this hovel, and a spirit in my feet seemed to lead me to the place where you secreted the letters. What have you to say to this, you hound!"

Pinnick said nothing. He stood still and gasped until the Stranger, losing command over his temper, seized him by his throat, and shook him until his teeth rattled in his head, and then he howled.

"Mr. Belton," said the Stranger, "Jack Jaunty is coming over to the Bowl this afternoon for a quiet talk with me. To-morrow my house will be open to all, when I will declare who I am, and you will know the reason why I have so long kept my name a secret."

He continued shaking Pinnick and thumping his head against the wall, and all the time he was speaking, and then suddenly throwing all his strength into one effort, picked up the ruffian and hurled him into a corner, where he lay half stunned and not daring to move until the Stranger and Mr. Belton had left the cottage.

When Pinnick thought that he was safe from further ill-treatment, he rose and shuffled out, with his hands deep in his pockets, and a scowling, baffled air upon him.

"I thought I held the trump card," he growled, "and have been laughing in my sleeve all this time; and now the Stranger comes to me to say that the game was in his hand all the time. Oh, what a fool I have made of myself!"

He gave his head a sounding blow, as if it had not suffered enough, and walked aimlessly about, now going inland, now turning towards the sea.

"What's this feeling that has come over me?" he said, stopping suddenly. "I feel as if I was drifting out of the world without being ill! Ugh! The very hand of death seems to be on my shoulder!"

He reached the very spot where Terrapin had stood at bay, and then disappeared so mysteriously. Pinnick descended into the valley, and sat down near a hillock covered with gorse and brambles. In this secluded place the air was very still—so still, indeed, that the foliage of the bushes scarcely quivered.

Suddenly Pinnick heard something stirring near him. At first he took it to be a hare or a rabbit scamporing about, but the sound increased until it resembled some large animal working its way from under the ground.

Pinnick's hair stood on end, and his throat grew hot and dry. His eyes were fixed on a clump of brambles, which, to his terror, became violently agitated.

A cry of horror burst from his lips as the head and shoulders of Terrapin appeared. What a spectacle of despair the man presented! He had lain hidden night and day upon a very bed of thorns. His hands and face were torn and scratched; his eyes were hollow and glaring, and when he spoke his voice seemed to come from the depths of the vault.

"Pinnick," he said, "am I so altered that you don't know me?"

"I know you, but I don't want to have anything to say to you!" Pinnick gasped. "Everything is in the hands of the Stranger; he has known who Jack Jaunty really is from the very first, and the secret will be out this afternoon and all over the place."

Terrapin turned livid as this information was imparted to him. Every word fell upon his ears like a death-knell, and beads of perspiration started out upon his brow.

"If that is the case, I must get away!" he said. "I will come to your house to-night, and you must get me away in a boat when all is quiet. My son must go, too."

"Your son's gone already," Pinnick replied. "You'll never see him again, unless you look in at the Ten Bells."

"What do you mean? What has happened to him?"

"He is dead!"

"Dead!"

Terrapin started, and a look of anguish fell upon his face. He rose slowly and beckoned Pinnick to follow him.

After they had gone some distance, Terrapin suddenly turned up, and for quite a long time he and Pinnick conversed together. What passed between them does not concern us; but when the conlab was over, the two villains linked arms, and made off at a quick pace; nor were they ever seen near Starcraig again. Where they went no one ever knew, but the village folk were content that they were gone. With their after life they were not concerned. It was the old story of "Good riddance to bad rubbish"; and no one ever troubled because they had vanished from the district.

Clearing Up of a very Extraordinary Mystery.

THE Seamew ran over to the Bowl in fine style, and Jack, leaping ashore, ran up to the Stranger's house, to find the owner anxiously waiting for his appearance, and fully prepared for him. To Jack's astonishment, the table at which his friend sat was almost covered with papers, some of which were crumpled and shrivelled as with the contact of water.

"Jack," the Stranger said, "help yourself to some lemonade. I have a rather long story to tell you, and I should not feel surprised if your throat becomes a little dry at times. Baxter, you had better stay, for what I have to say to Jack is for your ears also."

Bob ran his fingers through his hair, and planted himself upright against the wall in imitation of a grandfather's clock, and refused to be seated until the Stranger insisted upon his so doing in a manner that admitted of no argument.

"Some years ago," the Stranger said, gathering the papers together, "a certain young man living in a pretty Devonshire village fell in love with the vicar's daughter.

"There is nothing strange in that, for people are falling in love with each other every day all over the wide world; but this story has a romantic ring about it, as you shall hear.

"The vicar was poor, and proud, and did not favour the young man's suit, for he at that time was poor, too; but the young lady—I will call her Ethel Dalmany—gave all the love of her pure and beautiful nature to the man who paid court to her. My hero must have a name, so we shall know him as Algernon Wellesley Parlleton."

Bob Baxter, remembering that the Stranger's luggage when he first took possession of the Bowl was marked A. W. P., indulged in a gasp, and, in the attempt to suppress it, choked and turned almost black in the face.

The Stranger paid no attention to this interruption, but took the first document in his hand. It was a sheet of pink paper with crimped edges, such as young ladies loved to use in days gone by, and filled with writing, the ink having faded.

"Parlleton," he continued, "went to the vicar and begged of him to look at him in the light of his future son-in-law. 'Give me time,' he urged, 'to go abroad to win a fortune for your daughter. She is willing to wait a reasonable time for me.'

"The vicar treated the matter very coolly. He did not believe in young men who wandered about the world gold seeking. Parlleton was young and hot-headed. He told the vicar that he had no right to thrust Ethel into the matrimonial market, and left him in a passion.

"A few weeks afterwards there came to the village a young fellow reported to be immensely rich. It was whispered about that he was the possessor of a tremendous tract of fertile country in Mexico. His name was Mark Ricketts."

Jack Jaunty started violently, and Bob Baxter laid hold of the arm of his chair and held on tight.

"Yes," continued the Stranger, "his name was Mark Ricketts, and with him was his trustee, a lawyer named——"

"Terrapin!" Bob gasped. "And, bless my heart, sir, you are Algernon Wellesley Parlleton!"

"Exactly so; and, since you have guessed so far correctly, I will make my story as short as possible.

"Mark Ricketts became my rival. He paid court to Ethel, and the vicar encouraged him in every way, sounding his praises, and scouting me as an adventurer. Now that I come to look back, I can hardly blame him; but he broke my heart, and nearly drove me mad. Terrapin lent his aid in the scheme, and circulated a tissue of lies about me in a manner that was sure to reach Ethel's ears, and she wrote me a letter bidding me adieu.

"On the night following the receipt of the letter I paced up and down my room, enraged, broken-hearted, despairing, and with me very fiend in my heart. The tempter whispered in my ear that Mark Ricketts had robbed me of all I held dear upon earth, and bade me slay him; but the voice of my guardian angel prevailed.

"I called myself a coward and a villain, and as soon as daylight came I packed up and left the place. I went to America, but it was with no idea of making money now. I cared for nobody and nothing, and yet everything I touched turned to gold, and, almost in spite of myself, I won the respect of the people around me.

(To be concluded on Saturday next.)

OUR LEAGUE CORNER.

Applications for admittance to our football league still continue to come to hand, and there can be no doubt that this year our scheme is going to be a greater success than ever. It is quite evident that the news of what THE REALM is doing for junior footballers is spreading, and that many youths and young men are flocking round us because of the great facilities we are offering to them. We are glad to think that this is so, because it is just what we are aiming at in we want every junior footballer to look on THE BOYS' REALM as his own official journal, in which he can advertise the doings of his club, and from which he can at all times obtain advice and help.

The following is another long list of clubs which have been admitted to our football league:

Chesham Rovers F.C. (Pimlico), United Methodist F.C. (Manchester), Lilley A.F.C. (Camberwell), Moorpark Crusaders F.C. (Scotland), 3rd Ruthergien Hearts F.C. (Scotland), Malvern United F.C. (Southampton), Unity Mission F.C. (Sheffield), Princeville Clarence F.C. (Yorks), Kittorne Park Argyle F.C. (Southampton), St. Barnabas F.C. (Southfields), Rose Bank F.C. (Scotland), Clifton United F.C. (Barnsbury), Clapton United F.C. (Clapton), Wellfield A.F.C. (Warrington), Ludlow A.F.C. (Southampton), Loughton Farndale F.C. (Loughton), Charterhouse Nellis F.C. (Holborn), Oswald United F.C. (Leeds), Western Tuistic F.C. (Glasgow), Manchester United F.C. (Manchester), Colne Church Juniors F.C. (Lancashire), St. Paul's A.F.C. (London, N.W.), Newburne United A.F.C. (Newbury), St. Andrew's A.F.C. (Durham), Govan Thistle F.C. (Scotland), B.D.A. Juniors F.C. (Yorks), St. Chad's F.C. (Leeds), Westleigh United F.C. (Lancs), St. Jude's F.C. (Southwark), St. Mary's F.C. (Southampton), St. Paul's F.C. (Homerton), Eton Rangers F.C. (Burton-on-Trent).

We are not able to announce this week the names of the football leagues to which we have decided to present silver cups as permanent trophies, because of the number of applications for these has been so great. Your Editor is now looking into the various applications, to find out what he considers to be the most deserving, when he will make his decision.

OUR CRICKET LEAGUE.

Prize bats have been awarded to the following clubs for the best performance on Saturday, August 3rd:

SECTION 1.

MERSEY FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

AVONDALE C.C.—Secretary, Mr. Jr E. Clay, 33, Bodmin Road, Walton, Liverpool.

CLOVELLY C.C.—Secretary, Mr. A. J. Warrington, 8, Clovelly Road, Anfield, Liverpool.

DUNDER AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

CLIFTON BANK C.C.—Secretary, Mr. C. Ayling, c-o Miss Paterson, 14, Rosefield Street, Dundee.

SUNDERLAND AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

ST. GEORGE'S MEX'S OWN C.C.—Secretary, Mr. J. Jefferson, 20, Corporation Road, Sunderland.

BLACKBURN AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

ST. MICHAEL'S C.C.—Secretary, Mr. J. Sharpe, 12, Pine Street, Blackburn.

NORTH LIVERPOOL LEAGUE.

ST. JUDE'S C.C.—Secretary, Mr. B. Wall, 15, Webster Road, Liverpool, E.

EBBW VALE AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

BRADFORD LILLYWHITES C.C.—Secretary, Mr. S. Reynolds, Wesleyan Place, Beaufort, Mon.

SECTION 2.

Bats have been awarded to the following clubs, these having, in your Editor's opinion, put up the best show on Saturday, August 3rd.

JUNIOR DIVISION.

OAKLEY C.C.—Secretary, Mr. A. H. Mitchell, Penrith, Beaconstone Road, Leytonstone.

SENIOR DIVISION.

HOLMESDALE C.C.—Secretary, Mr. A. H. Leppard, 61, Bungalow Road, South Norwood.

The league table will appear again next week.

LEYTON SCHOOLS' SPORTS.

Every boy who can possibly manage it, should attend the Leyton Schools' Sports on Saturday next, Sept. 7th. As most of my readers are aware, these sports are held every year in aid of local charities. The admission is only 3d. and 6d., and a long programme of events has been prepared. The proceedings commence at 2 o'clock. We shall publish an article on the subject next Saturday.

LEAGUE TABLES UP TO AND INCLUDING SATURDAY, AUGUST 3RD.

"ST. CLARE CUP" CRICKET LEAGUE.

Club.	P.	W.	L.	D.	P.	R. for	W.	R. agst
St. Peter's U.	8	6	2	—	12	636	79	492 .80
Primrose	7	4	2	1	9	453	65	283 .60
St. Clare	7	4	3	—	8	382	57	453 .60
Manneh	6	3	3	1	7	410	70	410 .66
Nile	6	3	3	—	6	286	60	304 .90
Chesmont O. B.	7	3	4	1	7	483	61	518 .70
Stkwell Regina	7	1	5	1	3	426	70	492 .51

SUNDERLAND AND DISTRICT NON-CONFORMIST LEAGUE.

Names.	P.	W.	L.	D.	Pts.
1. St. Bede's Adult School	17	13	0	4	30
2. St. George's Mex's Own	17	9	5	3	21
3. Wesley Hall	14	7	4	3	17
4. Ballast Hills	17	7	8	2	16
5. Trinity Adult	17	7	8	2	16
6. Cleveland Road	15	7	7	1	15
7. Y.M.C.A.	15	7	7	1	15
8. Newbottle Institute	14	5	6	3	13
9. Ravensworth Street	14	5	7	2	12
10. Monkwearmouth P. C. I.	17	4	11	2	10
11. Dock Street Institute	15	3	9	3	9

EBBW VALE AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

Names.	P.	W.	D.	L.	Pts.
1. Coronets	5	4	1	—	9
2. Victoria	5	3	1	1	7
3. Beaufort	4	2	—	2	4
4. Cwm	4	2	—	2	4
5. Primrose	6	2	—	4	4
6. Primitives	6	1	0	5	2

CYCLING:

Mr. A. E. WILLS, the holder of a world's record for cycling, tells readers how to excel at this magnificent sport.

Practice on the Track.

THERE are several useful hints to which I would direct the attention of young riders in their initial preparation.

First of all, it is a good idea to look forward to the kind of track you will have to ride on in your races. If you are a metropolitan, or belong to some large industrial or commercial centre, no doubt most of your racing will be on a banked cement track, and your practice should be on a banked track, to accord with this. On the other hand, it may be that your racing will have to be done on grass, and your practice should therefore take place on a grass track. If you wish to get used to both kinds of track, you will find the level grass inside most cement tracks of admirable use to this end. All the metropolitan tracks, when practising for a country meeting, forgo the cement for the grass, in order that they may not feel strange on the latter.

Even cement tracks differ. I have been riding recently on the celebrated Parc des Princes track in Paris. This track is oval in shape, and was built more for fast sprinting than for paced races. The length of the finishing straight is 185 yards, which is considerably more than any of our British tracks. Most cyclists have their favourite tracks, and perform better at home than away; but if more attention was paid to getting used to all sorts and conditions of tracks there would be less grumbling and much more success achieved by those who followed out this plan.

Pace following on the path is a far different thing from riding in short distance handicaps. To become a successful pace follower one must have had a goodly experience of path riding, besides possessing a cool head, and strength and determination beyond the ordinary. It is unwise for the young rider to take up this class of work; he should wait until his muscles and strength develop and his skill and judgment in riding become more matured. The rider has to be able to pick up his pacing material smartly—no easy task. He must be able to hang on when the pick-up has been made, and his display of steering must be of the very best, if accident is to be avoided.

I have done a fair amount of riding behind pacers recently; in fact, my debut as a professional was made in this class of contest, when, behind a motor, I won a three-cornered match at Canning Town early this season. My

one mile British record

and the three-quarter mile world's record were also made behind motor pacing, and I was successful in heating several of the 100-kilometre grades in a thirty-kilometre race, paced, at the Buffalo Velodrome, Paris, a little while ago; but, then, I have had the benefit of that excellent schooling to be obtained only in handicap and scratch races, at varied distances, and against both small and large fields of competitors.

Leon Meredith, the hundred-kilometres amateur champion of the world, is a very successful pace follower over long distances. He also has had much riding experience in handicaps and scratch races, although he finds that training for short distance scratch races interferes with his pace following efforts, the methods of racing being so different. The condition for such distance scratch race consists of a crawl over the greater part of the distance whilst

jockeying for position,

and ending up with a wild burst home during the last two or three hundred yards. Pace following requires steady, consistent riding throughout the whole of the journey, a keen eye to the avoidance of mishaps, and a spurt now and again when necessary. On the Continent the pacing material is much superior to that which is obtained in England, and, as one thing, there is more demand, and to cope with this demand the professional trailer or pacer has been created. A clever and successful pacer is held in much esteem. A few weeks ago Darragon, the world's professional champion at one hundred kilometres, at a public dinner in Paris, presented his pacemaker, Andrez, with a gold medal as a recognition of his services in connection with the many victories gained behind his pacing.

Like pace following, long distance road racing should not be attempted by

the very youthful rider.

If it be his ambition, then he must first of all see about testing himself as to his subject to successfully stand the strain which it entails. Most of the well-known long distance riders in the early stages of their career spent a goodly portion of their time awheel, gradually inuring themselves to withstand fatigue, and at the same time gaining experience which in after years enabled them to overcome the many little trials and difficulties which beset those in search of road-riding laurels. One often reads the details of a record-making ride with astonishment and surprise that it was ever achieved, having regard to the difficulties, unforeseen and otherwise, that were encountered and overcome. Tyre troubles, bad weather, bad roads, a strong wind blowing against the rider, a slight collision, an unlucky fall are but a few of the mishaps which may be met with, yet perhaps it is this glorious uncertainty that creates the interest in these long rides against time.

(To be continued.)

SWIMMING:

Mr. WILLIAM HENRY, Secretary of the Royal Life-Saving Society, coaches readers in the important arts of Swimming, Diving, and Life-Saving.

Training.

SEVERAL of my readers have asked for advice on the subject of training for races. I shall try to supply this want, and do all I can to help them to become strong for the sport they desire to follow. In the first place, they need not bother their heads about diet. That will always be attended to by their parents or the heads of the school to which they may belong. No advantage is gained by boys in the study of lists of digestible and indigestible food, but they should remember that the most suitable time for a swim is about one and a half hours before or after a meal. To go for a swim just after a meal is the right way to encourage cramp and other bad results. They should avoid bathing when exhausted by some vigorous exercise, when the body is cooling after perspiring, or when shivering. To enter the water when hot will not be harmful, provided the swimmer takes great care to undress quickly,

rub the body briskly,

and at once dives in. To stand or wait at the water's edge until the warmth of the body has passed off is most harmful, and accounts for most of the colds that are contracted when bathing. After diving into the water when hot, it is best to get out and get a good rub down, so that the blood may freely circulate through the skin, but this rub should be of short duration, and, when finished, a swim may with advantage be indulged in. The main principle of all training is to get the body into the best possible condition, and to keep it in that state as long as possible; therefore common-sense must be the primary rule which regulates all one's efforts to attain this condition. It is better not to train at all than to do it by spasmodic spurts, or to overtax the strength.

If a swimmer wishes to attain success, he must cultivate regular habits, live plainly, and avoid smoking. To smoke is harmful, because it generally causes short breath, and, as staying-power is a vital requirement of a world-beating swimmer, smoking and irregular habits must be avoided.

Before speed can be expected, staying-power must be developed, and to attain this long distance swimming must be practised. By "long distance" I do not intend to imply that several miles should be swum at a time, as that would be wrong, and unreasonable; but for the novice my advice is that he should commence with, say, a hundred yards, and swim this distance daily for a week, the next week increase the distance to two hundred yards, and so on, as he feels capable up to four and five hundred yards, taking care to swim straight and with ease. In these practice swims all speed should be avoided, as these are only intended to develop proper breathing and staying-power.

Speed and Staying-power.

After each swim, avoid standing about, but rub the body vigorously till dry, dress, and take a brisk walk home. If these instructions are observed, the novice will, after, say, two months, be able to swim four to five hundred yards with ease, and will feel stronger for the practice he has had. In order to get up speed, the various strokes will have to be performed in faster time, and therefore the first attempts at speed should be made over a distance of, say, thirty yards. When this distance is finished, leave the water and breathe freely. When easy breathing has returned, half the distance at top speed may be tried, after which rub down, dress, and go home. On the next visit, swim a hundred yards, and finish the distance with a spurt, taking care to swim, say, four to five hundred yards at least twice a week. By these methods speed and staying-power will be developed, as also a knowledge of one's ability to put on a spurt, which will be of great advantage when engaged in an actual race. The novice should always remember that to attain speed a vigorous body is essential, and to acquire a vigorous body regular practice is most necessary.

(Next week an article on "Fancy Swimming" will appear.)

CHARITY CUP: CRICKET:

Mr. G. L. B. COVERDALE, Hon. Sec. East Riding of Yorkshire F.A., tells readers how to found a Charity Cup Competition.

Conclusion of Rules.

12. The semi-finals and final shall be played on grounds chosen by the committee. The net receipts of these matches to go to the charity fund.

13. A day shall be appointed by the committee for the decision of the matches in each round, and all draws must be decided on the date chosen, unless the special consent of the committee is obtained for a postponement. All applications for an extension of time must be made fourteen days before the date for the match selected by the committee.

14. In the event of a draw, the referee shall order further time of not less than fifteen minutes each way, except in the final tie.

15. The duration of each match shall be one hour and a half, and the referee shall deduct any time which he considers has been wasted either owing to accident or other cause.

16. Any club intending to scratch must give information of its intention to do so to the secretary of the competition, and also the secretary of the opposing club, not less than seven clear days before the date agreed upon for playing, or such club shall be reported to the committee, who shall have power to compel such offending club to pay the expenses incurred by their opponents, or shall take such action as they may deem expedient.

17. In the event of a draw as per rule 15, and the two clubs failing to agree to replay the match within seven days, the committee shall select a date for the contest.

18. No alteration may be made to these rules except at the annual general meeting, or at a special general meeting called for that purpose, and seven days' notice of such meeting shall be given to all competing clubs.

Rounding a bend *(see column 1).*

19. All questions of eligibility, qualification of competitors, and interpretation of rules, shall be referred to the managing committee, whose decision shall be final.

20. All accounts relating to this competition shall be at the disposal of the committee for inspection.

21. The annual general meeting shall be held on or before (say) the 1st of June in each year. At this meeting, the report and an audited balance-sheet must be presented, and the officers elected for the ensuing year.

22. When the winners of the cup shall have been ascertained, the secretary shall hand over the trophy to the officials of the club on their subscribing a document undertaking to return the cup in due course, and for its safe custody meanwhile.

23. Entries close (say) the first Monday in September in each year. The cup is vested in the president, vice-president, and secretary for the time being of this competition, and cannot be won outright.

(Finis of Rules).

ABOUT FORM E.

The rules having been approved by the committee of the charity competition, application for sanction from the County Association must now be made on Form E, which is as follows:

"1. Name of proposed charity competition.
"2. Object.
"3. Headquarters.
"4. Name and address of secretary.
"5. List of clubs forming the competition; the list must show the name of club, name and address of secretary, and the name of county or district association to which the club belongs."

After official sanction has been obtained, everything should be plain sailing, and the secretary of the competition should do all in his power to induce clubs to enter and make the competition a success. The working expenses of the competition should be practically nil, and it always must be remembered that it is in the cause of charity.

The English F.A. now allows persons other than players to kick-off in charity matches, and, if possible, the president of the competition, or some notable gentleman, should be invited to kick-off in the final match; if this is done, it will no doubt help, by drawing more spectators to swell the funds of the competition, and thus there will be a good sum to hand over to charity at the end of the season.

THE END.

Long-on and Long-off *(continued).*

I HAVE been not a little amused at times by the manner in which unqualified men—in fact, the "duffer" of the side—is put in the long field. In club matches, one often sees a young fellow who never starts after the ball until it has passed him on the boundary, and, of course, dozens of runs, if no good hitters happen to be in, are given away in this manner.

Catching in the long field is very different to catching when you are near the wickets. When I am at second slip the ball comes along with a lightning flash, and hardly has one time to glance at it before it is in one's hands. Mr. Jones often has to run in to make the catch. The body leans slightly back in the direction to which the ball is coming.

You must watch the manner in which the hands are held above the head for the long-field catch. At the moment of impact the ball will be held at the height of the chin. The hands form a perfect cup, the arms being well away from the body. There is this difference, however, between a position in the slips and in the long field, for the ball has to come a long way and to be waited for, so that the fielder is in a position to receive the catch in good time. This will sometimes make the fieldsman very tired. Although Mr. Denton, another great scout, G. L. Jessop, and A. O. Jones are probably never troubled with what I may call the nerve complaint, I am certain, however, that to the ordinary man, who very often plays for fun and just on

the edge of the ground,

the people who are hardly a yard away talk, and the players in minor clubs pay attention to what they are saying rather than to the ball. Presently a shout proclaims that it is somewhere in the vicinity of the fielder, and he rouses himself too late, his failure making him the object of a great deal of chaff.

For some years my plan was to get catching practice every day. Nothing else does so much to give one confidence. All kinds of catches—high, low, straight, and crooked—should be tried, and a little work in this direction every day is good. Do not attempt to catch with one hand fully extended, snapping at the ball, until you have had a great deal of experience. It is true with Denton and others you will sometimes see their left hand shoot out and intercept the ball in wonderful style, but there are very few indeed who can do this with the right hand, and perhaps one in a thousand with the left. It is very easy to

bruise your hands

unless you allow the ball to fall well into them, and nearly all of our best long fielders take the ball in catching with their hands close to their bodies about chest high. The idea is that in this way the hands are more under control, and the ball is nearer to the line of sight.

E. H. D. Sewell, who has never, to my mind, done himself full justice as a batsman, always used to delight in Essex crowd by reason of his wonderful work in the country. There lingers in my memory a day of Essex cricket in which this gentleman was particularly prominent. All, of whom I have spoken, is a dashing left-handed bat, and he sends mighty drive, which looked as though it was going out of the ground. Sewell happened to be on the boundary. The ball dropped very slowly from a great height, and everyone was applauding the batsman for

a mighty stroke.

Sewell ran about twenty yards, shot out his left hand, hit the ball up in the air, and then gathered it with both hands. The spectators rose as one man, and cheered the daring performance again and again. Those are the moments worth living for in a cricketer's life. It is, however, a fact that good long fields such as I have mentioned are often included in a side simply for their fielding abilities. Jessop and Fry were included in the Gentlemen's Match team because it was known from past experience they would have dozens of runs, and they very quickly showed that their prowess in this direction had not been over-estimated. Affectionately would I urge my young friends to try and excel in this position; if they do, they will give delight to those who are no longer players, and they will be a very useful help indeed to their side. Many a time have I seen

wild overthrows

simply because men got nervous after making a mistake.

One of our best long fields, in order to become a good catch, used to keep wicket to fast bowling for a quarter of an hour a day, and then would go and stand in the long field. What you should try to do is to watch one of the great examples that I have mentioned, and ask yourself whether you hold your hands in the right or wrong way. Remember, too, that to throw in slowly is no use at all, and consequently added to natural ability there must be strength, and power to concentrate your attention on every ball. Only as you do this are you likely to be in any way successful.

THE END.

(Next week some clever football articles by famous internationals will appear.)

CLUB NOTICES.

NOTICES AND CHALLENCES FROM READERS' OWN CLUBS. THESE ARE INSERTED FREE OF CHARGE.

ADDINGTON STANLEY F.C. (average 17) have a few dates open, home or away. Also one for Boxing Day. About 12 miles rail. Dressing given and required.—All letters to be addressed to Hon. Secretary, A. Andrews, 3, Addington Road, Canning Town, London, E.

DARNALL CHURCH JUNIORS (average age 15½) require matches. Most dates open. Also players for following positions: Goal, inside right, inside left, and centre forward.—Apply by letter to Hon. Secretary, C. Kinger, 16, Britannia Road, Darnall; or call, after 6 p.m., Walter Botham, 23, Craven Road, Darnall, Sheffield.

BASTWELL ETURIANS (average age 18–19) want matches home and away for season 1907–8 in Blackburn and district.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Francis, 18, Maple Street, Blackburn.

ST. BARNABAS F.C. (average age 15, medium) have the following dates open for home and away matches: Away, Sept. 21, and 28, Oct. 12, Dec. 14, Jan. 4 and 18, Feb. 1 and 29, March 14 and 28; home, Oct. 19, Nov. 9, Jan. 25, Feb. 8 and 22, March 7 and 28. Also a few players required, small subscription (6d.).—Write, stating positions, to Hon. Secretary, Y. Taylor, 50, Elsenham Street, Southfields, S.W.

DARTMOUTH F.C. (average 15) require matches with respectable clubs, away only. Also two good backs; small subscription.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, L. J. Limmer, 38, Surre Road, West Hampstead, N.W.

CHAPELTOWN CORINTHIANS A.F.C. (average age 16–18) wants fixtures. All dates open, within 5 miles of Leeds, for season 1907–8. Also several players. Following positions open: Good goalkeeper, full back, half-backs, and forwards. Entrance fee 6d., and 2d. weekly subscription.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Dalby, 6, Tramway Street, Leeds.

WOTHERSPOON F.C. (average age 15½) for XI., want fixtures for the coming season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, H. Brock, 6, Appin Road, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

BRISTOL TELEGRAPH MESSENGERS F.C. (average age 15½) requires fixtures in Bristol. State grounds and dates.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, E. A. Payne, 1, Margate Street, Victoria Street, Bedminster, Bristol.

WANTED, home and away matches (from Nov. 30 till end of season by Newbury United F.C. (average age 12–13). It is the same team as Newbury Junior F.C. Would play only under a different name.—Apply to Hon. Secretary by letter, R. Waldie, Newbury United F.C., 23, Craven Street, Newbury, Berks.

STANLEY A.F.C. (average age 13, weak) have all dates open. Only clubs within 2 miles need apply. Also apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Gowis, 38, Stanley Grove, Longsight, Manchester.

GRANVILLE F.C. (average age 16, weak) require matches for coming season, home and away. Last ground Wormwood Scrubbs.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Walker, 166, Railway Approach, Shepherds Bush, W.

ST. MARY'S ARGYLE F.C. require matches for the coming season. Nearly all dates open. Also a few good players.—Write to Hon. Secretary, W. Smith, 7, Dock Street, Southampton.

EALING UNITED F.C. would like dates for opening season, 2nd class, light.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, Phillip Johnstone, 107, St. James's Road, Glasgow.

LEVINGTON VILLA F.C. (average age 16–20) have a few good fixtures for respectable teams, home and away, within 10 miles of Leicester.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, J. Cross, Levington Villa F.C.

NEWPORT RECREATIVES (average age 20, medium) require a couple of fixtures in Bristol during the coming season. Small guarantee if possible.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, T. V. Stephens, 114, Malpas Road, Newport, Mon.

GROSVENOR F.C. (average age 15) require matches home and away. Ground near Stepney Green.—Apply by post only to Hon. Secretary, H. V. Dixon, 45, Portland Street, Stepney, E.

BARNSBURY UNITED (average age 17, weak) require matches for Oct. 5, Feb. 8, April 4, home; and Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28, March 28, April 11, 25, away.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, C. Howard, 8, Francis Street, Barnsbury N.

RAVENWOOD F.C. (average age 17, medium) have all dates open for away matches only. Respectable clubs only need apply to Hon. Secretary, R. Woodward, 8a, Lansdowne Street, Southfields, S.W.

EVERLEY F.C. (average age 15) require away matches for coming season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. S. Roll, 19, Queen's Road, Leytonstone.

CUTHAIRS UNITED F.C. (average age 16) have all dates open; away matches preferred within a radius of 4 miles from Parliament Hill.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, H. E. Tonking, 130, Ilthorne Road, Upper Holloway, N.

HUNTINGTON STAR F.C. (average age 14–16) require matches, home and away, all dates open.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, A. M'Cabe, 11 Huntington Place, Springburn, Glasgow.

MALVERN UNITED F.C. (average age 15½) require home or away matches in or around Southampton for the coming season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, E. A. Eden, 48, Ascupart Street, Southampton.

MATCHES wanted, all away, by a respectable club (average age 16½). Only first class clubs need apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Wilson, 20, Bacton Road, North End Road, Fulham, S.W.

CROMER STAR F.C. 2ND XI. (average age 15) want matches home and away. All dates open. Ground, Parliament Hill.—Write to Hon. Secretary, W. G. Ballard, 101, Lymington Avenue, Noel Park, N.

ST. PAUL'S F.C. (average age 14, medium) want matches for coming season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, F. C., 24, Ashenden Road, Homerton, London, N.E.

GREYMINSTER F.C. have dates open, home and away. Also vacancies for strong right and left backs.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. McCarthy, 16, Sedgeford Road, Shepherds Bush, W.

HIGHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OLD BOYS' A.F.C. (average age 16–17) require matches, home and away, within 2–3 miles radius. All dates open.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, T. Price, 9, Gammage Street, Durdley.

GOOD TREASURE F.C. want matches for next season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Lowers, 9, Ontario Street, London Road, S.E.

ST. ALBAN'S ATHLETIC F.C. (average age 16) require matches, home and away, S.E. district preferred.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, J. Austin, 7, Chaselield Road, Tooting, S.W.

WESTLEIGH UNITED want away matches for season 1907–8.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, William Swindells, 31, Jury Street, Westleigh, Leigh, Lancs.

LILLEY ATHLETIC F.C. (average age 15, weak) have all dates open, and are willing to meet all comers.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Harrison, 1, Victory Square, Newchurch Road, Camberwell.

BERKELEY ATHLETIC AND F.C. (average age 15, weak). Nearly all dates open for away matches to coming season.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, T. W. White, 45, Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell.

ALBION F.C. Matches wanted at home and away for coming season, all dates open.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, H. M. Sales, 40, Ossory Road, Old Kent Road, S.E.

BEECHFIELD F.C. (average age 16) require home and away fixtures for next season, within 6 miles radius of Lancaster. All dates open except September.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Paine, 35, Coverdale Road, Lancaster.

BERKLAND FOOTBALL CLUB (average age 15, strong) have the following dates still open: Sept. 28, Oct. 5 and 19, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, and 28, Jan. 11, 18, and 25, all February, Mar. 14 and 28, and all April.—Write to Hon. Secretary, R. A. Wallis, 47, Upper Belmont Road, St. Andrews, Bristol.

BARKING CRUSADER require matches for the coming season; home and away dates fixed are Sept. 7, 21, 28, Oct. 5, Nov. 23, Jan. 4.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, C. Dietz, Barking Crusader F.C., 72, Hart Street, Barking, E.

NEWTOWN VICS (average age 16, weak) want matches for season 1907–8 for home and away, within 5 miles radius.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Worsley, 83, Grafton Street, St. Helens, Lancs.

THE GREAT GONERBY BOYS F.C. (age about 16) desire to play matches home and away within 6 miles radius of Gt. Gonerby. They particularly wish to play respectable Grantham teams; all dates open.

EDMONTON SHAMROCK F.C. require fixtures for coming season, North London only; also a good goalkeeper for league team.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Hutchinson, 31, Bays Avenue, Upper Edmonton.

OSWALD UNITED (average age 17) has open dates.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, L. Hardaker, 34, Oswald Terrace, Gelderd Road, Leeds.

VICTORIA ROAD INSTITUTE A.F.C. (average age 19, medium) have all dates open; also one or two good players; small subscription.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, G. Humphreys, 49, Symington Street, St. James End, Northampton.

GLENVILLE F.C. (average age, 15½) have open Jan. 11, Oct. 26, Nov. 2, Thurs., Nov. 28, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, Dec. 7, Feb. 29, March 14, and April 4, 18, 25 (away).—Apply to Hon. Secretary, W. Ferdinand, 37, Arcadia Street, Poplar, E.

OSBORNE RANGERS RESERVES (age 14–15) require matches with good gentlemanly teams in Jesmond and district. All dates vacant, single fixtures and arranged one day.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, Osborne Rangers A.F.C., H. J. Lyall, 76, Ashleigh Grove, West Jesmond, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

ST. ALBANS F.C. (average age 16) require matches for coming season within 3 miles radius.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, 72, Mortlake Road, Ilford.

FIXTURES WANTED for the following season away and at home. Club's ground must be within 7 miles of Ashton-u-Lyne (average 15–16).—Apply to Hon. Secretary, Ben Hadfield, Stamford Square, Cockbrook, Ashton-u-Lyne.

LOUGHTON FERNDALE F.C. (age 18) require matches for following season (home and away); new ground.—Apply at once to Hon. Secretary, Arthur Keep, Loughton, Essex.

A LAD (age 17, height 5ft. 2in., weight 7st. 7lb.) would like to join leanue football club. Can play any position in forward or half-back line. Outside preferred.—Apply to Charles Searle, 8, Valnay Street, Tooting.

GOSWELL UNITED (average age 14, weak) require players for all positions, age 16 to 18. Also all dates open away.—Apply between 8 and 9 o'clock to Hon. Secretary, 2, Mulberry Place, Goswell Road, N.

A FEW PLAYERS (average age 15–16) wanted to join football club for season 1907–8. All positions.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, Charles Simmonds, 174, Coventry Street, Bethnal Green Road, London, E.

PLAYERS WANTED (age 15–16). Small subscription. Letters only. Matches also wanted, home and away.—Full particulars to Hon. Secretary, 26, Windmill Lane, Dalston, N.E.

A GOALKEEPER wishes to join a gentlemanly football club within three miles of Altrincham or Manchester. Willing to pay small subscription.—Apply to Russell Taylor, Cow Lane, Timperley.

A LAD (age 16) wishes to join a respectable football club for next season. Can play in any position. New Cleo district preferred.—Apply by letter to James Mace, 124, Grafton Street, Grimsby.

GOALKEEPER (age about 18) required for West London.—Apply R. Garratt, 2, Bulmer Terrace, Notting Hill Gate.

KINGSGATE A.F.C. requires several members for next season. Trial match takes place on Sep. 7. Private ground and dressing at Neasden. An opportunity of entering a league and cup team.—Apply at once to Hon. Secretary, F. Grundy, 41, Abbey Gardens, St. John's Wood, N.W.

ARGYLE F.C. (average age 15) want players for all positions for the coming season 1907–8.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, J. Kennedy, 10, Argyle Road, Liverpool.

A BOY (age 14) wishes to join a respectable football team as goalkeeper, in Bristol.—Apply to A. R. Barclay, 330, Fishponds Road, Bristol.

HOVE wishes to join a respectable football club apply to Hon. Secretary, A. Bass, West Brompton Albion, 9a, Tamworth Street, Fulham, S.W.

LAD (age 15½) wishes to join a respectable football team in or around Altrincham. Can play anywhere on right wing. Be pleased to pay fee if required.—Apply to V. Church, 71, Sweet Briar Walk, Edmonton.

BEECHWOOD F.C. require players for all positions (ages 15–18) willing to pay small subscription and entrance fee.—For particulars, apply to Hon. Secretary, A. W. Robinson, 28, Claude Road, Anfield, Liverpool.

KENSINGTON F.C. (average age 15) wants players for all positions. In Kensington district. Small subscription weekly.—Apply by letter to Hon. Secretary, W. Pickburn, 54, Acton Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool.

PLAYERS (average ages 15–17) wanted, all positions for the coming season. Fixtures also wanted.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, Charles Simmonds, 174, Coventry Street, Bethnal Green, London, E.

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MEAD CYCLE CO. Dept. 6 K

WANTED, a position as goalkeeper for next season.—Apply by letter, or call, S. Lester, 25, Higher Ardwick, Ardwick, Manchester.

KIRKDALE AND DISTRICT JUNIOR LEAGUE. Vacancies for above for good junior clubs (average age 15–17).—Apply at once to Hon. Secretary, W. A. Croxford, 29, Howley Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool.

A YOUTH (age 17½, height 5 ft. 5 in.) would like to join a respectable football club in the S.W. district as centre-forward; a league club preferred.—Full particulars to G. F. Bowerman, 57, Blantyre Street, Chelsea, London, S.W.

PLAYERS (age 16–18) wanted for new club; all positions; small subscription. Hornsey district. Play Saturday afternoons.—Write or apply, after 7.30, to Hon. Secretary, G. H. Guman, 7, Drylands Road, Crouch End, London, N.

A RESPECTABLE LAD (age 14½) wishes to join a football club in or about Westminster, is willing to pay a small subscription.—E. J. Vincent, Victoria Yard, Broadway, Westminster, S.W.

WANTED, a few respectable boys for football team (age 13-14), weekly sub.—Write to Hon. Secretary, G. Symonds, 66, Wellington Lane, Hull.

TWO YOUTHS (age 18) wish to join football club for coming season in N.W. district; outside left and centre-half.—Apply to A. Calvetti, 90, Robert Street, Hampstead Road.

TWO LADS (age 18) desire to join a junior league team, outside left and outside right; must be gentlemanly and within 6 miles radius of Ilford.—Apply to F. C. D., 2, Khartoum Road, Ilford.

ANY RESPECTABLE BOYS (age 16-17) desirous of joining a football club in Bethnal Green, apply to Hon. Secretary, Charles Simmonds, 174, Coventry Street, Bethnal Green Road, London.

A LAD (age 14) wishes to join a football club for this season; willing to pay small subscription; can play any position except goal and back.—Apply to L. Ball, 140, Plashet Road, Plaistow, E.

A FEW LADS (age 15-17) required for season 1907-8.—Write or call to Hon. Secretary, C. C., 9, Norton Road, Leo Bridge Road, Leyton.

A LAD (age 17, height 5 ft. 8 in.) wishes to join a football club in or around Finsbury Park. Can play inside or outside right; subscription willingly paid.—Apply by letter only to A. Cooper, 41a, St. Ann's Road, Green Lanes, Harringay, N.

WANTED, right half-back, centre-half, inside and outside left.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, J. B. Banner, 26, South Richmond Street, Edinburgh, South.

SILVERDALE C.C. (week) require matches. All dates open. S.E. district preferred.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, J. Knowles, 85, The Albany, Albany Road, Camberwell, S.E.

EALING JUNIOR C.C. (average age 15) requires matches, home and away, all September open. Also Ealing Junior F.C. (average age 16) requires matches, home and away. All dates open. L.C.C. pitches essential.—Apply to Hon. Secretary, R. C. Orchard, 19, Cloth Fair, West Smithfield, City.

IVANHOE C.C. (age 15-17). Wanted, a few respectable and reliable players to join newly-formed J.C. for 1908.—Apply, after 7 o'clock, or communicate with Hon. Secretary, H. C. Petty, 30, Chatham Street, Battersea.

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A Magnificent Tale of Colliery Life.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

How Rodwell Secured a Great Customer.

RODDY'S first impulse when he caught sight of Sully's face in the mirror, was to start up, grab hold of the spy, and pull him over the partition. But he did not.

For two or three moments Rodwell watched the reflection, silently making up his mind, and the result of it was that he decided to lie low, and keep quiet about it. Perhaps it would put the customer off, if there was a fuss of that sort.

"After all, Sully can't do much harm," thought Rodwell, "but if he does, I'll put a head on him that he'll never forget! I'm goin' to freeze on to this job."

The stranger had not noticed the peeping spy at all. He was looking at Roddy, and talking pleasantly, in ignorance that anybody else was within hearing. Soon, Sully's head disappeared, and Rodwell breathed more freely, though he guessed the ex-viewer was still listening on the other side. But that did not much matter.

"I want to get to the colliery before dark if I can," said Roddy's companion. "Does the manager live near the pits? Do you think I shall find him there to-night?"

"Oh, yes: you'll find him all right, sir!" said Roddy. "I'll go bail for that. I'll accompany you to Bryn y Garth if you'll let me, and introduce you to him. I'm goin' that way myself."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad," said the gentleman. "Are you connected with the colliery then?"

"Yes; somewhat!" said Roddy, hiding a smile. "I'm connected with it."

"Clerk in the office, perhaps?"

"Yes; I'm partly that," replied Roddy, thinking with amusement of the solitary, home-made desk in the cottage, where he got through his correspondence, and kept the accounts after working hours. He began to fear, however, that the stranger was expecting to see a huge and prosperous colliery, instead of a little, one-horse affair, with a single shaft, and a few sheds. But the splendid seam of coal removed his doubts. He only needed to show that.

"Things are a little rough as yet," he said. "The colliery hasn't been opened long, and they haven't got everything they need."

"I know that," said the stranger. "I have read the reports of it in the papers, and perhaps I know more than you think."

A sudden suspicion shot through Roddy's mind. Was this plausible gentleman an enemy—one of the Kenyon Price crew? But he rejected that idea at once. There would have been no reason for Sully to spy on him in that case, nor to look so displeased as the mirror had shown him to be.

"If there's a garage in the town," said his companion, "I should be glad to hire a motor-car and chauffeur to take me to the place, as that would save a lot of time, and I am anxious to get there without delay."

"He's got plenty of money, then," thought Roddy. "This looks like bein' a good, big deal, if we agree to terms."

Roddy told his companion that, unfortunately, there was no place in Aberford where a motor could be hired at short notice. It was as well, for the road to Bryn y Garth would have been very rough on a motor, and Roddy did not want to do, and whether he could telegraph the news to Kenyon Price, for, of course, he knew by now that a customer was on his way to Bryn y Garth.

Mr. Warrington stood chatting with Roddy for a minute or two, and then suddenly remembered that he had no ticket, having been in such a hurry at Cardiff.

"Wait for me a moment, I must go to the booking-office," he said, hastening in that direction.

Roddy went over the bridge to the bookstall to get himself an evening-paper. When he returned, Mr. Warrington had not come back, and as the time was getting short, Roddy went in search of him.

Mr. Warrington was not in the booking-office, however, and a search round about yielded no sign of him. Growing anxious, for it was close on the time for the train to leave, Roddy inquired of the ticket-clerk if a gentleman answering to Mr. Warrington's description had booked there.

"Yes; excess fare from Cardiff, on to Aberford, about four minutes ago," was the reply.

The train had now been at the platform for some time, and Roddy dashed towards it to see if Mr. Warrington were there. He was not in any of the carriages. The doors were being slammed, the guard's whistle was blown, and the train began to move.

"By gum; have I been fooled?" exclaimed Roddy savagely. "I'll let the train go, an' find out what's become of him, somehow!"

With a sinking heart he dashed back to the booking-office for a further search, beginning to fear that his hopes of a contract, that might save Bryn y Garth, were at an end. The train departed, and, after looking down the road outside, Rodwell began to search the station thoroughly.

"I can't believe he was a wrong 'un!" muttered Roddy. "I'd ha' staked my life on it, he was an honourable man, and a gentleman. Something must have gone wrong, or he's lost his way. An' yet it's a queer thing that Sully disappeared just about the same time."

Whichever way things were, Roddy thought they looked very fishy. It occurred to him that Mr. Warrington might have misunderstood how much time there was before the train left. Roddy went to the refreshment-rooms, with no success, and everywhere else he could think of. There was hardly anybody about on that part of the station now the train had left, and nearly all the staff were at another platform, where a train for Cardiff was about to start.

Roddy tried in that direction, then came back, and began searching among the deserted barrow rooms and box-rooms at the far-end of the platform—why, he hardly knew.

He was passing an alley-way when a faint noise reached him. At first he hardly noticed it. But returning, and entering the alley-way, he found it grew much louder, and, following the sound, he passed through a couple of half-open gates, and the noise became very unmistakable. It came from a lamp-room, where somebody was kicking violently, and shouting to be let out. Roddy ran to the door.

"Are you in there? Is that Mr. Warrington?" he cried.

"Yes!" shouted an angry voice. "Let me out!"

The door was locked, and no key was to be seen. Roddy ran for a porter, who came back with him, and opened the door, in much astonishment. Mr. Warrington, very hot, and red with anger, strode out.

"Who on earth locked you in there, sir?" exclaimed Roddy. "Was it—"

Mr. Warrington was about to reply very forcibly, but checked himself, and, thrusting a shilling into the porter's hand, strode down the alley-way.

The Admiralty Steps Into Bryn y Garth.

"COME away! We don't want a fuss before the railway-servants!" he said to Roddy, leaving the porter staring after him. "Now, my lad!" he said sharply, as soon as they were on the platform again, "how did you know I was in there?"

"I didn't," said Rodwell; "but I've been searching for you all over the place. It beats me how you got there at all. Do you mean to say you don't know who locked you in?"

"I don't!" said Mr. Warrington, frowning. "The whole business is beyond me, but this is what happened, as briefly as possible, and perhaps you can throw some light on it. As soon as I had taken my ticket, a well-dressed man came up to me, and, calling me by name—though I cannot remember ever seeing him before—asked me if I could consider a contract for coal, and promised me first-class Welsh, at a price which is about half what I should expect to pay. I declined, saying, I had already some business on hand—for I did not much like the look of him—and I left the booking-office by another door. He followed me, and said he had seen me with you, and thought it his duty to warn me you were an unscrupulous character, and wanted by the police."

Roddy broke into a grim laugh.

"Of course, I paid no more attention to the creature," said Mr. Warrington, "and I cut him short, and told him to go about his business. I was angry, as you may imagine, and I suppose it was that which made me lose my way, and take the wrong turning, in trying to reach the platform. I found myself among the luggage-rooms, and empty stores. I saw no more of the person who had spoken to me, but while passing a lamp-room, I found myself suddenly thrust violently into it, the door slammed, and the key turned.

"I made all the outcry I could, but I was there for quite ten minutes unheard, until you arrived. Whether it was the man who spoke to me that pushed me in, I cannot tell; but he shall pay dearly for it, if so!"

"Was he a dark, sallow man, in a morning-coat, and with a dark violet tie, sir?"

"That's he! The very man! What do you know—"

"It's too long a job to explain now, sir, but I'm not surprised. He was spying on us from the next carriage in the train. His name's Sully, and he belongs to the service of Kenyon Price, of the Coed Coch Collieries. They are bitter rivals of Bryn y Garth, and have tried to ruin it in many ways."

"Good gracious! What are you telling me, boy?"

"I should think you've had enough proof of it, sir, already. I suppose he knows you by sight, and thought you might bring business to us—I mean to the pits that would put us beyond his reach."

"Really, this is amazing! But why on earth should he try anything so childish as locking me in a lamp-room? What good could that do?"

"I should say, sir, that his game was to make you miss the train at any cost, so that he could get ahead or send instructions along before we got there. They'll be preparing some rascality in our absence, I'm safe to bet. And there isn't another train for Aberford to-night."

"By Jove, my lad, you must be right! If the rascal is trying to play any tricks on me, I'll take care he doesn't gain anything by it! No time, you say? What's the distance by road? Thirty miles? We'll have a motor-car from here at any cost! Come along!"

He hurried out of the station, hailed a fly, jumped in with Rodwell, and bade the coachman drive at his best speed to the nearest motor garage. The town was bigger than Aberford, and had a good one. They reached it quickly, and Mr. Warrington, paying the money down, hired a powerful Darracq car and chauffeur immediately. In another six minutes they were spinning away on their journey.

"Once you're clear of the town, drive like the deuce!" said Mr. Warrington to the chauffeur. "I'll see you don't lose by it."

"By gum!" said Roddy, as the car fairly flew when they reached the open road. "We shall beat Sully after all, even if he caught that train. It's a slow one, and we shall have the better of it by half an hour, at least."

The car laid the miles behind it in fine style, and Roddy's spirits rose to the top notch. He wondered more than ever who his companion was, and was coming Aberford was reached in an hour, and Roddy directed the car on its journey to Starve-Crow Farm. They had to halt as soon as they were on the moor, the road, though good enough for waggons, was too rough for the car's tyres. Mr. Warrington sent it back, and they finished the journey on foot. Roddy wondered what his companion was thinking of it.

As they came within sight of the pit, Gripe was heard barking furiously, and came out, with Tom Hughes, the manager.

"Is all well, Tom?" cried Roddy.

"Yes; all serene!"

"This is Mr. Warrington, who's come to inspect the pit. Tom Hughes, sir, of the Bryn y Garth."

"Where's the manager?" said Mr. Warrington, looking at the sheds and the horse-gin looming in the darkness. Only a single light was in the screening-shed window. Tom looked at his partner, who winked warningly.

"The manager's on leave, sir," said Tom grinning.

"I can show you every part of the colliery, sir, and at once, if you like," said Roddy. "We can do it in a couple, and go down the shaft. There's no fire-damp."

"Very well," said Mr. Warrington, looking rather surprised; "let us start. Nothing like seeing, for believing."

Roddy was afraid the basket would give him rather a shock, but the well-dressed visitor took it quite as a matter of course. Tom wound them both down to the bottom, and they started out at once with a supply of candles.

Mr. Warrington inspected the whole pit—there was not very much of it as yet — most thoroughly. He said scarcely a word, except to ask an occasional question. He tested the coal, measured it every here and there, examined the workings, and made many notes and plans, and his eyes missed not the tiniest detail. The cause of the flood, which still left its traces, had to be explained to him, and he merely nodded. Roddy was on tenter-hooks all the time, but he did not like to ask for any opinions. Finally they stood outside once more, and Mr. Warrington, after a brief look round over the rough gear and machinery, went to the lighted shed with the boys.

"Very good, so far," he said. "Now, where is the manager?"

At your service, sir," said Roddy, with a brief bow. "Tom Hughes and I are managers and owners, too."

"What!" exclaimed the visitor. "You!"

"I didn't tell you till you'd seen the seam, sir, for fear you'd think me too young, like the rest of 'em. We inherited this farm; we discovered the coal by accident, and the old shaft. We've improved it, and brought it to what you see, and, but for want of capital, an' through having to fight a powerful enemy, it would be a lot forwarder. It's in the rough yet, but there's no finer seam in Wales. I'll show you our title-deeds if you like."

The visitor held out a hand, and gripped Roddy's; Tom's also.

"My congratulations!" he said. "You've told me who you are, and now I must tell you who I am." He laid a card on the rough deal table. "Eustace Warrington is my name, and I am Crown Agent, acting on behalf of the Admiralty."

"The Admiralty!" exclaimed both boys.

"Yes; and I may tell you at once that you have here a gigantic quantity of the finest steam-coal I ever saw in my life. I learnt some news of it—I will not tell you the source—and was empowered to come down at once and make an inspection, and, if I was satisfied, to lay the basis for a contract at once. I will take your coal—all of it that science can extract from this pit—for his Majesty's fleet!"

The young partners looked at each other and gasped. It seemed too wonderful to be true.

"You look surprised," said Mr. Warrington, smiling. "I may say to you that the Admiralty is getting tired of contracting with middle-men and brokers, and is determined to get the very best steam-coal from its original sources. The powers to do this are largely placed in my hands. Subject to another examination and some experiments—you need not fear for the results—I shall draw up a contract with you for the supply of 500,000 tons of coal for the British Navy, at a price which you will find both just and generous. The Admiralty are good customers, as a rule," he added, with a smile.

"Five hundred thousand tons!" exclaimed Roddy. "We'll do it somehow, but our old rattle-traps here at present can only handle ——"

"That is nothing. I will arrange that you shall be provided with the most up-to-date machinery possible—proper winding-engines, a second shaft, and all things necessary. The cost will be deducted from the output in such a way as to make it easy for you. A legal contract will be drawn up. To the Admiralty, I may say, is anxious to get a firm footing with all new coal-fields. Some have lately been sold to foreigners, and Parliament is raising trouble about it. This seam of yours is too good to miss, and you will find us better customers than any private people, I promise you."

"Why, I'd sooner sell ten tons to help the country than twenty to a dealer!" exclaimed Roddy. "But there's one thing I think's forgotten, sir, an' that's gettin' the coal away. We've only a cart-track to use because of the road, but they'll be no good, and all the land they pass through is Kenyon Price's——"

"That is easily settled. It is only necessary to pass a small private Bill through Parliament for the building of a truck-line between here and Aberford. It is constantly done, and, as the Admiralty is interested in this, the right to build the line will be very quickly gained. Your neighbour, what's-his-name Price, won't be allowed to block the Admiralty's plans out of spite, that's very sure."

"Good!" cried Tom. "He's up against it now! What!"

"We shall build the line ourselves, and afterwards you will probably be able to buy it up. But we shall have to move to a long contract, and you mustn't deal with anybody else."

"And don't want to!" cried Rodwell. "We never dreamed of such luck as this, sir!"

"Well, we'll fix up the details and get the thing started. It's late to-night, so I'll leave you to sleep on it. Good-night!"

"Wait a bit, sir. I'll come with you," said Roddy, "and so will Gripe. You aren't goin' to travel back over the moor alone to-night, if I know it!"

"Why not?" said Mr. Warrington, in surprise.

(Continued on the next page.)

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WITH PICK AND LAMP.

(Continued from the previous page.)

"If you'd been with us here from the beginnin', you wouldn't ask," replied Roddy. "It's a queer little story, and some day, perhaps, I'll tell it you, sir. Hallo, there's Dafydd! I must introduce to Dafydd; he's much the best of the three, an' I dare say he'll come, too."

Dafydd did. He learned the great news on the way, and rejoiced hugely. The dark journey, by good luck, passed without adventure. Mr. Warrington was escorted in the best hotel at Aberford. An hour afterwards the boys were back at Bryn y Garth, dog-tired, but happier than they had yet been in their lives before.

The Hand of Fate.

It was barely seven o'clock next morning, and the young partners being at their busiest, and full of glee to think that the old horse-gin and baskets they were working would be done away with for good as soon as ever the present contract with their Aberford customer was worked off, that a showily-clad and sharp-looking man with a very business-like air turned up at the cottage and asked for the boys. They went to meet him there.

"My name's Hooker," he said, slapping a card down on the table, "and I want to know if you'll take a contract to supply me with 10,000 tons of this coal of yours, and sign the agreement here on the spot? Nothing like hustling in business—sharp's the word. I want an exclusive contract. What d'ye say?"

He named a price that made Tom prick up his ears, so generous was it. But, naturally, neither of the boys were excited at such an offer after what they had decided the night before.

"You're too late," said Roddy; "we're full up."

"Full up? Nonsense!" said the man, and then he gave an exclamation of surprise. "Why, you don't mean that you've had a visit from that swindler who calls himself an agent for the Admiralty, have you? Yes? Why, my good lads, he's an impostor! He'll do you out of a deposit, and then you'll hear no more of him. You look through this contract, and you'll see it's the fairest offer anybody ever had. I want your coal, and I'm willing to pay for it, so let's get the thing fixed up. I'm glad I'm in time to save you from that impostor."

Tom's face grew as long as a fiddle, but Rodwell looked at the man thoughtfully.

"There are a lot of impostors, it's true," he said. "Let's see, what firm d'you say you represent?"

"No firm; myself only. I'll take this coal, and pay for it."

"That's a good-sized lie, for a start. You represent Kenyon Price & Co., for I've seen you at their Cardiff offices. You thought you'd catch us out, didn't you? Well, you can tell your boss, as he doesn't know it, that you weren't in time. Our contract is fixed with the Admiralty."

"How dare you use such language to me, you cub!" cried the visitor hotly.

"That's quite enough," said Roddy. "Your game is blown, and my advice to you, Mr. Hooker, is to be as good as your name for once, and hook it. Off with you!" he said sharply, pointing down the hillside. "For should any of my men find you here and learn whom you come from, you'll be lucky if you get home with all your bones whole. Go!"

The visitor choked, stammered, and then took the advice and departed as quickly as he could, without another word.

"What you call a fen in his ear—eh?" said Roddy, laughing.

"What was his game, though?"

"To pin us down legally, so we couldn't take a contract from anyone else, an' so make it impossible to deal with Warrington. They hung out a precious tempting price for a bait."

"Whew! Then K. P. 'd rather buy our coal himself than let us get a job?"

"Buy! Not much buying about it. They'd have contrived to bluff us out of the money. But I think we've been at it long enough not to be caught by that sort of chaff."

"It did give me the cold shivers when he said Mr. Warrington was a fraud."

"Not much in that, for if I'm not mistaken, there he is coming up the road."

It was Mr. Warrington indeed, and he brought with him three other men—a colliery expert, a well-known engineer and geologist, and a private secretary.

He greeted the boys warmly, and introduced his companions.

"I've come to make the inspection," he said, "if you're agreeable."

"Rather!" said Roddy. "You're just in time, sir," he added, laughing. And before the others he described the visit of Mr. Hooker.

"The impertinent rascal!" exclaimed the Admiralty agent. "I will see that those people smart for it! However," he added, with a smile, "I think I can convince you I'm the genuine article. Shall we get to work?"

Roddy put the control of the coal-getting into his head-viewer's hands at once. Pat Lloyd had been promoted to that job, and the boys devoted themselves entirely to Mr. Warrington and his companions.

The examination took three whole days, in all. Bore-holes were sunk in many places, experiments were made, and the thing was done most completely and exhaustively. At last Mr. Warrington delivered judgment.

"There was no doubt of it from the first," he said, "but it's even better than I thought. There are at least two seams, nearly as rich as the one you're working now, underneath at a greater depth. We have proved those. Well, my lads, nothing remains to be done but to draw up and sign that contract, and then get right to work on the coal."

Great news it was for the boys. Mr. Warrington was absent a day or two in London, and when he returned, with a Crown lawyer, Mr. Wynn Williams was called in on behalf of the boys, and had what Tom called the "fattest job" their good friend had seen for many a day. Mr. Rodwell Owen and Mr. Thomas Hughes, of Bryn y Garth, were appointed to supply his Majesty's Navy with coal till further orders, the Admiralty contracting to furnish the necessary machinery to start with.

Then followed the great triumph. Such a change came over Starve-Crow Farm as had never been dreamed of. A second shaft was sunk on the most scientific principles, two great stagings and winding-engines reared their heads by each shaft, houses and sheds sprang up like mushrooms, and a whole army of men were at work day by day. Tram-lines were laid in the pit roads, and the private Bill promised by Mr. Warrington, having been run through a Parliamentary committee, Mr. Kenyon Price, of Plus Rhyll, had to endure the unspeakable humiliation of seeing a truck-line laid right through his property, to carry his rivals' coal to Aberford railway-station. In another week the Bryn y Garth coal was going to the naval dockyards at Milford Haven by the hundred ton.

All this time the boys had been far too busy to concern themselves with Kenyon Price. They were doing nearly half as big a trade already as he did at Coed Coch, and had a better customer. Mr. Warrington had wanted to put his own managers in and practically take the whole thing out of the boys' hands as far as work went, but Roddy refused to agree to that.

He meant to keep the final control in his own hands, and so quickly did he pick up what was necessary for him to know, and so much did he know already, that he carried his point. One thing he was particular about—he chose all the viewers and under officials himself, for none had a better knowledge as to who were the best men to employ than he. One of his first selections was Mr. Glass, who had given up his job at the Coed Coch in disgust. He was installed by Roddy as underground manager, and an excellent one he made.

"Gosh!" said Tom, at the end of the third week, "I'd give something to know Kenyon Price's opinion of all this. He's been pretty quiet lately, though."

"He's up to something. He's not the man to take a thing like this lying down," said Roddy.

"Well, we're out of his reach now, anyway. Why, Bryn y Garth 'll be as big a concern as the Coed Coch itself, in another year."

"And the Coed Coch is ours, too, remember that. Tom, we owe everything that we've got to good old Matt, and I'm not goin' back on our promise to him. Now things are going smoothly here, we'll get on the warpath again."

Mr. Glass entered the cottage—which the boys had made quite luxurious by now—and asked to speak with Rodwell.

"Always glad to see you, Mr. Glass," said Roddy warmly. "This is like old times—eh?"

"I think I ought to tell you, sir," said the manager, "that I believe there's a spy in the pits."

"A spy! Whom?"

"That I don't know; but you can guess. Things have been going wrong, and it takes me all my time to put them right. Somebody's trying to stir up discontent among the men—not with much success as yet. And everything we do is known outside, even secret things, almost before it's settled here."

"Ah!" said Tom pensively. "So I've thought lately. Whom do you suspect?"

"Can't get an inkling, sir. And yet I keep an eye on everybody. It's one of the hewers, I'm pretty sure, that's all."

Roddy sat down and pondered for some time.

"I don't like the look of this, Mr. Glass," he said; "but I think I'm as quick to spot anybody as the next man. I shall go into my own pit as a hewer, for a week, and keep my eyes about me."

"You are badly hurt, my poor fellow, I fear," said the rector gently. "But you shall not despair. There is hope yet, surely?"

"All right, sir," said Mr. Glass, without much surprise. "And you'll be as good a hewer as we've got among three hundred, too."

"Drop the 'sir,' Glass, there's a good fellow. We're too old pals for that. It's settled, I go down to-morrow morning."

Rodwell was as good as his word. For four days he worked in the pit with his own men, and what those who recognised him thought there is no saying. He himself said very little. Two days he hewed, in different stalls each shift, selecting them himself, and two days he passed as an under-viewer.

"Well, old chap!" said Tom, on the fourth night, at supper, to which Mr. Glass was invited, "is there anything in it?"

"Who's that hewer in No. 40, with the grimy brown beard an' long, thin hands?" asked Rodwell.

"That's John Hammond. He's been with us a fortnight," said Mr. Glass—"a very good hewer. I know all about him. He's a new man in Aberford, and lives at Vachell's Rents. A good hewer, but not very strong."

"I'll work in his stall to-morrow," said Roddy, after a pause; "and quite alone with him, please."

Mr. Glass nodded, and arranged it. For two days Rodwell holed out the coal in No. 40, in company with John Hammond. Of what passed in the stall he said nothing; but each night Tom found his partner was away for an hour or two; nor would Roddy, as yet, explain the reason.

It was on the fourth day that Rodwell, having been up nearly all night, and working all day, found himself nodding with sheer fatigue in a pause of the work, and all but fell asleep. He roused himself suddenly with a jerk, turned, and saw the bearded pitman Hammond standing behind him with uplifted pick, a strange gleam in his eye, half fierce and half frightened, and beads of perspiration standing on his grimy forehead. Roddy sprang up, and the man gave back a step, with a dry noise in his throat.

"No, no," said Rodwell quietly, pointing to the pick; "not that way, man. You haven't the pluck for it, nor the nerve. You thought you had, but you've not."

The pitman's breath came quickly, and he hesitated, a hunted look in his eyes, and his hands gripping the pick-shaft convulsively, so that his knuckles grew white.

"It isn't at all a bad get up," continued Rodwell, in a bitter, mocking voice. "It took me several days to make sure I was right, without letting you know it. Is this your last card, Mr. Sully?"

He took a step forward, and with a quick movement grasped the hewer's beard and jerked it. It came away in his hand, revealing the sharp, lean features of the ex-viewer of Coed Coch.

Sully gave a hoarse cry of mingled fear and anger. As Rodwell stepped forward again, the man jumped back and swung up his pick with frantic, hysterical force, thinking he was about to be attacked.

"Keep back!" he screamed.

The pick came into violent contact with one of the props that supported the roof of the stall, near the entrance, and just behind Sully. So sharp and shrewd was the blow that it split the wooden plate at the head of the prop and shivered it.

There was a great weight on that prop; the roof needed plenty of support. An ominous crushing sound followed the splitting of the plate, and the prop buckled slightly. But the ex-viewer was too frantic and excited to know what he had done, and missing a dangerous stroke at Roddy, swung up again for another blow.

"Stop, you fool! Look what you're doing!" cried Roddy. "You'll have the roof down—Ah!"

The voice was drowned in a thundering crash as the pick, striking the prop and splitting it, made the whole thing buckle and yield, and a large portion of the stall's roof, none too sound, gave way altogether. In an instant an avalanche of coal thundered down, and Roddy, springing back, caught his heel and fell.

He was just outside the area of the fall, but he caught a gruesome glimpse of huge masses of coal beating Sully to the ground in the twinkling of an eye, and covering him. Then a great cloud of dust arose, and Roddy scrambled to his feet, aghast.

"Help, here!" he cried, as several men came running to the spot. "There's a man buried!"

They set to work with feverish haste, in spite of the danger of further falls, Rodwell setting the example. Sully's face and head were clear of the coal, but masses of it covered the rest of him, and he was unconscious. In the midst of the work of clearing the coal away from him Tom hurriedly entered the stall.

"What's wrong, Roddy? Good heavens!" he gasped; "it's Sully!"

"Bear a hand here!" exclaimed Rodwell.

With all the speed they could, the rescue gang extricated the victim, and when they had done so it was only too plain that Sully's time upon earth would be short.

"He's alive!" cried Tom. "Run for a doctor, some of you!"

The ex-viewer opened his eyes feebly.

"No doctor can help me now," he said huskily. "For pity's sake, find a clergyman, and ask him to come to me! I can go easier so. A clergyman, if he can reach me in time! I dare not go as I am!"

His voice died away to a faint mutter.

"A doctor, as quick as you can!" whispered Rodwell to Pat Floyd, who had just arrived. "And a clergyman, too, as he calls for one. Hurry, Pat! Poor fellow," muttered Roddy, under his breath. "I fear it's all up with him."

A doctor was not easy to get at Bryn y Garth, and the nearest one was far away. But almost daily the rector of Bryn village, in whose parish the pits were, visited Bryn y Garth, and he was soon summoned below. He entered the stall, and Sully's eyes lit up at the sight of him.

"You are badly hurt, my poor fellow, I fear," said the rector gently. "But you shall not despair. There is hope yet, surely?"

"I'm dying, sir. I'm glad you've come, an' soon I shall need badly to hear from you. But first you must help me. There's a great wrong to be righted—a wrong I've done to these two lads, and I can't go with that on my soul. I'm goin' to set it right, and you shall be the witness," said Sully, in a low, strained voice. "Here's how the wrong was done, and how I've kept them from their own, which they shall now take and hold for good. Listen, now, sir, for my time is very short."

(To be concluded on Saturday.)

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