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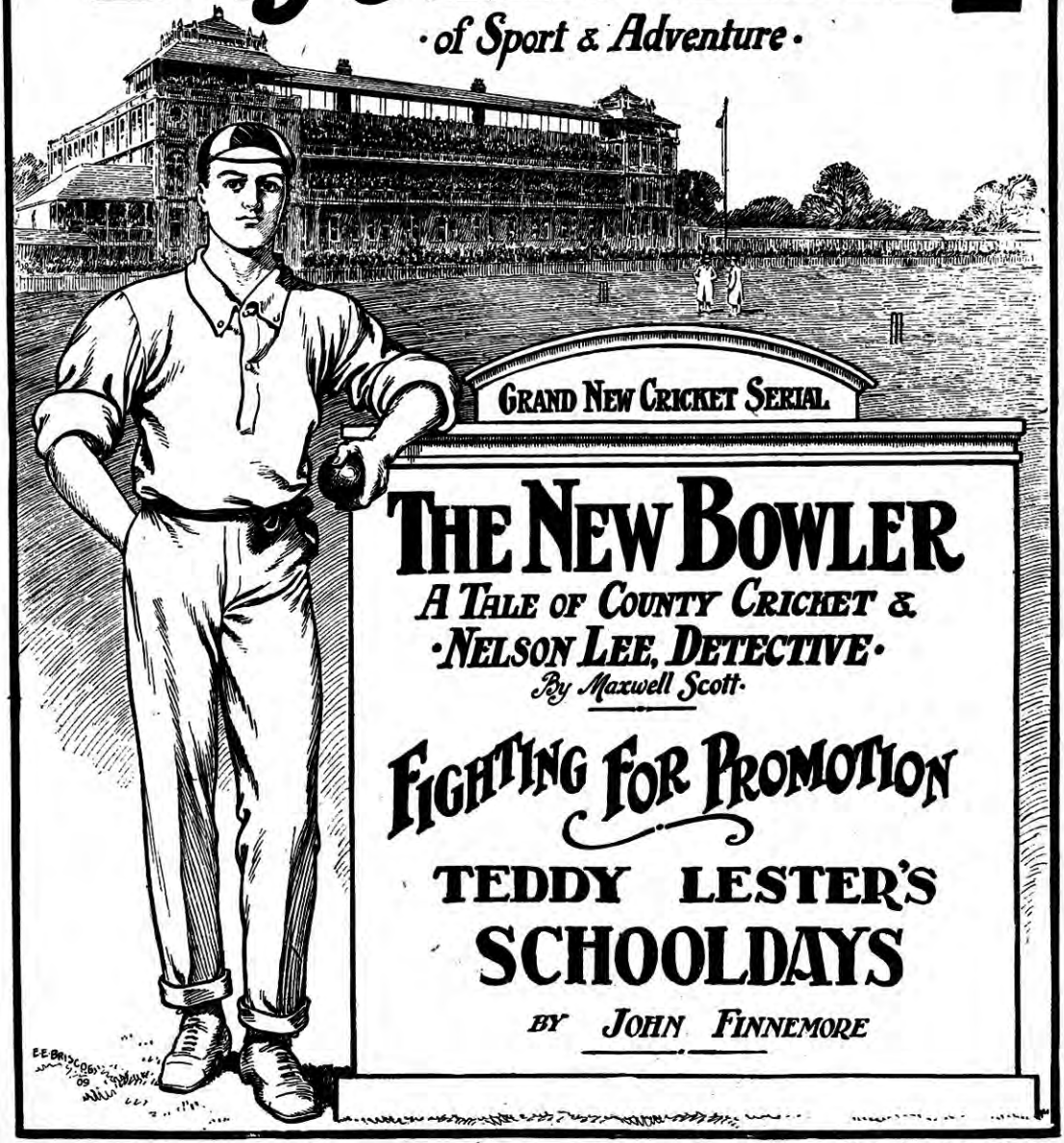

GRAND NEW CRICKET SERIAL

THE NEW BOWLER

A TALE OF COUNTY CRICKET &

·NELSON LEE, DETECTIVE·

By Maxwell Scott·

FIGHTING FOR PROMOTION

TEDDY LESTER'S SCHOOLDAYS

BY JOHN FINNEMORE

No. 361. Vol. VII.] [Saturday, May 1, 1909.

THE NEW BOWLER.

A Tale of the Great Australian Cricket Tour, Introducing Nelson Lee, the Famous Detective, and Jack Hartley.

By MAXWELL SCOTT.

COMMENCE THE STORY HERE.

The Australians.

Dick Vernon, a young Australian farmer, with no mean reputation as a cricketer, takes part in a match at Sidney—the Anglo-Australians *v.* The Rest of Australia—his splendid bowling help much admired. This match is being played so that the Selection Committee can decide upon the last few players who are to make up the eleven which is to be sent to England to represent Australia.

Nelson Lee, the great British private detective, is in Sydney at the time this match is played, and witnesses the game. Afterwards he is introduced to Dick Vernon, and compliments the young cricketer upon his play. Nelson Lee is certain that Dick will be invited to accompany the eleven to England.

Dick Vernon returns to his farm at Cooma in New South Wales, and one of the first things he does is to ride over to a neighbouring farm owned by a man named John Rigg. The attraction there is not John Rigg himself, but his adopted daughter, Ruth Sinclair, with whom Dick is in love.

At Rigg's Farm.

During his journey to Rigg's farm, Dick falls in with a stranger whose destination is the same as his own. The man is an unprepossessing-looking individual, and on his arrival, at sight of him, John Rigg seems stricken with fear. The two retire to a room together, while Dick and Ruth go for a walk around the farm. On their return they hear pistol-shots, and see the stranger jump on to his horse and gallop away. Dick starts in hot pursuit, but the scoundrel shoots the young man's horse beneath him, and makes good his escape. Meanwhile, Ruth Sinclair has discovered her father lying adoption shot through the neck and dying. He lives just long enough to scrawl on a piece of paper the name of his murderer—Mendoza—and these words: "If you wish to avenge my death go to Alec Tweedie, lawyer, Chancery Lane, London, and ask for him." Ruth determines to follow these vague instructions, and go to London. She also promises Dick that some day she will become his wife.

Fresh excitement is caused by the hurried arrival of the farmhouse, who report the approach of a notorious bushranger, named Dan Murphy, with his gang, in company with the murderer Mendoza. Why the latter has returned is beyond conjecture.

Dick gives hasty directions, and the farmhouse is rapidly barricaded to meet the attack of the bushrangers, which comes all too soon.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

THE 5th CHAPTER.
The Tables Turned.

IN the meantime the overseer and the rest of the hands, four in number, had shuttered the windows and had their guns in readiness. There were loopholes in the iron-sheeted shutters, designed for an emergency of this kind, and almost before the echoes of the bushrangers' volley had died away, an answering volley rang out from the inmates of the house.

This was an unexpected and a disagreeable surprise for Dan Murphy and his gang. They had confidently counted on taking the station by surprise, and had merely fired that opening volley in a striking fit of temper into the hearts of the inmates and convincing them of the futility of any resistance. When they discovered their mistake, and especially when three of their number were more or less seriously wounded by the shots of the defenders, they retreated in some confusion and took cover in the rear of the stables.

Here they held a hurried council of war, in which Mendoza took part, and in consequence of which Dan Murphy presently rode up to the front of the house on a white pocket-handkerchief fluttering from the end of the barrel of his upraised rifle.

By that time Dick Vernon, after bidding Ruth remain in the bed-room, had secured a gun and had joined the rest of the defenders.

"Hail, or I fire!" he cried, as Murphy rode into the moonlit yard, holding aloft his flag of truce. "What do you want?"

"I want to parley with yer," said Murphy, drawing rein. "We don't want to harm nobody, an' we don't want to steal nothing, but there's gentlemen in this wot 'as reason to believe that there are certain papers in the 'ouse wot he wants to see, an' he'd like to 'ave a look round an' see if he can find 'em!"

"You mean Mendoza, I suppose?" said Dick.

"Oh! Yer know 'is name, do yer?" said Murphy, in evident surprise. "Yes, that's the gent I mean—Mr. Mendoza!"

"Hail, or I fire!" he cried, as Murphy rode into the moonlit yard, holding aloft his flag of truce. "What do you want?"

"A murderer," said Dick—"a cowardly, cold-blooded murderer! What are the papers he wishes to see?"

The bushranger shrugged his shoulders.

"I neither know nor care," he said. "But he wants to see 'em, an' me an' my men is goin' to see as he does! At the same time, as I said afore, we don't want to 'arm nobody if we can 'elp it; so these is our terms. Open the door, an' let Mendoza in, an' as soon as he's found wot he wants we'll all go away as peaceable as lambs!"

"And if we refuse your terms?" asked Dick.

"You'll all be dead in less 'an arf an hour," said Murphy. "An' as soon as Mendoza 'as found wot he wants, we'll loot the place an' burn it to the ground. Them's our terms. Wot's yer answer?"

"So far as I am concerned," said Dick, nothing in the world would induce me to make terms with a murderer. But I'm not master here. I must consult the others before I give you your answer."

"Be quick about it, then!" growled Murphy.

Dick consulted the overseer, the rest of the hands, and finally Ruth Sinclair. They were all of the same opinion as himself. Desperate as the situation was, the affection they had borne for the murdered John Rigg forbade them for a moment to entertain the idea of coming to terms with the scoundrel who had murdered him.

"Besides," said the overseer, "if we accepted Murphy's terms, do you think he'd keep his part of the bargain?"

"No fear!" said the others.

"Of course he wouldn't!" said the overseer. "As soon as we opened the door, he and his men would rush into the house and murder the lot of us!"

"It is agreed, then," said Dick, "that we refuse their terms?"

"Yes!" chorussed Ruth and the others.

Dick communicated this decision to Dan Murphy. The bushranger made no reply, but, with another expressive shrug of his burly shoulders, wheeled his horse round and rode back to his followers.

A period of tense and anxious suspense ensued, during which, unknown to Dick and his companions, the bushrangers climbed on to the roof of the stables and wrenched off as many sheets of corrugated iron as there were members of the gang. It was an old dodge of theirs, and one that they had adopted with unfailing success on many previous occasions.

"I believe they've gone away," said Ruth, when a quarter of an hour had elapsed without any further sign of the bushrangers.

Dick shook his head.

"It's much luck!" he said grimly. "Dan Murphy and his gang are not so easily discouraged as all that. Why they have delayed their attack so long, and what they propose to do, I confess I can't imagine; but I'm perfectly sure——"

The sentence ended in a cry of dismay, for at that moment the bushrangers rushed into the yard, two of them armed with axes, the rest of them armed with revolvers, and all of them holding sheets of corrugated iron in front of them as bullet-proof shields!

Crack, crack, crack!

A rain of bullets poured through the loopholes in the shuttered windows. But the bullets glanced harmlessly off the sheets of corrugated iron, and a moment later the two men who were armed with axes were hacking at the front door.

"It's all up now!" groaned Dick, as the door fell in with a deafening crash. "But we'll die fighting, at any rate! Come along!"

Then he dug his spurs into his horse's sides and galloped off at whirlwind speed.

With shouts of alarm the bushrangers dashed out of the house and fled back to the rear of the stables, where they had left their horses. Before they knew what had happened, Dick and his companions could scarcely credit their good fortune, then, with one accord, they darted out into the moonlit yard.

About a quarter of a mile away they saw a squad of the N.S.W. mounted police, who were out on patrol duty, approaching the station. Dick fired his gun, to attract their attention, and excitedly pointed to the bushrangers, who by that time had mounted their horses and were galloping off in an opposite direction to that taken by Mendoza. Instinctively, the troopers guessed what had happened; and the next instant they were tearing after the bushrangers in hot and furious pursuit.

The rest may be told in very few words. After a short but exciting chase, followed by a desperate fight, in which many casualties occurred on both sides, the troopers proved victorious, and Dan Murphy and his gang were overpowered and secured.

But Mendoza—the man who had murdered John Rigg—succeeded in making his escape; and although his horse was discovered next day browsing in a field on the outskirts of Cooma, no trace of the man himself could be found.

THE 6th CHAPTER.
Selected.

ALL the events related in our last four chapters—the arrival of Mendoza at Sunny Creek, the murder of John Rigg, the attack by the bushrangers and their subsequent pursuit and capture—happened on Tuesday night. On the following Friday, as the reader will remember, Dick Vernon had been invited and had promised to play in the second Trial match at Melbourne; and the programme he had sketched out for himself, before the murder of John Rigg, had been as follows:

On Tuesday night, after spending an hour or so with Ruth, he had intended to return to Cooma. On Wednesday morning he had intended to leave for Sydney, where he had arranged to meet Bardsley, Noble, Gregory, Macartney, Cotter, Hopkins, Bowes, Kellaway, and Gorry—all of whom hailed from New South Wales, and all of whom were going to Melbourne to play in the Trial match, some of them for "All Australia," and the others for the "Rest." On Wednesday afternoon he had intended to leave with these men for Melbourne, where they were due to arrive on Thursday evening, and to play the match on Friday.

Such, we say, had been Dick Vernon's programme when he arrived at Sunny Creek on Tuesday night. After the murder of John Rigg, however, he decided that he could not leave Ruth alone with her great trouble, but must stay with her until after her adopted father's funeral, and until his affairs had been wound up.

But he had reckoned without Ruth. The moment he told her what he had decided to do, she at once forbade him to do anything of the kind.

"If you don't go to Sydney to-morrow," she said, "you won't be able to reach Melbourne in time to play in the match on Friday."

"Of course not," assented Dick.

"And if you don't play in the match on Friday," said Ruth, "you lose all chance of being selected to go to England!"

"That's so," said Dick. "But my first duty is to help you all I can, and so——"

"And so," said Ruth decisively, "you will go to Sydney to-morrow and play in the match at Melbourne on Friday. If you want to help me, that is the way to do it!"

"How do you make that out?" protested Dick. "How shall I be helping you by deserting you in your hour of trouble and going to Melbourne to play in a cricket match?"

"Because," said Ruth, "if you don't play in the match on Friday you won't be selected to go to England. And I want you to be selected. I want you to go to England. I want you to be there when I am there, and to help me to avenge my father's death."

"Then you really mean to go to England?" queried Dick.

She looked at him reproachfully.

"How can you ask such a question?" she said. "Of course I mean to go to England. Wasn't it my father's last request that I should do so? Have you forgotten this?"

She showed him the page of the account-book on which, it will be remembered, John Rigg had scrawled the name of Mendoza. If you wish to avenge my death, go to Abel Tweedie, lawyer, Chancery Lane, London, and ask him for the——"

"Needless to say, I do wish to avenge his death," continued Ruth. "I shall sell the farm and the stock as quickly as possible, and I shall cable to Alice Hartley that I accept her invitation, and am coming to stay with her at Torby Manor for a time. On arriving in England, I shall go to see Mr. Tweedie. If he cannot throw any light on the mystery, I shall engage the services of Nelson Lee—the unprepossessing Nelson Lee—and, if needs be, I will spend every penny I have to carry out my father's dying request.

"So now you know why I want you to play on Friday," she concluded. "I want you to be selected to go to England, as I know you will be, if you play. We shall then be able to go to England together, and you will be able to help me in my sacred task of avenging my father's death."

After a long story short, Dick finally yielded to her persuasions, and agreed to carry out his original programme. The result was that he returned to Cooma in the small hours of Wednesday morning, left for Sydney later in the day, met the men already mentioned, travelled with them to Melbourne, and presented himself, in company with the rest of the players, at Yarra Park on Friday morning.

The match, as previously stated, was the second Trial match arranged by the Board of Control and the Committee of Selection, and its object was to enable the committee finally to decide on the composition of the team to be sent to England.

For this purpose the committee had selected eleven men who, in their opinion, represented the best eleven that Australia could produce. They had then selected eleven other men whom they regarded as the next best combination. And now these two elevens were to contend. The former team being dubbed the "Anglo-Australians"—or, in some papers, "All Australia"—and the latter the "Rest."

Many changes had been made from the two teams which had figured under these names in the first Trial match at Sydney. Dick Vernon and Bardsley, for instance, had been transferred from the Rest to the Anglo-Australians, and the other changes which had been made had resulted in the Anglo-Australians being represented on the present occasion by the following powerful team:

McAlister, Bardsley, Noble, Ransford, Gregory, Armstrong, Macartney, Vernon, Cotter, Dodds, and O'Connor.

The Rest were also a powerful combination, as the following list of names will prove:

Parker, Mayne, Gehrs, Hopkins, Carroll, Barnes, Simpson, Kellaway, Whitty, Gorry, and Saunders.

There is no need to describe the first day's play at any great length. The Anglo-Australians won the toss, and so well did they play that they kept their opponents in the field all day. When stumps were drawn they had scored 496 for the loss of only six wickets, the not-outs being Bardsley 206, and Dick Vernon 49.

From the first ball on Saturday morning Dick was snapped at the wicket, thus failing by one run to achieve the coveted half century. Cotter partnered Bardsley, who carried his score to 264 before he was finally caught by Whitty, off Saunder's bowling. Eventually, a few minutes before the lunch interval, O'Connor was bowled by Saunders, and the innings terminated for the highly-respectable total of 648.

After lunch the Anglo-Australians took the field, and Parker (West Australia) and Mayne (South Australia) came out to open the innings of the Rest. Dick was entrusted with the first over, and, remembering his sensational feat at Sydney, where he had accomplished the hat trick with his first three balls, the spectators metaphorically held their breath.

Could the new bowler repeat his former triumph? It was too much to expect. Everybody said so, and Dick agreed with them.

"All the same, I'll have a try!" he muttered.

He opened with a medium-paced ball, which he meant to pitch on the middle stump, and break away to the off for a catch in the slips. But Parker did not wait for the ball to pitch. Running in to meet it, he smote with his bat, and the crowd involuntarily rose to its feet, expecting to see the ball fly over the bowler's head and out of the ground.

It was a magnificent straight drive, and the ball flew from the Westralian's bat with the directness and velocity of a cannon-ball. Dick saw it coming, a yard or more above his head, and with the swiftness of a lightning flash he leaped into the air and flung up his right hand.

Smack!

He stopped the ball, but the impact numbed his fingers, and he could not hold it. It rebounded from the centre of his palm, and dropped towards the ground. In an agony of despair he threw himself forward, flung one his left hand under it, caught it, bore half inch from the ground, and tossed it into the air, with an exultant shout of "How's that?"

For a moment Parker could scarcely believe his eyes. Neither could the rest of the players. Neither could the crowd. But the umpire could.

"Out!" he said stolidly.

Then it dawned on everybody that Dick had caught the ball; that Parker was out; that Dick had secured a wicket with his first delivery.

Like one man the spectators rose to their feet, and cheered until they were hoarse. Parker sadly retraced his steps to the pavilion. Dick's comrades crowded round him, and signified their delight by thumping him lustily on the back.

"The finest catch I ever saw!" said Noble; and the others echoed his opinion.

Gehrs, of South Australia, took the vacant wicket, and received Dick's next delivery with ill-concealed trepidation. But his fears were groundless. Dick's fingers were still tingling from the effects of his sensational catch, and he could neither grip the ball properly, nor give it that deadly spin which had been the chief characteristic of his bowling.

Gehrs soon discovered that Dick's bowling had lost its sting, and hastened to take advantage of the fact. Noble also made the same discovery, and after 20 runs had been scored off Dick, and Noble had thus had the best of the bowling, Dick was taken off and gave him a rest.

Against the bowling of Armstrong and Cotter, Gehrs and Mayne scored fairly freely; so, at last, Dick's services were again requisitioned. Although he was still obviously handicapped by his injured hand, he bowled Gehrs, and, two overs later, got Hopkins caught at the wicket. Mayne and Carroll played out time, and when stumps were drawn the Rest had scored 178 for three wickets, Mayne being not out 68.

Sunday, of course, was a day of rest, and the match was resumed on Monday morning. Dick and Armstrong shared the bowling, and the former's opening over proved that he had quite recovered from the effects of the injury to his hand.

In quick succession he captured Carroll's and Simpson's wickets; and, although Mayne and Kellaway made something of a stand, the whole side was out before lunch for 305.

At this stage of the game Dick had the splendid analysis of six wickets for 59 runs. In the second innings of the Rest—who had, of course, to follow on—he did even better, claiming seven for 41, and winding up a magnificent performance by bowling Whitty, Gorry, and Saunders with successive balls.

With the fall of Saunders's wicket the match came to an end, the total of the Rest's second innings being 165, and the Anglo-Australians thus winning by the conclusive margin of an innings and 158 runs.

"Which we owe entirely to you, my boy!" said Noble to Dick as they left the field. "You have more than justified everything I said about you to the Selection Committee. Your place in the team that is going to England is now assured. You can pack up your traps, and make all arrangements for going to England!"

Noble's prophecy proved correct, for that same evening Dick received an official communication from the Committee of Selection,

formally inviting him to form one of the team to visit the Old Country.

Needless to say, Dick accepted the invitation, and next morning the news was cabled to England that the following sixteen players had been selected to represent Australia, and would, with Frank Laver, of Victoria, as manager, sail for England on the ss. Oronto in five weeks' time:—

R. Vernon, J. R. Bardsley, M. A. Noble, S. E. Gregory, A. Cotter, V. Trumper, H. Carter, C. G. Macartney, A. J. Hopkins (all of New South Wales), W. W. Armstrong, V. Ransford, P. McAlister, W. Carkeek (all of Victoria), W. J. Whitty, J. A. O'Connor (both of South Australia), and R. Hartigan (of Queensland).

THE 7th CHAPTER.
Bound for England.

FIVE weeks elapsed. The Australian cricketers, after being entertained at a public luncheon by the Governor-General, the Earl of Dudley, had embarked on board the Oronto, and were now on their way to England. Ruth Sinclair, who had meanwhile sold the farm at Sunny Creek, had booked her passage by the same vessel, and at the moment when we renew our acquaintance with her, she and Dick were standing on the promenade deck of the Oronto, gazing at the fast-retreating shores of Australia.

It was then March 23rd. For the next fortnight the voyage proceeded without incident, deck-cricket and other sports being the order of the day, with concerts and amateur theatricals at night.

Long before the end of the fortnight, Ruth had established herself as a prime favourite with the rest of the passengers; whilst the members of the Australian team, knowing that she was engaged to their most popular comrade, Dick Vernon, and having an inkling of her mission to England, plied her with numerous attentions, and vied with each other in their endeavours to anticipate her slightest wish.

On April 8th the Oronto arrived at her first port of call—Colombo, the commercial capital of Ceylon. Here several of the passengers disembarked, and here also several new passengers came aboard, amongst whom was Nelson Lee, the famous English detective.

"Nelson Lee!" exclaimed Dick, when he saw him. "Well, I never! Fancy meeting you here!"

"Why not?" said the detective, with a smile. "Didn't I tell you when I saw you in Sydney that I was going to Ceylon to hunt for the final piece of evidence that I required to complete my case?"

"You did," said Dick; "but that was a couple of months ago. I expected that by this time you would be back in England."

"I also expected that I should be back in England by now," said Nelson Lee, "but my investigations in Ceylon took longer than I anticipated. However, I got what I wanted in the end, so my time hasn't been wasted."

"Your case is finished, then?" said Dick. "You are now returning to England?"

"Yes," said the detective. "And you are going to England, too, I see. Well, I'm not surprised. I told you, didn't I, that you were certain to be selected to go to England. I told you I should see you in England; but I must confess I didn't expect to see you quite so soon as this."

"Neither did I," said Dick. "But I'm very glad to have met you before I reach England, because—"

He turned to Ruth.

"This is Mr. Nelson Lee, my dear," he said. Then he turned to the detective.

"This, Sinclair," he said, "is my affianced wife. She is going to England, too, and may have need of your services there."

The detective bowed to Ruth.

"Any service I can render," he said, "is yours to command."

Then he glanced inquiringly at Dick.

"I haven't time to explain now," said the latter, "but I'll tell you all about it after dinner—that is, of course, if Miss Sinclair agrees."

"Certainly!" said Ruth. "I shall be only too glad to hear what Mr. Lee thinks of the affair, and to have the benefit of his advice."

Dinner was over. Nelson Lee and Ruth and Dick were seated in a secluded corner of the drawing-room. Dick had told the detective all about the murder of John Rigg, and Ruth had shown him the leaf of the account-book on which John Rigg had scrawled his dying request.

"And now, what's your theory?" asked Dick.

"It is impossible to formulate any theory at present," said Nelson Lee. "Before I begin weaving theories, I must have a great deal more information than I possess at present. For instance"—he turned to Ruth—"what do you know of your adopted father's history?" he asked.

"Practically nothing," said Ruth. "He was of English birth, I believe, and emigrated to Australia many years ago. He adopted me when my parents died, and was always very good and kind to me, but he never spoke of his past history?"

"Did you ever hear him mention the name of Mendoza?"

"Never."

"Or refer to any enemies he had, either in England or elsewhere?"

"Never."

"Yet he must have had enemies, and the fact that he told you, if you wished to avenge his death, to go to this London lawyer, would seem to show that his enemies were in England. Possibly, when he emigrated to Australia, he did so in order to hide from his enemies. Possibly they traced him to Australia after a lapse of many years, and sent Mendoza to interview him."

"With what object?" asked Dick.

The detective ebook his head.

"I cannot tell," he said. "Seeing, however, that Mendoza bribed the bushrangers to attack the house, and instructed them to offer to let you all go free if you would let him search the house, I should say that Mr. Rigg was in possession of something—possibly some papers—which his enemies were desperately anxious to secure."

"But he wasn't," said Ruth. "Before I sold the farm I collected all Mr. Rigg's papers, and I am prepared to swear that there was no document amongst them of the slightest importance to anybody."

"I will offer another suggestion, then," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps Mr. Rigg, before he emigrated to Australia, confided the papers to Mr. Tweedie. Perhaps his enemies knew that he had confided them to somebody, but didn't know to whom. Perhaps Mendoza wanted to search the house, in the hope of discovering the name and address of the man to whom Mr. Rigg had confided the papers."

"That sounds more likely," said Dick. "If you are right, Miss Sinclair has only to interview Mr. Tweedie, and the mystery will be solved."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "Five minutes' talk to Mr. Tweedie may clear up the whole mystery."

He turned to Ruth.

"What are your plans?" he asked. "Where are you going to stay when you reach England?"

"With an old school-friend of mine," said Ruth—"Mrs. Hartley, of Torby Manor, in Devonshire."

"Jack Hartley's wife!" exclaimed Nelson Lee.

"Yes," said Ruth. "Do you know Mr. Hartley?"

"Very well indeed," said Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, I'm going to Torby Manor myself soon after I reach England."

He turned to Dick.

"And you and the rest of the Australian team are going to Torby, I believe?" he said.

"Yes," said Dick. "Mr. Hartley has invited us to make his house our headquarters for the first week or fortnight after our arrival. He's very keen on cricket, isn't he?"

"Very!" said Nelson Lee. "And he plays cricket as well as he plays football—which is saying a good deal, as you doubtless know, he's a Canadian by birth, as he only settled in England last year, so he isn't qualified yet to play for any English county. Not to be deprived of his cricket, he has got together a splendid team of old public school and 'Varsity cricketers, which he calls the "Ramblers," and he has arranged a list of fixtures with all the leading counties."

"I know," said Dick. "We are to practise on his private cricket-ground, and we are to play our first match in England against the Ramblers."

"And Jack Hartley has invited me to play for the Ramblers against you!" said Nelson Lee. "That's why I'm going to Torby."

He turned to Ruth again.

"So we shall meet again at Torby Manor in a few weeks' time," he said. "In the meantime, if you like, I will see Mr. Tweedie as soon as I get England, and I will ascertain if he can throw any light on the mystery of your adopted father's death."

"Thank you!" said Ruth; "but I would rather see Mr. Tweedie myself in the first instance. You see, my father asked me to do so. If Mr. Tweedie cannot solve the mystery, I shall be very glad indeed to avail myself of your services."

The detective bowed.

"Just as you like," he said, with a note of disappointment in his voice. "In the meantime, may I give you one word of advice?"

"Certainly!" said Ruth. "What is that?"

"If my theory is correct," said Nelson Lee—"if Mr. Rigg deposited certain papers with Mr. Tweedie; if his enemies do not know the name and address of the man with whom he deposited the papers; if they are desperately anxious—as they appear to be—to ascertain the name and address, don't you think it would be wise to burn this leaf which you tore out of the account-book, and on which Mr. Rigg wrote the name and address?"

"Oh, I couldn't think of burning it!" said Ruth. "They were the last words my father ever wrote, and—and——— Well, I simply couldn't burn them!"

Again the detective bowed.

"I have given you my advice," he said. "It is for you, of course, to decide whether you will follow it or not. I was only thinking that perhaps Mr. Rigg's enemies might make an attempt to secure the page. But, of course, if you prefer not to destroy it——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I have nothing more to say," he said.

Saying which, he rose to his feet, bowed to Ruth a trifle coldly, and sauntered off to the smoke-room.

If only Ruth had taken his advice!

THE 8th CHAPTER.
The Two Spies.

ON the twelfth day after leaving Colombo, the Oronto passed through the Suez Canal, and three days later she arrived at Naples.

A good many of the passengers disembarked at Naples, and a few new passengers came aboard. Amongst the latter—that is to say, amongst the new passengers who joined the Oronto at Naples—were two young English tourists who appeared to be inseparable chums, and who registered in the names of Copley and Wyndham.

Half an hour after the Oronto had left Naples, Copley, with a white, excited-looking face, came hurrying up to Wyndham, who was leaning himself on the hurricane deck.

"I've just made a terrible discovery!" he said in a low, agitated voice. "Nelson Lee is aboard!"

Wyndham dropped his cigarette and reeled as if he had been struck.

"Nelson Lee!" he gasped. "Are you sure?"

"I've seen him," said Copley. "He joined the ship at Colombo, and intends to remain on board until the reaches Plymouth. Worst of all, he's an intimate friend of Vernon and Miss Sinclair, and spends nearly all his time in their company."

Wyndham spat out a venomous imprecation.

"The chief ought to have told us," he said. "It's no right to send us on a mission of this kind without warning us that Nelson Lee was aboard."

"But I don't suppose the chief knew," said Copley.

"Then Mendoza ought to have told him."

"But I don't suppose Mendoza knew, either," said Copley. "You see, Mendoza's cablegram to the chief was despatched from Sydney the day the Oronto sailed. At that time Nelson Lee wasn't aboard; and, of course, Mendoza couldn't guess that he would join the ship at Colombo."

Wyndham nodded.

"You're right," he said. "Now I come to think of it, neither Mendoza nor the chief could possibly know that Nelson Lee was aboard."

"It upsets all our calculations, doesn't it?" said Copley ruefully.

"For the present, yes," said Wyndham, who was rapidly regaining his customary composure.

"Altogether, if you ask me," said Copley, "it would be madness for us to attempt to carry out our plan under the nose, so to speak, of Nelson Lee."

"Therefore," said Wyndham coolly, as he lit a fresh cigarette, "we must get rid of Nelson Lee!"

"How?" asked Copley in a startled whisper.

Wyndham laughed and blew out a cloud of filmy smoke.

"You needn't look so white about the gills," he said; "I'm not proposing that we should murder Nelson Lee. I merely propose that we should get rid of him."

"But how?" asked Copley again.

"When we reach Marseilles," said Wyndham, "I'll cable to the chief, and I'll ask him to arrange with one of our men in Madrid to wire to Nelson Lee at Gibraltar, requesting him to go to Madrid at once, in order to investigate a case of murder and robbery at the British Ambassador's house!"

"The telegram will be delivered to Nelson Lee as soon as the Oronto arrives at Gibraltar," he continued. "Without a doubt he will swallow the bait. He will leave the ship and start for Madrid. The ship will then resume her voyage without him, and we shall have three clear days, before she reaches Plymouth, in which to carry out our plan."

Copley gazed at him admiringly.

"You're a genius!" he said. "I should never have thought of a simple dodge like that!"

* * * * * * *

It was April 27th. The Oronto had reached Gibraltar, and was anchored in the bay. Most of the Australian cricketers had gone ashore, to view the sights of the famous "Rock"; but Dick had remained aboard, and was chatting to Ruth in the music-room.

Presently the door opened and Nelson Lee put in his head.

"Ah! Here you are!" he said, walking in. "I've come to say good-bye—or, rather, au revoir! I'm leaving you here."

"Leaving us!" exclaimed Dick and Ruth in the same breath.

"Yes," said the detective. "As you know, I intended to stay aboard till the vessel reached Plymouth; but I've just received an urgent telegram from the British Ambassador at Madrid. Some important despatches have been stolen, and one of the secretaries has been murdered, and his Excellency wishes me to investigate the affair."

"So you are going to Madrid?" said Dick.

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "I don't know how long the case will occupy me, of course; but I hope to be back in England in time to play against you at Torby. In the meantime—au revoir!"

He hurried off to the gangway, where a boat was in waiting for him. He crossed the bay to Algeciras, and almost at the same moment as the Oronto heaved up her anchor and resumed her voyage, the detective took his seat in the Madrid express.

It was then about three o'clock in the afternoon. Four hours later the first-class passengers assembled in the saloon for dinner. After dinner Dick and Ruth, both of whom were in an evening mood, strolled down the promenade deck for a couple of hours; and then, as the night wind suddenly grew chill and a wetting mist crept over the sea, Dick suggested that Ruth should put on a wrap.

Ruth approved of this suggestion, and ran off to her cabin for her opera-cloak. When she came back her face was white, and she was trembling with suppressed excitement.

"Somebody has been in my cabin!" she said. "They have broken open all my boxes and bags, and have turned out everything on the floor!"

"Has anything been stolen?" asked Dick quickly.

"Not a thing!" said Ruth. "But every nook and corner of the cabin has been thoroughly searched. What does it mean, Dick—what does it mean?"

"I haven't an idea," said Dick. "We must report the matter to the purser at once. In the meantime may I see your cabin?"

Ruth led him to her cabin, where one glance sufficed to show him that she had not exaggerated the state of affairs.

"Do you think it was this they were searching for?" asked Ruth, drawing from her pocket the page of the account-book on which John Rigg had scribbled his dying message. "Mr. Lee said, you know, that my father's enemies might try to rob me of it. Do you think that was one of his enemies who heard, and that they searched my cabin to-night in the hope of finding this sheet of paper?"

Dick started.

"By Jove! I shouldn't wonder if you are right!" he said. "Anybow, you'd better take Mr. Lee's advice and burn that sheet of paper at once."

"I couldn't!" said Ruth. "I couldn't burn the last words my father ever wrote. But—but would you mind taking charge of the paper? It will be safer with you than with me."

"I'll take charge of it with pleasure," said Dick, taking the folded page from her hand and slipping it into his waistcoat pocket. "We'll discuss what's best to be done with it later. In the meantime, I must inform the purser of what has happened. You stay here. I'll be back in a minute."

Leaving Ruth in the cabin, he started out for the purser's office. The night was intensely dark; and, as already mentioned, the Oronto's decks were deshrouded in mist.

Ruth's cabin opened on to the hurricane-deck. Not a soul was in sight as Dick stepped out of the cabin, and closed the door behind him; but ere he had taken a dozen strides, two shadowy forms leaped through the mist and flung themselves upon him!

The forms were those of Wyndham and Copley! It was they who had searched Ruth's cabin, and they had heard every word of the conversation which had just taken place between the two lovers.

So sudden and unexpected was their attack, that Dick was completely taken by surprise. Almost before he had realised what was happening, he was lying on his back on the deck, with Wyndham kneeling on his chest and gripping his windpipe with his hands.

"It's in his waistcoat-pocket!" said Wyndham to Copley, in a hoarse excited whisper. "Quick! Fish it out, and then we'll stun him and drop him overboard!"

(Another powerful, long instalment will appear next week.)

Our Cricket League.

Below is a list of Cricket Clubs which have applied for admission to THE BOYS' REALM Cricket League up to the time of going to press:

SENIOR SECTION.

West Kensington United C.C., St. Michael's C.C., Nine Elms Brewery C.C., and Albert United C.C. (A Team).

JUNIOR SECTION.

Cheshunt Juniors C.C., St. Mark's Lads C.C., Bruce Athletic C.C., Laisterdyke Crescent C.C., Swan Athletic C.C., Croftonians C.C., Glendale C.C., Histon Institute Junior C.C., Albert United C.C. (B Team), Ferndale Athletic C.C., St. Aloysius C.C., Brooklyn C.C., and Mount St. Mary's C.C.

The following clubs have neglected to state which Section of the League they wished to join (Junior or Senior): Havelock C.C., Eclipse C.C., Birstall Invicta C.C., and Montgomery C.C.

Full Particulars of How to Join Will be Found on Page 794.

You Can Still Get Your Copy of THE BOYS' REALM Cricket Book—1d.

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, 23, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, E.C.
Back numbers of THE BOYS' REALM may be had by any reader for distribution amongst his chums on receipt of a postcard.
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, 23, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

New Features Coming.

MY chums already know that I am ever on the look-out for special attractions for THE BOYS' REALM, and that I spare neither time nor expense in my endeavours to procure the very best stories and articles for publication in our columns. This week, the special feature of our paper is the new series of cricket articles by J. B. Hobbs, of the Surrey XI., than whom there is no greater authority on all matters pertaining to our national summer pastime. I hope my friends will tell their chums about this brilliant new series of articles from his pen.

I am now making arrangements for the publication of swimming, cycling, running, and rowing articles by experts. All these will commence in our paper very shortly, and will be written by well-known and prominent gentlemen connected with each sport mentioned. I hope to be able to reveal their names at an early date.

Our Cricket League.

APPLICATIONS are pouring in from the secretaries of cricket clubs all over the country, asking that they may compete in our Great Cup Competitions, full particulars of which appear on another page. There is every indication that this year our Cricket League will be more successful than ever before. It is evident that the junior cricketers of our country are waking up to the fact that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by joining The Boys' REALM League. Here are a few reasons why the club in which you are personally interested should compete:

1. Because there is no entrance fee.

2. Because added interest is thereby given to the ordinary friendly matches.

3. Because each club interested has a good chance of securing the solid silver trophy which I have put up for competition.

4. Because if the cup is not won by your club, there still remain the silver medals and cricket sets.

5. Because every club entering will receive a handsome prize during the season in the shape of a first-class cricket bat.

If these five reasons appeal to you, and I am sure they must, you should register your club at once. See page 794 for full particulars.

Conquering the Smoking Habit.

IT is from a Carnarvon reader, whose initials are L. J., that I get a very interesting question. He tells me that he cannot give up smoking, although he is convinced that the habit is doing him a great deal of harm. Can I help him? he asks.

Has it never occurred to my reader that in confessing he cannot conquer the smoking habit he is giving himself a very poor character? He is practically saying that he is not master of himself, and this is a confession which no boy ought to make.

I do not see any reason why a boy should smoke, but I do see and do know scores of reasons why a boy should not smoke. The chief reason why a boy should not smoke is that it damages his physical condition, and if he did not smoke he would be a better and healthier lad. Smoking by lads is apt to affect them mentally as well as physically.

It is difficult in the limited space which I can give this paragraph to enter into the action which tobacco has on the system, but particularly I may say that smoking on the part of boys is apt to react through the tissues upon the brain, and in a certain way to demoralise them and set up diseases which should not exist.

Now, my Carnarvon friend, why not make the experiment, and send me your pledge? Why not say to me: "I am going to throw up smoking until I am twenty-one, because I realise it is not going to do me any good; on the contrary, it is going to do me a lot of harm; and because I am not going to confess to myself that I am a slave to any habit?"

It is when I receive letters like L. J.'s that I am doubly glad that the law has stepped in and prohibited youngsters under sixteen years of age from smoking. I believe that there is a tremendous amount of harm being done to the rising generation through indulgence in this foolish and silly practice. Ever since the early days of "The Boys' Friend" I have been preaching against smoking by boys, and have endeavoured to stir up parents, teachers, and those in still higher authority to a sense of this terrible evil.

And at length my efforts have borne fruit, and we now have a law to deal with juvenile smokers. I am heartily glad of it.

On Emigration.

THE thoughts of many an enterprising boy in his early years turn towards emigrating. It is surprising what a number of lads nowadays think of commencing life in a new country. Very naturally this is so, and the reason of it is easily found. Boys read newspapers to a much greater extent nowadays than was formerly the case, and the consequence of this excellent habit is that many lads realise that in our Colonies there are splendid chances for the steady, shrewd, industrious boy.

But this is not the only spur to emigration which boys receive—they read also in the newspapers, and in the many weekly periodicals, stories of men who, by industry and perseverance, have in our Colonies won immense fortunes in the great race of life. Naturally, with these words in his mind—brought before it repeatedly as they are—many a bright boy says to himself, there are plenty of chances for me out of Great Britain—more than I shall ever get at home—so I am off to one of the Colonies.

A Warning.

ALL this leads me to the object of this and the preceding paragraph—a warning to those boys who are thinking of emigrating. First, however, let me lay down for their guidance a few points which they should carefully consider before they decide to go abroad.

The first is that they should possess the willing consent of their parents. The second is that they should be healthy and strong. The third is that they should possess a knowledge of some useful trade; clerks and young men without any calling are not wanted in new countries. Everyone must be able to do something useful, something which will help the Colony forward. A fourth most useful point to bear in mind is that the young emigrant must select a Colony whose prosperity is increasing. And still one other important point is for the would-be emigrant to be careful not to be gulled by plausible advertisements. For information respecting our various Colonies, my readers cannot do better than apply to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W. This is a Government office, and there is no fear of the applicants for particulars of emigration being given false accounts of the prospects of the Colony they are thinking of going to.

A Bad Memory.

"INQUIRER" wants me to advise him concerning a system of memory training which he has seen advertised.

I am afraid that I cannot take upon myself the responsibility of recommending any system of memory training, because I know nothing whatever about the results achieved by them. I only knew that any boy of average intelligence can remedy a defect of this kind by a certain amount of mental training. Memory is, after all, largely a matter of habit. Get your memory into a proper way of working, and it won't fail you when you want to use it.

Failure of memory is a very common thing among lads, and it is really due to a lack of concentration—a habit one is apt to grow out of as one gets older, when the vital importance of not forgetting things is realised.

A Yankee Reader's Grumble.

I AM always glad to receive letters of candid criticism from my readers, whether the writer grumbles at my papers or praises them. Of course, I do not like to get several pages of vulgar abuse, as I must admit I have done on occasion, not because this does any harm, but because it proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the writer is a little-minded snob, and not worth a moment's thought. That is why I never condescend to answer such a letter, either through the post or on this page.

But as I have already said, I do like honest, candid criticism. If any of my friends have a grumble to make, let them write me a gentlemanly note pointing out exactly the trouble, and their letter will be duly taken into account when mapping out my future programme for the papers under my control.

I have received this week a grumbling letter from one of my Yankee friends whose initials are J. H. M. This is what he says:

"Boston, U.S.A.

"Dear Editor,—I have been a reader of 'The Boys' Friend' since its halfpenny days, THE REALM since its formation, also 'The Union Jack' and 3d. Library, and I have yet to see their equal on either side of the 'Pond.'

"Now, dear Editor, do you honestly think you are giving your Scotch readers a 'square deal' by:

"1. Omitting out of fourteen stories in these four papers to have one about Scotland or even in any way mention the Thistle?

"2. By the distribution of those magnificent photos of the leading football teams to omit the production of a Scottish club?

"3. By your far too frequent allusions to England as good old England, which raises the feeling that your paper is only for the place of its publication? I think Britain would be a little more harmonious to all at home, in the Colonies, and abroad. I am not Scotch, but an American who resided in Scotland for a short time, and who admires the ways and manners of its people.

"I am secretary of a football team out here, and I must congratulate you on your splendid football tales and the excellent advice you give to all your readers.

"Trusting to see a reply in one of your two papers, 'The Friend' or REALM, at an early date, which will show I have written on behalf of all Scotties. Wishing you and your papers every success, I remain,

"A YANKEE READER."

I feel sure that my Scottish friends will be obliged to J. H. M. for thus taking up the cudgels on their behalf, though, singularly enough, none of them have complained to me about the three points mentioned in the above letter. Nevertheless, I will see what I can do to rectify the omission, and to publish more Scottish tales in my papers than heretofore.

He Wants to Become a Railway Guard.

"JOHN S," of Birmingham, informs me that it is his ambition to become a railway guard. He, therefore, writes to me for advice.

The following facts were kindly supplied me by one of my readers, who is an employee of the Great Western Railway. This information upon how to become a guard is not only authentic, therefore, but of a highly practical nature, and should consequently be of great value to every reader who is thinking of securing a position upon a railway.

To become a guard, applicants must generally first become porters. Applications should be addressed to the "Superintendent of the Line." Nearly every spring several hundreds of men are taken on by the various companies for what is termed "Summer Service." Some of these are afterwards dismissed, but this "summer service" gives an excellent opportunity for a lad to enter the service of a railway company.

After mastering porter's work, the ambitious young man will proceed a step higher in the railway world, and become a porter-guard—that is, partly porter and partly guard. From porter-guard to second guard, and from second guard to head guard are but runge higher up on the ladder.

The following is a table of wages, from a porter to a guard:

Porters, 18s. to 17s. per week (and tips); porter-guards, 17s. to 19s.; second guards, 22s. to 23s.; head guards, 27s. to 29s.

And now, having supplied my chum with all the information he requires, it only remains for me to wish him every success.

My Brief Reply Corner.

A CURE FOR BLACKHEADS.—From Glasgow I have received a letter from J. K. asking me for a cure for blackheads.

J. K. should wash the part affected very often with a deal of soap and hot water, followed by a brisk rubbing with a rough towel. It will hasten the disappearance of these blackheads if he holds the affected parts over the steam arising from a basin of hot water every night, and then rubs them briskly as previously explained. He should keep the bowels open, take plenty of exercise, and a hot bath once a week.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

I cordially recommend my friends to— carefully read this cheery talk.—YOUR EDITOR.

"PLAYING THE GAME."

By the Chaplain of the Savoy.

My Dear Boys,—Life is very like a game of cricket, and it is a most important thing to observe the rules. Onlookers soon detect when anyone is cheating, and you can always feel the contempt of the crowd when one of the players takes a false advantage. It is a poor sensation, when a boy knows he is really out, to have the umpire's decision in his favour.

No one is ever quite sure whether you are playing the game of life fairly except yourselves. It is not very difficult to score falsely, but it brings little satisfaction. I have known a very large number of boys, but I always remember the few who "played the game." There was, as a rule, something about them quite different from other men. Their word is their bond, and their uprightness and genuineness inspires those who come in contact with them.

On the other hand, for the most part, people are found out. Many of the world have never played the game, which does not make any difference, though possibly they may have "succeeded." So I would say to you, never on any account "do anyone is the eye." Avoid all sharp dealing. Never pretend. If you stick to this in little things, it will stand you in good stead when you come to greater ones, and people will point to you as a lad who is "straight as a die," who never says more than he means, and who means everything he says. Shun everything underhand, and whatever bit of work you have to do, do it thoroughly.

It is a golden rule to be first to get to the office, and to be the last to leave it. Do not be slipshod about your business because no one is looking, or because the governor is away. Playing the game means sincerity in every shape or form.

Though we may not all be brilliant, there is a certain sterling worth in honest plodding and straightforwardness which brings with it its own reward.

It is a fine thing to be brought up in a home where everything from top to bottom is real, and I write to you as one who had this great advantage. Anything else is un-British, and the time is coming when we shall need all the old island virtues which made our ancestors what they were, and which will slip away from us every day unless we take uncommon good care. This, then, is my advice to you: Make a vow that nothing shall induce you to break the rules of the game of life. Start now, and if you "play the game" I shall be surprised if many of you don't get top average.—Your affectionate friend,

CHAPLAIN OF THE SAVOY.

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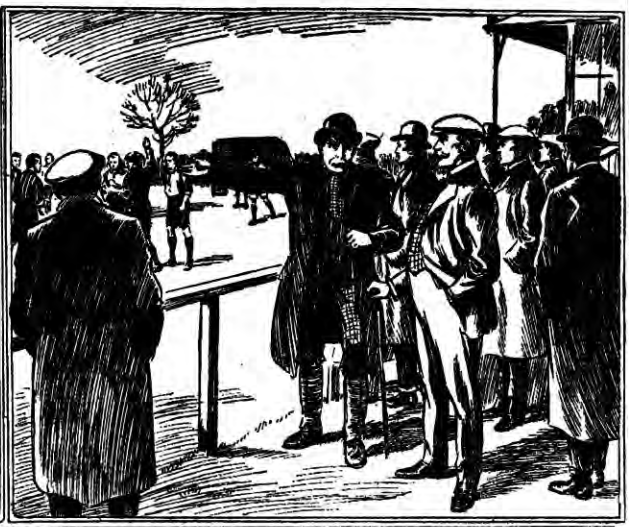
YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

The Wrong Referee.

A HUMOROUS COMPLETE FOOTBALL TALE.



John Crook pointed excitedly to the middle of the field. "They've got the wrong referee!" he yelled. "That's not Edgar Mason!"

The Publican Who Tried Bribery and Corruption.

JOHN CROOK, publican of Little Marley, sat one Sunday afternoon in a big arm-chair in the bar-parlour of the Coach and Horses, smoking a churchwarden, and thinking hard as he gazed into the glowing embers of the fire.

Crook was a famous character in Little Marley, one of the best-hearted, best-humoured men that ever breathed, and, astonishing to say, despite the fact that he had for eleven years run the Coach and Horses, turning it during that period into a paying concern, the lion-hearted publican was a teetotaller.

In his younger days John Crook had been a fine all-round athlete, a good boxer, and a capital horseman. In those days the game of football was practically unknown in Little Marley, it being quite a modern craze.

John Crook himself had never seen the game played until his son Jack came back from school two years ago; but during the progress of little more than a year a big local club had sprung up in Little Marley, of which Jack Crook was captain.

Having witnessed one or two strenuous games, John Crook became a convert to the looking-on passion. His was always the loudest voice that urged his son's club on to victory, and his purse was ever at the service of the club.

John Crook devoured almost every article on football that was written. He read the latest news about the big professional clubs, and, reading far more into the lines than was ever intended or that ever existed, he began to harbour a contempt for the morality of the great winter pastime.

Though upright to the last degree in all business matters, the Marley publican had strange ideas with regard to sport and politics. In either the one or other of these he thought it perfectly legitimate to buy any advantage if it were possible to do so.

"Bribery and corruption was the watchword at the old hustings, Jack," he would sometimes say to his son; "and you don't mean to tell me politicians have grown too scrupulous to employ such methods now. They do it in a more decent way, that's all."

The charges brought against a great Manchester football player and his suspension, therefore, had made a tremendous impression upon John Crook.

"Everything ain't fair and above-board in football," he would mutter to himself, as he watched the game; "and if our side play fair at the game, and t'other side don't, we're bound to get licked in the long run."

This view he would repeat to his son Jack on a Sunday, and Jack would burst into a roar of laughter.

"You're incorrigible, dad!" he would say. "As if there is any cheating and arranging of results in the amateur game. We are in for the County Cup, and Marley stands as good a chance of winning it as any other club in the competition; but if we do win, it won't be buying over the enemy."

Jack's father, however, remained unconvinced. His forehead was puckered with thoughtful lines as the Cup-ties came round. Marley won their games in the first and second rounds, having only one goal scored against them. In the third round they had to meet Kirkby, and it was the stiffest task they had to face. Kirkby were holders of the County Cup. They had won their way through the first and second rounds without having a goal scored against them.

Old John Crook was thinking over this as he sucked away at his pipe on this Sunday afternoon in early January, when the snow lay four inches thick upon the roads outside, and the fields, clothed in their mantle of white, stretched as far away as the eye could see, dotted with trees, whose tracery of boughs were picked out in feathery white; the most beautiful of fairy landscapes, and seasonable withal.

Jack Crook leant lazily back on the couch in the bow window, reading a Sunday newspaper, in which were detailed the big professional games of the day before.

The boy was a fine, upstanding lad of nineteen, a miniature Hercules in his way; a fit leader for the Marley club; a born footballer, who, by precept and example, had turned a team of mediocrities into an eleven that would trouble even the famous Kirkby club.

"Jack," said John Crook, suddenly putting his pipe down, "what's the name of the referee who's officiating in the Cup-tie?"

"Mr. Edgar Mason, dad," answered the boy. "He's one of the best referees in his class. We're lucky to have him, I can tell you. He won't be favouring Kirkby, anyway."

"Won't be favouring them—eh, laddie?"

"No, father. He's above all that sort of thing. One might call him the 'Incorruptible.'"

John Crook wagged his head shrewdly.

He was very thoughtful for the rest of that afternoon, just as thoughtful at church in the evening—for, though a publican, John Crook never missed evening service, leaving his assistant to look after the house—and he went to bed that night thinking of the coming match between Little Marley and Kirkby, and what a mighty triumph it would be if the local boys drew the teeth of the Kirkby dragon.

In the morning he strolled down to the free library, and there borrowed a copy of the "Parkhurst Directory." In the embrasure of the window he read through the list of names under the letter "M." A little way down he came upon the following:

"Mason, Edgar, 14, Gilman Street."

He jotted down the name and address, and returned thoughtfully home.

"Hi, Jack," he asked, as he sat down at dinner, "does your referee live in Parkhurst? Is he in business there?"

"Don't know what he is, dad," answered the boy. "I know he lives in Gilman Street. That is all I can tell you."

It was enough, too. That afternoon John Crook wrote to Mr. Edgar Mason, making an appointment for the following day at three o'clock, and hinting that the interview would result in something to his advantage.

It was a fifteen-mile drive to Parkhurst; but John Crook loved to whirl along the road in his light buggy, drawn by one of the finest horses in the county.

At two o'clock the publican was eating a hearty luncheon in the coffee-room of the Boar's Head, at Parkhurst; at three he stood at the door of No. 14, Gilman Street, with the knocker in his hand.

A minute later he was shown into a cosy but ill-furnished room, in which a warm fire blazed. He regarded the fittings of the apartment with keen interest.

"Looks as if the party who lives here ain't burdened with a superfluous amount of the good things in this world," he murmured.

Then the door opened, and a little, keen, dark-eyed man entered. He was, perhaps, thirty years of age. His face was good-humoured in expression. His head was bald.

He surveyed the visitor out of his alert, brown eyes, and smiled.

"Mr. Crook, I believe?" he said.

"The same, sir!"

"Will you please be seated? And now, sir, perhaps you will tell me why you have called, and what you want with me?"

John Crook cleared his throat. He regarded his companion closely. He had set himself a delicate task, and hardly knew how best to broach the subject.

"I dare say," he said at length, plunging desperately into the stream, "that you've come across some rum experiences in the course of your career, Mr. Mason?"

"I have that!" responded the other heartily.

"And your letter was one of them."

"And," the publican went on, "you wouldn't go so far as to call your profession a well-paid one!"

"It ain't!" said Mr. Mason emphatically. "Far from it!"

"The small fee you get, and the railway fare don't amount to a row of pins," John Crook continued. "I've seen some of you chaps holding the whistle. Off-side against one lot of forwards when they're dangerous, eh? And when they are in a legitimate position? And on-side all right for the other side, when all of them are off—eh? And a nice little cheque to line your pocket with when the game is over. That pays better than fair refereeing, don't it, Mr. Mason?"

And John Crook winked knowingly at his companion.

For a moment Mr. Mason glared angrily at him; then his expression changed, and a genial smile wreathed his lips as he set to rubbing his hands together again.

"Well, I wouldn't deny that it's a quicker way to make a bit of money," he said; "but there's the risk, Mr. Crook—there's always the risk!"

"What does it matter if you are well paid for it!" asked the publican in a whisper, leaning over and tapping Mr. Mason on the arm. "The bigger the risk, the bigger the fee—eh? Isn't that it?"

Mr. Mason actually winked.

"It depends," he said airily. "Tell me what you want me to do."

"Well, then," said John Crook, clearing his throat, "here's the whole thing in a nutshell: Kirkby are much stronger than we are. Yet we have the choice of ground, and, as you know, that makes a big difference. I don't see why our boys shouldn't win. It would be an easy matter for you to blow your whistle once or twice when Kirkby were dangerous, and haul them up for some supposed infringement. It won't matter so much, for the home crowd will be with us. Then you can let our boys get through once or twice, even if they happen to be off-side. A goal or two in the first half will break Kirkby's heart. I've set my ambition on our club winning the County Cup, Mr. Mason; and, listen, there's fifteen pounds waiting for you—three five-pound notes—if you'll just favour the weaker side a little bit."

Mr. Mason looked into the fire, and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"It's difficult," he said. "It may mean my being suspended. I don't want my name to be crossed off the list. I've always acted honourably. I've established a reputation for fair play."

"But think of it!" cried John Crook. "Fifteen pounds in the bank!"

"Make it twenty, and cash down," said Edgar Mason, looking up quickly, "and I'm your man!"

The publican fell to arguing, but it was no use; Mr. Mason was obdurate, and fifteen minutes later four five-pound notes were laid upon the letting-room table, and the two men shook hands.

John Crook returned to Little Marley chuckling at his triumph. His spirits bubbled over that night. Jack could never remember his father being so lively.

The old man gave him a smack on the back that nearly knocked him on to the floor.

"What do you think of your chance for the cup, lad?" he asked.

"Don't know, father," was the thoughtful reply. "I'm afraid we shall be badly beaten."

"Nonsense, lad!" was the laughing reply. "You'll beat Kirkby, never fear. You're a better team. I'm coming down to see you lick them. Gosh, won't we have a flare-up in the town that night!"

"You look upon it as a foregone conclusion, then, dad!" cried Jack, astonished.

"It is, laddie—it is!" roared the old man.

On the afternoon of the great cup-fight, Little Marley was en fete.

Kirkby and the club's supporters arrived in waggonettes, having started on their long journey early in the morning. The drive had blown the cobwebs from their brains, and they looked fit to battle for a kingdom when they alighted from their decorated brakes.

At last the teams were in the field; Kirkby sporting plain white, Little Marley blue-and-white stripes.

Shouting and laughing gleefully, John Crook awaited developments.

Then the referee made his appearance, and whistled the teams to the centre.

As he caught sight of the official, the Marley publican's face was a study. The referee in the Harris tweed knickerbocker-suit was tall, slight, and about twenty-eight years of age. He was clean-shaven, and nothing whatever like the Edgar Mason whom John Crook had seen in that little sitting-room in Parkhurst.

"They've got the wrong referee!" he yelled.

"What do you mean?" growled a man from Kirkby. "Wrong referee? Why, everybody in the county knows Edgar Mason!"

The whistle shrilled, and the ball was set in motion. Down the field went the Kirkby forwards with a rush. The Marley backs and halves defended well. It was a fast and stirring struggle, in which much fine football was shown. Jack Crook, however, seemed to be suffering from a species of stage-fright, and much misickicking was indulged in, with the result that at the end of fifteen minutes Kirkby scored.

John Crook sat like a man stunned. Not a word did he utter. His joy had vanished. When Kirkby put on a second, and a third, and crossed over at half-time leading by three goals to nil, he groaned aloud.

In the second half there was a local revival. The Marley forwards gradually began to recover their form. Then Jack Crook, at centre-forward, scored, with a thirty-yards drive. Later, Maidment, the Marley right full-back, put on the second goal from a penalty; and fifteen minutes from time Jack scored. The game ended in a draw; and then, for the first time, John Crook found his voice, cheering like a madman.

As he was wending his way out of the ground, he suddenly ran across a little, rotund, good-humoured man. His face was familiar. In a moment John Crook had him by the collar.

"You scoundrel!" he cried. "I've a good mind to hand you over to the police! You've been guilty of conspiracy to defraud. You passed yourself off as another man. Give me back my twenty pounds!"

The little man wrenched himself free, and stood grinning at the irate publican.

"Governor," he said, "it wasn't my fault. I can't help having the same name as my friend the referee, or living in the same street. I was born there. Edgar Mason, leather merchant, of Parkhurst, that's me. I got your letter. How was I to know what you wanted until I saw you? At first, I thought you were mad. Then I thought you'd better have a lesson on the advantage of fair play. You'll get no twenty pounds back from me, unless you want me to tell the whole county that you tried to bribe a referee. You wouldn't come well out of it, mister. You'd better say no more about it. Besides, I can do with the brass!"

John Crook said no more. His secret had better be kept, he decided.

He had his compensation later on, when Little Marley beat Kirkby fairly and squarely on their own ground.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's splendid complete tales.)

You Can Still Get Your Copy of THE BOYS' REALM Cricket Book—1d.

OUR CRICKET LEAGUE.

ALL ABOUT YOUR EDITOR'S GREAT OFFER TO JUNIOR CRICKET CLUBS AND COMPETITIONS.

SILVER CUPS FOR CRICKET LEAGUES.

Your Editor is prepared to present a Number of Solid Silver Challenge Cups to Certain Bona-fide Cricket 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 Official Rules of cricket.

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.

THIS FORM FOR CRICKET 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 CRICKET LEAGUE, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

CUPS FOR UNATTACHED JUNIOR CLUBS.

Two Solid Silver Challenge Cups (Senior and Junior) offered to Bona-fide Cricket Clubs of not less than one year's standing.

The First Division Cup will be presented to the Team (the average age of members of which must not exceed twenty) which puts up the best performances in their Saturday matches only, played between May and September.

SOLID SILVER MEDAL for Each Member of the Winning Team.

SOLID SILVER MEDAL for Each Member of the Runners-up.

A HANDSOME CRICKET SET will also be awarded to the Third and Fourth Teams at the End of the Season.

The Second Division or Junior Cup will be presented to the Team (the average age of the members of which must not exceed sixteen) which puts up the best series of performances in their Saturday matches played between May and September.

SOLID SILVER MEDAL for Each Member of the Winning Team.

SOLID SILVER MEDAL for Each Member of the Runners-up.

A FIRST-CLASS CRICKET SET will also be awarded to the Third and Fourth Teams in the Junior Cup Competition at the end of the season.

In addition to the above, a handsome cricket bat will be awarded each week in both divisions to the club which, in the opinion of the Editor, has put up the best show on the preceding Saturday. In all cases the Editor's decision is final.

Rules and Regulations:

(a) Only clubs which have been established at least one season (exclusive of 1909) are eligible for entry, and the respectability and standing of the club must be vouched for by some responsible person.

(b) Where clubs have two or more teams, only the premier team matches will count.

(c) Clubs desirous of entering this contest may make application now. In doing so, a list of their engagements between the dates mentioned above, with the names and addresses of the secretaries of the opposing clubs, and a letter from the president of the club, should be sent to the Secretary, BOYS' REALM Cricket League, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C., not later than May 8th.

(d) The cup and medals will be presented at the end of the cricket season to the clubs in each section which your Editor, the Secretary, and another umpire consider to hold the best records in the matches played between the dates stated above.

(e) Strict 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 official rules of cricket.

(g) The cup to be won outright.

(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 CRICKET League (Division ....), 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 .....

OUR LEAGUE CORNER.

Tables Showing the Positions of the Top Clubs in connection with THE BOYS' REALM Football League.

"THE BOYS' REALM" NORTHERN LEAGUE.
Tables to April 3rd.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Bintsall W.R.	24	23	0	1	182	28	48
Wellfield	24	23	0	1	100	15	47
Harlow Athletic	24	22	0	2	116	21	46
St. Jude's S.S.	24	21	0	3	100	25	45
Otter Rovers	24	21	1	2	142	21	44
Smethwick Grange ..	24	21	2	1	132	20	43

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Lynwood	24	24	0	0	307	3	48
Bowling St. Albans ..	24	24	0	0	130	9	48
Spazkhill St. Kimo ..	24	21	2	1	123	20	43
City Old Boys	23	20	2	0	88	18	40
Northgate	19	16	3	0	94	42	32

"THE BOYS' REALM" SOUTHERN LEAGUE.
Tables to April 3rd.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Elmhurst	24	23	1	0	133	18	47
St. Giles' Crescent ..	24	22	1	1	100	13	45
Palmerston Guild	24	22	1	1	93	15	45
Nichola Down Athletic..	20	17	0	2	67	13	37
Wolverton Albions ..	18	18	0	0	133	11	36

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Martin's	24	22	1	1	136	27	45
Malmesbury	22	22	0	0	127	20	44
Wilton	20	19	0	1	120	20	39
Hampton Park United..	23	19	2	2	94	16	40
Mitcham Athletic.. ..	20	16	0	4	88	23	36
Chapel-in-le-Frith ..	20	16	2	2	80	31	36

"THE BOYS' REALM" NORTH LONDON LEAGUE.
Tables to April 3rd.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Barnsbury Orient.. ..	24	23	0	1	130	17	47
Gifford United	24	22	0	2	100	10	46
Haslewood	24	22	0	2	135	14	46
Glendale	24	21	1	2	135	15	44
Lyrle Juniors	23	21	0	2	148	17	44
Brondesbury Crusaders .	22	21	1	0	160	24	42

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Fitzroy Rovers	24	24	0	0	83	19	48
Fulham Carlyle	24	23	1	0	108	19	46
Redfern	24	22	0	2	125	12	44
Granville	24	20	3	1	118	14	43
Clapton Park Wesleyans	24	20	0	4	104	29	40

"THE BOYS' REALM" SOUTH LONDON LEAGUE.
Tables to April 3rd.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Marlborough	24	22	1	1	115	19	44
West Greenwich Juniors	24	21	1	2	104	41	44
Woolwich Celtic	21	19	1	1	97	21	39
Albany United	22	19	2	1	97	23	39
St. Anne's	21	18	1	2	97	23	38

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Pimlico Crusaders.. ..	23	22	0	0	120	16	44
Elmwood	24	21	1	2	107	27	44
Eyre Athletic	24	18	2	4	122	29	40
Limehouse Invicta ..	21	19	2	0	104	9	38

"THE BOYS' REALM" SCOTS' LEAGUE.
Tables to April 3rd.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Larbert Celtic	24	23	0	1	122	32	47
Dennistoun	24	23	0	1	111	30	47
Waverley	23	23	0	0	96	15	46
Eastwood	24	22	1	1	108	13	45
Dalry Thistle.. ..	23	22	1	0	105	20	44
Glenfield	21	18	0	2	93	29	38

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Fernlea	24	23	0	1	121	23	47
Albion Vics.	24	23	1	0	104	30	46
Leith Thistle.. ..	24	22	1	1	114	17	45
Partick Y.O.. ..	22	18	1	3	70	22	39

"THE BOYS' REALM" IRISH LEAGUE.
Table to April 3rd.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Bushfield	18	17	1	0	76	21	34
Avondale	17	16	1	0	56	16	32
Victoria Swifts	13	10	1	2	38	17	22

Prize Football Awards for Week Ending April 3rd.

MANCHESTER UNION LEAGUE.

Ardwick Lads' F.C.—Co. League Secretary, A. Young, 62, Everton Road, C.-on-M., Manchester.

Highfield A.F.C.—C.o. League Secretary, A. Young, 62, Everton Road, C.-on-M., Manchester.

ANNFIELD PLAIN MINOR LEAGUE.

South Pontop F.C.—Hon. Secretary, A. Slater, 17, Pontop Terrace, South Pontop, Annfield Plain.

CHICHESTER AND BOGNOR LEAGUE.

Singleton F.C.—Hon. Secretary, C. Pratt, Horse and Groom, Singleton.

A Long Instalment of John Finnemore's Rollicking New School Story.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

TEDDY LESTER, a bright, fun-loving pupil at Slapton School, who needs no introduction to readers of THE BOYS' REALM.

ITO NAGAO (a little Jap), FOULKES, and JIMMY WEST, Teddy's chums at Slapton.

TOM SANDYS, the captain of the school, and a great favourite with everyone.

CHERITON, an Upper Form boy, who has founded, and is president of, the Bedlington Club at Slapton, which is a very poor imitation of a famous Varsity club.

TURTON, Cheriton's boron friend.

On the first day of the new term, Teddy and his chums plan a jape at the expense of the Bedlington Club, which is holding a meeting in Cheriton's study. They succeed in completely disorganising the meeting, much to the chagrin of Cheriton and his fellow-members.

Teddy knows that the influence of the club is not good, and resolves to break it up altogether at no distant date.

The Slapton first Rugger fifteen play a match with a famous amateur team called the Barbarians, and score a wonderful victory, to the great delight of the school.

A little chap named Maine is persuaded by Cheriton to become a member of the Bedlington Club, and upon doing so finds it a very expensive luxury. Teddy hears of this, and is more determined than ever to put an end to the club.

Teddy learns from Maine that the Bedlington Club intend having a feast in their dormitory that night. Teddy tells his chums of this, and, after lights out, they raid Dormitory No. 8, and confiscate all the eatables, which they remove to their own quarters and polish off with high enjoyment. This is a severe reverse for the Bedlingtons. The members are consumed with rage, and vow vengeance against Teddy and his chums.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

What the Bat Saw.

NO sooner did the door of No. 8 click behind Maine as he entered than every boy started up in bed. They had gone to bed, for there was nothing else to do—nothing else they dared do; but sleep they could not, they were so cruelly hungry. Now, here was Maine returning from the lion's den.

How had he fared there? A match was struck, and Calvert lighted a candle. By its light the occupants of No. 8 saw Maine limping down the room towards his bed in the far corner, his face wearing an expression of agony, and his lips closely pressed together.

"How did you get on, Maine?" called two of three voices.

"How did I get on?" replied Maine bitterly. "Why, how was I likely to get on, collared and dragged off like that? I thought some of you chaps would be certain to lend me a hand, but not one of you lifted a finger!"

"They were a jolly tough lot," said one boy; "but what did they do to you?"

"Do?" cried Maine. "Why, they kept me there while they ate the grub—just stuffing it all down before my very eyes; and then Prescott turned me over and swiped me nine times!"

"Nine times!" cried half a dozen horrified voices. "But he can't! Six is the regular number, and he isn't allowed to go beyond it!"

"He gave me nine, anyhow," replied Maine.

"You can report him to the head prefect for that," said Calvert. "I'll speak to the prefect about it."

"And tell everybody what we were up to," remarked Maine.

Calvert shut up at once. Yes, the circumstances would come out then, and look uncommonly awkward for him as head of No. 8.

Several voices were raised in sympathy and denunciation, but Maine only toiled wearily towards his bed.

"Oh, drop it!" he said. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm just about fed up with this affair!"

Everybody was silent, and Maine crawled into bed. No one could see his face, and there was a ghost of a grin on it. In truth he was fed up with the affair—fed up in more ways than one. He wished to tuck himself up snugly between the sheets and sleep after the glorious feed he had enjoyed among the raiders of No. 6. But his hungry comrades lay long before sleep came to their relief, and they wondered to hear gentle, peaceful snores soon coming from the corner where Maine lay. Maine, the boy who had been compelled to watch the destruction of the feast and to receive a swiping of nine cuts from the strong-armed Prescott.

The next day the story of the raid went through the school like wildfire, and there was immense roasting of a Bow-wow wherever he was found. It led to quite a number of fellows resigning from the club; but still Cheriton and Calvert stuck to it, and beat up new recruits, searching for them among the younger and sillier sort of boys, and thus keeping a fair band of Bedlingtons about them.

One day Maine sought out Teddy and told him that Cheriton had suspicions as to Maine's conduct on the night of the raid.

"Someone's been gabbling," said Maine. "He's got a jolly good notion that I had a share in the feed that night, and that Prescott's whopping was only a blind!"

"Queer," said Teddy; "I don't believe there's a fellow in No. 6 would peach. I don't think it for a moment."

"Peach!" said little Maine. "No one has peached; I'm sure of that, Lester! But that beast Cheriton is so cunning, and he's always sneaking about on the watch and listening, and I fancy he's heard something he wasn't intended to hear."

"All right," said Teddy, "I'll talk to him. If he so much as lays a finger on you let me know at once. I suppose you don't attend the club meeting now?"

"Not me," replied Maine, with lively scorn. "I've dropped 'em. I got Cheriton frightfully waxy by telling him that I'd done with a lot who couldn't save a gerge from another lot of chaps who came in and bagged it. Ever since then I've known he was down on me, but I've kept out of his way."

"Go on keeping out," said Teddy; "he's a good bit over your weight. If he learns too much and offers to give you beans, just apply to me. Where does this precious club meet now? It isn't in the studies—I've had a watch kept on the passage, so I'm pretty sure of that!"

In pursuance of his promise to "buet up" the club, Teddy had kept a sharp eye open for its meetings. If one had been discovered, he had a trusty band at his back ready to raid it, and stop the foolishness.

"I don't know where they meet. I don't think it's in the House at all," replied Maine. "I know one or two chaps who still belong to it, but they are jolly quiet about its movements!"

"They need to be," said Teddy. "The school is just about fed up with that sort of nonsance, and it's going to be stopped."

It fell to the Bat to discover the new quarters of the Bedlington Club, and he discovered them in a rather odd fashion. One day, after a game of footer which ended in a soaking downpour, he, very unwisely, was slow in changing, and so managed to catch a frightful cold. This cold caused him to be isolated for a couple of days in the sick-room. This was a room in Jayne's House, set apart for the use of the boys who were not up to joining their fellows in the usual routine, and yet were not so ill as to need conveying to the infirmary.

On the second afternoon of his stay in the sick-room the Bat poked his head out of the window and stared around him for a little change.

He had looked through the window a good deal, but, now he thrust his head out and glanced directly down.

He saw a side of the house of which he knew nothing, and had previously seen nothing. It was the part where lay the domestic quarters; places the boys were never allowed to visit. He looked into a yard into which the afternoon sun was shining, and where William, the bootboy, was polishing shoes; he saw ranges of outbuildings, of which he had known nothing, for the back premises were enclosed by a high wall, and of the rooms used by the boys, only the sick-room window looked down upon them.

The Bat ran his eye carelessly along the high brick wall, all overgrown with ivy, when suddenly his glance sharpened. He saw something moving at the far angle of the enclosure. He moved again, and the Bat shot his head back through the window, and now watched from the cover of the curtain.

Through his glasses he was long-sighted, and he had seen the face of Cheriton pop up over the wall and peer into the enclosure. Had Cheriton seen him? That was the question, and the Bat watched eagerly to observe whether Cheriton's movements showed signs of suspicions or not.

In a short time the Bat was certain that he had not been seen. Little by little Cheriton drew himself up on the wall, and all the time his glances were directed to the enclosure, as if that were the only place from which danger was to be feared. It was plain that he had no thought of being overlooked from the sick-room window, and, as the place was rarely

used, it was quite easy to understand why he never glanced up.

Now Cheriton had come to that place with an idea. He himself had once seen from the sick-room the quiet, deserted tangle of outbuildings which lay behind the north wall of the House, and a plan had formed itself in his mind. How jolly it would be to have a secret meeting-place for the club; not a common study, but some quiet, hidden spot just their own, and he hoped to find it here.

To aid him in his search he had made friends with William, and a levy of three half-crowns had been made on the club with which to bribe the knife-boy.

When Cheriton felt quite certain that all was quiet, he dropped into the enclosure and began to head forward through the tangle of shrubs and bushes. He stopped under a small walnut-tree and whistled softly.

William at once dropped the boot he was brushing, climbed some steps out of the area, and joined Cheriton.

"It's all right, sir," said William, grinning. "Theer's no'er a soul about! Now, come wi' me; I'll soon show ye a quiet place to suit ye!"

He led the way past some empty and closely-shuttered stables and a large coach-house, also silent and deserted, and then pointed to a small building behind the coach-house.

"Theer y'are, sir. Theer's the place I told yer about. It's an old brew'us'; but nobody never goes near it nowadays."

Cheriton went forward and raised the latch of the brewhouse door. As he approbached it his feet rang hollow on planking.

"What's this?" he said, glancing down.

"It's the way down to an old cellar as runs right under the brew'us'," replied William. "That's the flapdoor as you're a-standin' on. But theer's nothin' in it now. I've heerd 'em say as the beer wor stored down there in the times when they used the brew'us'."

Cheriton nodded, and entered the small building and glanced round. It was a room perhaps twelve by fifteen, lighted by a large skylight, and Cheriton nodded his head, very well pleased. "This will suit us first rate, William," he said. "You're sure nobody ever comes about here?"

"Nobody at all," said William. "Ne'er a woman about the place will come a-nigh these buildings. They say they're haunted. I dunno. They ain't been used for many a year. Just shut up an' left empty. Nothin' livin' in 'em but rats and mice."

William spoke the truth. Mr. Jayne's House was by far the oldest in the school. It was, in fact, the original building, around which the modern school had gathered. There was now no need for the outbuildings, which had served a useful purpose half a century before, and they had been left empty and unused. In the days when beer had formed part of the school dietary the brewhouse had been a busy place, and the cellar below it had been well filled; but those days had long since gone, and the outbuildings stood empty and idle.

But the brewhouse stood empty no longer. The Bedlingtons took possession of it, crept to it secretly by ones and twos, and held their meetings there. Nor for some time was their rendezvous suspected.

Then Maine came again to Teddy Lester.

"They've roped in two more and skinned them—Parker and Hollins," reported Maine.

"What little asses they must be!" cried Teddy. "What makes the young idiots listen to any of those Bow-wow bounders?"

"Oh, they think it's great for big fellows to ask them to join the club!" replied Maine. "I know all about it. I was had that way myself. Cheriton asked them. But he took jolly good care to find out whether they'd much pocket-money or not," added the boy significantly.

"Where do they hold their spreads now?" asked Teddy.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Maine. Suddenly Teddy started.

"Hollins!" he cried. "Why, Hollins is in No. 6! What on earth does the unutterable little ass mix himself up with those bounders for? He was one of the foragers when we collared the grub."

"That's just it," said Maine. "If he splits to his pals, it'll be a blue look-out for me. He can tell the how I was in it on your side!"

"What's he doing there, anyhow?" cried Teddy. "He knows all about the grubby crew. What has made him listen to their flabby gas?"

"I expect it's Parker," said Maine. "Parker is his great pal, and I fancy Hollins has gone with him. One jolly good thing, they can't rag me in the dorm.! I should have a pretty rough time of it, I bet, if Calvert was boss! But he's been dropped, and Digby runs our dorm."

"Jolly good thing for you!" said Teddy. "Arthur will see you're all right. Those bounders won't dare to lift a crooked finger under his eye."

Dormitory No. 8 had a new ruler. There had been such persistent and flagrant ragging in it that Calvert had been proved unfit for command, and the room had been placed under Arthur Digby, whose firm and fair handling held the balance equal between big and little, old and young, in No. 8.

The Three Chums Go Exploring.

At tea that afternoon Teddy looked up from gazing at the fire, and found Ito's eyes upon him.

"A penny for your thoughts," said the little Jap.

"You can have them for nothing," laughed Teddy. "I'm uncommonly puzzled where that crew of Bow-wows hangs out. They don't meet in Jayne's, and I've sounded chaps here and there, but can get no word of the pow-wows of the Bow-wows."

"W-w-w-w-why——" began the Bat, and began to flourish an empty cup in the air, and his friends knew that he had something to say, and turned their faces towards him.

By degrees he got his story out, adding that he had put his head through the window, and had seen Cheriton and William, the knife-boy, disappear in company among the outbuildings.

"By Jove," cried Teddy, "is that the solution of the mystery? Have they got a hang-out among that old rookery at the back of the house?"

"What is it?" asked Ito. "I have no idea what lies behind that great brick wall at the back of the house."

"I've been there once, just to see what was there," replied Teddy, "but I never heard of another chap going. I went because when I first came to Slapton I heard a long yarn about the place being haunted, so I had a look round just to satisfy my curiosity."

"Who haunts it?" asked Ito.

"Don't!" said Teddy. "I don't know that anything or anybody does. It is was a yarn which got up, I expect, because it is said that many years ago a groom hung himself in the coach-house. But, I say, suppose old Cherry and Hollins and his gang have rigged up a spot in there where they hold their precious meetings, and have a gay old time?"

"It isn't at all unlikely," said Ito.

"J-j-j-j-j-jolly l-l-likely!" opined the Bat.

"We'll have a look round there to-morrow," said Teddy; and the others agreed.

After morning school, Teddy, Ito, and the Bat went down towards the gym., instead of returning straight to the house, like the majority of the boys. Near the gym. they dodged aside into a path which ran between two tall box hedges to a side door of Jayne's House, the tradesmen's entrance by which goods were delivered.

They were lost if seen on this path, for it was strictly forbidden to boys; but, under the leadership of Teddy, they made a swift rush along two-thirds of it, then ducked under the low-hanging branches of a big cedar, and crept close to the wall of the house until they turned an angle, and were under the wall enclosing the north front.

Hidden by a grove of alder-bushes which grew outside the wall, they soon gained the corner where the Bat had seen Cheriton climb over.

Teddy gave a low whistle as they gained the spot. Half-bricks had been knocked out here and there, and the holes afforded the easiest of climbing.

"By jingo," said Teddy, "they travel up and down pretty regularly, by the way the bricks are scored. Keep your eye open, Jimmy; if anyone should come along, give a whistle."

"R-r-r-right!" said the Bat, and remained outside on the watch while his comrades made a trip of exploration.

Teddy slipped up the wall, and raised his eyes carefully above it; his cap was stuffed in his pocket. He saw the north wall, absolutely blank save for the sick-room window, and saw that the enclosure wore its usual deserted air. Nimbly he went over the wall, and dropped to the grass, and Ito followed.

The two boys paused at the foot of the wall, and looked round. Then Teddy's finger shot out. His quick eye had discovered their path. A faint trail ran across the tangled grass, and they followed it. The trail led to the corner of a large house, with tall, wide door; but the grass grew sparsely among the stones of the pavement laid before the great doors, and waved and sprouted from the very lintel.

"This is the coach-house," said Teddy. "And, look! the marks in the grass run straight on, and gives us our line."

Ito nodded; and went the boys, and soon arrived at the door of the smaller building.

"Looks as if they came here," said Teddy; and again Ito nodded assent.

Teddy raised the heavy iron latch, and the door opened.

"Got 'em!" snapped Teddy.

And the two boys looked at each other with a smile of eager interest, and knew they had run the Bow-wows to earth.

The room contained a number of small camp-stools, and the one or two rough benches which had formed its original equipment were pulled out of the corners, and set in line down one side. Here and there the boys flitted about the room, looking at everything, but touching nothing, and taking care not to leave the least sign of their presence in the secret den of the Bedlingtons.

"Look, Ito—look!" breathed Teddy, and pointed to recess in the wall where lay four or five pipes. "See, they're so jolly sure their hiding-place will never be discovered that they leave their pipes about, and there are three empty cigarette-boxes! The lazy slackers come here to smoke, and to fancy themselves quite too big for Slapton! What chance is there for any one of the rotters to do any good for the House at footer, or anything else, while he smokes, and spoils his wind and condition?"

"Smoking's no good," said Ito.

"Of course it isn't," said Teddy. "And these bounders are no good, either! Well, we've run 'em to earth, and that's a jolly useful thing to know. My aunt, I should just like to see Cherry Ripe's face if he could look in and see us rambling about his secret haunt!"

Ito smiled at the idea, then glanced at his watch.

"All right, old wary bird!" replied Teddy. "I know we haven't much time, so we'll slide back now. But we'll have a look round again, and before long, or my name's not Teddy Lester!"

They carefully closed the door, and ran back to the corner of the wall, where the Bat was waiting for them. Over the boys went, and then Teddy looked round him.

"Which way do the Bow-wows come here?" he murmured. "Not the way we've come, I'll go bail. It's a long sight too dangerous for regular use. I only dodged along this time because it's the nearest."

"Here's their track," said Ito, who had bent down and scanned the grass. "They come from the opposite direction."

"So they do. They slink up here from the back of the gym.," said Teddy. "We'll cut along on that line."

Teddy went swiftly and softly along the path by which the Bedlingtons gained the enclosure, and it came out on a quiet wall running through a small larch-wood, which lay between the gym. and the cricket-field.

"Not at all a bad route," said Teddy. "A fellow has only got to watch that no one sees him dodge aside from the path, and he can get up to the wall as easy as can be. And this path is free, and inside bounds."

A bell began to ring, and it meant the summons to dinner. The boys raced off at top speed, and rushed up to Jayne's as if they had been down to the gym. after school. As they burst into the hall, they came upon Cheriton talking to Hollins.

The younger boy looked uncomfortable at sight of Teddy, and edged away; and Cheriton strolled off, trying to look calm and unconcerned.

"That beast's hatching some mischief with young Hollins!" murmured Teddy. "He'd look jolly green if he knew where we'd come from."

"Wouldn't he!" chuckled Ito.

That night, in No. 6, Teddy marched over to the bed where young Hollins was undressing.

"Is it true, you little donkey, that you've joined this Bow-wow crew?" asked Teddy.

"Yes, Lester," said Hollins, going very red.

"I'd never have given you credit for being such an idiot!" said Teddy.

"It was Parker," grumbled Hollins; "he persuaded me into it."

"Parker's a chum who was such an ass as to want to go with Cheriton's gang, I'd let him go, and not be such a double-dyed idiot as to follow him!" said Teddy. "Why, how on earth do you manage to get along with such a set? You were one of us when we ragged 'em and bagged the gorge. What do they say to that?"

"Oh, Cheriton said he'd overlook it," mumbled the younger boy.

"I see," said Teddy; "you were led into sin by older and more wicked companions, and it will be forgiven. How very kind and good of the saintly Cherry Ripe! And how much did you pay for such loving forgiveness?"

Hollins went redder still, and gave no reply.

"Well," said Teddy, "you'd better drop 'em. I've spoken to you for the good of your soul, and passed my mind. I don't like to see a kid taking up with a crooked lot, and I've warned you. Think it over!"

He turned away, leaving Hollins with a red face and a very disturbed mind. It was a tremendous honour for a person of such distinction as Lester to take any notice of what a new, raw boy was doing, and Hollins was by now thoroughly sorry that he had been won over. In almost any other dormitory he would have been jolly sorry, for very solid reasons; but in No. 8 there was never the faintest touch of bullying, and Hollins was allowed to creep into bed without another look or word being turned in his direction.

Billy Murray's Window.

During the next day or two Teddy devoted much thought to his new part in the affairs of the Bedlington Club. He never once forgot those plans in his mind, then formed one which made his chums howl with delight when he expounded it.

"I'll get really what we want, and have one good lock over the ground again; then we must wait for a chance when they're having a merry time in their den. If this doesn't bust the Bow-wows, I'll never try my hand on them any more!"

So spake Teddy Lester; and he also announced that he should visit their stronghold by himself, lest the presence of more than one scout should lead to some suspicion arising; and his comrades agreed, for they had perfect faith in every proposal which Teddy put forward, and only awaited his instructions.

Teddy made his visit at the same time as before—a time when the boys were all in their various Houses, and getting ready for dinner—a time when a scout could take swift notes of the position; but no boy who wished to stay in the place would dream of visiting it, and of running the danger of going there merely to come straight back.

On this occasion Teddy's visit was paid to the cellar. He very carefully raised the large flap-door which formed the entrance, and found that this was easily done.

The hinges creaked and groaned a little as he tugged at the large iron ring by which the flap was raised; but the door was sound, and in thorough working order. He swung it over until it leaned against the wall, and then stared into the gloom of the cellar.

"No steps here," ruminated Teddy. "How did they get up and down? Well, here goes!" And he jumped lightly down to the dusky floor beneath. "I'm in, and I've got to get out," he reflected, as he dropped to the cellar level, and regained his footing.

He slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out an electric torch, and looked round as he pressed the button. In two minutes he had gained a complete idea of the place. It ran both forward and backwards from the opening closed by the flap. Forwards it went right under the brewhouse; backwards it stretched some distance behind the entrance. It was absolutely empty, save for a large frame of boards, with ribs of wood nailed on it. This frame lay on the ground beneath the opening. At one end it was furnished with hooks.

"I twig," said Teddy to himself. "This is the way up and down. This frame was hooked on that rod of iron just at the opening of the flap, and made a sloping gangway, and then the barrels were pulled up and down it. Got it—got it!"

What Teddy had got will be seen in time; but he was so tickled with the splendid fashion in which the mystery would fit in with his plans, that he did a lively breakdown, and chuckled tremendously.

He seized the frame, and tried to lift it into place. It was too big. It was altogether over his unaided strength. No matter. Let it drop, and promised himself it should be in place ere long. Then he delayed no more. He scrambled out of the hole, carefully replaced the flap, and shot back towards the House and safety.

The days were now shortening fast, and the afternoons on the football-field and hockey-ground were shortening with them. The darkness drove boys up to an early tea, and then there was quite a long interval before prep. began. This interval was spent by the bigger boys in their own studies, or rambling about to see friends in other studies; while the smaller boys spent it in the common-room, or in the studies of bigger fellows, in cases where they had friends who gave them the run of a study.

But there was no visiting between Houses. No boy was allowed to leave his House after last bed-time; but, like all other rules, this got crocked sometimes, and from almost every House there were secret exits, and ways of dodging bolts and bars, if only the breakers-out were sufficiently skilful and daring.

The way out from Jayne's during lock-up ran through the study of two fellows named Murray and Scott. Both were very good-natured fellows, and rarely offered objection if someone wanted to slide out for an hour at this forbidden time.

All the studies had barred windows, but in Murray's study one bar was loose, and could easily be worked from its position, and then slipped back again. The wall at this point was covered with ivy, and the huge, matted ribs afforded excellent hand and foot hold, so that it was easy to climb to the ground and back again.

Very well, then; one dull afternoon which had closed in dark quite early, saw Teddy, Ito, and the Bat drinking tea and devouring mixed biscuits before a comfortable fire, which filled the little study with a pleasant, dancing light.

There came a tap at the door, and Teddy sang out:

"Come in!"

The door was opened, and in came Maine.

"Hallo, young 'un, you look sad!" said Teddy. "Come here and collar a handful of biscuits, and look a little more contented with your miserable existence!"

Maine was rather pale, and his lips were firmly set.

"Well, they've had me all right," he said; "they've given me dose number one. I'm promised number two to-morrow."

"What do you mean?" cried Teddy. "Have those bounders been thumping you?"

"Just a trifle," replied Maine, stripping off

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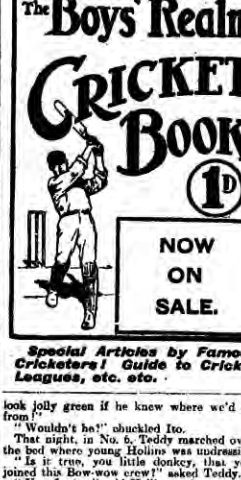

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his jacket and rolling up his shirt-sleeves; "but as much as I wanted for a first instalment. This is to be continued in our next, so they say."

"Who say?" demanded Teddy.

"The Chiefs," replied Maine.

"The Chiefs" was the name given to a kind of upper circle in the Bedlingtons, the big fellows who ruled over the rest. They were five in number—Cheriton and Calvert, of course, and three other fellows, Barnes, Hale, and Day, belonging to other Houses.

Maine rolled his shirt-sleeves up to his shoulders, and Teddy gave an angry growl. The little boy's arms were black and blue from wrist to shoulder.

"You have more bruises," said Maine, "but they're not so handy for exhibition as this lot."

"The brutes!" said Ito; and the Bat echoed, "The b-b-b-brutes!"

Teddy said nothing for a moment. But his shining eyes were fixed on Maine's bruises, and he was gently licking his lips in a way which meant bad business for somebody. His chums knew his little ways, and neither spoke to him. Presently he spoke.

"Where?" he said sharply.

"They caught me in that little wood beyond the gym.," replied Maine.

"When?" demanded Teddy.

"Just before lock-up."

"How?" snapped Teddy; and pointed to the bruises.

"Fists, and Cheriton's walking-stick!" replied Maine.

"Five of 'em," murmured Teddy gently, coming back to his normal manner.

"Yes, the Chiefs," returned Maine.

"Ah," said Teddy softly, "five big chaps with fists and a walking-stick! It seems to me it ought to be looked into. I think you said it was Cheriton's walking - stick, my son?"

"Yes, Lester; Cheriton's," said Maine.

"Very good," said Teddy; "very, very good! Now, Maine, slide into your jacket again, and collar the tin of mixed biscuits and comfort yourself. I'm going along to see friend Cheriton. I think you said he promised a second edition of the game?"

"Yes," said Maine.

"Ah, perhaps I can get him to change his mind on that subject!" And Teddy went to the far corner of the study, and began to turn over a heap of sticks. He drew from the heap an ash single-stick, and stripped off the basket-hilt. Then he made the pliant ash sing and whistle through the air as he delivered in fancy some terrific cuts.

The sound of the tough, pliant stick satisfied him, and he started towards the door.

Then Teddy went alone in search of the president of the Bedlington Club.

He marched along the passage and tapped on the door of Cheriton's study.

No answer. He tapped again. No answer.

He thumped with his ash stick. A door opened, and a head was poked out to see who was making the row. But the door was that of the next study, and the head belonged to Billy Nelson.

"Hallo, Lester!" said Billy. "Made a mistake about the number, haven't you? Come in!"

"No, Billy, I'm all right," replied Teddy. "I'm making a call on friend Cheriton."

Billy rubbed his chin and considered. He knew deadly quietness of that tone, and saw that there was a rough time ahead for friend Cheriton.

At this moment a boy came hurrying along the passage, and Billy called out to him to ask if he had seen Cheriton lately.

"Yes," replied the boy, running on; "saw him go into Murray's study about five minutes ago!"

"I'll look him up," said Teddy; and started for Murray's study.

Teddy didn't care a rap where he caught him; he meant to face into Cheriton till the bully howled for mercy—the more public the thrashing the better.

Teddy tapped on the door of Murray's study and was hailed by a jovial "Come in! Any more of you?"

He went in, and Murray looked up from the book he was reading.

"Oh, it's you, Lester, is it?" sang out Murray. "I thought perhaps it was some other joker who wanted to go down the spout!"

This was the term for escaping by Murray's window, and Teddy began to see daylight.

"I'm in search of Cheriton," said Teddy. "I want to see him."

"You'll have to wait till he comes back, then," said Murray, "for he and Calvert have just shinned down the ivy."

"Oh!" said Teddy; and seemed to find the information vastly interesting and entertaining, for he smiled grimly for the first time since he started on his search. "I'd be awfully glad if you'd let me and Ito and West slide down, too, Murray!"

"Sail ahead!" said the cheerful Murray, and returned to his novel, while Teddy darted back to his study.

He burst in, and the others stared in wonder to see him back so soon.

"I shall want you chaps, after all!" said Teddy. "I believe—I really believe—everything is in shape for a rag which I mean to beat everything so far. If the birds are not in the cage, I shall be jolly well surprised. Collar the tools, and we'll slide down the spout and soon see."

Ito ran to a drawer and took out a hammer and several long nails. The nails he stowed in his pocket, the hammer he hung about his neck by a length of whipcord, for he would want both hands free for climbing down the ivy. The Bat took a long, heavy stick, a leaping-pole out down; while Teddy's share of the preparations consisted in securing his electric torch and an oil-can, which he shook to be sure that there was plenty of oil in it.

"Stop here as long as you like, but be sure you shut the door after you when you go away," said Teddy to Maine; and then the three chums hastened away to tackle the Chiefs, for Teddy felt sure he would run them to earth this night.

Murray opened his eyes when he saw the moment or two, Teddy crept forward alone to reconnoitre.

He approached the door, and saw a round hole in it just about at the height of his shoulder.

The door had once had an old-fashioned wooden thumb-latch, and a hole had been cut through it to admit the thumb or finger to lift the latch inside. This hole was fully the size of a shilling or a little more, and through it Teddy could scan the whole of the place with ease.

He saw gathered there just the five fellows he wanted to secure in his trap.

Cheriton and Calvert had slipped out of Jayne's, and Barnes, Hale, and Day had slipped out of their Houses, and the Chiefs had forgathered in their haunt. Barnes and Hale were puffing at pipes, and Cheriton, Calvert, and Day had cigarettes in their mouths, and they were laughing, and chatting, and feeling very grand in this secret haunt of theirs, while other fellows had to be content with common-place studies.

Teddy heard some of the talk.

"Well," said Cheriton, blowing a long cloud of smoke into the air, "I feel a bit better now that young beast Maine has been well swiped. I'm hanged if he didn't have me that night! I thought they'd bagged him for the fun of making him watch them feed; but it was a put-up job, and the little scamp had his share of the gorge, and a howling good time!"

"Well, he had a howling time to-day as well!" bellowed Barnes, and laughed at his joke.

"And he'll have another, or two, before I've done with him!" growled Cheriton. "I mean to make these kids see that it isn't safe to join us and then chuck it up and help that least Lester to rob us!"

"They are there," said Ito, and the others knew it at the same moment. For they came from the shade of the trees and saw a faint glimmer from the skylight of the deserted outhouse, and knew that they had run their quarry to earth.

"I wish that rotter would break his neck!" snarled Calvert.

Teddy slid back to his companions, and whispered a few directions, and all three glided forward.

Now Teddy knelt down on the flapdoor, and squirted oil vigorously into the hinges. While he did this, the Bat made the five boys prisoners. He did this in the simplest and securest fashion. The present fastening of the door was an iron latch, with the familiar jug handle of iron on the one side and a projecting latch on the other. The Bat simply slid the long stick through the jug handle and laid it across the posts of the door.

Now it was impossible to open the door from the inside, and the Chiefs were trapped. But they knew nothing of that.

Just at that moment Cheriton looked at his watch.

"We've got half an hour yet," he said. "Who'll sing a song?"

Hale volunteered to oblige, and struck up a music-hall ditty he had picked up in the holidays.

"Well done, Hale!" murmured Teddy, still squirting oil copiously into the joints of the hinges. "Chant away, my merry bird. I hope there's a chorus!"

There was a chorus, and the five sang together, but not too loudly, for fear of making too much noise.

Still, it was quite loud enough for Teddy's purpose. He had ranged his friends along the flap—Ito at the far corner, the Bat in the middle, and himself at the end near the door —and upon a given signal, up went the flap and was flung back against the wall, beside which the brewhouse was built. And so well had the oil done its work that there was only one faint creak, a sound quite inaudible to the singers within.

Teddy now directed a shaft of light into the cellar, and the three boys sprang down without a sound. By the light of the torch, they seized the gangway, and their united strength was sufficient to raise it and slip the hooks over the rod in the frame of the trapdoor.

Teddy breathed a sigh of satisfaction. All was complete. The sloping gangway opened from the very threshold of the brewhouse. It had been so placed in order to roll barrels up and down from the place; and anyone now emerging from the brewhouse would step straight on to the sharply sloping surface, and go very hurriedly into the cellar.

"Now for the next act of the drama," murmured Teddy, and nudged the Bat.

Doubly Trapped.

THE Bat crept up the cellar, and posted himself exactly below the revellers. He could gauge their position to a fraction by the sound of their feet on the floor. Only a layer of planks on joists divided the outhouse from the cellar below it.

Teddy posted himself at the thumb-hole to watch the goings on inside, and in his hand he held the electric torch. Whenever he flashed a beam into the cellar, the Bat was to act, and the Bat knew well what he had to do.

Inside, Hale finished his ditty.

"Jolly good song, jolly well sung!" said Cheriton. "Who's next man?"

Outside, Teddy flashed a beam into the cellar. The Bat reached up and made three slow, solemn taps with the hammer on the boards above his head.

As it happened, there was a moment's silence after Cheriton's question, and the smokers were quietly puffing, and looking round to see who would be the next singer.

Into this silence came the three heavy taps, with striking effect.

Barnes leapt about a foot in the air, and cried out.

"What was that?" he gasped. "Something or someone knocked—right under my feet!"

"Pooh!" said Cheriton. "Rats—sure to be rats! There are plenty about these old places!"

The Bat knocked again, and these regular, heavy taps gave the revellers pause, and they looked at each other.

A double beam flashed now, and the Bat gave another performance. He had the power of executing a wail, a scream, or a groan with extraordinary effect. These sounds did not need words, so they lay easily within his gamut, and now he put in one of his best. He began a faint, shrill scream on a wonderfully high note, drew it out till it was enough to send a shiver through the boldest, then brought it down, down, down, till it ended in a horrid groan.

In the room aloft, the Chiefs looked at each other with scared faces.

"Pooh!" said Cheriton. "Cats!"

But he did not speak so confidently as before, and he looked uneasily over his shoulder.

"Cats!" said Hale, in a shaky voice. "It sounded too frightful for a cat! And it came from the old cellar under us. What can it be?"

The Bat now put in another awful and blood-curdling cry. This went the other way. It began with a low and dreadful moan, held it for a few seconds, then went up and up, till it ended in a thin, wailing scream, like the cry of a lost spirit.

"I s-s-say," said Day, with chattering teeth, "I've heard this p-place is haunted!"

"Yes," said Calvert, "I know that story. Didn't some chap hang himself here a long time ago?"

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Cheriton, trying to look calm and unconcerned, "who believes in ghosts nowadays? I tell you it's some stray cat that has got shut up in the cellar."

"O-o-o-o-o!" went the Bat once more, under the floor, and the Chiefs sprang to their feet.

"No living creature ever made that row!" said Hale, with a face as white as chalk. "I'm off! This is a bit too frightful!"

He made a rush at the door; but Cheriton—the brave Cheriton—was the first there. For all his bluster, he was the most frightened of them all, and no sooner did Hale turn to go than Cheriton raced as hard as he could to escape.

Their movements were hastened by another horrid and sepulchral cry from the depths, and they all bundled against the door in a heap.

"Open it, open it, why can't you, and let us out!" yelled Barnes.

"I can't!" screamed Cheriton. "Oh, oh, it's fastened! We can't get out!"

Fastened! The word kept them all silent for an instant, and the Bat seized the chance to strike another thrill of awful terror into their souls by a very fine performance in the way of a dying groan.

"Fastened!" repeated Barnes, with trembling lips. "Who's fastened it? Who knows we're here?"

Calvert darted back to the place where they had left the candle burning—the candle by whose light they had been sitting. He ran back to the door, and its light was thrown on the fastening.

"It looks all right," said Calvert. "Pull hard—pull hard! The door's stuck a bit."

Cheriton pulled, and Barnes pulled, but the door did not give way the fraction of an inch, so well did the stick fit in the outer handle The Bat now struck three solemn raps right under their feet, for he had followed them up.

In the light of the candle they stared at each other with ashen faces.

(Another rattling, long instalment will appear next week.)

THE CAPTAINS CAPTURE A STORY OF CRICKET

Specially Written by Charles Hamilton.

Straight on to the ground the motor-car dashed and pulled up in the centre of the pitch. The players swarmed around as Hadley jumped out. "We've captured the thief," he shouted excitedly.

THE 1st CHAPTER.
The Brixley Cricketers

"OUT!"

Tom Hadley looked down at his wicket. He certainly was "out."

The off-stump was reclining at an angle of forty-five degrees, and the bails were on the ground; and there was a murmur of disappointment from the fellows in front of the Brixley pavilion.

For Hadley was skipper of the Brixley team, and his followers had expected better things of him than that. He had knocked up 8 runs, and 80 would have been nearer the mark. His wicket was down to the bowling now, however, and there was nothing for him to do but to carry out his bat.

Brixley were playing South Hill, and it was not much of a match to them. They had expected to knock the weaker team out with an innings to spare, but the fall of their skipper's wicket altered the aspect of things.

Hadley made a grimace as he came up with his bat under his arm and met the glances of his friends. The South Hill field were looking very pleased with themselves, of course; but the pleasure was all on their side. Brixley were glum.

"Hard cheese, Hadley!" said Ted Morgan, slapping the Brixley skipper on the shoulder. "And that wasn't a difficult ball, either, as far as I could see."

"Next man in!" said Hadley. "You go in, Myers." Then he nodded to Ted Morgan. "Yes, it was hard luck, and no mistake. I'm not feeling fit to-day, and that's a fact. That's how it was."

Morgan looked anxious.

"I say, old chap, you're not going to get crocked up just before the Pilkington match?" he exclaimed. "This affair wouldn't matter much, but next Saturday——"

Hadley laughed.

"That's all right, Ted. I shall be all serene before next Saturday. Don't worry. It's only that I feel a bit queer to-day."

"You've been looking off-colour for the past few weeks, though," said Morgan—"as if you had something on your mind, old chap."

"Stuff!" said Hadley, though he coloured. "I'll get in out of the sun, and have a rest. This won't make any difference; we shall walk over South Hill, all the same."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so."

Hadley went into the pavilion. The rest of the out team were watching the game. Myers, at the wicket, was doing pretty well, and the South Hill bowlers could not touch him. Yet Myers' at any other time was nothing like the skipper's form.

Ted Morgan looked worried. He was Hadley's best chum; they had been at the same school, and worked in the same office together.

For some time past he had guessed that Hadley had some trouble on his mind, but Hadley had never confided to him. True, there was one matter which was worrying all the Brixley cricketers; but then, there was no reason why it should trouble Hadley more than the rest.

It was that there had been a succession of thefts from the pavilion, and nearly every member of the club had lost something at some time, and the thief had never been discovered. The fellows had been exasperated, but there was no reason why Hadley specially should worry over it. He couldn't be expected to watch the dressing-rooms while he was at the wicket, of course.

"Old Hadley seems off-colour," Morgan remarked to the fellow standing next to him. "I only hope he isn't going to crock up—for the Pilkington match as much as for his own sake."

Ponsonby looked at him.

"He's seemed pretty well worried for some time," he remarked.

"Yes, I've noticed it."

"So have I, and others."

There was something so peculiar in Ponsonby's tone that Morgan looked at him quickly. Ponsonby was not on the best of terms with Hadley. The reason was simple.

Hadley was employed in the office of Ponsonby's father in Brixley. Ponsonby had expected his superiority of social position to be recognised on the cricket-field, which, of course, from a cricket point of view, was absurd.

In the Brixley office Hadley treated Ponsonby with the civility and respect due to his employer's son. On the cricket-ground Hadley was captain, and had to be treated as captain. There had been friction, but Hadley's quiet determination had carried the day, and Ponsonby, who was not by any means a bad fellow in the main, had abandoned the impossible position he had taken up, but it had left him feeling sore.

"What are you getting at?" asked Morgan abruptly. "You——"

"Well hit!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

It was a good hit from Myers. The ball had gone on its travels, and was sorted out from the crowd of spectators who were watching the game, after converting an old gentleman's white hat into something like a concertina. The ball was thrown back, while 4 went up for Brixley.

Ted Morgan cheered the hit; but he did not allow Ponsonby to elude the subject he had raised. As the bowling recommenced, he looked at Ponsonby.

"Now, what did you mean?" he said. "Have you got something up against old Hadley?"

"Of course not! I only said he had been troubled over something for some weeks. Just about as long as the thefts from the pavilion have been going on, in fact."

"Oh, is that all? You think he's worrying over them?"

"Possibly."

"I don't see that he's any more responsible than the rest of us. A cricket captain can't be supposed to be a policeman, too."

Ponsonby laughed.

"Never mind," he said; "let it drop."

"Blessed if I understand you, Pon!"

"Well, let it drop, as I said."

And Ponsonby walked away whistling, leaving Ted Morgan in a very perplexed and dissatisfied state of mind.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
Black Suspicion.

"PHEW!"

Myers uttered the exclamation. He was in his shirt-sleeves in the dressing-room, and about to put his jacket on. He had felt in a pocket of it, and then he held the garment at arm's-length, and stared at it.

The other fellows stared at him.

The match was over, and Brixley, in spite of the skipper's failure to score, were easy winners. Hadley was putting on his things, looking satisfied enough. He was not at all a conceited fellow, and so long as his side won, he was content to have played a second fiddle himself.

"What's the matter, Myers?"

"The thief's been here again!"

"Great Scott!"

"What have you lost?"

"A leather purse!" said Myers, looking dismayed. "I know I oughtn't to have left it here, after what's happened before, but I was thinking about the match. Look here, this is serious! My whole week's screw was in that purse. I had it this morning when I left the works early. Two pounds!"

"My hat!"

There were exclamations of anger from the Brixley fellows. They all looked hastily through their things, and further exclamations showed that further losses were discovered. Some had lost money, some watches, some articles of jewellery. It was a wider sweep than had ever been made before by the unknown thief.

"My word," said Ted Morgan, "this is getting a bit too thick! I have been against making a scandal about it, but we shall have to have the police in now."

Hadley looked worried. Ponsonby smiled in a curious way.

"Hadley's against that," he remarked.

"You know my reason," said Hadley, in a troubled tone. "How the thief gets into the place beats me! There's only one door he could enter by without being seen, and that's locked with a Yale lock. If we called in the police they would jump to one conclusion at once——"

"That the thief was among ourselves!"

"Yes."

"That's utter rot!" said Myers.

"I know it's rot," said Hadley, "but that's what they'd think. It does look like it, if we didn't know one another too well to suspect such a thing."

"Then how do you account for it?" demanded Ponsonby.

Hadley shook his head.

"I can't account for it. I suspected that groundman who was discharged for drunkenness—Stanson—but——"

"How would he get in?"

"How would any thief get in, if you come to that? Yet he did get in. I suspected Stanson because there was a theft before he left, and it was pretty clear that he was guilty, though we didn't push the matter. He would know his way about here, and perhaps——"

"But Stanson has left the neighbourhood."

"Yes, so I hear. But——"

"He hasn't been seen near Brixley for months. I——"

"Hallo, you fellows!" broke in a voice, as the South Hill captain looked in. "Is this a funny joke, or what?"

"Is what a joke?" asked Ponsonby.

"Somebody's been through our pockets and cleared them out while we've been on the field."

Hadley flushed uncomfortably.

"We're awfully sorry," he said. "The same thing's happened here. There's a thief who's visited this pavilion several times before. Have you lost much?"

"About everything," said the other grimly.

"Well, we shall make the loss good, unless the things are recovered," said Hadley quickly. "The club stands to lose it."

"Oh, that's all right. It's rotten, though, ain't it?"

The South Hill skipper turned away. There was a dead silence among the Brixley cricketers.

"That means a new loss for the club," said Ponsonby. "We've had this sort of thing before. Will the funds stand it?"

"The funds will have to stand it. We shall have to have a whip-round, if it takes our last shilling. We can't let our guests be robbed, I suppose."

"I suppose not. I think the thief ought to be stopped."

"What's the good of saying that? We all think so, but how? That is the question."

"We'll discuss that when the South Hill chaps are gone. We don't want too much scandal if we can help it."

Ponsonby's words made an unpleasant impression. Nothing more was said on the subject, however, till after the departure of the visiting team. Then Hadley, in his direct way, came to the point.

"You seem to have an idea that you can find the thief, Ponsonby. If you can, out with it, and we'll all be grateful," he said.

"Not exactly that. But I think we ought to come down to facts, and not beat about the bush."

"Plain English, please."

"Very well, then," said Ponsonby sharply. "It's no good blinking the fact that the thief is in the team."

"What!"

"You heard what I said."

"You can't think so! In the team! Nonsense!"

"I don't think it's nonsense. You can talk about a discharged groundman if you like. I know jolly well the thief was in the pavilion, and hasn't left it."

"Then the loot is still here," said Morgan quickly.

Ponsonby smiled unpleasantly.

"That's more likely to have been passed out of a window to a confederate."

"Out with it! Whom do you suspect?"

"That's not a fair question. I want you all to look at the facts. The thief's in the team. I'm certain of that. Now, he was at work during this match. He had the pavilion to himself. We can't expect the scorer to be looking out for thieves. But, as it happened, Hadley was first out—quite unexpectedly. He came into the pavilion. It looks as if he was here while the stealing was going on. Did he see anything of the thief?"

"I didn't," said Hadley.

"Did you hear any noise in any part of the pavilion you couldn't see?"

"Not to notice it."

A dead silence followed Hadley's words. Ted Morgan clenched his fist convulsively as he realised what Ponsonby meant. Hadley did not yet realise it.

"That's all," said Ponsonby.

"I don't see it helps us much," said Hadley. "We——" He broke off, as the strange, strained silence seemed to strike him. "I——What are all you fellows staring at me like that for? What do you mean? You don't mean to say that you suspect——"

He broke off.

"We don't," said Ted Morgan. "Don't be an idiot, Tom. As if anyone could be bad enough to suspect you!"

But Hadley was deadly white.

"Ponsonby does," he said. "So do you, Myers."

"No, I don't!" stammered Myers. "But—but can't you explain?"

"I've nothing to explain. If you think I'm a thief——"

"No heroics, please," broke in Ponsonby, in his cutting voice. "Let's have this matter out. You can't deny that you've had a trouble on your mind for the past few weeks, Hadley. You've shown it plainly enough on the cricket-field, and I've seen it in the office, and so has Morgan."

"I don't deny it."

"More than that," went on Ponsonby, raising his voice, "I think I'm justified in saying out plainly what I know——"

"Say anything you like."

"Well, you know your young brother has been in trouble, for something of the same sort. I know, because his employer consulted my father about it. Young Willy Hadley has been sacked in London; you know what for."

"I—I never knew that," muttered Morgan.

Hadley's face was like a stone.

"Can't you say anything, Hadley?" exclaimed Jones at last.

"No," said Hadley, in a low, broken voice. "It's true about young Will. He got into the hands of a set of betting scoundrels, and they made him drunk, and he did a foolish thing. He never was dishonest. He believes he was drugged; but if his employer hadn't been a kind man he would have been ruined for life for what he did. I admit it, and Ponsonby's welcome to what satisfaction he gets out of spreading it."

Ponsonby flushed scarlet.

"I'd be the last to mention it," he cried, "only it lets in light on this matter. I think you ought to have some explanation to give. I know that young Willy Hadley paid his employer back thirty pounds. Where did he get it from?"

"You can guess——"

"Of course, I guess; you sent it to him, to save him. But where did you get it?"

"It was nearly all my savings, since you're curious."

"I hope it was," said Ponsonby. "I don't call you a thief. I only say that a detective ought to be called in, and the facts placed before him."

Hadley put his jacket on.

"Do as you like. I'm done with this club!" Ted Morgan caught him by the arm.

"You're not going, Hadley."

"Can I remain after that?"

"Yes. It's rot, stuff, piffle, bosh!" cried the young Welshman energetically. "Do you think I believe a word of it?"

"The others do."

Morgan's eyes flashed round the room.

"Well, if you go, I go. I won't stay in a club where my best chum's called a thief."

"You can't!" exclaimed Myers hotly. "Have you forgotten the Pilkington match next Saturday? You can't leave us in the lurch."

"Hang the match!"

"If you're going to desert us——"

"It's all right, Ted," said Hadley quietly. "Stick to the club. This may all come right. If the thief's found, I'll rejoin the club if you want me. Until then I'm better out of it. As for your detective, Ponsonby, get him at once; you know where to find me if I'm wanted."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Myers. "You're going to play on Saturday."

"Do you want a thief to play?"

"Don't be a fool! It's not proved; it looks

had, but I don't believe it, for one. We'll try to find the thief. Meanwhile——"

"I can't do it! Trust me, and I'll play. But to play in a side that thinks me a thief, or possibly a thief——You can't ask it."

And Tom Hadley, with his head held very high, walked out.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
Under a Cloud.

HADLEY kept to his word.

He had resigned from the Brixley Club, and it was open to Ponsonby to call in the detectives if he wished, but he did not. The others put it to him too strongly. Suspicion, it was true, was black against the skipper. He had sent money to his brother as the same time that the thefts were going on. His brother had doubtless been a victim; but there was no doubt that he had done what the law called stealing, whether a victim or not. If there was one thief in the family there might be another. That was how Ponsonby reasoned it out. He did not stop to think what a vast difference there was between young Willy Hadley—a weedy, self-willed youth, given to smoking cigarettes, and hanging about music-halls—and his elder brother, one of the finest fellows in the county, and one of the best cricketers outside the county club.

Tom Hadley had stood by his miserable relative in the time of distress; that did not show that he had the same tendencies himself. But Ponsonby was already prejudiced. And certainly many small circumstances had combined to throw suspicion upon the captain.

His own suspicion of the long-ago dismissed groundman, Stanson, really looked like a blind to throw the others off the scent. Stanson had not been seen near Brixley since his dismissal. And it seemed so clear that the thief must be in the team, that most of the fellows had come to agree with Ponsonby on that point. And if a member of the club was guilty, the finger of suspicion necessarily pointed to Hadley. Against the others, there were no grounds at all.

As Ashby week passed, the Brixley fellows thought it over, but they could not make up their minds. It looked like a certainty against Hadley; but then, when they thought of the frank face and genial manners of their old captain, they could not believe that he was a thief.

Ponsonby had been induced to drop his idea of calling in the police. There was a subscription in the club to meet the loss. The scandal would have been too great. Even if the skipper had been guilty, they would rather have dropped the matter, and dropped him, than have invoked the law. But how were they to discover the truth? And then there was the Pilkington match.

It was the most important match of the season to Brixley, and they had counted upon a good struggle and a good chance of victory. Without their best batsman, and the great advantage which a good captain means to a team, they had little hope of pulling off the match.

Thief or no thief, Hadley must play, or else they might as well make up their minds to a walk-over for the visiting team.

But Hadley was determined.

Unless the fellows had faith in him, he was out of the club; and even Ted Morgan could not prevail upon him to take a different view.

On the Friday before the match, Ted looked in at Hadley's rooms in the evening to make a final appeal. He found the late captain of Brixley in a gloomy mood. He, too, was thinking of the morrow's match; he was just as troubled as anybody at the idea of the visitors walking over the home side.

He looked up miserably enough at Ted.

"Feeling rotten?" asked Morgan.

Hadley nodded.

"Yes, rotten! I say, I think it would be best for all to have the detectives on the matter, as Ponsonby suggested."

"I haven't come to speak about that. We want you to play to-morrow, Tom."

Hadley smiled faintly.

"You've said so before, Ted."

"Well, I say so again. Will you play?"

"You've had my answer."

"I want you to change it. We've been chums a long time, Tom, and I think you might do it for my sake, if not for the club's."

Hadley visibly hesitated.

"Can't you?" said Morgan, encouraged by the signs of yielding in his friend's face. "You don't want the club to be licked hollow, any more than I do."

"Of course I don't."

"Then play."

"They suspect me of being a thief, Ted."

"They more than suspect you of being a good sportsman," said Morgan. "Never mind the other affair now. Play up, and get on your dignity next week, if you like! Be a sportsman, old chap."

Hadley laughed.

"Well, I suppose I can play, if you all really want me," he said, "I don't want to leave the club in the lurch. I——"

"That's all right!" exclaimed Morgan joyfully. "I'll tell 'em."

"But, of course, it's understood that after this match I resign for good—I'm out of the club, and I'll never speak in the street to any chap who can't say out plainly that he believes in me."

"That's all right—the thief will be discovered, I hope, and all will be cleared up—anyway, this sees us over the Pilkington match. We shall lick them."

And Ted Morgan hurried off to tell the news to the anxious cricketers.

It was received with general satisfaction. With Tom Hadley at their head, the Brixley fellows were ready to face Pilkington—or anybody! Even Ponsonby had to acknowledge that Hadley was wanted.

And the next day Brixley were bright and early upon the ground for the match.

They were in good spirits, as far as the match was concerned; though the mysterious thefts of the pavilion were still weighing upon their minds.

All was ready for the match—but Hadley! He had not arrived on the ground. Was he going to fail them after all? the fellows asked themselves anxiously, as the hand of the clock crept round.

Pilkington were there, in fine form. Their skipper came over to Myers, looking a little puzzled.

"Time," he remarked. "Isn't your skipper here?"

Myers looked worried.

"No. He's been delayed, I suppose. Have you any idea where he can be, Morgan?"

Morgan shook his head.

"No. He had the morning off at the office, same as I did. He ought to have been here. I can't think what's delayed him. If Williams wouldn't mind a bit of delay——"

The Pilkington captain nodded.

"Make it another ten minutes."

"Right you are—and thanks!"

Ten minutes ticked away. The Brixley fellows looked out anxiously for Hadley. He did not appear. Even Ted Morgan began to fear that the captain had changed his mind about playing after all, and had left the side in the lurch. It was hard to believe that of him either; but where was he? From the distance, as the last minute ticked away, came a sudden sound.

Zip! Zip!

THE 4th CHAPTER.
Captured!

AND where was Hadley?

As a matter of fact, the Brixley skipper had intended to be early on the cricket-ground. But he was in a gloomy mood that morning, and not feeling like his usual self. A walk in the fresh fields before the match seemed to him the best way of getting into his usual spirits, and he had turned his back upon dusty Brixley and gone into the green country. A quiet stroll in the fields and woods was just the thing for his perturbed and feverish spirits. The chiming of a village clock made him start with a sudden realisation that he was almost due at the ground; he had walked further than he had intended. With a worried consciousness of what his comrades might think if he were delayed, he hastened back to the main road, intending to sprint towards the town.

There was a toot-toot from a motor-car as he turned out of a lane into the road. Hadley looked up—it was Mr. Ponsonby, his employer, in the car—his own—going towards Brixley. Hadley threw up his hand without stopping to think, and the motorist slowed down.

"Ah, it's you, Hadley!" he said. "Oughtn't you to be on the ground by this time?"

"Yes, sir; like an ass I've allowed myself to get late. Could you give me a lift as far as the town?"

"Certainly. Jump in!" said Mr. Ponsonby cordially. He knew nothing of the late happenings in the Brixley club. "I shall pass the gates, and I can drop you there."

"Thank you, sir—you're very kind!"

"Not at all! Jump in!"

And the car got into motion again, with the cricket captain sitting beside the motorist. Hadley felt greatly relieved.

The car slackened down as it drew near the ground. There were a good many people on the road, going to the ground to see the big match. Hadley could see the high palings of the ground, at the end behind the pavilion, across the fields. He was looking in that direction, when suddenly his face changed, and he uttered a sharp cry.

Mr. Ponsonby looked at him.

"Anything wrong, Hadley?"

Hadley was on his feet, excitedly pointing.

"Stop, sir! Oh, stop! Look!"

Mr. Ponsonby stopped the car in blank amazement. His glance followed Hadley's pointing finger.

Then he uttered a startled exclamation.

From the wall of the Brixley ground a man was in the very act of dropping. It was at a spot shaded by trees and a high hedge, and had not Hadley been in the car he would never have observed it.

"The pavilion thief!" cried Hadley, his eyes blazing.

There could be no doubt about it.

The man was leaving the ground behind the pavilion by climbing the wall, and there could be only one explanation.

"It's the thief, sir!" explained Hadley hurriedly. "And, by Jove, I know him! It's the rascal Stanson! I know his face."

"By Jove," exclaimed Mr. Ponsonby excitedly, "jump out! You cut round the field and head him off, and I'll get on this side. The car can take care of itself. There's a policeman by the gate yonder. I'll run on and call him."

Hadley was already out of the car.

He had seen the direction the thief was making for, and he aimed to head him off. As Hadley came out of the cover of a hedge, the two almost ran into one another. The pavilion thief stopped, his face going white as he caught sight of the face and the blazing eyes of Hadley.

"You scoundrel, I've got you!"

The man sprang away, and ran.

He was no match for the best runner in the Brixley Cricket Club.

Hadley was after him like a shot. Closer and closer his footsteps pounded on the grass. His hand touched the thief's shoulder, and Stanson doubled, and ran off towards the road.

Hadley dashed after him again. He caught sight of a policeman's helmet over the hedge, and yelled:

"Stop thief!"

A policeman's burly form showed in a gap of the hedge. The thief, with a curse, halted, and then Hadley sprang upon him. They went to the ground together with a crash.

The rascal struggled desperately; but Hadley pinned him down, and the policeman dashed through the hedge and came to his aid.

But Stanson was already a prisoner.

On the ground lay a couple of watches and a bundle of garments he had dropped in the struggle—proof, if any was needed, of his guilt. The constable dragged his hands behind him, and snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"It's all right, sir," he grinned, as Hadley rose, gasping. "He's safe! Mr. Ponsonby's waiting at the ground, sir; he sent me here. We've got him. I may as well take care of these things." He picked up the stolen articles the thief had dropped. "I dessay he's got a lot more on him. What's this, too—a Yale key?"

"By Jove," gasped Hadley, "that's how the scoundrel got into the pavilion, without leaving a trace behind! He must have stolen that key when he was employed there. Bring him on, constable. I want him taken to the ground. There have been a lot of these thefts, and the fellows suspected somebody else. I want to show them the thief, now he's caught."

"I'll bring him, sir."

They hustled the captured thief through the hedge. The car was there, and the rascal—who had begun to struggle again, was plumped into it. The policeman jumped into the driving-seat, and Hadley behind, holding the thief in his place, and then the car buzzed up to the ground.

Hadley's eyes were blazing with delight now. The Brixley captain was cleared.

And in his present mood it rather appealed to Hadley's fancy to take the captured thief right into the ground, and show the truth to everyone there in a way that could not be questioned.

And so the car did not halt at the gates.

"Keep on!" exclaimed Hadley.

"Right in, sir!"

"Yes, right on the ground."

The constable grinned, and the motor-car dashed in, with a zip-zip and a cloud of dust.

There was a shout from the Brixley cricketers:

"There's Hadley!"

"What does it mean?"

Right up behind the wicket dashed the car. Hadley sprang to the ground. Ted Morgan and the rest were rushing forward.

"Hadley, what does this mean?"

"There's the thief!"

"What?"

"There's the thief! He's been in the pavilion again!"

There was an exclamation from Myers. He had just been in the pavilion for something, and had found his watch-chain gone. He came out with a blank face.

"The thief's been here again—— Hallo! Who's that?"

"The thief!" laughed Hadley. "And I expect you'll find all that's missing about him. His pockets are stuffed. It's Stanson, you see. I've brought him here to show you. He can go to the police-station now."

"Hurrah!" roared Morgan, tossing his cap into the air. "Didn't I tell you silly chumps all along? Hurrah!"

Ponsonby looked glum for a moment. His companions were looking at him very expressively. This was the end of his suspicions! But Ponsonby was true blue at bottom, and, after a few moments of chagrin and silence, he stepped forward, with outstretched hand.

"I'm sorry, Hadley," he said. "I can't say more. I'm sorry for this, and for the trouble there was between us before. If you like to shake hands——"

Hadley gripped his hand.

"That's all right. Bygones are bygones. I say, chaps, we're keeping Pilkington waiting. The game's the thing!"

And it was time. The car snorted away, and Mr. Ponsonby gave the policeman and his prisoner a lift as far as Brixley police-station. Meanwhile, the match commenced. And, tough tussle as that match was, there was never any doubt from the beginning which way it would go.

For Hadley was in wonderful form; he surprised even those who knew him best. The relief, after his recent troubles, seemed to have made a new man of him. And when Brixley proved victors in the match by 50 runs, the Brixley fellows chaired him to the pavilion, amid ringing cheers—and the loudest cheer of all came from Ponsonby.

THE END.

(Another cricket yarn next week.)

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THE AUSTRALIAN CRICKET TEAM OF 1909.

By J. N. PENTELOW.

(Continued from last week.)

Charles George Macartney, New South Wales.

a little fellow, and one of the youngest men in the team—23 in June next. Bats right-handed, with plenty of confidence and great variety of strokes; bowls left, and is deadly with a little help from the wicket; as a fieldsman to the off challenges comparison with Syd Gregory. Has twice reached three figures for N.S.W., and has bowled through an innings of Victoria, sending down ten overs for 8 runs and four wickets. Stepped into Test match cricket at 21, and looks like staying there for a long time to come.

Peter A. McAlister, Victoria,

born in 1869; ought to have been chosen for earlier teams. Has played for his State since 1898-9, in which season he made 224 v. New Zealand; since then has scored three centuries v. New South Wales, two v. South Australia, and one each v. English team, 1903-04, Queensland, and Tasmania. A steady bat, but not without hit, a good field in the slips, and has bowled on occasion. Vice-captain and treasurer to the team.

Montague Alfred Noble, New South Wales

36, captain of the team, and the leading figure in Australian cricket to-day. First played for his State in 1894-5, regularly since 1896-7, great man in Test cricket, owing to his dogged fighting qualities. Three times in England before. Made a century in the first match of his first tour. Scored 284 v. Sussex at Hove in 1902, and 267 in 1905. Aggregated over 2,000 runs on last visit there. Has made twelve centuries for N.S.W. v. Victoria, and seven v. South Australia. As a bowler—fast medium right—has been handicapped by strains, but at his best is very deadly. Once took seven wickets for 17 runs in a Test match. A fine field at point.

John Aloysius O'Connor, South Australia,

but born in and brought out by New South Wales. Well over 30. Had a chance in his native State's team at end of season 1904-5, and against Tasmania and Queensland; took fifteen wickets for about 10 runs each. Played through one Shell season for N.S.W., and then accepted an engagement at Adelaide. Has been since the mainstay of the South Australian attack, and is likely to take as many wickets as anyone in England. For S.A. and in the two Eleven v. Rest matches (six games in all) this last season had forty wickets at 23 each, only Armstrong having a better average. Took five for 40 in the second innings of England in his first Test match, Adelaide, January, 1900. A right-hand bowler, medium pace, a real tryer, who has bowled as many as eighty overs in a single innings. Has a peculiar run, and rather a low delivery. Left-handed as a bat, and very stubborn, but no great performer in that direction.

Vernon Ransford, Victoria,

only 24, but already bids fair to rival Trumper. Like Carkeek, Hartigan, and Bardsley, made his first appearance in big cricket five seasons ago. In following season averaged 61 for Victoria. This season had made 825 in eight completed innings up to February 15th, having scored 152 and 110 in the match v. New South Wales at Sydney, and a century in each match v. South Australia. A left-hander, very sound, and with graceful style, a fine field, and not at all a bad change bowler.

Victor Thomas Trumper, New South Wales,

31, the most brilliant and versatile batsman Australia has ever produced. Has made five centuries in Test matches. Three times in England before; scored 300 not out v. Sussex in 1899; in 1902 set up a record for Australian batsmen, making 2,570 runs with an average of 48, and scoring eleven centuries, two of them in one match, v. Essex; on last tour was troubled by a strained back. Is not very strong, but judging by recent innings in club cricket in Sydney, will give some of our bowlers a warm time in spite of the talk about his ill-health. Down under has scored at various times, 292 not out v. Tasmania, 253 v. New Zealand, 230 v. Victoria, 206 v. Queensland, and 178 v. South Australia, besides other three-figure innings. An excellent field, and at one time quite a useful change bowler, though he seldom goes on now.

W. J. Whitty, South Australia nominally,

but, like O'Connor, New South Wales by birth. Something of a speculation. The side needed a left-hand bowler besides Macartney, and Whitty was chosen—on promise rather than performance. The fourteen wickets he has taken in first-class cricket so far have cost 684 runs; but he is quite young, very keen, and fast improving. At the end of the trip he may be the best bowler on the side. Is coming on with the bat, too, but has not yet done very much.

(More fine cricket articles next week.)

The Young Cricketer.

By J. B. HOBBS (Surrey Eleven).

A Special Series of Instructive Articles, Written Exclusively for THE BOYS' REALM by the Popular Surrey Cricketer.

IT is with a certain amount of fear and trembling that I commence this series of cricket articles, because I realise the responsibility of acting as tutor to those who will, perhaps, expect far more than I can give. Nevertheless, I will do my best to supply my young friends with some useful hints on the way to become a first-class cricketer.

In using the term "first-class cricketer," I do not necessarily mean "county cricketer."

However, it must be thoroughly understood by my young friends that there is no royal road to success in cricket any more than in other branches of sport or walks in life. Success only comes through perseverance, and the hints I intend giving in my articles must be taken to heart, and diligently acted upon for hours, perhaps weeks, before any improvement is made.

I have looked on at the cricket which is indulged in by our boys on public grounds, and it has frequently struck me that we have a wealth of really good material from which great players could be made; but the proper early tuition has been wanting, and therefore, a ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, improvement is impossible.

In this, my first, article I merely intend dealing with certain things that are necessary to your equipment before you can step upon the green field and practise batting, bowling, wicket-keeping, and fielding. I will, therefore, give this chapter the title of

clothing and implements.

A proper regard of wearing apparel is absolutely essential to the well-being of a cricketer and it applies equally to the youth in his teens as it does to the man who is playing for his county. I have frequently seen boys practising with their ordinary walking-boots upon their feet, and wearing such articles as a stand-up collar and braces.

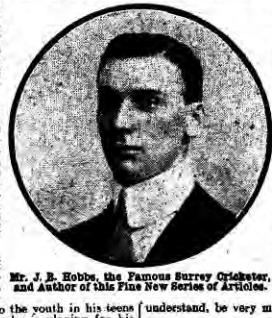
I base my full swell from my own very early experience that proper cricket-flannels and boots are quite beyond the average boy's pocket, but I take it that my readers are able to afford the ordinary necessaries, and are going into the game seriously. Then I will first deal with the question of boots.

The wearing of walking-boots at cricket will do more to hamper a young player than anything I know of, simply because the majority of strokes made with the bat demand quickness of foot, and it is a matter of impossibility to attempt them without a proper grip of the ground.

The same remark applies to bowling, and I am quite sure that many young players owe their cramped methods of batting and awkward deliveries through the early fear of losing their footing.

It is not necessary to obtain buckskin, or even "mock-buck," as I know of certain stout canvas boots that are to be purchased at a very low figure, and which will be quite good enough for a time. But they must be boots—not shoes—and must have some strong, sharp nails projecting from one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch from the soles. Let me also suggest that the boots should be clumped, in order that the pressure of the nails may not make the feet tender. They should also be easy-fitting, and worn over knitted woollen socks.

Braces should never be worn, even in practice, as they are bound to hamper the freedom of the arms. This will be particularly noticeable when making a forward stroke, and although perhaps in the majority of cases you may not yet know how to make a forward stroke, it is nevertheless as well to start in the proper way, and discard those things which are likely to prove a hindrance to ultimate success.



Mr. J. B. Hobbs, the Famous Surrey Cricketer, and Author of this Fine New Series of Articles.

For health's sake, I would strongly urge my young readers to wear flannel shirts in preference to those of the canvas variety. You are absolutely certain to become overheated at one time or another when playing cricket, and there is grave danger in standing about the ground if your cotton clothing is damp with perspiration.

Flannel is Always Safe.

Next, I advise the purchase of a sweater, which should be put on immediately after a lively innings or some heavy practice. A fairly good sweater can be bought for a few shillings, and the comfort derived from the wearing of it when fielding on a cold day will prove that the money is well spent.

If it is possible, purchase your own bat, and never attempt to use anybody else's. I know that a good bat will cost a great amount of pocket-money, but it will pay you in the end. Quite ninety-nine out of every hundred boy cricketers use bats which are in every way unsuited to them, being, as a rule, great, heavy, awkward implements, with nothing in their favour but their worth as firewood.

When buying a bat, don't take the first cheap one that comes to hand. Above all, find out the size you require, and be very careful not to choose one that is over full size for you. The shopkeeper will not mind your playing a few imaginary strokes on his premises, so try one or two, and if you can play them with a perfectly straight bat you will know that you have your size right enough.

It has been said that Dr. E. M. Grace spoilt his whole cricket career through practising when he was very young with a bat which was much too big for him. It somehow got him into the habit of hitting across every ball, and I believe he always found it difficult to play the simplest delivery with a straight bat.

As to weight, choose one with which you feel you can do as you like. The bat which is just your weight is that one which you can flourish about without feeling too great a strain on your wrists. At the same time, it mustn't be forgotten that a well-balanced bat will seem to be lighter than a badly-balanced one, although the two may really weigh exactly the same, and very often a rubber handle-cover will give it just what is needed. Many bat-makers do not manufacture their bats to balance properly without the handle-covers.

If you constantly use the same bat, and it suits your strength, you will, as you will easily understand, be very much quicker in

making your strokes;

in fact, you will experience a really delicious sense of freedom after using the great, heavy things that are, as a rule, bought when a boy, but remember that it must be exactly right as to size, and light enough to flourish without any tax on your strength.

Regarding pads and gloves, there can be no harm in using those which belong to the club. Boys' clubs seldom purchase men's pads, but if they are too large, they will, of course, be a great hindrance in running, and tend to make a batsman awkward in his play generally.

However, I think I have dwelt sufficiently long upon those things which I call "necessaries," and my next chapter will be devoted to batting. It is my intention to go very simply, but very carefully, into defensive strokes, scoring strokes, fast bowling, slow bowling, fielding, wicket-keeping, and a few hints to youthful captains before the completion of the series.

If any of my readers are in doubt about some of my explanations, I cordially invite them to write to me, and I will do my best to put them right; but every letter must be addressed to the Editor of THE BOYS' REALM, with "J. B. Hobbs" written at the top left-hand corner. Replies will be inserted at the end of each article about three weeks after the letters reach me.

J. B. Hobbs

THE CLOSE SEASON.

HOW BIG PROFESSIONAL CLUBS SECURE NEW TALENT.

Practice Matches.

WITH May 1st the "close" season commences, when, according to the laws of the English F.A., no football may be played. All clubs affiliated to that body must cease playing matches from May 1st to August 31st in each year, although after August 15th practice and charity matches between teams of the same club may be played. Amateurs who have not previously been members of such club, and also professionals who have not been engaged for the following season, may play in such matches. Except for some institution approved of by the F.A., gate-money must not be taken at practice matches in the close season.

It is during April and the following months that the big professional clubs begin to reconstitute their first and second elevens. The men who have done well, and satisfied the directors, are maintained, provided they assent to this arrangement, and the others—those who are not wanted, and those who are wanted, but won't stay—are transferred to other clubs.

Registration of Professionals.

Any league sanctioned by the English Football Association may provide in its rules for a system whereby a player may be retained, or a transfer fee demanded, after the end of a season's engagement. If such provision is made, the rules of any such league must provide that a player, if professional, cannot be retained at the end of the season without payment of wages, or the offer of reasonable terms of re-engagement, or, if amateur, without being played regularly.

Every professional player has to be registered on a special form supplied by the F.A. Each form, after all particulars have been filled in, including the date of signature, must be signed by the professional, and returned to the secretary of the F.A. within five days of such signature.

There is no more rigid observer of the Sabbath than the governing body of football. Sunday matches are prohibited, as everyone knows. Not only is this the case, however, but professional registration forms signed on a Sunday are not valid, and it is an offence for a club to induce a player to sign on a Sunday. The signing of a second registration form before the council have declared the first form invalid is also an offence. Clubs and players can be dealt with very sternly for these irregularities.

The Transfer Form.

When a player is being transferred from one club to another, Form H. of the F.A. has to be filled in. The following is a facsimile of Form H.:

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION.
Form H. (Rules 29 and 32.)

Form for Transfer of a Professional from One Club to Another.

The Secretary of the Football Association.

I am at present a professional of the .....Club, and Registered by the Football Association, and desire the Special Permission of the Council of the Football Association to be transferred to the.....Club.

.....Signature of Player.
.....
.....Postal Address.

Date.....

I desire the transfer of.....

from.....Club,
to.....Club.

.....Secretary.
.....Address.

I assent to.....being transferred from.....Club, to.....Club.

.....Secretary.
.....Address.

The registration of professionals is binding for one season only, but a professional may register himself for the following season for his own club during the month of April. He must not, however, enter into any engagement with another club until his existing engagement has terminated.

The Ten Pounds Bonus.

Until the period of registration of a professional player has expired he must not be approached by any other club with the view to induce him to leave the club for which he is registered when his engagement has terminated. No payment may be made to commission agents or other persons than clubs and players concerned in transfers and registrations of players. Clubs may not pay any player a bonus of more than ten pounds as a consideration for his signing a professional form. A bonus cannot be paid to a player on his re-signing for his own club.

Formerly there was no limit to the amount which might be paid for the transfer of players, but the sum paid for any player whatsoever must not now exceed £350. It will be remembered that a few years back Middlesbrough paid the huge transfer fee of £1,000 to Sunderland in order to secure the services of Alfred Common. And, seeing that he saved that club from relegation to the Second Division, there can be no doubt that he was worth it.

THE EDD.

OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

Sentenced for Life.

Sir Richard Easterbrook is found murdered in the grounds of his estate in Suffolk. Suspicion falls upon his nephew, Frank Easterbrook, who is known to have quarrelled with his uncle that very afternoon, and as the last person seen in company with Sir Richard. Mainly through the false evidence of Bernard Oates, Frank's cousin, the innocent lad is found guilty of taking his uncle's life. He is sentenced to imprisonment for life.

On his way to Bleakland Prison with several other convicts, Frank comes face to face with Bernard Oates, the cause of all his troubles, on the station platform. Enraged by Oates' sneers and insults, Frank springs at his tormentor, but is pulled away by Principal-Warder Rossiter, a harsh tyrant, who has no pity for the convicts under his charge.

The Punishment-cell.

On his arrival at Bleakland, Frank is taken before the governor, Major Grimtree, and sentenced to three days' punishment-cells for his assault on Oates.

Frank finds a friend in Assistant-Warder Dibble, who has heard the story of Frank's conviction, and whose soft heart is touched by the lad's terrible plight.

While crossing the prison-yard on his way to the punishment-cells, Frank passes another convict, a poor half-witted lad named Billy Simpson, who breaks away from the warders and makes towards the new arrival. He is only kept from speaking to the lad by Warder Soper.

One of the convicts at Bleakland, whose name is Captain Pentwhistle, has a certain influence over the governor, Major Grimtree, which ensures him some little leniency in regard to prison rules.

The Convict Warders.

Billy Simpson, in a fit of frenzy, sets alight to the prison. All the convicts are marched out into the yard, whilst the fire brigade extinguishes the flames. Warder Rossiter and Soper are both severely burnt, and removed to the infirmary. Captain Pentwhistle, knowing two new warders are expected, confiscates Rossiter's and Soper's uniforms. The ones he does, and making his way to the cell of a convict named Punch Milkins, tells him to slip on the other. The two then impersonate the new warders, who have not yet arrived.

The governor of the prison approaches, and the captain and Milkins pretend, being new men, not to recognise him. Punch Milkins makes Major Grimtree don a suit of convict's clothes. He then compels the governor to take a cold water bath, and finishes up by shaving him and clipping his hair in the orthodox prison style. Major Grimtree is then locked in a cell.

The following day there is great confusion when it is discovered that the governor is missing. Search-parties are sent out, but no trace can be found of the unfortunate Major Grimtree. A letter is found on the table in the governor's room, apparently written by his kidnappers.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

THE 18th CHAPTER *(continued).*
The Search for the Governor.

THE chaplain read the strange missive through twice ere he handed it back.

"What do you make of it, sir?" Payton asked.

"I don't quite know. It's a curious mixture of the tragic and the comic. The reference to the pheasant makes the matter look like a practical joke."

"Joke!" echoed the chief warder. "Pretty grim sort of joke! It's about as serious as anything could be, I'm thinking."

"What are you going to do?"

"Have out the warders and civil guards, and the soldiers, if necessary, and search for him. There's never anything happened like this before." And the chief warder raced on.

Ding-a-ling-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding!

From the high tower the alarm bell rang out. Ordinary early morning duties were neglected. Into the prison square warders and civil guards rushed helter-skelter, half aware of what had happened, and all eagerness to know more.

The governor was missing. He had been decoyed away, kidnapped, perhaps murdered! Somebody or other—probably some former prisoners—had visited Bleakland, had waylaid the governor, and, determined to pay off old scores, had taken him away.

Where was the governor? He must be found without delay.

Warders and civil guards were marshalled into companies. Chief-Warder Payntor addressed them, and gave them hurried instructions.

The companies were split up into sections, and at the word of command were sent off as a quick step in various ways.

Out from the prison went over a hundred men with grave faces. They feared the worst, though they hoped for the best.

Cliffs, woods, and moor were to be searched, nor were the men to return until Major Grimtree was found, or night should put an end to further searchings.

East and west and north went warders and guards. The sea was on the south, with great warships at anchor in the harbour not far away.

To those ships messages were sent, with a request that search-parties should go out in boats. Perhaps the governor had been thrown into the sea. Who knew? He must be searched for everywhere.

And he was searched for everywhere.

And all the time, amid this hullabaloo, two men alone in that prison thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Separated in the flesh, each locked in his own cell, Captain Pentwhistle and Punch Milkins were still together in spirit.

They looked back upon the adventures of the past night as one of the biggest jokes in their career. They heard of the preparation for the search, they heard of the departure of the search-parties, and there they sat hugging themselves, and smiling broad smiles that were not likely to fade away for some little time.

But, meanwhile, the search continued. Where—oh, where was the governor? Under their very noses had they only known it!

THE 17th CHAPTER.
The Governor Finds Himself in an Awkward Predicament.

PUNCH MILKINS and Captain Pentwhistle had, as we know, impersonated two warders. These two warders had been expected from Dartmoor overnight, but had not arrived.

Quite early the next morning, however, they did arrive, and duly presented themselves for report at the chief-warder's office.

But the chief warder was out, so were several of the principal warders, for whom they inquired. So, indeed, were nearly all the officials that day.

The reason for it they learned from a civil guard, who was very uncivil when he explained the matter to them.

"The governor's gone," he said surlily—"been kidnapped or something. Everybody's gone out to search for him, leaving about half a dozen of us to do about ten times the ordinary duties. You're the two new blokes from Dartmoor, I suppose?"

"Yes," said the tallor of the two. "My name's Bill Escott. My mate here is George Phipps."

The civil guard inclined his head, while Mr. Phipps, a short, thick-set man, with a ferocious-looking moustache, and a nose so ambitious that it always seemed to be looking upward, bobbed his head, and muttered that he was pleased to make the civil guard's acquaintance. At which the civil guard grunted, and, in the same surly tone, said he didn't know why. Nobody had ever been pleased to make his acquaintance before; and he was quite sure that for his part he didn't want to make any new friends at all.

The civil guard was, indeed, locally known as "Surly Jim." But the new warder didn't know that. They only noted his last words, and inferred from them that they hadn't much to hope from him.

"You see," said Bill Escott, "we're strangers here. There don't seem to be anybody at home as we can report ourselves to. You can't help us to kill time, I suppose, by showing us round the place?"

"No, I can't."

"Is there anybody who can?"

"Ain't the slightest notion. I tell you we've all got to do ten men's work to-day."

"Well," said Bill Escott, "we shall have to do something. The chief'll expect that of us, won't he, George?"

"That he will, undoubted!" said he with the ambitious nose. "Bill, this is a awk'rd case. What do you think we ought to do?"

"Ought to do summat," said Bill sagely.

"You're right," said George Phipps, with equally profound wisdom. "We ought to do summat."

"Unless, mind you," struck in Bill Escott, with the manner of one inspired—"unless, mind you, we don't do nothin'."

Warder Phipps started like a man impressed by this wonderful new idea.

"Bill," said he, "that's what they call in scholarship circles, a halternative. But I'm a bit doubtful about it. We ought to make ourselves acquainted with the ways of the place—get our bearings, so to speak; then, when the chief comes home, we can report ourselves to him, and let him know what smart officers we are."

"Well, I can't help you," broke in Surly Jim. "If you're such smart officers, you ought to be able to find your own way about. If you can't, ask one o' the lags to show you round."

Bill Escott looked up.

"It's pally of you to suggest that, mate. Now, is there any one o' the lags as is more to be trusted than the others? Do you know of one of the right sort, as won't take liberties, or play any tricks on us?"

"Yes, I do." Surly Jim was unbending a little. "There's No. 101. Reg'lar toff he is. He's as good as an old age pension to some o' the screws here. Tips several of 'em reg'lar, getting the money somehow from outside. Can't say as much o' the luck 'as come my way, though I certainly did have the price of a turkey from him last Christmas."

The two new warders exchanged a look. They were, no fear, of that unscrupulous type that likes a moneyed prisoner. They had been some years in the service, and during that time had considerably increased their incomes by taking bribes from the imprisoned men under their charge.

Those who doubt this sort of thing may be assured that a great deal of it goes on. Money is almost as powerful an instrument inside a prison as it is out, and warders are as corruptible—no more and no less—as any other mixed body of men.

So Bill Escott looked at George Phipps, and winked, while George Phipps tilted his snub nose a little higher, which was his way of signifying that he understood his mate's meaning.

"No. 101, you said?" remarked Escott.

"Ay, that's him! Captain Pentwhistle, his name is. Formerly of the Bloomshire Fusiliers. After that, a company promoter of the City of London. That's the sort of perfession he was following when he got nabbed, and received five years' penal servitude. He's the chap to show you round; and, what's more, he's a real pal of the governor's."

"That's our man, then," said Warder Escott. "Come on, George!"

Off they marched. A further inquiry gave them the information that Convict 101 was in hospital.

There they found him engaged with a plate of oxtail soup in a way that a genuine invalid might have envied.

"You're Captain Pentwhistle, ain't you?" said Bill Escott, approaching.

The captain put down his empty plate, screwed his monocle into his left eye, and very deliberately scanned his questioner from head to foot.

"That is my name," he said loftily; "but you have the advantage of me. I take it that you are one of the menials of this establishment? I am quite aware that in a place like this ordinary social etiquette often breaks down; but I would not have you forget that it is not the place of a menial to address a gentleman like myself, especially without an introduction. However, let that pass. I am a martyr to a tyrannous legal system, and I submit, being content to bide my time. Who are you? What are you?"

Bill Escott's brain was in a bit of a whirl. He was not yet accustomed to this sort of Pentwhistlerian eloquence. It impressed him rather. Moreover, he had those bribes in view, and he determined to stand well with the captain from the first.

"My name's Bill Escott," he returned slowly. "I'm one of the new warders."

"Ha, ha! Delighted to meet you!" said the captain, quite affable now that the formal introduction had been made. "Welcome to Bleakland! You'll find it a most healthy place. The air is bracing, and gives one such an appetite as to make the quite inadequate diet a miserable mockery and a sublime torture. Pleased to make you, and your friend—an English type of beauty of the retrousse order, I observe. You might introduce me."

Bill Escott raked his beard.

"That's George Phipps," he said.

"Ah! How are you do, Georgie? Pleased

(Continued on the next page.)

LAST STORY-PICTURE IN OUR GREAT 15,000-PRIZE COMPETITION.

The 15,000 Prizes will include:

Watches, Cameras, Telescopes, Footballs, Cricket Bats and Balls, Penknives, Boxes of Dominoes

(Presented by Messrs. Mackintosh, the makers of the celebrated Mackintosh Toffee)

Boxes of Draughts, Pocket Electric Lamps, Printing Outfits, Pencil Cases, etc., etc.

If only 15,000 Competitors enter, each will get a Prize!

FINAL SET! **FINAL SET!**

A SEXTON BLAKE ADVENTURE (Concluded).

See last column for full instructions for sending in your solutions.

READ THIS CAREFULLY.

All readers have to do is to cut out the twelve pictures that have appeared week by week in the THE BOYS' REALM, "The Boys' Friend," and "The Boys' Herald," paste them on sheets of paper, and write below each picture what you think should be the correct wording of the story which we have given in the form of Puzzle Pictures. Add your name and address, and post them to

"THE COMPETITION EDITOR,"
THE BOYS' REALM,
7, Waithman Street, London, E.C.

The latest date for receiving pictures is May 15th for readers living in Great Britain.

Two thousand prizes are reserved for Colonial readers, whose pictures must be sent in to our London office before July 31st.

The 15,000 Prizes announced will be awarded to the 15,000 readers whose solutions are correct or most nearly correct.

You may send as many complete sets of solutions as you please, provided the puzzle pictures accompany each set. Not more than one prize, however, can be awarded to any one competitor.

Your Editor's decision on all points respecting this competition shall be final, and he cannot enter into any correspondence whatever in connection therewith.

NOTE.—This Competition is run in connection with "The Boys' Herald" and "The Boys' Friend," as well as THE BOYS' REALM.

CLOSING DATES! MAY 15th (FOR READERS IN GREAT BRITAIN.) JULY 31st (FOR COLONIAL AND FOREIGN READERS).

BEHIND PRISON WALLS.

(Continued from the previous page.)

to see you. As a whole-hearted believer in the Darwinian theory that men are descended from monkeys, I am delighted to meet with a specimen that goes so far to convince one of its absolute truth."

Warder Phipps tugged at his fierce moustache.

"Look here, guv'nor," said he, "I don't know quite what you mean, but if you're getting at me——"

"Getting at you, my dear friend? No, no! Banish the thought from your mind, and give me your paw—that is, hand. Now, what can I do for you?"

The captain's patronising air seemed to rile George Phipps. He looked as if he were going to get savage again.

"Don't say nothin', Georre," said Warder Escott, nudging him. "Don't forget he's a toff, with plenty of oof. We shall be getting quidlets out of him later on."

The mention of "quidlets" seemed to soothe George. He twisted his moustache upward instead of downward, and actually grinned at the captain.

"We seemed to have arrived at a partic'lar awk'ard moment," said he. "Everybody seems away."

"Nearly everybody is away," said the captain. "The whole staff of wardens and guards are engaged in an expedition. The occasion is unique. They are out searching for no less a person than Major Grimtree, who, rumour says, was kidnapped last night."

"So we've heard," said Bill Escott. "And that's why we've come to you. We was recommended to you on account o' your thorough familiarity with the prison. We want to look round; and there being no warders to show us round, why, we thought as how you might."

Captain Pentwhistle leapt up as no invalid could have done.

"Show you round?" said he eagerly. "Why, so I will. Up to now, in spite of my varied career, I have never played the part of cicerone at a show place; but as a tourist I studied the methods of such, and I dare say I can fill the role."

A twinkle came into the captain's eye as he led the way through the ward.

"We are now," said he, in the manner of a professional guide, "in an interesting though depressing atmosphere. This is the prison infirmary, where miserable men drag out their miserable existence on a bed of pain, and "—suddenly remembering his oxtail soup—"strive to build up their shattered constitutions on a slightly improved diet. Let us pass out into the sunlight. On the left you observe that part of the prison known as X. Hall. The style of architecture unknown. The place is built for use, rather than ornament. The thickness of its walls, and the strength of the bars over the windows are, doubtless symbolical of England's might. They are also, of course, necessary for the safe keeping of the prisoners inside. Passing along the corridor to the right, you get a glimpse of the tailors' shop. One cannot enter that place without being reminded of Hood's gloomy and depressing masterpiece. His 'Song of the Shirt' comes home to one with a tenfold significance on beholding the unhappy wretches, who, day after day, month after month, toil there with needle and thread.

'Stitch, stitch, stitch!
With eyelids weary and red.'"

"That is the order of the day there, and not only of the day, but of the week, the month, the year, the long term of years to which——" Captain Pentwhistle broke off, flicked a tear from his unglassed eye, and then added: "Excuse my emotion, gentlemen, excuse me if I cannot finish the sentence regarding those hapless creatures. I must leave them to finish their own. Now, then, what would you like to see next?"

"Anything—anything!" responded Bill Escott, whose brain was in a complete whirl now. "A general look round, that's what we was in—a general look round."

Again a twinkle came into Captain Pentwhistle's eye. He was enjoying this game thoroughly, and a sudden idea came to him. He remembered that overnight he and Punch Milkins had shaved Major Grimtree's moustache off, had cut his hair, and had decked him out in broad-arrow garb. After that they had locked him up in one of the cells in the disused wing of the prison.

It occurred to him that he might get some fun out of this, and he forthwith decided to put it to the test.

"There is a very interesting case in the solitary-cells," he said insinuatingly—"very interesting."

"Oh, what's that?" asked Warder Escott.

"Well, I hardly think it would be safe for us to go and see him. You see, he's a dangerous character."

"Dangerous?" said Warder Phipps, tugging at his moustache, and screwing his face into a very baboon-like shape. "Think I'm afraid? I never met the lag yet as I was afraid to tackle single-handed, let alone when three of us are present. Come, my man!"

"Don't you call me your man!" said Pentwhistle irritably. "There is an undue familiarity about it which I resent."

"Oh, all right!" said Phipps, with a grin. "I apologise, old sport. What, about this fellow you say is dangerous? Should like to see him."

"Well, I'll take you to him. But let yours be the responsibility, not mine. Remember the man is really dangerous, and must be treated gently."

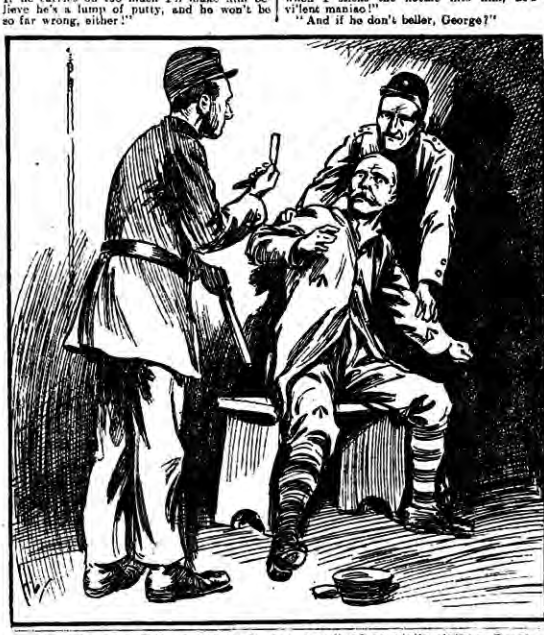
"Oh, I'll treat him gently!" murmured Phipps. "Only let him come any of his tricks with me, that's all."

"You see, he suffers from the most extraordinary delusions. He really oughtn't to be here at all; he ought to have been sent to Parkhurst or Broadmoor. He's a real barmy, if ever there was one. Most extraordinary are the delusions he suffers from."

"Oh, what might they be?"

"Well, one day he thinks he's the Prince of Wales, another day full of the belief that he's the German Emperor; he insists on writing out orders for new battleships by the dozen. The last time I saw him he was labouring under the impression that he'd discovered the South Pole. What he'll think he is to-day goodness only knows. But humour him—humour him!"

"Oh, I'll humour him!" muttered Phipps, with a significant grip of his truncheon. "I know how to deal with that sort o' case. I've got a sure cure for 'em here. You leave him to me. I'll knock the delusions out of him! If he carries on too much I'll make him believe he's a lump of putty, and he won't be so far wrong, either!"



After forcing Major Grimtree to don a suit of convict's clothes, Punch Milkins subjected him to the indignity of a haircut, and shaved off his moustache.

"This way, then!" said Pentwhistle; and led the way into the deserted wing. He halted at one of the cell doors. "Here's the place," he said.

Warder Escott unlocked it and threw it open. Instantly a wild-looking, distracted figure sprang towards the door.

It was Major Grimtree, though few would have recognised him. His clean-shaven face, close-cropped head, and prison clothes made him look as desperate a lag as any man in Bleakland.

He sprang towards the door, we say, and exclaimed:

"So you've come at last, have you? You've let me scream the place down for hours without coming near me? What do you mean by it—eh?"

"That's what I mean by it!" said Warder Phipps, clutching him by the collar, and sending him reeling back into the cell. "You jost behave yourself, or it'll be the worse for you, mister! I'm not one to put up with any 'anky-panky tricks!"

"Why, who are you?" demanded Major Grimtree, catching sight of a new face. "I have never seen you before."

"I'm one of the new warders from Dartmoor, I am, and this is the other."

Major Grimtree gasped.

"The new warders? Then you're the two villains I met last night, who treated me so shamefully, and locked me up here?"

"Well, I'm blowed, Bill!" Phipps exclaimed. "What do you think of that? One minute he says he ain't never seen us before, now he says he met us last night! What do you make o' that?"

"Mad!" said Bill Escott laconically.

"Mad, undoubtedly," said Phipps. "We must make sure o' this, Bill, and report accordin'. Now, mister, who are you?"

"Who am I?" thundered the wild-eyed man before them. "Why, I'm Major Grimtree, of course! I'm the governor of Bleakland Prison, as everybody in the place knows!"

Warder Phipps looked at him in amazement for one second. Then up went his ape-like face, forward went his shoulders, and the next minute both he and Warder Escott were doubled up with inextinguishable laughter.

"Ho, ho, ho, he, he, ho!" gargled Phipps. "Here's a go! Ever hear the like? The governor of Bleakland Prison. Ho, ho, ho, ho, he, ho! I never heard the like in all my born days!"

"Nor yet afore 'om, either!" said Escott emphatically. "What do it mean, George?"

"He's mad, o' course—mad as a hatter, who's first cousin to a March hare!"

"But, what sort o' madness is it, George? Is he vi'lent, or a 'armless gibberin'? Is he a maniac, or jest a dodderin' idiot?"

"We'll soon see," said Phipps. "Hold him, Bill, will you? Hold him while I sticks a needle through the fleshy part of his leg!"

"Is that a test, George?"

"Sure and sartin test. If he bellows out when I sticks the needle into him, he's a vi'lent maniac!"

"And if he don't beller, George?"

"Why, then he's an idiot—a blitherin' idiot of the very lowest horder of himbeciles! Now, then, got him?"

"Yes."

"Then hold him tight."

"Let me go—let me go!" cried the governor. "If you don't, I'll—— O-o-o-oow, o-o-o-w, o-o-o-oh!"

A needle had been thrust deeply into the fleshy part of Major Grimtree's leg, and instantly such a scream broke from his throat as might have been heard a mile off.

"That settles it," said Warder Phipps, with decision. "No doubt about him now. He's a maniac of the most vi'lent sort. We must report accordin'. A few days low diet will do him good."

They moved towards the door.

"Let me go! Don't look me in!" shrieked the governor. "I tell you I'm Major Grimtree. If you leave me here it'll be——"

The rest of what he said was lost, for Warder Phipps, with a grin upon his face, had slammed the door, and stood with Escott in the corridor.

"Clear case that, Bill—eh?"

"Oh, never knew a clearer, George. I reckon we ought to see the doctor at once, and get him to see into this case. The fellow ought to be at Parkhurst, with the barmy lot. But where's No. 101, the bloke that brought us here?"

"Must have gone," answered Escott. "I noticed he slipped off when we opened that door. He's most like gone back to the infirmary. We'll go and look for him, and then we'll find the doctor."

THE 19th CHAPTER.
A Humorous Situation.

CAPTAIN PENTWHISTLE had slipped off when the door of the governor's cell was open. But he had not gone back to the infirmary.

Foreseeing some fun, he wanted someone to share it with him. At once, then, he ran off, took a bunch of keys from a place where he had concealed them, and skipped off to Punch Milkins's cell.

"Punch," he whispered, as he opened the door, "want to see some sport?"

"Do I not, capting? What's the game?"

Hurriedly, Captain Pentwhistle told him. Punch Milkins went purple in the face, and laughed so violently that he threatened to have apoplexy.

"I say, capting," said he, as they passed out of the door, "do you mind another bein' in it?"

"Who's that?"

"My 'ighly-respected next door neighbour," said Milkins, with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder—"young Easterbrook. He's been more'n a bit moody all the mornin'. The sight of the governor goin' through the 'oop may liven 'im up a bit."

"All right. Here are the keys. Let him out."

A few words from Punch Milkins were sufficient to explain the situation to Frank.

All that morning, as during the previous night, the boy had been, as his neighbour phrased it, moody. Now, he welcomed this little adventure as a break in the dreadful monotony of his life in the cell.

There was very little danger of the three convicts being seen, most of the warders being away, as we have explained. In consequence, it was not a very difficult matter to conceal themselves in a place where they could see and hear everything that was going forward in regard to Major Grimtree.

The situation was to them by no means devoid of humour, and long and hearty was the laugh that they had, as they witnessed the scene between the prison governor and the new warders. Nor was Major Grimtree's plight wholly due to the fact that the two officers who had visited him were unfamiliar with his face. The change in his appearance had indeed made him almost unrecognisable.

Frank Easterbrook, gazing at the governor through a chink in the door of one of the opposite cells, found it difficult to recognise Major Grimtree in the wild-eyed, angry man who was arguing with Escott and Phipps.

In his convict dress, with his moustache off and his hair cut close, the governor looked as genuine a prisoner as any man at Bleakland.

Never before had Frank realised what a difference dress does really make to a man.

From their place of concealment the three convicts saw everything. They had their laugh out, and saw the two new warders depart.

"Hallo!" muttered Milkins, as he heard Escott's last words. "They've been took in clean. They think the guv'nor's barmy, and they're going to fetch the doctor to have a look at him. What'll 'appen now, I wonder? We'd better wait and see this through."

They hadn't very long to wait. In about a quarter of an hour the two new warders returned, accompanied by two gentlemen.

One of these was Mr. Keppiter, the deaf visiting justice, whom we already know; the other was Dr. Parsons, the medical practitioner from the village, who, during Dr. Sears's absence, had undertaken the medical duties of the prison.

As this party of four approached the cell where the governor was, Warder Escott was giving them some more details of what had happened.

"It's a most remarkable case, gentlemen sirs," he was saying. "I don't, o' course, set out to be a judge o' such things. I don't pretend to be no great scholard, but I do think, gentlemen sirs, I knows when a man's took leave of his senses; and if this here prisoner ain't start, starin' mad, why, I think I must be myself! Actually said he was the governor of Bleakland, and was most vi'lent in his conduck! But, now, gentlemen, you'll see for yourselves."

He unlocked the door, and threw it open as he spoke. In the corner crouched the governor, with his chin upon his knees, and his hands clutching his head.

"Dear me—dear me!" said old Dr. Parsons. "What an object of despair! This does indeed look a pitiful case!"

At the sound of his voice Major Grimtree sprang up.

"Dr. Parsons!" he gasped out. "And you, my dear Mr. Keppiter! Oh, how glad I am you've come! What a relief to find you here to rescue me from this hideous persecution!"

His eyes blazed as he spoke, and his features twitched in a way that only served further to disguise his real identity. Certainly, neither the doctor nor the visiting justice recognised him at that moment. They fully believed that he was nothing else than what the warders had described, a weak-minded convict. It looked as though the governor would remain unknown for a very long time yet.

(To be continued on Saturday next.)

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Wexstall Rovers have fallen on bad times. Once a prosperous First League team, they are now at the lowest ebb of ill-fortune. Disaster has followed disaster, and the opening of our story finds them slowly but surely sinking to the bottom of the Second League table. The players have lost heart, and but a small faction of stout-hearted members remain, putting heart and soul into one desperate attempt to place the old club on its legs again.

The most prominent amongst these are Jack Galway, the centre half-back; Frank Butler, the outside-right; and Lockett, the captain and goalkeeper. There is also a little crowd of players led by Maxwell, the right back, who, disgusted with the lowly position of Wexstall Rovers in the football world, have no thought for the club's welfare, but slack at every available opportunity. Their participation in the League fixtures does more harm to the club than good.

The Secretary Absconds.

The club is deeply in debt to Mr. Bessie, a building contractor, who has constructed a grand stand for them. He has never been paid for his work, and upon making a final application, Mr. Hensall, the secretary-manager of Wexstall Rovers, gives him a cheque for a hundred pounds. This cheque is, however, worthless, there being no money in the bank.

On the following Monday great consternation is caused by the discovery that Mr. Hensall has absconded with all the club funds.

Meanwhile, Frank Butler has got on friendly terms with a Mr. Sanderson, young Sanderson, who has been injured in a motor accident on the outskirts of Wexstall. Sanderson takes an unusual amount of interest in the club and its difficulties, and has an interview with Mr. Kelly, one of the directors. The outcome of this is that Sanderson offers to put up sufficient money to pay off the club's debts, and give it a fresh start. Needless to say, this offer is accepted, and a meeting of directors is held to put the proposition on a business basis.

The Turn of the Tide.

The whole team is reorganised, and the mutinous members are stood down for the time being.

A couple of victories over Seaton Barr and Tottenham Hotspur (League matches), and the defeat of Aston Villa in a Cup-tie, regain the Rovers a great amount of their lost popularity with the Wexstall folk.

In the second round of the Cup competition they are drawn away against Newcastle United. Their next League fixture is with Fulham at Craven Cottage, and, played under terrible weather conditions, ends in a draw.

A few minutes from time the ball is kicked into the river, and in attempting to retrieve it, a poor ragged lad, who has been watching the game with interest, fails in and is swept away by the current. Frank Butler dives to the rescue, and succeeds in bringing the lad to the shore in an unconscious condition. Medical aid is summoned, and news is later brought to Frank in the dressing-room at the Craven Cottage football-ground, that the rescued boy has recovered his senses.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

Tom Maw.

THAT hot bath did the trick. The lad whom Frank Butler had so gallantly rescued from the Thames opened his eyes, and, after drawing forth a deep, heartfelt sigh, he stared in astonishment at the men who were surrounding him, and at the strange appearance of the dressing-room.

Then Simmons, the trainer, with his own strong arms hauled the lad out, and, sitting him willy-nilly down upon a chair, he towelled him down, and a glass of brandy did the rest. Pale and ill though the boy looked, he recovered his magic pretty soon, in a confused, half ashamed way, he hung his head.

"That's right, my lad!" said William Sanderson, smiling, at him. "You won't come to much harm."

The boy shivered a little, and they helped him into his clothes.

Frank Butler, warmed by the steaming water of the bath, and revived by the brandy he had taken, and as physically fit as sound training could make him, was the worse for his immersion. As his chums Jack Galway, Brewer, the goalkeeper, and some of the others crowded round him, expressing their high opinion of his bravery, Frank smiled.

"It was nothing!" he said. "Any of you chaps would have gone in to help him, if you had seen him sinking there."

The lad, looking round, now caught sight of Frank's face, ruddy now with the glow that had been imparted to it by the steaming water.

He got off his chair, and staggered towards Frank. He looked appealingly into his face.

"You're Frank Butler?" he cried, and his voice was husky and trembling. "I owe my life to you! I shall never forget it. I—I thought when I tumbled in, and felt the icy water freeze me to the bone, that I should never get out again alive. But I am alive; and I owe it all to you!"

Then he suddenly drew his right hand across his head, and burst into a flood of bitter tears.

"I wish I was dead!" he cried. "I wish I had been drowned! My troubles would all be at an end then. Why didn't yer leave me in the river to die?"

His frame shook with the fit of sobbing that overmastered him, and in his weakness he sank forward, and Frank caught him in his arms.

For a moment the poor fellow could not speak a word; and his outburst had such an effect upon the other occupants of the dressing-room that they looked at one another in awe. There was something unutterably pathetic in the grief of this boy—for he was little more, albeit, he was a magnificently built lad, as they had seen when they stripped him and put him into the hot bath.

Then, recovering his self-possession by an effort, the lad lifted his head and looked away from them at the wall, his eyes veiled by a mist of tears.

"I've got no home," he muttered; "I've not father or mother. I've got no friends. I'm starving. I—I sneaked into the ground this afternoon—got in round by the river, at the risk of falling in. I—I never meant to drown myself. Only it was the football stopped me. I came down by the river-side this afternoon intending to go in and end it all; but when I saw the crowd streaming down to the football-ground, I—I couldn't do it. I—I love the game, and so I stayed to watch it; and it was that, I think, saved my life."

"You intended to drown yourself, my boy?" cried William Sanderson, shocked. "You can't mean it?"

The expression of the boy's face grew fiercely determined.

"I did mean it!" he cried.

"And why?"

A pair of big, brown eyes were set on Sanderson's face.

"Do you know what it means to go without food, sir?" asked the boy.

Sanderson shook his head.

"Do you know what it means to sleep out on the Embankment o' nights because you haven't enough coppers to get a doss in a fourpenny doss-house? Do you know what it means to hunt for work, and to be refused everywhere you go because you've no trade? Do you know what it means to be baited and driven by the police, and to walk, homeless and friendless, in the great City, where every one exceptin' yourself seems to be well-to-do? No; I suppose you don't! If you did, you'd guess all that I've suffered these last three or four months; and you'd understand why it is that a boy like me should have been tempted to end it all by suicide!"

"And was that your intention when you fell into the river?" asked Frank Butler sternly. "Did you do it purposely?"

The boy shook his head.

"No, sir," he cried, choking—"no! I tried to get the football, which was kicked into the river. The excitement of the game had made me change my mind, and all I thought of then was getting the ball out again. And when I felt the cold water closing round me, I suppose my courage came uppermost again, and I fought for my life; but I should have gone down if you hadn't dived in to save me."

"Where is your father?" asked William Sanderson.

"Father was killed on the railway twelve months ago," answered the boy, whilst his face went white, and his lips trembled. "Mother died of a broken heart, and I was left alone."

"And do you mean to tell me," said Sanderson sternly, "that nobody would help you? Neither your father's old friends or relations, nor the railway company on whose line your father was killed?"

"I don't know any of my relations," answered the boy. "Dad's friends wouldn't stir a hand to help me. They said I was old enough to help myself. And I wouldn't take the railway company's help—no, sir, I wouldn't accept that, desperate as I was."

Frank Butler and John Galway exchanged looks of pity.

"What is your name, my lad?" asked William Sanderson.

"Thomas Maw, sir."

"Well, Thomas Maw," said William Sanderson, smiling, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. You have no friends, and no home, and no means of earning a living. Well, I'm going to take you back to Wexstall with the team, and we'll see whether we can't find something for you to do there."

The boy stepped back a pace, and his lips parted. He stared at Sanderson, and then looked at Frank Butler, and at Jack Galway, at Manager Kelly, at Brewer, at Ainsworth, and at Gillingham, and his lips trembled. He passed a dazed hand over his forehead, as if he could not quite realise all that Sanderson's offer meant to him. Then, as the truth forced itself home, he stated forward, and stretched out his hands appealingly, looking up into Sanderson's handsome and kindly face.

"If you do that, sir," he said, and his voice throbbed with eager sincerity—"if you do that, I'll never forget it—never so long as I live! You'll save me. You'll make me. I can work. I'm not one of the lazy kind. I have seen a bit of the world, and I have suffered; and you won't find me shirk. I can play football, too. I have played many a game in my time. When I was a boy of thirteen, sir, I played for an eleven of youngsters belonging to Hexham Board School, against the champion schoolboys' team of England, and we licked 'em three goals to nil. I scored all the goals, sir. I've played from goalkeeper to centre-forward—in fact, in every position on the field. I can help you manage the club. I can read and write well, sir, and I am used to book-keeping. You take me, and try me; and if I'm no good, send me back to London to starve again, sir. But you won't find me wanting. All I ask for is a chance."

"And," said Sanderson emphatically, "you shall have it. There, there, my lad! Get into your things, and come along with us back to the hotel. The brake's waiting outside. Simmons, let him have my overcoat."

Simmons looked a little doubtfully at the pale-faced, hungry-looking boy.

"Very good, sir!" he said. And then he turned round. "Hurry up, my lads!" he cried. "Don't waste any time. We are all hungry; and the sooner we get back to Holborn, the better!"

The players finished their changing, got into their heavy coats and mufflers, seized their bags, and trooped, smiling, to the door.

William Sanderson's action, no less than Frank Butler's great bravery, had made a profound impression upon them all.

"Who wouldn't serve under such a chap as him?" said Jack Galway enthusiastically to Frank. "Isn't he a tip-topper, Frank?"

"He's a splendid fellow!" answered Frank heartily.

Thomas Maw got into his street things, although he resisted Simmons's first attempt to slip him into Sanderson's overcoat; but eventually he put it on, and then a move was made to the door. At this last moment, however, the Wexstall centre-forward stopped short.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Where's Caruso? Where's our mascot?"

Yes! There was the monkey! Had Wex-stall lost their mascot?

"Caruso! Caruso!" bawled Sanderson, Frank, and Jack all together.

Then there came a wild screech, and over the partition which separated the visitors' dressing-room from a room beyond scrambled the monkey, dragging his jingling chain behind him. He evaded the hands which were held out to seize him, and ran to Thomas Maw's feet. One look up into the lonely lad's face he gave; and then, with a satisfied kind of cry, he ran up his clothing, and perched contentedly on the lad's shoulder.

At first Tom Maw seemed inclined to throw him down, but the good-natured little creature chattered and blinked his eyes so pathetically that the lad hadn't the heart to deal roughly with him. Then William Sanderson, laughing, took the little monkey off the lad's shoulders.

"You're approved of already, Thomas Maw," he said. "The Wexstall mascot is a bit of a judge of character, I believe. You behave yourself, and deal loyally by us, no matter what the work we put you to, and I dare say we shall make something of you before we are done with you!"

The lad looked up into Sanderson's face with a wistful glance, and then Frank Butler caught him by the arm, and they led him to the door of the dressing-room, and out to the waiting brake.

They found the Fulham football players waiting for them there, and hearty were the handshakes they exchanged.

"Good-bye," cried Collins, of Fulham—"good-bye! And good luck in the Cup-tie next week!"

Then the crowd rushed excitedly round them. They were looking eagerly for Frank Butler, and, as they recognised him, they burst into a frantic cheer, and to this music the horses drew the brake away into the nose of the biting east wind that was sweeping the earth now that nightfall had come.

The Luck Dead Out.

THE week before their important Cup-tie match with Newcastle United was passed by the Wexstall players in preparing for the great contest. The Rovers were to meet one of the most scientific, if not the most scientific, team in England. For many years past Newcastle United had played football of the highest class, and they had fully earned the right to be regarded as one of the finest combinations of football players who had ever stepped upon a football-field.

On paper Wexstall Rovers had not a ghost of a chance. But, then, Cup-ties are Cup-ties, and often a dashing, thrusting team will manage to put a far cleverer combination off their game, snap a goal lead, and keep their opponents from scoring until the final whistle—and such a happening as that at St. James's Park, Newcastle, would mean a step nearer to the Final.

Could it be done? That was the question. In Wexstall folk were dubious. The club was rallying, but they had not the players in the club ranks that had graced them two or three seasons ago, and even the wonderful 5 to 1 win against Aston Villa in the previous round did not make people believe that the Rovers were capable of coming out of the tussle at Newcastle with a victory to their credit.

And what of the players themselves? What did they think about it?

Well, during that week there were serious, anxious faces when the players met on the football-ground, or took a ten-mile walk along the country lanes. The weather was mild. The cold snap had vanished. The sun shone. There were signs of spring to be seen on every hand.

The grass on the playing-pitch was beginning to show a fresh tint of green.

Training was done under ideal conditions, but—well, could the Wexstall Rovers win?

The form at Fulham was convincing, as far it had gone, but the conditions under which the game had been played were too extraordinary for a line to be drawn upon such a result.

Newcastle had thrashed Middlesbrough by 5 to 0 at Middlesbrough on that same Saturday. Cup-tie form with a vengeance! Newcastle were going to win the League championship, most likely, and there was no secret that they would go all out for the Cup as well.

Simmons did not try his lads very hard. Skipping-rope exercise, light dumb-bell exercise, some sprinting on the field, and a little ball play, and then penalty-kicks practice was all that he gave them to do, and in the evening Sanderson took good care that the lads should be fully occupied. He did not intend them to lose around public-houses amongst a crowd of casual admirers, who do the lads more harm than good, and so they were taken to the theatre or the music-hall of an evening, or came to play billiards in the billiard-room of the Three Feathers Hotel.

The new find, Thomas Maw, was living in a little room in the house of Gillingham's mother, and he came down to the ground every day and made himself useful, executing any odd jobs that Simmons, the trainer, or the groundman, or his manager, Mr. Kelly, wanted done for them. He was obliging, willing, polite, a good worker, and a good-looking lad into the bargain, now that he had plenty to eat and a roof to cover him. His smiling face was very welcome at the club ground, where so many scowling faces had been seen during the club's bad days.

On the Wednesday afternoon the lads came down to the ground by order of the secretary-manager, and by half-past two there was a fair muster, though some of them, notably, Gillingham, Ainsworth, and Freenan, were not to time.

Nor was the new lad, Thomas Maw, there, usually the most punctual of them all. He would have lived and slept on the ground if he could have his way, Sanderson had remarked to Frank the day before, so much was Maw to be there, and so enthusiastically did he work.

"Now, then," cried Simmons irritably, when the players had nearly all arrived—"now, then! Get out on the field, lads, and practise a bit of passing and shooting at goal. The manager wants it. It's the last bit of serious work we shall do before the match. You'll all have a rest to-morrow, and we travel to Newcastle on Friday!"

They filed into the dressing-room, and began to change, and Frank Butler had just got his football-boots laced when the door opened and Ainsworth came in, looking very pale, with a pair of eyes which glowed in their sockets like coals of fire. There were dark tints about them, and although the sun was shining, but mild enough, although the sun was shining, he shivered as he entered the warmed dressing-room.

Frank Butler caught his chum, Jack Galway, by the arm.

"Jack," he cried, "just look at Ainsworth! Whatever is the matter?"

Galway looked, and started to his feet with a cry of surprise.

"Ainsworth, laddie," he said, "you look as if you had seen a ghost! Is anything the matter? Are you ill?"

At the word "ill" Simmons the trainer swept round, and he uttered a cry of dismay as he caught sight of Ainsworth's face.

The half-back tottered to a locker and sat down upon it, letting his head fall wearily into his hands.

"I don't know what's the matter with me!" he groaned. "I've felt that something was wrong ever since the Fulham match. My head's on fire. My body's like ice. My limbs ache so that I can scarcely breathe. I've fought against it, but it's got the better of me to-day. I feel so sick, I had doubts as to whether I should come out or not. But I didn't like to send a letter. I thought some of you might misunderstand. I came down in a cab. Galway, lad, I don't think I shall be able to practise this afternoon!"

Frank Butler stepped up to Ainsworth and seized his hand. It was like a block of ice, and Frank could feel the veins swelling.

"No," he cried solemnly; and his heart sank. "Nor play on Saturday either, I'm thinking. Mr. Kelly?"

"Ay!" cried a voice from outside; and the next moment the manager bustled in.

He stared at the group of silent players who had gathered about poor Ainsworth.

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

"Will you go to your office, sir, and ring through for Dr. Morgan, and ask him if he'll be good enough to step over to the ground if he has the time? Ainsworth is ill."

The manager gave the poor fellow one searching glance, then turned upon his heel and hurried out of the dressing-room. A moment later they heard the telephone-bell ringing. Then the door was opened again, as Frank stood, with one arm round poor Ainsworth, supporting him, and this time it was Freeman who came in.

Freeman was almost bent double like an old man, and his face was ghastly to see, although two hectic spots burned on his cheeks. He crashing down upon the floor, but it couldn't get warm. I don't think I could have got warm if I'd sat in it. I feel as weak as a rat."

The players were silent. The utmost consternation reigned.

Then the door opened once more. Was it the doctor? No. It was the new lad, Tom Maw. He hurried forward, looking dejected and sad, his boyish brow wrinkled in perplexed thought.

"Sir, Galway," he said solemnly. "I—I couldn't get here before, because I've been looking after Gillingham. I want you to tell Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Kelly. I haven't been lazy. I couldn't come before, Mr. Simmons. Gillingham is ill. If it was so bad that he had to go to bed, and they put poultices on him, and the doctor's been. He says he doesn't think he'll be able to leave the house for a week."

"Not leave the house for a week!" cried Galway, in a hushed voice. "Do you hear that, boys?"

Ay, they heard. There were sad faces in the dressing-room that afternoon.

Then the door opened once more, and a well-dressed man hastily entered. He was a tall, stalwart man with a florid complexion, a good-looking man, with a dark moustache and a professional air about him, which was accentuated by the pair of gold pince-nez he wore.

He crossed straight to Ainsworth's side, felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and asked half a dozen questions, which Ainsworth answered as he supported his head with his hands.

Then the doctor spoke.

"You have your cab outside still," he said. "You must go home and get to bed at once. Have a hot water-bottle, and take the medicine I'll send on to you immediately. One of your chaps"—and he looked round at the footballers—"had better go home with him. He seems almost too ill to help himself."

Then he turned to Freeman.

"What, my lad," he cried, "you, too? This is too bad—too bad. Just when the team was going on so nicely, too."

He didn't waste much time on Freeman.

"You oughtn't to be out," he cried. "Here, put this thermometer in your mouth!"

The lad did so, and when the doctor extricated it, it showed that the lad's temperature was registered at 104.

The sick players were supported and led to the door, and behind them pressed their dejected and dismayed comrades.

Frank Butler caught Dr. Morgan by the arm.

"What is it, sir?" he asked.

"Influenza, if not worse," answered the doctor. "And they have got it in an aggravated form. I'll be able to tell if it is anything more serious by this evening."

Frank staggered back. Neither Ainsworth, nor Freeman, nor Gillingham would be able to play against Newcastle on Saturday. What ever should they do?

The doctor read Frank's thoughts, and he laid a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder.

"It's rough, Frank!" he cried. "Deuced rough on the club. These lads won't be able to play. I will take me all my time to get them fit by the next Cup-tie."

"The next Cup-tie!" groaned Jack Galway. "There won't be any next Cup-tie on. We shall be beaten to the world by Newcastle on Saturday."

Frank gave Jack a glance. Poor Jack Galway! His brave, manly heart had borne up stoutly through all the trials, tribulations, and vicissitudes through which the Wexstall Rovers had passed, but this last blow had beaten him quite, and it was almost heart-breaking to see the gallant Rovers' centre-half, whose only thought was for the welfare of the club he served, fall down upon a locker and burst into a flood of tears.

The Wexstall Rovers' luck seemed altogether too cruel.

Ball-Practice.

WHEN poor Ainsworth and Freeman had gone, a group of dejected players turned out on the playing-field; but it almost seemed a farce to put them through their facings. Of what earthly use was it for them to kick aimlessly at a ball? No amount of practice would make them good enough to beat Newcastle now. Their last hope had gone.

Simmons, the trainer, with his hands thrust into the pockets of his baggy trousers, strolled sorrowfully over the pitch.

"It's that mascot!" he cried. "It's that cussed monkey's the cause of it. He bring us luck indeed! Did you ever know a monkey bring any good to anybody? Nasty, stinking creatures! I'd have had my way I'd wring the little beast's neck, and spifficate the Italian who sold him to Mr. Sanderson, that I would!"

At that moment the weird piping of an old-fashioned barrel-organ echoed from the street outside the ground.

It was Caruso's late master playing his infernal instrument as he passed along the street, and the evil noise sounded like a skirl of triumph.

Frank, in no ways superstitious as a rule, wondered whether there could be anything in what Simmons said.

Then he heard footsteps near on the yielding turf, and he saw Thomas Maw, the boy he had rescued from the Thames, walking towards him with a wistful look upon his face.

"Look here, my lad," said Frank, beckoning to him, "don't go too near to Gillingham if his illness is infectious. If you do, we shall have you laid up, too."

"Well," said Simmons, the trainer, somewhat brutally, though he might be excused, he was so upset, "he wouldn't be no loss. We could do without him. It's the players that matter, and we've three of the first team down."

Thomas Maw looked at Frank wistfully.

"It was just about that I wanted to speak to you, sir," he said. "I've played football. I'm strong and well now. If you've no one else to play, I'll turn out against Newcastle on Saturday, Mr. Butler."

"You—you'll do what?" cried Simmons; and then, holding his side, he burst into a roar of laughter. "That's the funniest thing I've ever heard!" he cried. "That just about takes the biscuit!"

It did seem absurd. This bit of a lad play against Newcastle United! Why, it was too utterly ridiculous for words!

Frank shook his head and smiled.

"Thanks very much, Maw, for offering," he said. "I know you're willing, and that your heart is with us. But you have no idea what Newcastle United are like."

The lad looked hurt. His cheeks grew crimson. His lips parted as he looked eagerly at Jack Galway and William Sanderson, who came striding towards them, talking earnestly together.

"Haven't I, sir?" he cried. "I've seen 'em play. I saw 'em beaten in the final by Aston Villa. I've seen 'em play Woolwich Arsenal. And I've seen a good deal of League football, too. I know the class of play that is required. I don't suppose I could play up to the International standard, sir; only I know you are short of players. Some of your men have gone away; there are three of 'em down with illness now, and some of the reserves are disloyal, they say. It might be better to play me than to play a disloyal player, after all."

"What's this?" cried Sanderson sharply, pricking up his ears. "Do you hear that, Galway? Here's Maw wants to play in the Cup-tie against Newcastle!"

Jack Galway looked at Maw with an incredulous smile. Then he noticed how eager and excited the lad seemed to be about it. He remembered that Maw had said he had played the game as a schoolboy.

He jerked his head towards the dressing-room.

"Go and get some things on, my boy," he said. "Put on a pair of boots. Simmons'll find a pair that will fit you. I dare say, and then come out here again. If you do nothing more, I don't think it will hurt you to have a turn at ball-practice, and if you are any good at all we might find you a place in the reserves."

Tom Maw started off delighted. Simmons followed him, looking disgusted and dissatisfied.

In five minutes Maw came running eagerly on to the field again. He looked well in his football-gear. He was stockily built, had broad shoulders, and muscular arms. His lower limbs were inclined to be a little bandy, and seemed very strong. At that moment, and as he ran, the ball was flashed towards him, and with a one, two, three, Maw strode towards it, and, dribbling on with a speed and deftness which made Frank stare in surprise, he sent a swift, low, curling shot well out of the reach of Brewer, who was defending one of the goals. It struck the post and glanced in. Simmons stared from the touchline. The three friends exchanged glances of pleased surprise.

"Here, youngster," cried Jack Galway, running towards him, "dribble the ball on to me."

Brewer hurled the ball out from the goal to Tom Maw, and the boy obeyed the call. He ran swiftly, showing that he was well able to control the ball; and then Jack Galway, in his usual masterly style, tackled for possession, and there came a rare struggle for the mastery between them; and when Galway at length managed to secure the ball, and kick it away, he hopped round on one foot, kicking the other in the air.

"Why," he cried, as he made a grimace, "the boy tackles like a veteran. Let's try you a bit more highly, my lad."

The players formed themselves into two sides, attack and defence, and some smart ball play was seen. Maw had not quite the pace of the others; but they soon discovered that he had astonishing control, that he was full of tricks and cleverness, and that he could shoot with wonderful power, and this despite the fact that he had not played the game seriously for a season or two, and, on his own showing, had only been able to kick a half-inflated ball about with a gang of lads as rough and as down on their luck as he was himself.

"Maw," said Sanderson, with decision, when the practice was done, "you will go with us to Newcastle. I don't suppose we shall play you—it would be too risky—but you will come with us, just the same."

"Do you mean it, sir?" asked Jack Galway doubtfully.

"Yes, Galway," was the stern and masterful reply, "I do! And, anyway, supposing we did play him? We could only lose, after all. And that seems a foregone conclusion already, doesn't it? Remember, I have sunk a good deal of money in this club, and I mean to have some say in its management. I think you'll agree with me that this boy seems to be as good as many of the lads we play in the reserves, and he is a great deal more fit than most of them."

"That I grant you, sir," answered Galway. "But he hasn't had their experience."

"True. But he is loyal. He'd die for us. Such a lad is worth while experimenting with. You can see he knows the game. He is going with us to Newcastle, I am determined on that."

"And are you taking the monkey, too?" asked Simmons, with a sneer on his face, almost frenzied in rebellion by the misfortunes of the Wexstall Rovers.

"Yes," returned Sanderson, with decision, "I am taking Caruso, too!"

The Great Cup-tie.

THE misfortunes of some football clubs, like the misfortunes of some people, appeal to us in an irresistible kind of way. We may turn our backs upon some unfortunates, having no use for the weaklings that fall by the way; but we hold out the helping hand, or lend our support to others who have captured our fancy, we cannot quite say how. And so it came about that instead of the Wexstall Rovers, dogged by misfortune and a cruel fate, having empty terraces to play to at St. James's Park on the occasion of their great Cup-tie with Newcastle United on the following Saturday, there was a full ground—a full ground of people who would not have been surprised to see the home team win by even ten goals to nil.

The Wexstall Rovers team seemed quite strange to the regular followers of the football game. Here are the names as printed on the programme:

Wexstall Rovers.—Brewer, goal; Philips and Hughes, backs; Brown, Galway, and Price, half-backs; Frank Butler, Taylor, Sanderson, Jenkins or Maw, and Simpson, forwards.

The Rovers had tried to find the erring Baxter, who had never returned to Wexstall after that police raid in Manchester, but they had not been able to find him, as he had not returned home. They would have played him in Freeman's place and forgiven him if they could have discovered his whereabouts; but he was evidently afraid, and they could glean no tidings of him anywhere.

Newcastle United were represented by:

Lawrence, goal; Whitson and McCracken, backs; Gardner, Veitch, and McWilliam, half-backs; Rutherford, Higgins, Shepherd, Wilson, and Anderson, forwards.

There could be no possible comparison in the teams. Newcastle were giants; the others seemed to be pigmies.

The forty thousand people who had paid at the turnstiles were going to see the butterfly thrown upon the wheel.

The scene on the ground was remarkable. In one corner, packed behind the goal, was a lonely little batch of men from Wexstall, excursionists—about fifty of them—and they carried a red-and-white banner, which hung dejectedly from its pole. It had emblazoned upon it, in rude letters, "Wexstall Rovers for Ever," and a grotesque little animal—meant to be a monkey—had been embroidered on the corner of the flag, beneath the big red star.

Some of the men wore top-hats of red and white, and the rest wore favours. They had brought a bell, a bugle, and a clarinet with them, and with these they created an incessant din.

All round the field on every side, with that single exception, look where one would, one could see nothing but the Newcastle favours of black and white.

In the grand-stand sat Manager Kelly, with Jim Lockett by his side. Both were pale and anxious. It had been decided, owing to Sanderson's persuasion, and he had shown himself unusually stubborn in this, that Tom Maw should be played instead of Jenkins, and both felt very dubious about the wisdom of this step.

But there was no time to question it now, for, a moment later, to the welcoming cheer of forty thousand throats, the Wexstall Rovers, a spick and span team, ran on to the beautiful green stretch of turf. There was a moment's intervening silence, and then the roar was repeated, this time with added zest, as the eleven Newcastle men, in black-and-white striped shirts and trim, blue knickers, trooped on to the field, looking fit to fight for a kingdom.

A little ball-kicking was indulged in, and then the referee and the two linesmen appeared, and Sanderson was out of all, carrying in his arms the Rovers' mascot—the little monkey Caruso—who was festively arrayed in a neat little silken suit of red and white.

The crowd roared as they looked at the little monkey running over the grass at the end of a chain which Sanderson held.

Simmons, the trainer stood on the touch-line ready to receive the monkey from Sanderson's arms immediately the toss was made.

The referee whistled the captain to the centre line.

Jack Galway took the coin, and, after shaking hands with the Newcastle captain, tossed it into the air. They both peered at it as it lay on the ground.

"Heads!" had been the Newcastle call. It was a tail. Jack Galway had won, and he pointed to the end of the field from which a stiffish wind blew, and the little band of heroes from Wexstall behind the goal piped their cheer, and the clarinet blew a lusty note.

Then Caruso the monkey darted forward, picked up the silver coin, and gravely held it out to the referee. Amidst a scream of delight from the crowd, the official took it; and Sanderson, catching Caruso up in his arms, carried him back to the touchline, and consigned him into the arms of the trainer, who, shaking his head dubiously, conveyed him to the dressing-room, and chained him up safely there.

The club won't have no luck while this here monkey's alive!" he muttered.

Then a shout told him that the game had started, and, rushing back towards the field, he was just in time to see a forward rush of red-and-white shirts—white shirts with the Wexstall Rovers' star upon them—moving forward in a splendid line towards the Newcastle goal.

On they surged. McCracken tackled Frank Butler fiercely, but Frank passed to Taylor, who lobbed the ball over McCracken's head, and, never giving the big Irish back a chance of tackling, Frank sped on like the wind, and, with a lightning shot, struck the crossbar, whilst Lawrence looked helplessly on.

The crowd gave a yell of dismay. Whatever was happening?

A fine forward pass from Jack Galway had sent the ball along to Sanderson, and now the home goal was in danger! It was not half in danger either, for a small, boyish figure was seen to hustle goalwards.

Tom Maw—the despised and unloved Tom Maw—darted along between Veitch and Whitson, neither of whom could get near him. And the ball, unchecked, came down the field at the forward's feet. Maw was past the defence! He could not be off-side! The ball had come back to him from the goal.

Lawrence, agile as a cat, danced on his goal-line, his arms held ready.

Then the shot came, as Tom Maw was bundled over neck and crop by Gardner, but too late to save the goal. Like a flash the ball passed by Lawrence's outstretched hand as he fell, and nearly split the rigging of the net.

For a second there was a silence of stupefaction, and then Jim Lockett rose, shouting, to his feet in the stand.

"By thunder," he shrieked, mad in his wild enthusiasm, swept out of himself by this unlooked-for and miraculous happening, "the boy has scored!"

(Another thrilling, long instalment will appear next week.)

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