Complete Football Yarn by Sidney Drew.

The Boys' Realm 1d

·OF SPORT & ADVENTURE·

The promised aeroplane had come. It circled the ground three times, and then darted away. And Neil Grafton was lying in the goalmouth, with a bullet through his heart, stone dead!

NEIL GRAFTON'S LAST MATCH

A Stirring Story of League Football By Sidney Drew.

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NEIL GRAFTON'S LAST MATCH

A Thrilling Football Story.

By SIDNEY DREW.

THE 1st CHAPTER.
Rodney Bruce Brings Home a Visitor.

THE street was dingy, dark, and miserable, one of the mean streets of a great manufacturing town. It was raining also, and a keen wind made the dim gas-lamps that hung above the doors of the numerous cheap lodging-houses flicker dreadfully. A man, dressed in a faded suit of black, the collar of the coat turned up, and an old billycock hat pulled low over his eyes, shambled along the pavement with the listless step of one who has abandoned the battle of life, and admitted defeat.

He paused at the corner to peer into a shop, where newspapers and tobacco were sold. A boy came out with a poster and a bucket of paste. Then he went in again. The man's dull eyes had suddenly blazed with a fury of rage and hate. They were fixed on the damp poster the lad had just affixed to a board. The poster was advertising the forthcoming edition of the "Astonbury Football Record." Below the title of the paper appeared a photograph of Neil Grafton, the Rangers' famous amateur goalkeeper and captain. Below that was printed in large red type:

"RANGERS OR STAR?

WHO WILL WIN THE GREAT MATCH?

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS."

It was an excellent portrait of Neil Grafton, who had made himself the idol of the vast crowd that staunchly followed the fortunes of the Astonbury Rangers. It showed a handsome, deep-chested young man of five-and-thirty, with a fair, upturned moustache. If the face had a fault, it was that the eyes were too close together, but it was a handsome, manly face, and a strange contrast to the cadaverous, passion-distorted face of the man who was glaring at it murderously. He stooped and spat at the photograph. Then, with a snarl, he drew his nails across the wet paper and tore it away, from forehead to chin, in four long slips.

"The dog—the dog!" he snarled, and spat at the mutilated picture again. "If I could only take you by the throat! Rich and happy, are you? Fools yelling their windpipes sore in praise of you—eh? And I did time for you—six long years of agony! I forged John Grafton's name, did I? You dog—you dog! You drew the mesh tight enough, you hound! A lad of eighteen or nineteen couldn't have committed such a forgery, they said! He hadn't the brains; he hadn't the skill. But the wretched clerk could. He was hard up, and in the moneylender's clutches. That was enough. Pah, you handsome fiend, you!"

He heard a movement in the shop, and shrunk hastily away. The glimmer of a police-man's cape startled him, but he remembered that he had nothing to fear. He had paid for the crime of another, and the law had to set him free. What a mockery! He had only a few halfpence left; nothing but that and something he had hidden securely where he could find it on the time came. He had tried to begin life over again in London, but London had more than her share of such as he. And so he had slunk back to Astonbury, like a fool and a madman.

"There's one thing about it, Jack, that you can't deny," said a voice. "I know you're a red hot supporter of the Stars, but you can't deny that Neil Grafton plays the game like a gentleman!"

He had reached the main street, and was crossing the road. The old man stopped dead and looked round. The bell of an electric tram clanged a warning, and people shouted.

"Plays the game like a gentleman!" he said, with a bitter laugh. "Neil Grafton—a——"

The next instant he was seized, shaken and bewildered, and dragged from beneath the hoofs of a plunging drayhorse. A muscular young fellow had leaned out of a motor-car and picked him up bodily. He heard the crowd cheer, and found himself sitting in a hooded car.

"Drive on, Billy!" said a deep voice. "We don't want any explanations. Lost your head, didn't you, old chap?" asked his rescuer kindly. "It's a bit of an awkward crossing. Hope I didn't hurt you?"

The old man's answer came in a few hoarse gasps. The clutch on his collar had almost strangled him. Then the car turned into a quiet street and stopped before a house.

"Thanks for the lift, Billy!" said the younger man. "I suppose you can't wait. Our friend here doesn't seem very well, so I'll take him in with me. Take care of yourself!"

"Ay, I'll do that; and you take care of yourself, my lad!" said the driver of the car. "That's the point to watch. If Rod Bruce was to crock up, I believe our folks would murder me."

Rodney Bruce, the stalwart captain of the Astonbury Star football team, twice head of the League, and three times winners of the Association Football Cup, laughed as he helped the old man out of the car.

The man went without protest. There was a light and a bright fire in the pleasant little room, and a lad of sixteen looked up from his book with a cry of pleasure.

"All right, Sid," said Rodney Bruce; "I've brought a friend who has had a bit of a shock. Run down and get some whisky like a hero. Put on a coat, for it's still raining."

Sid Bruce rose readily enough, and seized a crutch, for he was lame. Rodney drew up an easy-chair for his guest, who held out his numbed hands to the blaze. They soon heard the stumping of the crutch.

"Now, old chap," said Rodney, "drink this. It was a close shave, and enough to upset anybody. Get a biscuit, Sid, or cut a few sandwiches. Ah, you're looking better already, Mr.——"

"Casper," said the stranger huskily. "You're very kind. Yes, Casper will do for me. I've never seen you before, sir, but I've heard you spoken about. You're the great footballer, aren't you?"

"I'm certainly a footballer," said Bruce, with his ringing laugh, "but without the 'great.' Don't put that in, please."

"But he is great, Mr. Casper—the greatest centre-forward in England!" cried Rodney's brother. "Everybody says so. Wait till you see him play. Even Neil Grafton says it!"

"Oh, does he?" asked the old man, in a queer, harsh voice. "Then it must be true. Perhaps you know Mr. Grafton—eh?"

"Well, I see him nearly every day," said Sidney. "I'm in his office, you know; one of his junior clerks. It was jolly good of him to give me a job, and shows what fine chaps footballers are. We can't make out who told him I was out of collar, but he actually wrote to me himself. Wasn't I glad? And Rod is the only player who ever beat him twice in one match. It shows footballers don't bear malice."

Casper gulped down the whisky. There was more colour in his face, and his eyes were brighter. He did not hold out his hand.

"You've saved my life, Rodney Bruce," he said. "Perhaps it wasn't worth saving, but we'll let that go. I wish you the best you can wish yourself. If I was to tell you I might be able to do you a good turn, you'd only think me a maniac, so it's no good saying it. No, sir; you needn't come with me. I sha'n't steal anything. Good-night! Old Bob Casper won't forget—he never forgets!"

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
A Mysterious Message.

TO the football-lovers of Astonbury, the two League matches between the rival teams were almost as important as the Cup-ties. In the League table the clubs stood first and third, goal average only keeping the Stars out of second place. A victory would bring them into the coveted position, unless, of course, Raydon Orient, the second club, managed to crack a very hard nut. Even then, if the Stars ran up a fair total of goals, they might reach the top, but goals were scarce things to obtain when Neil Grafton was there to protect his charge, scarcer than ripe cherries in mid-winter.

Both clubs happened to have mid-week matches away, but Rodney Bruce, Neil Grafton, and several other cracks on both sides stood down. Bruce was perfectly trained, but at the request of Billy Jackson, he turned out for a brisk walk. Billy groomed them, rubbed them, exercised them, and watched them as if they were not men, but a team of valuable racehorses, like the little, plump, good-natured tyrant he was. His whole heart was in the team, and he had sworn, if they allowed the Rangers to beat them, to give up training footballers, and take up a more gratifying profession as a trainer of performing fleas.

There had been a heavy snowfall, followed by a sudden thaw and soft rain. A lot of flood-water was out, but the Rangers' ground—it was the Rangers' home match—stood high, and was well drained.

Walking briskly, they left the town behind. Billy wore a necklace of skipping-ropes, and on the cinder-path that led across the fields to Gleeson he set his charges skipping.

"We shall have to go back the same way, Billy," said Rodney Bruce; "the meadows are all flooded. Just look at that place! I shall never be able to own a shoe like that out of football."

He pointed to the clustering chimneys of Fare Hall. It was here that Neil Grafton, the famous amateur, resided, for Grafton was the proprietor of one of the most prosperous businesses in Astonbury.

"Ye'll ha' tae save yer bawbees a bit, Rodd," said Aw'm thinkin'," said Sandy McKie, the right full-back. "But never say dee, lad! Wull, may Aw dee maself if it isna' the enemy!"

Half a dozen of the Rangers had taken the same path for the same purpose. Neil Grafton was with them, but a moment the friendly rivals were shaking hands and chatting.

"Bring your boys along, Jackson," said Grafton. "It will be pleasanter for you across the park. Or perhaps they'd like a cup of tea. I'm sure you're jolly welcome!"

"We'll chance the park, with much thanks; but not the tea, sir," said Billy. "We have to be careful; for such funny things happen. You might hocus that tea, and poison a few of us."

They all laughed.

Bruce had not seen Grafton since he had given Sidney the situation. In fact, he had hardly met the famous goalkeeper twice except in the football-field.

"It was awfully good of you to help my young brother," he said. "I did write to thank you; but I want to thank you again. Sid is a fryer, poor boy, and I hope you find him useful?"

"Oh, I dare say he suits, Bruce! I haven't had any complaints. If he's smart and willing I shall keep an eye on him. Great Scott, I never saw the lake so full! What's the matter with the sluice?"

"It must either be closed or clogged up," said Bruce. "The park will soon be a lagoon. It's pouring in from the brook in torrents. If you've got any tools handy we'd better clear it."

The water in the ornamental lake was washing higher and higher. Evidently the outlet was clogged; and the park would soon be under water unless something was done speedily.

"The fools!" cried Neil Grafton. "They've left the sluice down."

The yellow water was already brimming over the concrete parapet into the pool below.

Bruce shouted a warning as Grafton went splashing across.

Grafton seized the iron handle, and strained with all his might; but the sluice-gate, it seemed, was jammed, and defied his strength.

As Bruce hurried to his aid the water splashed above his boots. There was only standing room for two, and Sandy McKie turned back.

"Hang it!" said Grafton. "It might be screwed down. Try lifting, and see if that will free it. It's moving; Now press down with a jerk. A jerk may do it. I——"

He fell sprawling, gripping the parapet with arms and legs. The rotten, rusty handle snapped like a stick.

Bruce went over headlong into the pool below, and Grafton, staggering to his knees, and then to his feet, went splashing into safety, his face as white as death.

The others had raced down the slippery bank. Two of them were holding back Billy, who was frantic. Sandy McKie had flung off his coat.

Then a head rose above the turgid water, followed by an arm; and a dozen strokes brought Rodney Bruce within Sandy McKie's long reach.

Both the drenched men were seized and raced across the grass. In half an hour they were drinking tea, and chatting in the warm dining-room of Fare Hall, Rodney Bruce wearing one of the amateur's suits of clothes. But Grafton still looked white.

"No more of those tricks, Rod!" said Billy Jackson, as Bruce was turning homewards. "It's ended well, I hope; but I'd sooner have seen Fare Hall washed off the map than see you go over that dam as I did. Man, he was quick—as quick as if he expected the thing to break! He was flat down and out of the way in a wink. Now's it you didn't tumble into him, and bundle him over first? He's lightning!"

"Being a smart goalkeeper," laughed Rod, "he guessed which way I was going to shoot perhaps. You don't think he wanted to drown me—eh? It wasn't very pleasant; but there's no harm done. I'll be more careful, Billy."

At seven o'clock Sid Bruce came home, brimming over with news.

"You'll have to beat 'em, Rod, if it's only for my sake," he said. "I'm the only Starite in the whole firm, and I get some chipping about it. You can't blame 'em for sticking up for the Rangers when the boss of the firm captains the team. I'll wager there'll be some glum faces there on Monday morning when I go sailing up with the good old Star colours in my coat. Here, I bought you a paper with the latest information. There's a johnny coming in an aeroplane to see you make rings round them on Saturday."

Rod Bruce was glad to find no mention of the affair at Fare Hall in the paper. Sid was a highly-strung, sensitive lad, and he had always been delicate. He was so passionately devoted to his big, strong brother, the news would have upset him for days. In large and startling type was the announcement that if the weather proved favourable Mr. Malcolm Hughes, who was staying with Colonel Paley, president of the Astonbury Rangers Football Club, would attempt an aeroplane flight from Paley Manor to the ground towards the close of the match.

"Jove, that's a bit of a startler, sonny!" said Rod. "Let's hope he won't fall on me, or drop a propeller on our heads! That'll be something worth seeing. I couldn't get you a ticket for the stand, there's such a scramble for them; but Billy Jackson says you can potter about with him. So you'll get as good a view as the linesmen and police, which means you'll be right in front."

"You're a brick, Rod! It's something worth while having a brother like you. And I'm rippingly in now I'm not needing you such a lot of money? I know you didn't grudge it, Rod; but I couldn't help worrying about it. But it's over now, thank goodness! Perhaps you'd better not be very hard on Mr. Grafton, Rod," he added, with a laugh. "If you score three or four I shall be satisfied."

Three or four! Rod laughed at the idea.

Shooting at Neil Grafton, even when those hustling backs, Granshaw and Sukin, gave a man the chance, was something like shooting at a brick wall.

Presently the doctor came in—a sure sign that Billy Jackson was still uneasy about Rod's wetting. He felt Bruce's pulse, and then went off again with a grumble; for Rod Bruce was as sound as a bell.

"Sorry to leave you, Sid," said Rodney; "but I promised to play a game of billiards with Sandy McKie. Perhaps you'd like to come along? You're working a bit too hard, aren't you?"

The table had been cleared, and Sid had brought out his German Grammar.

He shook his head, and smiled.

"I'd prefer to grind a little, Roddie," he said. "I haven't any muscles, you know; so I must do my bit with my silly little brains. Don't be late, for I can't go to sleep till I hear you come in. Friday to-day, isn't it? No, only Thursday! I never knew a

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Saturday to be such a long way off! Hallo! There's the postman. I'll go, Roddie."

There was a sharp rat-tat. The letter was for Rod Bruce.

He tore it open, and then tossed it over to Sid.

"What a good chap he is!" said the lad. "He wants you to go over to dinner to-morrow night. Don't score more than two goals, Roddie, or I may get the sack."

The letter was from Neil Grafton, an ordinary, polite little note, inviting Rod Bruce to Fare Hall to dinner, and adding that a motor-car would be at his service to drive him home.

"Of course, you'll go, Rod? Shall I write for you? I know you're not fond of writing. And don't kill him on Saturday, Rod. He's a real good chap."

Rod Bruce gave his brother a hearty pat on the shoulder.

Sid was a sacred charge. He had promised to look after Sid.

And Rod felt the house happy enough, for Sid was happy and employed.

"Yes," he thought, as he waited for the traffic to pass, "Grafton is a good sort. It's the luck. I ought to have been an amateur, and always hoped to be one. Oh, that's all dead, and I'm a four-pound-a-weeker, like the rest! I guess it's all I'm worth; for I never was any good at business. If the poor old dad had told me—— But how could he? I was no good! And yet we might have easily raised the money and staved off the crash, I know that now; but I didn't then. Who was it who forced the bankruptcy? Funny thing I should forget—funny thing. Yes."

There was a paper in his hand!

Rod's thoughts had been far away in the brief past that now seemed so long ago. The paper was not a handbill, but a greasy slip.

He opened it and read a message—not written, but carefully printed in pencil, and so evenly that every letter looked as perfectly formed as type:

"Whatever you know you will be man enough to forgive. If you do not know, you may guess. And if you only guess, you will understand, I think, and forgive. There is still Saturday."

"There's owd Roddie Bruce!" cried a voice. "Play oop, Roddie, my owd champion! Gie 'em socks! Eh, Rod, thou'rt the lad! Play oop, Stars, and we'll sell all t'other team muck cheap!"

Bruce got away quickly, for he did not care to be addressed in the streets by some of his admirers.

Under the light of another gas-lamp, where it was quiet, he read the message again.

He had been unable to see what had given it to him. He could make nothing of it; and after a moment he thrust it into his pocket and forgot all about it.

"I wonder whether Grafton wants to talk to me about Sid?" he thought. "I must be that. Yes, he is a good chap, as Sid says. I'd better ask Billy, though, before I accept. But I've accepted already! Sid will have posted the letter. And Billy is a dear old excitable idiot!"

It was too late to mention the matter to the trainer now. Individually, the rival members of the teams were on the best of terms. Neil Grafton had always played the game, and so had Rodney Bruce. In the war of the leather they would still play it again, man against man, and, with ordinary luck, the better team would win.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
Blackmail and Threats.

"SO you think you have a chance of beating us, Bruce? You think we are not going to have it all our own way to-morrow?" asked Neil Grafton. "Try a cigar; they are really good!"

"I'll have a pipe, thanks!" said Rodney Bruce. "And you want to know what I think? That's what they call 'tellings,' isn't it? Well, I fancy it will about end with honours even. You have a splendid defence, but we are fairly strong, too, in that respect. I daren't say anything about our forward line as I happen to be in it. And it would not be fair to mention yours."

The plain but excellent dinner was over, and they were sitting in the billiard-room of Fare Hall. The only other guest was Mr. Warling, the manager of Grafton's huge and prosperous business.

"Professional football seems to agree with you, Bruce."

Bruce flushed as he filled his pipe.

"Perhaps it does," he said, after a pause. "I would prefer to be an amateur, but I have no choice. I do my best to earn my money; and I am quite convinced that professional football is perfectly honourable. I give my muscle, energy, time, and skill—if I have any skill—and I am loyal to my club. I would play for the sheer love of it if I could."

"But you are an educated man, Bruce," said the rich amateur. "Why not do both? Surely you can make more money by using your brains than by using your feet? If you had the chance——"

"Wait a minute!" broke in Rodney. "I've tried that. We went a smash at home, a terrible smash. I had a crippled lad left on my hands. It was not my fault or my father's fault, but the fault of trusting a lawyer too much. I had been taught to expect a lot of money, to think I was rich. Well, I wasn't rich. It was work or starve. A kind friend offered me a position that would hardly have bought bread and a roof for the two of us. That was impossible. I hadn't the heart to sign on for the old team. Remember, I captained that as an amateur, just as you captain the Rangers here. So I signed for Astonbury Star. It gave me time to look round, and brought in a living for Sid and myself. And I can't thank you enough for helping Sid."

"We can only advise you for it, Mr. Bruce," said Grafton's manager. "A sad thing about your brother—being crippled, I mean. I have not had much to do with him, but he seems—er—very smart."

There was something in like a sneer in the manager's voice that Rodney looked at him sharply. He had not a pleasant voice or a pleasant face. Both were harsh.

"Will you please ring for another box of cigars, Warling?" said Neil Grafton. "And make sure that the man shuts the door when he leaves. I've brought to be a real tussle between us, Bruce. Our men will be out to win in dead earnest, and so will yours, I expect. Somehow I fancy we shall just beat you. Would you care for a small bet—a case of champagne, or something like that?"

"I can't afford to risk even that, and I don't indulge in betting, Mr. Grafton. We shall beat you if we can, you may be sure. By the way, is there any real truth in this aeroplane business?"

"Oh, yes; the colonel told me we should have a visit, given fine weather and no accidents!" answered the famous goalkeeper. "Is the door shut, Warling?"

The butler had just gone out. Mr. Warling nodded; and, standing with his back to the fire, Neil Grafton puffed at his cigar.

"Mr. Bruce," he said, "my manager has given me to understand that something most unpleasant and serious for us has been going on in my office. My business is an extensive one, and I employ a large staff. As a matter of fact, small sums of money have been disappearing in a mysterious way. These small sums have now accrued to a considerable sum."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Rodney wonderingly. "Such a matter is certainly unpleasant. But why should you——"

"Mention my private affairs to you—eh? I admit it seems strange. Unfortunately, Mr. Bruce, someone in whom you are interested is under suspicion!"

Rod Bruce understood now. He leapt to his feet with an angry, threatening flash in his eyes, and his hands clenched till his knuckles showed white.

"Be careful what you are going to say, Neil Grafton!" he said, struggling to master his rage. "Don't call my brother a thief, or even hint it! Sid is as honest as the day. The lad would starve in the gutter before he would steal! Come, I suppose I must listen to you! I'll try to be calm. What have you to tell me?"

"Let me tell you that I laughed at suspecting your brother, Bruce. Warling will uphold me in that. It is a fact, isn't it, Warling?"

"Quite true," croaked the other man; "and I was of the same opinion, though it was only natural that one should distrust your brother as he was the last clerk we had engaged. Unfortunately, sir, after careful investigations, we were bound to suspect him, though most reluctantly. We have no absolute proof, but——"

"And without absolute proof you dare accuse him before me?" cried Rodney furiously. "Then I say it is a wicked and cruel lie!"

Neil Grafton raised his hand peacefully.

"Surely you do not wish the servants to hear this, Mr. Bruce," he said. "We are both very sorry and very grieved. Would it not be better to hear Warling out?"

Bruce sat down and nodded. There was a lump in his throat that almost choked him. Sid a thief! It was the maddest and wickedest suspicion that ever entered a man's brain.

"When I stated that we had no absolute proof," croaked on the manager, "I was telling the truth; but our suspicions practically amount to proof. Mr. Grafton does not wish to go to extremities. The boy is young and without experience, and the temptation was there. Perhaps in being too kind we are not doing our duty. Mr. Grafton is my employer, and as such I am prepared to carry out his wishes. But for the sake of our large staff, I was compelled to lay a trap for the culprit. To be accurate, in the presence of my employer, we marked certain coins."

Red stared mechanically at the sovereign Neil Grafton handed to him, together with a microscope.

"The milling at the bottom has been filled in with gold leaf in a certain way which can be plainly seen by the microscope, Mr. Bruce. One marked sovereign, and several silver coins marked in another way, are missing. It has been necessary to watch your brother closely. The result will be known in the morning, or in a shorter time, and we hope and trust that he will come out of the ordeal with flying colours. If he does not, it would be only like Mr. Grafton to hush up this miserable affair for your sake, and to give the misguided lad another chance."

Rod found himself in the hall. He snatched his coat and hat from the manservant. Grafton, who had hurried out after him, tried to detain him at least until he could send for the motor-car.

"Thank you!" said Rod, in a voice that was not like his own. "It will suit me better to walk. I have something to think about. I believe you mean to be kind, Mr. Grafton; but though this is rough on me, it's rougher on my team. A little of this will soon knock all the training out of one or any man! Couldn't you have held it—— No; I suppose you couldn't. Thank you, and good-night!"

Sid a thief!

Rod Bruce swung across the gloomy park and down the road as if walking for a wager. It was the blackest of all lies. He almost wished he had strangled Warling. And yet, as the manager had said, it was only natural to suspect the newest arrival. Any business man would do so. Rod wiped his forehead. He must keep calm. There was to-morrow to be faced. His club would expect him to appear on the field fit and well, and a sleepless night is a poor preparation for the strenuous game of football.

"Sid, poor, little, plucky Sid, a thief!" he repeated, and laughed.

It was too preposterous. Sid was as straight as a die. The lad was incapable of any mean action. His heart felt lighter as he reached home and glanced up at the lad's window. Sid had gone to bed, but he had made up the fire before doing so, and left his brother's slippers to warm snugly in the fender.

"It's murder!" Rod muttered as he paced the room. "The very thought of being suspected would kill the boy. But they daren't breathe you! They must guess—if you only guess, you will understand. I think, and forgive. There is still Saturday. Vengeance and gratitude!" The last two words were pencilled on the back.

He was in no mood to worry over mysteries that did not concern him, so he flung the paper into the fire. Sid was sleeping soundly. Had Rod ever doubted, the sight of his brother's handsome, boyish face would have sent every doubt to the winds. Then, blushing like a guilty thing, he took up Sid's clothes and crept out. He began to search, his hands shaking not with fear, but with shame. He only found a shilling and a few coppers, for it was the end of the week. And then Rod shivered as, by pure chance, he felt something round and hard between the lining and the cloth at the back of the coat. A hurried search revealed a tiny slit, and then, half dazed with horror, Rod Bruce was peering through the magnifying-glass at one of the marked sovereigns.

The clanging of the street-bell awoke him from what seemed a dreadful nightmare. He went heavily down the steps to where a motor-car stood, its only occupant Neil Grafton's manager.

"There will be a whole holiday to-morrow, as your brother knows," croaked Warling. "I am glad you are not in bed, Mr. Bruce. Grafton is keen on winning the match to-morrow—insanely keen. It seems a kind of monomania with him. I regret that I have very bad news. We have information that your football brother has already changed several of the marked coins. If—er—it is difficult to—er—— Mr. Grafton wishes you—er—to understand that if you are beaten to-morrow nothing more will be heard of the affair."

He seemed to feel that Rod was about to spring at his throat, for the car sprang ahead. Rod clutched at the railings dizzily. He understood the bribe; he understood the price, and knew, at last, that Neil Grafton was a rogue and a villain. To hide his brother's shame, he must shame himself, and pawn his honour. He must sell the game to Neil Grafton, scoundrel, or ruin Sid.

THE 4th CHAPTER.
The Shot that was Fired Unheard.

"I THINK you might make it three goals, Roddie, though he is such a good chap," said Sid, as he patted his burly brother on the back. "We expect three, old boy."

Rod had fought his battle. In his heart he knew it was a plot; but even to save Sid a thousand times he would not sacrifice his honour and his pride. The ground was packed. He heard the mighty roar that greeted the Rangers. Old Billy grasped him by the hand, and wished him luck. Then he gave the signal, and another roar shook the air as the Stars, in their blue and white shirts, entered the field. Rod shook hands with the referee; but his hands were in his pockets when Neil Grafton advanced to meet him. Their eyes met, and then, with a laugh, Grafton spun the coin.

"Heads!" said Rod; and, as the coin fell, with the King's head upward, he pointed to the southern goal.

The game opened poorly, and both sides made blunders. Both teams were over-excited and nervous. The only man who did himself justice was Sandy McKie. The crowd alternately cheered and groaned, or advised the players to pull themselves together. It was no use. Twenty minutes were wasted in a display that made keen enthusiasts despair. And then the air seemed to suddenly become charged with electricity as the Stars' left wing crossed the half-way line.

"Bruce, wake oop! What are you paid for?" yelled a thousand voices, for Rod was down on one knee, fastening a bootlace. "Are you daft or asleep, man? Wake oop!"

Then Rod Bruce awoke just in time to reach the ball as it swung across. He was being well watched, for he needed watching. Hughie Lloyd, the International, swept down on him like a blizzard, and ten thousand people held bated with anxiety a thunderous voice. Hughie did not get near. A pair of bewildered full-backs did their best—backs that seldom lost either their heads or their feet. Rod Bruce went between them like a man winged, and they met helplessly to collide. Then all was hushed. The goalkeeper of all the talents stooped, alert and ready. Rod poised himself, and drove at the ball. Swift as a panther Neil Grafton sprang to the left to intercept the shot; but it was a trick, for Rod had never touched the ball, his foot swinging over it. Before the backs were upon him he had contemptuously punted it across the line, close to the right-hand post.

"Goal—goal!" shrieked the delighted Starites; and roars of derisive laughter followed that made Grafton's blood boil.

That cool, contemptuous trick had made him look like a child before nearly forty thousand people. And before his nerves had ceased tingling the Stars' partisans were yelling again. Could there be lightning in this terrible centre-forward's veins? He was across the penalty-line again, with two dazed full-backs—and two of the best—hopelessly beaten, and the crossbar rattled above Grafton's head. Then the ball sang past him like a bullet as Rod Bruce caught it on the rebound, and all around were a tossing sea of hats, handkerchiefs, and umbrellas.

"Let Roddie have it!" they screamed. "Roddie can beat the whole eleven of 'em. Give Roddie the ball. Good lad, Roddie Bruce! Go it, Roddie!"

Exactly a minute before half-time the Rangers were four goals to the bad, and Rod Bruce had scored them all. Old Billy wept tears of joy, and Sid Bruce was nearly demented. The Rangers were a great team, and, during the second half they fought a losing fight like the warriors they were. But once again Rod Bruce, playing as he had never played before, broke through their ranks, and scored with a swift, curling shot that no goalkeeper could have saved. And then players and spectators alike looked skyward. The promised aeroplane had come. With a noisy clatter, the machine swept gracefully above the stands, beautifully handled. Few people there had ever seen one in flight, and, although the machine carried the flag of the beaten Rangers, it was deafeningly cheered by all. It circled the ground three times, and then darted away. And Neil Grafton was lying in the goalmouth with a bullet through his heart, stone dead!

"He could not have shot himself, for the bullet had been fired from behind, and there was no trace of burning or powder, or any weapon."

So said the coroner at the inquest.

An airgun pellet certainly has been used.

Warling, after a verdict of wilful murder against someone unknown had been given, admitted cringingly to Rod that he was certain that the dead man had planned to force him to sell the match by falsely accusing Sid of stealing money. But three months later Rod learned the truth, that he had already half guessed, in a newspaper paragraph. The old man he had dragged from under the van was Neil Grafton's murderer.

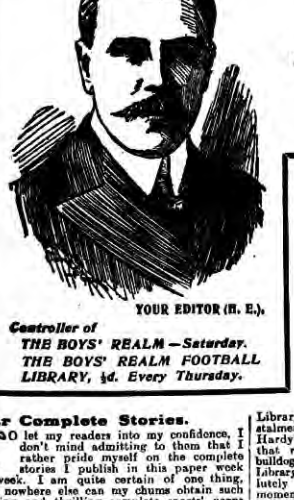
The paragraph read thus:

"The body of an old man, supposed to be that of an ex-convict, Casper Stevens, has been found in the Thames at Blackfriars. This discovery recalls the mysterious murder of the famous footballer, Neil Grafton, for Casper Stevens was sentenced for forging cheques for a large sum when in the employ of Neil Grafton's firm at Astonbury. He strongly protested his innocence."

THE END.

(Don't miss "Jack Noble's Strike," the grand complete football yarn in this week's "BOY'S REALM" FOOTBALL LIBRARY. Now on sale—1d.)

FROM YOUR EDITOR'S CHAIR.



YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

Controller of THE BOYS' REALM—Saturday. THE BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LIBRARY, 1d. Every Thursday.

Your Editor isalways 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.

Our Complete Stories.

TO let my readers into my confidence, I don't mind admitting to them that I rather pride myself on the complete stories I publish in this paper week by week. I am quite certain of one thing, that nowhere else can my chums obtain such stirring and thrilling complete sports' yarns as in THE BOYS' REALM. Our athletic tales have gained a great reputation for excellence amongst the sports'-loving lads and young men throughout our Empire, and I am constantly receiving delighted letters from readers in all parts of the globe, saying how much they enjoy our complete athletic yarns.

Taking the case, I am put on my mettle. It is one thing to gain a reputation; it is quite another to keep it. But that it shall be kept is my absolute determination. And so next week I am giving my readers two of the very best complete sports' tales money can buy. Their titles are:

"SNOPE'S MISTAKE."

A Laughable, Complete Football Tale, by Charles Hamilton.

"FLAPPER'S REVENGE."

A Splendid Story of Junior League Football, by Andrew Gray.

I strongly urge all my chums not to miss these especially fine, complete stories in next Saturday's number. I shall also be grateful if my readers will tell their friends about these grand yarns.

"Jack Noble's Strike."

THE new number of "THE BOYS' REALM" Football Library, which is now on sale, is certainly the best yet. This week's long, complete story is entitled "Jack Noble's Strike," and from beginning to end it is cram full of excitement and fun. Clifford, the lordly captain of the Pelham Juniors, and his toadies, have a bad time in their efforts to score off Jack Noble, and at the finish begin to wish they had left the popular skipper of the third eleven and his chums severely alone. None of my readers should miss the laughable scene where the Cliffordites get a bad ducking in Farmer Mead's pond. It will make their sides ache.

In this week's issue of our "Football Library" there is also an enthralling long instalment of the "Blue Crusaders," A. S. Hardy's great tale of League football. And that reminds me—look out for the special bulldog cover of "THE BOYS' REALM" Football Library next week. It is something absolutely new, and will catch your eye in a moment. Everyone will be talking about it on Thursday next.

Short-winded, and Suffers From Stitch.

J. P., of Canning Town, tells me that whenever he is playing football, he experiences a sharp pain in his sides, and asks me if I can suggest a cure. He also informs me that he is very short-winded.

Stitch is largely due to want of condition. J. P. must not only take regular exercise, but he must, to a certain extent, diet himself. No heavy or indigestible foods should be eaten for some hours before he plays in a match.

Another probable reason for this pain in the side, or stitch, as it is called, is that instead of breathing through his nose, as he should, my chum breathes through his mouth, thus allowing the impurities in the air to find their way to his lungs.

J. P.'s short-windedness may also be due to want of condition. My reader should pay great attention to improving his lung capacity, and this can be done by practising breathing exercises night and morning.

He Cannot Save Money.

FROM Driffield I have received a letter from one of my young chums, signing himself "Money-Spender," in which he tells me that he cannot save money. He says that he is a young spendthrift. It appears that my reader has fourpence a week pocket-money, and that no sooner does he get his fourpence than he goes straightaway and spends it. The money simply burns a hole in his pocket.

Perhaps if I tell my chum the plan I adopted when I was a lad, as a means of saving money, it will help him. I had a substantial money-box with a strong lock to it, and this I shut up and fastened, then threw the key down the nearest drain. When I received my pocket-money each week I used to go to this box and drop in a quarter of what had been given me, and thus prevented myself spending it. The remainder I felt I could do as I liked with.

I think that "Money-Spender" will find this a jolly good plan. I advise him to get a similar box, and to put one penny in it every week immediately he gets his pocket-money. Then, at the end of the year, he will have saved the nice little sum of four-and-fourpence.

Nowadays the Post Office issue special forms on which penny stamps may be placed, and when a shilling has been thus gathered together it may be deposited in the Savings Bank. This is another quite excellent way for a lad to save money.

Tobacco Stains on His Fingers.

ONE of my chums, who signs himself "Goodwicher," wants me to tell him how to get rid of tobacco stains on his fingers. I am very glad to notice that my young friend has decided to give up the bad habit of smoking cigarettes. It is a pity he ever commenced doing so, and I sincerely hope he will stick to his resolve. I look on the cigarette habit amongst lads as one of the greatest curses of our land.

To remove the tobacco stains from his fingers, my chum should invest in a lemon or two and a penny piece of pumice-stone. Then let him get a basin of hot water and a piece of soap, and give his fingers a thoroughly good washing.

Afterwards he should rub them well with the pumice-stone. This will probably remove a great deal of the stains. Then let him cut one of the lemons in halves, and rub the juice on his fingers. He will find that the acid will speedily efface the remaining traces of his cigarette-smoking.

The only thing he then has to do to keep his fingers clean is to let cigarette-smoking severely alone.

A Home-made Set of Boxing-gloves.

A. D., who has been a reader of THE BOYS' REALM for four years, and thinks it the best boys' paper published, asks me if I can tell him how to make a pair of boxing-gloves at a moderate cost.

Below, my chum will find full instructions how to make the articles he mentions at home for just over a shilling a pair—a very small sum when the ordinary price of boxing-gloves is taken into account.

First of all, he should secure about one and three-quarter yards of swansdown cloth; this will probably cost him one shilling and threepence. When he has this he must cut it into eight good-sized, square pieces.

Next, lay two pieces together on a table, or some other flat surface, place the left hand on them, and get a friend to draw a line round the hand, keeping about two and a half inches off the hand all the way round.

Having done this with two pieces, my friend should lay them more on the table, and get his chum to mark the size of his right hand in the same way.

Next, cut the shapes marked, and sew round with a stout needle and thread, leaving a good open space at the wrists to admit stuffing for the gloves.

Now, look round and see if you can find some old thrown-aside article of furniture, stuffed with horsehair. If you can, all well and good; if you cannot, you must purchase some horsehair or sheep's wool, and stuff the gloves through the opening of the wrist as tightly as possible, and when each glove is as full as it will hold, sew up the opening at the wrist.

Then my chum must get half a yard of broad elastic—which he can purchase cheaply from any draper's shop—and put four straps of elastic on each glove, one at almost an inch and a half from the wrist, one in the centre, and one near the top of each glove, and one on the thumb. Turn the sewing inside before stuffing the glove. Thus the first glove will be finished, and my reader can start on the next.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

OUR LEAGUE CORNER.

Being a Weekly Record of THE BOYS' REALM Football and Cricket Leagues.

Tables and Prize-winners for Week ending September 18th.

"THE BOYS' REALM" CRICKET LEAGUE.

Tables up to week ending September 18th.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Oxhill	16	16	0	0	3152	848	32
Chesham Juniors	16	14	0	0	2677	974	28
Dowsbury Road Jrs.	16	10	0	0	1496	632	20
Laisterdyke	16	10	0	0	1400	522	32
Kirkstall	16	15	0	0	1453	481	30
Parkside	16	14	1	0	1649	1168	28
Roseville	13	13	0	0	1435	618	26
St. John's	16	14	1	0	1037	756	28
Bruce Athletic	14	12	1	1	566	379	25
Royd Clarence	10	10	0	0	1190	447	20
Brockley Ivy	12	10	2	0	840	515	18

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Sankey	16	16	0	0	2763	348	32
Bowling St. Albans	16	16	0	0	1576	391	32
Glendale	16	16	0	0	1582	511	32
Orford	16	16	0	0	1086	382	32
Crescent United	16	16	0	0	1061	360	32
Otter Rovers	16	15	1	0	1199	502	30
St. Mary's	16	15	1	0	1770	575	30
Melrose	16	15	1	0	1062	487	30
Dulwich St. A.'s	14	13	0	1	1085	764	27
Humber Juniors	16	13	3	0	753	442	26
Buxton	13	12	1	0	1062	478	24
St. Paul's (Pad.)	12	11	1	0	908	526	22
Clarence O.B.'s	13	11	2	0	929	566	22

The Final Tables will be published next week.

"THE BOYS' REALM" CRICKET BAT CONTEST.

Table of Averages up to Week Ending September 18th.

	No. Times of Not Inns.	Out.	Runs.	Aver.
L. C. Byfield (Birmingham)	19	10	2042	226·88
M. Laycock (Leeds)	11	7	886	110·75
W. Creedy (Dublin)	17	5	1205	100·41
G. F. Jones (Flintshire)	18	5	1207	92·84
T. Kanseteer (Barnet)	15	5	938	93·8
R. Maxwell (Coatbridge)	20	6	953	68·07
A. Clarke (Yorks)	14	2	372	31
R. Thompson (Yorks)	11	2	273	30·33
R. Jordan (Grantham)	10	1	250	27·77
V. Parker (Kettering)	18	5	340	26·15
H. Mountain (Yorks)	18	1	316	18·5

"THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

Tables up to Week ending September 18th.

NORTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Winwick Juniors	3	3	0	0	49	4	6
Oxhill	3	3	0	0	24	2	6
Viola Juniors	3	3	0	0	21	4	6
Culcheth	3	3	0	0	11	2	6
High Street Juniors	3	3	0	0	15	8	6
Orford Albions	3	2	0	1	15	1	5
Warwick Juniors	3	2	0	1	10	7	5
New Shildon Reserves	2	2	0	0	5	1	4
Birstall	2	2	0	0	11	7	4
Marlborough	2	2	0	0	9	3	4
Oldbury Excelsior	2	2	0	0	28	3	4
Prospect	2	2	0	0	4	1	4
St. Jude's	2	2	0	0	5	1	4
Rensham Juniors	2	2	1	1	8	3	3
Avondale	2	1	0	1	8	2	3

SENIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
All Saints	3	3	0	0	22	3	6
Stockton Heath	3	2	0	1	10	1	5
Stalmcliffe	2	2	0	0	8	0	4
Dewsbury Juniors	3	1	1	1	3	4	3
St. Elmo	2	1	1	0	10	9	2
Otter Rovers	3	1	2	0	5	4	2
Batley Parish Church	3	1	2	0	5	11	2
Brentford	2	1	1	0	8	1	2
Bowling Iviota	2	1	1	0	4	0	2

SOUTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Annfield Park	3	3	0	0	23	2	6
Mill Green Juniors	3	3	0	0	13	4	6
Avenue United	3	3	0	0	13	5	6
Gillingham Wanderers	3	2	0	1	7	3	5
Palmerston Guild	2	2	0	0	4	1	4
St. Botolph's	2	2	0	0	14	0	4
Roseland	2	2	1	0	1	17	3
St. Anne's	2	1	0	1	9	6	3
Denmark	2	1	0	1	7	6	3

SENIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Boys' Brigade	3	3	0	0	24	1	6
St. Giles' A	3	3	0	0	16	3	6
Leagrave	3	3	0	0	11	1	6
Tredegar Hotspurs	3	3	0	0	12	2	6
Pear Tree	3	2	1	0	11	6	4
East Side	2	2	0	0	7	3	4
St. Mary's	2	2	0	0	5	2	4
St. Michael's	2	2	0	0	5	2	4
St. Giles' Crescent	2	2	0	0	10	2	4
Eastleigh Locos	2	2	0	0	11	4	4
St. Aldhelm's	2	2	1	0	15	1	3
Wibech	3	1	1	1	8	2	3

NORTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Luke's 2nd XI.	2	2	0	0	20	0	4
Walthamstow	2	2	1	0	8	7	4
St. Martin's	1	1	0	0	11	0	2
Redfern	1	1	0	0	9	0	2
Lordsmead	1	1	0	0	7	1	2
Cheshunt	1	1	0	0	3	0	2

SENIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Shepherd's Bush Juniors	1	1	0	0	2	0	2
Arkindale	1	1	0	0	2	0	2
W. Hendon Rags	1	0	0	1	3	3	1
Leytonstone Juniors	1	0	0	1	0	4	5	0

SOUTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
New Corinthians	1	1	0	0	19	1	2
W. Greenwich Juniors	1	1	0	0	12	0	2
White Horse	1	1	0	0	5	3	2
Woodside	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Glenhurst St. Luke's	1	0	0	1	2	5	0

SENIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Columbia	1	1	0	0	3	0	2
Clarenden	2	1	1	0	6	3	2
Coverdale	1	0	1	0	1	2	0

SCOTS AND IRISH SECTION.

JUNIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Hellenelea	5	5	0	0	20	3	10
Vale of Dee	4	4	0	0	14	1	8
Greenmount	3	3	0	0	12	2	6
Castle United	3	3	0	0	11	4	6
Wednesday United	3	2	0	1	10	5	5
Camelon Vics.	2	2	0	0	7	3	4
Albany	3	2	1	0	3	2	4

SENIOR.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Albion Vics.	2	2	0	0	6	0	4
Glenfield	2	2	0	0	6	3	4
Rosebank	3	2	1	0	10	7	4
Mayflower (Leith)	1	1	0	0	5	2	2

Prize Football Awards for Week Ending September 18th.

MANCHESTER SALFORD DISTRICTS AMATEUR LEAGUE.

COLLYHURST LADS F.C.—Hon. League Secretary, P. D. Perris, 18, Bushton Street, Rochdale Road, Manchester.

SOUTH LONDON CHURCH OF ENGLAND LEAGUE.

CHRIST CHURCH CRYSTAL PALACE F.C.—Hon. League Secretary, S. Hudson, 50, Halstow Road, Westcombe Park, S.E.

MANCHESTER UNION LEAGUE.

HULME HALL F.C.—Hon. Secretary, B. Ducker, 62, Everton Road, C.-on-M., Manchester.

BESWICK AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

PETER SPENCE LODGE F.C.—Hon. Secretary, W. Hines, 19, Field Street, Queen's Road, Miles Platting, Manchester.

"THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LEAGUE. NORTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR.

NEW SHILDON RANGERS F.C.—Hon. Secretary, A. Smith, 19, Craddock Terrace, New Shildon.

SENIOR.

HORBURY BRIDGE U.F.C.—Hon. Secretary, F. Wilson West End Villas, Horbury, Yorks.

SOUTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR.

ROSELAND VILLA F.C.—Hon. Secretary, W. Morris, 14, Thomas Street, St. Thomas, Swansea.

SENIOR.

TREDEGAR HOTSPURS F.C.—Hon. Secretary, T. Lewis, 3, Red Lion Square, Tredegar, Mon.

NORTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR.

LORDSMEAD F.C.—Hon. Secretary, O. Barton, 80, Lordsmead Road, Tottenham, N.

SENIOR.

SHEPHERD'S BUSH JUNIORS F.C.—Hon. Secretary, C. W. Horton, 11, Augustus Road, Shepherd's Bush, W.

SOUTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR.

NEW CORINTHIANS F.C.—Hon. Secretary, J. W. Barham, 292, Barking Road, Plaistow, E.

SENIOR.

CLARENDON F.C.—Hon. Secretary, A. C. Love, 2, Ellerthorpe Street, Poplar, E.

SCOTS AND IRISH SECTION.

JUNIOR.

WEDNESDAY UNITED F.C.—Hon. Secretary, D. Bett, Victoria Terrace, Dunfermline.

SENIOR.

LEITH MAYFLOWER F.C.—Hon. Secretary, L. Bolt, 10, Wilkie Place, Leith.

THE ARMY CHAMPIONS.

By CAPTAIN MALCOLM ARNOLD.

SPLENDID LONG INSTALMENT OF A NEW ARMY SPORTS TALE.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS ARE:

RON and VAL BRANDON, two popular young corporals attached to the Ansbire Regiment. The Ansbires have lately been transferred from Blacktown, in the Midlands, to Aldershot. Ron and Val are both certified gymnasium instructors.

SIR PAUL MARRIOTT-DEVERES, a young lad of eighteen, who is heir to large estates. Paul quarrels with his uncle, Lord Wildermise, and leaving home, enlists in the Ansbires under the name of Paul Marriott.

MAJOR GILBERT MARRIOTT, Paul's rascally cousin. Knowing that Paul stands between himself and a large fortune, he determines to get rid of the lad. He joins Paul's regiment, and leads the lad to look upon him as a true friend.

Our story opens at North Camp, Aldershot, where Val and Ron are utilising every spare moment in training the Ansbires' football team, which has been entered for the Army Cup Competition. The Brandons, backed up by the team, determine to make a bold bid for this much-coveted trophy.

While drilling a squad of recruits Ron comes across Paul Marriott, and is immediately struck with the lad's personality. It is obvious to him that Paul is of high birth, and he enters into conversation with the lad, with the result that they become firm friends.

Soon after, Gilbert Marriott makes an unsuccessful attempt on Paul's life, though nothing can be proved against the cousin.

In the first round of the Army Cup Competition the Ansbires are drawn against the Army Service Corps, and after a tremendous tussle they win by three goals to nil. Paul Marriott is injured during the game, sustaining a broken leg, and things look very black for the Ansbires, especially as the lad is still unable to play when the next draw is made.

Gilbert Marriott falls in with a desperate ruffian named the Chairman—a cool, plausible cracksman who has a spite against Ron and Val Brandon. Major Marriott enlists the Chairman's aid in his attempts on his Cousin Paul's life.

Val, who is training for a coming Marathon race, goes out for a practice spin one night, accompanied by Ron. Little do they dream of the stirring adventure in store for them.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

Man v. Horse—A Long Chase.

"YOUR trap is ready, sir," said the groom at the Royal, touching his hat.

The Chairman rose to his feet and nodded.

"All right," he said; "I'll be with you in a minute."

When the man had vanished, the master-cracksman crossed the bed-chamber, and lifted a long dustcoat from the peg behind the door. Then, one by one, he placed a jemmy, a bunch of keys, a small lantern, and a revolver in the various pockets of the cloak. Finally, he slipped his arms through the sleeves, and glanced round, with a quiet smile.

"It's a long time since I had the pleasure of following my trade," he thought, an evil smile flickering across his cruel face. "I hope I sha'n't make any mistakes."

He pulled a soft cap out of his pocket and put it on, drawing it well down over his ears. Then he left the room, and made his way to the front of the hotel.

The lamps of the trap were shining brightly in their brackets, and the big horse pawed impatiently at the ground.

"'E seems anxious to make a start, sir," the groom said, as he passed the reins up to the Chairman; "you'll 'ave to 'old 'im in for a bit."

The man in the trap smiled.

"He won't be so spry by the time we reach Bagshot!" he cried.

Then, with a swing of the whip, he started off on his long drive.

"Now for the major and Odiham House," thought the Chairman.

He had mentioned Bagshot, which lay in the opposite direction, simply as a blind. He was bound for the country seat of Lord Wildermise, having received a message from Gilbert Marriott to the effect that the time was ripe for the robbery which both men had discussed some weeks before.

Major Marriott had promised to meet the Chairman at a small inn about a mile away from the scene of their operations. There they were to discuss their final arrangements.

The Chairman kept the horse trotting along the Bagshot road until he came to a spot where a narrow lane led over the moors to the left, and, after describing a wide circle, struck the Basingstoke road. There was a lamp-post at the foot of the lane, and he reined in the great beast as he made the turn.

Two silent figures, jogging along beneath the hedgerows, heard the crunching of the trap wheels, and halted.

"Look out," Val said. "There's a vehicle of some sort coming up behind us."

Ron turned and looked back. The light from the lamp fell on the sharp features peering out from beneath the cap; then the trap swept into the darkness towards them. But that glance had been enough to warn Brandon. He leaned forward, and, gripping Val by the shoulder, pulled him into the shadow of the high hedge.

"I say, what the dickens——" began the younger brother.

Ron put his hand over Val's mouth.

"Shut up!" he whispered. "That man in the trap—didn't you recognise him?"

Val turned his head towards the vehicle, but the darkness only allowed him to see the black outlines of the man as he swept towards them.

The two corporals crouched down and waited until the trap passed. The horse, with the surer, quicker instincts of the brute, shied a little as he passed them; but the Chairman had his eyes fixed on the narrow lane ahead, and did not notice the two lads.

When he was about fifty yards ahead, Ron rose to his feet.

"We must follow that trap," he whispered quietly. "There is some mischief afoot, and I mean to see what it is."

He started to trot along the quiet lane, and Val dropped into place by his side.

"I'm hanged if I know what game you're on!" he said. "You might give me a hint or two."

"I caught sight of the driver of that trap," said Ron, "and if he isn't the Chairman, then my eyes must be failing me."

"The Chairman! You mean that fellow who was burned!"

"Who was supposed to be burned," his brother amended. "I'm sorry you didn't have a chance to recognise him. It would have settled the soap business at once."

Val gave vent to a low murmur of anger.

"We'll hang on until I do get a squint at the beast; and, if it is the same one, I'll have him out of that in a jiffy! I'd give anything to have a good drive in between his evil eyes!"

"The Chairman is a dangerous sort of brute," Ron remarked, "and we will have to go very carefully. He is bound to be armed."

"Thank goodness, we are in running kit," the younger brother said. "If he stops anywhere within the next fifteen miles, I'll bet I sha'n't be far behind."

They had no difficulty in following the trap. The sound of its wheels on the roadway came plainly to their ears. They always kept at least fifty yards behind it, and their soft running boots made no noise on the wet grass by the roadside upon which they ran.

For the first three miles of their long chase neither of the lads spoke much. The beast between the shafts was a beauty, and fairly ate up the distances between the milestones.

Often the two runners found themselves dropping further and further to the rear as the unconscious driver whipped up the horse; but Val—who, of course, was the more experienced of the two—just increased the pace enough to keep the sound of the trap in their ears.

"We've a long way to go, old chap," he would murmur, "and it will come back to us at the next hill."

His Marathon running had taught him that it was the steady pace which tells, and he was content to bide his time.

At every hill, however, the corporals found that they could make up such distance as they had lost on the level. The horse, with the trap to hamper him, could not take the rises as easily as the two unhampered runners.

At the end of the fifth mile Ron had his bad time—that period which sweeps down on all runners, and requires a mighty heart and high courage to resist. Val heard the labouring breath and the heavy thud of the feet, and checked his pace slightly.

There was no need for him to offer any suggestions; Ron's training experiences would help him over the spell; but he slackened down, and drew closer to his brother's side.

"Stick it, old chap!" he murmured.

Ron set his teeth hard, and laboured on. Every step he took seemed to rack him from head to foot. His arms felt as heavy as lead, and his head dropped forward on his breast; yet during the whole of the struggle his ears still held the rumble of the wheels ahead.

It was the only thing he could think of. Whatever happened, that sound must remain. All his efforts and energies were concentrated in that one thing.

A long, steep hill gave him the rest he needed. The Chairman allowed his panting beast to drop into a walk, and the two corporals, jogging along behind, drew nearer and nearer, until they were within a hundred yards or so of the slow-moving vehicle.

Then Val, with a glance at his brother, dropped into a walk.

"Take—a—spell, now," he gasped.

The rest of that hill was taken at a walk, and when they reached the top, and felt the cool rush of the night winds against their cheeks, they felt fit to take up their work again.

The spin downhill effectively checked away the lingering traces of fatigue, and, with their reserve strength pulsing through them, they butted through the darkness like deer.

On the level again the lights on the trap were seen bobbing and swaying in front, like two phantom lanterns, to guide them.

"How do you feel now, old chap?" Val asked.

Ron laughed softly.

"Fit to run all night, Val," he replied. "We'll track that beggar down now all right."

Mile after mile—mile after mile they sped along the quiet road. Now and again they would swing past some quiet house or cottage, and occasionally a dog would come sniffing and rumbling hoarse challenges to them; but they kept steadily on their way.

At last a sharp rise in the ground brought them to a bridge, and Val caught the glint of water beneath it.

"We are crossing the canal now," he muttered. "Odiham cannot be very far away."

As they had cycled out to Odiham House a few weeks previous, they knew the road.

Ron fixed his eyes on the lights ahead.

"If he turns up to the left, we will know where he is going——" He stopped, and an exclamation of annoyance escaped his lips.

"We are a pair of thundering asses!" he said. "Don't you recognise that trap, Val?"

Val followed his meaning at once.

"By Jove," he said, "of course I do! It is the one that Paul's scoundrelly cousin was in when the traction-engine tipped him over."

"And it proves that the Chairman must know Major Marriott," said Ron, "and must be working for him. You needn't look much further for the solution of the soap business, Val."

"The murderous ruffians!" his brother said, clenching his fists.

A sharper sound from the front drew their attention in time to see the trap wheel round the road to the left—the road which led to Odiham House.

"We are nearing the end of our run, old chap," said Ron, "and we'll have to go easy now."

They turned after the trap, and jogged on for about a half mile or so. Then the sounds ceased suddenly, and, on turning a sharp bend, they saw the lights of the little inn shining on the road. The trap was standing by the hedgerow, and was unoccupied.

"This is their rendezvous," Ron murmured. "We must try to locate them. Keep well in to the hedge."

The brothers were wet and streaming with sweat, but the work in front of them was too important for them to think of their own wants. They reached the trap, and found that the horse was tethered to a gatepost. The Chairman had thrown a rug over the panting animal, and the warm smell which came to Ron's nostrils told him that it, also, had had enough of the long chase.

"You are a goer, old chap!" the corporal thought, as he slid over the gate. "But we stuck to you, all the same."

He found himself in the dingy yard at the rear of the inn. Turning the corner, a finger of light starting out from the wall attracted his attention. He gripped Val by the sleeve.

"Go carefully, now, Val!" he murmured.

A few paces brought him to a narrow window. The blind inside was slanted to one side, and allowed the interior of the room to be seen. Peering over the ledge, Ron took in the whole scene.

At the opposite ends of a small, bare table Major Marriott and the Chairman were seated. Their heads were bent forward over a sheet of white paper. Paul's scoundrelly cousin was talking rapidly in a low tone, and now and then his finger would point out some spot on the paper in front of him.

Moving his head out of the shaft of light, Ron laid his head against the bottom of the window. The murmuring voices came to his ears.

"And the dogs?" said the Chairman.

"I have seen to that," he heard the harsh voice of Marriott reply. "You need not fear them."

A low, brutal chuckle sounded.

"It will be the softest crib over you cracked," the major went on; "and the Wildermise diamonds are worth having!"

A chair creaked, and the listener heard the shuffling of feet as the Chairman stood up.

"And I'll have 'em before another hour has passed!" he cried.

One bound drew Ron clear from the window. Val was by his side in an instant.

"You heard——" began the older brother.

"Everything," Val put in quickly. "What are you going to do?"

"Make for Odiham House as quickly as we can," said his brother; "and when these scoundrels come——"

He never finished his remark. There was a low growl close to where they were standing, and from his kennel a huge yard dog came bounding towards them.

The noise it made startled the two conspirators. Marriott leaped to the window and threw it up.

The light rested on the white running clothes of the two gymnasts. With a furious oath, the big scoundrel whipped out a revolver and fired.

With one swift swing Val sent the square mass hurtling through the air. The cushion caught the Chairman fairly between the eyes, and the astonished man was lifted clean off his feet, and went head over heels into the hedge.

Thwarted Rogues.

As the infuriated man raised his revolver Ron caught the glint of the steel circle. Short as the pause was between the aim and the report, it was enough for the quick-witted gymnast. Throwing himself against his brother, he sent Val sprawling on the cold stones of the yard.

"Here, dash it——" began the astonished Val. The crack of the revolver, and the zipp! of the bullet as it sung overhead, cut his remarks short.

"Keep in the shadow and make for the gate," Ron whispered; "these fellows will stop at nothing."

The growling yard-dog had betrayed their presence, and was plunging and tearing madly at his chain to reach the two runners. As Val started off behind his brother he turned, and with a well-planted kick sent the furious animal yelping into his kennel.

The change in the dog's note warned Gilbert Marriott of what was happening.

"They are making for the gate!" he cried, turning to the Chairman. "Quick, get round to the front and stop them!"

The hawk-faced cracksman dashed for the door, drawing a heavy jemmy from his pocket as he did so. Marriott leaped through the opened window, and tore off across the yard.

Hearing the heavy feet pelting behind him, Ron dropped back.

"Go straight ahead for the trap," he said to Val; "I'll tackle this fellow!"

"But——"

"Don't argue just now! Get ahead!"

Val vaulted the gate and ran towards the trap. Ron wheeled round. He was only just in time. The huge fellow was almost on top of him.

"You confounded sneak and spy!" rasped Gilbert, leaping forward. "I'll break your neck for you, curse you!"

The figure in front of him was a good four inches shorter than the major, and he thought that he would have no difficulty in carrying out his threat.

Within a yard from Ron he reached out his huge fist and made a clutch at the lad's throat.

A quick side-step carried the gymnast out of reach. Then his hard fist closed, and, drawing it back to his shoulder, he poised his body for a moment, then drove at the heavy face in front of him with all his strength.

In the scrimmage it was impossible to make sure of his aim, but the blow landed full on the thick neck of the enraged man with a thud which told of its terrible power.

Marriott gave vent to a bellow of anguish, and staggered forward a few paces, coming to rest against the gate.

Holding the top bars with his left hand, he tried to reach the pocket where he had replaced his revolver. The dim light from the lamp in the roadway allowed Ron to catch the action. With a panther-like spring he was at the gate.

"Drop that!" he cried.

The major's hand still kept on its way; then, realising that stronger measures only would save him, Brandon closed with the fellow.

A sharp, hard jab with his right fist into the thick sides made the huge body bend sharply; then——

Crack!

His left fist hooked fairly under the heavy jowl.

The major's head fell forward, and he collapsed against the wooden barrier without a word. Ron leaped back as the unconscious man sprawled at his feet; then, without troubling to glance at his prostrate enemy, he leaped the gate and turned into the road.

"All right, Val!" he cried, sprinting towards the trap.

That cry saved Val's life.

The younger Brandon had reached the trap, and had commenced to turn the horse out from the hedge.

The Chairman, catching sight of the thin figure as he emerged from the inn, had crept stealthily forward, with the murderous jemmy clasped tightly in his hand. Within a few feet of the stooping lad he had paused and swung the iron bar above his head. Another instant and it would have descended with crushing force, but at that moment Ron's voice reached his brother.

"Come along, then, sharp!" he called, straightening up.

The heavy jemmy whizzed harmlessly past his shoulder, and the Chairman, carried away by the force of his blow, went ploughing into the hedge.

With a cry of wrath Val sprang at the man. He made a quick grab at the Chairman's arm, but the master-cracksman was no mean antagonist to tackle.

One swift lunge freed him from Val's grip, a vicious kick, which caught the gymnast on the shins, sending him doubled up with pain, followed, and then a loud, crashing among the branches of the hedge told Ron that the other rascal had made good his escape.

"Ow, ow! The brute has lamed me!" the unfortunate Val cried, hopping on one leg, while he carefully nursed the other. "He's all steel and whipcord! Kicks like a beastly mule, hang him!"

"You're lucky he didn't do more than kick," Ron cried; "he's the most dangerous brute of the two." He turned towards the trap. "Jump up sharp!" he continued, swinging into the seat as he spoke.

Val hopped forward and clambered painfully up the wheel, throwing himself on the cushioned seat with a grunt of pain.

Ron lifted the reins and shook them slightly, a shout sounded from behind them, and, turning his head, he caught sight of a number of figures gathered in the lighted doorway.

"Stop them—stop them!" the voice of Marriott bawled.

The horse was already on the move, and a cut from the whip sent it off down the road at a hard gallop.

"You've soon recovered, old chap," Ron thought grimly; "but you'll have to whistle for your cart."

Suddenly a crackling in the hedge in front of them sounded, and, just where a lamp-post cast a yellow gloam across the white road, they saw the thin figure of the Chairman appear.

The cracksman stretched out his arm, and both lads caught sight of the ring of steel wavering in front of them.

"Halt, or I fire!" came the cold, harsh command.

Ron's reply was to stand up and lash at the willing beast between the shafts. The trap surged forward; then Val, stooping down, seized the hard leather cushion from his brother's seat.

"Bob down, Ron!" he yelled.

Within five yards from the threatening figure Ron dropped suddenly on to his knees.

With one swift swing Val sent the square mass hurtling through the air.

"Stop that, you beast!" he yelled mockingly.

The cushion caught the Chairman fairly between the eyes. His revolver went off in the air, and, cursing savagely, the astonished man was lifted clean off his feet, and went head over heels into the hedge from whence he came.

A roar of laughter went up as the swaying vehicle passed him, then Ron straightened up and sat down again.

"Bravo, Val!" he said. "That was ripping! You bowled the hound over like a ninepin!"

Val clutched at the side of the rocking trap and looked about fifty yards behind them a number of dark shadows were pelting along the road. As the pursuers passed the lamp-post Val was able to distinguish Marriott staggering along in front. The Chairman joined the disorderly throng, and then the darkness blotted them out again.

"The tables are turned, my friends," he cried; "but I don't think you'll bang on as we did!"

Gradually the trap drew further and further away from the yelling crowd, and when Ron turned into the main road all sounds of the pursuit had completely died away.

He kept the horse at its full speed for well over twenty minutes, and then stopped to listen.

"They've chucked it all right," Val said; "Marathon-running is not in their line, I suppose."

"I'm sure safe enough now," Ron replied; "Paul's unfamiliarity with us too wise to risk tackling us on the high-road. There would be too many awkward questions asked."

He shook the reins, and the tired animal started off at a quiet trot. Val leaned back behind the seat, and, feeling around, came across a couple of thick fur rugs.

"We might as well be comfortable," he remarked, throwing one over his brother's shoulders; "and a thin jersey is not quite the costume for driving in."

The reaction which always follows a time of excitement set in then, and for over an hour the brothers sat quite still, watching the lights from the lamps flickering on the roadway ahead.

"I suppose you understand what all their plotting and planning was about?" Ron said at last.

"I wasn't sure until the major mentioned the hounds," Val replied; "it's not so long ago since we were introduced to the brutes. They mean to break into Oldham House."

"They meant to," Ron corrected. "I doubt very much if they will tackle it now. The fact of our being at the window will scare them off it, as they won't know how much or how little we heard."

"I must admit that I heard nothing," the younger brother said; "I hadn't a chance. That beastly yard-dog spoiled everything."

"Anyhow," said Ron, "we've found out enough to satisfy Paul that his cousin really has his enemy. The Chairman was the man who handed the poisoned soap to the hospital orderly, and he is Gilbert's confederate. Our ten-miles' trot has been worth while."

"And this fellow whom you call the 'Chairman,'" Val continued; "is he the man you thought was killed?"

"Yes. His face is not one easily forgotten. He's by far the most dangerous customer of the two."

"He looks an evil, vicious-tempered beggar," Val murmured. "I caught a glimpse of his eyes just as he fell backwards into the hedge, and there was real red murder in them."

Ron thought for a moment before he replied.

"Our position is decidedly awkward," he said. "We both promised to keep Paul's identity a secret, and until he frees us from our promises our hands are tied. So far we have managed to best the wretches every time, but we can't hope to keep on top always."

"I think that they will lie low for a bit now," Val said, "and Paul should be out of hospital very shortly; then we can lay the whole business before him, and let him decide."

"That's the only thing we can do," his brother remarked; "but it seems a thundering weak reply to their murderous attack to-night."

The lights of North Camp began to glimmer and glow ahead of them, and Ron quickened the pace a trifle.

Within a few hundred yards from the cavalry barracks he stopped the trap and jumped out.

"We'll have to finish our journey on foot, Val," he said. "The mounted police patrol here during the night, and they would be sure to stop us and ask awkward questions."

"But what about the trap and gee-gee?"

Ron turned the horse's head around, and, running by its side for a few paces, cut it across the flanks twice. It set off at a gallop along the road, disappearing around a bend.

"Some wandering tramp will have the pleasure of finding a light, serviceable vehicle," the gymnast murmured, with a grin.

Val laughed.

"That's a new way of sending back a 'Returned empty,'" he cried.

They trotted along the road together, and, as Ron had feared, came up with a patrol of blue-uniformed M.M.P.'s. The corporal in charge turned to them as they swung past.

"More bloomin' Marathoners!" he murmured to the man on his right. "The garrison's gone barmy, I reckon. I'd like to see myself wasting a good night's rest in doubling over these bally roads!"

His companion grinned.

"It keeps them out of mischief," was his philosophical response.

Harris Gets His Own Back.

THE Farnborough Athletic was a strong team, and commanded a fine following among the civilian element of that little town. Their ground was situated in a lane close to the main road, and at two o'clock on Saturday afternoon there was quite a respectable crowd passing in through the gate, and paying their threepences to the official posted there.

There was no turnstile nor check, and if now and again some energetic youngster succeeded in dodging the vigilant eye of the ticket-collector, and passed in without payment, that did not matter very much. The Athletic had no expensive tastes, and so long as their gate receipts paid for the rent of the field, etc., they were quite content.

In most football-grounds a soldier in uniform admitted free of charge, but at Farnborough soldier and civilian had to stump up their modest threepence.

One or two of the Anshires grumbled at this, but their grumbling did not prevent them from paying.

The match was due to start at three p.m., so they had plenty of time to argue on the rights and wrongs of the case.

Presently a stir at the gate heralded the arrival of their team, and the cheer which greeted Ron and his merry men was a hearty one. Val noted the large number of Guardsmen present, and touched Ron's sleeve.

"That fight of yours has done us a bit of good, old chap," he said. "There's quite a crowd of the big fellows come to watch."

One of the crowd came forward and held out his hand to Ron. The gymnast looked up into the features of his old antagonist Taffy.

"Eyes all right, feeling—all right?" the genial Cardiffian cried.

"Al," Ron replied, shaking the strong palm; "and very glad to see you, Taff. You've brought a decent crowd with you."

The stumpy middle-weight grinned.

"I went round the canteen and collared as many as I coot," he said, "and I've brought something to make a noise with, whatefor."

He held up a stout rattle and turned it a few times. The rasping of the stout lathes against the wooden cog-wheel could be heard on the other side of the field.

"Wait till you hear it after you've scored a goal!" Taffy added.

The dressing-room was a shed with a corrugated roof. A primitive affair, but quite sufficient for their wants.

Harris was the first man dressed, and as he finished tying his boots on Ron turned to him.

"You might stump up to the gate and keep a look-out for Parsons," he said. "He forgot the embrocation, and went back to fetch it. Tell him to buck up."

Harris went off on his errand, and as he reached the gate a quaint idea came to him.

Parsons had been the leader in the Black Hussars' concert fiasco, which had ended so disastrously for Harris and his "Merry Minstrels." The pontical batman's soul still burned with hopes of revenge, and he thought that here was a chance.

He stepped up to the man at the gate.

"How's business?" he asked.

"Pretty fair," said the collector. "Some of your chaps grumbled a bit at paying, but they did pay, and that's the main thing, ain't it?"

Harris grinned. The man was playing up to him beautifully.

"The Anshires ain't a bad lot," said the footballer, "but some ov 'em are so mean as misers." He stopped and gazed along the lane.

"And the meanest ov the whole lot is a big fat fellow wot ain't turned up yet," he added.

The gatekeeper collected several threepences, then Harris continued.

"E's a swanker of the worst sort," he said, fairly gloating over his detailed description of Parsons' personal failings. "D'you know wot 'e usually does?"

"No."

"Well, as you're a stranger, and seem a decent sort, I'll tell you. 'E waits until the rush has passed, then 'e swaggers up to the gate, and kids 'e is one of the team!"

The collector snorted indignantly.

"Oh—ho! Is that 'is little game?"

"It is," said Harris; "and, what's more, 'e'll argue with you about it. If you ask 'im why 'e didn't come in along with the rest, 'e'll spin some fairy-tale about stoppin' back for bandages or lemons or embrocation! I tell you 'e's 'ot stuff, 'e is!"

The look of stern resolve which came into the man's face made Harris's vengeful heart leap with joy.

"He'll have to be very hot before he can pass me without paying his threepence!" the man snapped.

Harris could have yelled with delight at this, but he succeeded in concealing his elation with an effort.

"Of course, you won't give me away," he said, moving off. "I only did it as a friendly act towards a decent chap."

The gatekeeper nodded gratefully.

"I'm much obliged to you, mate," he said. With unholy joy rioting within him, the wily Harris slid off and hid himself in the crowd opposite the gate. He had hardly secreted himself before his eyes caught sight of the stout goalkeeper hurrying down the lane.

"Now, you bally old porcupine," he muttered, "you'll 'ave to stump up three beautiful browns to see yourself keep goal! Ha, ha!"

Parsons reached the gate. The collector looked up, and, noting the portly form, suspicion leaped into his eye. From the description given to him by the friendly Anshire, this ought to be the villain who tried to swank his way into football-grounds.

The goalkeeper swept through the gate, and nodded in his friendly style to the man.

"Got a decent crowd, I see," he said, stepping forward. "I'll have to hurry, I suppose. I'm late for the team."

The gatekeeper's laugh was a cold, sarcastic sound which made Parsons halt and stare at him.

"The admission into this field is threepence," the collector said slowly, holding out his hand. "We have to pay here!"

Parsons gasped. In the crowd Harris saw the movement, and a thrill of absolute joy ran through him.

"This is where I get my own back, you old crow!" he muttered.

"Pay 'ere!" repeated the goalkeeper. "But I'm playing to-day!"

"I know that," said the man calmly; "playing your old usual dodge, my man! But it's not going to work this time. See!"

Parsons leaned forward and inspected the fellow closely, trying to discover traces of drink or lunacy in the countenance before him. His search was quite fruitless. The man was in his sober senses, and evidently meant what he said.

The goalkeeper shrugged his shoulders.

"I was sent back to get a bottle of 'em——" he began.

The collector went off into a sneer of laughter. The fat rogue was doing and saying exactly as his informant said he would.

"Look here, my lad," he snapped. "I know what you're going to say. You are one of the team. You were sent back for some lemons, or bandages, or a bottle of embrocation." He leaned forward, and held out his hand. "Threepence, please!"

"But—but——"

"I tell you I know all about you! Pay up!"

"Do you think that I'm goin' to pay and then play?"

The collector began to look angry.

"I don't care what you do once you're inside!" he snapped. "But it will cost you threepence to get in!"

Knowing that time was short, the disgusted goalie put down his handbag, and began to rummage through his pockets.

"I've played in some 'ot grounds," he commenced bitterly; "but this one takes the bun——"

"And your threepence," put in the waiting collector grimly.

With a sigh almost as big as his stout frame, the goalkeeper fished out a sixpence, and handed it over.

The collector's hand closed on the coin swiftly, and he held out the change.

"It's something new for you to be bowled over, I suppose?" he said.

Parsons picked up his bag and eyed his questioner.

"I suppose this is a football-ground all right?" he remarked.

He pocketed the threepence, and then finished his comment.

"'Cos if one was to judge by you, old hoss, it might be a bloomin' lunatic asylum!"

Then the collector, with the threepence in his pocket, was proof against his victim's sarcasm.

"That's all right, mate," he replied drily. "You go in and have a good time. It'll do you good to feel that you've been honest for once in your life."

(Another rattling long instalment next week.)

REDFERN MINOR.

A *Rattling Long Instalment of Charles Hamilton's Fascinating School Tale.*

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

SIDNEY REDFERN, a bright, fun-loving lad, who is a new pupil at St. Dorothy's School.

ARTHUR REDFERN, Sidney's elder brother, who is a prefect in the Sixth Form. Arthur Redfern is inclined to be easily led, and is under the by-no-means good influence of

RANSOME, another Sixth-Former, a slacker, and a good-for-nothing.

SKELTON and BROWN, two Fourth-Formers, and leaders of the Classical side of St. Dorothy's.

TAFFY MORGAN, VERNON, and RAKE, the leaders of the Modern side at St. Dorothy's, deadly rivals of Skelton and Brown.

At St. Dorothy's there is a deadly and everlasting feud existing between the Classical and Modern sides.

Sidney Redfern allies himself to the Classicals, to the rage and humiliation of the Moderns.

Ransome and Arthur Redfern have got themselves into difficulties with a bookmaker named Cunliffe, who threatens to report them to the head-master unless they pay him the money they owe him.

One night Ransome persuades Arthur Redfern to go down to see Cunliffe to settle up with the man. Arthur does so. But it so happens that it is Redfern major's turn to see the Fourth Form into bed, and as he does not turn up to fulfil this duty, the head-master discovers his absence, and tells Lunsford that unless Arthur Redfern has returned by eleven o'clock, to report he him. Redfern minor overhears this, and guessing where his brother is, he breaks bounds and hurries over to Wyndale, where he finds Arthur and warns him of his danger.

Arthur gets back to the school in time on a bike, but Sidney on returning is caught by his form-master, Mr. Ford. The latter cross-examines the boy, but Sidney, preferring to shield his brother, refuses to answer. The next day Mr. Ford takes Redfern before the head-master, and Sidney sees expulsion looming in view.

Arthur Redfern hears of his brother's terrible position, and is a prey to agonising doubts. He knows not how to act. Shall he disgrace himself and thus clear his young brother, or sacrifice Sidney for his own safety? He cannot make up his mind what to do.

Meanwhile, Sidney is locked in solitary confinement. That night Arthur Redfern steals the key to the confinement-room and creeps in to see his young brother. Soon after he has gained admittance, footsteps are heard approaching down the corridor, and a second later the head-master, and Phipps, the house-porter, enter. The light of the lamp Phipps holds shines full on the white face of Arthur Redfern, and the Head gazes at him in speechless amazement.

(How read this week's instalment.)

No Confession.

"REDFERN MAJOR!"

Dr. Cranston uttered the name in wonder as his glance fixed upon Arthur Redfern. A frown gathered upon his brow.

Arthur's face was pale.

It was the cruellest of ill-luck that the Head should have discovered him there, and for the moment it seemed to the prefect that all was up, that the Head must guess the truth, that the revelation he had striven to avert must come at last.

His eyes sank before Dr. Cranston's searching glance, and he could not find his voice to speak. Redfern minor looked on in silence. He had not lost his wits, but there was nothing he could say. If only his brother had not come!

"I am surprised to see you here, Redfern major."

Arthur did not speak.

"I gave orders that no one was to be admitted to the punishment-room. Someone has taken the key from Phipps's bunch. I presume it was you, as I find you here."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur's voice was very low.

"I can understand your concern for your brother," said the Head, his face relaxing a little. "But you are a prefect, Redfern, and you should know your duty better."

"I—I——"

Arthur's voice failed away; he did not finish the sentence. What could he say? If the Head had known the terror that was in his heart at that moment, he would have pitied him. He did pity him; few could have seen the misery in the prefect's face without feeling for him.

"You need not explain," said the Head quietly. "I know why you are here. You had better go, Redfern major. I will speak to you again presently."

Arthur's white face went whiter.

"You—you know, sir!" he stammered.

"I can guess, at all events."

"Oh!"

"You came, I suppose, to speak to your minor," said the Head, somewhat surprised by the despair in the face of the prefect. "I can understand how this disgrace of your younger brother affects you. If you had asked me for permission to try the effect of your persuasion upon this obstinate boy, I should not have refused it. But you should not have come here in this surreptitious manner."

Arthur smiled in a ghastly way.

The Head was on a wrong scent, after all. He had not guessed. After all, how was he to guess? The prefect's terror had been founded upon his anxious mind and his shaken nerves. It was not possible for the Head to guess the facts without a clue.

Arthur breathed more freely. The Head was watching him, and he was surprised by the changing expressions of the Sixth-Former's face. He had no clue to what was passing in Arthur's mind.

"I am sorry, sir," said Arthur, more collectively. "I know I ought not to have come without your permission, but—but——"

"I understand. You may go now. I will see you again. In fact, I wished to speak to you about this matter, even if I had not found you here. Wait for me in my study."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur gave his brother a single glance as he left the room—a glance of dumb appeal. But it was not needed. This was not the first ordeal Redfern minor had been through, and he was not likely to fail in courage at the eleventh hour.

Arthur Redfern went down the passage, and the Head motioned to Phipps to place the lamp upon the table and retire. There was no gas in the punishment-room. The door closed upon the house-porter, and the Head was alone with the culprit.

The doctor did not speak at once. There was a painful silence in the room—a long pause that made Redfern's heart beat more quickly.

The light from the lamp fell full upon the junior's face, and showed it troubled, but calm, steady, and resolute as ever. It was not the face of a lad who would be likely to commit petty and stealthy faults; the Head could not help thinking so as he looked at him.

"Redfern," said the Head at last—and his voice sounded strangely deep in the stillness of the room—"Redfern, you have had a day to think over your position. Have you come to any change in mind?"

"No, sir."

"You still refuse to explain your visit to the public-house in Wyndale?"

Redfern was silent.

"You still maintain that you went there with an innocent motive, and not for the purpose of associating with the men of low character who assemble there?"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern promptly.

The Head sighed.

"I would gladly believe you, Redfern. But you must see yourself how absurd this story is upon the face of it. If you have an explanation to give, why do you not give it?"

"I—I cannot tell you, sir."

"Is this the respect that is due to your head-master?" said the doctor, with great patience.

"I am sorry, sir," said Redfern earnestly. "I hope you don't think I could be disrespectful to you, sir. I'd cut off my hand first. But—but I can't tell you what you ask, sir! I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

Redfern did not speak.

"There is something in this more than appears on the surface," said the Head. "If you are telling me untruths, Redfern, you have a great deal to answer for; for if you can look like that and lie, I can never trust a boy again. Redfern, I came here to make a last appeal to you to satisfy me if you could. If you have anything to say—anything that would make your story appear less incredible—I ask you to say it. I ask you to speak to me as a friend, instead of as a head-master."

"Oh, sir!"

"Well, Redfern?"

"I have nothing to say, sir."

The doctor's face hardened.

"Very well, I have spoken to you for the last time, Redfern. I shall not see you again till the school is assembled to-morrow morning, when you will be expelled in public!"

Redfern's face went whiter, but it did not falter. He was prepared to go through with the ordeal to the finish.

"Very well, sir. I can only say that if you knew all about it you wouldn't think so badly of me."

"I wish I could believe so, Redfern."

The Head left the room, and Phipps came in.

"I'm to see you to bed, Master Redfern, and take the light away."

"Right you are, Phippy!"

And five minutes later Redfern minor was in bed, the room in darkness, and the door once more locked upon him.

Arthur's Last Card.

DR. CRANSTON entered his study, and gave a slight start as he saw Redfern major standing by the desk.

He had forgotten for the moment that he had directed the Sixth-Former to wait for him in his study.

"Ah, it is you, Redfern!"

"You told me to wait for you here, sir."

Arthur was still pale, but he was quite collected now.

"Very good! I want to speak to you about your brother, Redfern," said Dr. Cranston, seating himself, and turning his glance upon the prefect. "About your visit to the punishment-room I will say no more. I will take the anxiety you feel for your brother's fate as a sufficient excuse."

"Thank you, sir."

"I have spoken to Redfern minor," went on the Head. "I can get nothing from him. He refuses to explain his visit to the public-house in Wyndale. I am very sorry to have to say so, Redfern, but it leaves me no resource but to deal with him severely. But it has occurred to me that you might be able to give me some clue to his strange conduct."

Arthur started.

"I, sir?"

"Yes. As his elder brother, you have naturally kept an eye on him to some extent since he has been at St. Dorothy's." Arthur winced, but the Head did not notice it. "As a prefect, too, you should know something of the habits of the juniors. Have you seen or heard anything of any disreputable associations your minor may have had?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You were absent from the school at a time when it was your duty to see lights out in the Fourth-Form dormitory," said Dr. Cranston. "It occurred to me that it might have been on your minor's account."

Arthur was silent.

"Come, Redfern! If you can tell me anything, you surely know that it is your duty to do so," said the Head kindly. "For your sake, if for no other reason, I should be glad to deal as gently as possible with Redfern minor."

Arthur licked his dry lips. If he could only have had some of Ransome's nerve and cynical coolness his part would have been easier to play.

"I—I don't know what to say, sir. You know, this is a terrible blow to me. I know how my mother will feel it if Sidney is sent home. I—I feel that I haven't looked after him as I ought since he has been at the school."

"I am sure you have done everything in your power, Redfern. You must not take your brother's faults too much to heart."

Again the prefect winced.

"I—I don't, sir. But—but if you'll allow me to suggest——"

"Go on."

"I—I know Sidney is innocent of any wrong-doing, sir——"

"You mean, you believe it?"

"Well, yes, sir. But—but I know him, sir. He's always been straight as a die," said Arthur. "Whoever has been doing wrong, it wasn't Sidney. I—I can't explain everything, of course; but—but I've a pretty good idea how the case stands. It isn't obstinacy that keeps my brother from speaking——"

"What is it, then?"

"He is shielding somebody else, I think, sir."

It was a bold stroke. If the Head had guessed whom Redfern minor was shielding—— But how could he, when the very suggestion came from Arthur?

Dr. Cranston looked very grave.

"You mean that Redfern minor——"

"I think he's sticking up for somebody else, sir. Suppose—suppose another fellow—a fellow

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in his Form, sir—some Fourth-Former—had gone to that place. Sidney is just the sort of chap who'd cut off like a shot to fetch him back, sir, and save him from getting into trouble." The prefect's voice grew steadier as he proceeded, and as he marked the effect of his words upon the Head. "He'd cut off, without stopping to think of the consequences, to help a—a chum, sir. Now, he couldn't speak about it without giving the other fellow away. That's how I work it out, sir."

"I seem forbid that I should expel a boy for acting from a mistaken sense of honour!" said the Head. "But—but are you sure of this, Redfern?"

"As sure as I can be of anything, sir."

"Has Redfern minor said anything to lead you to think so?"

"Well, yes, sir."

The doctor pursed up his lips.

This was quite a new light to him, and, indeed, it cleared up many points that had been wrapped in mystery.

"But—"

"You know, I place great reliance upon your judgment, Redfern," said the Head, after a long pause. "You are the prefect I trust most, as you know. But are you sure that your natural anxiety for your brother has not led you to take too favourable a view of his conduct?"

"I am quite sure of that, sir. I am certain of what I say—as certain as I could be if I had been with Sidney that night."

Another long pause.

"Have you any idea what person he may be shielding?"

Arthur writhed. He shrank from the lie direct. To his weak nature it seemed much less culpable to act a falsehood than to tell one.

"I—I think I could guess, sir; but I should not care to mention names. As a prefect, I—I could look into the matter later, sir."

"You have disturbed me very much, Redfern, by telling me this. I am sure you would not speak without grounds. Leave me now, I will reflect upon the matter. I wish to be just."

Arthur Redfern left the study.

He breathed deeply when he stood outside in the corridor.

Had he succeeded? Was that danger to be escaped, after all?

The perspiration stood in thick drops on the prefect's brow.

"I—I say, Redfern major——"

It was Skelton of the Fourth. He was in pyjamas, with his trousers on, and a jacket buttoned round his neck, and a pair of slippers on his feet.

The prefect glared at him severely.

"What are you doing out of bed, Skelton?"

"I couldn't sleep," said the captain of the Fourth dismally. "I—I've been thinking about Reddy. I—I was sure you'd do something for him, Redfern major. I tried to get to his room, but Phipps is looking out. I say, is there a chance for him?"

"I think so."

Skelton's face brightened up wonderfully.

"He won't be sacked?"

"I hope not."

"Hurray!"

"Don't make a row here, you young ass! Take twenty lines for being out of your dorm. after lights out," said Arthur, "Oh, never mind! Don't do the lines; but get back to bed sharp."

"But there's a real chance for Reddy?"

"Yes. Cut off!"

"Good egg!"

And Skelton cut off. But he did not go back to the Fourth-Form dormitory. He scouted round Phipps's room, and saw that the house-porter was there; and then he scuttled off to the punishment-room as silently as a ghost.

He tapped lightly on the door. All was dark within, but he was pretty certain that his chum was not asleep.

"Reddy!" he whispered through the key-hole.

Redfern minor sat up in bed.

"Hallo! Is that you, Skelton?"

"Yes. I've just seen your major. He's been with the Head; and he says there's a chance for you. He thinks you won't be sacked!"

Redfern minor sprang out of bed. In a second he was at the keyhole, trembling with anxiety and excitement.

"Skelton!"

"I'm here!"

"Has Arthur owned up? Is he——"

"I don't think so. He didn't look like it. He's worked it somehow without giving himself away," said Skelton. "He's jolly deep, you know; and I dare say Ransome put him up to some dodge. Ransome is full of dodges."

Redfern felt a weight lifted from his mind.

"Good-night!" whispered Skelton, through the keyhole.

"Good-night, old chap!"

And Skelton scuttled away. And Redfern minor went back to bed in a greatly relieved frame of mind.

To Go or Not To Go.

REDFERN MINOR was out of bed in the punishment-room at the first gleam of daylight.

He had slept but little that night. Skelton's whispered words of encouragement had done more than anything else to keep him awake, as a matter of fact.

But he did not feel heavy from want of sleep. He was in too excited a state for that.

Upon the happenings of that morning his whole future depended.

Was he to be sacked, or had Arthur's intercession saved him? Was he to remain, after all, at St. Dolly's?

Long before the rest of St. Dolly's was awake Redfern was up and dressed, and filling in the time by striding about the narrow limits of the punishment-room.

It seemed an age to him before he heard the sounds of the awakening household below.

The key clicked in the lock at last, and Phipps looked into the room.

There was a sombre expression upon the house-porter's face. Redfern's face fell a little as he observed it. If there was hope for him the porter evidently did not know it.

"Good-morning, Phipps!"

"Mornin', Master Redfern!"

"Where's my brekker?"

"I ain't come for that, Master Redfern. You're to foller me to the 'Ead's study!" said Phipps sorrowfully.

"Oh!"

"Which I'm sorry it's 'appened, Master Redfern," said the house-porter, as he led the way. "If it was to be only a flogging I'd hoist you with pleasure."

"Thank you!" said the junior, with a faint smile.

Phipps tapped at the Head's door, and marched the Fourth-Former in. The Head was standing by the window, and he turned a severe face upon the boy.

"You may go, Phipps."

The house-porter retired, with a last look of commiseration at Redfern minor, which did not give the junior much encouragement.

Redfern waited.

Dr. Cranston did not seem to be in a hurry to speak. Perhaps he did not realise what torture the suspense was to the anxious lad.

Redfern's eyes had time to note the anxious and thoughtful wrinkles on the doctor's face, and to observe, too, the cane lying on his writing-table. What was the cane placed there ready for? If he were going to be expelled the Head could not be going to cane him, too. It was not likely. The sight of the cane generally had a perturbing effect upon youthful delinquents shown into the Head's study. Under the circumstances, it had an opposite effect upon Redfern.

His heart beat quickly, more hopefully.

"Redfern," said the Head at last, "I have something to say to you which you will probably be glad to hear. Your brother has given me what explanation he could of your conduct, and he regards it in a more favourable light than I did myself. I have tried to come to his way of thinking. I am so anxious not to commit an act of possible injustice that I shall run the risk of pardoning one who has done flagrant wrong. You will not be expelled!"

Redfern's heart beat so hard that he felt almost suffocated. He could not speak.

"Redfern major is the prefect whom I trust the most in the school, with perhaps one exception," said the Head. "His opinion would naturally carry great weight with me. As he is your brother, he should know you. His opinion is that you are acting in this peculiar manner for the purpose of shielding someone else who is at fault; that not you but another is really guilty!"

Redfern started.

In giving that explanation to the Head, Arthur had been sailing very near to the wind—very near to the wind indeed.

Dr. Cranston read the boy's expression.

"Is this true, Redfern?"

Silence.

"Very well. I repeat, that I shrink from the possibility of committing a great injustice," said the Head. "I shall not, therefore, expel you. But your refusal to answer questions put to you by your Form-master and your head-master must be severely punished. I am going to cane you!"

"Yes, sir."

Redfern spoke quite cheerfully. He knew how Dr. Cranston could "lay it on," but the severest caning was nothing to an expulsion. He felt that he could go through that caning with a smile on his lips.

"Have you anything to say, Redfern?"

"Only that I thank you, sir, and that I am sorry I should seem to be disrespectful to you."

"Very good! Hold out your hand!"

Dr. Cranston took up the cane. Redfern held out his hands in turn, and the cane descended upon each of them eight times. Dr. Cranston had a scientific way of laying the cane on, and the first blow made Redfern shiver. Before the last had been delivered the junior's face was white and strained, and pain seemed to be tingling through every nerve in his body.

But he held his lips tightly shut; he held back the tears that would fain have forced themselves into his eyes.

Redfern was "game" all through.

Dr. Cranston laid down the cane.

"You may go, Redfern."

"Thank you, sir!"

The boy left the study unsteadily, and closed the door behind him. In the passage he stopped to squeeze his hands under his arms. The pain was terrible; he had never felt anything like it before, except once, when he had had an accidental kick on the shin at football.

The Head had said that the punishment was to be severe, and it had been severe. But Redfern was to stay at St. Dolly's!

There was a patter of feet in the passage, and Skelton and Brown ran up.

"Reddy, I've just seen Phipps. You've been to the Head!"

Redfern nodded.

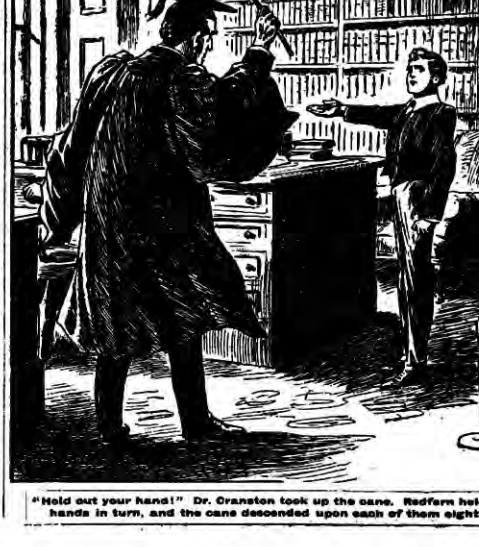
"What's the verdict?"

"Hold on," said Redfern, in a low voice. "Don't speak to me for a minute."

Redfern rubbed his hands. The pain was passing, and Redfern was tough, too. A smile dawned upon his strained face.

"It's all right, kids. A licking's only a licking. Let's get in to breakfast."

And Redfern minor went in to breakfast between his two chums, each of them holding an arm, and all three of them grinning serenely.



"Hold out your hand!" Dr. Cranston took up the cane. Redfern held out his hands in turn, and the cane descended upon each of them eight times.

Skelton's Scheme.

WE shall have to celebrate this!" said Brown III., after morning lessons.

A group of Classical juniors had gathered round Redfern minor in the quadrangle to congratulate him on his narrow escape.

They wanted to ask him questions, too, and they asked them, but they received no satisfaction in the way of replies. Redfern simply wouldn't tell them what it had all been about, or what he had been breaking bounds for. When inquiries grew too pressing, he frankly advised the inquirers to mind their own business. Skelton and Brown knew; but as far as Redfern was concerned, nobody else would know.

The juniors of St. Dolly's were beginning to know Redfern minor, and they soon gave up asking questions. Brown III., too, had started a more important subject. Redfern was a great man in the Form now, and his perilous adventure and narrow escape should be fittingly celebrated in the Fourth. It was something for the Classicals to be in possession of a fellow who had been shut up in the punishment-room and nearly expelled: there was a certain amount of eclat about it. The Moderns could only look on in envy.

Between Moderns and Classicals there had been a truce while Redfern's peril lasted. But the moment it was known that Redfern was safe the truce was at an end. The old rivalry seemed more keen than ever after its brief rest.

"Jolly good idea!" said Skelton. "Celebrate it, of course. Those Modern worms never have anything to celebrate."

Redfern laughed.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm jolly glad to get off, that's all. That's sufficient celebration for me."

"What form had it better take?" asked Benson. "What price parading the quad. in a body, and blowing tin-whistles and beating drums?"

"Jolly soon get a prefect on your neck if you start anything of the sort."

"My idea would be a feed," suggested Spratt. "As Redfern is the founder of the feast, so to speak, he ought to stand a feed."

"Good old Tubby!"

"I think it's a jolly good idea," persisted Spratt. "Redfern can borrow some tin from his major, and stand a big feed to all the Classicals in the Fourth."

"Ass! We've got to celebrate Redfern, not Redfern celebrate us."

"It's all the same, so long——"

"So long as you get a free feed!" said Skelton, with a snort. "You ring off! I rather think a feed's a good idea; you can't do better than stand a feed, when you come to think of it, especially now the cold weather's coming on. A feed for twenty is a good wheeze."

"Ripping!" said a dozen voices.

"But Reddy's not going to stand it."

"Couldn't," said Redfern cheerfully. "My tin doesn't run to the extent of standing feeds with twenty at table."

"I suppose not. It's a question for subscriptions from the whole Form—with the exception of Reddy."

"Hear, hear!"

"All the Classical chaps will contribute, according to their means," said Skelton.

"Or according to their meanness!" said Benson, grinning.

"Dry up, Benson!" Skelton said. "Let's get to business. I'm going to put up a money-box in the passage, for every chap to put his contributions into."

"Why not pass round the hat?" asked Phipps, a Fourth-Former who rejoiced in the same name as the house-porter, and was sometimes jokingly called Phipps minor in consequence.

"Because the money-box is a better whoeze. Some of the chaps have plenty of tin, and some of them have only a bit. Well, every chap ought to put in what he can. The rich chaps will naturally put in a good deal, and the poor ones needn't be ashamed of shoving in pennies and twopences. See the idea? Then a chap who shoves in half-a-crown won't be able to swank about it, because nobody'll know; and a chap who's only got a ha'penny to spare needn't blush about it."

"Well, there's something in that," said Phipps doubtfully.

"Of course, there's something in it, ass; or I shouldn't suggest it!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"What do you think, Reddy?" asked Brown III., who saw a slight smile cross Redfern's face as Skelton made his brilliant proposition.

"Oh, I'm dead in this act, you know!" said Redfern cheerfully. "It's all right! Skelton's doing this thing, and I don't want to try to improve upon his methods."

"Well, it seems to me a pretty good idea," said Skelton.

"You go ahead, old chap!"

"What about the feed?" said Spratt anxiously. "When is it to come off?"

"We can settle that later, Tubby."

And Skelton promptly carried out his wheeze.

(Another rattling long instalment next week.)

"CAPTAIN JACK"

A STIRRING STORY of LEAGUE FOOTBALL.

By Popular ARTHUR S. HARDY.

BEGIN THE STORY HERE.

"Bravo, Welsby Albion! Well played, Jack Fenton!"

A deafening volley of cheers rings across the Welsby Albion playing-field as sturdy Jack Fenton slams the ball through the Aston Villa goal for the fifth time. A few seconds later the whistle sounds for time, leaving the home team victorious by five goals to all, four being scored by the new centre-forward.

JACK FENTON, a handsome, strapping lad, is the son of SIR JOHN FENTON, of Blackmere Hall, who is the head of the greatest industry in Welsby, and owns scores of mills. Jack has quarrelled with his father on countless points, and has renounced position and fortune to take up the life of a professional footballer. He signs on for the local team, which is in the First Division of the English League, and in Welsby Albion's opening fixture of the season with Aston Villa he wins the unstinted popularity of the townsfolk by his faultless, dashing play.

Bad News.

Returning to the dressing-room after the match, and after receiving a rousing reception, Jack meets his rascally cousin, RICHARD FENTON. Richard is a mean-spirited, unscrupulous character, who is partly to blame for Jack's quarrel with his autocratic father, and who has now cunningly usurped Jack's position.

Richard Fenton sneers at Jack for taking up the calling of a humble professional footballer, and after hot words have passed between the two, Jack's anger is aroused, and he knocks his treacherous cousin down.

Richard then departs, mustering up all the dignity he can under the circumstances.

By playing centre-forward for Welsby Albion, Jack has supplanted another man named JIM SMART, a sullen, malicious individual, who fosters a bitter and unjust spite against young Fenton.

Smart deliberately picks up a fight with Jack, and the two adjourn to the gymnasium to settle the disagreement with the gloves. Smart suffers a terrible thrashing, and swears to wreak vengeance on Jack in the near future.

Welsby Albion, who have won their first three matches, are next booked to play Sunderland away.

Sunderland lead practically throughout the game, but one minute from time the scores are equalised, and the match ends in a draw.

Returning to the dressing-room, Jack learns from Shuter, the trainer, that a strike is threatening in Welsby, all Sir John Fenton's employees having rebelled upon his stating his intention to cut down their wages.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

On Strike.

THE newspaper report which Trainer Bill Shuter had shown to Jack Fenton after the match with Sunderland had not lied. The workers in the Red Mill at Welsby had gone out on strike, and had thus struck the first blow in the industrial war which was soon to shake Welsby to its foundations.

Jack Fenton tried to think of all that this might mean as the train bore the team back to Welsby. It never seemed to occur to him that the strikers might try to make capital out of him, whom they knew to be in sympathy with their movement; and, therefore, when he stepped on to the platform at Welsby, he was astonished to find himself almost instantly surrounded by a group of workmen.

One of these, a big burly fellow, led off with a cheer.

"Now then, boys!" he cried. "Altogether! One, two, three! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" cheered the crowd.

Then one of them struck up the customary refrain.

> "For he's a jolly good fellow!
> He's a jolly good fellow,
> For-or he's a jolly good fel-el-ow!
> And so say all of us!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The cheering died away, and Jack found himself a good twenty yards nearer the station exit, with a crowd of workmen swarming round him.

The moment he could make himself heard, Jack fought for elbow room for himself, and faced the group of working men.

He was smiling. It is as well to use tact when you deal with a crowd.

"Well," he asked. "And may I ask what this demonstration means?"

"Yes, Jack, laddie!" cried the big fellow who had led the cheering. "It means that you've got a lot of pals in Welsby, and Welsby's proud of you!"

"I don't know what I've done to deserve such praise," answered Jack.

"Stuff and nonsense," retorted the big man. "Haven't you been turned away from home because you've got sympathy with the workers? Don't we all know that Sir John Fenton and you could never see eye to eye? And haven't we seen you play of a Saturday for the Welsby Albion, and proven yourself a man, which is more than can be said for your cousin, Mr. Richard?"

Jack walked towards the street.

The crowd followed him. He found a group of a hundred or more men idling away their time outside. Perhaps they were waiting for the men who had chosen to give Jack such a strange welcome home. Anyway, they faced about as Jack and his escort appeared, and there was an immediate commotion amongst them.

A moment later Jack found himself confronted by a mass of excited mill-hands. Some of them wore badges in their buttonholes, the badges which stamped them as Union men, and which they had been ordered to wear while on strike.

"Are you strikers from the Red Mill?" asked Jack of the big man who walked by his side.

The fellow nodded and grinned. But there seemed to be a threat veiled by the grin.

"Yes!" he cried.

"And you have been waiting for me? For what purpose? Have you anything to propose? If so, out with it!" cried Jack.

The young footballer was forced to a halt. The crowd in front of him prevented him from proceeding further.

"Yes," answered the big man now. "We've bin talkin' things over amongst ourselves, Jack, and we've come to the conclusion that you know more about these matters than most of us. We've come here as a deputation to ask you to lead us in the strike, to voice our claims, and to force a settlement with Sir John. You're the lad to do it, if you will. And we'll see—or rather the Union will see—that you don't suffer for it, either."

Jack Fenton's lips curled.

"I'm not a paid agitator," he said. "I have sympathy with the workers, but I will never consent to lead them. That must be the duty of those who induced you to go out on strike. I will not do it. You would place me in a false position. How can you expect me to lead a revolt against my own father?"

"He never studied you, Jack," said a voice in the crowd. "He turned you out of house and home, and forced you to shift for yourself."

"Ay," retorted Jack. "And what if he did? Is that any reason why I should lead you in this agitation? Do you think that because my father has dealt harshly by me, that I ought to retaliate by trying to injure him?"

"Injure him!" cried an ominous voice. "He wants to cut our wages down from 8d. to 7d. an hour, because, he says, that the mills don't pay. Do you hold wi' that?"

"I have never held with any sweating of labour," answered Jack fiercely. "I am against it."

"Then lead us, Jack."

Jack Fenton shook his head.

"No!" he answered. "My sympathies are with you, but I can't lead you."

"Do you hold wi' the reduction, laddie? He'd grind us alebodied men down from 5s. 4d. a working day, to 4s. 8d. That's 8d. on his side; 8d. a day makes a difference of 4s. a week. Four shillings a week is all that stands between us and starvation. We can't do wi' it. We've got our families, our wives and children, to support. It's downright wickedness. It's done that Sir John Fenton may swell his profits."

Jack held up his hand.

"Workmen of Welsby," he said. "Listen to me. There are two sides to every question. Do you know what my father, Sir John Fenton, says—"

"Ay, we know!" cried the big man in a menacing voice. "We know! He says that he's reducing wages because foreign competition is spoiling the trade in Welsby. He says he's reducing the wages all round, instead of discharging 15 per cent. of his employees so as to give 'em all a chance. He says he's studying the greatest good of the greatest number. But we workers of Welsby know that it's all lies! Lies! Do you hear?"

"Ay!" came in a mighty shout from the crowd, and the men taking off their caps burst into a thunderous cheer.

There were women workers and girl workers standing on the pavement watching the scene with moist eyes. Most of them wore the clog and shawl. A poor, unhealthy lot they looked, too, for the most part.

Some of the strikers hoisted the big man up on their shoulders, and he caught sight of the women and the girls.

"Look at them!" he cried. "Look at the wimmen! Isn't it enough to make your heart bleed? That's what Sir John Fenton has driven them to!"

"Ay!" once more rang out in a menacing roar.

"And yet," shouted Jack Fenton, during a lull in the storm, "before my father came to Welsby its trade was in ruins and its people starving. He, at least, has made the town what it is. And, though I don't hold with the grinding down of the workers, I do hold with arbitration. Men of Welsby, don't force Sir John's and Fenton's hand. Meet him in an amicable spirit. He's stubborn, but he's reasonable if he's approached the right way, and he may give you concessions, if you'll only strive to meet him!"

"Have you ever found him reasonable, Jack?" asked a workman in a heavy tweed suit, leering up into Jack's handsome but pale face.

The crowd laughed at that.

Jack Fenton, the outcast from Blackmere Hall, find his father reasonable. The very idea was hilarious.

"Come, Jack, laddie," cried the big man, leaping down from the shoulders of his mates, and linking arms with Jack. "Come! Throw in your lot with us. You can agitate out of your football time. The crowd love you. You're the born leader for us. There's the chance of a lifetime waiting for you here. You'll make yourself famous. You'll be able to stand for Parliament before the end comes, as the working-man's candidate for Welsby. Think of it! Honour to whom honour is due, Jack. The football member. It's worth trying, Jack! You'll work out your own salvation. You'll heap coals of fire on your father's head. Come, come! Just stand by the workers!"

Jack shook his arm free.

"I may stand by the workers," he cried. "And I'll do everything that lies within my power to alleviate distress, but you must let me go to work in my own way. You must leave me to pick and choose. I will not become your chosen leader. I will not consent to agitate in this strike. It is not fair. I am not a labour leader. I am only a professional footballer. I wish you luck, but you must find someone else."

The greatest disappointment was depicted on the face of the big man, and on those of the rest of the strikers who were within hearing of Jack's voice.

"Well," cried the big man, "think it over. We won't ask you to decide now. My name's George Keppell. You'll find me at one of the committee-rooms we're organising down in t' town. If you change your mind, coom to me there, and we'll soon make a man o' ye."

"Thanks," answered Jack, as he forced his way onward, the colour mounting to his forehead. "Thanks. Should I change my mind, you'll hear from me soon, Keppell."

He found it a difficult task to pass through the surging ranks of the crowd. They all wished to have a look at him; many of them wished to shake him by the hand, and when he had passed the men he had the women to deal with.

Poor souls! They crowded round him closely, peering up into his handsome, serious face, and smiling at him as if he were a god. He was only a professional footballer, and yet there was not one amongst them who did not recognise in him the son of Sir John Fenton, the capitalist, who was grinding them down—a son who had himself been crushed down beneath the iron heel of the tyrant baronet.

"It was the workers of Welsby made your feythers rich, Jack!" cried one eager-looking woman. "It was our work, the labour of our hands, gained him title. And now he'd rob us of the right to live!"

"I hope it's not so bad as that, lass," answered Jack.

"I tell you," cried a brutal-looking fellow, turning to George Keppell—"I tell you that that lad's a blackleg. I know him. You can't wash the taint out o' the blood in a generation. All capitalists are wi' the capitalists. He's a charlatan, that's what Jack Fenton is!"

The man was the ruffian who had led the attack on Sir John Fenton's carriage.

George Keppell thrust him rudely aside.

"You speak wi' malice," he cried. "The lad's true—as true as steel. That's why I want him on our side. We've paid agitators at work—Union leaders to help us, but if we want to win this fight we want Jack Fenton to fight for our side, too, and I hope we may get him yet."

As for Jack, no sooner had he escaped from the women than he was joined by his football friends.

"What's the game, Jack lad?" asked Sturgess, the goalkeeper.

Jack Fenton smiled sadly.

"The game is, Sturgess," he cried, "that the strikers wish to make a labour agitator of me, and offer me a seat in Parliament, but I mean to keep out of this struggle if I can."

Jack Fenton's Appeal.

SUNDAY passed quietly away. As far as Jack Fenton could judge, there was little alteration in the feelings of the workers at Fenton's Mills. Monday morning came with the local papers full of leaders and articles on the question of the coming strike. Without exception, the opinion was expressed that both the workers and Sir John would be well advised to settle the matter by arbitration.

Settle a strike by arbitration! It's a difficult matter, especially when the strike is in its initial stages, when the workers have yet to feel the pinch of hunger and distress, and are full of the fighting spirit, backed by a strong sense of injustice.

The air was for all the world as if it were surcharged with electricity.

Jack put in an early appearance at the football-ground on Monday, and then went home.

On the way he found himself the centre of public attention. Jack Fenton, hitherto the despised footballer, the outcast from Blackmere

Hall, had been the object of sneers and gibes. Now it had been reported—goodness knows how; news manages to get wind—that he was to lead the revolt of the mills.

On Tuesday Maidment's Mill went on strike, swelling the ranks of the outcasts from the Red Mill. On Wednesday the Cannon Street Mill and the George Street Mills followed suit, and the strike was raging fiercely.

The streets in the vicinity of the mills presented an extraordinary spectacle. Here men were to be seen on picket duty outside the gates, and every man or woman who approached the mills was subjected to a severe examination.

Jack Fenton went near on purpose to see, and he was astonished at the activity and earnestness of purpose shown by the strikers.

Who was at the back of this well-organised strike? he wondered. Who was responsible for the mismanagement which had brought it about?

Jack went home, feeling pretty sick at heart that night. Training at the football-ground in the morning had not helped to cheer him up, either, for the rain had teemed down as if it would never stop, and a heavy mist had enveloped the land, making the conditions out of doors as depressing as they well could be.

Jack Fenton ate alone, and as he ate he pondered over the situation.

Would nothing save the awful privation and distress that must surely follow this strike? he wondered. Was there nobody strong enough to make an appeal to Sir John Fenton?

He thought and he thought and he thought, and it came to him as he gazed into the burning coals of the fire after the meal was finished that not a single living soul could be found who could put the claims of the workers before Sir John in anything but a biased light.

Jack Fenton lit a pipe, and smoked until his brain almost reeled. Then suddenly he was seized with a determination.

He would go up to Blackmere Hall in defiance of his father's express wish, and he would himself face Sir John, and see whether he could not induce him to meet the leaders of the strike in the matter of arbitration.

He went out into the hall, took down his hat and a macintosh, and slipped them on; then, opening the door, he went out into the night.

Rain was still falling, and not many people were abroad. They were at home, enjoying the warmth of a fire—maybe some of them perhaps for the last time for many weary weeks to come.

The atmosphere was gloomy and oppressive in the town, and Jack felt thankful when he had made his way into the country lanes which led up the hill to Blackmere Hall.

The water squelched beneath his boots as he tramped along the well-kept gravel drive. When he reached the hall he found only the soft gleam of a single light shining within. Not a window that he could see was lighted up. Depression seemed to hold Blackmere Hall in its grip, too.

Jack mounted the steps of the house, and set the iron bell clanging fit to wake the dead.

In answer to the summons a man came along the hall, opened the door, and peered out. It was not old Benjamin as Jack Fenton had expected.

The manservant guarded the door.

"What is it you require, sir?" he asked, in an uncompromising voice, regarding Jack with suspicion.

"Is old Benjamin here?" asked Jack.

"He has been superseded in the duties of the 'All, sir," answered the manservant.

"My business is with Sir John Fenton," said Jack.

"What name, sir?" asked the man.

"John Fenton."

The servant smiled maliciously. He had expected such a reply.

"I have instructions from the baronet, sir," he said, "not to admit you."

"I respect your instructions," answered Jack coolly. "But, at the same time, I must ask you to take my name to my father, and beg him to grant me an interview. You may tell him that I shall not detain him long."

The manservant hesitated.

"Do as I command!" cried Jack impatiently. "Sir John's instructions were so explicit, sir—"

"I don't care how explicit they were. I have come on important business—business which does not admit of any delay. Take the message!" thundered Jack.

The manservant—a creature of Richard Fenton's, mind—Jack's cousin had installed in Blackmere Hall on his own account—closed the door and locked it, so that Jack should not force his way into the house, and then went off to convey the message. He was gone about five minutes. Then he came back again, unlocked the door, and thrust his grinning face out.

"Sir John says that he cannot see you, Mr. Fenton," he said. "He says that he desires to have nothing to do with you, and you'll oblige him by not troubling him again."

Then the fellow would have shut the door in Jack's face; but, with a swift movement, Jack got his arm through the opening of the door, and the next moment, with a powerful push of his strong, muscular shoulder, he had sent the door flying wide, and the servant staggering before him.

Then he stalked into the hall.

He knew his father's habits of old, and guessed that after dinner he would find him in the library, or in the drawing-room. The drawing-room was nearest, and he paused at the door, the expostulating manservant treading at his heels.

His father was within. Jack could hear his voice.

A moment later he had the door open, and had entered. He saw his father standing with his back to the fire, and his coat-tails raised, whilst Richard Fenton was leaning lazily back in an armchair, and Lady Fenton, beautiful, pale, and resigned, was listening to what the two men had to say.

At the door opened Sir John Fenton turned, and the phrase he was uttering died away on his stiffening lips.

"Jack Fenton, my son!" he exclaimed; and for a moment a friendly light seemed to gleam in his eyes. The next they had assumed the relentless stare which Jack knew only too well.

"Why have you come here?" asked Sir John, in icy tones. "I told my new butler, Johnson, not to admit you, and yet you have had the audacity to force your way in here."

"John!" protested Lady Fenton, who had risen to her feet, and was looking eagerly and anxiously at her boy.

"Silence, madam!" cried the baronet. "Now, sir, speak! Say what you have to say, and then get back to the town, and rejoin your low-class friends!"

"What I have to say, sir," answered Jack quietly, "is this. I have been much about the town, listening to what the strikers have to say, and I think I can say with authority that, if you will consent to meet them, and listen to their claims in a spirit of fairness and open-mindedness, that you will do much to relieve the tension, and to save yourself. It is not too late to arbitrate. A friendly movement now may save much misery and suffering in the future."

"You come as the people's advocate," said Sir John bitterly.

"And," said Richard Fenton, with a sneer, "Sir John has made up his mind. Go back to the town. Take this message to your precious band of strikers: Sir John Fenton will not falter—will not bend. He will break first. He is determined to have his own way. He will go through to the bitter end, cost what it may. He will carry his policy through; and if there is going to be war, it is the workers who have asked for it, and who will get it. If there is to be starvation, it is the workers who will starve. If there is to be distress, it is these fools who have gone out on strike who will suffer. Sir John has money. He could sell his mills, and retire from the business, to live a life of ease, whenever he chose, and that he will do rather than have his hands forced by these low-born scoundrels!"

Jack ignored his cousin. It was to him as if Richard Fenton had not spoken. He looked anxiously at his father.

"Father," he said, "I have come to you in a friendly spirit, because I can foresee all the misery of the future. Meet these people half-way. Make them a concession, however slight, and there will be no strike. I am convinced of it. Father, I am talking about. Pause, before it is too late!"

Sir John Fenton laughed. Once again he had contrasted his strong, manly son with his effeminate, treacherous, wily nephew, and once again the contrast had been to the latter's advantage. But he had taken up an attitude years ago from which he did not intend to recede now. Sir John Fenton was one of those men who could never confess themselves in the wrong.

"You have heard what my nephew has had to say," he said, in icy tones. "I have handed the control of my business affairs over into his hands, and whatever he decides shall be done. Richard Fenton is the arbiter."

"And," cried Jack, his voice ringing through the apartment like a clarion, "it is to Richard Fenton that this strike is due! It is at my cousin that the people will be able to point and say: 'It is Richard Fenton who has done this monstrous thing!' Father, you have always looked upon me as a fool, whereas I see now that, apart from your rare business ability, you are only a stubborn one. Well, I have done my best. I leave you to the guiding hand of my cousin—and I wish you well of him!"

Jack kissed the room to his mother, took her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Good-bye, mother!" he said. "I needn't ask you. You have no sympathy with Sir John in this strike!"

"Jack, my brave boy, my dear son!" she cried, as the tears coursed down her cheeks. "Oh, if only he had you to lead him, there would be hope yet. But I see none as it is—none!"

Jack kissed his mother again, bade her good-bye, then walked proudly, with head erect, to the door, and passed through it.

Sir John Fenton remained with his eyes set on the carpet. His son's words had struck home, and he knew it. He felt it right he wondered. Was he weak, after all, as Jack had said? For the first time in his life his faith in himself was shaken.

Then he slowly raised his head, and looked his nephew in the eyes.

"What were you saying, Richard?" he asked; and the scheming nephew took up the discussion at the point he had left off, as if the interruption had never been.

He believed that he had his uncle completely in his power.

The Match Against Everton.

SO Jack Fenton had thrown the dice, and had lost the game. Well, he felt that he had nothing now to reproach himself with, and for the rest of that week he applied himself to his training as if he had no other interest than football in his life.

Saturday's match was against Everton, the leaders of the League, a team that were very hard to beat, especially, strange though it may seem, away from home.

The strike by that time was raging fiercely. Three other mills had gone out on strike. The crisis, which might easily have been avoided, was at hand.

Jack had kept indoors a great deal, and when he had gone out he had taken the least-frequented streets that led out of the town. He had no wish to meet George Keppell, or any of Keppell's friends, just now. He did not wish to identify himself with a demonstration against his father.

On the Saturday morning Jack found himself wondering what the gate would be like for the match that day.

Everton were a sure draw. Given normal conditions, they could have expected the ground to be full to overflowing. But the club's patrons had to be careful with the sixpences now. They couldn't afford to go to the football match every Saturday now, as they would do in the ordinary course, when money was flush. And yet it is astonishing what men will do in order to witness their beloved game of football.

When Jack went down to the ground in the early afternoon, he found the usual crowds streaming towards the turnstiles, and the usual thousands crowding the terraced banks at each end of the playing-pitch; and the two stands looked as if they would be well patronised, too.

Maybe there would be four or five thousand less people there than if there had been no strike in Welsby on; but one does not miss four or five thousand people amongst, let us say, twenty thousand.

The one subject under discussion in the dressing-room that afternoon was the strike, and the players cast meaning glances in Jack's direction as the lad entered.

"Jack's the boy who can tell you all about the strike," said Griffith.

Jack had become a hero in the eyes of his comrades, who saw in him something else than a mere paid footballer. Had not Jack been offered the leadership of the men on strike?

Jack, for his part, undressed very quietly, scarcely uttering a word to anyone, and just as quietly donned his playing things.

He was too busy thinking about his father and his mother at Blackmere Hall to worry himself about trivialities.

"You'll play the game to-day, laddie!" said Griffith, coming up to Jack.

Bill Shuter, the trainer, gave the centre-half an indignant glance.

"Play the game?" he cried. "Can you ever see Captain Jack doing anything else?"

Jack smiled.

"You need have no fear about me, Griffith," he said. "My heart will be in the game all right the moment we get on the move, and I shan't forget that the team is depending on you to do it that you watch Freeman. There's nobody can score goals like the man who made a League record."

"Unless," said Sturgess, with a laugh, having overheard Jack's remark, "it is the lad we shall break in."

From the ground came the hum and buzz of the crowd.

There was a pleasant snap in the air which would render the game most enjoyable. Jack longed to get out on the playing pitch, and let the blood about. His mind had been too much occupied by the trade dispute during the week that it had begun to get upon his nerves. The game would be a welcome relief.

Everton, always quick to turn out, were the first team to be dressed for the game, and they made their way out on to the playing pitch to a roar of welcome, which had a decidedly Liverpool flavour about it.

Several excursions had brought enthusiasts from Liverpool to see Everton lick the Albion, and they didn't forget to let the Welsby folk know it.

Sturgess, all impatience, went to the door of the dressing room, and then opened his mouth with a gasp of surprise.

"Hi, Jack!" he cried. "Here's someone to see you!"

"Show him in," said Jack.

The next moment old Benjamin, looking more venerable than ever, stood before Jack, with a kindly smile in his twinkling eyes. He nodded in admiration at Jack's stalwart frame.

"Ay," he cried, "you're the bonnie man, Master Jack! Bah! What's Mr. Richard?" Then his face grew serious.

"Master Jack," he said—and his voice trembled—"I've come here for to tell you that Lady Fenton's come down to the ground in an open carriage to see the match, and I'm afeared for her. She's Sir John's wife, and they hate Sir John just now."

Jack gave a start.

"Lady Fenton is here?" he cried incredulously. "On the ground?"

"Yes, Mister Fenton. She's come to see you play."

Jack stared at Benjamin aghast, and the colour rushed to his forehead in a crimson flush. Then he spoke.

"Well," he said, "no matter if she is here, Benjamin. The crowd won't harm her. They know how kind she has always been to the poor. They know how she has sympathised with them, and has tried again and again in her humble way to help them. They love and respect her. They would never dream of harming her."

But even as he spoke a howl from the crowd caused Jack to rush out to the door. He ran down to the players' gate, and, looking towards the grand stand, he saw his mother, looking beautiful, but, oh, so pale, about to take a seat in the front of the stand amongst the directors, and he saw the angry crowd surging and swaying, whilst fists were shaken at her.

"There she is!" cried one angry man. "That's her! That's the wife of the capitalist, Down with Sir John Fenton!"

Then Jack, whose heart was swelling fit to burst, found his comrades crowding upon him, and mechanically he ran out on to the playing pitch.

No sooner did the crowd catch sight of his well-set and manly figure than a cheer burst forth which must have startled the town.

How they cheered! The hand-clapping and shouting was universal. It never ceased whilst Jack ran along the field to the opposite goal. Half-way along the level green stretch of turf, Jack found himself face to face with his mother. He could see her looking down upon him out of a pair of eyes which were half filled with tears, but in which flashed a light of pride and joy.

Jack bowed to her. It was all that he could do, and that action, simple though it was, lulled the anger of the crowd.

After all, she was a woman, like their own wives and daughters, and their war was not to be waged against a woman.

Jack stood in the middle of the pitch with folded arms, lost in thought, and he did not hear the referee blow his whistle summoning the captains to the centre.

Besides, if he had done so, he would not have heeded, for, after all, he was not the captain of the Welsby Albion.

But Griffith now laughingly prodded him in the back.

"Go and toss the coin, Captain Jack!" he cried.

Jack looked at Griffith, smiled, and then obeyed. Up went the coin into the air, and down it came again, and the Everton skipper having called, looked down to find that he had lost.

Jack decided to stay where he was, and the teams did not cross over, which gave Everton a very slight advantage from the wind.

Then the ball was placed in position, the whistle blew, and the game began.

The teams were composed as follows:

Everton: Scott, goal; R. Balmer and Macconnachie, backs; Harris, Taylor, and Makepeace, half-backs; Sharp, Coleman, Freeman, Young, and Mountford, forwards.

Welsby Albion: Sturgess, goal; Bailey and Grant, backs; Mason, Griffith, and Dunlop, half-backs; Riley, Hughes, Jack Fenton, Andrews, and Jamieson, forwards.

The game began at a terrific pace, and thrice the home forwards almost broke through.

Then Everton had a turn, and Freeman, with a dashing run and a show of pace which was electrifying, broke through the middle, and with the goal at his mercy, put fly at ten yards' range a shot which seemed bound to score.

A thrill of breathless excitement was felt by the crowd, and then, miracle of miracles as it seemed, Jack Fenton managed to get his head fast to the ball, and sent it flying on to the crossbar, whence it went over the top of the net for a corner-kick. The crowd gave vent to a great shout.

From the corner-kick a scramble took place in which the ball seemed to bounce about the tops of the players' heads for quite a minute, and then, with a long kick, Griffith sent the ball into touch well beyond the half-way line, and the pressure was relieved.

But still, there was to be no rest. Sharp made a run from the throw-in, and Sturgess by a daring dash out of goal only just managed to pull down the ball from the top of Freeman's head. He had just time to hurl it to Bailey to clear, and then he was down, with an Everton player on top of him.

The game was thrilling to watch. And now Jack Fenton snapped up Bailey's punt, and was off down the centre like a flash. The three Everton halves were at once beaten, they having been well up in attack. The two backs were standing wide of Jack, but now they came rushing towards him as hard as they could run. Macconachie went for the man, and Balmer raced back towards the goal to help defend.

Jack and Macconachie had a rare tussle for possession, and in the middle of it the two men fell.

A roar of laughter went up, but it was instantly changed into a cry of horror which brought to occupants of the stand to their feet, for Macconachie had risen, but Jack Fenton lay there upon the yielding turf just as he had fallen, with his legs doubled up under him, and his pale face staring at the sky; but the eyes were closed, and the lad did not move.

The next moment a piercing shriek came from the grand stand.

"My boy! My Jack! My son! My poor boy!"

Lady Fenton was standing on her feet, with her hands tightly clasped, and with a look of agony on her face, and there wasn't one man in all that vast concourse of people who had not some show of pity for her now.

The mother was distraught. She thought her son was dead!

(Another powerful long instalment next week. Don't forget to buy No. 5 of "THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LIBRARY. Now on sale—1d.)

THE ATHLETIC CORNER

Conducted by W. G. GEORGE, Holder of the World's One Mile Championship.

The Action for Long-Distance Running.

I PROMISED in last week's article to describe to you the correct action for long-distance running. It is as follows:

Toe the line with both feet, standing flat-footed, the feet being about three inches apart. Now raise the heels, coming up slowly on to the balls of the feet, thence to the toes, the arms, hanging loosely at the sides, held slightly forward. As the raising process from the heels proceeds, the body and arms will naturally and necessarily bend from the hip and fall more forward until balance is being lost, and a foot is naturally thrust forward to support the falling body, and thus the action of "forced balance running," we will call it, is started, and must be continued indefinitely as each stride is taken until the termination of the race or practice.

As each stride is taken, the foot should fall right on the ball; the heel will then be just clear of the ground, but should not touch the ground unless compelled to do so through weariness.

Unfortunately, this trouble comes to all at some time or another, and it is therefore advisable that a light but by no means too low a heel should be attached to all long-distance running-shoes, so that the right position of the foot may be maintained throughout.

The actual action will be immediately apparent to anyone who tries to accomplish the foregoing instructions, and after that, all the pupil will have to do is to swing the arms, which must be held low, forward as each stride is taken, just far enough to compel the body and head to follow them, and to force the legs to stride out naturally, with the least possible forced exertion, in support of the unbalanced falling forward motion of the body.

This action will naturally

shorten the stride,

and therefore the athlete must make a point of striding out as far as possible, but never to the extent of disturbing his even carriage and steady balance.

When the pupil has once discovered and corrected his imperfections, and has "cottoned on" to the best way of accomplishing his desire to do the thing properly, all he will have to do further will be to practise, and keep on practising until it has become just as natural and more easy for him to run, or "fall forward," than to walk. Then he will be fit and ready to run a "Marathon."

Great Britain in the past had prided herself on her stamina and staying power, but her sons appear to be losing that prestige which she gained, for have we not been continually beaten of late in the performance of those athletic contests wherein we prided ourselves most—viz.: in Marathon races, in rowing, and various other games?

But I will confine myself to long-distance running, where, it will be remembered, we imagined ourselves invincible until we were taught a very necessary and wholesome, though unpalatable, lesson at the late Olympic Marathon race of last year, in that event it was thought that Great Britain would not only hold pride of place, but would occupy all the leading positions at the termination of the race.

As it turned out, we were ignominiously beaten and outclassed, not one of our boasted champions occupying a single prominent position at the finish.

We may well ask, "What happened?" and

"Why were we beaten?"

The answer is simple. We have been preeminent so long in this class of contest that we became too conscious of ourselves, and in consequence neglected our training, and put off the necessary preparation for the event in question until too late, and thus permitted other countries to oust us from our proper place.

It is, however, a very good thing for this country that it was athletics, and not war, that gave us our lesson. But now it has been given, we must see to it that we make amends, and we must strive to re-establish ourselves in the eyes of the world, and to our own satisfaction.

We certainly have the material and the knowledge, but we have lacked the discipline, and neglected our old national habits of taking a sufficiency of practice and exercise.

Our tramcars, motor-buses, tubes, lifts, etc., have had a great deal to do with this; but my young readers will, I trust, see to it that they at least will not develop into drones by the too great a use of all such conveniences.

Let them one and all climb a few flights of stairs, run or walk to school or work, and always play the game, my boys, at whatever you are doing; and don't forget the "hundred-up" exercise, for it is by such work that you will not only make athletes, but men of yourselves. More than that, you will quickly restore to Great Britain her prestige and pride of place.

(To be continued next week. No. 5 of THE "BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LIBRARY is now on sale—1. Don't fail to buy a copy.)

THE YOUNG FOOTBALLER.

A Fine New Series of Instructive Articles by J. W. Robinson, the Famous International Player.

GOALKEEPING *(continued).*

I THINK the best and easiest way to tackle this subject, so that you will get the most out of it, will be to give you four guiding rules right off, and enlarge upon them afterwards:

1. A goalkeeper should never kick if he has time to use his hands.

2. Always throw or kick the ball to the wings, and not to the centre of the ground.

3. Never leave the goal by running out unless it is absolutely necessary.

4. Don't endeavour to gain the applause of the onlookers.

Now, regarding my first rule, you will, I am sure, know that when a shot is taken at goal there are three ways of taking and getting rid of the ball. The first, which is the safest, is to catch it in both hands, and then throw or kick it away, always remembering that the quicker the ball is got rid of the better. Don't be tempted to hold the ball too long in order to make an opponent look small. It is risky. Another way of dealing with a shot is to use the fist and punch the ball away. Now, although I have known some great goalkeepers to use the fist very frequently, is, in my opinion, extremely unsafe. Of course, there are times when fisting is about all you will have time to do, but unless necessary it should never be attempted. When there is time to catch the ball in the hands there always is time to do so. Fisting is certainly showy, but very risky. The only other way of getting rid of a ball besides those I have mentioned is that of kicking without using the hands. I know sometimes an occasion will arise when there is only just time to kick, but I cannot say enough about the dangers of kicking away. If the ground is the least bit uneven or greasy a miskick is very easy, and it is almost a certainty that

your opponents will score

from it.

My rule No. 2 is a most important one, because if a goalkeeper sends the ball to the centre of the ground it is far more likely that one of the opposing side will get hold of it, in addition to the fact that such a movement will not give much time for the defence to collect itself and get into position. Kicking or throwing the ball to the centre of the ground is sure to result in another attack, because the opposing players, having already attacked, will be more or less massed well up in the centre; consequently, the only safe way to bring relief is to send out to the wings. In this way it doesn't matter so very much if the wing player is robbed of the ball, because the defence will have had time to get into position and be ready to carefully mark each opponent.

Rule No. 3 will, if followed, be found most annoying at times. I know what it is to be standing between the posts awaiting the onslaught of opposing forwards; nevertheless, I am sure a goalkeeper should never leave his charge, excepting under one condition, and that is when a forward has got clear away, and is making straight for goal. In this case, if a goalkeeper

remains between the posts

he is throwing away a fine chance of saving, as it should be fairly simple for a forward to score when he has only one man to oppose him, and a good space on either side where he can put the ball. Coming out will naturally discomcert the forward, besides giving him much less of the goal to aim at, and if he attempts to dribble round, the "goalie" should charge him. Otherwise, never come out.

Rule 4 is one which, at times, will be hard to follow. I suppose it is only natural that a player should like to gain the applause of the onlookers by a bit of brilliant individual play, especially if there are some personal friends present. Such individual efforts at brilliance are generally coupled with great daring, and I have no sympathy for a player who risks his side for the sake of his own pleasure.

This kind of play is bad enough in other positions of the field, but it is ten times worse when indulged in by a goalkeeper. If you play the real, solid game you are worthy of far more applause than you would be by playing in fours of brilliance. It may be very tempting to make a forward look poor by some risky movement of yours, but it is not football.

J. W. Robinson.

(To be continued.)

LOST MATCHES.

By G. L. B. COVERDALE, Hon. Sec. East Riding County F.A.

BY the time this appears in print Realmites will no doubt have played one or two matches. Now, my remarks this week are chiefly directed to those who have lost their first encounters. Those clubs that have won or drawn will be full of enthusiasm, and will play all the harder to keep an unbeaten record.

My sympathy also goes out to the clubs that lose their first few matches, especially if that club is a new junior organisation. Should a new club lose its first two or three contests, then comes perhaps the most critical time in its career. Should, unfortunately, failure probably bring dissatisfaction, and when this element makes itself apparent, it needs careful management and tact to weather the storm.

Furthermore, the officials will have to use their persuasive powers to retain the "danglers." By this term, I mean those players—and we find them in every club—who at the first lost match want to go off to another club, and blame the management, other players, or anybody else, as long as it isn't themselves, for the team's non-success. A club that is in a winning vein can always obtain and retain players.

You may say don't have "danglers" in your club. Well, I agree, certainly; but a club is hard to get together without them, and very often it occurs that circumstances render it impossible to include some of these luke-warm individuals in a team.

Captains, secretaries, and officials should never lose sight of the fact that when one team wins its opponents must lose; we all can't win. Then it is more merit due to a team that keeps together, although losing match after match, than there is to a team that is always winning.

Should your club have lost its first few matches, I recommend that you call a general meeting of the club, and discuss the matter of your non-success. Let the captain express his views on the situation, and then let any member of the team speak and give his advice. Consider where your weak points are, whether in the defence or the attack, and how the defects can be remedied.

It may be that the club has been dogged with ill luck, and matches have been lost by the odd goal only. If this be the case, then the team does not need very much reconstruction, and it only requires a little of the "We are going to win" spirit, and the next match will see you come out with flying colours, and confidence will again spring up in the hearts of players and supporters.

With respect to the club that has lost badly, say, by four or five goals, then something more than mere talk is essential. Probably new players are required, and these are hard to obtain, especially by a losing team; and, what is more, nearly all players worth anything will by now have got fixed up.

A general meeting is certainly the place for a junior club to discuss the question of new players, as those members present will doubtless know of likely men who want to join a team. What is better, they may know of a cousin, brother, or friend who is doing well with a younger club, and who is desirous of having a trial with one of a little higher grade.

These are the players you want. Perhaps the inclusion of one or two of such will change the whole character of the team, and success will again come your way.

Map out some defined method of attack, and try to arouse the enthusiasm of the players. If you do, "wins" are sure to come your way. Should the grumbling element be very strong, let one or two of the worst culprits go; your club will certainly be better without them.

Captains should try to encourage their men to be of good heart, and not show the "white feather." By the latter phrase, I mean don't let players get down in the mouth if know we shall lose; we did last week"; spirit. It is determination, as well as good play, that wins matches.

Mutual fellowship and unselfishness are other essentials. Cultivate these traits, and your club is bound to be a success.

When you lose a match don't blame the referee; he may have made a mistake, but more often he doesn't. Players are too apt to lay blame on that much-abused official—the football referee. How often we hear of off-side goals, disallowed goals, all kinds of goals, being discussed by players who are absolutely ignorant of the offside rule, and the laws of the game generally. If players would only study the rules a little more, we should hear much less of this dissatisfaction.

THE END.

ASTON VILLA.

The History of the Famous Midland Club Briefly Retold.

IN the year 1874 a band of young men connected with Aston Villa Wesleyan Church, Lozells, Birmingham, decided to form a football club. It was quite a small and humble affair, and for some time the members of the newly-formed club were quite content to kick a ball about on various pieces of unenclosed ground in the vicinity of Heathfield Road. After that they played matches on Aston Park, and had for their deadly rivals the old Birmingham Cricket and Football Club, whose field was Aston Lower Grounds, at that time the home of Birmingham sport. Such was the beginning of the great Aston Villa Football Club, to-day one of the greatest professional organisations throughout the land.

It is probable that the club would have remained obscure and unimportant all its days had it not been for the fact that one afternoon, when the members were indulging in a punt-about, there appeared on the scene a young fellow, named George Ramsey, who watched the somewhat crude shooting and dribbling of the players with great interest.

A Clever Player.

George Ramsey was a footballer of no mean repute. He had played the game in Scotland, and had made his mark in the football circles of Glasgow. He was a small man, active as a cat, and trimly built—every inch a footballer. His coming to Birmingham was due to business, and this was the first time since his arrival in the great Midland city that he had had an opportunity of kicking a football.

Having stood on the line for a while, George Ramsey asked that he might join in. The members of the club were only too glad to welcome the new-comer, who there and then gave them an object-lesson in the art of dribbling. The Aston Villa team were astounded. They had never seen anyone play like this young man. His control of the ball was amazing, and the way he eluded those who endeavoured to rob him of the leather seemed almost uncanny.

Quick to seize their opportunity, George Ramsey was asked to become a permanent member of the club; and within a very short time he was, willy-nilly, elected captain of the Villa team. Under his splendid leadership the play of the members improved marvellously.

Of course, it took a long time to lick the talent into shape, and for some considerable period the Aston Villa Club was content with a strictly local programme. Such strong Black Country clubs as Wednesbury Old Athletic, Wednesbury Strollers, and Stafford Road were above their mettle, and they could by no means claim to rank as the leading Birmingham football organisations.

Two More New Recruits

Presently, however, there came on the scene those two wonderful players, Archie and Andy Hunter, and the brothers helped considerably to further improve the play of the Villa team. They schooled the members in short passing, long passing, and general combination whilst on the field, and thus brought the play of the Aston Villa Club to a very high point of excellence. It may be here stated that Archie Hunter was frequently connected with Ayr Thistle, whilst his brother Andy had previously been indentified with Third Lanark.

Whilst much of the early success of the Aston Villa Club was due to George Ramsey, it was Archie Hunter who actually laid the foundations of its fortunes. It was a lucky chance that brought the redoubtable Archie into touch with the club. He would have attached himself to a rival organisation, but for the fact that he could not find the ground. Hearing that the Villa Club, and learning that already several Scotsmen were playing for it, Archie threw in his lot with them, and, with the help of his brother Andy, moulded and

improved the play

of the team beyond recognition.

It is sad to relate that the brothers Hunter both died prematurely from that deadly scourge consumption, as did John Hunter, a third brother, who played for Third Lanark. Archie Hunter captained the Aston Villa team for nine years, George Ramsey having been skipper the four seasons previous to his occupying that position.

Soon after Archie Hunter arrived on the scene, the Aston Villa Club obtained a ground of their very own on the Wellington Road field at Perry Barr. It certainly left much to be desired, for it was by no means level, and there were a number of trees along the touchlines, and a pond not far away. One end of the field was really on the side of a small hill. However, it passed muster in those early days, and it was not until the spectators began to come in fair numbers that the trees were removed.

It is on record that on more than one match during the first season that the Villa Club played on the Wellington Road field that there were only two onlookers—George Ramsey's brother and Mr. William MacGregor, "the Father of the League." Mr. MacGregor himself was then to be the case. In course of time, however, the club got better known, and on one notable occasion the noble sum of 5s. 3d. was raked in as gate-money, much to the delight of the treasurer.

(This splendid article will be continued next Saturday week.)

THE CORSINGHAM RIVALS.

A Fine Complete Football Story

By FRED LOWTHER.

THE 1st CHAPTER.

The Fight.

"YOU'RE done, Jack; let's stop it!"

"Yes, old man, do. It'll be a draw, and no shame to either of you."

The speakers were Frank Tyrrell and Geoff Deane, two Corsingham College boys. On the former's knee sat Jack Playfair, breathing heavily, but with the flame of fight still as bright as ever in his eyes.

"Sponge away!" was his curt response. "I'm not caving in yet. I'm jolly well keeping on as long as I can see!"

"Time!"

Prompt at the call Playfair rose to face his opponent, Hardwick, for the eleventh round.

Yes, the eleventh round. Not often that a school fight gets into double figures, but such was the case with the tussle which was waged on the greensward among the beeches of Downsford Park, two miles from Corsingham.

"Wonder how long they'll keep on?" muttered Layley, one of Hardwick's supporters.

"Till they jolly well drop!" replied Hardwick's second, Carby. "Our man isn't going to give Playfair best if I know it."

"Go it, Jack!" said Tyrrell, with grim satisfaction. Though the hard-drawn breath of the fighters came sobbingly through their nostrils, Playfair was hitting out with the force of a kicking mule.

"No end to the beggar's strength," sighed Deane.

"Toughest chap in Corsingham, I'll bet," said Tyrrell.

"Wonder how it will end?"

"Time enough for the end when it comes; and that won't be for a bit, yet. Jack's going stronger than ever. Oh, well hit!"

"Ugh!" A queer-sounding grunt that of Playfair's, an expression of mingled pain and satisfaction. Parrying a lunge of Hardwick's with his left, he had just got in a heavy body blow, which made his opponent gasp and reel.

Recovering, he pressed Playfair hard, and a furious bit of in-fighting took place, in which the dull thudding of each blow was marked by the grating breaths of giver and receiver.

Rousing all his flagging forces, Playfair managed to beat Hardwick off, and a moment later landed home a whizzing right-hander on the point of the chin, which sent his antagonist to grass. Jack almost went there himself, for his brain was rocking in a sickening fit of dizziness. The timekeeper's voice, trembling with excitement, began to count out the seconds. Hardwick made an effort to rise, but failed.

He lay still for two seconds, then tried again, for though every nerve and sinew of his bruised body was calling for rest, the lust of battle was still raging fiercely in mind and heart.

His second attempt was successful, though he was a pitiable sight as he staggered to his feet. Again Frank Tyrrell said that the fight should be stopped, but Hardwick's second only smiled in reply.

"You can stop it at any moment," he said sneering, "by withdrawing your champion and giving us the fight. But short of that—well—Go on, Hardwick. Well hit, sir!"

Tit, tat! Thud, thud! It might have been a second round instead of the twelfth; but the pace was too furious to last long. Hardwick's right and Playfair's left got home together with equally overpowering effects, and the two went down just as the timekeeper called the end of the round. And when time was called again, neither of the combatants could respond to it, neither had strength enough left even to try. They had fought all out, and they were too well matched to be able to fight to a finish; and it was with very evident relief that Langley, the timekeeper, declared the match drawn.

The relief seemed to be shared by all present except Carby. If was heard to say that his man was quite willing to go on, and that there was no sense in having the thing declared a draw; there was no satisfaction in such a result. He would rather have lost, he said.

"All right, Carby," came the quiet voice of Geoff Deane, a resolute-looking, grey-eyed fellow, who was helping Tyrrell to attend to Playfair; "I'm glad you look at it that way, and if you want a definite result, you'd better try to win it yourself. Hardwick and Playfair can do no more, so suppose you and I start in? I'm quite ready, if you are."

Carby paled.

"Oh," he stuttered, "that's nothing to do with it! There was to be a fight between Hardwick and Playfair, because Playfair called Hardwick a liar, and——"

"Yes," said Deane cuttingly; "and Hardwick had only spoken what he thought was the truth; because he repeated what he had heard on the word of honour of his precious friend Carby. Hardwick has fought for what Carby did, as Carby's too clever a coward to fight for himself!"

"Oh, hold on there!" blustered Carby. "I can't stand that, you know!"

"I don't want you to," said Deane; "I'm trying to stir you up. I want you to answer me in the only possible way. There's bad blood between us, Carby, and you've got other fellows to fight your battles for you long enough. And now I'm asking you to do a little for yourself—to fight for your own hand!"

"But why should I fight with you?" said Carby, glancing at Geoff Deane through half-closed eyes. "We've no quarrel."

"No?" was the reply. "Who tried to ruin me at the school because he was jealous of my being appointed skipper of the football eleven? Who turned some of my best chums—and some of the best players—against me, and got them to leave the eleven? Who poisoned the minds of Hardwick, there, and Langley, too, and Donnelly against me? Ugh! I could ask questions like those for an hour on end, but the answer to them all would be the same—Carby! Carby, who won't fight when fairly challenged, and must be shamed into standing up in his own defence. Carby! The same Carby that I strike in the teeth—so! There Carby, will you fight now?"

There was no reply for it now. Carby knew that if he refused his influence over Hardwick, Langley, and the rest would be gone. Langley acted as his second, while Tyrrell officiated for Geoff Deane.

This second fight did not extend to eleven rounds. Far from it; for halfway through the second, Carby was knocked clean off his feet and on to his back, and failed to come up within the prescribed time.

"I understand now," thought Playfair, "why the beggar gets other fellows to fight his battles for him. Very good reason; can't fight himself for damaged dates. And his action—for!—he looked as if he was doing paper-hanging on piecework!"

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

The School House Match.

THAT great day in Downsford Park had marked the close of the summer term.

Since then the holidays had passed, and now Corsingham Station was echoing once again to the shouts of the boys returning to the old school on the hill. As Geoff Deane and Langley, dodging the tumult, his tanned face grew grave as Carby passed him with a sneering remark to his companion, Donnelly.

Little wonder that Geoff's thoughts went back to the day of the great fight, and that he felt vaguely anxious about what the coming weeks would bring. Hardwick and Playfair had only had all the more respect for one another after their punishing fight, but Deane knew that Carby's enmity against him burned all the more intensely since the short, sharp lesson given on the greensward among the beeches.

The junior skipper was roused from his reverie by the touch of a firm hand upon his arm. Turning, he was greeted by Bradley, of the Sixth, the captain of the Corsingham College first eleven.

"Look here, Deane," said the prefect, "I've got some news for you. The date of the inter-House match for the Alberley Cup has been fixed. It's much earlier than usual this year. On Wednesday week, in fact. But there's a special reason for it."

Deane looked up inquiringly.

"Mr. Alberley himself," continued Bradley, "is paying a visit to the Head next week, and the match has been fixed so that he may witness it. He has never been able to do so before, so I hope you will put up a specially good fight. Remember what's depending on it. If Milner's goes down this time—well, you know what that will mean."

Geoff Deane nodded rather blankly. He knew what it would mean only too well. In the early days of Corsingham College that famous school had comprised two Houses only, known as the School House and Milner's. Though the number had since been added to, the two old Houses regarded themselves as being in a class apart, and between themselves a healthy rivalry in matters both of sport and scholarship had always been carried on with unflagging vigour.

This rivalry had been encouraged when a former master, Mr. Alberley—a most enthusiastic athlete, and a double Blue—had presented a cup to be competed for by Association teams representing the two original Houses of Corsingham. The main condition was to the effect that the elevens must be drawn from the Fourth-Form boys of the respective Houses; another was that in the event of the cup being won in any three successive years by the same House, it should become the absolute property of that House.

Geoff Deane's uneasiness will be accounted for when it is added that the School House had already been successful two years in succession, so that another win would give them the coveted trophy for their own. The junior captain knew that it would be a hard job for his own House—Milner's—to put up an eleven capable of preventing a third and decisive victory.

"I know there are long odds against you, young 'un," continued Bradley, "and the time's very short. But you'll do your best, I know. Mr. Alberley was House-master at Milner's, and you don't want to let him see his old House be having its colours lowered on Wednesday. Get up the strongest lot you can, and—well, don't let anything personal—any outside matter—stand in the way."

Deane knew very well to what these concluding words of the prefect referred, and they kept his thoughts busy during the drive up to the college. Arriving there, he made his way along the corridor upon which the Fourth-Form studies opened. But passing by the door of his own special domain, Study No. 5, he knocked at that belonging to Study No. 3.

Now, Study No. 5 was occupied by Carby, and his friends, Hardwick, Langley, and Donnelly. These four were all good footballers, and, in order to give Milner's a chance in the coming contest, they would have to be included in the eleven. And Geoff Deane would have no choice in the matter. The word Bradley had meant by not letting anything personal stand in the way of putting up a strong lot.

After what had happened at the end of the summer term, it was a very hard thing for the junior captain to do; but Geoff Deane was not the fellow to shirk his plain duty, and when a very hard thing lay in the path of it he usually tackled the hard thing right away.

His pulse quickened a little as he knocked at the portal of the enemy's camp; then, in answer to Carby's drawling summons, he pushed it open and stepped forward.

He found himself confronting the four tenants of the study, together with Douglas Hope. Tom Langley's cousin, who was lounging by the mantelpiece. Hope had come to Corsingham only a few weeks before the end of last term, and very little was known about him yet.

"I want to have a few words with you fellows," began Geoff, "if you don't mind."

"Oh, no," drawled Carby, "I don't think we mind—very much. You see, we always make allowances. A few words. I think you said? Well, anything will do to pass the time until tea. I don't think you'll find us hard to amuse. Fire away!"

The sneering words touched Deane on the raw, and he had a hard struggle to keep back an angry reply. But he was there to speak for the House, not for himself, and he managed to smother his irritation.

"I suppose you know," he said, fixing his grey eyes straight on Carby's, "that the inter-House match for the Alberley Cup takes place on Wednesday week?"

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

Swearing a Truce.

"WE did hear something of it," returned Carby; "but, of course, we weren't much interested. It'll be a very tame affair, I expect. Last year we had the pleasure of watching Milner's get jolly well licked; and, of course, we shall have the same pleasure again on Wednesday week; only this time, of course, School House will win the cup for 'keeps.'"

"I should soon very pleased with the notion," said Deane indignantly. "But it's just to prevent the School House winning the cup for 'keeps' that I've come here now. Instead of sitting up gloating over the defeat of your own House, Carby, it would suit you better if you came out then and did to play the galley, and help Milner's to win. That's just what I'm asking you fellows to do. I don't want our bickering to be the means of Milner's losing the Alberley Cup, and so I ask you to put it aside for the time, and join in with the rest of us, to give the old House a chance."

Langley, Hardwick, and Donnelly started, and exchanged glances. Deane could see that all three were inclined to accept his proposal. But they left Carby to act as their spokesman, and Carby did not exactly see eye to eye with his chums.

"Ah," he drawled, "very interesting position! The noble captain is at his wits' end to find a team; so, for his credit's sake, he doesn't mind putting his pride in his pocket a bit. Geoffrey Deane, Esq., eating humble pie in Study No. 5! Good thing it's not generally known, or the whole school would be crowding in to see the show. I'm sure that——"

But Carby stopped abruptly. He saw that Deane was roused, and, though brave enough with his tongue, he did not care to provoke anything physical.

"You're sure what, Carby?" said the junior skipper. "Forgotten—eh? Well, I'm sure that talk is cheap, anyway. I'm not eating humble pie. I'm speaking for the House, not for myself. And as for your sneers at my pride as captain—well, if my being captain prevents you four from joining in, I'm ready to stand down right away. I'll resign the position. I'll do anything to help the School House carry off the Alberley Cup. So there!"

This declaration took Carby by surprise. Before he could find a reply, Langley got up, and said hurriedly:

"That's enough, Deane. You're going to be captain right to the end, for one, and ready to help you win the match on Wednesday."

"I, too," said Hardwick briefly, with a defiant glance at Carby.

"And me similarly," said Donnelly. "For little things have got to give way to big ones. Our rivalry's all very well. Five, is the little one, but Milner's v. School House is the big one. So take notice, all whom it may concern, that the inter-study squabbling is to be let alone severely until the inter-House match is settled. There, Carby, it's very pretty little piece, and I've said it very nicely, haven't I?"

But Carby was looking very sick. The prompt consent of his three comrades had taken all the wind out of his sails.

"Well," he said, with a poor attempt at cheerfulness, "I suppose I'll have to follow the majority. But it's understood, of course, that this arrangement only affects the cup match. We're not coming into the eleven for good, and when Wednesday's contest is over we go back to the old terms."

"You mean it's only a truce, not an alliance," said Hardwick. "Well, let it go at

(Continued on the next page.)

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that, for the present. Perhaps, when Wednesday's contest is over, we'll have something more to say about it."

Carby darted a venomous look at the speaker, Hardwick was certainly getting very "uppish," and he seemed to have the cheek to entertain ideas of his own upon a subject which Carby had already thrashed out and settled. Hardwick would have to be put back in his place—not just then, however, for Geoff Deane had his team-book out, and was entering the names. Carby's was put down last, its owner remarking that he would be glad to play in his old place, centre-forward, but that he feared he was rather out of practice.

"Well," said Deane, "as soon as I take the team-list to Bradley, he will arrange several good practice games for us."

"Good!" said Langley. "The truce is sworn, the hatchet's buried for the time, and we must play up all we know."

On leaving Study No. 5, Deane went straight to Bradley, who, on scanning the *list*, squeezed the junior's hand in a hearty grip, and said:

"Good, most good!"

It wasn't much, perhaps, but from Bradley it meant a great deal.

"Get 'em out on the upper field to-morrow, Deane, at three sharp," were his parting words, "and I'll have a scratch team ready to put you through your facings."

Returning to his own domain, Geoff found Tyrrell walking round and round the circular table, closely pursued by Playfair, who was holding a shiny new topper in his hand.

"Here, what d'you think of this, Geoff?" exclaimed Playfair. "Ever see a chap for wriggling out of a bargain like this chap Tyrrell? We saw Grasshopper at the station with a queer-looking parcel, and Tyrrell said he would eat his best hat if it wasn't a gramophone trumpet. Well, this is Tyrrell's best hat, but the owner absolutely refuses even to taste the band, though it's been proved to him that the thing isn't what he said it was."

"Well, what is it, then?" asked Geoff, looking at the big, hollow metal affair which lay on the table.

"Oh, it's a megaphone!" explained Morton, generally known as the Grasshopper. "A friend of mine used it to coach a racing four on the river. He used to ride his jigger along the towing-path; but one day, when he was shouting to the bow oar, he had a nasty spill over a snag, and very nearly made a hole in the water. Anyhow, the handle-bar of his jigger made a hole in the megaphone right enough. He threw it aside as useless; but I thought it might come in useful, so I boned it, and patched up the hole with the end of a salmon-tin. Nobby says it's it!"

"Well, it looks all right," admitted Geoff.

"Yes, rather! And you bet it sounds all right, too. Of course, with the patch on it sounds a trifle weird, but that makes it all the better for the purpose."

"What purpose do you mean?" queried Deane.

"Why, to cheer on Milner's to the fray, of course, on the great day of the Alberley Cup match."

"Now, then, that'll do, Grasshopper," laughed Geoff. "There'll be no chance for you to go blowing into megaphones on the match day. You'll want all your breath for those dashing right wing rushes of yours."

"Oh, I don't mean to use it myself," explained Morton. "I'm going to lend it to Freddy Ward; and if he doesn't keep on shouting the old war-cry, 'Mop 'em up, Milner's—Mop 'em up, Milner's!' till he's jolly well black in the face, I've promised him faithfully that I'll clump him over the head with it, good and hard."

"Well," said Geoff, "I hope Milner's will be able to mop 'em up on Wednesday week, and here's the little list of those I'm depending on to do it."

The little list was eagerly scanned, and soon there were exclamations of surprise.

"What! Carby at centre-forward!" cried Tyrrell.

"Donnelly, Deane, and Langley, half-backs!" read Morton, in amazement.

But the big surprise was reserved for Playfair.

"Backs, Playfair. Hardwick," he stuttered. "Playfair, Hardwick! We two, and no others. My aunt! Last time we—humph!—played together, the result was a draw. Well, what shall be, shall be."

He sat down, and, putting on the fogborn voice he often assumed, said, slowly and impressively:

"Well, I hope that the School House forwards will be frequently giving us looks-up; for, if left to ourselves, H. and I will be sure to get putting our dukes up!"

"Do, do," said Deane. "All that's barred till after the match. We've sworn a truce, and they're joining in to help keep up Milner's credit. So, of course, you chaps will receive them in the same spirit as they're offering themselves."

"Right you are, Geoff," said Tyrrell. "You ought to go in for the diplomatic service, old man. When you went in to Study No. 5, we sat waiting for you to be thrown out."

"Dare say I would have been," said Deane, "if I had let Carby's talk affect me."

"Queer lot, Carby!" muttered Playfair. "Spite of my mill with Hardwick, I'm sure we'll play all right together, and Langley and Donnelly are both decent chaps. But, between ourselves, I wish we could have had another centre. What about that cousin of Langley's? I believe that's the position."

"Quite so," said Geoff; "but when Carby offered, I couldn't refuse him in favour of a new chap whom we'd never seen play."

No more was said, and next afternoon the first practice game was played. Carby soon got over his rustiness, and managed to score twice against the scratch goalkeeper, who was by no means a bad custodian. As to the others, the first strangeness quickly wore off, and they settled down well together. Langley and Donnelly, the new additions to the half-back line, gave great promise; while at full-back, the two combined to the advantage of the School House soon made Playfair and Hardwick forget their old enmity.

"Very fair show," was Bradley's verdict. "With a week's practice, you should do very well, Deane."

Geoff took care that the practice was given; and, though Carby grumbled that he was being overtrained, the others all seemed the better for it. In their week the strangely-assembled eleven bucked up wonderfully, seeming to be inspired throughout with Geoff Deane's enthusiasm. So it happened that when the eventful Wednesday came round the prospects of School House carrying off the cup as their own were not quite so rosy as they had been.

The great day broke bright and clear, with just enough of a nip in the air to nerve the players to their liveliest form. The rival Houses of Corsingham were simmering with excitement, and the field was lined with eager spectators a good hour before the time of starting play. Perched on the roof of the pavilion was Freddy Ward, tightly grasping Morton's patched megaphone, while his chum Dyce, to clear his throat for the cheering that was to come, kept feeding him with black-currant jujubes. However, the jujubes had begun to pall, and Ward was all impatient to begin; so when a burst of hearty cheering ran round the field, Freddy hurriedly swallowed the jujubs he was engaged on, and raised the megaphone to his lips.

Hardwick's right and Playfair's left got home together with equally overpowering effects, and the two went down just as the timekeeper called the end of the round.

"Good old Milner's!" he bellowed. "Play up, boys! Go it—go it! Mop 'em up, Milner's! M-aw-aw-p 'em up!"

"Steady on, juggins!" shrieked Dyce, trying to plug up the megaphone with the jujube-box. "You can't expect our chaps to start mopping 'em up in the dressing-room. The teams aren't out yet."

"Then what did all those silly owls cheer for?" asked Freddy.

"For Mr. Alberley and the doc., of course. They've just taken their places on the stand. But here they are, Freddy! Now's your chance! Let it rip good-ho!"

Freddy roared with all his force as the teams took the field, and the crowd responded nobly, in spite of its splint. The notes produced varied from a long-drawn groan to a loud, angry bellow, while now and again came a shrill squeak, just to relieve the monotony. Freddy Ward wanted Milner's to win, and if the megaphone could give them any help he meant them to have it.

The ball was kicked off, and, after a little "woolly" play, the opposing elevens settled down to one of the hardest-fought games ever seen on the playing-fields of old Corsingham. The sanguine followers of School House soon saw that their men would have all their work cut out to pull off the third win.

Carby was playing well, and giving the redoubtable School House backs, Brand and Whitman, lots of trouble. Donnelly and Langley were supporting their captain with all their might; while behind, Playfair and Hardwick, the old feud quite forgotten in the ardour of the game, met and turned again and again the dashing charges of the School House forwards.

"Pity," thought Deane, "that it's only a truce. I wish it could be an alliance for always."

THE 4th CHAPTER.
Entente Cordiale.

At half-time they changed over without either side having scored. It was soon made plain that Milner's attack had lost a lot of its sting; in fact, their centre-forward seemed to have cracked up altogether. He muffed his shots, fooled his passes, and let the School House players romp round him generally. The display was pitiful, after the dashing show he had made in the first half.

"Good thing there's no score up!" muttered Hardwick, preparing to meet a rush.

He cleared, and then settled down with Playfair to defend their goal. They were grimly resolved that, whether their own forwards scored or not, they would do their utmost to keep the School House forwards from passing them.

Well, it was a hard job, but they did it. No goal was scored against Milner's. But Brand and Whitman did as much for their side, and so what was recognised as the hardest tussle that had ever been waged for the Alberley Cup ended in a result unknown before—a draw, 0—0.

When the referee's shrill whistle blast put an end to the game, Freddy Ward followed it by a long-drawn, melancholy roar on the megaphone, a roar which might have been uttered by a grizzly bear disappointed in catching a nice bun. He let the instrument drop on his lap, and looked round dolefully.

"No score!" he groaned. "A draw! My word! And I've roared till I've given myself hiccough in the lips and shaking palsy in the windpipe, and delirious tremblings in the vocal chords, and it hasn't done a bit of good!"

"Yes, it has," urged Dyce. "The School House buffers haven't got the cup yet. There'll have to be a replay, and while there's life there's hope. So buck up, old man! Here, have another jujube!"

There was only one subject of talk in Milner's House that evening. The replay had been fixed for the Saturday, so that Mr. Alberley, who had been highly pleased with the keenness shown in that day's contest, might see the matter decided.

"Well, Jack," said Deane to Playfair, after tea, in Study No. 5, "Hardwick and you played up like brothers, I must say! If it hadn't been for your defence, it wouldn't have been a draw."

"Oh," said Playfair, with a sly wink, "it's not the first time Hardwick and I have been very busy together, and ended up with a draw —— Hallo!"

There was a tap at the door, and, in answer to Deane's "Come in!" Hardwick and Langley presented themselves.

"Sit down, you chaps," said Geoff. "You haven't come to tell us that the truce is ended, have you? You aren't going to leave us in the lurch with the replay on Saturday—oh?"

"Of course not," said Langley. "The truce was to last until the contest is decided, and, of course, we are striking in until then. We all think so, all except Carby, and, of course, he doesn't count—not now."

"How do you mean," asked Deane, "doesn't count—not now?"

"He has drawn out," said Langley. "He's not playing again."

"Oh! Doesn't feel fit, I suppose," said Geoff. "I was very sorry to see him crack up the way he did after the interval."

"Huh!" said Hardwick. "I dare say you'll be sorrier still when you know that he cracked up on purpose. He did his best to give the match away."

"What?" exclaimed the occupants of Study No. 5.

"Fact," said Hardwick. "We know Carby, and we twigged what he was after. Of course, the other three of us did our best to make up for it, when we taxed him with it just now; he didn't deny it, but said we were soft-headed fools for not doing the same. In fact, he said so much that we got fed up with Carby; and the result is, he's seeing about a shift to another study, and is giving notice on his behalf, that he won't be playing on Saturday."

"But why should he play such a low-down trick?" asked Deane.

"Why?" replied Hardwick. "Because he couldn't stand us breaking away from him the other night when you came to the study to make the truce. But we've been under Carby's dirty thumb too long, and I'm jolly glad it's done with. That's one good turn you've done us, Deane."

After a little more talk about Carby, Geoff said:

"But who can we put in his place?"

"Well," suggested Langley, "if you've got no one else, you might give my cousin, Douglas Hope, a show. He's going to take Carby's place in Study No. 5, and I dare say he'll be able to take his place in the field as well."

Geoff Deane interviewed Hope at once, and the matter was soon arranged. Langley's cousin certainly had all the outward signs of a speedy forward. The deep chest, the slim loins, the well-knit limbs, every curve of the lithe figure suggested pace and agility. Deane wondered why he had not played before; but the fact was that Hope, who was by no means a duffer, had seen what a hold the unworthy Carby had gained over his cousin and chums, and had not been able to take much interest in anything until that gift Carby walked. As this was now done, Douglas Hope was all eagerness to take a part in defending the record of Milner's House. That night, Geoff Deane retired to rest well content, and full of the liveliest hopes. If Milner's had not won the match, they had at least prevented the School House from winning the cup outright. That fact, Geoff knew, would give his chums a lot of confidence, and nerve them to still more vigorous efforts when Saturday came.

Nor was that all. The altered tone of the No. 5 fellows, now that Carby had been unmasked, made Deane feel hopeful that the temporary truce between the rival factions might be extended into something more lasting. But it would be time enough to see about that when the great match had been lost and won.

The eagerly-awaited Saturday afternoon came round. Again the Head and his guest, Mr. Alberley, took their places on the stand, and again Freddy Ward and the megaphone took their places on the pavilion roof. Again Dyce ministered to his friend with jujubes. But Freddy was very much out of spirits. He didn't approve of that funny new fellow, Hope, appearing as centre-forward.

"Never saw the beggar kick a ball yet," he grumbled.

He thought it was all up with Milner's chances. He hadn't heard enough to blow, and so, after greeting the appearance of the teams with a wheezy row, he dropped the trumpet, and settled down to watch the discomfiture of his champions.

However, the absence of the megaphone music was never noticed. All the spectators soon had something else to occupy their attention. Wednesday's game had been a regular rattler, but it was doomed to take a very far back seat when compared with Saturday's. Five minutes from the kick-off, the School House men, led in dashing style by their centre, Watts, were pressing Milner's defence very hard. The School House supporters yelled as if the Alberley Cup were already as good as gained. They were just a trifle previous, however.

Langley, rising after being charged down, seemed to be in difficulties with his ankle. When he got on his feet, he threw himself into it with good heart, but went down heavily again, and this time he was compelled to leave the field.

Freddy Ward groaned.

"Only ten men! We never had much chance, but we've not got a ghost of one now."

"Cheer up, old grouser!" said Dyce. "We're not dead yet! Have another jujube! Ha, ha! See that!"

Playfair had just cleared with a splendid return to mid-field. Douglas Hope, as if determined to make up for his cousin's absence, was on the ball like a flash. He began a run down that made the spectators hold their breath. On bounded Hope, with Hope just behind it, keeping it moving with light touches given in his stride. Whitman moved out, charging the centre-forward, but the ball had been passed to the Grasshopper on the extreme right. Morton drifted towards the corner flag, and before Brand could tackle him, sent in a long shot which missed the post by an inch, and no more.

"Near thing!" shuckled Dyce. "Better luck next time!"

The next time was not long in coming. The School House seemed powerless to hold Hope back, and down he came again. This time he twisted the leather over to the light-hearted, long-legged Tyrrell, the outside-left. Tyrrell shot, and it took the keeper all his time to catch and clear with a hurried throw.

The excitement round the ropes was growing intense. Even Freddy Ward had been convinced by this time that the new recruit could kick a ball, and in a very effective way, too. Geoff Deane thought, with grim satisfaction, that to-day's centre-forward was not likely to crack up after changing ends. The other members of the team seemed to be inspired by the

presence and example of this agile youth, whose swarthy cheeks were only slightly flushed, and whose big black eyes were all agleam with the spirit of the grand old game.

"Are we down-hearted?" chuckled Dyce, nearly tumbling off the roof in his excitement. "I decidedly do not think. Oh, go it, Hope! Go it, my hearty!"

Again the new centre-forward was charging down the field, dodging and dribbling and passing in a wonderful way.

"One sec. he's there. Next sec., where is he?" said Dyce. "My word, it's Douglas Hope first, and greased lightning a bad second!"

This time the centre saw an opportunity of acting in his way. He dodged Whitman, and before Brand could tackle, he sent the leather goalwards like a roundshot from an old English three-decker.

Stephens, the School House goalkeeper, made a bold attempt to save. He staggered, then stood with raised arms, gazing vacantly. He did not seem to understand where the ball was. Well, the ball was in the net. He did not seem to understand what it meant. Well, the crowd soon let him know.

"Goal—goal!" they shouted. "Bravo, Milner's! Mop 'em up, Milner's!" they yelled, while from the pavilion roof the megaphone boomed and squeaked like a whole menagerie gone mad.

Yes, it was a goal for Milner's. As the ball was centred, Playfair looked meaningly at his old foe, Hardwick, and Hardwick returned the look.

"One up," said Hardwick.

"And if we—" said Playfair.

"Quite so," said Hardwick. If the backs could keep up the defence, the match was won.

Well, the backs did keep up the defence, and the match was won for Milner's. Not by one to nil, not even by two to nil, but by the magnificent result of three to nil. Those three goals were all scored by the new centre-forward, Douglas Hope, who, on the conclusion of the most exciting match ever played at Corsingham, was carried shoulder high to the pavilion, where, if it hadn't been for Dyce, Freddy Ward would have shown his appreciation by letting the patched megaphone drop on the forward's head.

Tom Langley was grinning, in spite of his ankle.

"I had a notion!" chuckled he, "that when I was knocked out my precious cousin would play up quite enough for any ordinary two."

The Milnerites were jubilant, the School House guns had been spiked, and to gain the Alberley Cup they have to make the three successive wins all over again.

For Geoff Deane what was perhaps the most memorable moment of that exciting day was still to come. It was when the players, having changed, were making their way back to their studies to wile away the hour or so which must elapse before the big tea in Hall, at which Mr. Alberley was to take the seat of honour.

As Deane turned into the Fourth-Form corridor, his nostrils were greeted by the pleasing odour of hot buttered toast. At the same moment he heard the cheerful occupants of Study No. 5 come along behind him. He turned to meet them with a rather queer expression in his grey eyes.

"Well, you fellows," he said, "is this the end of the truce, or—"

"Or," said Hardwick. "See here, Deane, this has meant a lot for us. Getting away from that waster, Carby, for one thing; and then having the chance to play up side by side with you of the old House. I feel like living again, and so, if you like—and I speak for my chums here, too—we won't end the truce, but will make it a permanent alliance."

"An entente cordiale, in fact," said Douglas Hope.

"Exactly," said Tyrrell's voice from inside the study. "And why can't you ask the gentlemen to step in and taste the brew? Tea in Hall's all right, but they're bound to be peckish after the cross-Channel swim, and a regular Ben Nevis of toast, and I've got the brew stewed to a turn."

Geoff Deane pushed open the door. Tyrrell cheered as the No. 5's filed in and took their places. The Corsingham rivals were reconciled.

THE END.

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ADAM RUDMAN, a gamekeeper on a certain Colonel Heathcote's estate. Adam and Snipe get on very well together.

Some time later, Snipe learns that a certain DEXTER SLADE, who owns a small piece of land adjoining Colonel Heathcote's, puts down rasins to tempt the pheasants over the border on to his ground, and then shoots them. Adam Rudman is much incensed at this, and Snipe thinks he will try and put a stop to his games. It seems that the law cannot touch Slade.

Morton Lascelles, a rich local magnate, receives a visit from Dutch Dan, who seems to have some hold over the man. It appears that Lascelles had paid Dan a large sum of money in the past to get a certain child put out of the way. Dan startles Morton by suddenly announcing that he did not carry out his work, and that the child is still alive!

The child in question is none other than Snipe. Dutch Dan hopes to blackmail Lascelles on the strength of this, but that worthy will not believe the poacher until he has seen the child with his own eyes; therefore, Dutch Dan does his best to get Snipe into his clutches again, but without success, thanks to some mysterious unknown and unseen person, who has aided Snipe on several occasions.

Rudman goes away on a visit, and Snipe learns that a gang of navvies who are working close by intend making a raid on Colonel Heathcote's coverts. Snipe warns Cleave, the under-keeper, but that worthy will not believe him.

A few nights later Snipe creeps out to await the approach of the poaching gang, and nearly falls into the hands of an entirely different band—the Crowles. The lad dashes off to give warning, but hides at the sound of many heavy feet. It is the gang of navvies approaching, and they are coming straight for the clump of bracken where Snipe is concealed! The ground is open on every side. He is cornered—completely cornered!

(Now read this week's instalment.)

THE 18th CHAPTER.
Snipe's Ruse.

FOR a moment Snipe was panic-stricken. There was no way out. If he jumped up and bolted, a hundred to one a charge of shot would bring him down. There was nothing for it but to stay where he was, and be kicked out like a hard-lying rabbit.

What would happen then he had no idea. The least would be that they would tie him to a tree, gag, and leave him.

In an emergency like this some people go stupid. Others find their wits stimulated. Snipe was one of the latter. In the few seconds that was left him he did some pretty hard thinking, and just as the nearest navvy was within ten yards a brilliant inspiration came to him.

He put his hand into his big inside pocket. Ah, he had some wire snares! What luck!

It was the work of a moment to pull them out, drop his stick, and spring to his feet.

The nearest man gave a hoarse cry of alarm, and pointed his gun straight at Snipe's head.

"Don't shoot!" cried Snipe, in tones of extreme terror. "My, you did give me a start! I thought you was some more keepers."

"What d'yo mean?" growled the navvy, a hard-faced ruffian.

"Why, I've 'ad to run once," whined Snipe. "They near caught me in beyond there. I were just a-settin' a wire or two, and they come almost a-top o' me. But I sneaked out without them seeing me, and were running for the side o' the wood, when I come on you. Gave me a proper start, it did, till I seed you was the chaps they was waiting for!"

"Waiting for us, you say?" growled the leader of the gang, seizing Snipe roughly by the collar.

"I reckon so, from what I 'eard 'em say," replied Snipe, in the same whining tones. "Don't you go for to 'urt me, an' I'll show you where they be."

"How many are there?" asked the navvy suspiciously.

"There ain't only two," replied Snipe—"at least, that's all I seed."

"And 'oo are you?"

"My name's Jim Weat. I be son o' James West, o' Fullerton."

Snipe's ready replies seemed to quell the navvy's suspicions. Plainly, he took him for the poaching youngster he pretended to be.

"All right," he said. "You come along wi' us, an' show where them fratted keepers be. But you let me catch you up to any tricks, an' look out!"

He emphasised his threat by giving the boy an ugly shake—a shake which banished Snipe's last scruples at the trick he meant to play on the gang.

"Go soft," he said. "They ain't far off."

"They won't 'ear us in this wind," put in another rough-looking brute. "Come on, Jarge! We'll fix 'em to rights!"

It was blowing great guns, a fact for which Snipe was truly grateful. The one thing he was really afraid of was that some of the navvies might hear the Crowles' shooting. If they did —well, he hardly cared to think what it meant for him.

Holding him firmly by the arm, the big navvy walked sharply onwards.

"I seed 'em over among them larch-trees," said Snipe, as they approached the spot where the Crowles had been at work.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before there came two shots in rapid succession. Even now Snipe's wits did not fail him.

"They sees you!" he muttered sharply. "Lie down!"

To his intense relief, the big navvy let go his arm.

"Let 'em 'ave it!" he roared furiously. "Shootin' at us afore they knows what we're about!"

There was a crash as half a dozen guns were fired all together. Snipe seized the opportunity to make a wild dive for a bramble-thicket close at hand.

"'Ere stop that kid!" he heard a shout.

One man made a dash at him, but grasped empty air. Snipe was already in the depths of the thicket, worming along like a snake, flat on his stomach.

The thorns were thick as a hedge, but Snipe went through them like a shot. Now the Crowles were shooting in earnest. He heard their guns banging away. The man who was chasing him gave a yell. Some shot had peppered him. Snipe heard him turn and rush away.

Above the shriek of the gale rose wild shouts, and heavy boots crashed through the undergrowth. The navvies were charging. In spite of his fright, Snipe could have shouted with delight at the success of his stratagem.

Another moment, and he found himself on the far side of the thicket. He crawled out, and, cautiously raising his head, glanced back over the top of the bushes.

Down among the larch-trees there was a tremendous din. The navvies had charged right on top of the Crowles. They were all mixed up, fighting like mad. There was no shooting now. Snipe saw dark figures rushing in and out among the tree-trunks, swinging their guns by the barrels. He heard the dull thud of blows, and yells and shrieks from the combatants. Plainly, each party had taken the others for keepers, and in the half-light had not yet found out their mistake.

When they did! Snipe's skin crawled as he thought of their rage. Any one of them would be ready to kill him if they could lay their hands on him. He knew he ought to clear for all he was worth, but for the life of him he could not leave the excitement of the fight.

Phew! There was Jake Crowle down. One of the navvies had clubbed him over the head, and he went over like a falling tree. Snipe wanted to yell "Well done!" In spite of his having led the navvies into this trap, his sympathies were with them. He hoped they would wipe out the Crowles. The boy had never forgotten that horrid moment when Bill Crowle deliberately pitched him down the Dene Hole.

"Give it 'em, lads!" shouted the leader of the navvies. "Let 'em 'ave it!"

And, letting drive, he bowled over another Crowle. But a huge, squat figure sprang in front of him, and Bill Crowle aimed a blow that would have cracked his skull like a teacup if the navvy had not flung up his gun just in time.

Bill's gun struck the other by the lock, and snapped it in two like a rotten stick. Bill flung his gun down, and sprang at the navvy with open arms. The two closed, and, locked in a fierce grip, went reeling and stamping up and down among the close-set tree-trunks.

Three men were on the ground. As far as Snipe could see in the moonlight, two were Crowles and one a navvy. The navvies were getting the best of it. Down went a third Crowle, and the other two turned and bolted away among the trees.

Snipe made a frantic spring, just reached the far side, clutched at an oak bough, missed it, and was in the act of falling back into the deep channel below, when a long, lean arm shot out and seized him.

All this time the ever-increasing gale had been stripping the clouds into tattered fragments, and driving them across the sky. Now suddenly the moon burst out brilliantly, and the floor of the wood was silver light, crossed by wildly-tossing shadows. In the open parts it was almost as light as day.

But Snipe had forgotten his danger in the excitement of the battle between the big navvy and Bill Crowle. He stood on tiptoe, peering over the tops of the bushes.

There was little to choose between the two. The navvy was a bit the taller, but Crowle was the heavier. Round and round they went, each struggling desperately to throw the other.

Now that the rest of the Crowles were gone, the navvy's friends stood round, shouting encouragement, but not otherwise interfering.

In the end it was chance settled it.

Bill Crowle made a mighty effort, and, exerting all his vast strength, lifted his opponent clean off his feet, and tried to dash him down backwards. In the act, his foot caught in a root. He tripped, and both went down together. But the navvy, not Bill, was on top.

Snipe saw the navvy's great hand close on Bill's throat. Bill still struggled furiously, his great body leaping and bouncing under the other's weight. But the choking grip soon settled him. All of a sudden he went out flat and limp, and the spectators roared with glee.

The navvy held him another minute, to make sure, then got stiffly to his feet.

"'E's got 'is gruel," he said, giving the body a contemptuous kick.

One of the others spoke up:

"What's the little gyme? 'E ain't no keeper. Look at 'is gun!"

As he spoke he picked up Bill's gun, and pointed to the cut-off barrels.

The others crowded round, talking excitedly. Snipe could only catch a word or two through the roar of the gale.

"It was that lying kid!" the big navvy shouted suddenly. "I'll flay the young beggar, if I catches 'im!"

The words made Snipe realise the danger of his position. He ducked sharply, and made off.

Unluckily for him, the moon was now shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky. Next moment a shout told him he had been viewed, and at once the whole gang were crashing through the wood behind him.

As they came they spread out fanwise, and Snipe's heart sank to his boots. He had never been in a tighter place, not even when the Crowles chased him in Dene Coppice. Then he had a chance of escape, now he had none.

There was no chance to double. He was forced to run straight ahead, a course which took him right into the heart of the wood. A brook ran through the middle of the covert. Snipe knew that it was deep, and its banks swampy. He did not think he could possibly cross it. That was where they would catch him.

But there was no choice; he had to run on. Presently he was tearing down a grassy slope among alder and hazel bushes. At the bottom the water gleamed in the moonlight. On the far side of the brook the ground rose steeply, covered closely with young oaks.

He glanced back. Three of the navvies were in sight. He could hear the other two behind. The big fellow was leading.

"Got 'un now!" shouted the latter triumphantly. "'E can't cross the brook!"

He was right. When Snipe reached the edge he instantly plunged kneedeep in bog. He struggled out, and, turning to the left, ran hard along the bank.

If he could only find a place to cross! The oak wood opposite was so thick he might dodge them if he could only get into it.

He heard the nearest of the navvies crashing through the bushes above him. He was cutting off the corner. Another fifty yards would finish it. But Snipe would not give in. With sobbing breath and aching legs he still tore along up the rough, reed-grown bank of the stream.

Here the brook grew narrower, and on the far side the oaks overhung the deep, black, sluggish water. But on his side the bank was all deep mud. Snipe glanced longingly at the oaks, but dared not try it.

"Jump!"

The voice came keen and clear out of the thick scrub opposite.

Snipe paused, unable to believe his ears. The nearest navvy was pounding downhill through the alder and hazel, not fifty yards away.

"Jump!" came the voice again, sharp and insistent.

Snipe could see no one. He glanced at the brook. Certainly this was the narrowest part, and opposite was a clear space to land on. Like lightning he took his decision, and ran back a few paces. Then he rushed forward. A pleasant surprise awaited him. The near bank under the reeds was firm enough to get a good take-off.

He made a frantic spring, just reached the far side, clutched at an oak bough, missed it, and was in the act of falling back into the deep channel below, when a long, lean arm shot out, seized him, and, with amazing strength and quickness, pulled him bodily right into the thick of the bushes.

"Quick, this way!" came the voice. And Snipe found himself pushed head foremost into a black hole in the ground—a hole so small that it was hardly larger than a badger's earth.

Too much amazed to do anything but obey, he shuffled along on hands and knees, bumping his head against the roof of the tunnel.

Of course, it was pitch dark, and he had not the remotest idea where he had got to, where he was going, or who had suddenly come to his rescue in this amazing fashion.

"Straight on!" came the voice behind. "I'm covering up the mouth."

Utterly puzzled but devoutly thankful, Snipe wriggled forward. The passage became larger. Presently he could stand up. He saw a gleam. It was moonlight which filtered down through a small crack in the roof.

"Wait where you are," came the voice behind. "I won't strike a light till they've sheered off."

"Wot's 'appened? Where's 'e gone?" The voice was the big navvy's. It was so horribly close that Snipe shuddered.

"It's all right," came the voice of his unknown friend. "They'll never find you."

"Up jumped the brook," replied one of the other poachers. "'E's up in them bushes. 'Urry up, an' we'll 'ave 'im orl right."

"Look out, then! I'm a-going to jump!" cried the big navvy. Snipe distinctly heard the man's head, then a yell, a struggle, followed by a terrific splash.

"I thought so," came a low chuckle behind Snipe. "It's a nasty, awkward place. You'd have gone in, too, Snipe, if I hadn't been ready for you."

"I just shout should!" exclaimed Snipe. "I don't know who you are, but I tell you straight those chaps would have killed me if they'd caught me."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied the other, "after the trick you played them. But, hush! They're across now."

Yes, heavy footsteps made the ground above their heads shake, and sent little stones rattling down from the roof of the tunnel. Snipe could plainly hear their voices, and they were so close he hardly dared breathe.

"E can't have gone far," said one. "E's 'iding meat like."

"Spread out an' beat the bushes!" growled the big navvy. "I'll 'ave 'im if it takes all night!" His tones were so vindictive that Snipe shivered again. But once more came the friendly voice behind:

"Don't worry. They might hunt for a week, and never see us. Even if they did——" He said no more, but Snipe understood the threat in the unspoken words.

For quite five minutes more the roughs tramped up and down close overhead. Then, growling and swearing, they moved on, and their heavy steps passed up the hill.

There was the crackle of a match behind Snipe, and the little flame shone in the rocky walls of a narrow tunnel. Snipe swung round. He was face to face with Captain Crackshot!

THE 19th CHAPTER.
Captain Crackshot at Home.

"YOU!" exclaimed Snipe. "You! What's brought you here?" He stopped. "After all, it was no business of his.

"What's brought you here?" you were going to say," said the other, with a smile beneath his heavy moustache. "Well, that is my affair to tell you at present. But I'm not going to tell you at present. But I'm not going to tell you at present. But I'm not going