"THE BLUE HUSSARS"—NEW ARMY SPORTS TALE.

The Boys' Realm

of Sport & Adventure

GRAND CHRISTMAS WEEK NUMBER

"CAPTAIN JACK."

A Stirring Story of League Football

By A. S. HARDY.

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CAPTAIN JACK.

A Stirring New Tale of League Football. By Popular A. S. HARDY.

BEGIN THE STORY HERE.

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.

RICHARD FENTON, Jack's cousin, 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.

The Great Strike.

Welsby is the scene of a big strike, owing to Sir John Fenton having threatened to cut down the wages of his employees. The strikers endeavour to persuade Jack to become their leader, but the young footballer refuses.

He is, however, determined in his mind to aid the strikers as far as possible, for his heart is touched by the scenes of poverty and want that he witnesses as the winter sets in.

Considerable trouble is caused by the strikers, who, as the cold weather increases in severity, experience the severest pangs of hunger, and get out of hand.

Welsby Albion's next match is against Liverpool, away.

Just as the game is about to commence, Jack receives a telegram, which sends every drop of blood from his face. It informs him that the strikers have attacked Blackmere Hall, and that his mother has been seriously injured.

(How read this week's instalment.)

Reassuring News From Welsby.

WHEN Manager Barry had in turn read the fateful telegram, his face grew troubled. He stroked his chin thoughtfully, and then looked at Jack.

He had known Jack Fenton a long time, but never before had he seen the lad look so troubled as he looked then.

"It's strange, my boy," said the manager. "I just bought a newspaper whilst you were changing in the dressing-room. It was the latest out, and had been brought down to the football-ground by motor-bicycle. There was nothing in it about the strikers getting out of hand at Welsby."

He took the afternoon edition of the Liverpool paper out of his pocket as he spoke, and, opening it so that it showed the stop press column, he pointed to the front page.

"There you are," he said, "read that."

Jack read, and this is what he saw:

"THE GREAT STRIKE—LATEST NEWS FROM WELSBY.

"All quiet. Keppell held meeting, at which he denounced the militant attitude of strikers. Threatened to resign leadership if any further acts of violence were committed. Situation otherwise unchanged. No hope of immediate arbitration."

"That is more hopeful—eh, Jack?" commented the manager.

Jack's face brightened, and the colour returned to his cheeks.

"Yes, Barry," he said; "but, all the same, I can't go on with this match if I am wanted at Welsby. If my mother has been injured I must go to her."

"We have brought no reserve with us, Fenton, and Shuter is too old, too fat, and too slow to turn out. We shall have to play ten men if you refuse to play."

"I don't refuse to play," answered Jack firmly. "But I must know the truth about this telegram before I turn out."

"It is probably a hoax, Jack," said Griffith.

"It may be all that, Griffith; but I tell you I must know the truth!"

"We are getting 'im," said Manager Barry. "Here comes the Liverpool team!"

Yes. The ten men in their scarlet shirts, and their trim, tall, and formidable-looking International goalkeeper, in spotless white, had just turned out of their dressing-room, and they came towards the ground in a swinging, dashing play.

Hardy punting the ball into the air, and following after it with the rest of the lads trailed off behind him in a long, thin, athletic line.

The crowd caught the glint of the brilliant red, and a resounding cheer rang out, and they at once ceased to interest themselves in the probable reason for the Albion not taking the field, their eyes following their favourites as they strode along.

Hardy, as he ran on, gazed with some curiosity at the group of lads in the black-and-white checked shirts, who seemed so reluctant to turn out.

"Mr. Barry," said Jack Fenton firmly, "I'm sorry to have to say that I cannot play until I have discovered whether the information conveyed in this telegram is true or false, but I mean it. You will have to start the game without me."

Manager Barry looked Jack Fenton in the eyes. Some managers would have ordered the lad on to the field. Barry did not.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "Griffith, take your lads on to the field, will you? But don't start the game until the referee orders you to. Fenton, you come with me. Let us find Tom Watson, the Liverpool manager, and get a telephone message through to Welsby. We shall soon decide the question then."

"A good idea," said Sturgess. "I'll hold the enemy out until you come back, Jack. Only your absence makes a great deal of difference to the play of the team. Don't be longer than you can help."

Griffith led his men out with a rush, and Manager Barry, beckoning Jack to follow him, ran off to find an official of the Liverpool club. They found one of the directors making his way towards the stand.

The director stated as he saw the Albion manager and their crack centre-forward coming towards him.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "Aren't you going to play, Fenton? Not hurt, are you?"

"No," answered Jack.

"We have heard bad news from Welsby," explained Manager Barry. "They say that Blackmere Hall has been burnt down, and that Lady Fenton has been dangerously hurt. We want to use your telephone and find out if there is any truth in the rumour. Fenton can't play until his mind is at rest."

The director grasped the situation in a flash.

"Come along!" he cried.

They followed the man, who led them to the manager's office, where a telephone rested on a desk there.

"Here you are!" cried the director. "Ring up one of the newspaper offices in Welsby. That is the surest way of learning the truth."

Manager Barry had all the telephone numbers safely stowed away in the cells of his memory, and he took off the receiver.

"Put me through to 6,099, Welsby, will you?" he cried. "Trunk. It's important. Rush me through as soon as you can."

Then he waited.

From the playing-field outside there came a never-ceasing roar, which only changed in depth and strength according to the varying incidents of the game which was in progress there.

The referee had evidently forced the teams to play, and the game had been started with only ten men on the visiting side, to the no little astonishment of the excursionists from Welsby, who had come over in support of their cracks.

Jack, clad in his football things, waited with arms folded, and a face heavy with gloom and doubt by the side of the desk. It seemed to him as the clock on the wall ticked loudly, and the cries and shouts rang out from the football-ground, that that call would never come.

Manager Barry had replaced the receiver, and had lit a cigar, which he puffed at nervously as he waited for the exchange to call him up.

Hand-clapping and wild shouting came from the ground, and the stand presently rocked as some dashing bit of play thrilled the onlookers.

"We are evidently getting the better of it, Barry," said the Liverpool director. "I should advise Fenton to hurry up if you wish to have a look in in this game. I know our boys. Often impotent if they are kept at bay, there is no team in the country can keep them out once they get in a scoring mood."

Still the telephone bell did not ring.

Then of a sudden one deafening roar, which fairly split the air, went up, and then rang out the frantic cry of "Goal! Goal! Goal!"

There was no need for Manager Barry or for Jack Fenton to ask which side it was who had scored. The excursionists from Welsby, though numbering several hundreds, were as a drop of water in an ocean when merged with the home crowd who had assembled to witness this match.

Liverpool were a goal to the good.

Manager Barry said never a word. He felt sorry this had happened, but he was not the one to reproach Jack Fenton at a moment like that, when it was quite possible for the events spoken of in Keppell's wire to have occurred in Welsby.

The three men—the manager, the footballer, and the club director—stood silent in the office, waiting, and a roar from the field presently announced the fact that the ball had been set in motion again, and that the contest was being renewed, and still the roar of Liverpool throats told that it was the Anfielders who were having the best of the argument.

Then, all of a sudden, the telephone bell rang.

"There you are, Jack!" cried Manager Barry, in a tone of relief. "Answer the call yourself. You are the lad who most earnestly wishes to know how things have been getting on."

Jack sat down in the manager's chair. He took the receiver and placed it to the ear.

"Welsby. Trunk," said a voice. "You're through."

"Thank you!" answered Jack over the wire. "I say, is that 6,099, Welsby?"

"Yes. We're the 'Record' office. Who are you?"

"My name is Fenton—Jack Fenton, of the Welsby Albion. I am speaking from the Liverpool football-ground——"

"Not yet. Liverpool are a goal up. I want to get on the field as soon as I can if the news you'll give me is right. I have received a wire from George Keppell, the labour leader. He says that the strikers have attacked and burnt Blackmere Hall, and that my mother, Lady Fenton"—Jack's voice broke under the stress of his pent-up emotion—"has been dangerously hurt; that her life is in danger. They ask me to come back to Welsby. Is there any truth in it?"

Jack waited expectantly for the answer. Something seemed to buzz on the line, and the voice of the man speaking from the Welsby "Record" office was blurred and smothered by the sound.

Jack touched the arm of the receiver once or twice.

"Exchange!" he cried. "There's some interruption on the line. Have you cut us off."

"No," was the answer. "Wait a minute."

Jack waited, and Manager Barry noticed that his cheeks had blanched, and his eyes were dull with pain. The tension was almost more than the lad could stand. It was just as well he had not turned out with the team, for worried as he was he would have been nothing more nor less than a passenger.

And now the telephone line cleared again.

"Hallo!" cried Jack. "Are you 'Welsby Record'?"

"Yes. Is that Fenton speaking?"

"Yes."

"There is not an atom of truth in the rumour, Fenton. All is quiet in the town. Blackmere Hall is safe. One of our special reporters has just come down from there after trying in vain to get an interview with Sir John. He's only been back in the office five minutes. The strikers are quiet. The telegram was evidently sent to you to put you off your game."

"Thanks!" cried Jack. And his eyes grew bright.

"I'll verify everything, Fenton, and send a message through to you ready for when you leave the field at half-time."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Jack, relieved. "Good-bye!"

He put up the receiver, and leapt to his feet.

"Barry," he cried—and his voice throbbed with a note of joy—"Barry, that telegram was a forgery! Blackmere Hall is safe. My mother is all right. There's nothing wrong in Welsby."

Manager Barry tossed his cigar away in his excitement, and gripped Jack by the hand.

"Thank Heaven for that, my lad!" he cried. "And now on to the field with you, and see whether you can't turn the tide of the game in our favour. Liverpool are pressing. Can't you hear the roar? We are being overplayed. We need you there to steady up the game."

Jack Fenton waited for nothing more; but, thanking the director as he shot by him for his kindness in letting him have the use of the telephone, he rushed down the stairs to the stand, and made his way as quickly as possible on to the field.

Not a soul noticed him until he had reached the touchline. Then a mighty roar of welcome went up. Jack Fenton, the missing link, the man who held the line of forwards together, had come out to play at last, and two great, frantic outbursts of applause rang in his ears as he went striding along the field with the grace and ease and speed of a deer.

A Drawn Game.

PLAY was going on at the far end of the field when Jack Fenton appeared; he saw the Liverpool men bombarding the Albion goal. The crowd behind the net, and in that part of the field, rocked and swayed as they set up a never-ending roar of excitement. So intent were they on the progress of the game that they had not noticed that Jack Fenton had turned out after all.

Most of the players were gathered either inside or just outside the penalty area. Hardy, the Liverpool goalkeeper, had followed up, and was standing near the half-way line, where the two backs, Chorlton and Crawford, waited, ready to return the ball if either of the Albion defenders got it away, or to check any advance of the Welsby front forwards should the luck turn the ball their way.

Shot after shot was sent in, but the ball struck the bodies of first one player and then another. The Liverpool inside forwards, Stewart, Parkinson, and Orr, passed and repassed the ball, or tried to break through on their own, but without avail.

The two outside wing men, Goddard and MacDonald, waited on the wings for the ball to come out.

At times the valiant Sturgess was mastered, and it was good luck alone, and the way in which Griffith had packed the goal, which kept the ball out.

Jack Fenton stared in amazement as he ran, and then a roar went up as the ball was seen to soar high above the crossbar and find a lodgment amongst the crowd on the terraced bank behind.

The ball was sent back, placed by Sturgess, and kicked off by Graham, and down the field it came, to fall at the foot of Jack, who remained near the half-way line and close to the backs the moment he saw that the Liverpool attack had ended in failure.

Jack trapped the ball as it fell, and as he saw Chorlton had been placed to tackle him, he kicked the ball high above the head of the back, swerved round him like a Rugby player, and went after it as hard as he could run.

Hardy had gone back to his goal the moment the ball had been placed by Sturgess for the kick-off, and had stood with his hands on his sticks. As he saw Jack Fenton racing with all speed, as fresh as a daisy, and relieved of all worry now, for the goal, Hardy made as if to come out, but in a second he realised that he could not get to the ball before Jack reached it, and, on second thoughts, he remained at home.

Crawford now came for Jack, but he had to cross the field, and Fenton had the speed of him. Jack fastened on to the ball the moment he reached it, and, dribbling onward with consummate skill, never letting it be more than a yard or so ahead of him, and timing his strides and his touches to a nicety, he kept ahead of the back until he had almost reached the penalty area.

Then Hardy, realising that it was neck or nothing, came out with one of those magnificent rushes of his. Straight at Jack he came with the speed of an avalanche, intending to smother the ball, or floor the forward.

Jack took one look at the net, and then shot the ball as hard as he could drive towards the goal. It went soaring onward, rising as if it would go above the bar, but at the last moment it took a curve downward and inward, and the people gave vent to one frantic yell of dismay. Hardy vaulted on. So did Jack. Neither could stop, owing to the momentum of their bodies. Jack's effort in kicking the ball, however, had thrown him out of his stride, and at the second step he took, down he went with a thud, and the International goalkeeper fell headlong over him.

Both men were down, but the ball had been rammed home by one of the most brilliant examples of opportunism that had ever been seen upon the historic Anfield ground.

The chance had come Captain Jack's way, and he had realised the event in the most thrilling and sensational manner.

Hardy picked himself up, gazed ruefully at his fine white playing shirt patched with mud now, and then smiled grimly. He was sportsman enough to appreciate good play, even when it came from a member of an opposing team.

"Well done, Fenton!" he cried.

What mattered the tremendous pressure and overwhelming balance of the play in the favour of Liverpool now? There were scored at one goal all, and the invincible Albion still had a chance of winning the match.

Even the home spectators applauded that magnificent goal.

As for the excursionists from Welsby, they roared and shouted until they could shout no longer.

The ball was sent back to the middle of the field, and to the tune of the referee's whistle the game started again.

But what a change there was in the demeanour of the visiting players now. Gloomy, anxious a soul noticed him until he had and almost from the kick-off their halves got the ball again. A pass from Griffith sent it to Jack's toe, and Jack, not waiting to be tackled or charged off the ball by the resolute Harrop, slipped it on to Hughes, who back-heeled it to Riley. Along the touchline went the winger, and straight and true to the centre he swept the moving sphere before he could be interfered with in any way.

Hughes trapped the ball as it fell, and a first-time shot found it driven to Hardy's hands.

It came at the goalkeeper high and true, and

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he was forced to tip it over the bar for a corner.

Jamieson seized it, and put it by the corner-flag, and amidst seething excitement he sent in a beautiful curling ball which lodged on Robinson's head. The half-back propelled it away from goal, but, leaping high, Dunlop breasted the ball down. Andrews rushed in, took it, and slipped it to Jack, who shot at once, the ball hitting the back of the net with terrific force, the goalkeeper falling prostrate just a fraction of a second too late to save.

Two goals to one! Welsby Albion had sensationally obtained the lead!

Out from goal the ball was brought, and a half minute later the players were rushing and thrusting in the game again, and Liverpool, led by the fleet and daring Parkinson, were almost through, when Bailey ran up and took the ball bang off the toe of the Liverpool centre as he was about to put it through.

Ding, dong, with little to choose between the sides now, and played at a pace that no other match had shown that season, the game went to half-time, and then twenty tired players left the field, anxious to gain a few minutes' respite, whilst two goalkeepers, who had been forced to be on the alert for the major portion of the first forty-five, walked stolidly after.

What a game—and what a gate!

It was the finest struggle seen in Liverpool for many and many a long day. The play had been vigorous, and yet clean in the extreme.

No shady tactics had been employed, and the managers of the two clubs felt proud of their lads as they disappeared in the direction of the dressing-rooms, and the band came out to play during the interval.

Football played under circumstances like these is a grand game. The professional takes a high place in the winter sport when he plays with the chivalry and good temper of the amateur, and these representatives of Liverpool and of Welsby were a credit to the game they played.

The crowd never ceased to discuss the points of the game during the eight minutes the players were absent from the field, and when they came out again the reception accorded them testified to the full the appreciation their brilliant exposition of soccer had met with on the part of the men who had paid their money to see the game.

As for Jack Fenton, he was all smiles.

The editor of the "Record" had been as good as his word, and a telephoned message at half-time verified all that he had told Jack. There had been no attack on Blackmere Hall, and Lady Fenton was enjoying the best of health. The telegram had been sent by some malicious busybody who had evidently hoped to put Jack Fenton off his game, and Jack smiled to think of this fellow's feelings when he read the half-time score in Welsby after the news had been flashed thitherwards along the wires.

The teams lined up, and a round of handclapping greeted the resumption of play.

A mist was curling over the ground now, and the light was getting bad, although there was no fear that the game would not be finished.

For a while the play was of a disjointed and desultory character, with a great deal of kicking into touch. Neither side were taking any chances, particularly the Albion, who had gained the lead.

There was not so much of combination, but a great deal more individuality shown in the movements of the players now. The game, too, was not so fast as it had been, and there was not so much to cheer and shout about.

The thousands looked on with strained attention. They seemed to come under a spell. It was as if the great moment of the struggle had come and their nerves were strained to breaking-point.

One side or the other would emerge the stronger from the contest of mind and muscle—but which side would it be?

Of a sudden there was a Liverpool breakaway, and with irresistible dash, halves and forwards took charge of the game. The pace increased like the fire and fury of the first half. The ball was kept on the move, passed, repassed, swung out to the wings, and sent crashing back to the centre again, but still the Liverpool eleven could not add to their score.

Parkinson was watchful, alert, ready to snap up any chance that might offer itself, and he had proved by the consistency of his scoring that he was the man who wanted watching.

For some minutes the pressure lasted, and then the Albion forwards took the ball to the other end, and four hard, fast, low shots were directed at Hardy, any one of which might have meant an increase of the Albion score.

But the goalkeeper had a safe pair of hands, and a sure pair of eyes, and a brain that was firm and steady.

The shots were caught, and the ball was sent down the field again, and with the mist growing every moment thicker and thicker, the game neared its close with the visitors still in possession of the lead; although it would have been hard for even the most ardent partisan from Welsby to have found any superiority in the visiting team.

True, Albion had this much in their favour—they could point to the fact that Liverpool had scored their goal when Welsby's finest forward was off the field, and might suggest that but for that they might never have scored at all.

The mist which had gathered thick over the Mersey was now enveloping the city on every hand, and Anfield was enshrouded in the dark, clinging veil long before the finish.

Still, the referee could follow the various incidents of the play, and he felt that there was no justification yet for him to abandon the match.

If these teams had been foul they might have indulged in illegal acts and reprisals which the referee could never have seen; but they conducted themselves like men, and in the gathering gloom the game petered out towards its finish.

Despairing of their side's success, many of the people on the banks commenced to make their way towards the exits from the ground.

The game looked as good as over, and the win for the Albion assured.

The referee glanced at his watch.

It wanted two and a half minutes to time.

The ball was kicked into touch, thrown into play, and kicked into touch again, and so on, and in this way Liverpool made their way from their own half of the field into that belonging to the Albion.

One minute and a half to time, and no chance of a score.

Suddenly Robinson threw in the ball, and Goddard, getting to it, tricked Dunlop, and swerved towards the Albion goal. He saw two of the black-and-white checked defenders coming at him, and then down the centre of the field flashed a quick, active figure in a red shirt.

It was Parkinson, the deadly goal-scorer.

"To you!" cried Goddard, as he slipped the ball to the foot of the centre-forward, and, realising that it was the last chance, Parkinson went on.

One, two, three men he tricked, and then hard and true he shot, and so fast travelled the ball towards the net that Sturgess did not see it until it was right on to him, and then stretched out his lengthy arms too late.

The ball went by, and as the referee blew his whistle Parkinson was smothered by his comrades, who had rushed to congratulate him.

Liverpool had somewhat luckily saved the game by equalising the scores by the very last kick of the match.

For a moment the spectators did not quite realise what had happened, and then, as they saw Parkinson's delighted comrades hugging the centre-forward, towards the exit from the field, and saw some of the others waving their arms in triumph, they knew that the game had been saved, and a last frantic roar went up to and one of the best games Anfield had ever seen.

Outside the Drill-hall.

THE place which Jack Fenton had secured for his soup-kitchen, where the rations of soup and bread were to be doled out to the starving women and children of Welsby, was an old and disused drill-hall in Renfrew Street, a narrow and somewhat dirty thoroughfare near to George Street, where Jack Fenton lived.

Renfrew Street was situated in the oldest part of Welsby. It was narrow and ill-lighted, and many of the buildings which were not being used as workshops, minor factories, and warehouses had been permitted to fall into a state of dilapidation and decay.

Half the buildings in the street were to let. Nobody would take them because their condition was impossible. Many pounds would have to be spent upon them to bring them into a proper state of repair, and landlords were disinclined to do their premises up for the low and somewhat speculative rents they would secure by handing them over to small traders in Welsby.

The truth of the matter was that this street had been included in an improvements' scheme for Welsby which had been approved of five years before, but which had been only partially carried out, the corporation being hardly rich enough to pay compensation to the landlords—compensation which they would have to pay before the latter would give them permission to sweep this dirty, dilapidated street away.

Sound business men would not take premises in a street which was to be pulled down shortly and rebuilt. Landlords would not improve their property unless they could see their way to getting their money back, and as the corporation would not pay them the compensation asked for as it was, they would be hardly likely to pay heavier compensation upon property which had been improved. And so the street remained dirty, gloomy, only useful as a near cut to certain quarters of the town.

The drill-hall had been in a mouldering state for years. Once it had been used for entertainments and concerts, but with the building of lighter, more comfortable, brighter, and better-ventilated halls, even these entertainments had failed it, and its doors had been finally closed never to open again.

Mischievous youths and boys had smashed all the windows, which had been protected with boards after the mischief had been done. Slates had fallen from the roof. The iron lamp outside the entrance had been smashed, and twisted out of all shape.

It was to the place which Jack had secured wherein to carry on the charitable work he had conceived.

His first care was to make the place warm and comfortable.

He sought out a builder, a man named Jones, on the Monday after the match with Liverpool—a builder who did a number of odd jobs for the Albion, and who had an interest in the football club.

It did not take them long to come to terms. The builder was willing to help and for the sake of the charity he agreed to do the work at cost price.

On the Monday he sent a dozen men down to the drill-hall, and these started at once to clean up the interior, to put in new panes of glass, to overhaul the gas-pipes and gas-fittings, and to see that the place was put in thorough order.

They worked with a will. Many of them came into very close contact with the sufferers from the strike, and most of them loved Jack Fenton, and were staunch adherents of the football club.

When Jack turned up at the drill-hall at five o'clock on the Monday afternoon, after a swinging walk through the town, he found a huge fire glowing in the big grate at the end of the hall, and the gas burning, making the place look fairly cheerful.

But bleak and bare it was, nevertheless, with its damp walls, from which the plaster was falling, and the distemper all blotched and bubbling from the damp.

"We're going to clean all that down, Mr. Fenton," said the foreman who was supervising the job. "And we'll have the place ready for you by to-morrow night."

"I'm having the boilers and the ovens sent in in the morning; they will be got ready for me overnight. I can start my soup-kitchen on Wednesday," said Jack. "That is fairly satisfactory. I'll have bills stuck up about it to-morrow, and announcements put in the paper to that effect. I don't want to lose another minute."

"Did you pay much for the use of the place might I ask, sir?" asked the foreman.

Jack Fenton smiled.

"I did not," he said. "The owner of the property is a self-made man. He was telling me that when he was a lad his father was a victim of a big strike, and he has never forgotten the terrible times they went through then. A scrap of dry bread for dinner. A little rice boiled in water, and without milk or sugar, whenever they could manage to gain a copper or two, that was all they had to live upon; and he told me, besides, that his sister had died at the age of sixteen as a result of the privation she had been put to. No. He did not charge me much. He gave me the drill-hall rent free, and said that he would do everything he possibly could to forward my cause."

Jack went outside when the men left, and saw the doors padlocked.

The foreman wished him a cheerful good-night, and then hurried off with the men on his way home.

Jack noticed men and women standing about the street, in the vicinity of the drill-hall. They were evidently watching the progress of the building which was to be devoted to their needs.

Poor souls, thought Jack, as he shivered in the biting wind which came sweeping along the gloomy thoroughfare, their need must be great if they anticipated a bowl of soup with such hungry eagerness.

As the workmen moved away, some of these women, with shawls tightly clutched about their heads, came nearer to the drill-hall, where Jack stood unobserved in the shadow of the doorway.

How bent and feeble they seemed, thought Jack. How the strike had altered them!

What interests in life could these poor souls have now?

It was terrible, terrible!

Why would not his father end the strike? Why did he hold out for the last farthing of the bargain he offered them? Why could he not give way a little, and put an end to all this misery and suffering and sordidness?

What had Sir John lost by this strike already? Jack wondered. The loss could not be computed. It must have run into many thousands of pounds, and so long as the mills were working there would always be a profit for Sir John, even if he gave the strikers all they asked in this time of crisis in the trade. And what was it they asked? Merely that their wages should not be cut down, but should be allowed to remain at what had been a recognised rate of pay for many years.

Jack had known his father once as a kind-hearted man. Now he was hard, as hard as flint, and embittered and soured into the bargain—embittered and soured, it may be, by success, which does not always improve a man.

Richard Fenton, his rascally cousin, was at the bottom of it all, as Jack well knew. If only that malevolent influence could be got away from Blackmere Hall, and Lady Fenton's wise, kindly-hearted counsel could prevail, there would be an end to all this misery and despair; but, thought Jack, that end could not come yet.

He was thinking thus when the women, and some girls who accompanied them, and one or two old and broken men, came quite close to

There were fully a hundred people now running after the goose, and and on every side resounded the shouts and laughter of the amused onlookers.
(See the Mirth-Provoking Complete Story, "Uncle Bill's Goose," in the Grand Christmas Week Number of "The Boys' Friend." Now on sale, 1d.)

him. They started as they saw him standing there, merging with the shadows. At last one of them stepped up to Jack, and peered into his face.

"It's Mr. Fenton!" she cried.

"Which Mr. Fenton?" said a hard, cold voice at Jack's elbow; and, turning, Jack saw a fierce-eyed, mad-looking woman standing by his side, with her fists clenched as if she would strike him. Hatred gleamed in her eyes. She seemed scarcely human.

"It's Mr. John Fenton, old Sir John's son," said the first speaker.

In a moment the fierce look upon the woman's face vanished, and a kindlier expression took its place.

"Jack Fenton!" she said. "Heaven bless him!"

Then she looked into his eyes with a haunted, hungry look.

"When do you open the soup-kitchen, sir?" she asked, and the words came in a halting whisper.

"On Wednesday," answered Jack, as he stepped forward amongst them. "To-morrow, if I can."

A glad cry rang out at that.

"We shall have something to eat to-morrow," said another of the women.

"Yes," said Jack, feeling in his pockets for all the loose change he had upon him; "I hope to open the kitchen to-morrow. I shall set an announcement up outside. Meanwhile, you all look tired and hungry. Here, take this, and share it amongst you, and get what relief you can."

And he handed the money to the woman who had at first threatened him. She made a motion as if to refuse it, but he insisted.

"No, no!" he said. "Take it. Your need is far greater than mine. It is nothing to me, it means everything to you. And I can afford it. I have plenty more where that came from."

He pushed his way through their ranks before they could say another word.

"Good night!" he said, as he strode onward into the darkness, and their answering cries and sobs of gratitude followed him as he strode along, the most generous payment, he felt, that ever he had earned in all his life.

(Another stirring long instalment next week.)

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

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

YOUR EDITOR'S XMAS GREETING

To my Chums—A Right Merry Xmas & a Glad New Year—Your Editor.

ONCE again I have the pleasure of giving my loyal readers the hearty old-fashioned greeting: "A Merry Christmas." In these unsentimental days I am afraid that the words sound rather formal, especially when they are only expressed in cold, hard print. But from the bottom of my heart I mean them, and it would give me the greatest pleasure to heartily grip every reader of the old REALM by the hand, and in person convey my sincere good wishes for the festal season.

Of course, that cannot be; I have many thousands of loyal supporters living hundreds and hundreds of miles distant from these offices whom I can never hope to know personally, whilst the readers who reside in the great metropolis from which THE BOYS' REALM emanates make a mighty band. I fear my arm would be tired ere I had clasped one-twentieth of their number by the hand and given them the old, old greeting. It only remains for me, therefore, to convey to all my chums my hearty good wishes through these columns. Gladly do I avail myself of the opportunity of so doing. It is my sincere wish that Christmas, 1909, may be the happiest, the jolliest, the brightest, and the best Yuletide my readers have ever had, and that the new year which will shortly dawn may be for them a time of good health, wealth, and prosperity. God bless you, my chums, one and all.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

Don't Be a Prig.

BEFORE me lies a letter from a Pendleton reader, whose initials are W. B., who tells me that he is seventeen years of age, and employed as a junior clerk. He says that he has no chum, having discarded all the chaps he was friendly with because they smoke, absent themselves from Sunday-school and church, frequent music-halls, and use bad and silly talk. It seems that my chum, W. B., has got acquainted with a young lady, of his own age, whom he describes as "a really nice girl," and he wants to know whether he is doing right in taking her out. It appears that her parents have no objection.

Now, the first thing that occurred to me when I read W. B.'s letter was that it was written by a young prig. Mind you, I am not saying anything against church-going or attending Sunday-school, because, to my mind, these are most excellent ways for a lad to spend Sunday. Nor do I agree with lads smoking, or constantly attending music-halls. Further, no one abominates more than I do the use of bad language on the part of youths and young men, or, indeed, older people.

But my point is this: W. B. is rather inclined to pat himself on the back and say, "I'm better than they are. I go to church every Sunday. I don't attend music-halls; I don't smoke—indeed, I'm a jolly good sort, if you only knew." That is what leads me to think that he is a young prig, and I want to warn him against it. There's nothing more detestable on the face of the earth than a goody-goody, flabby youth, who prides himself on being better than everyone else.

I don't advise W. B. to go with bad companions. Shun them, by all means. But do come off your perch, and be a little more of a healthy British boy, and a little less of a sanctimonious prig. Fear God, live uprightly, do good, but don't go round bragging about it. Now, with regard to W. B.'s girl companion, let me say that, if there is nothing underhand or secret about their comradeship, I see no harm whatever in their going about together. Indeed, if W. B. is really fond of the young lady, it is possible he will aspire to make a position for himself in life, so that he may later on ask her to share his fortunes.

But, all the same, I think that W. B. has plenty of time for love-making and courting in days to come, and he would be better employed studying hard to fit himself for life's battle than wasting his time in "walking-out" with the girl who has taken his fancy. I have been quite plain and candid with my chum, and I hope he won't take offence at my rather outspoken criticism of his letter.

He is Not Tall Enough.

ROG. lives in Manchester, and he says he is considered very small for his age.

He asks me point-blank to tell him how he can become taller. He doesn't beat about the bush like some boys do, and put up a lot of excuses. He simply goes straight to the mark and says: "I am too small for my age. How can I improve this state of affairs?"

Well, R. G., I can tell you that if you take a fair amount of exercise, eat plenty of good food, and lead a clean, healthy life, you will be doing all that is humanly possible to improve your physique and stature. More than this, I am afraid you cannot do. Plenty of good, plain food, properly digested, will help to provide that muscle and sinew which your body needs. Plenty of exercise will get you into good trim, and enable your body to make the best of the nourishing food you have eaten, and clean habits will keep your body in a healthy state, so that all the advantage which good food and sensible living can give towards expanding your frame will be yours.

Don't forget, R. G., plenty of food, a moderate amount of exercise, clean habits, and plenty of fresh air. This is the secret of improving the growth.

Letters From Girl Readers.

IT is with great pleasure that I note the remarkable increase in the number of letters I am receiving from my girl readers. I am glad to think that I have so many supporters amongst the gentler sex, and I can assure my young lady friends that their letters are always welcome.

The following is a communication I have received from two sisters in Stockport. It is a very kind letter, full of praise for my papers, and good wishes for myself, and I thank my fair correspondents most heartily for writing to me in this friendly strain:

"Dear Editor,—My sister and I are delighted with THE BOYS' REALM, especially the Christmas Double Number, which we think excellent.

"'Captain Jack' is our favourite serial, but we certainly thought 'Redfern Minor' very good. We are very glad to see a sequel to it, which I am quite sure we shall like.

"We wish you all success with your new paper, 'THE BOYS' REALM Football Library,' and also a merry Christmas.

"We are,

"Yours sincerely,

"G. AND E. C."

How I Help My Chums.

BELOW I publish a letter from one of my Plaistow chums, who signs himself "A Grateful Reader." It is a letter which speaks for itself, and which needs no comment from me:

"Dear Editor,—It is my desire to thank you for publishing, some months ago, a warning against practising a certain bad habit. When at school I fell into impure ways, and was soon in such a condition that I could hardly call my soul my own. However, thanks to your splendid paper, which I have taken in regularly for some years now, I have been able to overcome this evil, and I now feel fit and well again."

My chum goes on to say how pleased he is with THE BOYS' REALM and with the stories contained therein, and finishes up by saying:

"You are at liberty to publish this letter as a warning to other lads who are in the same predicament as I myself was before I took advantage of your valuable advice."

Thank you very much, "Grateful Reader." I am glad to know that through my advice and help you have been able to break yourself of the terrible habit you mention.

"Jack Noble's Christmas Tour."

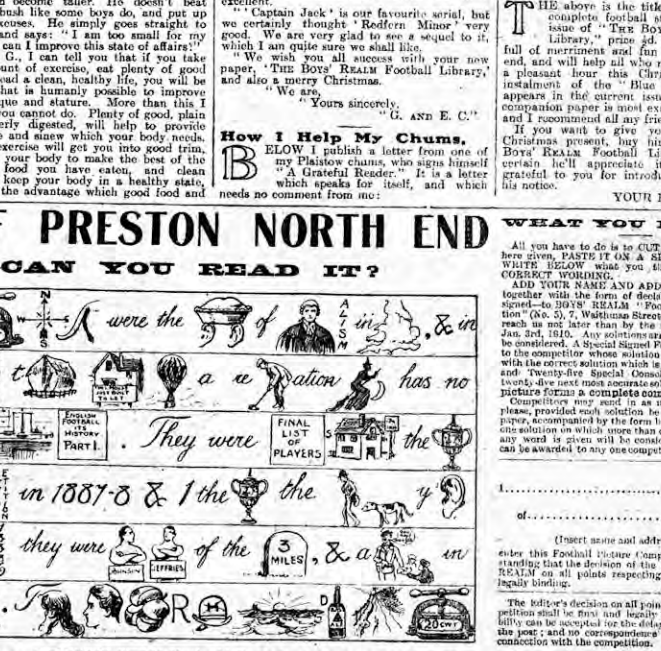
THE above is the title of the laughable complete football story in this week's issue of "THE BOYS' REALM Football Library," price 1d. The yarn is cram full of merriment and fun from beginning to end, and will help all who read it to wile away a pleasant hour this Christmas. The long instalment of the "Blue Crusaders," which appears in the current issue of our Thursday companion paper is most exciting and thrilling, and I recommend all my friends to read it.

If you want to give your chum a little Christmas present, buy him a copy of "THE BOYS' REALM Football Library." I'm quite certain he'll appreciate it, and be deeply grateful to you for introducing the paper to his notice.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

THE HISTORY OF PRESTON NORTH END

IN PICTURE—CAN YOU READ IT?



First Prize—

Handsome "Olympic" Match Football, Bearing the Signatures of the PRESTON NORTH END Team

(Manufactured by F. H. Ayres, the Famous London Athletic Outfitters),

AND

Twenty-five Special Consolation Prizes.

Next Week the History of SOUTHAMPTON F.C. will be Published.

WHAT YOU MUST DO.

All you have to do is to CUT OUT THE PICTURE here given, PASTE IT ON A SHEET OF PAPER, and WRITE BELOW what you think should be THE CORRECT WORDING.

ADD YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS, and forward it—together with the form of declaration below, properly signed—to BOYS' REALM "Football Picture Competition" (No. 5), 7, Watthman Street, London, E.C., so as to reach us not later than by the first post on Monday, Jan. 3rd, 1910. Any solutions arriving after that will not be considered. A Special Signed Football will be awarded to the competitor whose solution most nearly coincides with the correct solution which is to be Editor's handy; and Twenty-five Special Consolation Prizes for the twenty-five next most accurate solutions. Each week's picture forms a complete competition in itself.

Competitors may send in as many solutions as they please, provided each solution be on a separate sheet of paper, accompanied by the form below duly signed. No one solution on which more than one possible reading of any word is given will be considered. Only one prize can be awarded to any one competitor.

No. 5.

I.....

of.....

(Insert name and address in full)

enter this Football Picture Competition on the understanding that the decision of the Editor of THE BOYS' REALM on all points respecting it shall be final and legally binding.

The Editor's decision on all points respecting the competition shall be final and legally binding. No responsibility can be accepted for the delay or loss of solutions in the post; and no correspondence will be entered into in connection with the competition.

PETER JACKSON OF MANCHESTER

A GREAT NEW BOXING STORY.

BY

INNIS WOOD.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Peter Jackson.

Oxford undergraduate, champion amateur middle-weight boxer of England, and Rugger Blue for his 'Varsity, is a sturdy Manchester lad, dogged, indomitable, and as open and honest as the day.

While playing at Blackheath against a crack London team, Peter receives a telegram from his mother, asking him to come as soon as possible to a certain address in Bethnal Green, where she and her daughter are lodging. Peter sets out immediately after the completion of the match, only stopping to have a few words with

Cato Carfax,

a mean, unscrupulous character. Carfax is a Christ Church man, a member of the Rugger team, and what is known at the 'Varsity as a "Blood." Peter, though he dislikes Carfax, is strangely drawn towards the man.

Cato Carfax is in love with Peter's sister Nellie, and has sworn to make the girl his own, by foul means or fair.

On arriving at Bethnal Green, Peter finds his sister and mother in a humble lodging, and learns to his dismay that they have lost all their money. Mr. Jackson on his death was supposed to be insured to the amount of twelve thousand pounds, but since it has been discovered that all this has been eaten up by numerous claims and mortgages.

Peter Arrives at "Fairyland."

Despite this stunning blow, Peter puts on a smiling face, and vows to pull things together again. After a scanty meal, he wanders out through the slums of Whitechapel, and in with Phosphor Boyd, a once famous pugilist, who has opened a boxing saloon in the district.

Boyd, knowing what a clever boxer Peter is, persuades him to turn professional, offering to train him, and put him up as champion of the world. Peter accepts this offer, and later manager to make a deadly enemy of Dan Ralli, an unscrupulous crook.

Meanwhile, Carfax and Richard Jackson, Peter's uncle, are deep in a scheme to bring the lad not only to ruin and ruin, but also to the gutter. To do this they know they will have to put a stop to Peter's boxing career. Dan Ralli, the crook, is in their pay.

Kidnapped!

Peter removes his mother and sister from Bethnal Green, and installs them in a little cottage near Esher. He then journeys with Boyd and a herculean and kindly negro named Phospher to the Isle of Wight, where he is to undergo two months' strenuous training.

Six weeks slip by uneventfully, and then Peter is kidnapped and carried aboard Cato Carfax's steam yacht, the Kestrel, which is lying off the coast.

Boyd, Phospher, and a detective named Dickie Pile soon get on Peter's track, and instinctively guess what has become of him.

Boyd and a man named Finch search for the Kestrel in a motor-boat, while Pile and Phospher, who are ashore, send them an urgent message by means of the coastguards, who signal to the motor-boat.

Boyd raises his glasses to his eyes, and with muddy-beating heart reads the signal. Is it news of the missing Peter?

(Now read this week's instalment.)

The Coastguard's Message.

THE message that Jem Boyd read from the flag signalling at the coastguard-station was ample cause for his excitement and exultation.

"Shanklin 'phone us as follows," it said. "Something crooked going on aboard Kestrel. Bound man taken there this morning. Chine look-out reports free fight going on forecastle-head; one man against lot. The one man after knocking out most of his assailants, escaped from two armed with revolvers by leaping overboard. Was picked up while swimming towards pier by boat from Kestrel, and taken aboard, bound again, when yacht departed full steam S.-W. by S. Have instructed all stations to report Kestrel, when seen, and 'phone just received that she touched Linnet Cove, near Freshwater, at ten o'clock this morning, putting boat's crew and sick man ashore, then stood out seaward.' Ends."

"Great James!" he shouted, turning to Finch, his face ruddy with pleasure. "Did you boys read that? Let her go, Finch!"

"Don't know the Morse code," said Finch, looking up from his engines. "Where do you want her heading, sir? She's like a greyhound on the leash, and will jump to it any moment you slip her."

"Lay her straight for Linnet Cove," said Boyd. "That's where the Kestrel touched this morning at ten o'clock, and there's no doubt they had our boy aboard. There's not two men in these parts could mop up a whole yacht's crew single-handed."

"No. Did he do that!" asked Billy eagerly, while Finch's dark eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"He did so!" said Boyd grimly.

Chine look-out at Shanklin had him under the telescope, and saw the fight. Lor', what wouldn't I ha' given to have been there for a couple of minutes."

"Well, it don't surprise me, guv'nor," said Billy Baker. "The fact is, that since 'e began trainin' Master Peter 'as put on a 'ittin' power I've never seen the likes of. That left of 'is is a fair thunderbolt! You can't escape it, once 'e sees 'is way in, and where it lands it carries every ounce of 'is weight in it. Sixteen-men are good scrappers, I'll allow, but I'd back Peter to knock out a bunch of eight or ten of 'em at a go, if he could get a fair show to keep 'is back out of danger."

"You've got as much jaw as an old woman at a tea-party with a winkle and a pin!" said Boyd testily. He was far too excited to listen to anybody else's opinion, and he was cudgelling his brains to know how he should get into touch with Phospher and Dickie File. Dickie had wired, in his laconic way, that he would off on another trail after the marauders of the preceding night. But he had not given a clue as to where he was likely to touch. Yet it was essential to have the use of his detective's experience and sharp eyes when it should come to the question of picking up what traces there might be of Peter at Linnet Cove.

"Shore her into St. Lawrence, Finch!" he commanded. "I must send a telegram to Dickie."

He addressed the wire to the cottage at Appaldecombe, and sent Billy to despatch it. The delay was but short, and a little before two o'clock the motor-launch was nosing her way noiselessly through a heavy mist into Linnet Cove. There was not an inch of this coast that Finch did not know in fine weather or foul, in sunshine or by the blackest night. Like all sailormen who have been born and bred and lived by coasting, he had the instinct of shallows and shoals, and had as keen a nose for a quay, a landing-stage, or a beach as a mouse has for cheese, corn, or biscuits.

He brought the launch, light as a feather, along the wooden landing-stage, and peered through the fog into Boyd's anxious face.

"There's only one road inland from here," he said, his voice strangely muffled in the mist. "You bear to your right on leaving the jetty here, across a patch of clayey ground to a stone wall protecting a meadow. The wall runs for about a hundred yards up a bit of fairly steep hill, that you'll find rare and greasy. You ought to have no difficulty in picking up the tracks of your men, especially if they were carrying a sick man. I'd come with you, but I can't leave my boat."

"An' you'd be no good in a scrap, anyhow," said Boyd, with a kindly grin at the engineer's slight frame and weedy arms and legs.

"That's true," said Finch, unmoved; "but though my arms are a poor sort of weapon, I've not got such a bad headpiece, and, with all deference, it seems to me you're taking a lot for granted."

"What are you driving at?" snapped Boyd. "Give it a name, man; I'm full up of mysteries!"

"Well, seeing that this man Peter of yours seems to have laid out the Kestrel's crew," said Finch, "it's just as likely as not that the sick man they've put ashore is one of the crew. If his head fell on an iron stanchion, for example, he might be in a bad way, and they'd need a doctor. I don't see why they should go all the way round the island to bring the man here."

"It's curious," said Boyd, with a wide grin, "how the moment you run your nose ashore you leave your senses at sea. Don't you see that it's just the fiend Carfax's artfulness to queer the trail. Didn't I tumble to it first thing we were sure Peter was missing this morning!"

"You did, guv'nor, and that's a fact!" said Billy. "You said, says you——"

"I know what I said, you busted windbag!" said Boyd. "Do you suppose we've nothing to do but sit jawin' here all day? Look alive ashore! You stay here, Finch, but just off the end of the stage. Pass us one of your extra lights. You might as well try to whistle a hymn with half a lemon in your mouth as see anything through this blankety fog. It'll be a chance, if we don't walk into the water."

They got away at last, Boyd growling his anathemas as he dragged his feet through the sugging clay, and becoming almost inarticulate with sheer overflow of feeling language as he found—with a stumble, bruising his shins and knuckles—the rough stone wall that Finch had indicated as a landmark.

Once that, however, the progress of the two was no longer tormented by the fear of circling back into the water. The stone wall made an efficient guide, and though the fog hung like wool in the deep cutting up which the two were climbing, the bright light of the binnacle lamp showed them plainly enough the regular traces of four pair of feet that had preceded them.

Boyd stuck to this trail with the tenacity of a bloodhound. It led them presently to a low door in a stone wall some eight feet high. The door was locked, and as it was of oak, and heavily strengthened with iron bars and great headed nails, it promised a strenuous and a noisy resistence to any onslaught.

"Here, my jumping days are over!" whispered Boyd, drawing Billy to the wall. "I'll give you a back. You've got to shin over and open that door."

"And if the key's not in it?" growled Billy.

"Take the lock off!" snapped Boyd. "Here's my knife; there's a screwdriver in it."

He leant against the wall, and Billy, climbing on to his shoulders, got an elbow over the coping of the wall. At the same moment his leg was seized in a grip of iron, and a whisper hissed up at him:

"Come down, or you'll ruin all!"

"Snakes!" gasped Billy, coming down with a run that nearly dislocated Boyd's neck, and left him breathless and wordless, jerking his head from a collar like a gigantic, gasping toad panting from a pail of water. "If it ain't old Phospher. Where on earth do you spring from? I thought——"

His discourse was interrupted by a rousing buffet under the ear from Jem Boyd, which landed him, sitting, on the sopping turf.

"That'll teach you!" foamed Boyd, his more mature eloquence still impeded by his fury.

"By James! To think that I give a back to a low-down, gutter-scraping ball-puncher like you, only to have one of my eyes nearly scooped out by your thumb, and my gizzard nearly torn from its bearings by your heel first, and then your beastly claws. You wait till I get you home, my boy, that's all!"

"Hist, master—hist!" whispered Phospher, who was fairly dancing with anxiety, while Boyd bellowed out his wrath. "If they hear you, it'll spell death to Dickie File."

"And so you're here, are you," said Boyd, peering incredulously through the mist at the black, beaming face. "What have you found out?"

"Come further from the door!" muttered Phospher. "This way, along the wall. If all goes well, Dickie will meet me here presently. About twenty yards up is the main entrance, and Dickie's scouting by that way. We know this is where their car ran after their act-back last night. But Dickie's best on finding out if Master Peter's inside the house or not. No one in the village knows anything of them. They say the house belongs to a London gentleman, Mr. Richards; but that's all they know, 'cept that he's got one or two motors, and a steam yacht, the Kestrel."

"And we know," said Boyd, "that Peter was aboard the Kestrel when she sailed from Shanklin, and that the yacht put in here, and sent ashore four men, carrying a filth. What's more, we followed their tracks from the landing-stage to that very gate. So there's precious little doubt that they've got Peter tucked away inside there, safe enough, and intend to hold him till his future in the ring is fairly finished. But that's just where they count without Jem Boyd——"

"And Dickie File!" squeaked a voice that made the three men jump.

Dickie drew nearer, until he came into the circle of wan light where the heads of Boyd and Phospher and Billy were gropingly closely together. Boyd wrung his hand silently, and looked his question.

"I've seen him," said Dickie quietly. "He's there all right, wrapped up and strapped up in blankets from head to foot. And what do you think he's doing?"

"Biting at his straps?" suggested Phospher.

"Not 'e!" said Billy. "If 'e was strapped, 'e's not a fool, and 'e'd swell to it. And now he'll off-swell, and slide out of them blankets easy as shelling peas."

"He's asleep," grunted Boyd.

"Both for you, boss!" said Dickie, with a little squeaky laugh. "That's just what he is doing—lying on his back, sound asleep, and looking as happy as a kid after its bottle. I watched him through the skylight for a good five minutes. He's in a bare room with just a bed in it. There's no way to get into the skylight, and that's barred and crossbarred so that a rat could scarcely squeeze through. I didn't dare make any signal, or the slightest noise, for I couldn't see all the room, and I didn't know but someone might be on guard over him. It was easy enough to get on to the roof.

"It's only a two-storeyed building, and there are half a dozen trees with branches spreading right over the slates. But unless we unroof the place, there's not much show of getting in. The lower windows are all guarded by close-shut iron shutters, and barred into the bargain. They told me at the post-office that the house was once a private doctor's who took a few mad cases, till he went mad himself, and the place was shut up. We may take it for granted that there's no getting in by way of the ground floor, unless we call

(Continued on the next page.)

Peter lifted his hands and the wig at the same time, and Phospher started back with a low cry of amazement. "It's Master Peter!" he whispered.

up the police and make a formal matter of it."

"No police wanted!" snapped Boyd. "We can talk about police when we get safer back. But if they commander think they're safe to be nabbed, they may hurt the boy out of spite, and try and fight through. No, this is our little show. Our craft and strength against theirs. If they're the better men, they'll win. If they aren't, we win. And as we're going to win anyhow, I want to stands to reason we're the better lot."

"We shall have to be very, very careful, then," said Dickie. "Remember, those fellows are playing a desperate game, and they'll have eyes and ears skinned for all they're worth. Have you boys eaten?"

"Now you mention it," said Boyd, "I haven't had a bite since I left London last night."

"Nor I since supper," echoed Billy, in a tone of the deepest melancholy. "I'm fainting for it!"

"Phospher and I laid in at lunch-time," grinned Dickie. "We'll take on watch while you go and feed. You can't miss the village. Keep the wall here on the right, then follow the road you come to to your right, and it brings you straight to Limsted. We'll give you an hour. Go to the Golden Bull. It's in the market-place. If any move takes place, we'll let you know there."

"Good egg!" said Boyd cheerfully. "Fact is, I could do a leg of mutton!"

And leading the way, followed closely by Billy, he was received into the mist, and blotted from sight.

The Bearded Man.

PETER JACKSON awakened from that sleep of his feeling a great refreshed, and consciousness only of a tingling warmth, an annoying sense of restraint, and a keen, clamorous appetite.

He had slept little during the night, after the exciting experiences to which he had been subjected. The blow to his head, the exultation of his escape from that cabin and of his fight on the forecastle-head of the Kestrel, the chill and exhaustion of that icy plunge, and still more freezing swim, and then give swift transition to hot blankets and a heavy dose of old whisky—all had combined to induce one of those physical states of purely perfect fatigue that responds so smoothly to the call of sleep.

It was nearly five when he opened his eyes, took stock of his surroundings, and little by little reconstituted all that had passed.

"They're treating me with a quite inexplicable tenderness!" he murmured bewilderingly, as the light of a solitary candle showed him a hearty plateful of cold beef and ham, a loaf of bread, a pat of butter and a cheese, and two quart bottles of beer.

He was far too matter-of-fact to let this bewilderment stand in the way of his appetite. His left wrist, like his left ankle, was attached by a chain and a stout steel band to rings in the wall; but his right was free, and he could move without too much discomfort.

He fell on the food prepared for him, and devoured it ravenously, wondering the while more and more to what extraordinary coil of circumstance he ought to refer the good fortune of his treatment.

He was not the only one who wondered; but while he wondered and blessed, the others wondered and cursed. Jake and Price and Sharpe, who had all suffered grievous and most painful damage to their visages, were as ready ripe for mutiny against their leader on the night as need be.

They did not understand at all to what end Peter was being thus saved, and nursed, and coddled, and thought for. They were rawly vicious against him. And had their leader, in addition, had an omniscient eye, known how to instil more than the fear of death into them, Peter would have been maimed beyond all hope of recovery.

"It's my opinion," said Jake savagely, as he and the cronies foregathered over their pipes and beer in the kitchen, "that the boss has gone off his nut. Here he's got the man we've gone to all this trouble for, and all 'e can think o' doin' to 'im is to dangle 'im like a marionette over a barby. It makes me sick."

"You'll be very much sicker, my good Jake," said a voice harshly from the doorway, in which their leader had suddenly appeared, "unless you learn to keep a civil tongue in your head, and, if you don't, to pay any attention to my orders! It is now five o'clock. The yacht will be back here at eight, with a dago crew, who are not likely to talk or ask questions. Mr. Jackson will then be handed on to the yacht, and your duties for the time being will be over, and you will be free to return to London, a course I should advise you not to delay over. Jem Boyd's no fool. And though I've given his thick head something to puzzle over, we can't leave out chance. He may have stumbled on a clue, and be following it up; but he's cleverer than I think if he's here before breakfast to-morrow; and by that time the nest will be empty. You'd better, then, all of you, motor up to Ryde to-night, and take the first boat across in the morning. And go separately after Ryde. Meanwhile, the three of you will keep on the move from room to room downstairs, and strain every nerve to catch the slightest sound from without. If Boyd and his man mean rescue, you may be sure they'll attempt something crafty; and there must be no surprise. So off you get, and keep your ears open. I am going to see Mr. Jackson."

He left them without nod or gesture, and strode away up the stairs. Jake looked after him with an evil, cunning glance.

Master Peter opened the door of Peter's prison, entered, and, closing the door after him, walked over to the bed, and looked down at Pete.

"Feel better?" he asked, in a cordial tone.

Peter nodded, and looked at him with a resolute, curious stare. Despite the beard and the glasses and the wig, there was something hauntingly, baffling familiar in the whole set of the man; but, for the life of him, Peter could not put a name to him, nor even a frame or surroundings.

"Very much better," he said cheerfully. "Good sleep! Good food! Right as a trivet; but I've been wondering."

"What about?" said his captor, with a smile that was distinctly pleasant.

"What the little game is," said Peter bluntly. "If you had meant me to be crocked, you wouldn't have been so careful of me. Yet if you were not my most bitter enemy, and an enemy, too, of all good sport and fair dealing, I should not be here. What is the game? And who are you?"

"As to who I am," was the reply, in the blandest of tones, "I think I may count myself as an old, if not a thoroughly valued, friend. You shall judge."

He lifted his hand, and, taking his wig from the back, peeled off hair and beard and moustache.

"Cato Carfax!" said Peter, in a glacial tone. "I suspected as much. Yet I could not deem it possible that a gentleman should have so degraded his honour and befouled his life."

"Ah, Peter, Peter," said Carfax, with a little derisive laugh, "you're not got out of that bad habit that made your speeches so wearisome at the union. You will go in for heroics, and you will be sentimental. Now, I bar heroics, and I am never sentimental. That is why I have come here to have a nice, quiet, confidential chat with you."

"You could have had that for the asking at Appaldecombe," said Peter, restraining his rising anger, "and yet you have chosen to pester me in the worst forms of outrage and indignity. Why?"

"For the very simple reason, my dear Peter," said Carfax suavely, "that it is extremely improbable that you would, in the freedom of Appaldecombe, have listened to me with the same careful attention as you will listen to me now that your freedom and future is in my power to dispose of. I will be quite frank with you, Peter, and go even further.

"I am large, and almost sure of a phenomenal success in the rather brutal profession you have chosen, you would be a serious and constant menace, if not an insuperable obstacle, to a design that I have set my heart, my will, and my body, upon. I have no objection to you, and I don't allow anyone or anything to stand in my way. Therefore you had to be removed, my dear man, to leave my way in the will of my own making. And you are removed. Your body could not be more frank with you. You are in my power, and until you subscribe to the conditions I shall presently name to you, in my power you shall remain, if you grow white-haired in it!"

"I think," said Peter slowly, his steady eyes searching the burning gaze directed on him, "that in my heart I always knew you to be a low-class blackguard, Cato Carfax. But I'm not going to be bandy words with you. I don't care what your conditions are. I don't even want to hear them. The fact that they are yours is quite enough for me. I refuse them. So you can do your worst!"

"I am sorry to hear your poor kind of strategist, Peter, my friend," sneered Carfax, whose sang-froid seemed to have been a little ruffled at last by the withering contempt in his captive's voice, "the conditions concern you much more than they touch me, I think. At least, they concern those you love."

Peter looked at him, a sudden fear clutching at his heart, and invading his face and eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked, over lips suddenly dry and hot and rough.

"And I really believed you rather quick-witted," said Carfax, with a light, mocking laugh. "Do you suppose, my dear man, that I should have gone to all this trouble and risk in securing you, if the object of my actions were not already equally in my power? Does a man charter a vessel to go treasure-hunting before he has located his treasure?"

"What do you mean?" asked Peter again, and his voice was little more than a dry whisper.

"I will tell you," said Carfax quietly, and in tones a-thrill with a strange imperiousness. "I love your sister Nellie. I mean her to be my wife, if I have to burn England for her. I mean to put to use all your power to find money for her. I mean, if all other methods fail, to force her consent by her love for you. She will give her freedom for yours.

"The day she marries me, six hundred a year will be placed at your disposition, and you will be conveyed to Australia, and put at liberty, free to settle there if you like, and at such a distance that you will be able to cool down before acting rashly. That's the whole sketch, Peter, my friend. And now I'll leave you to reflect on it."

"One minute!" said Peter, with a calm that surprised himself, for he had thought he would suffocate with rage at Carfax's first mention of his beloved sister. "You seem to me to have overlooked one very essential fact. You don't know where my sister is, and from me you never will know. She is safe out of your reach, and forewarned against any wile you might devise."

"My poor Peter," said Carfax, taking a step nearer the bed, "do you not yet understand my little parable of the ship and the treasure? Not only do I know where your sister is, but I may say that you do not know. I did not approve of the lonely lodging you found for her at Jasmine Lodge, near Esher, and I moved her and her mother to a more bracing climate, where they are under the most special care of old retainers devoted to me. You will see, then, that I hold all the trumps; and your opposition will, besides being futile, render you ridiculous. You had much better give in."

He bent forward and peered at Peter.

Through his half-closed eyes, Peter saw the face of Carfax bending over him, and he realised that his enemy was given over to him.

With one of those lightning-like movements that so flustered his ring comrades, he shot out his right, and, clutching Carfax by the throat, dashed his head down on to his manacled left hand, which, in turn, closed round the throat of the choking man.

And thus for a few grim seconds they lay, Carfax's contused, swelling face not a foot from Peter's livid visage, his tongue lolling, his eyes bulging, and injected with blood, his left arm pinioned under him, his right arm numb under the deadly pressure of Peter's elbow.

Then suddenly he went limp. But Peter was taking no risks. And the game of possum was one he had played himself. He heaved Carfax's head up, and tapped the solid stone wall with his temple. There was no pretence about the jerk forward of the inert neck. Peter let him fall back on the bed. Then he searched his pockets till he found the key to the bands that locked his ankle and wrist. In another moment he stood erect on the floor, free, and garbed only in blankets.

He looked down gloomily at the unconscious man. He was not over-nice, but he felt a distinct revulsion against the idea of dressing in clothes taken from Cato Carfax. But common-sense carried the day. Any moment might bring up one of Carfax's "toughs," and it is not given to any man to fight effectually in a blanket.

Peter stripped his enemy, and donned his clothes. Then he looked Carfax to the rings on the wall, and threw the blankets over him, turning him sideways, and drawing the blankets over Carfax's face.

The sound of a step ascending the stair brought him to a lively sense of his danger. He sprang at the wig discarded by Carfax, and drew it on. Then he strode to the door, and opened it, standing with his back to the solitary candle, and looking into the cunning eyes of Jake.

"Well?" he snapped, in a voice as near to Carfax's as he could make it.

Jake gave him a curious, suspicious glance.

But the eyes were in the shadow; height and build were about the same; and the face was completely hidden by the beard.

"The men 'ave come from the yacht," he said. "Came nearly 'arf an hour ago. Dirtiest lot of dago I ever did see in all my natural. Are they to go, or 'ow shall I send them up? They reported that a motor-launch was lying down by the landing-stage, but sheered off into the fog as the Kestrel moored. And they said, too, they saw some fellows 'angin' about the cove when they came up. Like enough it's Boyd and his crew. We've been lookin' round for 'em, or I'd 'ave come up earlier. But we saw no signs of anyone. All the same, if we don't want another scrap, we'd better 'urry. And what if my mates reckon we'd be safer if you'd put us ashore somewhere on the mainland than if we risk running past Boyd to Ryde."

"Very well," said Peter. "Get ready. I've got five or ten minutes to finish here. Give the dagoes some grub and liquor. I'll see them presently."

Again Jake looked at him doubtfully. The voice was certainly different from his master's usual snarly tone. But the suspicion seemed too wild, and, in any case, Jake had no option but putting it to the test himself. He edged away, and, with a furtive, backward glance, hurried down the staircase.

"I'm in a tight hole," murmured Peter, as he re-entered the room and closed the door. "My voice will betray me in a minute. I wonder what this yacht-crew means? Going to move me again, I suppose. And they may pile in here, and one glance at Carfax will give the whole show away. I must stop that."

He looked around for some means of barricading the door. He had seen already that the outside alone was furnished with bolts and held no key. Beneath the bed was one of the thin iron slats used as a spring on the cheaper sort of bedsteads. He whisked it out, bent it to a two-inch mesh, and thrust them beneath the door till the curving iron was rigid and unyielding. He tried opening the door. But it would not budge the eighth of an inch.

At the same moment a sudden fall of plaster at the far end of the room caused him to leap round. Then he stood as one petrified, staring across the ill-lit gloom.

For, one after the other, two men dropped into the room, and he was looking down the barrel of a revolver into the hard, angry, vindictive eyes of Jem Boyd, and beyond Jem's shoulder, into the glittering orbs of Phospher, the negro.

Carfax Gives the Alarm.

THERE was nothing of the laggard about Jem Boyd, and as soon as he had spent forty-five minutes of hard work in satisfying the cravings of hunger, he started back for the rendezvous at a pace that kept Billy on the trot.

His arrival was greeted with a grunt of satisfaction by Dickie File.

"Look here," he said, holding up a rope-ladder, "we have not been idle—Phospher and I. We got the rope in the village, and the rungs in the second. And this colour-box of yours is an artist in notes. This is my little idea. You can't climb trees, guv'nor; but we may want you and Blackie to take a hand in any fighting. I take it that the great idea is to get Peter Jackson out and off the land. Well, I'll climb up, get on to the roof, fix this ladder, and wait for you three to come up. Then we pull the ladder up, of course. And we start in straight away to uproot. I've marked the spot. Mind you, we've got to work quiet as worms. We've got to make a comfortable big hole in half an hour, and no one have an idea that we're at work. I'll take the slates off and pass 'em to Phospher, and you, boss, will see that Billy takes them from Phospher and notches them down gently as he'd drop a flagstone on a baby. Of course, when it comes to the plaster, we'll have to plump through and risk it. And that's where you'll come in, guv'nor."

And not unmuttered Phospher, a coppery light blazing in his inscrutable eyes.

"You, too, my estimable Ethiopian!" said Dickie. "You and the guv'nor will take first brunt, and stand off any attack, while I release our friend Peter, and lead him to the ladder. Billy will go through the hole. Billy and Peter will then make a bee-line for the boat, while we tackle the engineers of this audacious bit of kidnapping. How does that suit you?"

"All right, except in particulars," growled Boyd. "Peter had better wait on the roof till we join him. The beggars may get into the garden and cop him as he comes down, and in that case we shall be no further forward. And sometimes the bolder ways find."

"I think it's you who want warning!" said the low, phlegmatic tones of the engineer, as he stepped out of the mist into their little circle. "And I'm just in time. The Kestrel's back, and with a crew of the coarsest-looking lot of cut-throats I've seen this side of Cheffy."

Boyd turned from her, but I stayed near enough to hear what was going on. Eight men were being selected to go ashore, in order to bring aboard a dangerous maniac. That was enough for me, so I posted into the willows, made fast, and slipped up to pass you the word. And if you don't want those fellows to tumble over you, you'll up and flit straight."

The advice arrived none too soon, for they had scarcely scattered in a communicating line among the ghostly trees when the boat-crew from the yacht came swinging past, and more than one head was turned suspiciously in their direction. But though the men halted a moment, and jabbered excitedly, they were evidently disinclined to tempt the shadows. They vanished through the main gates.

"Good man, Finch," said Boyd, "get back to the launch, and keep your ears open for the cry of a lost child. Understand? Come on, you other boys! The nearer we follow the heels of those fellows, the less chance there is of our being looked for in the grounds."

Boyd's prevision had proved correct. Jake and a half-dozen men, at the hurrying of shadows in the wood, insisted on four of the new-comers accompanying them to the spot. But by the time they got there Boyd and his men were safely ensconced on the roof, a corner of which Dickie was unstitching.

And thus it was that within the half-hour Boyd and Phospher, kicking away the thin sheaf of plaster, dropped in so unexpectedly on the startled Peter.

For the moment there was a tense silence, Boyd and the negro, handling their revolvers, and peering with dazed, smarting eyes through the powdery dust.

But, to them, after what Dicky had reported, there could be no doubt that their adored master was the tall, slim figure being chained there on the bed, and that his captor was the bearded, grinning ruffian standing there at his side.

It was Phospher who made the first move. He dropped on his haunches, and with the spring of a jaguar, landed within three feet of Peter, and, levelling his revolver straight at his head, crooked his finger to the trigger.

"Hands up!" he said, in a nasty tone.

"Good old Phospher!" said Peter softly, as he lifted his hands and his wig in the same gesture.

"It's the master!" cried Phospher, in a strangled voice, falling at Peter's feet.

"Why, Peter, old man!" said Boyd. "And who's that in your place?"

"We'll talk of him presently," said Pete quickly, restraining Boyd. "Listen! We've got to consider a way of escape. I take suspected my voice just now, and he's bringing up the lot!"

They listened. Up the stairs came the sound of the tramp of many men, and then suddenly a thundering at the door, and as suddenly the voice of Carfax yelling:

"Break the door in, men! The prisoner escapes by the roof. Half of you look to the garden!"

(Another enthralling long instalment will appear in next week's "Boys' Realm.")

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The MAN WITH THE MASK.

A Christmas School Tale. By JAMES HOWARTH.

THE 1st CHAPTER.

Preparing for the Holidays—Left Behind.

CHRISTMAS was very near. Lessons were at an end at Dalesbury House. The score or two scholars, whose youthful minds, for a consideration, Dr. Jisson had set himself the task of cultivating, were on the point of departing for their various homes. Revelling in the cessation of authority, that came to an end the moment the worthy pedagogue finished his brief address, the boys were rushing madly about, gathering together their many, varied belongings, and making the old house re-echo with their shouts.

"Ten minutes to change, three to wash, twenty to feed. I'm going in for the lightning quick-change artiste business after this!" laughed Lester Arnold as he made a dive into his trunk.

"Has anyone seen my old footer-boots? If I leave 'em lying about the cleaners are sure to annex 'em while I'm away. I wouldn't part with them old trifles for any money! They've carried me past the enemy too often. I must preserve 'em, if only to remind me of the glorious footer season we have had. Ah, thanks, Tommy!" to a small chap, whose quick eyes had spied the missing footwear lying in a far corner. "These are the very identicals!"

At the far end of the dormitory the indistinguishable rumble of a half-buried voice could be heard to issue from Ernest Perkins, the one obese specimen of boyhood Dalesbury could boast of, who was stooping over a gigantic box, his head buried in its cavernous depths.

"I say," the fat one grumbled, as he straightened himself up and turned his heated face towards the rest of the boys, "who's been putting this beastly sticky stuff at the bottom of my box?"

In his hand he held a sheet of brown paper, the surface of which had been carefully spread with gum-arabic.

"I'll break the rotter's jaw, whoever it was!"

No one answered.

Perkins gazed hard and long at Simmins, a confirmed practical joker; but that individual's face bore an expression of complete innocence.

"Not guilty, m'lud!" he said, in answer to the accusatory glance. "I know nothing about the matter, Perky."

"You're a—" Perkins was beginning, with the utmost politeness, when Ricks, the janitor, put his head in at the door.

"Time's nearly hup, young gen'lemen!" the school porter shouted. "The 'Ead's a-waiting of you all in the gen'ral-room."

"Right-ho, Rickotts!" cried Lester Arnold. "We'll be with him in a tick. Give me a hand to strap up this trunk, old chap. Sit on its head while I draw the buckle tight."

"No time, Master Arnold! I've 'eaps o' things to do 'sides 'elpin' you young gen'lemen. In an hour the coaches will be here."

"Do the other thing, then! You look amazingly blue this morning, Ricketts. What's made you get your blue-rag out?"

But the porter had fled.

Perkins continued his indignant grumbling.

"It's too bad!" he growled, when he had succeeded in freeing his trunk of the sticky substance. "It's taken me nearly half an hour to get the filthy stuff out. I haven't got a single blessed thing packed yet!"

He gingerly deposited the gum-smeared paper on to the nearest chair before resuming his labours.

Perkins was a trifle absent-minded. He was also abnormally lazy.

He had scarcely packed away half a dozen articles before he wanted a rest. He sat down on to the sticky paper that had previously given him offence.

Explosive laughter came from all parts of the dormitory. The rest, well acquainted with the stout one's absent-minded ways, had fully expected this to happen.

"What's the matter now?" he asked, glaring around.

Only the heaving backs of his chums were visible. Everyone seemed to be particularly busy at that moment. Every head was buried in its owner's box. But the subterraneous chuckles continued.

By this time Perkins had entirely forgotten the gummed paper incident; he had also forgotten the fact that he had on his best unmentionables.

Being unable to discover a reason for their laughter, he slowly rose to resume his packing.

"I never saw such a lot of idiotic rotters!" he mumbled, as he added one or two more items to his collection. "Anyone who did not know what asses you can sometimes be would imagine you were enjoying some huge joke!"

The tumultuous heaving of the backs recommenced; the muffled chuckles increased in volume.

"All right!" muttered Perkins resignedly, as he gave up the puzzle. "You can go on laughing. Pray don't mind me!"

He lifted up one of the more weighty packages and carefully placed it at the bottom of his box. To do this he had to stoop well over the receptacle.

Now, as has before been said, Perkins was very stout. When he stooped, the breadth of person he exposed was extraordinary; and, with the paper still adhering to him, the sight he presented was a truly comical one. And, once he had inclined from the perpendicular, it required considerable exertion on his part before Perkins could stand upright again.

By this time the muffled chuckles had ceased. Every head was lifted, and every eye was directed to his corner of the dormitory.

Lester Arnold placed his fingers to his lips for silence. The rest, nodding a willing acquiescence, held their hands over their mouths as they watched.

Simmins had unearthed a piece of calico from somewhere.

Stealing behind Perkins, he quickly rent this in two.

The tearing sound it gave out had the desired effect. The stout one hurriedly sat down, both hands clasped to a remote part of his anatomy.

"I think—I fancy——" he commenced to splutter.

Then, catching sight of the grinning Simmins with the torn fragment in his hands, he guessed what had happened. At the same moment he discovered the questionable way in which his best nether garments had been decorated.

His fat face elongated with amazement.

The lookers-on fairly howled with laughter, till at last Perkins, naturally good-tempered, found the mirth irresistible, and was obliged to add his bass rumble to the medley of sounds.

The only two who were not taking part in these active preparations for departure were Jack and Frank Smithson, two young Colonials, who had been placed in Dr. Jisson's charge for the completion of their education. Their home was in West Canada.

Although in these days of quick travel, when a voyage across the mighty Atlantic means but a matter of a few days, the distance was too great for them to spend the vacation with their own people. And, having no relatives on this side of the ocean, there was only one arrangement possible—that they must spend the time as best they could in the doctor's company. This meant rather a lonely time of it for the two lads, who were already looking forward to the few weeks of isolation with gloomy anticipation.

They had not been long enough at Dalesbury House to make any real friends. With the exception of frank, good-natured Lester Arnold, they had not got on very well with the rest of the doctor's pupils. The new surroundings and companions were so entirely different to what they had been used to. They missed the exciting times they had spent on their father's big timber-station, the congenial company of the lumbermen's sons. They were only just beginning to grow accustomed to the change when the Christmas holidays became due.

When Lester Arnold learned in what way the two young Colonials were destined to spend the vacation his concern was very great. This had not been till almost the last day of the term.

"Whatever will you two chaps do with yourselves?" he cried. "How will you manage to fill in the time? This old place is all O.K. when the chaps are all knocking about; without 'em it will be like—like living on Juan Fernandez without even a Man Friday to console you! Once our backs are turned, the Head will shut himself up in that other old house of his as tightly as a whelk in its shell, and you'll be left entirely on your own."

"Oh, we'll be all serene!" Jack answered, his lip quivering, nevertheless. He was thinking of the gigantic Christmas party that would be already gathering together at the far-away timber-station.

"We'll have to hop around and interest ourselves as best we can."

It was not until the coaches that were to take their schoolfellows to the station were drawn up at the door that they realised how completely they were being left in the cold.

They stood upon the steps of Dalesbury House watching the scramble that took place for the front seats with moist eyes. Behind them, also interested in the departure, stood Dr. Jisson.

The Head was a tall, gloomy-looking man, who did not enjoy the best of health. Lately he had been looking so bad that even the boys, usually unobservant of such matters, had commented much on his sickly appearance.

"Looks as if he had the old man of the sea hanging on his back," Lester had said, when they were discussing the doctor's evident ill-health. "The Head will be glad to get rid of us for a spell."

In this he guessed correctly.

Dr. Jisson was watching the departure of the boys with a feeling of relief. But he was not unmindful of the two who would remain in his charge. He was perfectly aware how much in the cold the Colonial boys must feel.

He patted both on the shoulders encouragingly.

"Cheer up, boys!" he said. "The time will soon pass. Before we know where we are they will be all back again once more, and then you can resume your romps together. In the meantime, I must form plans for your entertainment."

"To-morrow I expect an old friend—a Mr. Nickolls. Although much older than yourselves, he is in every way more fitted for the task of entertaining you than I. It is on your behalf that I have asked him here. We will shut up the school, and resort to my private establishment. The school housekeeper will be going, and Ricks wishes to pay his people a visit. There will only be my other housekeeper and our three selves left till Mr. Nickolls joins us. There they go!"

The troublesome question of seats had been settled. The coaches were about to start.

At the last moment considerable difficulty had arose as to where Perkins could be stowed. Neither were the occupants of any of the coaches willing to have his unwieldy person wedged up amongst them.

In the end Perkins had to content himself by taking a seat upon the steps at the rear of the last coach. From this position he saluted the Head, and beamed benignly upon the brothers.

"Good-bye!" yelled Lester Arnold. "Good-bye, sir! Good-bye, Jack and Frank!"

There was a clatter of iron-shod hoofs, a flourish of whips, and a shouting chorus of good-byes as the coaches swung down the road.

It was not until the rumble of wheels had died away in the distance that Jack and Frank turned sorrowfully away to follow the doctor indoors.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

In their New Quarters.

VERY little distance separated the school from the doctor's other establishment.

They were, in fact, two ancient dwellings the doctor had obtained a lease of years previously, one for educational purposes, the other for his own private use. The grounds adjoined. You had but to pass through a wicket-gate to get from one place to the other.

Why the Head should want to keep the two places on had always been a mystery to his pupils.

The private establishment was ruled by an aged housekeeper, whom they rarely saw. When questioned, the matron of the scholastic establishment was most reticent on the subject; neither did old Ricks appear willing to impart any information. All the boys knew was that they were forbidden, under any pretext whatever, to go anywhere near the other house, and they had always religiously obeyed the doctor's stern mandate.

Therefore she present arrangement came as a great surprise to the brothers.

"You can regard this place as Liberty Hall," remarked Dr. Jisson, as Jack and Frank followed Ricks, who was carrying their immediate waste into their new quarters. "You may do what you please, and, with the exception of the left wing, roam where you please about this place. I must have your faithful promise not to go near the left wing."

Both gave the required promise, though much puzzled.

Probably, from being less used, the second house looked much older than the school; but the architecture of both places was alike. Both buildings had the same gloomy, barrack-like appearance, the same heavy-mullioned windows; the same vast, scantily-furnished rooms resounding with the same uncanny echoes.

"This is a rum show!" grumbled Jack, as accompanied by Frank, he completed a hasty inspection of the house—all excepting the mysterious left wing. Their way to this part of the house they found barred by a huge, oaken, nail-studded door, securely locked. And from the grounds without the windows they could see were both closely shuttered.

"Oh, it's all right!" declared Frank, who was of the most matter-of-fact, unimaginative temperament. "We'll soon get used to it."

"You may, old boy. I won't—not if I live here for a century. It's too uncanny altogether for my taste. That aged female below stairs looks a veritable fossil, and is about as deaf as one. I can't make her out quite. From the gleam in her eyes I should say she resents our presence here very much."

"She's all right, too!" declared Frank. "The dinner was grand! Far better cooked than what we got over there"—indicating the school with a jerk of his elbow. "If we fare no worse, I won't mind."

But Jack could not rest easy. He felt that he must keep moving about. Unlike Frank, he had a most imaginative turn of mind. He could picture all sorts of tragedies having taken place in the big, gloomy rooms they had passed through. The baronial-like hall had made him shudder.

His ultra-sensitive imagination made him see the dead-and-gone dames and grandees strutting about its mosaic pavement; the crossed rapiers hanging upon the walls, and the remnants of rusty armour lying about in the darker corners, further strengthening the scenes his disturbed fancy conjured up.

The room allotted to them was the topmost of all—the furthest removed from the tabooed left wing, Jack was careful to notice.

"I vote we go out for another stroll," he suggested at last, unable to stand the place any longer. "Anything will be better than stopping here."

When they returned indoors the doctor was nowhere visible, neither was his aged housekeeper. In the dining-room, however, they found an appetising meal spread, a plentiful supply of candles, and a few good books.

"This is a trifle better!" remarked Jack, when they had finished eating. "Pull up to the fire, Frank, and fling me over a book from that pile. An hour's nice, quiet read, and then we'll be off to roost!"

"I'm easy now," replied Frank, with a yawn. "One long tramp in the heavy snow has made me sleepy. If I stay down here any longer I'll be obliged to prop my eyelids up with match-sticks. Coming?"

"I'll have to, I suppose"—with reluctance.

When Perkins stooped, with the paper still adhering to him, the sight he presented was a truly comical one. A titter of laughter ran round the dormitory.

"You are a sleepy old fathead! I daren't stay down here, with only those ghostly shadows the candles are making for company. I'd be howling with fright in no time. This is a dismal old hole, and no mistake!"

Frank yawned more widely than ever.

"I'm off!" he said briefly, as he made for the door.

By the time Jack reached their room Frank was already between the blankets, far away in the land of nod, entirely hidden from view beneath the folds of bedclothes.

For once Jack envied his brother his ability to fall asleep under any conditions. As far as he himself was concerned, he felt he would never be able to get a wink all the time they remained in their new quarters. It was rather too cold, however, to sit idly watching the candle burn itself out, so he hurriedly flung off his things, blew out the light, and sprang into bed.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
The Face.

WHETHER due to his changed surroundings, or due to the depressing effect the house had had on him from the moment Frank and he entered the doorway, Jack's sleep, far from being peaceful, was disturbed by a series of hideous nightmares. Curiously enough, even in the midst of these dreams, he was perfectly conscious of where he was lying.

Although his body was at rest, his brain refused to remain inactive. And all the terrifying ordeals his sleep-racked mind was made to pass through took place in his new, low-ceilinged bed-chamber.

The shadows that had lurked in the far corners of the apartment now seemed to assume more than their share, emerging from their retreat to hover near his bedside.

Only nothing was quite clear. The shadows were mere moving blurs of blackness, whose mutterings he could hear, but whose faces he could not see. Apparently they had no faces, nor definite outline, and were ever on the move, and ever changing.

But they would not leave him alone—now approaching quite close, now hurriedly retreating, but never very far away. Their presence filled him with a feeling of indescribable horror.

At last one of the indistinct shapes came quite near, and Jack thought he could feel claw-like fingers gripping his throat.

The pain was real enough, as was the sensation of choking.

With a big effort he threw off the feeling of deadly stupor that had held him powerless so long. He fought with his hands, and lashed out with his feet. Suddenly he knew he was no longer dreaming, that the fingers at his throat choking the life out of him were real hands, the dark form looming above him not an imaginary creation of his excited fancy, but a real assailant.

Instantly Jack's brain grew clear, and he knew that a murderous attack was being made upon him. Already he could feel his strength ebbing; the feeling of suffocation increasing. The agony was indescribable. In another moment or so he must succumb.

Thrusting both feet against the dim form his staring eyes could see, and using both hands to tear away those that were throttling him, Jack gave one mighty upheaval, and succeeded in wrenching himself free.

He heard the figure give out a weird, uncanny cry as it crashed on to the floor—the crash telling Jack it was real flesh and blood he had to deal with. This knowledge dispelled what little remained of his former fear. Uncanny shadows he might tremble at, a housebreaker—for such he took his assailant to be—he was not afraid to tackle. Freed from its former terrors, his mind once more sprang into active action.

Without a moment's hesitation, he hurled himself upon the figure that, in the half-light, he could see writhing upon the floor. One of his flying feet must have caught his midnight visitor below what is termed in pugilistic circles the bread-basket, disabling him immediately.

Jack's attire was scanty. Its loose folds afforded a good grip to the one beneath him, whose only anxiety now seemed to be to get away as soon as possible. This was exactly what Jack did not intend to let him do if he could prevent it. The boy's blood was up. He was determined he would get a glimpse of the face the struggling figure was endeavouring to conceal.

Jack Smithson was an accomplished wrestler. For that particular branch of physical culture he held all the honours at Dalesbury House. The one below him being in an inviting position, Jack soon wrapped a powerful arm-lock, with the intention of bringing the hidden face uppermost.

Excepting for the one crash, as his assailant had been hurled to the floor, there had been very little noise made. Only their laboured breathing broke the silence. The tussle taking place was a grim, silent struggle for mastery, the figure striving to free itself from the powerful, young, unioning arms. Jack equally determined to make secure his prisoner.

At last the lever he had applied began to tell. Another heave, and the concealed face would be visible. Jack dug both knees into the rug he happened to be kneeling upon, and exerted all his remaining strength.

At that moment the moon burst free of the clouds. It was now shining almost directly opposite the little window, and the broad beams that found their way through the tree's bare branches cast a flood of light into the room.

This light fell upon the struggling figures—upon the face Jack had been struggling to see. What the moonlight revealed made him relinquish his hold. The face that stared up into his own was too horrible for description. It bore a fixed, malignant, bestial expression, and looked altogether too fiendish to be that of a human being.

Jack gave a shuddering cry as he fell back, both then clasped to his eyes to shut out the dreadful sight. The face resembled nothing his most distorted imagination had ever conjured up. It was but a momentary glimpse he had caught of the beast-like countenance, but it had been quite sufficient. Trembling all over, he shrank further and further away, till at last his back was touching the wall, and he could get no further. Would the—the thing go, or would it resume its attack on him? Jack dare not uncover his eyes to see what was happening. Would a cry arouse Frank?

Their united efforts might prove sufficient to drive away the awful being, if not from the house, at least from their room, which they could then secure against further intrusion.

"Frank, Frank!" he screamed.

"Hallo!" answered a sleepy voice, after what seemed like an hour's interval. "What's the matter?"

Talking his hands away from his eyes, Jack saw his brother's white-clad figure clambering over the bed in his direction.

"Take care, Frank!" he cried out. "Don't go near it!"

"Don't go near what!" Frank spoke in puzzled tones, as he stood staring down at Jack's crouching form. "What maggot's bitten you now—Imagination?" This was the nickname Frank sometimes gave Jack, suggested by his inclination for "seeing things." "There's nothing here, you silly fathead! What on earth are you sitting out in the cold for? Ugh"—shivering—"it's enough to freeze the marrow in your bones! What made you yell out?"

Jack had immediately regained his nerve. He was staring at the spot where his terrible visitor had lain—where that awful face had glared up into his own.

There was nothing there!

The patch of moonlight showed nothing more dreadful than a crumpled rug—a heap of twisted bedclothes; beyond was the bare boards.

"You've been dreaming, that's what you've been doing!" exclaimed Frank disgustedly, as he followed Jack's terrified glance. "You've been indulging in too much fiction lately, and your imagination has run away with you. Why don't you read the 'B. R.,' or something sensible? I guess you'd be seeing bogies then. I'm not going to prowl about the dark corners down below. Jump into bed with me, if you've got 'em as bad as that. If anyone had even hinted you could be such a chuckle-headed idiot I would have punched his jaw!"

And Frank handed his unreasoning brother into his own bed.

Then he collected together the clothes Jack had scattered about the floor, and, having added them to the already ample supply, curled himself up by the shaking brother's side, his indignant grumbles gradually dying away as sleep once more got the better of him.

THE 4th CHAPTER.
Mr. Nickolls—Frank Disappears

THE following morning the boys met Dr. Jisson again at breakfast; they also met for the first time Mr. Nickolls, the gentleman whom the Head had told them he was expecting, who had arrived by a very early train.

The visitor was a great contrast to his scholarly friend. He had a more mirth-loving, cheery disposition. Over breakfast he kept up a continual flow of quips and anecdotes, Frank was in a constant roar. Jack did his best to join in the mirth, even the doctor smiling occasionally. The Head was looking far from well. The habitual pallor of his face had increased; he looked as if sleep and he had been strangers for some time. He inquired how the two boys had passed the night in their new quarters; and Frank, replying for both, said not so bad. A slight kick on the ankle warned him that Jack did not wish to have the incident of the night alluded to.

Frank was unshaken in his belief that his brother had been dreaming. In vain Jack pointed to the blue marks encircling his throat, bruises that told how fierce had been the grip upon him.

"Your own work," said Frank, with great decision. "You've been trying to throttle yourself. I'll have to keep a close watch on you in future. If this kind of thing continues, you'll be doing yourself a serious injury one of these days. You'll have to be sent to bed early, lad! Don't talk to me about faces! The only face you saw last night was the reflection of your own terrified mug in a mirror!"

"There is no mirror in our room."

"I don't care whether there is or not. It was your own face you saw, I tell you. How you managed it I can't say. Didn't I jump up the moment you yelled out? Had there been others in the room besides ourselves, wouldn't I have seen 'em?"

"It had time to escape before you were aroused."

"Had it? Well, what made you plant yourself in a corner like a dethroned mandarin? Why didn't you jump up and prevent it—if you must call your imaginary visitor by that name!

And this is all the gratitude I receive for risking pneumonia, and other healthy complaints, through going to your assistance! Dreams, my lad—nothing more!"

But Jack could not be convinced. A close inspection of the bed-chamber in broad daylight failed to reveal more than one common outlet. At the far side of the room the wall gave out a hollow sound, but there was no door. Jack was much mystified.

During the whole of the day his handsome face never lost its worried look, that Frank's raillery and Mr. Nickolls's jokes could not chase away.

When retiring for the second night he took upstairs with him a stout cudgel. Frank laughed long and heartily at this precaution.

"I'll have to lie awake to watch you," he said. "If you have 'em bad again during the night you may make a mistake, and take your beloved brother for a spook!"

But he failed to keep this resolution. He was fast asleep long before Jack had summoned up enough courage to undress.

When he did get into bed, Jack found that he had not the former night's difficulty in getting to sleep. No assailants or no assailants, spooks or otherwise, he felt fearfully sleepy, and dropped off almost at once.

It seemed to him that he had not been asleep more than five minutes before something caused him suddenly to awake again. His mind instantly reverted to the previous night's experience, and he began to tremble as the lineaments of the awful face flashed across his memory. But this time it was no grappling fingers at his throat that had aroused him; it was the feeling that someone or something had brushed against the bed. Instinctively he shot a quick glance across to the candle he had left burning. The way it had sunk into its holder told him at least three hours might have passed since he turned in. Even as he looked the feeble illumination gave a sudden, expiring flicker. The room was once more in utter darkness. On this occasion there was no moonlight to dispel the stygian blackness.

Jack sprang out of bed with the intention of lighting a fresh candle, but this time he was determined not to allow his fears to prevent him from sifting the matter to the bottom. His cudgel held lightly in his right hand, with his left he began to grope his way towards the side-table. A slight sound made him pause again. Expecting an attack, he instantly placed himself on the defensive, with his weapon raised to strike the moment anything touched him.

Nothing happened, however. Moreover, Jack knew whatever was moving about the room was at the far end. He could hear shuffling footsteps quite distinctly, and the sound of heavy breathing that was not Frank's familiar nasal music.

Now was the time to convince his unbelieving brother.

"Frank—Frank!" he breathed, in an intense whisper, reaching out to shake that sleepy individual.

But Jack was destined to get still another shock. His groping hand passed over the flat surface of the bed without meeting with resistance. Frank's bed was empty!

For quite a spell his bewildered mind refused to accept the fact of Frank's absence. His first impression was that he had made a mistake, in the intense darkness confusing the two beds. A single stride across the narrow space was sufficient to convince him this was not so, however. Both beds alike were untenanted. Then his dazed faculties began to reassert themselves; he knew that he was confronted by a new and unlooked-for mystery. It was this knowledge that aroused him to action. Bracing himself up, he steadied his shaking form by clutching hold of the bedrail, and listened intently.

There no longer was any sound in the room. The shuffling footsteps had ceased. Jack thought he heard a door—or door away, it seemed to him—then all was silent.

Feeling his way quickly back to the side-table, he struck a match, placed a fresh candle in the holder; then, as the flame shot up, looked about him. The room had not been in first awakening had come from that part of the room furthest from the door, beyond the beds, where there was a considerable area of empty space.

In the furthest corner of all lay their trunks, just as Ricks had pitched them down. There was nothing else to be seen. Apart from the cold, the dreary look of the place had made him shudder.

Jack hurriedly dressed himself before making further investigations.

When he had accomplished this, the first thing he did was to make for that portion of the wall that had given out a hollow sound, there he was before examining the room. Something made him connect this wall with the otherwise unaccountable disappearance of their midnight visitor. Frank could not have—if he could only discover it—there was a secret door at that side of the room.

It was whilst subjecting this wall to a most minute examination that Jack's worst fears were confirmed. Frank had met with foul play; he had been ruthlessly murdered—his body dragged through this secret door, the method of opening which was so hard to find. At any rate, if not killed, Frank had been grievously wounded. Upon the floor, just where the skirting-board ran around the room, were a few moist, ominous-looking stains, requiring very little inspection to tell him what they were. Blood!

As he made this terrible discovery, Jack staggered back with a cry of horror, the candle he was carrying falling out of his nerveless hands.

THE 5th CHAPTER.
Clearing Up the Mystery.

AFTER uttering that one cry of alarm, Jack stood motionless with just enough presence of mind left to make him place his foot upon the light he had let fall. Then, in a sudden frenzy of passion, he began to beat upon the wall with both hands, shouting out incoherent threats into the darkness.

Ah, what was that?

Someone else was knocking, also. But this new sound was coming from behind him. Moreover, it was accompanied by a shrieking voice that he recognised. The familiar sound brought him to his senses again. Feeling rather ashamed of his brief insane outburst, Jack stooped and picked up the extinguished candle. This he relit with one of the matches he still carried about with him, then ran to unlock the door. It was Mr. Nickolls who entered.

But he did not look the same cheery, fun-loving gentleman the boys had grown attached to during their one long day's acquaintanceship. Mr. Nickolls's face now wore a stern, troubled expression. He was attired in a long dressing-gown, and, like Jack, carried a lit candle.

I heard the racket, and thought I had better come and inquire for myself what caused it," he said. "I'm sleeping just beneath, you know. What has become of your brother?"

Jack began to stammer an explanation, but failed miserably in his attempt to make things clear. Instead of showing surprise, Mr. Nickolls seemed to be expecting some such revelation as he was trying to make. With a suggested word thrown in here and there, the doctor's friend quickly made himself master of the little Jack knew.

"I feared as much," remarked Mr. Nickolls sadly, and the gravity of his face increased. "We must not delay a moment in going to your brother's assistance."

"But where is he?" cried Jack, in despair.

"I will soon show you—at least, I will take you where you may be directed to, for carried or dragged he must have been, after first being rendered unconscious by a blow dealt him whilst he slept. Why did I not interfere sooner, and prevent this terrible affair happening?"

He made straight for the portion of the wall that had attracted Jack's attention. Unlike the latter, he did not waste time feeling about for hidden springs, but pressed upon a particular part of the floor with his foot.

Instantly a portion of the wall receded and they were gazing into a dark passage.

The circular course it took told Jack they were making for the forbidden left wing. From the narrow confines of the passage the familiar cry he had heard must have come. The remembrance of that cry made him feel a trifle easier in mind. At any rate, Frank was still alive. But he must be pretty bad, or his abductor unusually powerful, to enable him to overpower so very little resistance to prevent anyone being carried away against their will through so small a space. Undoubtedly, after that one sharp cry, Frank must have sunk into unconsciousness.

As near as Jack could judge, they had traversed about forty feet along the passage, when Mr. Nickolls came to a halt, and blew out both candles. Jack shut his eyes, so that he might more quickly grow accustomed to the darkness. On opening them once more, he could see a transparent glow shining on the left of him. This, he could see, was finding its way through a thin crevice, to which Mr. Nickolls had placed his ear. Jack could hear no sound.

Apparently satisfied, Mr. Nickolls stamped with his foot.

The sudden glare of light made them both blink. The passage had terminated in a doorway similar to the one by which they had entered. Poising himself on his toes, Jack stared curiously over his companion's shoulder into the apartment beyond.

If the rest of the house was poorly furnished, no pains or expense had been spared to make the secluded left wing an abode of luxury. Innumerable candles, set in costly candelabra, lit up the room with beautiful equipments. This ample illumination reflected itself in the many mirrors set in massive brass frames, and in the polished woodwork of the quaint Louis XI. furniture.

It was not the expensive fittings of the place that riveted Jack's attention, however. There, almost at his feet, lay his brother Frank, with a thin stream of blood trickling over his white face, flowing from a small cut in the forehead. Beyond Frank again, with face hidden, lay another figure, also motionless.

Making his way quickly towards where Frank lay, Mr. Nickolls placed his hand near the boy's heart.

"He's all right," he whispered, after a moment's pause. "Slightly wounded, that is all. We must get him away from here before he comes round again."

Jack was hardly listening. Greatly as he was attached to his brother, the second motionless figure was claiming all his attention just then. Was the face that was hidden from view the same hideous one he had seen the night before? Impelled as if by magnetism, he commenced to walk across the room.

"Come back!" Nickolls hoarsely called out. "I forbid you to go any nearer!"

But Jack did not heed the imperative call.

He felt quite calm now, and not the least bit afraid. Approaching quite close, he bent over the silent form. What he saw caused him more than ever. The grotesquely-hideous features were but those of a mask! Underneath he could see the outline of another face. Whose?

Before he could satisfy his curiosity by plucking away the hideous contrivance that hid the real face below, he heard the click of a key turning in a lock. A door at the opposite end of the room opened to admit Dr. Jisson.

The Head was even paler than usual. After carefully closing the door behind him, he looked hard at Jack, and at the inanimate form lying at the boy's feet. From them his gaze travelled towards his friend, who was pillowing Frank's head upon his knee.

"Has he——" he began, pointing a shaking finger at the figure wearing the mask; then paused, apparently unable to continue.

"He has," Mr. Nickolls quietly answered, as he smoothed the hair back from Frank's white forehead. "The poor fellow has had another of his old attacks, Henry."

The Head sat down in the nearest chair, burying his face in his hands.

"And I was just beginning to think he was getting better!" he muttered. "It is nearly twelve months since he had the last. The specialist said time and perfect quietness was the only cure. He has had that, goodness knows!"

Then his troubled eyes caught sight of the open door leading into the secret passage. He flashed an interrogative look at his friend.

Mr. Nickolls nodded.

"Yes," he said, "he has been using that means of communication with the rest of the house. Years ago, Henry, I warned you not to leave it open. Had you taken my advice this affair would not have happened. Luckily it has not turned out as serious as I first imagined. Fright, coupled with a sharp knock, has rendered the boy unconscious. I fancy, when he comes to, he will scarcely know what has happened."

The Head shuddered.

At that moment Frank opened his eyes. Then he sat up and glared at his brother.

"I knew you would do it, you old fathead!" he angrily cried. "You've cracked my crown, after all, with that confounded cudgel of yours! Why you wanted to drag me about the room, after nearly finishing me, I can't say. I remember feeling you tugging me about in the darkness before I went off. I will——"

He broke off his tirade suddenly, realising he was in a strange room. He glared at the silent figure lying near.

"W-why—w-hen—w-what?" he stammered.

It was Dr. Jisson who answered him.

"My poor boy," began the Head, "I owe you both an apology, and an explanation. This—this poor creature"—resting a tender hand on the motionless figure on the carpet—"is my brother! Years ago, a too close pursuit of abstruse subjects affected his brain. Although an extraordinarily handsome man, he began to be troubled with the idea his face was unsightly—not fit to be seen. It was not until a mask had been procured for him his mind was once more made easy—for a time.

"Curiously enough, nothing but the most hideous one that could be manufactured would satisfy him. We had to interview and enlist the services of one of the property hands at Drury Lane before we could get the exact article we wanted. Unfortunately, my brother later on began to develop homicidal tendencies, making it necessary he should be isolated from his fellow-creatures.

"This I did by installing him in this old house, that happened to fall empty at the time, and being so close to the school, offered exceptional facilities for me to watch over him. My friend and my aged housekeeper are the only two people who have known of his existence here besides myself. From time to time symptoms of his homicidal mania have shown themselves. Mr. Nickolls and myself have both had narrow escapes. Strange to say, just when his frenzy is at its height, he sinks into sudden unconsciousness, remaining as you now see him, sometimes for hours. It is to that curious trait in his disorder you owe your escape, Frank, my boy. Hush! I believe he is coming to!"

The figure on the floor had given an uneasy writhe. The mask fell aside, exposing a handsome, intellectual face that the boys stared curiously at.

"Quick!" gasped Dr. Jisson. "I must be alone with him when he awakens. Go out through the passage!"

In a moment Mr. Nickolls had hustled the two boys from the room. When they reached their own apartment, the kindly gentleman heaped the bedclothes on their shivering forms, then sat on the edge of the bed, and talked. For more than an hour he remained with them.

At the end of that time, the secret door once more opened, and the Head stepped out of the passage. Tears were coursing, unchecked, down Dr. Jisson's pale cheeks.

"A miracle has happened!" he cried. "My brother has returned to his senses without a suspicion of his curious malady remaining. His mind is now as free from painful illusions as it was ten years ago."

Mr. Nickolls stepped forward, wringing his friend's hand with ill-concealed emotion.

"This is an unlooked-for, happy ending to your trouble, Henry, and to your awesome experience"—turning to the boys, who were both sitting up in bed again.

"Hark!" said Frank.

Somewhere below an ancient clock gave out one loud, resounding boom.

"One o'clock!" exclaimed Jack. "It is Christmas day! We can now with perfect truthfulness wish you a merry Christmas, sir!"

And in the dim light of the spluttering candle, the four shook hands.

THE END.

(Two more fine complete tales next Saturday.)

THE BLUE HUSSARS.

A Tale of Army Sports in India.

By CAPTAIN MALCOLM ARNOLD.

THE 1st CHAPTER.
Marching Orders.

"WHAT'S the hurry for, Tony?"

Trooper "Tony" Moore, who had just clattered through the narrow cantonment gates, pulled up his charger sharply.

"We're off, my son—off at last!" he replied. Tom Hammond looked up eagerly.

"To Dalakim?" he cried.

"Got it first time, Tom," Tony said; "I've just come from headquarters. The 'old man'"—there is no disrespect in this term used by Tommy Atkins to designate the colonel of his unit. Custom has set the seal on it—"has to go up at once."

"But, I say——"

"Can't stop now, Tom!" And the orderly lifted his reins again. "Wait until I come back from the mess. Then you'll hear all about it!"

He trotted slowly across the square, making a handsome figure in his clean khaki and spotless equipment.

Hammond, full of the news, hurried across the square towards his troops bungalow. Morning parade was over, and the majority of the troopers were busily engaged in cleaning up their kit.

"Tenshun!" yelled Hammond, as he entered the door.

One or two men leaped to their feet at the command, which usually heralds the appearance of an officer. When they saw Tom's handsome face smiling at them, there was a growl of disgust.

"Git away wid ye!" a big Irish lad cried, brandishing his pipe-clay sponge threateningly. "Phwat the blazes do ye mane by bouncin' in on us loike that? I thought it was the generil come to promote me at last!"

The idea of O'Keefe—Patsy O'Keefe, the best rider and hardest nut in the Blue Hussars, with more "red ink" on his sheet than any three men in the corps—expecting promotion made the room grin.

"Ha, ha, ha! Promote you, you old tank?" laughed Hammond.

"All roight, ye bastes!" he grinned. "Ut's a good job ye have somewan to laugh at! Ut's a poor set av miserable microbes ye'd be widout me, Oi'm thinkin'!"

Farrier-Corporal Saunders turned to Hammond.

"Your face is as full of news as a newspaper," he said; "let's have it!"

"Oh, I can't tell you much!" Tom said, dropping on to a bench. "But old Tony, who was regimental orderly to-day, has just come into barracks, and he says we're bound for Dalakim!"

"Hurro!"

"Hurrah!"

"By gum, that's great!"

"When do we go?"

"You'll have to wait until Tony comes—and here he is!"

There was a musical jingle in the passage outside, and Moore swung through the door. A perfect storm of questions arose.

"Here! Whoa, whoa!" he cried. "Steady on. Let's get my belt off, for goodness' sake!"

He went over to his bed, slipped off his white pith helmet, dropped his belt and sword on the bed; then, running his fingers through his crisp, black curls, he swung round.

"Now, then," he cried, "I'm ready!"

"And so are we," Hammond put in; "Get on with your fad, my son!"

Tony stretched out his long legs.

"You know that there's been trouble at Gilapur—the British Commissioner there had to barricade himself inside his house for four days?"

"Yes, yes; get on!"

"Well, I was very close to the general's door this morning, and, of course, couldn't help hearing scraps of talk now and again. Orders have come from Calcutta to send the best cavalry corps in the Presidency District into that town just to keep order for a bit."

"Hear, hear! Then we were bound to go."

"That's what I thought," said Tony; "but one of the side-de-camps had the cheek to suggest that the Scarlets were the most suitable for a nice little job like that!"

A roar came from Patsy.

"Phwat is that?" he yelled, leaping to his feet. "The Scarlets better than the Blues, the Owld and Bowld? Bad luck to the man who sid it, whoiver he is!"

"Good on you, Patsy," cried Tom—"that's the talk!"

"Why, we've beaten 'em three times at football——"

"And at tent-pegging——"

"And heads and posts!"

"Besides capturing all their blessed transport last manœuvres."

"But the general didn't take any notice of the silly jay!" Tony continued. "He said that there was only one corps in it—that was ours!"

"Bravo!"

"Bless his heart for that!"

"And so I was sent for our colonel; and he fairly jumped with delight when I delivered the message. You should have heard the champagne corks popping as I left. Captain Trangmar jolly near hugged me when I went down the steps again."

"Where is Dalakim?"

"Somewhere about a hundred and fifty miles from here," Tony went on. "It's only a sort of buffer state. It's wedged between Nepal and Bhutan. As far as I can make out, there's only one town worth talking about in the whole province, and that's the capital, Gilapur."

"Why the dickens don't we go and take the blessed town at once?" the corporal asked.

"It would save us a lot of trouble."

Trooper Moore was generally admitted by his chums to be of superior attainments. He never "swanked," nor tried to thrust his educational advantages forward, but most of the troop went to him when they wanted advice or assistance.

He had a first-class certificate of education, and, although one of the youngest men in the regiment, had already qualified as an interpreter. Apart from these advantages, he was an all-round athlete, and, with the exception perhaps of Tom Hammond, was the finest footballer in the cantonment.

Naturally, his word carried weight, and the troop turned to him as the corporal voiced his query.

"Come on, Tony, my son," Patsy said; "let's have your opinions on the matther! Oi've nivir known you to be far out."

"Well," said Tony, "it's easily understood why our Government allows the rajah to stick to his independence. Nepal is a mighty state, and Bhutan isn't too small, either. Together they could make a lot of trouble; but, while Silkim on the one side, and this little state

(Continued on the next page.)

Poising the net between them, Tony and Tom leaped forward. One swing lifted the meshes clear of the sitting child. Then, just as the tiger rose to spring, the huge net was flung out above it. *(An exciting incident from next week's grand instalment.)*

on the other, keeps them apart, they can't combine and become dangerous. Now, do you twig?"

"Good!" Tom said. "Tony's scored a 'bull,' as usual. And now, my son, can you give us any idea when we have to start?"

"I believe I can guess at it!" said the handsome young trooper. "The clerk in the supplies and transport office told me that our ration-chit had been altered from the usual seven to four days. That means that we leave the cantonment before next Saturday."

"Sexton Blake the second!" cried Tom. "And I bet you're not far out."

The conversation now became general, and Tony took advantage of it to beckon to Tom.

"Let's have a stroll outside, old chap," he said; "I want to have a quiet talk to you."

The two chums strolled out and along the wide verandahs. Tony was evidently disturbed by something.

"Why this long face, old chap?" Tom asked.

"I was just going to explain," the young trooper returned; "I've heard a rather strange bit of news."

He waited until they were quite clear of the bungalows, and then plunged into his tale.

"You know that old tobacco-merchant, Hasan Khan—he has a stall outside the Dudbha bazaar? Well, he and I are great pals, you know."

Tom nodded.

"So he ought to be, Tony," he said; "I haven't forgotten your dive into the Teesta River——"

"Rubbish!" Tony put in. "There wasn't a bit of danger. However, old Hasan is a decent sort of chap, and has made quite a pal of me in his way.

"I met him this morning on my way to Government House, and we chatted for a few moments. He told me then that he was a native of Dalaikim."

"No. Why, I always thought he was a Pathan."

"So did I," Moore went on; "but I believe that Dalaikim is a purely Mohammedan state —hardly a Hindu in it, you know."

"The chief is called 'Rajah,' isn't he? That's a Hindu name."

"I'm not sure," said Tony; "but I believe his proper title is Rajiwar. However, it doesn't matter a brass button to us. Hasan told me that he was a very decent sort."

"Is he, by Jove! Then why in the name of thunder doesn't he look after his bloodthirsty subjects?"

"Because he has a young fanatic for a next-of-kin," Tony explained. "Prince Ahmed is the bounty's name, and it is he who is causing all the trouble. Are you ready for a walk in town to-night?"

"Rather, my son!" Tom said.

"Then I'll meet you at six o'clock as soon as I come off duty," Moore finished. "We'll stroll up to the bazaar and see what friend Hasan has to say. We might get some handy information from him, you know."

Hampton looked at Tony quickly.

"Ah, now I think I see what you're driving at, you old bargee!" he said. "There may be promotion in this, and you want me to be in it—eh?"

Tony nodded his head.

"Got it first time, Tom!" he replied. "I can see a bustling time ahead for us; and if you don't want a point or two over that bullying hound this time, I'll be blowed!"

Moore and Hammond were chums in the best sense of the word. They had enlisted together, had gone through their recruits' drill at Norwich depot together, and had been drafted out to the Blue Hussars, to join the same troop, "B."

Unfortunately, Tom had managed to incur the enmity of the farrier-sergeant-major of the squadron. When still a recruit, Burt, the warrant-officer in question, had approached the lad, and had asked him to act as his batman. Tom, being a clean, tidy soldier, had impressed the farrier-sergeant-major favourably.

Tom, however, objected to the rather menial work which such a post entails. He was of good parentage, and was fairly well educated. He had enlisted, hoping to rise, and he knew that to act as a servant would rather spoil his chance of becoming a corporal.

Foolishly enough, he had told Burt this. And the warrant-officer promptly became embittered towards the lad.

So Trooper Hammond found that he had made an exceedingly powerful enemy, and one who could, and did, stand in his way on more than one occasion.

Tony Moore, on the other hand, had been approached by the regimental sergeant-major twice within the previous year, and asked if he would accept the lance stripe, Tony had refused; and the reason of his refusal was known only to his bed chum, Hammond.

"I'll not be placed a step above you, old chap," the loyal youngster vowed; "you're as keen and as clever a man as there is in the squadron. When I take promotion, you'll have to be doing the same."

And Tom knew that his chum meant it.

"Hallo!" Tony cried, as they passed beneath the verandah again. "Here's your pal coming."

Tom looked up, and, catching sight of the heavy-jowled farrier-major, groaned.

"I'll bet the beast has something to say to me," he said; "he always has!"

Burt, although an efficient soldier, was not of the best type. He stopped as the youngsters swung past and scowled at Tom.

"What are you doin' round the stables?" he snapped.

It was certainly after stable hours, but there was no reason for the man to put such a question.

Tom's hot temper was up at once.

"The stables are not out of bounds are they?"

Burt took a pace forward.

"Don't forget who you're speaking to!" he cried. "I'll keep my eye on you, my lad. We've been having funny reports about fodder lately."

"You dare to hint that I have been stealing——"

"I say, that's a bit thick!" Tony put in, for the first time. "I must be in it as well. I shall have to find out from the adjutant how much fodder is missing."

Burt's face paled a little. He had simply been baiting the lad.

"You'll what?" he roared.

"Go to the adjutant and find out how much fodder is missing," Tony said, with a very serious expression on his face; "it's just as well to know."

"If I hear of you putting your nose anywhere near the orderly-room, look out!" yelled Burt, as he swung round and hurried away.

Tony chuckled gleefully.

"Got the best of him that time," he said. "Eh—what?"

"Yes, you did," Tom agreed bitterly. "But I feel that I shall some day forget myself, and go for that sneering brute!"

"And get three months' imprisonment for your pains. Not if I can help it, old chap!" said his chum.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
Prince Ahmed Vows Vengeance.

IT was growing dusk when the young troopers turned into the side-street which led to Hasan's house.

Half-way down, Tom's spur-buckle became loose, and he stooped to fasten it. Just as he had pulled the leather thong tight again a soft footfall sounded behind them.

"Out of the way, you dogs!" a harsh voice growled in Hindustani.

Tony wheeled round indignantly. A tall, lean figure, in native dress, was advancing towards them.

"Dog thyself, my friend!" he replied, in the same language. "There is room enough for all to pass."

The swinging figure came on, and then, when opposite Tony, thrust out a lean, wiry arm, sending the trooper reeling against the wall of a house.

"Here, I say, that won't do!" Tom cried, springing forward.

He gripped the loose sleeve. With an angry snarl, the stranger dropped his hand towards his broad cummerbund.

"Look out, Tom!" Tony yelled.

Tom saw the gleam of a thin blade of steel; then, closing with the man, he caught him around the waist and heaved.

The cross-country runner flew off the ground, and the next thing he knew he was lying on his back in the roadway, blinking up at the sky above.

Tom was sprawling across his chest. A torrent of fierce words burst forth, and in a moment the young trooper was fighting for his life.

Three wild, vicious lunges of the knife were made before Tom's strong hand could fasten around the wiry wrist, then over and over on the silent roadway the two combatants rolled, writhing and kicking like a pair of wild-cats.

It had all happened so suddenly that Tony was taken aback for the moment. Then, realising his chum's danger, he darted forward.

He was only just in time. The long native had the strength of a tiger, and fought with the fury of that terrible beast.

Tom managed to plant his hard fist into the bearded face above him; then the man, straddling across his struggling body, yelled as he lifted his heavy blade.

But before the blade could descend Tony was on him. One leap brought his knee against the murderous right hand, then gripping at the raised arm, he twisted the wrist around. The vicelike grip brought a shriek of agony from the native. The knife dropped from his hand, and as Tony jumped back the fellow was dragged clear.

"Don't let him go—don't let him go!" Tom panted, scrambling to his feet.

But that was easier said than done. A catlike swerve of the lithe body sent Tony reeling; then the man, with one bound, was on his feet.

"By Allah, thou shalt suffer for this!" he yelled.

"At him, Tom!"

The troopers sprang forward together, but they were too late. The long figure turned, and with one backward bound gained the centre of the roadway. Then, with his robe tucked up, he shot across into the shadows opposite and disappeared. When the troopers reached the spot they found a long, narrow alley running between two houses. Tom was about to dash into the gloomy place, but Tony held him back.

"No fear, my son!" he gasped. "You stay where you are. That brute may have friends waiting for him, and us, down there. We'd never come out alive!"

"The scoundrel—the murderous ruffian!" gasped Tom. "He must be mad. Fancy rushing into us like that! I'll bet he's not a townsman."

"He was too strong for a man of Darjiling," Tony agreed. "He must be a big pot, whoever he is. Ah!"

Something glittering in the roadway caught his eye. He stooped and picked up the knife.

A jewelled hilt, by Jove!" he said. "We'll keep this, Tom. It may come in handy some day."

Tom grumbled as he began to rub the dirt and dust from his clean khaki.

"It jolly nearly came in handy to-night!" he muttered. "I hope I meet that beggar again. He won't get off so easy next time, I'll bet!"

Tony looked up and down the deserted street, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Well, there's no good of hanging about here," he remarked. "We'd better get along to old Hasan's, while we're safe."

"Perhaps he'll be able to explain."

"We won't mention this business, Tom. It has nothing to do with him, and it would only worry the old chap to think that his guests were attacked like this. We'll sing dumb, if you don't mind."

. . . . . .

"I say, what a ripping place!" Tom gasped.

Tony smiled. It was not the first time that he had been inside the luxuriously-furnished room.

"You wouldn't think that old Hasan owned such a place, would you?" he remarked.

Tom did not reply. He was gazing round at the heavy, shimmering tapestries on the walls, the heaps of silken cushions, and the jewelled lamps which lighted the interior.

"It's a corker!" he muttered. "Why, the old stall outside doesn't look as though it was worth tuppence!"

"You can't judge by exteriors in this country, old chap," Tony said. "Some of these dirty hovels are absolutely palaces inside."

A velvet curtain swayed back from the doorway, and the tall silk merchant glided in. He had taken off his simple cotton garb which he wore when attending to customers, and was now arrayed in a wonderful garment of figured silk. The strong brown hand which he thrust out to welcome the lads was covered with glittering rings.

"I am pleased to see you," he said, in slow but perfectly pronounced English.

He waved towards one corner of the chamber, where a small divan stood.

"Sit down," he said, "and we will have a little supper. Then we can talk."

While the servants were bringing in the meal Hasan commenced to talk about the news.

"So the Blue Hussars go to Dalaikim on Saturday—eh? I suppose you are pleased?"

"How on earth did you know that?" Tony asked.

Hasan waved his hand.

"There are no secrets in the bazaar, my friend," he said. "You British talk in front of servants."

Tom and Tony laughed.

"Well," said Tony, "and what do you think about it?"

Hasan looked at the lad who had plunged into the icy river to rescue him from drowning, and shook his head gravely.

"I am glad that Dalaikim is to be honoured by the presence of such an illustrious corps, but I am sorry for the corps."

"Why?"

"Because there is much trouble and bitterness before you," continued the merchant. "Gilapur is a nest of conspiracy and corruption. The task you have undertaken is bigger than anyone imagines."

"Oh, if there are knives to fighting——" hot-headed Tom put in eagerly.

Hasan shrugged his shoulders.

"That's just what it never will come to," he explained. "Not, at any rate, while the old rajiwar rules. No, my friends, my fear is that he will be the more deadly secret enemies—the stab in the dark and away. The—the—how do you say it?"

"Hooligans?" suggested Tony.

"Yes, yes! The hooligans of the streets who will work up cases against you. Those are the enemies you will have to fear."

"That's a cheerful prospect, I don't think!" muttered Tom.

"What about Prince Ahmed?" Tony asked.

"Ah! May the solace be denied him!" Hasan muttered. Then, aloud, he continued: "He is leader of the sect which hates the British rule and Government. His party is strong, too. Stronger even than the rajiwar is old. Yes; he is your chief enemy. If you can—how do you say it?—collar him, you will have done much to bring peace to my poor little birthplace."

The arrival of the meal checked their conversation for some time; but when the lads had eaten heartily of the fare—native dishes, but beautifully cooked—Hasan had three narghiles prepared, and they returned to the divan to smoke the mild fragrant tobacco.

"I bar the ordinary cigarettes and plug," Tom remarked to Tony; "but this style of smoking is extra good."

"It's the scented water through which the smoke passes that makes it taste so ripping, old chap," Tony replied, drawing blissfully at the silver mouthpiece.

Hasan sat very quiet for a moment, his keen eyes half-closed. Then he turned to Tony.

"You have always refused to accept anything from me," he began, "and so I am still your debtor."

"I say, do change the subject!" the young Hussar put in; "you've repaid me a dozen times for the little thing I did. Hang it all, it was only a case of getting wet for a few minutes."

(Continued on the next page.)

HOW TO PLAY "SOCCER."

By STEVE BLOOMER, the Great International Player.

A Further Chat on Goalkeeping.

I REMEMBER a case of a goalkeeper coming out which ended in the simplest of goals being scored. The match in which the mistake took place was the semi-final tie for the Association Cup between Derby County and Millwall, and J. W. Sutcliffe was keeping for the London team. The incident had its origin in Warren, the Derby half-back, ballooning the ball to a tremendous height and distance, but although the sphere went in the direction of the Millwall goal, there was never any real danger of its reaching the net so long as a man stood between the posts.

But for some reason or other Sutcliffe rushed out to meet the ball, and just then the sun burst out from behind a cloud and shone full in the face of the great goalkeeper as he looked upward. This, of course, had the effect of making him lose sight of the ball, which bounced just behind him, and kept bouncing along the ground until it trickled into the net. I do not mention this to point out any mistake of Sutcliffe's, but merely as an extraordinary incident.

I wonder how many of you know that between a first-class goalkeeper and his two backs there is always a perfect understanding? Probably you have noticed in a big match the easy and machinelike manner in which a back will allow the ball to go to the goalkeeper and, by a half-circular and graceful run, intercept the oncoming forward.

There is one man I shall never forget for his eagerness to be in the thick of everything. He certainly had a perfect understanding with his backs, but I am inclined to think that he would far rather have done all the defending work himself. This man was Jack Robinson, and I can assure you that, although I have known him since I could first kick a ball, yet there have been times when he has come from underneath

a heap of struggling forwards

triumphant but absolutely unrecognisable.

I don't think I am far wrong in saying Robinson has broken nearly every bone in his body during his career, in addition to partially losing his hearing; but I always attribute his accidents to the daring manner in which he played. There never has been another goalkeeper like him, and there never will be. Jack was just great!

Now, let us get back to work. I want to warn you against a great failing which I have noticed times out of number in junior football —yes, and sometimes in First League games. I refer to the manner in which the ball is gathered and got rid of. I have looked on at games in which goalkeepers have become more or less popular idols with the crowd simply because they constantly used their fists upon the ball and sent it careering up the field by a blow from the shoulder. This is not goalkeeping. It is tempting providence.

Footballs are funny things, and are just as likely to glance off the knuckles and fly into the net, or over the line and give a corner, as they are to go up the field; and, in addition to this risk, I defy any goalkeeper to fist away a ball in a manner which will help his forwards, unless he is very lucky.

I haven't the slightest doubt that catching a ball in the two hands and throwing it away to the wing man does not look so attractive to the onlookers, but it is the right thing to do when all the players are in the vicinity of goal. Of course, at other times a goalkeeper should catch the ball with his hands and kick it well up the field. But here again let me give you a hint. In kicking up the field, always aim in the direction of the wing men, and not in the centre, whilst the kick should never be made too high.

Now, boys, don't make the mistake of thinking that you can learn the art of goalkeeping from a book. You cannot. But you can take notice of hints when they are given to you, and endeavour to act upon them when you are playing. For I am absolutely certain that it is only by practice that you can hope to become proficient in this particular department of the game.

A goalkeeper should be a strong kick, have a good reach and height, an active and clear brain, nerve, and unhesitating confidence.

Steve Bloomer

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THE BLUE HUSSARS.

(Continued from the previous page.)

The merchant looked at the handsome face in front of him admiringly.

"Getting wet—eh?" he repeated slowly. "That is your way of putting it. However, I have thought of something which will be very useful to you. I own a small house in Gilapur. It is of no use to me just now. But it may be useful to you. Use it while you are stationed there."

"But——"

"Ach! You are not going to refuse again, I hope. It is such a small thing this time."

Tony saw that the man was really troubled, so he gave in.

"I don't suppose that we'll have much opportunity of using the house," he said; "but, still, I accept your offer."

Hasan withdrew a heavy ring from his finger, and handed it across the divan.

"You will show this to the servant," he said; "he will know then that you have authority."

Moore took the ring, and clipped it into the loose pocket of his khaki jacket.

"And now," Tom said, "can you give us any hints. I mean, do you know of any way by which we can bring those beggars round to our side?"

Their native host smiled.

"I do," he said. "The native of Dalakim is a rogue, but he is also a sportsman. You will never win by the sword, but you may do by more peaceful means."

"What are they?"

"Go in for every sport you can. Tackle the native troops at their own game. They are excellent horsemen, and the rajwar encourages them. Get your officers to arrange gymkhanas, get your best tent-peggers and swordsmen to enter, and the men of the town will judge you by your successes."

"I'd like to play them a game at football," said Tony, with a grin.

"How would a wrestling-match go?" Tom added.

Hasan shrugged his shoulders.

"Football is not known there yet. But you will find plenty of good wrestlers to face."

"Well, we'll just have to do our best!" Hammond murmured. "From what I can make out, it isn't going to be a picnic exactly; but, somehow or other, I believe we'll pull through."

"I hope you do," said the merchant gravely. "I will be able to go back to Gilapur then. I was sent across the borders three years ago because I was one of those who favoured the British rule."

It was late when the two troopers left the hospitable house, and made their way back through the narrow streets towards the cantonments. Tony had received full instructions from the merchant where the house in Gilapur was situated, and the two lads rather enjoyed the idea of having a private residence to themselves.

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"We'll be big pots, old chap," Tom said. "I don't suppose that it will be a very swagger place; but, still, it will sound very 'O.T.' when we say 'Come and see us at our town house!' Eh? What?"

As they turned out of the bazaar, two figures in native dress came out of a side alley and glided past them. The troopers did not pay much attention to the men. Had they done so, they might have found something sinister in the way in which the taller of the two peered at them as they passed.

"Thou art sure that there is no mistake?" the tall man muttered, when the troopers had clanked out of earshot.

"On my head be it, O Protector," the other replied, with the slow, whining treble of the social inferior. "Thy servant has often seen the dark-haired one at the house, and the other is the dark one's friend."

"And they go to Gilapur," the tall man murmured, half to himself. "By Allah, I wish I had killed the dog when I had the chance. Who knows what plots those two Feringhees have planned?"

His sinewy hands clenched, and a dull fire blazed in his dark eyes. Standing well over six feet, with the sinewy grace and alert strength of the hillman, Prince Ahmed was a foeman worthy of any man's steel, as Tom and Tony had proved a few hours previous.

The man by his side was one of Hasan's indoor staff. The merchant had taken the rogue with him when he had fled from his native state. And, with the characteristic gratitude of the lower-class Mohammedan, he was eating his master's salt, and, at the same time, acting as spy for the Royal fanatic at his side.

"Twas well that I came here as I did!" Ahmed continued, biting savagely at the thin end of his black moustache. "To-morrow I can go back with the news. By Allah, we shall be ready for them! They will find that Gilapur is not sleepy India! We will not bend so easily to the yoke! Curse them—curse them!"

In his rage he stopped, and, lifting one loose-sleeved arm, shook his fist menacingly in the direction which the unconscious soldiers had gone.

"Allah helping me, I will drive thee and thy masters like sheep from our land!" he breathed.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
At Gilapur—The House of Hasan.

"DRAW swords!"

Clear and crisp the colonel's voice rang out. The long line of troopers moved, then a forest of five hundred blades flashed in the sun. The curious throng gathered outside the high walls of Gilapur shivered.

What were the Feringhees about to do? Since daybreak the ragged hordes had been waiting for the coming of the British troops. They had seen the snakelike column wind down the hills and stretch out along the plain until they reached the town.

Man, woman, and child, they had rushed to the eastern gate to watch the troopers enter.

"Aha, here are my children!" some crooker shrilled. "They come to kill! Flee—flee while there is yet a chance!"

For a moment the crowd rocked, and it would not have taken much to create a panic. But when the Blue Hussars started forward again they did so in colums of fours, and at the "walk."

Colonel Vialoux's orders had been short and to the point.

"The Blue Hussars will ride into Gilapur with drawn swords!"

File after file the gallant regiment passed beneath the wide arch of the gate and into the narrow street. The bared sword at each man's side was a symbol which most of the watchers quickly understood.

It meant that the Hussars came there in peace, but were prepared for war.

A native crowd never cheers, but it is usual to hear some slight murmurs of greeting as troops pass them. Gilapur, however, was ominously silent. During their mile ride to the wide square in front of the palace, there was only one voice raised in greeting.

From a hovel a bag leaped out, and yelled at them as they passed.

The appearance of the vicious old beldame made one or two of the troopers grin. But Tony Moore shrugged his shoulders as he glanced at Tom.

"Nice sort of welcome that—eh?"

"Didn't quite catch it, old chap," Hammond replied.

"Well, she wants Allah, through the kindly assistance of Mahomet, to wither us all ere the coming of the moon," Tony explained.

"The deuce she does!" gasped Tom.

O'Kelly was in the same four as the two chums—glanced back at the hag.

"Bad luck to ye!" he muttered. "If we git as withered as you are, ould dear, wid bad timpir and spoile, whin we're as ould as you are, 'twill be old enough."

Across the wide square the colonel led his men. Then, halting them, they formed into line and advanced steadily towards the gates of the palace, where a big pavilion had been erected.

Beneath it, on a raised dais, a group of native officers stood, and in the centre of them, chatting to the British Commissioner, was the stout rajah.

When the troops halted, and the colonel had saluted, the old ruler stepped forward, and lifted his bejewelled hand to his turban.

"Welcome to Gilapur," he said, in a quavering voice.

Colonel Vialoux acknowledged the greeting, but his grey eye, wandering around the dark faces behind the ruler, saw nothing but enmity in the glances directed at him and his men. What might have been an awkward moment was skilfully avoided by Captain Henry, the British Commissioner.

He stepped forward, saluted, and then pointed over to the far side of the square.

"I have been putting things in order for your coming, sir," he said. "I hope you will find the quarters comfortable."

The colonel took the hint, and, wheeling round on his charger, he galloped back to the head of his men.

The whole regiment filed past the ruler, each squadron coming to the "Carry" as they passed the dais. The old rajah returned each salute most punctiliously, and something like a grudging murmur of admiration stole around the native officers.

Rigid, unmoving, as though man and horse were moulded together, the fours rode past.

Captain Henry heard a rustle, and, glancing round, saw that Prince Ahmed had suddenly thrust his dusky face forward, and was glaring at a certain file of Hussars now just approaching the saluting point.

The commissioner glanced at the troopers. Tom and Tony, although handsome enough lads, had nothing about them to justify the long, steady scrutiny which this known enemy to British rule levelled at them.

"Hum! Now I wonder what on earth does that mean?" the keen-brained officer thought. "I would have understood had that young beast glared at an officer. But these lads were ordinary troopers. I must remember this."

Half an hour later Tony and Tom were busily engaged in attending to their mounts in the long, rambling outbuilding which had been transformed into a stable. Their seven days' march through the hills had made them very glad to find a roof above their heads once more.

The place fairly hummed as the troopers rushed to and fro, some carrying fodder, others swinging pails of water in their strong hands.

"I'll bet this place has never seen so much life before," Tony said, glancing around at the red adobe walls.

"I think we're thundering lucky to strike such a crib," Tom remarked. "With just a little bit of alteration it will make a ripping barrack."

"It strikes me that it has been a monastery of some sort," his chums went on; "those little niches in the walls were where the idols used to stand, I fancy. Rather a come-down, you know, from temple to barracks—eh?"

Tom reached up and patted the neck of his mare.

"Come-down, be hanged!" he said. "I think that old Sally here is better than any dirty wooden god. What do you say, old girl?"

The tired animal nozzled its soft nose into his palm, then turned again to the feed in front of her.

"She says, 'Bother the gods, as long as I have corn!'" Tony put in, with a smile. "And it's a jolly good answer, too."

A harsh voice broke in on them suddenly.

"Come along, Hammond!" It was the farrier-sergeant-major's voice. "Loafing again—eh? Get on with your work, do you hear?"

He fairly barked the words at the lad. Tony saw Tom's face tighten, and, knowing that his chum was tired and hot from the long march, was afraid that he might lose his temper.

He turned to Burt at once.

"I'm afraid that it's my fault, sir," he said. "I should be in my own stall, but we've both finished work, and were just jawing over things."

Tony was a universal favourite, and even the vindictive warrant-officer softened as the steady eyes met his.

"That's just what you would say," he muttered, turning on his heel. "Pity you don't look out for a better chum."

Tom wheeled round with blazing eyes. Burt was already on his way down the long line, examining the horses as he went.

"The beast!" Tom said. "The cad!" Hammond broke out. "By Heaven, I'll not stand much more of his bullying!"

He threw down the leather bucket he had in his hand, and looked at Tony.

"He talks to me as though I were a dog!" he went on. "And that sneer as he went! I tell you, Tony, I shall go for him some day. I wish you hadn't interfered. It gave him the chance of a parting sneer, and he took it. As if I wanted anyone to stand between me and trouble!"

"Oh, rats to you, you old fathead!" said Tony. "He didn't mean anything of the sort. Besides, whatever he meant, what does it matter? No one would believe that of you; not even the beast that said it!"

"He hates me, I tell you," Tom went on. Fatigue made him short-tempered, and Tony stood ready to stop the lad did his rage tempt him to rush after his persecutor. "Hates me! And some day I—I——"

"Some day you will laugh at him," said Moore. Then, linking his arm in his chum's, he commenced to drag him toward the wide doors. "And, in the meanwhile, we'll go and see if there isn't a decent meal to be had anywhere."

(This powerful new military yarn will be continued next week.)

BRADFORD CITY F.C.

An Interesting Article Giving the History of the "Citizens" since the Formation of the Club.

A BRIEF SUMMARY.

BRADFORD CITY are a clever First League team, the club having been formed in 1903. Their colours are claret shirts, amber collars and cuffs, and white knickers. The City ground is situate at the Valley Parade, Manningham Lane. They were admitted to the Second Division of the English League in season 1903-4, and finished fourth from the top, with the following record: Played 34, won 12, lost 15, drawn 7; goals for 45, goals against 59; points 31. The following year they were eighth from the top, and in 1905-6 they fell to the eleventh position. April, 1907, however, found them fifth on the list; whilst in 1907-8 they were champions of Division II., and thus secured promotion. So far they have done extremely well this season.

The following particulars concerning the men who are playing for Bradford City this season will interest all their supporters. It is interesting to note the large number of Scotsmen to be found in the team.

Robert Campbell.

Campbell, who is a native of Ayrshire, plays at right-back. His height is 5ft. 7½in., and he weighs 13st. 2lb. He has previously been identified with Craigton Strollers, Partick Thistle, Glasgow Rangers, and Millwall. He has played in both Divisions of the Scottish and English Leagues and in the Southern League, and has represented the Scottish League. He is a powerful kick, and a robust tackler.

George Chaplin.

Chaplin is the City's left-back, and, like Campbell, he hails from across the Border. His native place is Dundee, and he is a Scottish International, having represented his country against Wales. He joined the City in 1906. His auburn locks make him easily distinguishable on the field of play.

John Comrie.

The Bradford City team is rich in Scotsmen. Comrie is another, and comes of a family of footballers. He plays at centre-half, weighs 12st. 7lb., and stands 5ft. 10in. He has previously played for 3rd Lanark, Reading, and Glossop.

Frank O'Rourke.

Still they come. O'Rourke is also a Scottish International, late of the Airdrieonians. He joined Bradford in April, 1907. His position is centre-forward, and he is 5ft. 9in. in height, and weighs 12st. 6lb.

James Speirs.

Speirs is a Glasgow laddie, and learned his football in the great Scottish capital. He has played for Glasgow Annandale, Maryhill, Glasgow Rangers, and Celtic, and has been capped for Scotland against Wales. His age is 24, he stands 5ft. 10½in., and weighs 12st. He occupies the position of inside-left.

Peter Logan.

Logan, Speirs's partner on the left wing, hails from Edinburgh. His height is 5ft. 7½in., and he weighs 9st. He first played outside-left against Leeds University, and speedily proved that Nature intended him for that position, although he previously took the inside place. He learned how to control the elusive leather with Alva Rangers and Edinburgh St. Bernards.

George Robinson.

Robinson is a veteran who joined Bradford City in 1903, when the club was formed, having previously won his laurels with Notts Forest. His height is 5ft. 11in., and he weighs 12st. 11lb. He plays at right-half.

E. A. Lintott.

Lintott is an all-round athlete, and excels at football, cricket, and tennis. He plays at left-half, and is 5ft. 10in. in height. He is 26 years of age, and has played footer practically all his life. He has represented England against Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and was formerly identified with Devon, Plymouth Argyle, and Queen's Park Rangers. He is a native of Godalming.

Robert Whittingham.

Whittingham plays at inside-right, is 5ft. 7½in. in height, and weighs 12st. 8lb. He joined Bradford last season, and is a prolific goal-scorer. Experts attribute much of Bradford's success this year to the fact that he is included in the team. He previously played for Blackpool and Burslem Port Vale.

Richard Bond.

This is Bond's first season with Bradford City. He plays outside-right. His height is 5ft. 5in., and he weighs 10st. 10lb. He is a native of Preston, and an International. He has played in League football for seven seasons.

(See this week's "BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LIBRARY for a striking group portrait of the Bradford City team. Now on sale. One Halfpenny.)

THE ARMY CHAMPIONS.

By CAPTAIN MALCOLM ARNOLD.

Splendid Instalment of a Fine Army Sports' Tale.

Exit the Chairman.

THE man gave Ron the desired information, then shuffled his feet for a moment.

"We ain't said anythin' about oof," he murmured insinuatingly; "but I'm a pore man, mister."

"I don't doubt you, old chap," said Brandon easily; "but you'll have to wait. Of course, you might be as honest as daylight, but then, you might not."

Paul leaned forward again. He had a small gold coin between his fingers.

"Here's something on account," he said; "and if we find your story correct, we will leave a fiver for you with the police."

The ruffian sighed as he took the coin.

"There ain't much bloomin' trust on your side of the bizziness!" he muttered.

Val grinned as the fellow shuffled past them and down the narrow steps of the 'bus. As he stepped off into the wide roadway opposite Westminster Abbey, the three lads watched him.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find that he has been 'having' us," said the baronet; "but, anyhow, we couldn't afford to neglect the chance."

Ron shook his head.

"Oh, I think he's genuine enough!" he said. "He has a real grudge against that cold-blooded beast!"

The policeman on duty in the wide porch was rather surprised to see the three red-coated lads, when Paul mentioned his name and business, the surprised look changed to one of deferential attention.

"Sir Robert is in his room at the present moment. If you will come this way, sir——"

"You can go, Paul," Ron said; "we will wait for you here."

The young baronet was not long absent, and when he returned there were a couple of keen-faced men with him.

"Inspectors Harvey and Prince!" Paul said, introducing the officers.

The corporals shook hands, and then Harvey plunged into the business before them at once.

"I don't suppose that we shall have a lot of trouble," he said; "it will either be a fair surprise capture, or else we will find that he has vanished altogether."

"And he's such a lucky hound," said Val, "that I'm beginning to fear that your last suggestion will be correct."

"The luckiest of hounds reach their last run some day, corporal," the inspector put in grimly; "and this rascal may find himself collared at last."

In order to avoid suspicion, the party separated, and made for the private hotel in the quiet side street by different routes. The two inspectors were the first to arrive, and, when Paul and the two Brandons entered the small hall, they found the police-officers awaiting them.

"He is in his room," Inspector Harvey said.

The proprietor of the hotel, a little, red-faced man, was rubbing his hands nervously. "Mr. Brown"—the name by which the Chairman had registered himself—had been one of his best patrons, quiet, unassuming, and retiring. He could hardly believe that, in reality, the man was a desperate criminal.

"I do hope that there is no mistake, gentlemen," he said. "Mr. Brown has stayed with me before."

Ron turned to the man.

"How long ago—two months?"

"Yes," said the proprietor; "he stayed with a stout, military-looking gentleman."

"That was the time of my fight at the 'National,'" Ron explained to the detectives, "and practically settles the matter. I am sure he is the Chairman."

"Well, if you are ready, we shall soon see," Harvey said.

He motioned to the proprietor, who, with obvious reluctance, led the way upstairs.

On the second landing he stopped, and pointed to a door half-way down the corridor.

"No. 20," he said.

Harvey and Prince went forward, the three lads at their heels.

Val felt his heart beginning to beat rapidly. There was a moment's pause, and then Harvey rapped loudly on the door.

"Who is there?" came the cry.

Ron bent forward eagerly.

"All right, inspector," he said; "I recognise the voice."

"Right!" said Harvey.

Then, without troubling to reply, he flung the door open and stepped into the chamber.

A smothered cry came to the lads' ears.

A tall figure leaped up from a chair and backed against the window.

"What is the meaning of this——" the Chairman began.

Then, behind the bulky forms of the detectives, he saw the face of his young enemy.

His breath was drawn through his clenched teeth in a fierce, hissing sound. Then, recovering his composure, he laughed.

"Aha! So you have found me—eh? You've taken a long time over it."

Harvey stepped forward.

"I arrest you, Eric Mayners, alias the Chairman, on a charge of attempted murder and robbery!" he said.

"Indeed! How interesting!" came the cool reply.

"And I warn you, that anything you say now will be taken as evidence against you."

"Thanks!"

There was something so cool and composed about the man's bearing that Val found himself again admiring the courage of the rogue before them.

"He's a plucky scoundrel," he whispered to Paul. "He might have——"

The two detectives had almost reached the Chairman's side. Suddenly the long figure stood up, his hand was raised swiftly to his lips, and a tiny phial crashed on the floor.

"Quick, he has poisoned himself!" Harvey cried.

They rushed at the beaten rogue, but they were too late.

In two minutes I shall be gone!" the cold voice said, as the master-cracksman collapsed into a chair by the window. "Not all the powers on earth can save me! Ha, ha, ha! Don't look so infernally disappointed!"

"Go for a doctor; see if there is a telephone here, quick!" cried Harvey.

The three lads, glad to escape from that awful chamber of death, rushed out and down the stairs.

They found the proprietor waiting for them, and explained their mission. The alarmed man rushed to the telephone, and within a few minutes a doctor had arrived.

The three soldiers were in the hall when the medical man appeared, and they left the proprietor to show him up to the room.

"Let's get out of this as quick as we can," Val said, with a shudder; "I've had enough."

They waited until the owner of the hotel came down the stairs again. A glance at his face was sufficient.

"He's gone to answer for his crimes before a Higher Judge," he said.

Ron looked at Paul. The young baronet's face was white and haggard.

"Come along," the sturdy lad said; "we'll clear out of this. They know where to find us if they want to."

Val did not wait another second. He simply dashed down the steps of the hotel and out into the open street.

Preparing for the Final.

THE six weeks which had to pass before the great final day were fraught with much importance to Ron and Val.

Colonel Armytage informed them that their recommendations for commissions had been forwarded, and they both attended special classes in Aldershot to prepare for subjects "A" and "B" of the military examinations.

Training, however, was by no means neglected. Morning and evening saw the footballers at work. They had a huge following in North Camp, and their Saturday matches were well patronised.

The team with whom they had to play in the final was the gallant 37th Royal Irish Fusiliers. A fine team, and one that would make a rare bid for the trophy.

"Win or lose, I'm content, you know," Sergeant Major Knowles said to Ron; "but, by jiminy, I'd give the last few hairs on my head to see us just pull it off!"

A similar spirit animated every man in the battalion. From colonel to drummer they were all looking forward to the great day. The old slur on "Army soldiers, but no sportsmen," which the unit had laboured under, had been killed for ever. No matter what happened in the years to come, they could always turn up the old records, and prove that the Anshires had fought their way into a final of the Army Cup.

And if they managed to win it—well, that would set the seal on their great season.

Somehow or other, Parsons got it into his head that Harris was weakening. As a matter of fact, the rhyming private was as strong as a bull, but the goalie thought otherwise.

One morning, Parsons came puffing into the team-room just as the players sat down to breakfast.

He had a huge steaming bowl in his hands, and he made straight for Harris.

"Ere you are, towny," he said, placing the dish in front of the right-half. "Get this into you. It'll do you a lot ov good. You'll feel a new man arterwards."

Harris sniffed at the thing, and pushed it indignantly on one side.

"Smells like stewed leather!" he cried.

"Take it away! I don't want it."

"Ov course you don't towards the pair. A chuckle went round at the grieved look which came into the stout private's face.

"You won't take it?" he repeated. "Well, if you ain't the most ungrateful bloke ever I struck! D'you know what that cost me?"

"No," snapped Harris; "but I should think it was dear at a 'a'penny!"

"A 'a'penny? Why, it's real mock turtle soup, you—you owl! Bought a tin of it at the coffee-bar, I did, and it cost me one-and-a-tanner!"

Harris looked around him in despair. He could not help feeling touched at the generosity of his big friend. One-and-sixpence meant more than a day's pay gone.

"I'm sorry, Parsons," he said, "it's very nice of you to look after me like this; but—but I don't need it. I'm all kiff, old chap. There ain't anything the matter with me."

The goalie drew himself up. There was a glitter in his blue eye.

"Are you goin' to refuse this 'ere soup?" he demanded slowly, waving a fat finger towards the bowl.*

Harris knew that a refusal was equal to a declaration of war. With a long sigh, he picked up a spoon and drew the bowl towards him.

"Oh, I'll 'ave it, seein' you brought it, old chap," he began.

He put a generous spoonful into his mouth, then started to his feet, coughing and spluttering like a drowning man.

"Ouch! Ooh! Help! I'm poisoned!"

The whole room went off into a roar of laughter. Parsons glared at his pal indignantly.

"Wot are you doin', you chump!" he yelled, grabbing at the bowl. "You'll spill it in a minit."

"I hate it away—take it away! Chuck it in the bloomin' dustbin!" cried the right-half, wiping his lips carefully. "It's muck, that's wot it is!"

"Muck be blowed!" Parsons cried. "I might have known better than git you mock turtle. You ain't used to it. It's above you, old hoss!"

"Mock turtle, d'you call it? It's more mock than turtle, I'll bet. Taste it for yourself."

Parsons thrust the spoon into the whitish fluid and sipped cautiously. The quick look of dismay which crossed his face made his chums howl again.

"Ough! Well, I'm 'anged!" he said, dropping the spoon.

Leaning down, he sniffed at the steaming fluid.

"It does smell like dish-water," he muttered.

There was a rattle at the door, and a white-clad figure rushed in.

"Where's Parsons?"

The big goalie turned.

"Here!" he cried.

The cook hurried to the table, caught sight of the bowl, glanced at it, and threw up his fat hands.

"Blest if I didn't think so!" he cried.

With an awful suspicion rising in him, Harris turned to the man.

"Out with it, mate! Let's know the 'orrible truth!" he said.

"Do gave you this?" the cook asked, turning to the goalkeeper.

"Nobody," said Parsons, in a faint voice. "I found it on your table, and took it away."

"You did, did you?" the man cried. "Then consider yourself bloomin' lucky you ain't poisoned! That's the water I used to clean the coppers with!"

Harris's yell could have been heard in the next barracks. He fairly flew to the door.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he howled. "Where's the quack? I'll want the stomach-pump. I'm poisoned!"

"Come back 'ere, and don't make a mug of yourself!" said Parsons bitterly. "You ain't swallowed any ov it."

Harris hesitated for a moment, then returned slowly to the table. The cook picked up the bowl and prepared to retire.

"Your soup is still waiting for you up at the cook'ouse," he said.

"Let it wait!" snapped the goalie, sitting down heavily. "Chuck it down the drain; put it among the swill—anywhere. I've finished with it."

Thank 'Eaven for that!" muttered the half-back. "I'll get a bit of peace, now, perhaps."

The soup incident was too good to keep, and it soon went all round barracks. Parsons had to stand a deal of chaff, and he did so with his usual imperturbability.

"That's the wust ov bein' good-'arted," was his usual response; "you always get let in."

(To be concluded on Saturday next.)

OUR LEAGUE CORNER.

Being a Weekly Record of THE BOYS' REALM Football League.

Tables (Top Clubs only) and Prize-winners for Week ending November 27th.

"THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

NORTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Winwick Juniors	13	7	1	5	115	5	28
High Street Juniors	13	13	0	0	91	6	26
Culcheth Juniors	13	12	1	0	81	12	24
Orford Albions	12	11	1	0	77	14	22
Ashill	11	11	0	0	65	5	22
Warwick Juniors	11	10	0	1	63	11	21
Birstall B.R.	10	10	0	0	62	12	20
Marlborough	11	10	1	0	64	18	20
Greenside	10	10	0	0	75	22	20

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Otter Rovers	13	12	0	1	93	8	24
Stockton Heath	12	11	0	1	69	4	23
Hunslet Westwood	13	11	1	1	57	13	23
St. Mark's	10	9	0	1	47	9	19
All Saints	11	9	2	0	41	14	18
Dewsbury Juniors	12	6	1	5	43	10	17

SOUTHERN SECTION.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Ansfield Plain	12	12	0	0	91	6	24
Mill Green	10	9	0	1	51	18	19
Averne	10	9	0	1	46	10	19
Pear Tree U.	9	9	0	0	20	7	18
Catholic B.B.	10	9	0	0	62	8	18
Palmerston Guild	9	9	0	0	32	10	18
St. Botolph's	10	7	0	3	87	15	17

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Giles' Athletic	12	12	0	0	84	4	24
Pear Tree A.	11	11	0	0	66	6	22
St. Aldhelm's	12	10	0	2	53	6	22
East Side	11	11	0	0	37	8	22
Leacrave	12	11	1	0	39	13	22
Eastleigh New Locos	10	10	0	0	78	6	20
Ferndale	12	10	1	1	59	13	21

NORTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Chesbunt Juniors	10	9	0	1	39	6	19
Blundell Old Boys	9	9	0	0	28	5	18
St. Stephen and XI.	9	9	0	0	61	3	18
St. Luke's	10	8	1	1	49	17	17
St. John's	8	8	0	0	60	10	16
St. Martin's	8	8	0	0	76	8	16
Bruce Hall	8	8	0	0	31	4	16

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Walthamstow Orient	13	10	2	1	83	17	21
Brunswick	10	10	0	0	93	8	20
W. Hendon Baptists	11	9	1	1	40	13	19
Shepherd's Bush Juniors	7	8	0	1	47	4	17
Vincent	8	8	0	0	69	6	16
Sinclair	8	8	0	0	47	3	16

SOUTH LONDON SECTION.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
West Greenwich Juniors	10	10	0	0	52	14	20
White Horse	9	9	0	0	68	11	18
Christ Church	8	8	0	0	52	10	16
New Corinthians	6	6	0	0	38	2	12
Clapham Crusaders	8	6	0	2	30	7	12
Cambrook	6	5	0	1	25	5	11

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Columbs	12	9	0	3	41	3	21
Clarendon	11	7	3	1	33	15	15
Globe Albions	8	6	0	2	21	7	14
Coversdale	9	6	2	1	20	7	13
Edinburgh Castle	9	5	3	1	35	8	11
Sandford	6	5	0	1	14	7	11

SCOTS AND IRISH SECTION.

JUNIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Hollanlea	12	12	0	0	67	11	24
Castle United	12	12	0	0	55	12	24
Camelon Vics.	10	10	0	0	47	10	20
Athenry A.C.	10	9	0	1	40	5	19
Vale of Dee	10	9	0	1	36	5	19
St. Vincent's	8	8	0	0	38	9	16
Tayside	8	8	0	0	43	6	16

SENIOR SECTION.

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts.
Albion Vics	10	10	0	0	50	4	20
Glendale	9	9	0	0	39	14	18
Avondale	9	9	0	0	33	2	18
Glenart 1st	9	9	0	0	31	8	18
Mayflower	7	7	0	0	27	7	14

Prize Football Winners for Week Ending November 27th.

SOUTH LONDON CHURCH OF ENGLAND LEAGUE.

HOLY TRINITY F.C.—Hon. League Secretary, W. Hudson, 50, Halstow Road, Westcombe Park, S.E.

NONCONFORMIST LEAGUE.

RHODES STREET WESLEYAN F.C.—Co. League Secretary, F. Nicholson, 161, Warley Road, Halifax.

CROXDALE AMATEUR LEAGUE.

CORNFORTH LANE F.C.—Co. League Secretary, W. R. Manders, 50, Croxdale Colliery, Durham.

BESWICK JUNIOR LEAGUE.

ONWARD HALL F.C.—Co. League Secretary, J. Crowther, 10, Peel Street, Ancoats, Manchester.

FERRYHILL AND DISTRICT LEAGUE.

BOWBANK F.C.—Hon. Secretary, G. Allan, 11, Wylam Street, Chilton Colliery, Co. Durham.

MANCHESTER SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

ST. JUDE'S F.C.—Co. League Secretary, G. Slater, 36, Dryden Street, C.-on-M., Manchester.

"THE BOYS' REALM" FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

NORTHERN SECTION.

CHAPEL JUNIORS F.C.—Hon. Secretary, W. Smith, East View, Hayfield Road, Chapel-in-le-Frith, Derbyshire.

SOUTHERN SECTION.

PEAR TREE UNITED F.C.—Hon. Secretary, F. Watts, 48, Mortimer Road, Itchen, Southampton.

NORTH LONDON SECTION.

BRUNSWICK AND ARGYLE F.C.—Hon. Secretary, A. Walker, 50, Southampton Street, Pentonville, N.

SOUTH LONDON SECTION.

ST. GEORGE'S F.C.—Hon. Secretary, H. White, Lynton Cottage, Clarens Street, Forry Hill.

SCOTS AND IRISH SECTION.

EXCELSIOR F.C.—Hon. Secretary, H. Gibson, 11, Chevering Street, Paisley.

ST. PATRICK'S A.F.C.—Hon. Secretary, W. McDonald, 18, York Street, Dublin.

Jack Noble's Compliments, and He'll Be Glad to Meet You in This Week's - "B.R." Football Library. Now on Sale—½d.

ARTHUR REDFERN'S VOW.

A Rollicking New School Tale by Popular CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

ARTHUR REDFERN, a Sixth-Former and a prefect at St. Dolly's School.

SIDNEY REDFERN, or "Redfern minor," Arthur's brother. A bright, free-living lad. St. Dolly's is divided into two educational sections—Modern and Classical. Sidney is a Classical, and firm chums with

SKELTON and BROWN, of the Fourth. A deadly feud exists between the Classicals and the Moderns, the latter being led by

TAFFY MORGAN, VERNON, and RAKE of the Fourth.

RANSOME, a Sixth-Former. A shicker and a good-for-nothing, who, exercising a strong influence over Arthur Redfern, gets the prefect mixed up with a betting gang. Thanks to his younger brother, Arthur gets clear of this unsavoury crowd, and provides Sidney that he will have nothing further to do with Ransome's shady transactions.

Ransome, resenting this, vows vengeance, and seeks to draw other St. Dollyites under his wing.

The opening of a new term finds the school captainship vacant, and Arthur Redfern and another lad named Knowles are proposed for election. Additional interest is added to the election by the fact that Arthur is a Classical and Knowles a Modern.

Ransome, though a Classical himself, intends voting for Knowles, the Modern candidate, and endeavours to persuade other Classicals to do likewise; but with no great success, thanks to Redfern minor and Skelton.

The day of the election comes, and despite Ransome's efforts, Arthur Redfern heads the poll, and becomes the new captain of St. Dolly's.

Knowles, chagrined at his defeat, is an easy prey for Ransome, who lures him into his clutches, and encourages him to set at naught Arthur Redfern's authority.

Ransome gives a little tea-party in his study, and Arthur suddenly steps in, to find Knowles and several others smoking. The new captain orders them to stop. Knowles, egged on by Ransome, refuses, and ultimately, his anger getting the better of his discretion, he sends Arthur reeling back with a heavy blow.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

A Bad Beginning.

ARTHUR REDFERN staggered towards the door of the study, with the strong grasp of the Modern prefect upon him. The new captain of St. Dolly's was more amazed than anything else. The flushed, angry face of Knowles was looking into his; the prefect seemed to have lost control of himself completely for the moment. It looked as if Knowles's threat would be carried out, and Arthur Redfern would be hurled from the study into the passage.

Ransome and his friends were on their feet now, looking on in tense interest and alarm. There was alarm in every face but Ransome's. A struggle between the two head prefects was an unheard-of occurrence; at the most hostile moments the hostility of the Classicals and Moderns had never gone as far as that. And Arthur was captain of the school! There was only one fellow in the study who did not wish himself out of it. That one was Ransome.

His eyes were gleaming with satisfaction. All was going well—for him! For nothing now could heal the breach between the two seniors, and the first step had been taken for rendering Redfern's captaincy a farce in the school.

Back to the door Arthur Redfern staggered; but there he collected himself. Then he made an effort, threw himself forward, and Knowles reeled back in his turn. The fellows in the study scattered to make room for them.

Arthur Redfern wrenched himself loose, and with a great effort hurled Knowles back. The Modern prefect staggered against Ransome, who caught him and supported him.

"You fool!" cried Arthur. "You insane fool! What are you thinking of? Stand back!"

The sound of the struggle had already attracted attention. There was already a pattering of feet in the corridor.

When it became known that the captain of St. Dolly's was fighting with the head Modern prefect, all the school would be there.

Knowles faced the captain, flushed and panting.

"Get out, then!" he said.

"I will go," said Arthur, controlling his temper with a mighty effort. "I will go, to save a disgraceful scene before all St. Dolly's!"

Knowles clicked his teeth.

"Go, then. That's all I ask!"

"But this is not the end of it, Knowles. I shall expect an apology from you," said the captain of St. Dolly's sternly.

Knowles gave a bitter laugh.

"You will not get one!"

"I hope I shall, when you are cool. At present I'll leave you to think it over." And Arthur Redfern stepped out of the study and closed the door. Three or four fellows were already on the spot, and they looked curiously at the flushed face of the captain.

"What's happened, Redfern?" exclaimed Plimsoll, of the Fifth.

Arthur passed on without replying. Plimsoll opened the study door, and looked in.

"Hallo, you chaps! What's happened? Been a row?"

"Yes," said Ransome.

"Oh, mind your own business!" said Knowles irritably. "Get out!"

"Keep your wool on!" said Plimsoll, in surprise. "I was only asking a civil question!"

"Well don't bother!"

Plimsoll withdrew his inquiring head. Knowles kicked the door shut after him. The prefect's face was troubled. He was already ashamed of the outbreak.

"Look here, you chaps," he said roughly, "don't say anything about this outside ourselves. It's not a thing to jaw all over St. Dolly's!"

Vane nodded emphatically.

"You're right, Knowles!"

"Are you going to apologise to Redfern?" asked Ransome, with a sneer.

"No!" said the prefect hotly. "But if he doesn't wish it to go any further, I don't. I'm sorry I lost my temper, and that's a fact; though I wouldn't tell Redfern so!"

"But it must go farther unless you apologise," said Bellew. "Redfern can't take a handing like that quietly."

"Not likely!" said Ransome. "But why not have it out? You could stand up to Redfern, and a real tussle would clear the air."

"Good heavens!" muttered Knowles. "What would the Head say if he heard? A fight between a head prefect and the captain of the school!"

"He would never hear."

"Besides, Redfern has forced it upon you," said Ransome. "You are only standing up for your rights, and the rights of your friends. Sit down and have a smoke!"

But Knowles shook his head and quitted the study. One by one Ransome's friends dropped away after him. They felt that there was trouble ahead, black trouble, and though they disliked interference from Arthur Redfern keenly enough, none of them could look to the future with the same cynical coolness displayed by Ransome.

Left alone, Ransome shrugged his shoulders and settled down to read a highly-coloured sporting paper, lighting a fresh cigarette to assist him in the task.

Meanwhile, Arthur Redfern had gone to his study. He had been on his way there when he had been drawn into the trap Ransome had laid for him. His minor was waiting for him in his study, to discuss some question dealing with junior football. Sidney looked at Arthur as he came in, and noted at once the expression upon his face.

"Anything wrong, Arthur, old chap?"

The quick, affectionate question was very different from the way Redfern minor would have spoken not so very long ago. There had been distrust on Arthur's part, loyalty on the minor, till at last, when Sidney had saved Arthur from the results of his own reckless folly, the clouds between them had cleared away. Now, there were not two firmer friends at St. Dorothy's than the major and the minor, in spite of the differences in their age, and their position in the school.

Arthur Redfern closed the door. His face was dejected.

"Yes, Sid," he said quietly.

"I thought I heard some row up the passage," said Redfern minor anxiously. "What has happened?"

"Oh, it's Ransome, of course! You know, Sid, the vow I made when I got clear of those rotters who were doing their best to ruin me—see that I was. I vowed I'd stand out anything of the kind at St. Dolly's if I became captain; that I'd see that no other fellow was led into the same trouble that fell upon me?"

"Yes, Arthur; and I said I'd help you."

"I thought Ransome would have sense enough to turn over a new leaf, the same as I did. He was far deeper in that rotten business than I was, and he ran a much greater risk of being expelled if it came out. Instead of getting him to do the same as I've done, I've only made an enemy of him."

"He was always your enemy, Arthur."

"I suppose he was, in a sense; at all events, he's an open enemy now. He's got Knowles under his thumb, just as he used to have me, and he is determined to make as much trouble as he can, unless I let him and his precious Smart Set alone."

"Which you won't do?"

Arthur's eyes gleamed.

"Never!"

"Good for you!"

"Only there's been a row," said Arthur. "Knowles has struck me!"

"Struck you?" exclaimed Redfern minor, in astonishment. "The hound!"

"That's the beginning," said Arthur bitterly. "Of course, there's only one thing for me to do. I can't bring the matter before the Head—I suppose that's my strict duty, as captain of the school—but it would make the fellows all look on me as a sneak and a coward. I must fight Knowles."

Redfern minor drew a deep breath.

"Fight him?"

"Yes. Of course, that is Ransome's game. I am to open my term as captain with a fight with the head prefect of the Modern side. If it gets to the doctor's ears—"

"Phew!"

Spratt whirled right into Taffy, and the two of them went to the floor with a crash. Then the door was slammed and locked again.

"But it can't be helped. Unless Knowles apologises—which he won't do—I shall have to meet him."

Redfern minor looked dismayed.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Arthur, more briskly. "What was it you wanted to see me about, Sid?"

"Oh, only about our junior football club!" said Redfern minor. "It doesn't matter; I won't bother you about it now."

"All right. Will you look for Courtney and tell him I want to speak to him?"

"Yes, Arthur, old man. Don't worry."

And Redfern minor quitted the study with a very troubled look on his face. He had worked hard to secure his brother's election as captain of St. Dolly's; but it was evident that the captaincy was not to be a bed of roses for Redfern major.

A Mysterious Meeting.

"KEEP up a good fire, Rake, old man," said Taffy Morgan, the great chief of the Modern juniors in the Fourth Form at St. Dolly's. "It's jolly cold, and we want the kettle to boil for tea."

Rake looked into the coal-locker.

"All gone," he said.

"Oh, there's some left, chappy," said Vernon. "Can't be all gone."

"Not a knob!"

"Then you've been jolly extravagant," said Taffy. "We've used up our allowance, and we shall have to pay for more. Who's got the tin?"

"By Jove," said Vernon, "I haven't, chappy! My last sixpence went for the sardines."

Rake did not reply verbally, but he turned his trousers-pockets inside out as his contribution to the discussion. Taffy grunted.

"Well, there's an old box we can get," he remarked—"the one the tuck came in from your pater, Rakey. Run and fetch it out of the box-room."

"I'm making toast."

"So you are. Run and fetch it out of the box-room, Verny."

"I'm doing my impot."

"Look you, we can't have the fire going out in this weather!" exclaimed Taffy severely. "I'm surprised at you!"

"Well, you go and fetch the box."

"Rotten slackers!" said Taffy; and he rose to go.

It was cold in the passage, and dark on the stairs. The particular box-room in which the box Taffy wanted was deposited was on the same floor as the dormitories. Taffy went up the stairs, and groped along to the box-room. The gas-jet in the passage did not cast its light thus far.

To his surprise, Taffy suddenly discerned a streak of light shining from under the door of the box-room.

"My hat!" he murmured. "What's up?"

The box-room, as a rule, was tenanted by empty boxes and other lumber, and seldom visited by the boys, unless it was some member of the Smart Set looking for a quiet corner in which to smoke a surreptitious cigarette.

Taffy wondered who was there, and he turned the handle of the door quietly, intending to burst it open suddenly, and surprise the lurker, whoever he was.

"Ow!" gasped Taffy the next moment.

The door was locked, and Taffy had inadvertently knocked his nose against it as he shoved it hard, and it did not budge. He rubbed his nose, and kicked the door.

"Who's in there?"

"Hallo!" came a voice from within.

"Open this door!"

"Name!"

"Eh—what? I'm Morgan, of the Fourth."

"Go and eat coke, Morgan, of the Fourth!"

"Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"I know who you are—young Brown."

"More rats!"

"I want a box—"

"Bosh!"

Taffy breathed hard through his nose. He could hear a murmur of voices within the box-room now, and the sound of a subdued chuckle.

What did it mean? He had evidently surprised a secret meeting of the Classical juniors of the Fourth Form. What was on? Some plot against the Modern party, that was certain. Taffy was extremely curious. He kicked at the door again.

"Hallo!" said a voice near him. "Who's that?"

"Hallo, Benson!" said Taffy, turning round as the Classical came up. "Are you going into the box-room?"

"Yes, rather!" said Benson.

"Is it a meeting?"

"That's telling."

"Look here, young Benson——"

"Go and eat coke!"

Benson tapped at the door. The voice was heard from within again.

"Hallo! Who's there?"

"Benson!"

The door was unlocked, and it swung open. The light streamed out in the passage.

A group of Classical juniors were revealed.

"Come in, Benson," said Redfern minor.

Benson entered. Taffy made a desperate rush to enter, too, but there was a shout from Redfern minor:

"Line up!"

And the Classicals lined up, and Taffy was received with open arms, so to speak—grasped, and hurled forth into the passage again, where he alighted with what a novelist would call a sickening thud."

Taffy was on his feet again in a second; but the door of the box-room was shut with a slam, and the key turned in the lock.

The Modern junior hammered at it furiously, but his hammering was only answered by loud Classical chuckles from within.

"You rotters!" roared Taffy. "What's it all about, anyway?"

There was no reply to that question. Having considerably hurt his hands on the door, Taffy gave up hammering and retired. He was going downstairs, when Spratt, of the Fourth, came puffing up. Spratt was fat, and short of breath, and when he was going upstairs he could generally be heard at quite a distance.

Taffy stopped as he saw Spratt. It occurred to him that this was another Classical proceeding to the mysterious meeting in the box-room.

"Spratt, old chap, where are you off to?" asked Taffy, in honeyed tones.

"Blessed box-room!" grunted Spratt. "Blessed meeting!"

"What's it about?"

"Don't know."

"Redfern minor called it, I suppose?"

"Yes. He sent a paper round in class this afternoon calling this meeting. Most important —every Classical to turn up."

"That's why you're going, then?"

"Well," said Spratt confidentially, "I thought it might be a feed. That might be Redfern's way of putting it, you know. I don't know what else there is to make it worth while climbing up all these blessed stairs."

Taffy laughed.

"I'll come in with you, Spratty."

"Can't be did," said Spratt, shaking his head. "Classical meeting—most important. No Modern rotters—shem!—no Modern chaps allowed."

"Look here, Spratt, I'll make you a sporting offer. I want to see what's going on in the box-room. I know they're up to something. Get me in with you, and, if there's not a feed, I'll stand you a dozen tarts at the tuckshop."

"Well, that's a good offer," said Spratt. "After all, I haven't promised not to let any Modern in. Reddy never mentioned it."

"Of course. Is it a go?"

"Come on," said Spratt. "Keep behind me, and dodge in when I enter. Of course, you know they will chuck you out again."

"I don't care, after I've seen what's going on."

"All right, then."

And Taffy, chuckling softly, followed Spratt to the door of the box-room. Spratt's ample figure, added to the dusk, quite concealed Taffy. The Modern leader was simply burning with curiosity. He knew that the mysterious meeting, upon which he had lighted purely by chance, must mean a big move against the Modern party. If it were simply a meeting, there would be nothing to see, except Classical juniors. On the other hand, some preparations of some sort might be going on, and in that case a good look into the box-room would give the whole show away to him.

Spratt tapped at the door, and looked round nervously over his shoulder at Taffy.

"Keep close!" he whispered.

"Right-ho!"

Brown's voice came through the keyhole in response to the tap.

"Who's there?"

"Me!" said Spratt, promptly and ungrammatically.

"Who's me?"

"Spratt!"

"Enter, Spratt!"

The door was opened. But this time the Classicals within were more on their guard. The door opened only half-way, and several fellows inside kept their feet against it, so that it could open no wider. Room was left for Spratt to get in, and that was all.

"Buck up!" said Redfern minor. "Don't be all night about it, Spratt."

Spratt walked in, and Taffy pressed close behind him. In an instant he was seen, and the Classicals jammed the door upon him. At the same moment Redfern gave him a push that sent him staggering back, and the door, shutting hard, biffed him upon the knees and the nose as he reeled away. He gave a gasp, and hurled himself forward at the door, and it yielded for a second. But only for a second. It was jammed hard, and half a dozen feet against it within hold it as fast as the lock could have done.

"Beasts!" gasped Taffy.

But the door did not remain shut. Spratt's assistance to the enemy could not have escaped the observation of the Classicals.

After about half a minute the door suddenly opened. Taffy started forward hopefully, and as he did so Spratt came whirling out, with three or four feet flourishing behind him. He whirled right into Taffy, and the two of them went to the floor together with a crash. Then the door was slammed and locked.

"Oh!" gasped Taffy.

"Ow!" came from Spratt.

"You utter ass! What did you do that for?" roared the Modern.

"They've chucked me out!" said Spratt feebly. "Reddy said I was trying to get you in to the meeting. Rotten, wasn't it? I've been chucked out!"

"Serve you jolly well right!"

And Taffy walked away, very much ruffled. He was as curious as ever, or more so, but it was clearly useless to attempt to penetrate into the mysterious meeting. He hurried down to the study to consult his chums.

Captain Against Prefect.

COURTNEY, of the Sixth, tapped at Knowles's study door and entered. Courtney's handsome face was very serious, and it was easy to see that he had something of matter upon his mind. Knowles was busy at his table, with a Greek paper before him. At all events, he appeared to be busy. But it occurred to Courtney that he had only just taken up the pen as he heard the tap at the door.

"Hallo!" said Knowles, not very cordially. He did not need telling that Courtney had come from Redfern major in connection with the scene in Ransome's study.

"I've got a message for you," said Courtney awkwardly. "This is a beastly bad business, Knowles."

"What business?"

"Your quarrel with Redfern."

"That was yesterday," said Knowles, with a yawn. "I fancied it was all over by this time."

"I really don't see how you could have fancied that, Knowles. It is impossible for Redfern to pass a thing like that. He has been giving you time."

"Time for what?" asked the prefect disagreeably.

"To think it over. You ought to apologise."

"I don't think so."

"You know that Redfern was only doing his duty as captain of the school in interfering in what was going on in Ransome's study. You know jolly well that as a prefect you ought to have interfered, without waiting for Redfern."

"I don't want lessons from you, Courtney!"

"Well, the long and short of it is that Redfern hasn't heard from you, and so he has sent me," said Courtney abruptly. "What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing."

"Something will have to be done. The matter can't remain where it is. Already the school is whispering that you have struck the captain, and that he has taken no step in the matter. It is impossible for Arthur to let it go at that."

"He can do as he likes."

"If you refuse to apologise there is only one thing to be done."

"I suppose you mean a fight. Well, I am ready, if Redfern major is."

"I suppose you know what a rotten affair a fight between the captain of the school and a prefect will be," said Courtney. "If it came to the doctor's ears it would be enough to lose Redfern the captaincy. Do you want that?"

Knowles flushed crimson.

"If you think so, Courtney——"

"I don't think so, but you must think of it. If Redfern loses his position through this affair, I know what all the fellows will say about you."

Knowles shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Well, I can't help it," he said at last. "I won't apologise, that's flat. As for the Head getting to hear of it, why should he? I shall not say anything, and I suppose Redfern won't, and our seconds will keep the secret."

"These things have a way of getting out."

"Well, I don't see what's to be done."

"Very well; it's to be a fight, then. Who's your second?"

"Ransome."

"What time and place will suit you?"

"Any. Settle it with Ransome."

"Very well."

Courtney quitted the study. Ten minutes later Ransome entered it. There was a subdued glitter of triumph in the eyes of the cad of the Sixth. Matters were working out exactly as he had anticipated, and exactly as he wished.

"It's settled," he said. "I'm glad you've taken this line, Knowles. It will show Redfern and his set that you're not to be bullied. After all, practically half the school voted for you at the election, and it's absurd Redfern putting on all these flourishes over a majority of one, and that one a kid who was routed out of the tuckshop at the last moment."

Knowles nodded.

"What have you arranged, Ransome?"

"In an hour's time behind the chapel," said Ransome. "That's all right?"

"Yes. Mind, Ransome, this must be kept awfully dark," said Knowles uneasily. "If it gets to the Head, he will be down on Redfern major. Of course, I don't care for Redfern. But Courtney has pointed out that if it caused Redfern to be sacked from the captaincy, the fellows would look on it as a put-up job by me for that purpose."

"I don't see how the Head can hear of it," said Ransome, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "It's among us four, unless Redfern lets his minor know. He seems to tell his minor everything. He chums with him more than with anybody in the Sixth, I think."

"The boy might chatter."

"Possibly. That's Redfern's look-out. As a matter of fact, Knowles, if there is any interference from the masters, it will be because the Redfern party have talked. I don't believe Arthur Redfern has a chance against you. Some of them might like the fight to be stopped before it ends in his getting a licking."

"I don't know about that," said Knowles, with a short laugh. "I shall try my best, of course; but I don't feel very certain about the result."

"I think you'll win."

The two seniors remained in talk till the time for the meeting, and then they left the house together. Ransome had packed a few requisites for the fight in a bag. The early night had long set in, and the moon was sailing over the chapel—a cold, white light streaming down upon the buildings and the wide quadrangle. Behind the chapel was a lonely spot either by day or night, and now there was little chance of an intruder turning up there. The moonlight made it almost as bright as by day.

Arthur Redfern and Courtney were already on the ground when Knowles and his second arrived. Arthur's brow contracted a little at the sight of Ransome. He would rather any other fellow had been Knowles's second. But, of course, it was not for him to raise any objection on that score.

Courtney came forward to meet the late comers.

"I suppose you haven't changed your decision?" he asked, in a last faint hope that the contest might be avoided.

Knowles shook his head without speaking.

"Certainly not," said Ransome.

"Very well."

In silence the two principals stripped off their jackets. Ransome opened his bag, and produced sponge and towel, and a can which he filled at a tap in the garden. Then all was ready for the conflict.

"Three minute rounds and minute rests," said Courtney, taking out his watch. "Is that agreeable?"

"Yes."

"Time!"

The two seniors stepped up. They shook hands in a mechanical way, and immediately the sparring commenced.

Both of them were half hearted at the start. The weight of his responsibility as captain of the school was hanging upon Arthur. It was his duty to put down fighting in the school, and here he was fighting, and with a prefect! Yet what other course had been open to him? Knowles had overrun him. He was not a bad fellow in the main by any means, though obstinate and passionate. As a prefect he was in an unpleasant position himself, and he felt, too, that he had placed Arthur at an unfair disadvantage. But the only alternative—an apology—was out of the question, from his point of view.

But as the round proceeded both of them warmed up to the work. Arthur's right came home on Knowles's chin, and Knowles put in a counter that rang on the captain's chest. Then both faces flushed a little, and the fighting grew more earnest.

"Time!" said Courtney.

They parted, both panting a little, both with sparkling eyes. Ransome clapped his principal on the back.

"Good!" he whispered. "Get as close to him as you can. You're stronger than he is, but not on your feet; you see; get close in, and hammer him. That's your cue."

"Right-ho!"

The second round commenced. Knowles pressed the fighting now, and Arthur Redfern gave ground a little.

But his guard was perfect, and hardly one of Knowles's slogging blows got home, and even while giving ground, he dealt tap after tap upon his adversary's face and chest.

Knowles's face grew more and more crimson with exertion and anger as he strove in vain to get through Arthur's defence.

But it seemed to be impassable.

Finally, towards the close of the round, Knowles made a desperate assault, fairly hurling himself upon the captain of St. Dolly's.

Arthur Redfern gave ground again, guarding skilfully; but Knowles received, without heeding, two smart taps on the jaw, and came on slogging furiously. He broke through Redfern's guard, and dealt him a heavy right-hander, which Arthur partially guarded. The blow missed his face, but grazed his ear, and spun him half round. As he spun, Knowles drove in his left, catching him on the side of the jaw.

Arthur dropped like a log.

"Time!"

It was the end of the second round.

Courtney helped up his dazed chum, and sponged his face, giving him a seat upon his knee. His face was serious and quiet.

Arthur did not speak a word. His head was ringing, his jaw aching; but his brows were knitted with determination.

"Time!"

They stepped up to the line again. Again Knowles tried his rushing tactics, which had proved so successful once. But this time they were not so successful.

Arthur Redfern was more on his mettle than ever, and he was putting all he knew into that round. Knowles came on like a bull, but reeled back panting from a defence he could not penetrate, and as he receded, Redfern major came on.

His fists seemed to move like lightning. His right came through Knowles's guard, and caught him under the chin, and Knowles staggered.

Like a flash Redfern's left was on his chin in a jarring blow, and in a twinkling the ready right had followed it up, and Knowles went to the earth like a sack of wheat.

He bumped on the ground with a shock that shook out what little breath he had left, and lay there dazed and gasping.

Redfern dropped his hands, and waited. Courtney, watch in hand, counted. The fight was according to rule. If Knowles did not rise at "ten," he was beaten.

"One—two—three—four—five——"

The Modern prefect sprang to his feet. Arthur Redfern could have struck him down as he did so, but he did not. He allowed his opponent to rise, and contented himself with defence as the prefect came on again furiously. Knowles's senses were swimming, but he attacked fiercely, and for some seconds Redfern had all his work cut out to guard the driving blows.

Then he came in again, hitting hard, and Knowles staggered, and crashed on the grass once more. Courtney was looking at his watch.

"Time!"

It was fortunate for Knowles, for he would never have risen again in ten seconds. Ransome lifted him, and made a knee for him. There was a slightly anxious look upon Ransome's face; but it was not caused by the events of the fight.

He had hardly been looking on at the last round. More than once his eyes had swept round as if in expectation of something, or somebody; but the clear moonlight, shining down, showed only the level stretch of grass by the chapel wall, and the dim buildings shutting off the view towards the school.

Knowles gasped painfully as he rested on Ransome's knee.

"That was bad!" said Ransome, in a low voice. "But keep it up. Hang it out as long as you can, and don't get to close quarters for a bit."

"Time!"

Redfern stepped up briskly; Knowles as willingly, but more slowly. The round was hard and fast from the start. Blows were given and taken almost unheeded, and the two combatants advanced and receded, swayed and hammered, as if unconscious of pain. Their eyes were gleaming now. They had forgotten everything but the fight. Each saw only the hostile face before him, and had forgotten all else.

Courtney looked on with keen anxiety. This was probably the last round; it could not go on at this pace. But Ransome was not looking on. His glance swept the shadows round the chapel again.

From the mass of shadow a moving form detached itself, apparently coming from the direction of the school. Ransome's eyes glittered, and he turned to the scene of the fight once more, watching keenly.

The fight was hard and furious. The faces of both seniors showed terrible signs of the conflict. Knowles's left eye was closed, and his nose was swollen, his lip cut, his cheek bruised.

Arthur Redfern's nose was streaming red, but he never even noticed it. There were cuts on his face, a bump on his chin. But he was careless of all as he pressed his enemy harder and harder.

Knowles was weakening. Twice—thrice Arthur's blows came heavily in, and he could not stop them. He reeled, and reeled, still fighting. Arthur gathered all his energy for a final effort.

Knowles's guard was swept helplessly away, and Arthur's right crashed on his chin. As he staggered back, the clear put in with his left fairly on the "mark."

Knowles gave a single gasp, with a sound like air escaping from a punctured tyre, and dropped. Courtney counted.

"One—two—three—four—five——"

Knowles did not even move. The moonlight shone on his white, bruised face; only his eyes were wide open, glittering with rage and helpless chagrin. But he was done.

"Six—seven—eight——"

"Boys! Redfern! Knowles! What does this mean?"

It was a deep, stern voice. Courtney stopped counting, the words frozen on his lips. The Sixth-Formers swung round towards the newcomer in utter dismay. It was the Head!

(Another rattling long instalment next week.)

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