

Our Grand Christmas Number!

The Boys' ^{2d} REALM

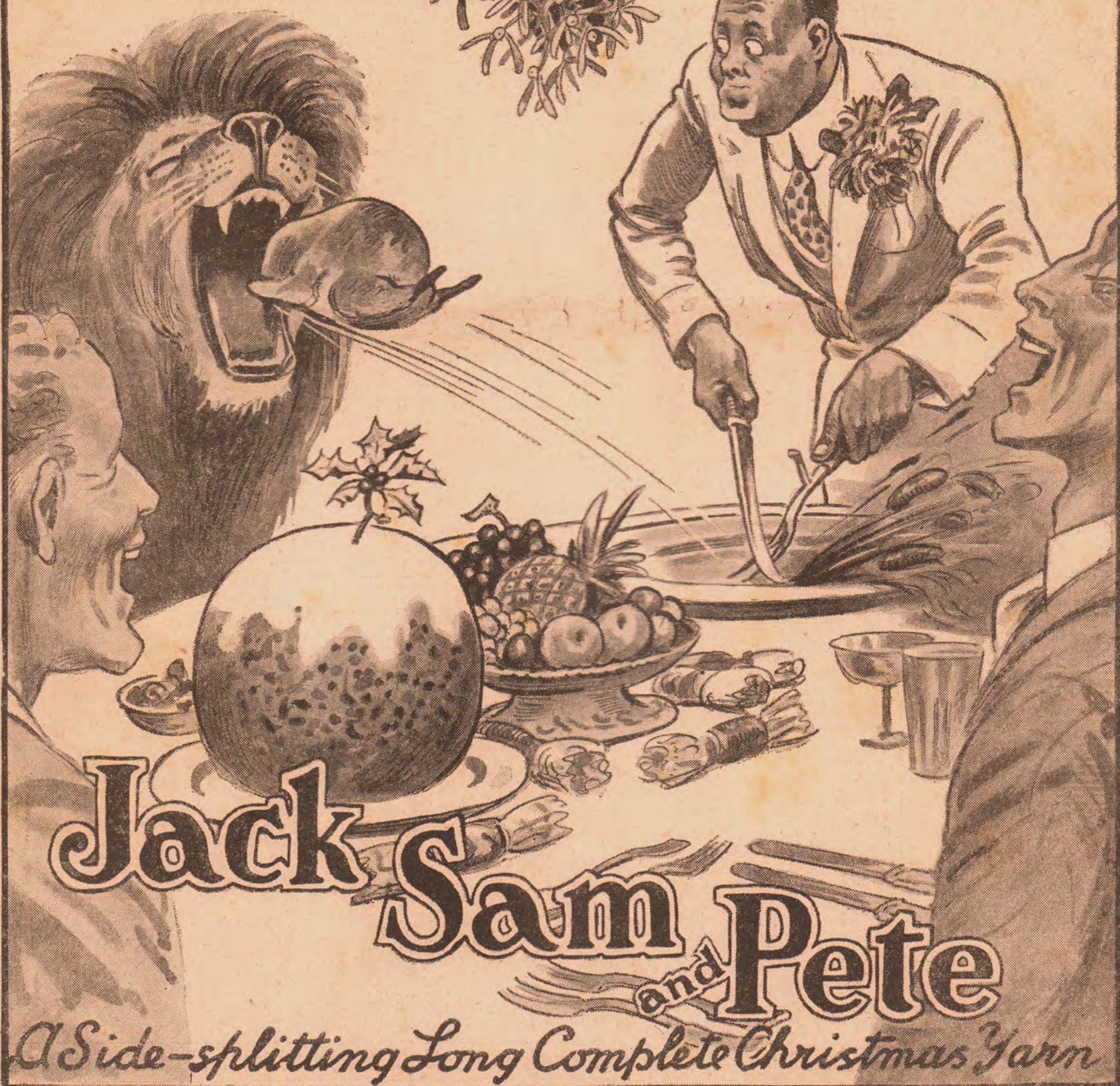
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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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A STATUE FOR "GUMBOIL"!

Pete is on hand when it is unveiled. He takes a few eggs and some lemons with him. 'Nuff said! Pete's the lad to keep things lively!

JACK SAM AND PETE!



By

GORDON MAXWELL.

The 1st Chapter.

The Wizziwozzo!

"BOYS," said Pete, attacking his seventh rasher of bacon, "sides being berry near Christmas, dis is a pink-letter day in de history ob dis great and hysterical town!"

Sam, the American member of the famous trio, raised his eyes from the copy of the "New York Herald" that was propped up against the coffee-pot.

"Come again, image!" he drawled, smiling across at Jack.

"I remarked," said Pete, with dignity, "dat dis is a pink-letter day in de history ob dis great and hysterical town!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Jack and Sam, their early-morning outburst of merriment attracting startled glances from all parts of the coffee-room.

"Go on," growled Pete, "show your ignorance before all dese handsome gents! I blush for you; for you ought to know better! And you seem to forget dat dere was manners in de wilderness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall be much obliged if you two—er—gentlemen will endeavour to restrain your vulgar hilarity," barked a strident voice that echoed through the room like a jarring discord. "This is a respectable commercial hotel, not a third-rate music-hall!"

The speaker was an angular, hatchet-faced individual with a long, pointed nose and a drooping moustache, and there was something so funereal about his demeanour that it seemed most unlikely that he had ever been known to smile.

A commercial traveller of long standing, he was known on the road as "Misery" Markwick, and he certainly looked anything but joyous as he sat at his table by the window and glared across at Jack, Sam, and Pete.

Outside, the morning sunlight shone on an over-night snowface—real Christmas weather!—and it seemed as though something of the chill of the morning had got into Mr. Markwick's voice.

"I quite agree wid you, old hoss!" said Pete gravely. "De vulgar hilarity was most reprehensible!"

"I was not speaking to you, fellow!" snapped Mr. Markwick acidly. "My remark was addressed to the two persons at your table!"

"I guess you mean us, sir?" drawled Sam, with a quiet smile.

"Yes, sir, I do!" blazed Misery, his angular frame quivering with rage. "I like to have my breakfast in peace, and I object most strongly to being disturbed by hooligans who don't know how to behave in the presence of their betters! Should you subject me to any further annoyance I shall complain to the manager and have you ejected! I shall not warn you again!"

Having delivered his ultimatum, Mr. Markwick turned his narrow back upon the comrades and attacked his breakfast in the manner of a starving man, using his knife and fork with great speed and dexterity; his method of eating stamped him as a glutton.

The other people in the coffee-room appeared to be highly amused by the incident, but Jack and Sam were not even smiling as they looked across at the stranger who had offered them a public insult. The

This Week's Long Complete Story:

PETE'S CHRISTMAS!

comrades were anything but quarrelsome, and never looked for trouble—but there were limits to their endurance.

"For two pins," remarked Jack in a quiet voice, "I would pull that gentleman's long nose and demand an apology!"

"Leabe him to dis child," said Pete, lifting the dish-cover and helping himself to two sausages and a kidney. "But you'll hab to wait until I hab taken de edge off my appetite!"

"You've already consumed enough breakfast to keep a large family for a week," smiled Jack; "but there's nothing unusual in that, of course!"

"I tink it is very ungentlemanly ob you to comment upon my appetite," reproved Pete, with a shake of his head. "Just because I hab a light snack occasionally—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack and Sam heartily. The amiable Mr. Markwick muttered something and swung round in his chair.

"Will you be quiet, you—you hyenas?" he shouted, brandishing his napkin at the comrades. "I've already warned you, yet—"

"Gr-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r!"

Markwick's strident voice stopped abruptly as he sat bolt-upright in his chair and remained like a person petrified, while into his shifty, colourless eyes there crept a look of fear. He disapproved of most things in an imperfect world, and he had a real dislike of children, flowers, and animals—but dogs were his chief aversion. And now, it seemed, a ferocious brute was crouching under his table—preparing to spring at his legs!

"Gr-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r!"

The thin blood chilled in Markwick's veins as he gazed round the coffee-room, a look of terror and mute appeal upon his hatchet features; fully ten seconds ticked away before he managed to find his voice.

"T-t-take it away, someone!" he stuttered, little beads of cold perspiration standing out upon his forehead. "I—I hate dogs! Ow! I'm bitten!"

He jumped violently as another deep-throated growl came from beneath the table, but he undoubtedly let his imagination run away with him when he declared that he had been bitten. There was no dog there, of course. Pete, an expert ventriloquist, was responsible for the bloodcurdling snarls and growls!

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Call the beast off, you grinning fools!" shouted Markwick, taking a chance and leaping on to his chair. "Does the thing belong to you three?" he demanded, glaring across at the smiling comrades.

"Dat dog won't hurt you, old hoss!" said Pete reassuringly. "Least, I hope it won't! And, anyway, it would only take a lump out ob your calf. And you wouldn't miss dat, would you?"

Markwick's hatchet countenance was grey and moist as he shook a skinny fist at Pete.

"You—you d-dare to sit there and admit that the—beast is yours!" he stammered, balancing himself with the greatest difficulty. "Take him away, you black maniac!"

"Wid de greatest ob pleasure, old hoss," said Pete, with disarming meekness.

Leaving his table, he walked across the coffee-room and dropped to his knees beside Markwick's chair. The strained expression upon his face suggested that Pete was not in love with his task. He looked thoroughly frightened, and his voice was tremulous as he spoke to the imaginary dog.

"Good boy, Wizziwozzo!" coaxed Pete, placing his hand beneath the chair. "Come out, Wizziwozzo, and let—"

"Wizziwozzo!" echoed Markwick involuntarily.

"Yes, old hoss," nodded Pete. "De wizziwozzo is a deadly snake found in de African jungle; one bite from him and it's all ober wid you!"

"And—and you've named your savage brute after that deadly reptile!" cried Markwick, aghast at the mere thought.

"Dat's right, old hoss," agreed Pete quietly. "You see, dis hound has got some wizziwozzo blood in him, and when he bites—"

"I don't want to know anything about it!" shouted Markwick, wild-eyed with panic. "Take him away, you madman!"

"Down, Wizzi!" ordered Pete sternly. "Down, sir!"

He changed his position a trifle, and, by leaning forward, he was able to curl his arm round the back of the chair and come within touching distance of Markwick's leg. Clapsed in Pete's fingers were two articles of domestic use—a pair of sugar-tongs and a fork.

"Down, Wizzi!" commanded Pete once more. "Don't you show dose teef at me, sir! Down, I say! Ah, would you, you brute!"

Misery Markwick was in a state verging upon collapse as Pete shook the chair and pretended to come to grips with the ferocious Wizziwozzo; but Markwick made a remarkable recovery when the sugar-tongs nipped the calf of his leg and the prongs of the fork pricked his skin. "Ow! I'm stung!" he shouted, jumping high into the air and landing on the edge of the table. It is not surprising, therefore, that the table tilted and crashed to the floor with a clatter that must have been heard all through the hotel. So deafening was the din that it drowned the mighty roar of laughter that broke from the other guests.

As for Markwick, he remained flat upon his back and stared up at the ceiling, wondering, in a vague kind of way, how the earthquake had happened. The uproar was at its height, when the door opened and the manager rushed into the room, his hands raised in horror, his mouth gaping.

"What is the meaning of this tomfoolery, sir?" he demanded, standing over the prostrate Markwick.

"He says he's been stung by a dog, old hoss," explained Pete. "Yah, yah, yah! 'Scuse my mirf!"

The sound of Pete's hearty guffaw had a marked effect upon Misery, for he sat straight up, like a mechanical figure, and glared into the grinning countenance.

"You're to blame for this, you black scoundrel!" he shouted. "Where's your dog? What have you done with the savage brute that took a lump out of my calf?"

Pete, who was seated on the floor, shook his head and gazed about with wide-open eyes.

"Dog, old hoss?" he asked, in surprise. "I don't know nothin' about no dog! What sort ob dog was it?"

"You know, you scoundrel!" fumed Markwick, scrambling to his feet. "You said that it had some wizziwozzo blood in him, and—"

"What are you babbling about, sir?" demanded the manager, his eyes upon the broken crockery and upturned table.

"Don't worry, old hoss," counselled Pete, tapping his forehead with a significant finger. "Dis gent appears to be suffering from ants in de attic! Dere never was no dog in the room!"

"You're a liar!" cried Markwick, trembling with anger and indignation. "These gentlemen"—he

waved his hand round the coffee-room—"will bear me out when I say that you had a dog with you—a most ferocious brute with dripping jaws and red eyes!"

The manager frowned. "Is that so, gentlemen?" he asked, appealing to the other commercial, who were still chuckling.

"I don't remember seeing a dog," declared one, a chubby-faced, jovial-looking man.

"Nor I!"

"I'm sure there hasn't been a dog in the room!"

"Misery's been seeing things!"

The chorus was unanimous; the manager looked stern and tight-lipped as he turned upon Markwick.

"If this is your idea of a practical joke—" he began.

"But I tell you the brute was here—under my very chair!" broke in Markwick, in a frenzy. "Didn't the thing bite me?"

"I couldn't say," returned the manager, without a trace of sympathy. "All I know is that you'll have to pay for this damage! And your little prank is likely to cost you a pretty penny!"

"Little prank!" hooted Markwick, losing his last vestige of control. "There's been some trickery here, and that black scoundrel is at the bottom of it! I've been fooled, I tell you, and these grinning apes have enjoyed the joke!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, holding his sides and swaying backwards and forwards. "Fancy de poor old hoss being stung by an imaginary dog! Yah, yah, yah! I should hab de wound cauterised, old hoss!"

"You mean cauterised, you image!" laughed Jack; and the coffee-room rocked with a cataclysm of mirth.

Markwick looked like a person demented as he glared round with smouldering eyes, and a flush mantled his cadaverous cheeks as the din increased in volume. Then, without the least warning, he snatched a heavy dish from the wreckage at his feet and rushed straight at Pete.

"Look out!" went up the warning shout. But Pete continued to rock to and fro, roaring with laughter. "Yah, yah, yah!" he boomed. "De poor old hoss was—"

Crash!

Down flashed the heavy dish, full on top of Pete's woolly head, and a cry of surprise echoed through the room when the china broke into a score of pieces and clattered to the carpet.

"Yah, yah, yah!" shouted Pete, who was obviously none the worse for the assault. "Did someone pat me upon de noddle?"

Again was the laugh against Markwick, and he was gibbering with fury as he picked up a jug and splintered it upon Pete's ebony pate.



"I'M STUNG!"

Misery Markwick leaped high into the air as Pete nipped him with the sugar-tongs. Markwick brought the table over as he crashed to the floor. The deadly wizziwozzo had done its work!

"Dere!" grinned Pete. "Now a fly has gone and settled upon my cranium! Why not try dat coffee-pot, my dear old boss?"

"And I will, you hound!" shouted Markwick, snatching a silver pot from an adjacent table.

Crack!

The force of contact did not seem to trouble Pete in the least, but Markwick ripped open a wild yell when the lid of the pot flapped open and a stream of boiling coffee smothered him and scalded his chin.

So angry was Markwick that he was scarcely responsible for his actions. In his mad frenzy he grabbed an ugly-looking carving-knife—and then Pete closed with the fellow.

"I shouldn't play wid dat, old boss," he said, encircling the thin wrist with a steely grip and forcing the other man to open his fingers. "Knives and guns are barred in dis establishment!"

"Let go, you scoundrel!" cried Markwick, struggling madly in a frantic effort to free himself. "Take your dirty paws off your betters!"

"Dat's all right, old boss!" grinned Pete. "Don't you worry your pretty head about dat! And don't kick me on de shin, or I may tap you on de nose—like dat!"

He had no difficulty in holding Markwick with one arm, so it became a simple matter for him to raise his free hand and flick his captive with a muscular finger and thumb. Markwick ripped out a bleat of pain, and told himself that he had lost the tip of his nose.

"Now, den," mused Pete thoughtfully, "what's the next item on de programme?"

"You're going to let me go, you black savage!" shouted Markwick, struggling anew. "I'll have the law on you for this assault! Gentlemen, I appeal to you! Release me from the clutches of this madman!"

The gentlemen thus appealed to did not seem to be in any hurry to go to Misery's rescue; indeed, most of them were callous enough to chuckle over his discomfiture. After all, he would have attacked Pete with that knife, so he deserved everything that might be coming his way.

"You're a bit hot-headed at de moment, old boss," said Pete, "so de best ting I can do is to put you out ob harm's way! Ah, I hab it!"

Clasping the struggling Markwick to his broad chest, he carried him across to the corner and stuffed him bodily into the lift that was used for conveying food from the kitchen to the coffee-room. There wasn't much space in the lift, and it was a very tight fit. Pete managed it, however, and Markwick could not move a limb by the time he had been jammed into the recess. Even his power of speech seemed to desert him at that moment, for all he could do was to grimace like a baboon and make strange jungle noises.

"Pass along de car, please!" cried Pete, preparing to close the door. "All aboard! Right away, den!"

He slammed the door and pressed the bell-push. A moment later there came a dull, rumbling sound as the lift and its human occupant descended into the basement. Pete's face was one big grin as he walked across to his table and sat down to his unfinished breakfast.

The 2nd Chapter.

"Gumboil" Gets Annoyed!

"AS I hab already remarked," said Pete, a little later in the morning, "dis is a pink-letter day in de his-distry ob great and hysterical town!"

Jack and Sam were now seated in Pete's office up at Seahaven Rovers' football ground, and they smiled broadly as their friend repeated the statement that had started all the trouble in the coffee-room of the Ship Hotel.

"You mean a red-letter day, don't you, image?" asked Jack.

"What does de colour matter?" demanded Pete. "Why quibble ober a little ting like dat? Well, dis is a red-letter day in dis hysterical town!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's de matter now?" asked Pete testily. "Ain't you two boys acquainted wid English? Your ignorance gibs me a pain in de neck!"

"Are you sure you don't mean historical town?" drawled Sam, feeling for his cigar-case.

"H'm! Maybe you're right for once, Sammy," admitted Pete, rather grudgingly. "Dough dere



"GUMBOIL" FINDS THE EGGS! "Gumboil" clapped the hat on his head—and then stood petrified with amazement as a sticky, glutinous substance began to trickle down his face and neck. Pete had omitted to tell him that there were two eggs in that hat!

ain't much difference in de sound ob de words, is dere? However, we won't go into dat, 'cos dere ain't time. What do you tink am goin' to happen?"

"Couldn't say," said Jack.

"Give it up!" said Sam.

Pete sat back in his big armchair and beamed at his chums through horn-rimmed glasses, and it was obvious that he was in no hurry to impart his important item of information.

"Say, are you tongue-tied?" drawled Sam at length.

"Dere's no need for panic, Sammy," declared Pete, with a wide grin. "You shall hear eberyting in good time! I must collect my thoughts!"

"Well, I think we'll go for a stroll during that long and painful operation," said Jack, getting up and making for the door. "Coming, Sam?"

"Sure!"

"Just a moment, boys!" cried Pete, a trifle anxiously. "It's all right! I've collected my thoughts! You know Amos Gumboil, de mayor?"

"We ought to, image!"

"Well, de people ob Seahaven hab subscribed to a fund, and dey are goin' to erect a monument to him."

Jack frowned in perplexity.

"A monument?" he echoed.

"Yes," nodded Pete. "A big stone statue showing him in his robes ob office!"

"But he's not dead yet," smiled Jack.

"Dat don't matter to dear old Gumboil!" grinned Pete. "Dat stone statue is goin' to be unveiled to-morrow afternoon. It's a sort of li'l Christmas present for de town! What do you boys tink ob dat?"

"I think it's a very beautiful idea," drawled Sam, "and I'm only sorry that I wasn't able to make a small contribution to the fund! I know I've got a counterfeit rouble somewhere!"

"I presume," said Jack, "that you will witness the impressive ceremony?"

"Yessir!" grinned Pete, a mischievous twinkle in his dark eyes. "I shall be dere, sir! S'matter of fact, I wouldn't miss de show for all de onions in Spain! I tink," he added reflectively, "dat dere's goin' to be some fun, boys!"

Jack and Sam exchanged glances.

"I fear," said the former, "that the unveiling ceremony will not pass off so smoothly as Amos

Gumboil would wish! What have you got up your sleeve, image?"

"A lilywhite arm!" answered Pete, without a smile.

"Who told you all about this business?" asked Jack.

"Dere's a full-page announcement in dis morning's paper," answered Pete, "and I understand dat de town crier is going to say a few words at regular intervals during de day. De statue stands in de snowbound square outside de Corn Exchange, and de paper calls upon ebery loyal citizen to be present at de unveiling ceremony. All de town councillors will be dere, and so will de town band; but I don't understand why dey are goin' to set Gumboil's house on fire!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Jack, in amazement. "Who told you that they're going to set his house on fire?"

"It says so in de paper!" returned Pete, with a show of heat. "It says distinctly dat de mayor is to be presented wid an illuminated address! Now, what can dat mean but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pete looked puzzled and indignant as his chums roared with laughter.

"Go on! Laugh at de poor

"LONG LIVE OUR MAYOR!" said one placard.

"GOOD HEALTH TO AMOS GUMBRIL!" said another.

As Pete had predicted, it looked as though it was going to be a red-letter day in Seahaven.

The unveiling ceremony was to take place at three o'clock, and the square in front of the Corn Exchange was crowded with people long before that hour. The Silver Band enlivened the proceedings by playing popular airs with much noise and enthusiasm. A special platform had been erected for the band, and the musicians, all of them wearing holly in their buttonholes, appeared to be objects of interest to the group of unwashed urchins who occasionally nudged each other and spluttered with laughter.

The passing of minutes found more and more people swarming into the square, and by ten to three it looked as though the whole of Seahaven had turned out in force. The crowd was dense, but everyone appeared to be in the best of spirits.

A passage had been roped off from the door of the Corn Exchange, and a carpet was laid across the snow to the broad stone steps of the newly-erected statue. The statue itself, bulky beneath its canvas covering, seemed to be of noble proportions.

Amos Gumboil had been entertained to lunch in the Corn Exchange, and all eyes were upon the door of that edifice as the hour of three approached.

The bandmaster, a rotund gentleman with a strawberry complexion, looked moist and nervous as he tapped upon his music-stand and glanced towards the Exchange. At that moment Councillor Pettigrew, the deputy mayor, appeared at the head of the procession and signalled to the Silver Band.

"Now, all together, boys!" wheezed the gentleman with the strawberry complexion, flourishing his baton.

A thunderous outburst of melody should have greeted his worship the mayor, but only strange gurgling, spluttering, choking noises came from the Seahaven Silver Band. The next moment the square echoed with a tumultuous roar of laughter that must have been heard all over the town.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah, yah, yah! Play up, old boss!"

Jack, Sam, and Pete had taken up an excellent position at the foot of the statue, and the latter's

hearty guffaw rang out like a clarion note as he watched the group of urchins who were now all sucking lemons noisily and grimacing in a most excruciating manner.

"Are you responsible for this side show, image?" asked Jack, his smiling eyes upon Pete.

"Me?" came the startled reply. "How can you suggest such a ting? Ob course, I may hab giben dem youngsters de lemons, and I may hab giben dem half-a-crown each, as well, but how was I to know dat dey were going to eat de fruit in front ob de Seahaven Silver Band?"

The vast crowd was still roaring with laughter, for what should have been a fanfare of trumpets had died away into an agonised gurgle; but Pettigrew tried to look impressive and dignified as he led the way to the foot of the statue and mounted the broad steps. Six or seven councillors trailed after him, and Amos Gumboil, in full mayoral robes, trailed along in the rear, his fleshy countenance flushed, his little eyes smouldering with fury.

"Three cheers for the mayor!" shouted Pettigrew. "All together! Hip, hip, hooray!"

The crowd was too helpless with laughter to do much cheering, and Pettigrew received but a half-hearted response to his rousing shout.

Three or four councillors looked uncomfortable and self-conscious as they took up their respective positions and gazed round upon the sea of smiling faces, but Pettigrew—tall, bottle-shouldered, with an egg-shaped dome and a long, pointed chin—was absolutely master of himself, as became a deputy mayor.

The deep murmur of voices died down to an expectant silence as he cleared his throat noisily, and the frown cleared from Amos Gumboil's brow as he told himself that his colleague had the situation well in hand.

"Ladies and gentleman!" cried Pettigrew, in sepulchral tones. "This is a red-letter day in the history of Seahaven!"

"Dere you are, Sammy!" said Pete. "What did I tell you? De gentleman says—"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" snapped the deputy mayor, glaring down at the comrades. And the bloated countenance of Amos Gumboil turned from red to purple as he recognised his arch-enemy.

"Go ahead, old boss!" urged Pete, beaming encouragement.

"To-day," continued Pettigrew. "I have a most pleasant duty to perform; but before I unveil the statue I am going to call upon a fellow-townsmen, who has expressed a wish to say a few words about our distinguished and popular mayor. I call upon Mr. Mallory Markwick!"

Arrayed in a tight-fitting frock-coat and a silk hat, Markwick looked like a dyspeptic undertaker as he strode down the steps of the Corn Exchange and made his way to the foot of the statue, and a murmur of applause rumbled through the crowd as he bared his head and took Amos Gumboil's outstretched hand.

"Who would hab taught it?" grinned Pete, turning to his companions. And Jack and Sam guessed that Misery was booked for all kinds of trouble.

Markwick coughed importantly and gazed round, and the hesitant manner in which he started his speech suggested that he was somewhat unnerved by the importance of the occasion.

"I—er—shall not keep you long," he began, "but I feel that I ought to say a few words in praise of your esteemed mayor, whom I have known and—er—respected for many years."

"Hear, hear!"

"He is, as you all know, the—er—"

"The biggest robber in the town!" interjected Pete, throwing his voice and putting the words into Markwick's mouth.

A gasp of surprise broke from the crowd, and surprise quickly gave place to merriment, a shout of laughter echoing through the square.

Amos, purple with rage, looked as though he meant to do something physical as he stepped up to his old friend.

"Look here, Misery," he grated. "this is no time for playing the fool!"

"But—but I didn't say it, Amos!" stuttered Markwick, looking absolutely flabbergasted. "It—it must have been somebody else."

"Rot!" snapped Gumboil. "I recognised your voice. Get on with it—or else shut up!"

(Continued on next page.)



JACK SAM AND PETE!



(Continued from previous page.)

Markwick ran his tongue over his dry lips as he turned slowly and faced the grinning crowd. He was palpably nervous, and his limbs were shaking, but he determined to stick manfully to his task.

He ran on, his strident voice reaching every part of the packed square:

"Your popular mayor is honest, straightforward, and generous in all his deals, and I, for one, feel honoured that I am able to call him friend—the ugly-faced old scoundrel!"

This was altogether too much for the crowd, and a thunderous shout of laughter reverberated upon the crisp December air.

As for Markwick, he swung round upon Amos and extended his arms with a helpless gesture.

"I swear I didn't say it, man!" he protested hoarsely. "You know perfectly well that I wouldn't call you a scoundrel!"

"But I heard you!" rasped the mayor. "You must be going mad! Anyway, get it over as quickly as you can."

The audience was still chuckling heartily as Markwick raised a skinny hand for silence and continued his speech.

"To-day," he cried, becoming inspired, "we have with us a truly great man, who is respected by all his fellow-townsmen, a man who unselfishly devotes his time, money, and energy to the welfare of Seahaven!" He took a deep breath.

"I refer to Amos Gumbriel," he concluded, swinging round and flinging wide his right arm with a dramatic gesture—and all might have been well had he not sent the mayoral hat flying from Gumbriel's bald head!

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, holding his sides; but even his deafening guffaw was swamped by the shrieks of mirth that broke from the moist-eyed crowd.

The hat fell at Pete's feet, and he was still grinning broadly as he picked it up and handed it back to the purple-faced mayor. But he omitted to tell Gumbriel that he had slipped a couple of eggs into the hat of office.

Where the eggs came from was known only to Pete, but the fact remains that they were inside the hat when the mayor clapped it on to his head. The eggs broke, of course, and Amos ripped out a wild yell as cold, glutinous moisture trickled down his face and neck. This further misfortune sent the crowd on the verge of hysteria.

Pettigrew told himself that it was time for him to take charge of the affair.

"Play something, confound you!" he shouted, waving to the bandmaster. But no sooner did the gentleman with the strawberry complexion essay to obey orders, than the group of unwashed urchins produced more lemons and brought the musical programme to an abrupt conclusion.

"Unveil this darned thing!" snarled Amos, jerking a thumb at the statue. "Everybody seems to have gone stark, staring mad this afternoon, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that black scoundrel was at the bottom of all the trouble!"

The mere mention of "black scoundrel" caused Misery Markwick to turn sharply and follow the direction of the mayor's pointing finger. On catching sight of Pete's beaming countenance he became as immobile as the stone statue on his right, his jaw sagging, and his eyes staring from their sockets.

"Good-afternoon, old boss!" grinned Pete, raising his felt hat.

"How's de sting getting on?"

"Don't talk to me, you hound!" shouted Markwick, regaining his power of speech. "I'm going to have the police on you before you're much older!"

"Silence!" hissed Pettigrew, nudging him in the ribs. "Attend to this solemn ceremony!"

The deputy mayor was holding the length of rope that, on being pulled, would bring the white canvas sheet tumbling to the base of the statue, and a breathless silence settled upon the eager-eyed crowd as it waited for its first glimpse of the effigy.

Bracing himself, and assuming a



When I was a Boy!

BY

TOM PHILLIPSON

Wolverhampton Wanderers' Goal-scorer.



Born in a Football District!

Now is the time for merry-making: Christmas, the happiest holiday of the year is upon us. I expect you're all looking forward to having a great time.

Well, I'm glad you are! But for us footballers there is no merry-making—only a strenuous round of travelling and match-playing.

But don't think that I'm grouching; I chose to make football my means of livelihood quite a number of years ago; and I've never regretted it. Although it certainly does upset my Christmases!

As a little nipper at school, I was always determined to one day become a pro footballer. I was born in a football district—at Ryton-on-Tyne, near Newcastle.

Dodging Kicks!

So keen were we at school, that our games in the school playground were pitched battles between sides representing boys who supported Sunderland and the others who boasted of Newcastle United as their favourites. When I tell you that the sides numbered dozens, and the ball used was only a small one, you'll see that we had more kicks at each other's legs than at the ball.

Despite the kicks and bruises, however, those were happy times for us and we learnt something from them, if it was only how to dodge the other fellow's kicks!

But I expect you are waiting to hear something about my Christmas experiences. Well, here goes!

A Football Snow-fight!

One Christmas morning I awoke to find the countryside covered with a wonderful blanket of deep snow, and like all youngsters, my heart was overflowing with joy at the thoughts of a good romp out of doors. Well, it so happened that several other lads and myself had arranged to play a game of football against some other boys from the neighbourhood during the morning.

Our opponents turned up, and the game was started. Before very long, we were leading by umpteen goals to nil, and the other chaps were quite losing their heads.

Suddenly, "Pelt 'em, lads!" shouted their skipper. And before we knew just what was happening, snowballs were raining down upon us, thick and fast! Well, you can guess we didn't run, neither did we stand and look at 'em. We retaliated, of course, and in a very few minutes the football match was turned into a pitched snowball fight!

I won't say who won; anyway, I went home to my dinner feeling the worse for wear—yes, and looking a sorry spectacle!

But what mattered. In a very few minutes I was seated at the table ready for the usual Christmas feast. Snowballs, football and everything was forgotten; my one idea was to gorge myself until I couldn't gorge any more!

Too Full for Footer!

But no sooner was Christmas dinner ended, than I was out again, trying to

play football. But I soon had to pack up, go home, and rest quietly; my inside wouldn't stand a game of football—in fact, it wouldn't stand any exertion!

I suppose I was about ten when I started to play real football with my school side, the Emma Ville, Ryton, side. Some great times we had, too, although I played at centre-half—which I consider to be the hardest place in the side. But I enjoyed that position.

For a couple of seasons, however, much to my great dismay, I had to play without football boots—that is without a pair of my own. I usually begged, borrowed, or stole a pair in which to play. Many a time I should have done much better by wearing my ordinary boots, for some of the borrowed boots were several sizes too large for me. Somewhat uncomfortable for playing in, too!

A Useful Christmas Present!

My parents were none too keen on my playing football, so I could not get them to buy me a pair of boots. At times I had to make all sorts of

which, had I been successful, would have cut me out of International honours—yes, and prevented me from playing Saturday football altogether! Well, to cut the story short, I failed—failed hopelessly.

My First Honours!

Subsequently, three caps came my way, two against Wales—one of them at Watford, and the other in Wales—and the one against Scotland.

The latter match gave me great pleasure, for it was played on Newcastle United's ground, before a large contingent of my own friends. I didn't dream, however, in those days, that one day I should play on that same ground as a member of the Newcastle team in English League matches. But such was the case, for I joined the Magpies in December, 1919, after the War.

I ought to tell you that although I was a centre-half with my school side, I was chosen for England as an inside-right, and enjoyed the games immensely. My partners in those schoolboy Internationals included boys who have since become well-known players to-day—Dicky York, the famous Aston Villa and English International winger; Bob Skinner, the Tottenham Hotspur half-back, and Cox, the ex-Charlton Athletic winger, who is now playing with Sittingbourne. We were all pals together!

Involved in a Train Smash!

I said I enjoyed the games, but I also enjoyed the sightseeing and the travelling. What boy doesn't enjoy such delights? There's one journey I shall never forget. We were a merry band of youngsters and officials going down to Wales to play the Welsh boys, when, passing through Gloucester Station, a calamity happened. As the train passed over the points near the junction, four of the carriages left the rails! There was a crash, a few bumps, and we found ourselves thrown from one side of the carriage to the other. Fortunately, none of us was hurt. It all appeared very good fun to us, although, of course, the railway company did not think so!

I've travelled far since those days, and I've had varied experiences, but those of my school days remain uppermost in my memory. I shall never forget my boyhood.

A Wanderer!

After leaving school, I had several seasons in junior football, and then, during the War, I joined Scotswood. I told you earlier, that I later joined Newcastle United. Since then, I've been a wanderer, and am now with the Wolves, where I'm very happy.

I must pack up now, so I'll wish you the happiest of Christmases. May you have plenty of presents—and plenty to eat!

Tom Phillipson



TOM PHILLIPSON.

plausible excuses to get on to a football field even. One Christmas morning, however, to my profound joy, I was presented with a real pair of brand new football boots from father. What a surprise it was, and what a proud boy I was when I first played in them. I had a happy Christmas that year, I can tell you!

Well, in 1913 my game had improved so much, that I was selected to appear for the English Schoolboys. Before I got that far, however, I think I ought to tell you of an obstacle I had to overcome—or should I say that it overcame me—just previous to my being selected for the International match.

I had entered for an examination

most impressive air, the deputy mayor tugged at the rope—nothing happened! But his next attempt was more successful, for the white canvas-covering crumpled up and revealed the stone statue of Amos Gumbriel—but what a statue!

The 3rd Chapter.
Trouble for Pete!

IT was not the Amos Gumbriel that the townsfolk knew so well; it was another Amos altogether. An Amos with a bright red nose and a black eye, an Amos whose mayoral robes were covered with an old-fashioned night-shirt!

The effect was incongruous, to say the least of it, and the crowd stared blankly in open-mouthed surprise. Nobody spoke; a stunned silence settled upon the assembly. Everybody just stared and stared.

Pettigrew stared. Amos Gumbriel stared. Pete stared. And the statue, with its red nose and black eye, stared also—with difficulty, perhaps, for it was something special in the way of black eyes.

Human nature being what it is, it was inevitable that the stupefied silence could not last for long, and but a matter of seconds ticked away before the tension snapped and the crowd burst into a roar of laughter

that increased in volume until it was almost ear-splitting.

The mirth became general, if one may exclude Amos, Pettigrew, and Mallory Markwick, for even the councillors produced handkerchiefs and spluttered into them.

The mayor stood petrified, staring up at the effigy that would make him the laughing-stock of the whole country. The blood ebbed out of his fleshy countenance, leaving it unusually pale.

"Someone," declared Pettigrew, "is at the bottom of this!"

It was a solemn, sagacious statement, and Amos Gumbriel swung round upon the deputy mayor with blazing eyes.

"If that's all you can say," he snarled, "keep your stupid mouth shut! Of course, someone's at the bottom of it! Do you think a stone statue is able to dress itself up in a night-shirt?"

It was at this moment that the strawberry-faced bandmaster had a

brain-wave, and he felt sure he was doing the right thing when he tapped upon his music-stand and called upon his men to strike up that inspiring melody, "See the Conquering Hero Comes!"

"One, two, three!" he said, waving his baton, and scarcely did the first notes disturb the atmosphere than Amos Gumbriel twirled round and shook a big fist at the Seahaven Silver Band.

"Stop that infernal row, you noisy soundrels!" he roared. "Take those fellows away! Bury 'em somewhere! Push them over a cliff! Take 'em away! I hate the sight of 'em!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I'm afraid you ain't got no soul for music, my dear old Gumbriel!"

Amos looked scarcely sane, as he turned his head and showed his ugly teeth in a snarl.

"I've a good mind to give you in charge, you black maniac!" he fumed. "I'm pretty well certain that you're at the bottom of this afternoon's fiasco! It's the sort of imbecile thing that would appeal to your distorted sense of humour! You think you've been very clever, no doubt, but you'll find that you've met your master in Amos Gumbriel! I'll hound you down, and make you pay dearly for this day's work! I'll

run you to earth, you grinning ape!"

"Dat's all right, old boss," said Pete easily. "You'll always find me in de manager's office up at de Rovers football ground."

Amos snorted.

"Don't you believe it, you black scoundrel!" he shouted, with a wild laugh. "It's me who'll be sitting in that office before many weeks have passed! I'm determined to get possession of the club, and I don't care what means I employ to—"

"Keep a check upon your tongue, Amos!" warned Pettigrew, tugging at the mayor's sleeve. "You don't want to tell the world!"

Gumbriel was no fool, and he was quick to realise that he was allowing his anger to get the better of his natural prudence, so he turned his broad back upon his arch-enemy and said no more.

The police-superintendent, a friend of Gumbriel's, anticipated the mayor's wishes by ordering his men to clear the square. The tractable townsfolk went home with smiling faces, well pleased with the afternoon's entertainment, and in a good mood for Christmas shopping.

"Well, boys," said Pete, as Amos Gumbriel and his retinue moved off towards the Corn Exchange with as much dignity as they could muster, "I tink it's about time we got back to de hotel and had a snack ob food! S'matter of fact, I hab come ober quite faint, and unless I hab a pound of pork sausages, a steak pie, and a couple of chickens—wid plenty ob vegetables ob course—I feel dat I shall collapse from exhaustion."

"Come along, image!" laughed Jack. "I feel a bit peckish myself!"

"Laugh and grow hungry" is a good motto," drawled Sam.

Gumbriel, meanwhile, had flung his mayoral robes aside and was pacing up and down his private room in the Exchange. He was a very angry man at that moment, and the expression upon his pouchy face was positively venomous as he recalled the events of the afternoon. What should have been an impressive, solemn ceremony had been turned into a farce, and he felt fully convinced that the story of his humiliation would find its way into every paper in the country. He would become a public laughing-stock; people would turn round and grin after him in the street. His life would be one long nightmare.

"And that dirty nigger is responsible for the whole thing!" grated Amos, with an oath. "I know it! I can feel it in my bones! One thing is certain—Seahaven isn't big enough to hold both of us!"

Gumbriel did not try to delude himself into the belief that it would be an easy matter to get rid of his enemy, for Pete was deeply entrenched in the town. Owning, as he did, practically every share in Seahaven Rovers Football Club, it seemed most likely that he would make his home in the place. At least, so thought Amos, who did not know that the comrades were temperamentally incapable of staying in any town for more than a few weeks at a time.

"It's the football club that's keeping him in Seahaven," mused Amos, coming to an abrupt halt and staring out of the window through narrowed eyes. "Without the club—"

A queer, mirthless smile twisted his thick lips. "It will be easier—less risky—to destroy the club than to destroy him!" he told himself. "The club, then, must be destroyed!"

So reasoned Amos Gumbriel. It was dusk when, ultimately, he passed down the broad steps of the Corn Exchange, and so engrossed was he in his thoughts that he did not even glance up at the red-nosed, black-eyed effigy whose old-fashioned night-shirt flapped bravely in the breeze.

Turning up the collar of his overcoat, and pulling the brim of his felt hat well down over his eyes, he avoided the main streets and set off towards the docks, covering the snowy ground at a brisk pace. He showed no sign of hesitation as he reached the slum quarter of the town and headed for Lavender Terrace—a narrow, unsavoury street that wound its way down to the dock gates. Halting before a tall, flat-fronted building that looked exactly like its neighbours, he glanced to right and left and passed into the gloomy, stone-paved hall; then, after another pause, he carried on and mounted a flight of uncarpeted stairs. Reaching the landing, he

ANSWERS
Every Saturday—PRICE 2!

rapped upon the door that faced him.

"Come in, can't yer?" came a husky voice from the interior of the room. Amos Gumbriel opened the door and entered.

"Really, Luke," he protested, addressing his host, a burly individual in shirt-sleeves, "your manners are execrable!"

Luke Squeers, the foreman stevedore, stirred sluggishly in his armchair and glared across at his visitor.

"Wot do you want, any'ow?" he demanded, a threat in his tone. "I didn't ask you to come up 'ere, did I? I ain't forgot what 'appened last Saturday, so if you take my tip you'll 'op it—an' lively!"

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the mayor, snapping his strong fingers.

"An' tut, tut to you!" growled Luke. "With knobs on!"

"Last Saturday's affair was an obvious misunderstanding, my dear fellow," declared Amos, seating himself upon the edge of the plain deal table. "That black scoundrel bluffed the lot of us; there's not the slightest doubt about that! He was working upon supposition all the time, but we weren't to know that, of course!"

A grunt came from Squeers.

"You think that?" he asked, his heavy black brows meeting over his twisted nose.

"I'm sure of it!" returned Gumbriel earnestly.

"Huh! Then that's something else I've got up against the black 'ound!" grated the stevedore, stretching his powerful arms. "And I'll get even with 'im yet—the dawg!"

"He has certainly been asking for trouble ever since he landed in Seahaven," declared Gumbriel, studying his unlovely host with speculative gaze, "but up till now he has proved one too many for us!"

"The 'ound's 'ad all the luck!" snarled Luke Squeers. "You jest give me a sporting chance o' getting my own back—"

"I've come here to offer you that chance, Luke!" interjected Gumbriel, with a cunning leer. "I've thought of a scheme that simply can't go wrong!"

"Wot—another one?" sneered the big stevedore.

"Yes, another one," smiled Gumbriel, keeping his temper with difficulty. "But we won't go for the nigger himself!"

"Wot d'yer mean?"

"I mean," answered Amos quietly, "that we'll strike at him through the club! Do you follow me?"

"Course I don't!" growled Luke, thumbing shag into a blackened clay pipe. "I ain't no good at riddles!"

"Why shouldn't we set fire to the Parker Lane ground?" asked Amos Gumbriel in matter-of-fact tones. "The offices and the clubhouse would burn like tinder, and I happen to know that the stands are anything but fireproof! With the place a smouldering heap of ruins, we shall be able to congratulate ourselves upon having got even with this black barbarian!"

"That sounds fine!" declared Luke, puffing at his foul clay, "an' there's nothin' I should like better than to watch that bonfire! What a sight! But can it be done?"

"Anything can be done, my dear fellow!" declared Amos, with a laugh, and he was still chuckling as he produced a cigar.

"Wot about this blaze up at Parker Lane?" pressed the stevedore, watching his visitor as he put a match to his choice weed.

"In the first place," returned Gumbriel, "I wish you to be in charge of operations; and I need hardly say that I will pay you handsomely for the job!"

"Go on!"

"In the second place," said Gumbriel, gazing at his host through a haze of cigar smoke, "you will have to find at least a score of men who can be trusted implicitly to carry out your orders. Do you think you can do that?"

Luke nodded his bullet head and grinned.

"You bet!" he growled. "I could get fifty if I wanted 'em! Things are a bit slow down at the docks. It's Christmas, but money ain't too plentiful!"

"Exactly!" out in Amos. "We will pay your men well, of course, for a dissatisfied—er—hireling is liable to let his tongue run away with him!"

Luke Squeers showed his big teeth in a grin.

"Don't you worry your 'ead about that!" he growled. "The coves I



SQUEERS' CHRISTMAS BOX! Three jets struck Luke Squeers at the same moment, bowling him over. "Get up, Lukie!" roared Pete. "Dere's a lot more moisture comin' your way! Dis am goin' to be a bery wet Christmas Eve for you, old hoss!"

pick for the job won't talk, 'cause they know me too well, I give you my word!"

"Splendid—splendid!" declared Amos. "And now, if you will listen very carefully, I will outline my plan of campaign!"

"Go ahead!" urged Luke Squeers, dragging his heavy armchair towards the table.

The 4th Chapter. Lukie is Unlucky!

MANAGER PETE adjusted his enormous horn-rimmed glasses and looked up from the ledger he was studying.

It was Christmas Eve, and he was seated in his office up at the Rovers football ground, and his manner and attire were most businesslike.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and a diminutive youngster popped a tousled head into the room.

"Gent to see you, sir!"

"Name?"

"Smithers, sir!"

"Send Charlie in!"

Charlie Smithers was a docker who had every reason for being grateful to Pete. There had been a time, but a few weeks before, when Pete had intervened and saved him from the wrath of Luke Squeers, the bullying, heavy-handed foreman stevedore.

"Come in, old hoss!" cried Pete, as Smithers stood upon the threshold twirling his shabby cap nervously in his fingers. "And how is Charlie dis morning?"

"Very well, thank you, sir," answered the docker, his eyes travelling round the comfortable office. "I hope you won't mind me calling, sir, but I've got something rather important to tell you!"

"Mind?" said Pete heartily. "Ob course I don't mind! I am always ready to see my friends! Come and sit down, and help yourself to a handful ob dese cigars! I know dey are good ones, cos dey belong to Sammy! Now," he ran on, as his visitor perched himself upon the edge of a chair, "what's de trouble? If it's financial assistance dat you want, Charlie, you hab only to say de word!"

"No, sir; it's nothing like that, sir," said the docker hastily. "It's—it's about Luke Squeers, sir!"

"H'm!"

The merry twinkle died out of Pete's eyes, and his face set. He knew that Squeers hated him, and that the big fellow would go to any length to do him an injury. Pete at once suspected that there was further trouble ahead.

"So de amiable gent is going to hab another try, is he?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the docker. "It's like this, sir. There ain't much doin' at the docks, and there are a lot of men—real bad eggs—who just hang about all day, waitin' for something to turn up—and they ain't particular as to what it is! Well, there was nothin' doin' at all

this mornin', and who should turn up but his nibs!"

"Lukie?"

"Yes, sir! I was hanging about the quay, thinking there might be a chance of a day's work, and for some reason or other I kept my eye upon Luke Squeers. His movements interested me, for he went first to this man, and then to that, and the chaps he spoke to were all bad eggs! I know 'em, but it don't do to tell all you know when you work in the docks, sir! Many a poor feller's been shoved off the quay for speakin' out of 'is turn!"

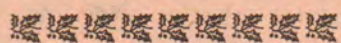
"Yes, go on, old hoss!" said Pete, but with no show of impatience.

"Well, sir, what do you think 'appened then?" asked Smithers. "His nibs looked round and then walked straight up to me! 'You're right down on your uppers, ain't you?' 'e asked; and I said that I was. 'Well,' 'e says, 'I can put you on to a private job if you'd like to earn yerself a tanner for a Christmas box!'

Tenners don't grow on lamp-posts, sir, but I didn't jump at the offer. 'Is it a straight job?' I asked, knowing Luke. 'Sure!' 'e grunted. 'Come up to Lavender Terrace at twelve o'clock!' 'e says. Well, sir, to cut a long story short, I went up there to Luke's place, and who should I find there but about twenty others—bad 'uns, every one of 'em!"

"What happened after that?" asked Pete, as Smithers paused.

"Luke," continued the docker,



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with quiet emphasis, "told us that we were to get a tanner each for settin' fire to your football ground!"

Pete nodded, but showed not the slightest trace of surprise or anger.

"The idea," explained Smithers, "is to burn the stands, the clubhouse, and the offices to the ground."

"And how is dat to be done, old hoss?" asked Pete, in a quiet voice. "It may not be so easy as it sounds!"

"Each man," said the docker, "is to have a tin of petrol and a special flame-thrower, and Luke says the whole place will be ablaze in less than three minutes! 'E says that it don't matter about snow bein' about because the flame-throwers would set fire to an iceberg!"

"What time does de pantomime start, Charlie?"

"Two o'clock, sir—after midnight!"

"H'm," mused Pete, consulting his gold wrist-watch, "dat gibbs me nearly ten hours in which to put a tuck into Lukie's little Christmas scheme! How are dese beauties goin' to get into de ground?"

"I couldn't say, sir," returned Smithers. "We're goin' to get our final instructions at ten o'clock to-night. Anyway, Luke says that everything is cut and dried, and 'e's as 'appy as a dog with two tails! One thing he impressed upon us, though. We shall take up our positions before the stands at five minutes to two, but we're not to do anything until the Corn Exchange clock has struck the hour! Luke talked like a blessed major-general before the attack!"

"Well, Charlie," said Pete, thrusting out a muscular hand, "I'm most obliged to you for coming along and putting me wise to dis dirty business!"

"Don't mention it, sir!" grinned the docker. "You seem to forget what you did for me."

"And dere's a whole lot more dat I'm goin' to do for you, old hoss!" declared Pete. "Come and see me to-morrow mornin', and dere will be a Christmas present for you. And now you'd better buzz off, 'cos I've got a lot to do before de balloon goes up!"

A cold, light breeze was blowing up from the sea at twelve o'clock that night, bringing more snow, until everything was flecked with white. Then, in some inexplicable, elfish manner, a sudden calm set in, and banks of sullen clouds sailed sluggishly across the heavens.

Seahaven looked like a dead city at that hour, all the Christmas shoppers had gone home, and most of the street lamps had been extinguished.

The clock of the tower of the Corn Exchange struck solemn notes, announcing that the hour was half-past one, and it was twenty minutes later when shadowy, spectral figures could be seen moving noiselessly across the snowy playing pitch up at the Parker Lane ground.

The figures looked eerie as each took up a position in front of one or other of the stands, and no sooner

did they halt than they became almost invisible—part of the night—and barely discernible even against the background of white.

Incredible though it may seem, there were other mysterious spectres abroad, and one of them spoke in a husky whisper after he had consulted his luminous wrist-watch.

"Three minutes to go, boys!" he said, "and den we frighten de life out ob Lukie and de udder gents. Golly! Dis waitin' for de fatal hour is makin' me go all goosey! Dis am a fine game for Christmas mornin'. I hope we don't run into Santa Claus!"

"Don't make so much noise, you black image!" growled Jack. "And keep your eyes glued to your watch. It's going to be touch and go this journey!"

The comrades were crouching upon the flat roof of the grand stand, from which point they had an uninterrupted view of the snowy playing pitch. Facing them, a towering black shadow, was the other stand.

"I guess Wipple and the other fellows are beginning to feel the strain," drawled Sam, chewing at his cold cigar-butt. "How goes the time, image?"

"Nudder minute to go, Sammy," answered Pete. And a gripping, tense silence fell upon the trio. "Get ready wid de gadgets!" Then, after what seemed an age, he exclaimed: "Right!"

Scarcely had the word left his lips than the white rays of three powerful searchlights cut through the sable darkness and flooded the playing pitch with a radiance that was reflected with almost blinding intensity by the snow. Almost simultaneously four more searchlights came to life on the roof of the other stand.

The surprise was complete—paralysing! Luke Squeers and his would-be incendiaries stood perfectly still, as though turned to stone. Seen from the roof of the grand stand, they looked like so many pigmies, but the comrades had no difficulty in recognising the flame-thrower that was strapped to each man's chest.

Luke and the others remained statuesque for fully ten seconds, but they started violently when the tense silence was shattered by a blood-curdling roar that boomed out upon the cold, Christmassy air. That terrifying jungle cry was as much a snarl as a roar—a blend of both, indeed—and Luke & Co. were in the grip of stark, petrifying terror as they stared at the powerful, maned brute that was bounding across the turf from the direction of the clubhouse.

Fido, Pete's tame lion, looked wild-eyed and ferocious in the clear, white glare of the searchlights, and Luke Squeers uttered a yell of fear as the massive brute emitted a snarl of fury and leapt straight at him. Feeling sure that his last moment had come, the giant stevedore crumpled up and collapsed in a heap—and the lithe-limbed body flashed over him and landed some yards away.

Robbed of its prey, the lion swung round and stood with lashing tail, its smouldering eyes seeking another victim, and it was at this moment that one of Luke's men ripped out a yell and dashed away across the pitch.

The running figure roused Luke Squeers and his men to action, and the next moment the whole crowd took a desperate chance and raced across the turf.

"After dem, Fido!" roared Pete, from the grand stand. "Make a good meal!"

A chorus of shrieks rang out as the lion uttered another bloodcurdling roar and bounded forward, and so swiftly did he cover the ground that he had not the slightest difficulty in cutting off the fugitives' retreat. Rounding them up, he made them change their direction, and the comrades shouted with laughter as he chased them round and round the playing pitch.

"Get a move on, Lukie!" shouted Pete. "De Peruvian mousehound's just behind you! Yah, yah, yah! I'll back you to do de hundred yards in ten seconds, old hoss!"

Two or three of Luke's hirelings collapsed through a combination of fear, funk and exhaustion, and it was not long before Luke himself swayed and pitched forward upon his face.

Soon the snow-covered football pitch looked like a field of battle, its casualties being scattered about in untidy heaps, but the terrified dockers were stirred into life once more when a dozen footballers

(Continued on page 172.)

THE SHATTERED
STACK!

Julian Mawson blows up the giant chimney—
and it wrecks Don's mill! But he'll pull through!

DON O' DARKTON!

By
ROBERT MURRAY.

A stirring story of
Football and Mill Life.

GET TO KNOW—

Don Desmond, a clever young footballer, who is hated by **Julian Mawson**, a thorough scoundrel, in charge of Mawson's Mill whilst his father, William Mawson, is recuperating from a serious illness. Don is the latter's nephew, and Julian has learnt that his father intends to leave all his property to Don. Don is centre-forward of the Rangers, who play at Fallow Field, a beautiful stretch of ground given to Don by a man of mystery—

Thomas Crabtree. When Crabtree learns that Julian Mawson has sacked Don and a lot of other Rangers' enthusiasts from the mill, he finds them employment at his own mill, making Don general manager. Don is kidnapped by one of Julian Mawson's hirelings, and imprisoned in a disused coal mine, but is eventually rescued.

Meanwhile, Darkton Villa—the local Third Division club, who are without a ground, owing to a recent burst reservoir—cause a big surprise by beating the Athletic away from home in the First Round of the F.A. Cup!

(Now read on.)

The Draw!

FOR the first time for eighteen long years, the hooter on the old Crabtree Mill added its raucous screech to the dozens of other sirens that blared over Darkton on the Monday morning following the match between the Rangers and Mannoek Wanderers.

Don Desmond and Thomas Crabtree had done their work well. There was not a hitch anywhere, and all the operatives had to do was simply to clock-in and go straight to their respective jobs as though they had been working there for months past.

Sam Elder and his chums were delighted to get back to work; and Don had never felt more happy in his life as he stood in the private offices listening to the rumble of the engines, the whipping of the flying belts, and the busy chatter of the looms.

Old Thomas Crabtree had kept his word. The mill was in full swing again, and it was doubtful if there was a single operative in Darkton who was unemployed at that moment, except of his own choice.

There was but one shadow of regret that fell across Don Desmond's happiness, and that was the realisation that he was now working for a rival concern, and that his success was bound to have a reactionary effect on Mawson's Mill.

Still, that wasn't his fault. Julian Mawson was entirely to blame, and he would have to answer for all that had happened when old William Mawson returned to Darkton to find that many drastic changes had taken place during his absence.

The chief topic of conversation in every quarter that morning was the sensational and unexpected victory of Darkton Villa in the First Round of the Cup, despite the fact that they had been playing away from home.

Up to then the Villa had been displaying terrible form. They had not won a League match for over two months; and now, at the most critical stage in their affairs—when their pitch, headquarters, and everything else had been swept away by the bursting of the reservoir—they seemed to have found their true form at last.

At any rate, a 5-1 victory over a team like the Athletic was something to boast about. It was bound to re-awaken local interest in the club, but it was too late in the day.

Caleb Roust had rented temporary offices for the Darkton Villa F.C., and the Monday morning found him seated there in company with John Clamp, the manager.

Roust was in an even viler temper than usual. His eyes were bulging, and he drew so hard at his cigar that it crackled like a firework.

"You're a nice sort of manager, Clamp!" he snarled contemptuously. "Haven't you anything to suggest at all? Supposing we're lucky enough to be drawn at home again in the next round of the Cup, what are we going to do about a ground?"

"What's the good of asking me?" muttered John Clamp sullenly. "You know as well as I do that there's not a suitable ground in all Darkton, save Fallow Field."

"Then we've got to get hold of Fallow Field!" roared Roust, thumping his fist on his desk with a force that threatened to reduce it to ruins. "The Villa's defeat of the Athletic has given us a new lease of life. It's awakened fresh interest in the club. I always said that I was depending on the Cupbies to make up for our losses during the past few months, and if the Villa is drawn at home again in the next round, and we have a ground to play on, I'm confident that we should attract the biggest gate that has ever been known in Darkton."

"Ay, I don't doubt you're right," agreed John Clamp, thumbing a wad of tobacco into his pipe. "But there's too many 'ifs' about it. 'If' we're drawn at home. 'If' we had a ground to play on. Do you mean to say you're going to make another attempt to try and persuade young Desmond to give up Fallow Field?"

"Curse young Desmond!" snarled the Villa's managing director. "I'd like to meet the fellow who stuck him down the Clayton pit-shaft and tell him what I think of him for bungling his job! Why couldn't he have flung him in and smashed his confounded neck? If that brat was out of the way I don't believe I should have the slightest difficulty in getting hold of Fallow Field."

"It would be still easier if old Thomas Crabtree was out of the way," suggested John Clamp, with a meaning shrug of his shoulders. "If it hadn't been for him stepping in and re-opening his mill young Desmond would have sold you Fallow Field a couple of weeks ago. He had as good as agreed to do so when the old fool interfered."

"That's true!" grumbled Caleb Roust sourly. "I had the whole team on my side when I offered to sign them on for the Villa, and if they were out of work now I believe I could bring them over to my way of thinking."

"But they're not out of work. The Crabtree Mill is in full swing again. It opened up this morning, with young Desmond as general manager, and every one of the Rangers fixed up with a soft job. You couldn't buy Fallow Field now if you were to plank down all the money you possess."

Caleb Roust's face had cleared slightly, and there was a cunning glint in his eyes as he sat rolling his cigar from corner to corner of his wide mouth. John Clamp's remarks had set him thinking, and had caused him to realise that the biggest obstacle between himself and possession of Fallow Field was not Don Desmond, but old Thomas Crabtree and his confounded mill. If these two factors were eliminated it would make a great difference to the whole situation.

"I must see Julian Mawson," thought the football director. "I reckon he'd be just as pleased to hear that old Crabtree had kicked the

bucket, and his mill had shut down again. And I don't believe that Julian Mawson has any more scruples than I have. In fact, it's my strong opinion that he's the person behind the scenes who's been engineering these mysterious attacks on young Desmond. Though why he should have such a grudge against the lad I'm hanged if I know!"

"It's time we got the result of the draw through," said John Clamp, glancing at his watch. "Parsons, of the 'Darkton Echo,' promised to ring me up at once."

Scarcely had the football manager spoken than the telephone-bell sounded, and John Clamp reached eagerly for the instrument.

Caleb Roust watched him keenly as he lifted the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"Yes, Clamp speaking. Oh, yes, go ahead, Parsons—let's hear the worst!"

A minute later John Clamp rang off and turned towards his companion with a peculiar look on his face. He looked slightly dazed and incredulous.

"You're right, Mr. Roust," he said at length. "You'll have to find another ground in Darkton; and if you do I can guarantee that we'll fill every inch of it!"

"Then the Villa has been drawn at home again?" blurted Caleb Roust, craning forward eagerly. "Who do we meet in the next round of the Cup?"

"The Borough."

"Thunder and lightning! The Borough!"

Caleb Roust fell limply back in his chair and puffed out his cheeks until he resembled a pig's head in a butcher's shop—only not nearly so good-looking and considerably less wholesome!

For the second time in succession, the luck of the draw had come Darkton Villa's way, and on this occasion they had been matched against a strong team who had a big reputation as Cup fighters. In other words, the game was bound to attract a huge crowd—and the Villa had no ground!

"If the Villa can beat the Borough the club'll never look back again!" declared John Clamp enthusiastically. "We'll have all Darkton grovelling at our feet. By James, it's the chance of a lifetime, Mr. Roust!"

"Yes. But what's the use of us being drawn at home if we haven't a ground?" hooted Caleb Roust, striding up and down the office. "We shall have to do as we did with the Athletic—arrange to play away. Now, if we had Fallow Field—"

"Yes, if we had Fallow Field," murmured John Clamp sarcastically to himself. "If I could get another job I'd tell this bloated bully exactly what I thought of him and clear out at once. He hasn't got the brains of a jellyfish, or the intelligence of a dried haddock!"

Caleb Roust suddenly flung the remains of his cigar in the fireplace, and, snatching up his hat, crammed it on his bald head. There was an expression of resolution on his flabby face that made him look like a scowling gargoyles.

"You leave this matter to me, Clamp. The Villa have got to have Fallow Field!" he rasped. "Two heads are better than one, and I'm going along to see Julian Mawson. He's just the man to help us!"

John Clamp wrinkled his nose, and stared puzzledly at Caleb Roust.

"Julian Mawson! What's the use of going to see Julian Mawson?" he asked shortly. "How can he help you? He has no control over young Desmond now. He can't persuade him into selling Fallow Field."

"Two heads are better than one," replied the football director meaningfully. "Mawson's on my side; he's got to be. He'd do anything to get me to renew my contracts, especially now the Crabtree Mill has opened up in opposition."

There was not the slightest doubt that the news that the Villa had drawn at home against the Borough in the Second Round of the F.A. Cup had created intense interest throughout Darkton. A special edition of the "Sports Echo" had been printed, and the papers were selling like hot cakes in the streets.

Though the Villa had fallen into disfavour during the past couple of months owing to the poor show they had made in the League matches, the prospect of a visit from such well-known Cup fighters as the Borough had sent a wave of excitement sweeping through the town. There was a smug smile of satisfaction on Caleb Roust's face as he strutted through the town and

listened to the chance remarks that reached his ears.

The Rangers F.C. was totally eclipsed for the time being. Everyone was discussing the possibility of witnessing a stirring Cuptie struggle between the Villa and the Borough, and the possibility that the Villa might go one step farther in the great fight for the most coveted of all football trophies.

"By gosh, fancy being drawn at home again—and against the Borough!" exclaimed one of a crowd of men who stood on a street-corner holding forth on the result of the draw for the Second Round. "That'll be a game worth seeing."

"Worth seeing! But we won't see it," jerked another man disgustedly. "The match is bound to be played at Huddersfield, the same as t' Villa had to travel to Owdham i' Satiday instead of meeting the Athletic on their own ground, as they were entitled to do."

"Ay, it's danged hard luck on t' Villa having had their ground destroyed just as the Cupties were starting. Let's hope they'll be able to find another ground here in Darkton."

"But there ain't no other ground that would be any use to 'em."

"What about Fallow Field?" suggested one member of the crowd. "The Rangers will be playing away that week, and they might lend their ground to t' Villa."

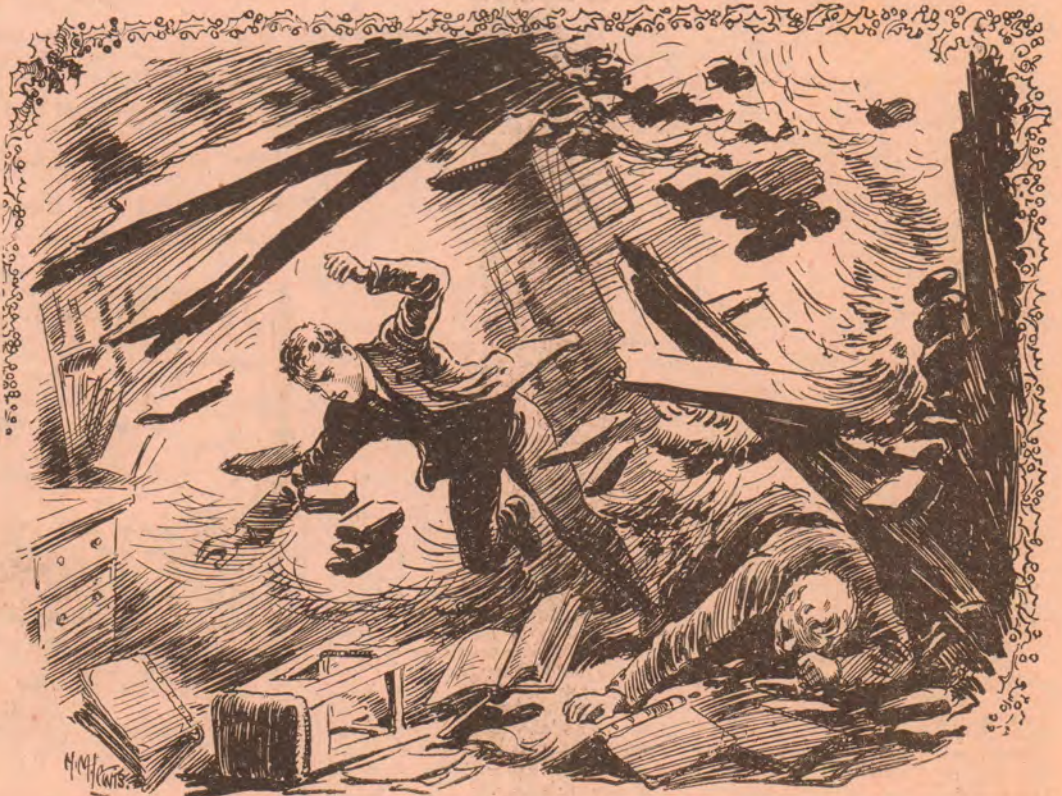
A cunning gleam crept into Caleb Roust's eyes as he digested these remarks, and passed on his way. If only he could stir up a certain amount of local feeling, he might place Don Desmond in such a position that he would be courting resentment and unpopularity if he refused to allow the Villa to play their Cuptie on Fallow Field.

There was not the slightest doubt that all Darkton to a man was as keen as mustard that the match against the Borough should be played at home. Few of them could afford the long journey to the Yorkshire town, and, besides, it would practically ruin what chance the local club had of passing into the next round of the cup.

They could scarcely hope to vanquish the Borough on the latter club's ground, where they had preserved an almost unbeaten record.

"I'll have a word with the editor of the 'Echo'; I'll get him to pull the strings for me," thought Roust shrewdly. "I'll bet the whole town will back him up if he suggests that the Villa be allowed to play their Cuptie on Fallow Field, so that the club will have a fair chance of victory, and everyone in Darkton will be able to see the game."

"He can word the article in such a way that that cub Desmond will scarcely dare to refuse to give his consent without stamping himself as an unsportsmanlike, selfish young prig. Ah, Mawson, the very person I wanted to see!"



DISASTER!

All around was a terrible shattering and groaning of stout timbers, the crash of broken glass and the clatter of falling brickwork. Don was flung headlong to the office floor, close against the senseless form of the old mill-owner. What had happened?

When Two Villains Meet!

EVEN as Caleb Roust reached the entrance to Mawson's Mill, Julian Mawson himself came striding out through the gates. He did not seem at all pleased with himself. There was a sullen, brooding look in his eyes, and his long face was set in a black scowl that gave him the appearance of an ill-tempered mule.

"As a matter of fact, I was just thinking of coming to see you, Roust," he jerked, as he recognised the football director. "About those contracts of yours—are you prepared to renew them? Don't you think you're acting unreasonably, after all the years you've been doing business with our mill?"

Caleb Roust wagged his big head, and toyed with the massive gold watchchain that spanned his bulging stomach.

"As a matter of fact, Mawson," he said maliciously, "I was thinking of transferring all my business to the Crabtree Mill. I understand the prices are ten per cent below those you quote."

A spasm of fury convulsed Julian Mawson's face. Roust had touched him on a sore spot. The mention of the rival mill that had only been opened that day was like a red rag to a bull.

"To blazes with the Crabtree Mill!" he snarled thickly. "I'd like to see the infernal place wiped off the face of the earth, and that old fool Crabtree with it. And—"

"And young Desmond as well?" suggested Caleb Roust, with a deep chuckle. "I'm with you there, Mawson. I'd like to see you get your wish. If that happened, I'd renew my contract at once, and give you an order that'd keep your mill working full time for the next six months!"

Julian Mawson stared hopefully at the man. The loss of Roust's business had been a crushing blow that had shaken the mill to its very foundations.

"What exactly do you mean, Roust?" he asked eagerly.

"I mean exactly what I say," said the football director, slipping his arm through Mawson's and walking him slowly down the street. "I'd like to see the Crabtree Mill wiped off the face of the earth!"

"Why? What good would that do you?" queried the other man puzzledly.

"It would throw young Desmond and his confounded gang out of work again!" explained Caleb Roust, in a low voice. "It would knock all the stuffing out of them. They'd be so sick they wouldn't know what to do with themselves; and it's a hundred to one that if I renewed the offer I made Desmond a week ago he'd jump at it!"

"Huh! So you're still keen on buying or leasing Fallow Field?" muttered Julian Mawson, endeavouring to adapt his long strides to the short steps of his corpulent companion.

"I've got to get hold of Fallow Field, by hook or by crook!" declared Roust vehemently. "It's the only way I can save the Villa. If I can't secure another ground, the club is bound to go smash, and I shall lose thousands of pounds, not counting what I should make out of the Cupbies. This situation affects you just as much as it does me, Mawson. We've got to put our heads together. We've got to find some means of putting old Crabtree out of business and forcing him to close down his mill. And it's got to be done at once!"

"Thunder and lightning! If I knew how to crush the old fool, don't you think I'd do it?" snarled Julian Mawson desperately. "It's impossible! The mill only opened to-day, and I don't suppose Crabtree would close it again if you offered him every penny you possessed. Perhaps you're thinking of making him an offer for the place?"

"Don't talk like a fool!" snapped Roust impatiently. "I mean every word I say—and I'm not afraid of taking risks. I'd like to see Crabtree Mill burnt to the ground, and the interfering old fool sizzling in the middle of it!"

"Perhaps you're thinking of setting fire to the place?" sneered Mawson. "You wouldn't stand a dog's chance. There's bound to be a night-watchman on the premises, and the fire-station's only a few doors away."

Quite by chance the two men had been walking in the direction of the very place they had been discussing, and they suddenly stopped short as they found themselves almost opposite the Crabtree Mill. Julian Mawson's eyes narrowed, and he swore violently under his breath.

It presented a scene of tremendous activity. Motor-lorries were streaming in and out of the yard, and bales of cotton were being swung about in all directions. The deep song of the engines came distinctly to their ears, and the ceaseless chatter of the greedy looms. High overhead towered the great chimney-stack, clouds of black smoke belching up into the sky. A wooden scaffolding had been erected around the foot of the shaft, and workmen were swarming upon it like human flies.

"It's high time they had that stack repaired," muttered Julian Mawson. "I've heard say that the foundations have sunk a couple of inches. It'll cost Crabtree a pretty penny if he has to have it pulled down and rebuilt."

"I'd like to see the confounded thing fall down!" snarled Caleb

It was the voice of industry, and it sang a song of toil and activity and of prosperity to come. The grim shadow of unemployment was lifted from Darkton. The Crabtree Mill had absorbed every man and lad who wished to work, and no longer were crowds of disconsolate-looking individuals to be seen hanging round the street-corners and Labour Bureaus.

Old Thomas Crabtree and Don Desmond felt that they had achieved something to be proud of as they sat facing one another across the big desk in their private office and realised that everything was in full swing at last. Their labours of the past few days had not been in vain. They had made order out of chaos. The mill had opened punctually to the minute that Monday morning, and there was no busier place in the whole of the town.

"Here cooms t' gaffer! Give him a cheer, laads!"

"And one for young Don!"

Sam Elder, Ben Walters, and Ed Maddocks had been appointed overseers, and they looked very conscious of the responsibilities of their new position. Jack Royd was a machine-minder, and all the other members of the Rangers' team were employed in such jobs as fitted their capabilities.

There was only one fly in the ointment, so far as Don Desmond was concerned, and that was the thought that he was now working for a rival concern, after he had spent so many years learning the business under old William Mawson. But it was not his fault. Julian Mawson was the responsible party, and he would have to answer for it all in the end. From the day he had taken over full control of his father's interests, Maw-

son's club was unable to take full advantage of the favours that the luck of the draw had thrust upon them.

"It will be a crying shame if the Villa is unable to make arrangements to play their Cupbie at home," ran the article. "After the splendid fight they put up against the Athletic it is not unreasonable to suggest that they stand an excellent chance of disposing of the Borough. But the match must be played in Darkton. It is a matter of local interest. There is only one ground in the town which would meet all the requirements of such a great event, but we understand that the young owner steadfastly refuses to come to the Villa's assistance and grant them the use of an enclosure that would enable every football fan in Darkton to witness the match in comfort. We trust that the individual in question will reconsider his decision, and not allow personal matters to sway him towards the 'dog-in-the-manger' attitude he appears to have adopted."

A flush of anger and indignation crept into Don's cheeks as he read these words. The article did not state the true facts of the case. It was a direct and unjustifiable attack upon himself, and he guessed that Caleb Roust had been pulling the strings in order to excite sympathy for the Villa and stir up resentment against the Rangers F.C.

"The cunning scoundrel! He's trying to play on the feelings of the townspeople and lead them to believe that I'm deliberately going out of my way to spoil the Villa's chances of lifting the Cup," he thought bitterly. "It isn't merely a question of allowing them the use of Fallow Field for this one match. That wouldn't suit Roust's book at all. He wants to buy the ground outright, and I'll see him to blazes before I consent to do that! This situation would never have arisen if Roust had played the game in the first place."

Don Desmond was too busy to decide what action to take in response to the attack that had been made on him. There were a hundred and one things to be seen to that would keep him late at the mill that night.

But as he hurried home for a hasty tea that evening he saw things in the streets which decided him that it was worth working late. Everywhere was crowded with shoppers moving before windows trimmed ready for Christmas.

Busy folk were making early purchases, and on his way back to the mill Don came upon a little group from Carter's Mill. The men, some with their wives and children, were outside a butcher's shop. Turkeys strung the front of the place, flanked by sides of beef, with a big porker at the front, a lemon in his mouth.

"Here's young Don!" a spinner yelled as he spied the boy. "There'll be a Christmas dinner for all of us, thanks to him! A merry Christmas to ye, laad!"

His companions realised it, and they crowded round, but Don dodged them laughingly and hurried on. For all that, he was glad to think that what he had been able to do would make some difference to these folk during the season of plenty and good cheer.

Another Attempt.

BACK at the mill, he joined Thomas Crabtree in the office, and they went over the events of the day, and discussed their plans for the future. The old mill-owner was hopelessly behind the times, but he was determined to get a thorough grasp of present-day business methods. He plied Don with an unceasing stream of searching questions regarding the many evolutions that had taken place in the cotton industry since he had retired from business, eighteen years previously.

"Great Scott! What a thoughtless old fool I am, keeping you here all this time!" exclaimed Thomas Crabtree eventually, as he glanced at the clock on the wall. "Nearly nine o'clock! You must be dog-tired, my lad. You'd better come along and have a bite of supper with me, and then get straight to bed. Hallo! What's the matter, my boy?"

Don Desmond had suddenly started to his feet and was staring across towards the window at the other end of the room. The blind was partly drawn, and it was as dark as pitch outside.

"I don't know. I could have sworn I saw someone peering in the window just then," said the young

(Continued on next page.)



"MERRY CHRISTMAS, DON!" "There's young Don!" a spinner yelled, as he sighted the boy. "There'll be Christmas dinner for all of us now—thanks to him! Merry Christmas, lad!" The spinner was right—but none of those happy Christmas shoppers knew of the black cloud which hung at that moment over Crabtree Mill.

Roust vindictively. "By James, it would flatten the whole mill out like a house of cards. There wouldn't be a wall left standing. If that would only happen, we shouldn't have anything more to worry about, Mawson!"

Julian Mawson stepped back instinctively as he stared up at the massive brick column, as though half-fearing to see it sway and come thundering down on top of him. Then he suddenly caught his breath sharply. A tinge of colour crept into his pale cheeks, and his eyes were blazing with excitement as he turned and grabbed his companion fiercely by the arm.

"By heavens, you've given me an idea, Roust!" he said huskily. "Let's get away from here, where we can talk quietly."

"What's bitten you?" jerked Caleb Roust, wincing beneath the grip on his arm. "If it's anything particularly confidential you'd better come along to my office. What's the great idea?"

"You were speaking of taking risks just now," said Julian Mawson meaningly. "If you're willing to fall in with the suggestion I am going to make, I reckon I can guarantee that by this time to-morrow the Crabtree Mill will have ceased to exist, and young Desmond will be only too glad to sell you Fallow Field for any sum you care to offer him!"

Christmas Dinner—Thanks to Don!

BACK to work again! If there was one place in all Darkton where happiness and contentment predominated, it was at the newly opened Crabtree Mill.

It was difficult to believe that the big factory had lain silent and deserted for eighteen long years. Once again the full-throated roar of the engines and the busy chatter of the looms added their clamour to the general voice of the town.

"My money and your brains, Don—we'll put it that way," said the old mill-owner, as he surveyed the well-appointed office, with its filing-cabinets, adding-machines, and other up-to-date devices. "I don't think we could have got things done so quickly in my young days."

Together the old man and the young footballer made a complete tour of the big mill, passing through the spinning-rooms, the carding-rooms, the warehouses, and every branch of the business.

Smiling faces greeted them on all sides. The operatives were as happy as sandboys. For the first time for many weeks they knew that there would be a pay-envelope waiting for them on the coming Saturday, which would prove most acceptable, considering it was Christmas week.



A Christmas Wish from the Artist who illustrates the story on this page.

son's Mill had been on the downgrade.

Late that afternoon the result of the draw for the next round of the F.A. Cup ran through the mill like wildfire, and gasps of consternation greeted the news regarding Darkton Villa.

"By gosh, they've been drawn at home again, and against the Borough!" exclaimed Sam Elder, as he bent over the newspaper that Don Desmond had brought into the spinning-room. "Ah'd like to see old Caleb Roust's face! Ah reckon he's as sick as mud. T' Villa won't stand a dog's chance if they have to play away from home!"

"It'll be a great pity, in one way," said Don gravely. "I'm not thinking of Caleb Roust, or his club. But, after all, the Villa is Darkton's representative team, and it's only natural that the people would like to see them do well in the Cup. It would be a good thing for the town. If the Reservoir Ground hadn't been destroyed they'd get a record crowd there. I'd like to see the game myself."

"If you'd have accepted Roust's offer last week we might have been playing for t' Villa against the Borough," muttered Sam Elder, and shook his head thoughtfully as he returned to his duties. He was as true as steel to the Rangers, but it had always been his ambition to become a professional footballer, and he still had hopes in that direction.

Don Desmond was a prey to vague feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty as he returned to his office and read the comments of the "Sports Echo" about the draw for the Cup. The loss of their ground had stirred up a tremendous sympathy for the Villa. They had been out of luck all the season. Now that the tide had turned



footballer puzzledly. "I thought I caught a glimpse of a white face pressed against the glass."

"Only fancy! Or perhaps it was the night watchman going on his rounds," suggested Thomas Crabtree. "No one else would be hanging round the mill at this time of night."

But Don was not satisfied. With a couple of strides he crossed the room and flung open the window. It was not too dark to prevent him from seeing in every corner of the yard at the rear of the mill, but there was no sign of anyone there.

Satisfied that it was only his imagination, Don closed the window again and drew the blind.

It was then, when the light from the window had been obscured, that a figure that had lain concealed behind a stack of packing-cases in one corner of the yard slowly lifted itself into view, and, hugging the shadows, moved stealthily towards the base of the great chimney-stack that towered two hundred feet above the mill.

"By jinks, that was a narrow shave! I thought everyone would have been gone by now," muttered the man under his breath, as he stared back at the dim glow of light that was visible through the green blind. "It's old Crabtree himself, and young Desmond as well. Here's hoping they'll stay where they are for another ten minutes or so!"

They'll get the surprise of their lives, and it'll be a bit of good news to take back to the guv'nor!"

Welch, the hired scoundrel who had already made two dastardly attempts on Don Desmond's life, hunched himself down on his heels. With the greatest of care he drew a queer-looking, cylindrical object from his pocket and wrapped it in his cap before he laid it down.

Next, he produced a steel instrument and commenced to loosen one of the many bricks that went to make up the massive shaft that reared straight up into the darkness. It was not a difficult task, for the mortar was crumbling and friable with age, and once the aperture was made Welch plugged it with some soft clay, in which he embedded the cylindrical object that he had treated so tenderly.

Then he struck a match, and, sheltering the tiny flame in his cupped palms, blew it out again almost at once, leaving a crimson spark spitting and spluttering by the base of the chimney-stack!

With nervous haste the man snatched up his cap and darted across the mill-yard. Leaping up, he grasped the top of the surrounding wall and swung himself over to the other side. Then he took to his heels across a piece of waste ground, and it was not until he had covered a distance of several hundred yards that he pulled up and stood peering nervously back in the direction of the mill.

"It was probably the night watchman—it couldn't have been anyone else," Don Desmond was saying at that moment, as he again assured himself that the window was securely fastened, and reached for his hat and coat. "We can ask him on our way out."

"Possibly he didn't know we were staying late until he looked through the window," agreed old Thomas Crabtree. "I forgot to tell him; in fact, I didn't think we would be here till this hour. You might switch on the light in the outer office, my lad, so that we can see our way out."

Even as the young footballer moved towards the door the dull, muffled roar of an explosion boomed out close at hand. The floor beneath him seemed to rock and heave so that he was almost thrown off his feet. A shower of plaster came pattering down from the ceiling, and just before the lights snapped out he caught a glimpse of old Thomas Crabtree's white, alarmed countenance, and heard his sharp cry of consternation.

"Good heavens! What was that?"

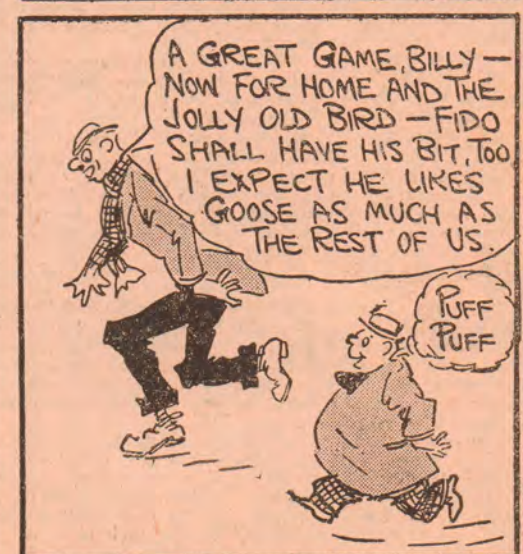
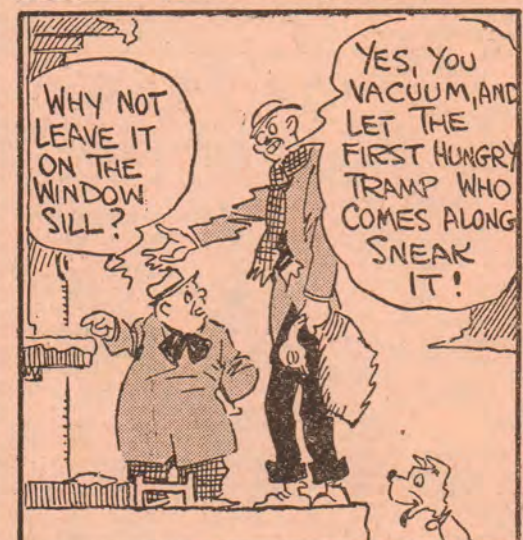
During those next few seconds Don Desmond sensed that something was about to happen, though what it was he had no idea. The terrific crash of sound reminded him unpleasantly of the bursting of the reservoir, when the Villa ground had been swept to destruction, and a portion of the town had been inundated by the foaming torrent of water that had cascaded down from the hills.

Instinctively he crouched back against the wall, and the next instant there came the most deafening, awe-inspiring crash that he had ever heard. It was as though the whole world had exploded about his ears.

Dazed and bewildered, he was thrown violently to the floor. All about him was a ghastly clattering and groaning of stout timbers, the jangling of broken glass, and the rending of splintered woodwork. The building was rocked to its very

(Continued on the next page.)

When the Goose Trotted!



PRIZE FOOTBALLS.

Each week the Editor awards three Full-size Match Balls and a number of Football Games for the most interesting paragraphs concerning readers' football clubs. All letters should be addressed to the BOYS' REALM, "Prize Footballs," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Bromley Sports F.C. (Sheffield) was started two seasons ago by Mr. S. Wright (now the secretary), who, previous to that, had been a football referee. During their first season, Bromley played in a medal competition, but fared rather disastrously. Out of a total of 19 games they only succeeded in winning, 5, lost 11, and drew 3. Mr. Wright hurriedly points out, however, that this was not due to lack of ability, but rather owing to the fact that his team were forced to play eleven above their own age and weight. The following season, Bromley joined a league and again started badly, losing their first two matches. And then, one night, the boys were introduced to Mr. Wright's fox-terrier pup. They became great friends, and the players decided to make the dog their mascot. The next Saturday the puppy was taken to watch the game—and Bromley won, 7-0! Since then he has attended every match, and the team have gained 11 points out of a possible 12. That's the stuff to give 'em, Bromley! You must guard that puppy day and night! Let's hope he continues to bring you good luck—and don't let him get his sharp teeth in the REALM full-size match ball I'm sending you. By the way, sorry I can't use that interesting snap of your team. I'm afraid it's rather too small for reproduction in the REALM. If you care to send a larger one, though, I'll see what I can do. All the best!

Page Bank F.C. (Spennymoor, Co. Durham) is rather a remarkable club—remarkable, because it possesses no secretary and has no funds! Well, I'm very sorry to hear about that, Mr. Newman—who is the captain. The average age of the club is 15, and they possess two balls, both very much the worse for wear. Again, my sympathies! But Page Bank is a team with plenty of grit. On one occasion, when they were to play a Willington team away from home, the centre-half and the centre-forward thought that four miles was too far to walk for a certain defeat. The result was that two substitutes had to be found, and although these were not up to the standard of the other fellows, the team managed to force a draw. Well done, Page Bank! Look out for the football game I'm sending you.

A. B. Sports Club (Shortlands, Kent) gets its name from a kind gentleman who let the team have a pitch rent free. I bet some other teams were jealous! It is a newly-formed club this season, and difficulties seemed to crop up all ways. There was a lack of funds to purchase football kit, but this problem was solved by the members buying their own. Their first match was against a London club (Mr. Jackson, who writes the letter, won't divulge the name because "they might think we are trying to brag"), whom they easily licked to the tune of 13-0. Some stuff are A. B. Sports Club! The next

game was against Central F.C., and, sad to relate, A. B. Sports were too sure of themselves. At half time they were losing 4-1. In the second half, however, they put their backs into it and eventually ran out the winners. Carry on like that, A. B. Sports, and I hope you'll like the football game I am sending you!

Stoke Brotherhood F.C. (Coventry) was formed in the 1922-23 season and played friendly games at first. They did so well that the following year they decided to enter the Bible Class League. This the club did—and fared disastrously. Five games from the end of the season they were at the bottom of the table with only 1 point gained out of a possible 54! Great Scotland Yard, that won't do, Stoke Brotherhood! Well, anyway, some of the fellows wanted to pack up, but the majority said "Carry on!"—stout-hearted fellows, those!—and of the remaining five games, two were won—that sounds weird, doesn't it?—one was lost, and the remaining two games drawn. Thus the club's record for that season was: played 32, won 2, drawn 3, and lost 27! Too bad, too bad! The following campaign they did little better, playing 24 games, winning 5, losing 18, and drawing 1. Last season's record was also rather a dismal affair, reading like this: played 16, won 3, lost 9, drawn 4. But this season—ah, what a difference! Anyway, up to the date I received Mr. Bailey's letter, the club had played eight games and won them all. Won, not lost them! Cheers for Stoke Brotherhood F.C. And I hope you like the full-size football I'm sending. Sorry I am unable to use your photograph. 'Fraid it's a wee bit too small. Trot along a bigger one, and I'll do my best to insert it in the REALM.

Brunner Athletic (Walthamstow) played 26 matches last season, won 14 of them, lost 8, and drew the remaining 4. Not so bad, that! This season they carried on, although they had no funds. Still, Brunner Athletic are a cheery set of lads,

and they're looking forward to better times. That's right. Never lose heart, and prosperity will eventually come to you. Write again later, Brunner, and perhaps you'll win a prize then.

Albion Lads A.F.C. (Manchester) was formed last season and, owing to lack of funds, had to be content with playing friendly games. Towards the end of the campaign they entered for the Boys' REALM Medal Competition (Manchester Section of the BOYS' REALM League) and won their way to the final, when they triumphed over Corpus Christi by 3-1. Thus Albion Lads won a set of medals in the first year of their existence. Jolly good, what! This season they joined the Manchester Section, and are having a very successful time, beating one team by 14-0, and another 8-1! Sorry I can't award you a football, Mr. Hodgson, but I'm sure you and your team-mates will spend many a happy hour with the Football Game I am sending you.

Bath A.F.C. (Sheffield) made a disastrous start this campaign, and at one time were nearly at the bottom of their league—the BOYS' REALM League, Sheffield Section, by the way—and lost two matches by 12-0, one by 10-0, several by 8-0 and 5-0! Gosh, you must pull up your socks, Bath. That won't do at all! Ah, what's this—they did pull their socks up? Mr. Slingsby goes on to say in his letter that they achieved a good performance in defeating Parkwood 2-1. Parkwood, apparently, was the team that gave them that huge trouncing of twelve clear goals earlier on. Bravo, Bath! Write again, and I'll do my best to find a prize for you!

Gorse Hill Prims (Swindon) are hot stuff. In fact, they are very hot stuff! Apparently, they have developed the useful habit of topping leagues, and winning shields, and cups. Why, in the 1924-25 season, they won no less than five trophies, including the Wiltshire Junior Cup, which is competed for by all the junior clubs in Wiltshire. Two of these were trophies for six-a-side football, at which game Gorse Hill Prims are experts. The 1925-26 season was not quite so successful, although they retained the Borough League Shield and the Fairford Cup, in addition to winning the Wanborough six-a-side. This season they have joined the Swindon and District League, and have entered for the Wilts Senior Cup, the Elliot Cup, the Swindon Junior Cup, and the "Advertiser" Cup. Jumping rattlesnakes—you're going to have a busy season by the look of it, Prims! I hope you do well in all these competitions, and if you win them all, write and let me know, won't you. Who knows, you may be able to do it, too, with the aid of the fine REALM full-size match football now on its way to you!

PHOTOGRAPHS.

Have you seen the photograph of Govan Ferndale on page 172? What about sending up a photo of YOUR team? Address it to the Football Editor—and then look out for it in the REALM!

When the Goose Trotted!

Fido Makes Sure of It!

Long Len and Puffing Billy!

CONGRATULATE ME, YOUNG BILLY—I'VE WON THE GOOSE IN THE CLUB'S CHRISTMAS DRAW!

I'VE JUST TIME TO TAKE IT ALONG TO THE "DIGS" BEFORE WE GO TO THE MATCH—COME ON!

CONFOUND THAT DOG!

PUFF PUFF

PUFF PUFF

SUFFERING SNAKES—IT'S **FIDO!**— I THOUGHT I'D DROWNED HIM!

I EXPECT HE DRANK THE WATER, LEN— ANYWAY, IT'S CHRISTMAS, THE SEASON OF GOODWILL— CAN'T YOU FORGIVE AND FORGET?

FIDO'S A FINE LITTLE CHAP REALLY—I SAID HE'D BRING LUCK AND YOU'VE WON THAT GOOSE, LEN!

H'M—YES— WELL PERHAPS I WAS A BIT HASTY WITH HIM!

THERE'S NO-ONE IN AND I'VE LEFT MY KEY IN MY OTHER CLOTHES— DASH IT!— CAN'T VERY WELL TAKE THIS BIRD TO THE MATCH, CAN WE?

NO

WHY NOT LEAVE IT ON THE WINDOW SILL?

YES, YOU VACUUM, AND LET THE FIRST HUNGRY TRAMP WHO COMES ALONG SNEAK IT!

NO, LEN, THIS IS WHERE FIDO COMES IN— THIS IS WHERE HE MAKES GOOD— LEAVE HIM ON GUARD AND HE'LL SEE NO-ONE ELSE GETS THAT BIRD!

GOOD IDEA FOR YOU BILLY— GOOD THING OLD FIDO DID TURN UP REALLY— I WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED THIS MATCH FOR ANYTHING!

A GREAT GAME, BILLY— NOW FOR HOME AND THE JOLLY OLD BIRD— FIDO SHALL HAVE HIS BIT, TOO I EXPECT HE LIKES GOOSE AS MUCH AS THE REST OF US.

PUFF PUFF

!!

BUT, LEN, I TOLD YOU HE'D SEE **NO-ONE ELSE** HAD IT !!

FRANK JENBY

Fido Makes Sure of It!

Puffing Billy!

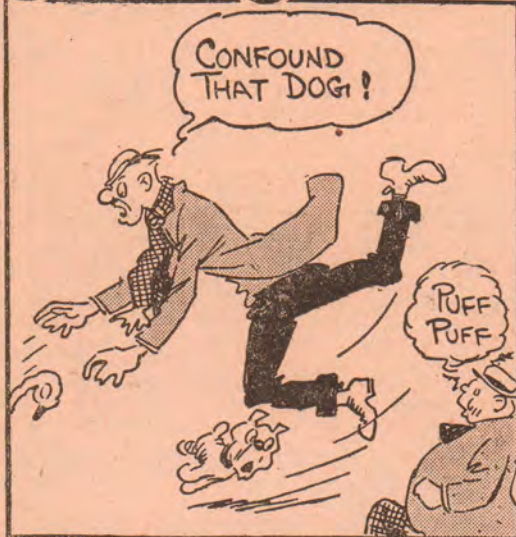
I'VE JUST TIME TO
TAKE IT ALONG TO THE
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—COME ON!



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NO, LEN, THIS IS
WHERE FIDO COMES
IN—THIS IS WHERE
HE MAKES GOOD—
LEAVE HIM ON GUARD
AND HE'LL SEE
NO-ONE ELSE GETS
THAT BIRD!



(Continued
from previous page.)

foundations, and an avalanche of bricks, plaster, and other debris rained down upon him with crushing force. For a moment the wall protected him partly from the downpour, then that too collapsed, and some heavy object struck him a stunning blow on the side of the head.

For the next few moments Don Desmond lay helpless and only semi-conscious, with crash after crash of falling debris still ringing dully in his ears. They seemed to sound the death-knell of the Crabtree Mill. It seemed scarcely possible that a stick or a stone of the great building could remain standing. Yet even then the lad did not realise that it was the towering chimney-stack that had collapsed, and come thundering down clean on top of the factory.

His mouth and nostrils were filled with dust and powdered plaster; his head ached terribly. The pitch darkness, the suffocating atmosphere, added to the horrors of the situation, and his blood chilled at the idea that he might be lying buried beneath hundreds of tons of bricks, rubble, and shattered beams.

This impression was enhanced when he first attempted to move. It was as though his back was broken, and he was paralysed from head to foot. But his limbs were only numb; as he gradually recovered the use of them he found

that he could shift a huge beam that lay across his shoulders, and kick his feet free of a mass of rubbish that encumbered them.

He was then able to turn over and sit up, but it was only with difficulty, for there was a criss-cross of broken planks and laths that shut him in on all sides. Don realised that it was the formation of these very beams—especially those above him—that had saved him from being crushed to death. He had had a miraculous escape. Save for a heavy blow on the head and numerous bruises, he was practically unharmed.

But how had he fared with Thomas Crabtree? Don was so dazed that he had forgotten all about the old mill-owner for the moment; but now his heart commenced to beat rapidly with sudden alarm and anxiety.

The old man had not been half a dozen yards away from him when the amazing disaster had occurred. Don's voice was husky and shaky as he commenced to call out.

"Mr. Crabtree, where are you? Are you all right?"

Nothing but silence greeted the lad's query. He shouted again, and the reverberations of his voice brought a shower of debris pattering down upon him. He feared that there might be a fresh subsidence at any moment, that would slowly but surely crush the breath out of his body.

And then a fresh horror was added to the situation. A spasm of deadly fear stabbed through Don as a faint smell of burning wood came to his nostrils, and then he heard an ugly crackling noise that was pregnant with ghastly possibilities.

Something was on fire! Close at hand the debris had burst into flames, and in another few moments

the very place where he was imprisoned might be roaring like a blast-furnace!

Another gush of smoke set the young footballer gasping and choking for breath, and through a crack in the surrounding tangle of planks and beams a livid tongue of flame leaped up as though hungry to reach him and sear him with its scorching breath!

The Mill in Ruins!

DON DESMOND found himself threatened with one of the most fearful forms of death that could be imagined. It had been terrible enough when he had been imprisoned at the bottom of the old Clayton pit-shaft on the outskirts of Darkton, but the present situation was even more ghastly.

So far as he knew, he was trapped like a rat beneath tons and tons of debris and shattered woodwork, the greater part of which was probably highly inflammable. Fire had broken out, and he could distinctly hear the fierce crackle of the hungry flames, whilst clouds of pungent, suffocating smoke curled and eddied around him.

For several moments Don Desmond lay completely paralysed with horror and despair. He was faced with two alternatives, and he did not know which one to take. If he attempted to wriggle his way out towards the open air, it was more than likely that the tangled mass of wood and brickwork above him would subside and crush him like an egg-shell.

If he remained where he was he was bound to be roasted to death by the approaching flames, which were even then glowing redly

(Continued on page 176.)

The Boys' Realm Football League

Any reader interested in the League should write to the Football Editor (enclosing a stamped and addressed envelope) who will send the fullest possible information by return of post. His address is: FOOTBALL EDITOR, THE BOYS' REALM, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. A FULL LIST OF SECTIONS AND SECTION SECRETARIES appears on page 175.

A Time Limit!
I want to draw particular attention to the fact that Sections who have not started playing matches by January 1st, 1927, cannot qualify for REALM Championship Cups this season.

This is a very necessary ruling—but it does not mean that the formation of new Sections must necessarily stop altogether from January to April.

Those four months form a splendid opportunity for new Sections to be got together, then when the footer season opens once again later in the year, all the necessary work has been done and play can start straight away.

270 New Clubs!
During the last six weeks it has been my pleasure to register no less than 270 new clubs with the League—and more are coming in every day.

During this period of a month and a half, no less than eleven new Sections have been formed—some with two Divisions. Four more Sections are almost complete. This means that long before the new year the membership of the BOYS' REALM Football League will be more than trebled, and I think it speaks well for the way in which junior footballers all over the country have welcomed the formation of the League.

The total number of clubs registered at the moment is a little over 500.

Manchester Section.
I have just received a letter from Mr. Cordock, secretary of the Manchester Section. He mentions that the local president, Councillor T. Harrison, gave a little dinner to all the captains of the teams in the Manchester Section—to which I referred a week or two back.

Just 42 sat down at the table, ten fellows being kept away by the bad weather, so that those who accepted Councillor Harrison's invitation enjoyed a little more grub than they otherwise might have had!

A Special Division!
The Manchester Section has formed a Special Division for the accommodation of clubs late in registering. Levenshulme Scouts A.F.C. and Parkside F.C. have registered with this Section, while the following clubs are newcomers to Div. 4:

Oak Villa F.C.
Brunswick Juniors F.C.
St. Thomas Boys A.F.C.

Divisions 2, 3 and 4 of the Manchester Section are now well into their season, and the following shows the League tables to the middle of October:

Div. 2.	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Broughton I.	6	6	0	0	18	4	12
Chester Alb.	7	5	1	1	30	5	11
Moston Juniors	5	5	0	0	32	1	10
Brunswick	6	5	1	0	23	12	10
Beswick Blue B.	6	3	2	1	16	22	7
Moston St. George's	5	1	1	3	16	12	5
Alexandra	5	1	1	3	18	13	5
St. Agnes S.S.	6	2	4	0	18	18	4
Parkfield L.C.	6	1	4	1	19	33	3

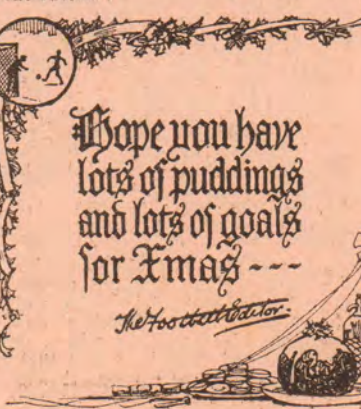
Div. 2.—contd.	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Chorlton Juniors.	6	1	4	1	9	17	3
St. Augustine's	3	1	2	0	6	10	2
Vine Ath.	5	1	4	0	7	26	2
Collyhurst Wes.	5	0	5	0	6	32	0
North Hulme	3	0	3	0	1	14	0

Div. 3.	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Dorset	7	7	0	0	22	5	14
North Salford	6	4	1	1	26	17	9
Albion Lads	6	4	2	0	32	10	8
Christ Church	5	4	1	0	24	9	8
Belmont Vics.	7	3	2	2	23	10	8
L.M. & S. Junr.	6	3	3	0	15	20	6
City Juniors	5	3	2	0	14	12	6
Crowcroft Villa	7	2	3	2	18	21	6
Empire Lads	6	2	3	1	27	21	5
Crofton Junrs.	7	1	3	3	20	32	5
Varley	5	2	3	0	10	12	4
Kirkmanshulme	6	1	3	2	26	30	4
Renshaw D.M.	4	2	2	0	9	14	4
Victoria	6	2	4	0	16	34	4
Wilson Rovers	7	1	6	0	13	40	2
Newcastle Lads	5	0	4	1	7	15	1

Div. 4.	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Corpus Christi	7	6	1	0	26	8	12
Albert Celtic	6	5	1	0	30	5	10
Crescent Alb.	6	5	1	0	17	7	10
Chester Alb. J.	7	5	2	0	30	12	10
Beswick B.B.	7	3	4	0	16	26	6
Besse's Junrs.	4	2	1	1	21	8	5
Wilmott Cor.	4	2	1	1	7	4	5
St. George's	7	2	4	1	9	24	5
Holy Trinity	5	2	3	0	12	10	4
1st South Manr.	4	2	2	0	6	9	4
St. Peter's	7	1	4	2	15	33	4
Brunswick J.	2	1	1	0	5	3	2
Victoria Park	4	0	2	2	7	13	2
Church Cor.	4	0	3	1	6	15	1
St. Thomas' Boys	3	0	3	0	4	22	0
Oak Villa	3	0	3	0	2	13	0

The South-West London Section.
Elliot's F.C. and Laburnam Rovers are newcomers this week to this thriving addition to the swiftly growing London Sections.

Things are going to be lively in London when all the Sections here start challenging one another!



Bravo, Kilmarnock!
It is a real pleasure to announce this week that the canny lads of Kilmarnock have come up to scratch. Mr. John L. Jones, the Section Secretary, has sent me ten completed Registration Forms for that number of teams.

Howard Thistle are a sound lot of lads, with an average age of 16 1/2 years. Nether-vale F.C. are a shade older, but are not so big a club. Caprington Thistle, like Galston United and Celtic Crusaders, are going to make a real scrap to get the REALM Championship Cup. The other teams registering with the Kilmarnock Section are Crookholm, Rosebank F.C., Kilmarnock Victoria "A", Dundonald Bluebell, Burnawn Rovers F.C., and Hillhead Victoria.

Good luck to the whole bunch of you; I hope you have some corking games—and if you think that the Glasgow Section is getting a bit uppish, stroll across and take them down a peg or two!

Basingstoke Section.
We haven't heard much about these chaps lately. As a matter of fact this Section is only just being started, but this week we have to extend a glad hand to Tadley Reserves F.C.

Mr. Freeman, the Section Secretary, has high hopes of getting things going strongly in Basingstoke very shortly. He certainly is not letting the grass grow under his feet in his efforts for the cause of junior football.

Bolton Booming!
Four more clubs come into the Bolton Section this week: Victory Amateurs F.C., Merrell Rovers, Kent Street Rovers, and Haugh United.

Mr. Morridge, the energetic Secretary, tells me that he thinks it will be necessary to run a senior and a junior Division for this Section: in which case, all the clubs mentioned will come into the latter Division.

The necessity for two Divisions of a newly-formed Section suggests that the REALM Football League is booming in Bolton. Well, the more the merrier!

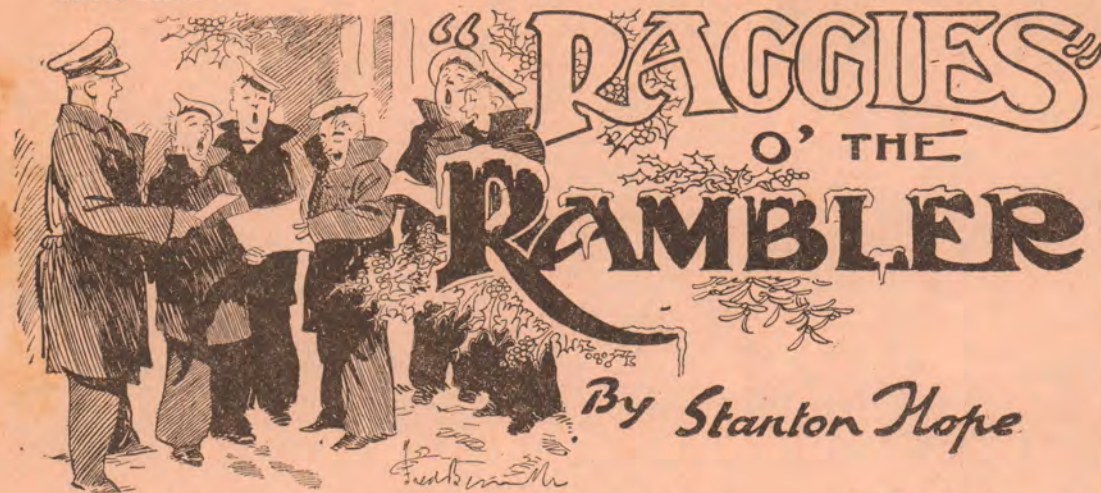
It is go-ahead secretaries like Mr. Norman R. Morridge who are sending the League along in great style.

Leigh Section.
A letter from Mr. Martland, this morning, announces that he had been obliged completely to reorganise things in the Leigh Section. "It has grown by leaps and bounds, and I should be obliged if you would send me more Registration Forms immediately, as a number of clubs are waiting for them," he says in his letter.

In the beginning, Mr. Martland wasn't sure if a Section could be run in Leigh, but he was game to try—now he knows that a Section can not only be run, but it is going to be a big affair!

Leigh will have plenty of talent to choose from by the time that they play their Inter-Section match against Manchester on New Year's day!

FUN-FOOTBALL— The raggies have never had a Christmas like this one! Their rollicking adventures will make you merry!



The 1st Chapter. The Carol Singers.

AND cold she lay in the old oak chest, All under the mistletoe bough—

"Wow-wow!"

Boy "Dusty" Rhodes, of H.M.S. Rambler, broke off short in the singing of the old Christmas song and glared reprovingly at his interrupter. "You shut up, Bodger Lees," he told the cad of the lower deck. "Just 'cause you can't sing in the waits yourself, there's no call for you to interfere with those who can."

It was the first dog-watch, and although the bluejackets had only just had their tea, Ordinary Seaman Bodger Lees was helping Boy Horace Stoop, his crony, to eat a Christmas cake in the sleeping flat. He paused in this matey pursuit to grasp Stoop round the neck as though for physical support.

"Sing! Did you hear him, Stoop? Sing! And I thought ole Dusty was practising animal imitations for the Christmas concert!"

Deeming it better to ignore such rudeness, Dusty warbled again the words of the old carol as he looked out his No. 1 uniform from his kit-bag.

"All under the mistletoe bough—"

"Bow-wow!" yapped the two cads, in unison.

The arrival of merry "Shiner" Bright and little Tich Bailey, Dusty's raggies, in the sleeping flat, caused Bodger and Stoop to pipe down. Recent experiences of the hard, knobby fists of those two chums had hammered into their thick skulls the fact that they had better mind their p's and q's.

"Cheerio, Dusty!" piped Shiner merrily. "It's a glorious evening for going ashore."

"But cold," shivered Dusty. "I'm almost sorry, mateys, that I told the new lieutenant I'd sing in the party, 'cause you know what an unlucky fellow I am for catching colds."

"You'll all jolly well wish you'd gone to the pictures instead o' singing silly carols by this time to-morrow!" interposed Bodger Lees cheerfully. "You wouldn't catch me going and standing about outside of houses on a night like this, straining my bloomin' throat, just to curry favour with the new officer."

"Don't be a chump, Bodger!" retorted Shiner. "You know jolly well that you and Stoop went along to Petty Officer Gurney, who's second-in-command of the waits, to have your voices tried. They were found guilty, and I myself heard Gurney tell you that when he retired from the Service, and started a coal round, he'd get you chaps to help sell the stuff on the streets!"

It was quite true that, to some extent, Bodger Lees and Horace Stoop were jealous of the Rambler waits, a party of singers which had been formed by a new officer, Lieutenant Bertram Moulding—commonly known as Mouldy—who, as the son of Professor Moulding, the composer of the famous Canterbury Cantata, was keen on all forms of vocal exercise.

Heedless of the further remarks of Bodger and Stoop, Shiner, Dusty, and Tich had a wash and brush-up, warbling carols the while, and after changing into their No. 1 uniforms and donning oilskins and hats, went up on deck.

Other leave men, including the Rambler cads, were going ashore, but the waits party were falling in separately. These were personally inspected by Lieutenant Bertram Moulding, a good-looking, rather

THIS WEEK'S STORY: WHAT A CHRISTMAS!

pale-faced officer with dark, soulful eyes. He expressed himself satisfied with the appearance of his songsters. Petty Officer Gurney, who accompanied him, bore a conductor's baton and a deal of carol music inside a waterproof case.

"Now, my men," said the lieutenant, after an inspection—Tich drew his chest up another half-inch at the word "men"—"I'm pleased to inform you that among the visits we shall pay to-night on behalf of that excellent charity the Seamen's Orphanage, we shall make a call at the Anchorage, the private residence of Admiral Beelbrow. The admiral is a great admirer of Christmas music, and I hope we may delight him with our vocal efforts—especially as he has kindly invited the whole party of you to take supper at the Anchorage after we have sung."

There was a stir among the carol party, and smiles gradually broadened on their faces as they visioned a jolly good spread at the admiral's magnificent home on the outskirts of Portsmouth. Near by, in another line of leave men, Bodger Lees and Horace Stoop looked as though they were going to be ill. For the first time, they really envied their shipmates of "old Mouldy's" carol party, and wished they were going, too—not to help the deserving charity, but to render yeoman service at the admiral's spread.

The picket-boat, commanded by a smart midshipman, made two trips to the Victory Jetty with the leave men, and Lieutenant Moulding and his waits party opened the evening's proceedings with a few choice selections of Christmas music outside the Pompey Town Hall. The financial response was good, and the singing greatly appreciated—in spite of some unseemly cat-and-dog noises from round a corner, where Bodger and Stoop lurked in hiding.

At Shiner's suggestion, a halt was also made outside that popular resort, the Cubby Hole Cafe, run by Mrs. Rhodes, Dusty's mother, and another crowd enjoyed the singing and gave liberally. Sally Bright and Flossie Rhodes, the respective sisters of Shiner and Dusty, were not at the cafe that evening. The boys were delighted to learn, however, from Mrs. Rhodes that the girls had gone up to the Anchorage to act among others as extra waitresses at the supper to be given by the admiral.

"This is ripping!" cried Shiner. "We shall see 'em after all, mateys! It wouldn't have seemed like Christmas Eve without seeing Sal and Flossie, especially as we shall be on board all Christmas Day."

The waits party, under old Mouldy, paid some other visits, and by easy stages came to the outskirts of Pompey and to that old mansion known as the Anchorage.

Proceeding up the drive, they took up their positions before the wide porch, and sang Christmas carols.

What mattered it if the chill of the wintry night had got through their bones, and their noses were almost Navy blue? Wasn't there a thumping big spread set within the mansion, and that feed was theirs as soon as they had galloped through the programme of carols?

The 2nd Chapter. Carols—and Grub!

AT the special request of Dusty, they finished the programme with the poignant ditty about the mistletoe bough, and the young lady who crept under the old oaken chest and was smothered on Christmas Eve.

"It's wonderful—wonderful!" mumbled Dusty to Shiner, as he turned the music with half-frozen fingers. "Somehow, matey, it always gives me a goose-flesh, and yet it makes me feel bright and happy. And after all," he added in a funeral voice, "it's only what might happen to any of us if we went a-skylarking among old sea-chests. That's the beauty of it."

"Oh, shurrup!" returned Shiner. "Your brand of Christmas cheer always makes me feel I want to weep, matey! Now let's get on with the merry washing!"

Mouldy waved his baton, and the strains of the old song rose on the night air. Blinds were drawn aside at some of the windows of the house, allowing yellow pencils of light to pierce the darkness, and several faces could be seen peering from the warmth within upon the circle of Christmas waits.

"And cold she lay in the old oak chest, All under the mistletoe bough—"

"Wow-wow!" came from somewhere among the laurel shrubbery. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed some of the carollers.

"The town seems full of dogs to-night!" snapped Lieutenant Moulding testily. "That's about the sixth I've heard."

The three raggies said nothing to their officer, but Dusty expressed the general opinion among themselves.

"Those rotters, Bodger and Stoop, are up to their rotten japes again," he whispered. "They're lurking in the shrubbery, and you bet they've only come on the odd chance of being invited in to the supper."

The doors of the Anchorage were thrown open, a silent invitation for the singers to come in out of the cold. Two hefty footmen stood on

each side of the wide hall, which was lined with suits of armour and pictures of the Beelbrow ancestors. Admiral Beelbrow, red-faced and beaming, stood in the centre to greet his young guests.

"Splendid! Splendid, my boys!" he cried. "Your singing to-night has taken me right back to the old days when I used to be the life and soul of the comic pierrots on board the good old Arethusa. Permit me now to lead the way to the dining-room!"

"Hurrah!" cheered the carollers.

Such cheering could only mean one thing to Bodger Lees and Horace Stoop in the shrubbery. It meant grub, and they were not going to be left out of it if they could help it. So they hurried out of their hiding-places, and, omitting to notice that they had about half a hundredweight of thick yellow clay on each boot, tramped up the marble steps and smirked their way into the well-lit hall. They were just in time to see Shiner and Dusty greeting pretty Flossie and Sal under a sprig of mistletoe, to the amusement of the two big funkeys.

"Hallo!" exclaimed one of the funkeys, turning on the black sheep of the Rambler. "You can't come in with boots like that!"

"Stand aside, fellow!" said Bodger, bluffing it out. "I'm Able-Seaman Hislop, and this is my pal, Stoker McCormack! We're the star tenor singers of the waits!"

It happened, unfortunately for the cads, that at that moment Lieutenant Moulding came out of the dining-room to see what had become of Shiner and Dusty, and his brow clouded at the dishevelled and dirty appearance of Bodger Lees and Stoop, who were arguing with the funkeys.

"What are you doing here, my lads?" he demanded sharply. "I presume, from your muddy look, that you were in the shrubbery giving those detestable canine imitations during the singing of one of our most beautiful carols! Return to your ship at once, and smarten yourselves up!"

He beckoned to Shiner and Dusty and turned back to the dining-room, while pretty Sal and Flossie, blushing and laughing, ran away to help with the serving of the supper.

No sooner had the lieutenant left the hall than the two funkeys, annoyed at the audacious attempt of the cads to invite themselves to the admiral's party, grabbed them and threw them down the outer steps on their necks—a proceeding which the three raggies watched with great amusement.

"Ooh! Yow! Oh dear!"

The two Rambler rascals picked themselves up and ambled painfully round the house. From inside they could hear peals of laughter, merry conversation, the rattle of cutlery, and tinkle of glasses. They caught odd snatches of the talk, which set their mouths watering.

"Give the cold chicken a fair wind, Dusty!"

"This lobster is prime!"

"Sherry trifle for you, matey?"

"Thanks, Flossie! Just a few more of those salted almonds!"

"Look here, we've simply got to

get in somehow!" spluttered Bodger desperately.

"Well, you can jolly well go alone!" whined Stoop, who was a born funk. "If you like being used as a giddy football by those beefy brutes in the comic get-ups, you can just play that game by yourself!"

"Oh, go and eat coke, you worm!" retorted Bodger crossly. "If you're windy, I'm not!"

Horace Stoop muttered under his breath, and slunk off down the drive to return to his ship, while Bodger, trying to form a plan in his mind for getting some of that grub, walked round to the rear of the mansion.

He guessed that the waits party would leave in about an hour, and that they would not scoff every bit of tuck set out on the tables in this grand spread. So if Bodger could not attend the feast itself, he reckoned that at least he could obtain some of the remnants afterwards. If only he could secrete himself in the house somewhere, he might be able to get to the pantry later and bag some of the good things, afterwards making his getaway.

A window on one of the sides of the house was unlatched, and, after hiding his oilskin among some bushes, Bodger wriggled in and made his way through a deserted room into the great hall.

The funkeys were not there, and everyone, including the servants and the extra waitresses, seemed to be gathered in the large dining-room, where lusty voices were singing "For he's a jolly good fellow!"

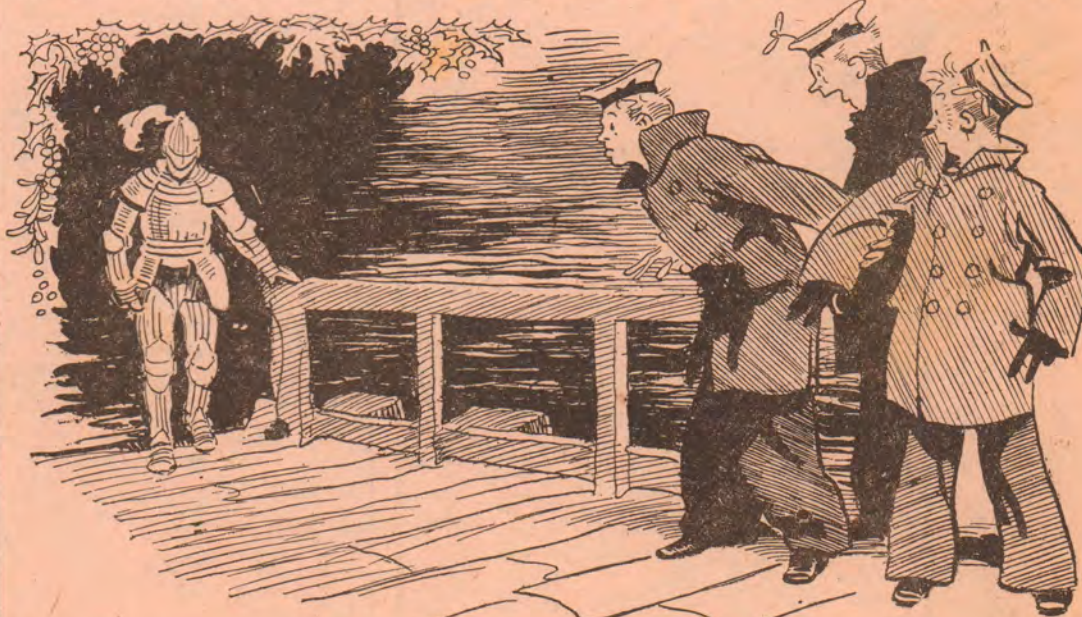
Suddenly Bodger heard footsteps coming from the direction of the kitchens, and he nipped into the first hiding-place available, which was behind a suit of armour.

The butler came up the hall and entered the dining-room, bearing a tray with decanters set on it. Deciding that he might have to wait for some little while, Bodger suddenly realised the safety of that armour. By getting his fingers under a projection, he was able to raise the back of it and insert his legs inside; then, by twisting himself like a contortionist, he managed to get his head and body in, and his arms through the chained sleeves, and his head into the open helmet.

He had just succeeded in his efforts when there was a clang behind him as the back of the armour dropped with a snap, shutting him in, and, in jerking his head back in his surprise, he dislodged the vizor of thin steel, which snapped like a trap in front of his face and almost nipped a piece off his nose—and there was Bodger Lees, in the armour of a mediæval knight, with only a thin chink to look out of in the vizor, and now horribly scared at finding himself in this stuffy suit of tin.

Standing there in line with the other armour, Bodger saw the admiral, Lieutenant Moulding, and the waits file out of the dining-room, all looking very happy and well fed. He began to cheer up a bit.

After the Rambler fellows had gone he would start making his way out of the armour and bag what grub he could. That he might be an hour or so adrift over leave did



A GHOST IN ARMOUR!

A hollow groan sounded from the figure in armour as it clattered along the jetty towards the raggies. "T-tar m-me!" gasped Dusty. "It's a g-g-ghost!"

not worry him a jot. He had often been in the rattle before; and, after all, nothing was likely to be said on Christmas Eve, even if a fellow were late in getting back to his ship. So, in spite of the stuffiness of his tin attire, Bodger Lees smacked his lips and waited.

The 3rd Chapter. Footer for an Appetite.

"MERRY Christmas! Merry Christmas, mates!" There was no attempt to stay in hammocks this morning, and the cheery shout of Shiner Bright brought the merry bluejackets to the realisation that this was indeed the day of days in the year.

As the last notes of the bugle rousing the ship died away, a whole volley of Christmas greetings broke out, and little Tich gave Horace Stoop the first Christmas present of the day by smacking him heartily with a handful of holly as the young cad bent down to rescue some of his gear which had fallen to the deck.

"Merry Christmas, matey!" "Yoops!" shrieked Stoop. "If it wasn't for what the padre told us yesterday about peace and good will, I'd punch your silly figurehead, young Bailey!"

Meantime Dusty Rhodes was sitting up in his hammock dolefully peering into one of his blue Navy socks.

"Nothing in my stocking, as usual," he mumbled hopelessly—"nothing at all, 'cept a hole!"

"Well, have a mince-pie, matey!" cried Shiner merrily. "Here, catch!"

He took a rather damaged one from his kitbag and threw it to Dusty, who stopped it with his eye.

Suddenly the boy who slept next to the hammock of the Rambler bully demanded:

"Where's Bodger?"

For the first time most of the bluejackets realised that Bodger had not slept in the ship. But as it was not the first time that Bodger had broken his leave by staying out all night, not much was thought of his being adrift.

After the lads had bathed and dressed, Petty Officer Gurney came down to the sleeping flat to inquire if anyone knew anything about Bodger, who had not returned from his previous night's leave as he should have done. The only one who could have offered a really helpful suggestion was Horace Stoop; but, afraid of being mixed up in any more trouble himself, he merely said that he and Bodger had parted company, and he had no idea as to what his mate's intentions had been.

This, of course, was not true. Stoop knew well enough that Bodger had intended robbing the admiral's pantry, and he rightly guessed that some misfortune had befallen Bodger in the course of that dangerous adventure.

Half the ship's company was away on Christmas leave, and the rest—which would include Shiner & Co.—would take their leave in the New Year. Physical drill was washed out, work was reduced to a minimum, and soon they were sitting down to the best breakfast of the year.

The Rambler, like the other warships in Portsmouth Harbour, was well decorated with holly and other greenstuff, collected by the crew. Masthead, yardarms, jackstaff, and even the gun-muzzles were wreathed in it, and gay-coloured signal flags and bunting helped to lend a festive air to the grim, grey floating engine of war.

Down below on the mess decks all sorts of little treasures had been unearthed from kitbags and ditty-boxes, and there were many photographs displayed to lend a home-like atmosphere.

Shiner Bright had put up a pretty portrait of Flossie Rhodes, and Dusty Rhodes had set up an equally pretty picture of Sally Bright. Stoop, usually devoid of sentiment, managed to find among a lot of his grubby belongings a discoloured photograph of what he called his rich uncle—a successful pork butcher—and after decorating the top of this portrait with a sprig of mistletoe, hung it prominently on a bulkhead.

No one worried much about Bodger Lees. They guessed that he would return in his own good time; he always did when he was adrift over leave. And then he would get properly "in the rattle," and get some of his future leave and pay docked.

Shortly after breakfast Shiner took



DUSTY HATES COALKEEPING!

Dusty found himself hurled to the ground, and the charging forwards trampled over him. Then Nippy Cummings leaped on top of Dusty, and bounced there as he headed the ball into the net. The Rams' goalie wasn't enjoying his merry Christmas!

the junior football team ashore for the Christmas Day match against an eleven consisting of band boys of the Royal Marines. The team was practically at full strength, and Stoop was again to play in his old position at left-half, Alec Piper standing down on account of having eaten too heartily of mince-pies on the previous night. Bert Howard was to occupy the left-back position; his form of late made the loss of Bodger Lees, for whom he deputised, less felt than it might have been.

By previous arrangement, several girls, including Sal and Flossie, met the team ashore and accompanied them to the Marine Barracks on the hill beyond Fratton. A heavy mist was beginning to descend upon the harbour, but up here the sun was shining brightly.

The band boys, under the leadership of Bugler Cummings—popularly known as "Nippy"—turned out in jerseys of vivid scarlet, blue shorts, and smart footer stockings with red trimmings.

"What-ho, the merry Robins!" cried Shiner, as he led his team on to the barracks' large footer ground. "Merry Christmas, everybody!"

The compliments of the season were vociferously exchanged between the elevens, and, after the Rams had changed, the game was commenced smartly with the band boys kicking down the slight slope of the field.

Right from the first note of the whistle both elevens were out for some vigorous exercise—to get appetites for the subsequent Christmas dinners! Within the first five minutes Dusty, who was whiling away the time by chatting to Sal through the side of the goal-net, found himself suddenly called upon to deal with a terrific drive from the Robins' outside-right.

"Well cleared, mate! Good old Dusty!"

Horace Stoop got the ball, and, forgetting his enmity with Shiner & Co. in the excitement of the glorious winter game, whipped out a fine pass to Tich, the speedy left-winger. Promptly Tich took the ball on the run, and, tricking a couple of defenders, cut in and crashed the ball under the bar just out of reach of the Marine goalie.

"Goal! The Rams for ever!"

This early unexpected reverse only had the effect of putting the band boys on their mettle. Quickly they came into the picture, and, forcing a corner, had the chance of a lifetime as the ball, deftly steered by that sure kick, the outside-right, dropped not a yard in front of the goal-mouth.

Valiantly Dusty strove to punch out, but, slipping on the treacherous turf, planted a fist on Bugler Cummings' nose.

"Yarough! What's that for?" spluttered the opposing skipper.

No one heeded him. Dusty found himself in the middle of a surging throng of lithe young bodies. The ball danced as though bewitched in the very goalmouth, while the Rams vainly strove to get it out and the Robins tried to get it in.

In the melee Dusty found himself hurled to the ground and many feet making a mat of him. His pained protests went unheeded in the shouts

of the excited players and the shrill encouragement of the girls just at the back of the goal-line.

In a final desperate effort Nippy Cummings leaped aloft, and, getting his head to the bewitched football, drove it between the posts, himself descending on the prostrate form of Dusty, bounced there with both muddy feet.

"Goal! Goal!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"What the dickens was the goalie doing?" Horace Stoop asked crossly. "Why wasn't he between the sticks?"

The answer was fairly obvious, as several boys staggered to their feet, revealing Dusty Rhodes—battered, bruised, and mudstained on the ground.

"Hard luck, old chap!" cried Shiner, helping him up. "Been hurt at all?"

For a few moments Dusty choked like a jibbing motor engine.

"Hurt!" he gulped out at last.

"Nearly killed, that's all! O-oh, my poor face—and my ribs! My left arm is broken, too, I think, and my right leg! Oh crumbs!"

"You'll be all right in a minute," said Shiner, thumping him on the back. "We mustn't look on the black side."

Tich laughed as he surveyed the muddled form of his unlucky raggie.

Shiner, and he cleverly got his forwards going, with the result that the score of the Robins was soon passed. From that time onwards there was no doubt about the issue. And the Rams, having gained a most excellent appetite for dinner, careered jubilantly off the field, the victors by five goals to two.

Resisting the invitation of the band boys to delay their return to the ship, the Rams returned early to Pompey. There was to be much fun on board the ship that day, and not for worlds did they intend being late for the most wonderful shipboard dinner of the year.

The fog was thick over the harbour, and Shiner & Co. stopped at the shore end of Victory Jetty to take farewell of the two girls, while their shipmates went along to board the picket-boat.

The raggies were still waving to the trim figures of Sal and Flossie as the girls receded in the mist, when a curious metallic clangour sounded from under the jetty.

"Crumps! What's that?" asked Tich, trying to peer through the cracks in the decking. "It sounds like a lot of tinned sardines having a scrap-up!"

And then, to the utter amazement of Shiner & Co., the figure of a medieval knight loomed in the mist, clattering slowly up the steps from the mud-flat to the deck of the jetty above.

"T-t-tar m-m-m-me!" stuttered Dusty, in his astonishment. "It's a g-g-ghost!"

Like most sailor-lads, Dusty was rather superstitious, but Shiner laid a restraining hand on him as he was about to edge away.

"Don't be a chump!" he said, and demanded of the figure: "What's the giddy jape?"

A hollow moan sounded from within the armour, and at that Shiner stepped up to the figure and rapped loudly on the steel breastplate with his knuckles.

"Hi, you inside there!" he shouted. "Who the thump are you?"

And, accompanied by another hollow moan, came the answer:

"Bodger Lees."

The 4th Chapter. Tinned Bodger!

IT took Shiner, Dusty, and Tich some few moments to get over their surprise at this astounding Christmas apparition. When they did, they started laughing so much that Bodger, within the suit of armour, began to clatter around them, waving his arms, and spluttering like a dud rocket which has got half buried in the ground instead of going up in the air.

"It's just my blessed luck to meet you silly idiots!" he babbled in muffled accents from within the tin suit. "Any decent chaps would open this beastly thing and get me out!"

Shiner wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes.

"Well, we haven't a tin-opener, fathhead!" he called through the crack in the vizor. "And if we had, we jolly well wouldn't let you out till you were polite. See?"

That made Bodger after his tone.

From abuse he changed to pleading, and told the raggies how he had got into the armour in the admiral's hall, and later had found himself unable to get out.

He had even made his way, unseen and unheard, to the pantry after people had retired to bed at the Anchorage, but although there had been a deal of tuck about, he had been unable to feed himself with it as he could not get the vizor up. In consequence, he was now ravenously hungry and dead tired, through having had to make his way cautiously round Pompey in the night to get to the water-front unseen.

Here he had hidden under the shore end of the jetty, hoping against hope that he might be able to get in touch with some friendly shipmate who would help him out of his awkward predicament. Sleep, however, had claimed him before the Rambler team had come ashore, and he had awakened just in time to hear the raggies taking leave of Sal and Flossie.

"Get me out, mates," he pleaded, "or else help me to reach the Rambler, so's I can get one of the artificers, who's a pal of mine, to open this blitherin' tin suit!"

Glad to do a good turn, even to an enemy, on Christmas Day, the three raggies tried to release Bodger; but Bodger had fallen down several times in the night in the old suit of armour, and it had become battered in parts, so that it was now firmly jammed. Try as they would, they could not open it, nor could they lift the vizor which encased their shipmate's face.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, matey," said Shiner to the sufferer. "We'll not go back in the picket-boat—though it's hooting at the end of the jetty for us now. Instead, we'll hire a row-boat, and smuggle you back on board, and tell your pal, the artificer, to come and operate on you with a hammer and cold chisel."

"Thanks!" mumbled Bodger gratefully. "Artificer Jones is the chap, and he's bound to do it 'cause he lent me half-a-dollar a couple of months ago."

The picket-boat at the end of the jetty could not be seen because of the mist, and the midshipman in charge, evidently tired of waiting for the skipper of the Rams and the other two players, pushed off to return to the ship. Thereupon Shiner went along the foreshore and borrowed a row-boat, without asking permission, and into this the raggies pushed the unfortunate Bodger Lees.

"If only it were Guy Fawkes' Day instead of Christmas, Bodger!" cried Shiner cheerfully, as he rowed out on the harbour. "We couldn't half make a bit of brass by carting you through the streets!"

To this Bodger made a muffled, gurgling noise; he was afraid to say too much lest the raggies should decide not to help him further, after all.

"What did he say, mates?" asked the merry skipper of the Rams.

"Dunno!" grinned Tich. "I heard him making a noise like a tinned herring just now."

"It wouldn't surprise me if he gets himself suffocated afore we can get him out," opined Dusty pessimistically, "just like that poor little gel in the Christmas carol." And he sang mournfully:

"And cold she lay in the old oak chest,

All under the mistletoe bough."

And it was Shiner and Tich this time who responded cheerfully with an exuberant "Bow-wow!" which made Bodger clatter his armour like half a dozen empty tomato-tins rolling down a backyard steps.

By a smart feat of seamanship, the raggies found the Rambler in the mist, and drew up unseen under the starboard boat-room. The outward bulge of the warship's bow prevented them from being spotted from the deck above, and thus far they had done remarkably well.

Getting Bodger on board, however, proved a herculean task. They hoisted him so that he could get a grip on an open port, and boosted him so that he was able to wriggle his head and shoulders into the ship. But there he stuck fast, and the raggies, after tying up the boat, shinned on board, and hurried down to the sleeping-flat by way of the forward companion to drag the struggling Bodger inboard.

It was tough work, and Bodger descended with a crash on the deck when at last they got him in.

(Continued on next page.)





(Continued from previous page.)

"Quick! Someone's coming!" cried Tich. "Stow yourself among those kitbags, Bodger!"

Scared almost stiff, Bodger lay on his back among the kitbags, with the sharp point of his steel vizor sticking upwards, and Skinner & Co. hurriedly placed one or two other kitbags over him.

Hardly had they done so and got out of the flat by one companion-ladder when Petty Officer Gurney came down another ladder.

The petty officer had become aware that the raggies had not returned in the picket-boat, as they should have done, and he imagined he had seen them come aboard by way of the boat-boom against regulations.

Certain, if that were the case, that they would come down to the sleeping-flat to leave their footer-gear, he settled himself among the kitbags to wait a few minutes on the chance of their arrival.

Hardly had Gurney seated himself than he emitted an agonised howl, and leaped up, grasping the tail of his coat with both hands. His first idea was that some marine had left a bayonet among the kitbags, but he staggered back with a gasp of amazement as a mediæval knight, with a sharp-pointed steel vizor, scrambled from among the kitbags, and went clattering in fright out of the sleeping-flat.

Two marines on sentry-go in the starboard alleyway imagined themselves candidates for the sick bay as that weird figure in armour went clattering past them. Almost immediately afterwards, Bodger, through the narrow slit in his vizor, saw the captain of the Rambler himself, followed by the first lieutenant, old Mouldy, and several other officers.

With a muffled howl he turned on his heel, clattered past the trembling sentries again, bowled Petty Officer Gurney over, and sought refuge in his former place among the kitbags in the lower deck sleeping-flat.

Hardly had he settled himself there when Shiner & Co., imagining the coast was clear, descended again, and approached him. Stooping down, Shiner rapped loudly on Bodger's tin suit.

"Hi, Bodger!" he cried. "Are you still in there?"

"Yooops! Groogh! Gerraway!" came the smothered, unintelligible reply of the Rambler cad.

The clatter of feet on the steel decking of the alleyway preceded the entry of Captain Sir Rodney Vincent and other officers and ratings.

"Copped!" gulped Dusty. "In the bloomin' rattle even on Christmas Day!"

The three raggies sprang smartly to attention in the presence of their skipper.

"What is the meaning of this, Boy Bright?" demanded the captain of the Rambler. "And who is this posturing intruder in the fancy dress?"

"It's Ordinary Seaman Lees, sir, I believe," interposed Petty Officer Gurney. "I think I recognised his voice as after—er—severely injuring me, he tried to make his escape."

The dignified captain of the Rambler walked up to Bodger, who was trying to stand to attention in his armour, and rapped loudly on the steel breastplate.

"Come out of these at once, Lees!" he commanded.

"Gr-r-rh! W-wish I c-could, sir," came from the interior of the helmet. "I'm fixed in, and—oo-er—I'm starving!"

The captain tried hard not to smile.

"How did you come to get into this ridiculous predicament, Lees?" he inquired.

"Ooh! I didn't know it was one of them things, sir," moaned Bodger. "I thought it was an ordinary suit of armour, and I got in it at the admiral's house just for a joke. G-going to play the Christmas ghost on some of me pals, that was all."

"Well, I don't want to be hard on you as it is Christmas Day, Lees," said Sir Rodney, "and providing the admiral himself is agreeable, you will hear no more officially about this absurd affair from me, at any rate. Now, Petty Officer, take him to the workshop and get one of the artificers to release him."

BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE—A GLASGOW SECTION TEAM.



GOVAN FERNDALDE F.C.

This Club plays in the Glasgow Section of the BOYS' REALM Football League. The players in the above photograph, reading from left to right, are: Back row: W. Kerrigan (sec.), J. Baldwin, W. Bennett, W. Johnstone, D. Gordon, P. Whitten, A. McCusker, and B. Higgins (trainer). Front row: J. McConville, P. Brown, J. Haggerty, A. McDonald, and J. Mitchell.

"These other boys were adrift over their leave also, sir," pointed out Gurney.

But the sporting captain of the Rambler ignored the remark, and went out of the sleeping-flat followed by his officers and other attendants.

Left with the task of getting Bodger released, Gurney sent that worthy clattering out of the sleeping-flat with a well-placed boot behind him, and Shiner & Co., chuckling in high glee, followed afar off to see the fun.

Artificer Jones was in the workshop doing a small soldering job in connection with the ship's cinema projector, and when he heard that Bodger was the fellow inside the armour he showed no desire to get him out at all.

"The Old Man says he's got to come out," Gurney said, "though I'd leave the silly young cub to stew inside there for an hour or two longer."

Before starting operations, though, Artificer Jones demanded through the slot in Bodger's vizor whether he might expect an immediate repayment of his half-crown with interest on the victim's release. A satisfactory reply having been obtained, the artificer bundled Bodger face downwards on a bench and started work by trying to melt the rivets in the seat of the tin suit with a blow-lamp.

With a howl of pain, Bodger gave a convulsive squirm. His iron-shod heel rose swiftly and struck Artificer Jones under the chin while one of his mailed fists smote Petty Officer Gurney lustily on the nose.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" yelled the peering raggies from the doorway.

"You howling young ass!" belated the outraged artificer. "Keep quiet, or you can jolly well stay inside there the whole of Christmas Day!"

"You stop jabbing me with a red-hot poker!" spluttered Bodger from inside the armour. "I won't have it, so there!"

"It's a blow-lamp, fathead!" returned Artificer Jones, rubbing his bruised chin. "That's the quickest way to get off rivets, but if you don't like it I'll try files and cold chisels."

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" groaned Bodger.

This time the artificer and Gurney commandeered the services of the three raggies to hold Bodger down on the bench while the skilled workman got busy with hammer and cold chisel.

Clang! Clang! Clang! And with each blow Bodger emitted a howl, though having the rivets knocked off could not have hurt him anything like as much as the heat of the blow-lamp on his tin suit.

For ten minutes Artificer Jones went steadily to work, heedless of Bodger's cries, and if he occasionally allowed a file or cold chisel to slip, it was only to be expected of a man who had had to wait for two months to get his half-dollar back.

At last the job was done. Bodger repaid the half-crown as promised, and staggered forth out of the workshop to the laughter of all, intend-

ing to report sick to the ship's doctor and try and get a long muke as an invalid.

He had not taken more than half a dozen steps along the alleyway when the brazen note of a bugle pierced the ship, and the three raggies in unison sang lustily to the call:

"The roast beef of Old England is jolly good stuff,

But that which we get is most horribly tough,

And the worst of it is that we don't get enough

Of this good old roast beef of Old England.

What ho! the old English roast beef!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Shiner gleefully, as they completed the singing of that version of "The Roast Beef of Old England." "And now, mates, for the merry Christmas dinner!"

At those words Bodger Lees straightened himself, and a smile gradually spread all over his face. Then, with a hungry yelp, he turned his thoughts from the ship's sick bay and went barging along after the raggies to the festive board on the decorated mess decks!

Needless to say, Shiner & Co., Bodger, Horace Stoop, and all their shipmates were in their respective messes on the decorated mess-decks when the usual Christmas Day procession of the captain and officers took place.

At the head of each table Sir Rodney paused to exchange greetings with the men and to sample some of the fare from the laden board. His tact was marvellous,

NEXT WEEK!



JOHN DUNCAN, Leicester City's captain and Scottish International, writes in "WHEN I WAS A BOY:"

and the merry bluejackets suspected he must have the inner capacity of an elephant and the digestion of an ostrich.

Perhaps, however, it was lucky that the skipper of the Rambler was a bit of a juggler in his way and dexterously managed to convey various offerings in the shape of pieces of turkey and plum pudding to a specially made secret pocket in the tails of his ceremonial frock-coat.

This ceremony having been concluded with musical honours, another good old Naval custom was revived. The popular first lieutenant was hoisted shoulder-high by some of the boys and chaired round the lower decks. Old Mouldy, who was not so popular, was taken charge of by Bodger and others, who incidentally managed to bump his head soundly against various projections in the process.

"What about old Gurney?" demanded Shiner, when Mouldy had been dispensed with.

Before he knew what was happening, Petty Officer Gurney was seized by scores of hands, and hoisted high on the shoulders of the lads who rushed at him.

None of them liked Gurney—and it was entirely his own fault when he wriggled so much that he fell off the shoulders of the lads who supported him.

"Ow! Lemme go!" Gurney howled. "Lemme—Yooops!"

His last remark was caused by the fact that somebody dropped a very soft and rather rotten orange on his nose.

Shiner and Dusty and Tich hauled Gurney up on to their shoulders again, and marched him round the lower deck. Gurney tried to duck the projecting beams, but every time that he ducked, they all heaved him up, and the P. O.'s progress round the deck was marked by a succession of violent howls and groans of pain.

Finally they let him down, and Gurney ran like a hare; he spent some time applying arnica to his bruises before going to his own mess.

And what a Christmas dinner the raggies and their messmates had! Roast turkey and veges, plum puddings, mince pies, fruit, sweetmeats of all kinds until even Dusty himself felt so happy he had to sing:

"And cold she lay in the old oak chest,

All under the mistletoe bough—"

But a perfect chorus of "bow-wow's!" and laughter drowned his efforts, and the merry fun proceeded even faster and more furious than before.

The gramophone was set going and crackers were pulled, and perhaps the motto which Bodger Lees and Stoop got between them could not have been bettered for them:

"Though fame has missed you, still you can Play the game and be a man!"

(The Raggies again next week in another side-splitting complete story—"UNLUCKY FOR DUSTY!")

JACK SAM AND PETE!



(Continued from page 165.)

appeared on the scene, each holding the nozzle of a hose.

Now, Luke Squeers and his hirelings had a wholesome and deep-rooted dislike of water, particularly when it was used for ablutionary purposes, so no sooner did a vicious hissing sound fall upon their ears than they staggered to their feet and reeled away down the field.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, as a powerful jet of water cut through the air and struck Luke Squeers full in the back of the neck. "Damp their ardour, old hosses! Get up, Lukie, dere's a lot more moisture comin' your way. Dis am goin' to be a bery wet Christmas Eve for you!"

Moaning and blubbering, soaked to the skin, and shaking with acute fear, the burly stevedore scrambled to his feet and staggered onward, but he had not covered more than a couple of yards when three jets struck him simultaneously, and bowled him over like a ninepin.

Fido, the lion, had taken a seat in the grand stand, and seemed to be enjoying the entertainment. He raised his magnificent head and roared—with laughter, perhaps—as the drenched hooligans fought their way through the gaping hole they made in the tall fence.

Jack, Sam, and Pete were wiping their eyes as they watched the last of their visitors disappear through the aperture.

"I think," remarked the latter thoughtfully, "dat dear Lukie has received a lesson dat he ain't likely to forget in a hurry! From now onwards, boys, he'll gib dis child a wide berth."

Jack and Sam exchanged glances. "I wonder?" they murmured in unison.

They knew the Luke Squeers type of hooligan, and they were convinced that he wouldn't rest until he had contrived to pay off old scores—with interest.

"But we won't bodder about Lukie just now," Pete said presently. "I got to invite all ob de footballers to a dinner after de match to-morrow mornin'. Pity dat dey hab got to play on Christmas Day, but it will gib dem an appetite for dinner—because dere is goin' to be quite a lot ob dinner!"

The Rovers won their Christmas Day fixture handsomely, playing before one of the biggest gates that the ground had ever known. After the match they went into the grand stand to where Pete's Christmas feast was spread.

As Pete said, there was a lot of food. The long table almost groaned under its load.

"It am a pity, Fido," said Pete, as he reached out for the turkey which he was sharing with Jack and Sammy, "dat Peruvian mousehounds like you don't eat Christmas dinners!"

Fido, sitting on his haunches at the side of the table, looked up and blinked hungrily as he saw Pete take a slice off the turkey.

"Maybe I'll gib you de bones afterwards, Fido," Pete informed him. "Dere'll be plenty ob— Golly, dis am a bery slippery kind ob turkey, Sammy! He's slidin' about all ober de dish, an'— Oooh!"

He made a frantic stab with the carving-knife as the turkey skated in the gravy. It sailed off the dish. Fido saw it coming, and he opened his mouth. The turkey dived into it!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack and Sam, and their laughter was echoed by the footballers as they saw what had happened.

With the turkey in his mouth, Fido bolted from the room, Pete watching him with goggling eyes.

"Dat mousehound's de limit!" Pete gasped. "Nebber mind, dere's plenty more turkeys! Pass me anudder one, Sammy, an' stop your noisy laughter. I want to hurry up an' finish dis Christmas dinner, 'cos when we hab eaten all we can we are goin' to stand up and drink de health ob our old friend Gumboil!"

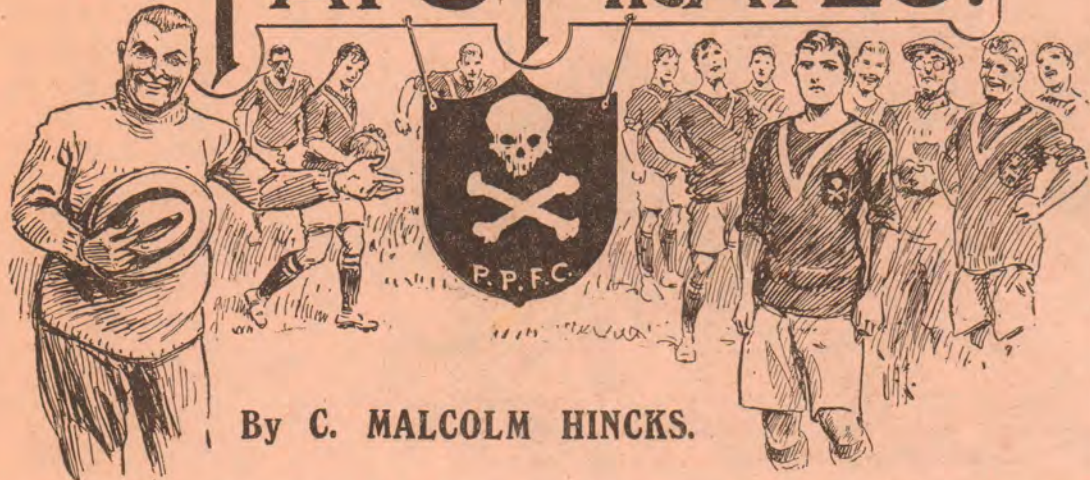
THE END.

(Look out for another stunning long complete adventure of Jack, Sam, and Pete, in next week's REALM. Order in advance!)

NOSEY GETS A DUCKING!

The Pirates' mascot gets a bit of his own back this week! Nosey was all dressed up when Bill Bladger turned the hose on him! "Good old Bill!" said the Pirates.

PAT'S PIRATES!



By C. MALCOLM HINCKS.

GET TO KNOW—

Terry Dale, the cheery centre-forward of Pat's Pirates, a team which takes its name from

Pat O'Hagan, Terry's uncle. Pat trains the team; they are known as the "Pirates" because they have won every football trophy for which they were eligible. The professional team is Bradbury Town; they are doing badly, and to stop the rot the Pirates sign on as amateurs and play in place of the Town team. The chairman of the Town is Mr. Homfrey; his daughter, **Jean**, and Terry become close friends, much to the disgust of

"Nosey" Parker, son of one of the Town directors. The Pirates are drawn at home to Garrow in the Second Round of the F.A. Cup, and Bill Bladger, an enthusiastic supporter of the Pirates, rushes round to tell Terry the good news. In the washing-down yard of the motor works where Terry is employed, a man turns a hose on Bladger. Terry rushes up, and knocks the man down!

(Now read this week's rousing chapters.)

A General Wash-out!

THE men standing about in the washing-down yard were either too dazed or too doubled up with laughter to interfere. There, in one pool of water, rolled the little barber-fan, his alpaca coat and apron hanging limply round him, whilst a short distance away lay the burly washer-down in his clogs, oilskin, and sou'-wester, mixed up with the hose, from which poured a powerful jet of water.

And standing over him, fists clenched, jaw set hard, was Terry Dale, the man who had knocked him down.

With a yell of rage, the man sprang to his feet, his clogs rattling on the bricks, and a huge fist flew towards Terry's head.

"I'll teach you!" he cried.

Biff!

Terry steadied him by a sharp punch on the chest. He had achieved his object—cut off the water supply from poor little Bill Bladger—and he had no desire to hurt the man, whom he could see knew precious little about the way to use those huge fists of his.

"Cool down!" Terry said. "I don't want to hurt you!"

"Hurt me!" roared the burly young man, throwing off his oilskin and kicking off his clogs. "I'm going to break every bone in your body!"

"Steady, mate!" called the driver of the muddy bus that had come in to be washed. "These bricks are no place to be scrapping on!"

"They're good enough for me!" roared the big man furiously; and, plunging forward, he aimed a blow at Terry's head, which, had it found its mark, would have been almost sufficient to knock it off. But the dark brown head wasn't there. As a result the washer-down nearly overbalanced, wheeled round, plunged like a mad bull, and got a stinger right on the nose.

"Ow!" he yelled; and, still further maddened with pain, and vowing a terrible vengeance, he again sprang at the good-looking, lithe, and quick-moving young man in greasy, blue overalls.

The men standing round were all laughing, for they could see that audacious Terry Dale was just playing with his huge opponent, giving him an occasional tap, and dodging his bull-like rushes.

But little Bill Bladger, drenched

to the skin, was no judge of fighting, and he thought the big, furious man was bound to win.

"Oh, do be careful, Terry—do be careful!" he pleaded. "We're at home to Garrow in the Second Round! Do apologise to him! Oh, don't be so rough, sir—no ill-will, I'm sure. He's a Pirate, and we're at home to Garrow on Saturday week!"

The washer-down was deaf to the little fan's appeal; but Terry grinned cheerfully.

So that was what Bladger had come to the yard for—to tell him the great news. At home again! That was good! Though Garrow would take a lot of beating.

Biff!

The sharp rap over the ribs checked the headlong flight of the big man with the huge, wildly-waving arms.

If the Pirates could beat Garrow they would be among the giants of the game in the Third Round in January.

Wheee!

A lucky shot on the part of the big man had just missed his head, the huge fist grazed Terry's ear and stung it.

Biff!

Terry's left returned the compliment on the right eye of the big washer-down. It jerked his head sideways—the sharp pain had made Terry put more pep than he intended into that punch—and the washer-down's head wobbled, as did his knees. He stared stupidly at his lithe and panther-like opponent, and then without any warning whatever sat down abruptly upon the blue bricks right in the stream of water flowing from the hose.

And well-meaning little Bladger, intent on saving his discomfort and restoring friendly feelings, made a dash for the hose to divert the flow.

There is a lot in the axiom of more haste less speed. In his haste the little fan raised the hose, and he did not understand the working of the patent nozzle—that could be regulated from a steady trickle for the coachwork up to a highly powerful jet for the wheels and under-carriage. At the moment the nozzle was set to deliver its most powerful stream, and as Bill Bladger raised it it delivered that healthy stream on to the back of the neck of the dazed man sitting on the blue bricks.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Bill, in consternation, and hastily swung round.

"Ough!" said the conductor of the muddy, green bus, and dropped his box of tickets as the jet took him in the middle of the waistcoat.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" murmured the miserable little fan, half-drowning the driver, as he swung the hose round violently.

There was a meeting of the directors of the Bradbury Motor Services, Ltd., that afternoon, and Horace Parker—acting for his father during his absence abroad—was attending it. Leaving his car to wait for him outside the depot, he was making for the offices, when, hearing the noise of the fight in the washing-down yard, he made his way there instead, and entered it just as the greatly alarmed little Bladger, fearing personal injury as a reward for his well-intentioned

action, hastily swung round the hose. Swish!

The deluge took Horace Parker full in the face. For a moment his long, prominent nose seemed to penetrate through the miniature Niagara Falls; but Bill Bladger, paralysed with horror, held the hose steady. Nosey Parker's silk hat was sent yards, and, dancing wildly, he was borne backwards, smart, grey morning coat and trousers soaked by the icy-cold water. He joined his hat in the puddle just as the driver and conductor made a rush for the man who had half-drowned them.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried the little barber, with chattering teeth, and, wildly flinging away the hose-soaking the foreman of the repair-shop in the process—he made a wild plunge towards the big gates.

Terry Dale could not keep a straight face, and, although his grazed ear was painful, he forgot it as he gazed at the picture round him.

The washer-down—partially revived by Bill's shower-bath, and the fact that there are pleasanter places than water-logged bricks to sit upon—was getting to his feet. A short distance away the drenched foreman was expressing his views on the subject, and not once repeating himself; the half-drowned driver and conductor were in hot pursuit of Bill Bladger. In a puddle of water beside his sorry-looking silk hat sat Nosey Parker, whilst the men who had escaped the deluge were too doubled up with laughter to be of the least use to anyone.

Terry moved over to the hose to turn off the water; but at the sight Nosey Parker grabbed his soaked hat, jumped to his feet, and made a bolt for it. Terry turned off the water; and slowly the big young man came towards him.

"You win—easy!" he said. "Shall we wash it out, mate?"

"It's about the only thing that's left to wash-out!" said Terry, with a grin, as he extended his hand.

Meanwhile, Nosey Parker, he-dragged and drenched to the skin, was hurrying towards the gates, where he had left his luxurious saloon car. He dared not ride home in it, for he knew his only chance of avoiding a bad chill was to keep moving. To make matters worse, the first of the Christmas snow was beginning to fall, and the icy wind made Nosey's teeth chatter.

Another director of the motor-bus company passed him at the gates.

"Good heavens, Parker! What on earth have you been doing?"

"What do you think I've been doing, you fool—basking in the sunshine!" snapped the cold and discomfited young man; and, leaving the important director gazing after him in anger and amazement, he went out to his driver.

"I've met with an accident, and shall be walking home. Drive to the stores, send in a message that I wish to see Mr. Morton as soon as he can get away, and you wait and bring him home."

As he turned away a group of small boys, recently released from the council school farther along the road, approached with curiosity.

"Hi, boys!" shouted a dirty-faced, bullet-headed youngster in a penetrating voice. "Here's another Channel swimmer!"

Brushing roughly through the boys, Horace Parker set off for his big house on the hill, selecting quiet roads as far as he could; but he had to cross two main streets, and those wretched boys kept close on his heels.

"Hi, Channel swimmer!"

Nosey felt murderous towards the bullet-headed boy, but he had to keep on. Like most men who had led sheltered lives and were quite unused to discomfort of any kind, he was terribly nervous, and this was enough to give him his death of cold. He pictured himself lying dangerously ill in bed, and the big stores going to ruin without his guiding hand.

The fellow Bladger should suffer for this! He had had a few words with the Pirates' fan on several occasions, and not unreasonably came to the conclusion that the little barber had purposely turned the powerful hose upon him.

As he neared the road of big houses in which he lived, the small boys gave up the chase. There was no further fun to be got out of Nosey. A portly policeman, strolling leisurely along his beat, gasped at the sight of the usually spick-and-span Mr. Parker turning into his

garden looking such a wreck, and his elderly gardener, just finishing in the gathering dusk, dropped his broom on the drive.

"Hot bath—mustard!" shouted Horace to the startled butler, as he entered the hall, and then sneezed violently. "Quick, man—quick! My life may depend upon it!"

Upstairs he went, water squelching from his boots. Plunging into his bed-room, he took off his boots and outer garments, yelled to the butler to place clean things for him outside the door, and hurriedly made for the bath-room, where he stripped off the remainder of his soaking clothes and jumped into the bath.

He quickly jumped out again with a howl of agony, however, saying things about his butler for having made the bath hot enough to boil a lobster. But with a little cold water added it was bearable, and as he revelled in the grateful warmth he began to think. It would be difficult to get revenge on the barber, but Terry Dale had been fighting on the company's premises in the company's time. Nosey was a director of the company, and he would see to it that Terry Dale was punished immediately!

Quickly he dressed in the clothes placed ready for him, went downstairs, gulped down a stiff dose of hot whisky-and-water, and rang up the Bradbury Motor Services, Ltd., asking to be put through to the secretary's office. Nosey felt pretty certain that after the board meeting the secretary would still be at the office, and soon his voice was heard over the wire.

"Hallo, Mr. Parker! Hope you won't be any the worse for your wetting."

"I expect I shall be—and I'll break that little barber's neck!" replied Nosey viciously. "But there's another man at the bottom of it—one of the company's employees, though he should not remain so for another moment. A fellow named Dale was fighting in the yard, and caused the trouble. He must be sacked at once!"

A cold note came into the secretary's voice. He was not in the habit of taking orders like that, especially from a bumptious young man who was a deputy director during his father's absence.

"I should have thought that you would have been the last man to wish to get Dale into trouble, seeing that he and his fellow-Pirates are saving your club, Mr. Parker! But, as it happens, the general manager happened to be in my office—which overlooks the washing yard—and we both saw the whole affair. The washer-down asked for trouble, and he got it; and little Bladger's comedy turn with the hose was clearly an accident. It's true he had no right on the premises; but he got a worse dose than you did, and stood about in wet clothes watching the fight. We thoroughly enjoyed the show!"

"Enjoyed it!" gasped the horrified Horace.



THE MASKED MENACE!
soon had him gasping for mercy.

Terry drove his fist full between the eyes of one of the masked men, and the fellow crashed down. Sandy attacked the other and The Pirates could fight almost as well as they could play football!

Over the wire came the secretary's discreet cough.

"I mean the actual fighting, before you came on the scene, Mr. Parker. Dale was playing with the big fellow; he could have outed him any time he liked. It's no use asking me to take any action. The G.M. has seen both the culprits, and asked them to refrain in future from fighting during the company's time, unless they happened to be engaged as pugilists. The matter was brought before the board, as a member wondered what had upset you, and it was agreed to take no action. So, you see, like the rest of this afternoon's proceedings, any charge against Dale is a wash-out. Good-bye, Mr. Parker!"

Nosey muttered something, and hung up the receiver. He did not like that secretary, and he was furious at the thought that he and the general manager should have witnessed his discomfiture from an office window. Also, he had a horrible suspicion that the secretary was laughing at him.

Then Morton arrived, and Nosey poured out the whole story to the ex-footballer, whom he had given a good position in his stores on the understanding that he should help him to oust those audacious Pirates, sicken old Homfrey—who was putting up the money—and enable him to get control of the club at a very small expense.

James Morton was sympathetic, but he said it was clear that it would be useless to make a row over the incident—in fact, he had not been wise to speak to the secretary as he had.

"You don't want people to know that you're up against the Pirates. It's the very last thing you want known!" he said.

"I tell you, Morton, those fellows have got to go down to Garrow!" replied Parker. "Why, man, if they beat them they'll be among the giants in January. With their amazing luck, they might beat Huddersfield or Tottenham Hotspur—and if they did that we'd never be rid of them! That fellow Pat O'Hagan and his precious Pirates would rule the roost for ever and ever! I tell you, Morton, something's got to be done—and what the dickens are you going to do to help?"

James Morton coolly lit a cigarette.

"I'm not losing my nut, anyway! We've nearly a fortnight before the Cup match, so what's the use of getting panicky? I've got a vague idea, but it wants thinking out. That chap Clegg—the pro—is very sick at not playing in the League now."

"But those half-baked schoolboys insisted that we should pay the displaced pros just the same!"

"And, seeing they're playing for nothing, you can't call the terms hard," said Morton. "But Clegg is a part-time man, with a mighty big idea of his own importance. He thinks he's being robbed of his chances; and as no one else seems to want him, he's sullen and vengeful!"

"Well, what about it?"

"I think Clegg is going to be of use. He works with Dale in the repair-shop; he'd be eager to put the kibosh on him—and if you can get Dale out of the way you've got the Pirates beaten and broken!"

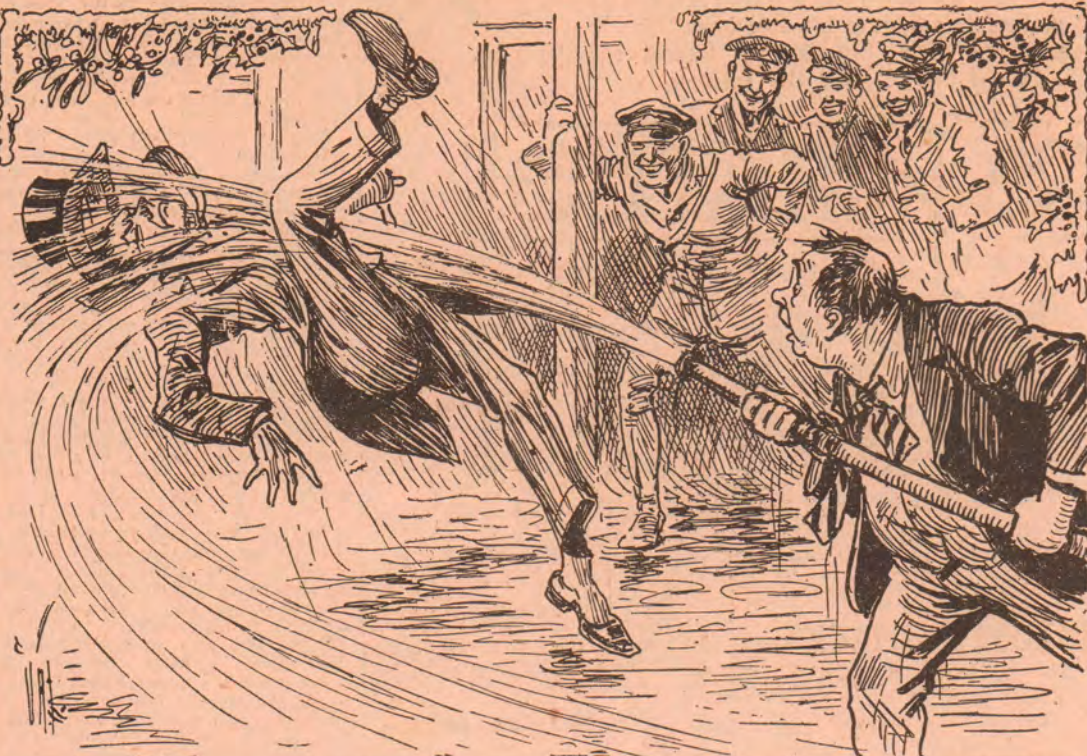
On Halford Moor!

FATH, if it's training the boys are after wanting, that's the sort I'm thinking will worry Garrow, and it's the truth I'm telling ye!"

"Sorry I spoke!" said the trainer of Halford United, sitting beside the genial Irishman with the fierce blue eyes on a seat by the gangway that raw, cold December Saturday afternoon.

Before the game had started the Halford trainer had been expressing sympathy with Pat for having to meet a highly trained team like Garrow in the Second Round of the Cup next Saturday. He had said how it must be impossible for a team of amateurs—all of them engaged in jobs either high or low—to get the training that was necessary for victory in such a match.

And now, with only five minutes to go, Pat's Pirates led the home team by three goals to one, and the youngsters in the claret shirts with the skull and crossbones badge were dominating the game. Pat O'Hagan, with beaming face, was jingling his medals, thinking of the two valuable points gained and the moral effect the victory would have not only on his own men, but in an opposite way upon the men they were



NOSEY GETS A WASH! The deluge from Bill Bladger's hose took Nosey full in the face. Almost paralysed with horror, Bladger stood clutching the hose as he stared blankly at the upstart rotter, whom he was soaking. Nosey hadn't expected a greeting like this!

to meet in the Cup contest next Saturday.

Pritchard was still crooked, and red-headed Crake had played in his place again with complete success. In fact, his play at full-back had been chiefly instrumental in cracking up the attack of a clever line of forwards. That, in conjunction with Loftly Laton being at the top of his form in goal, and Terry Dale and Sandy Beale more audacious than ever in the Pirates' forward line, had been too much for the home team, and now they were playing like a beaten side, while the dashing Pirates were easing up. They had no desire to rub it in, and there was next Saturday's all-important match to be thought of.

Their supporters who had made the journey to Halford missed a familiar figure and a familiar noise. There was no toot of the flute, no excitable little man waving his black flag with the gruesome skull and crossbones. For Bill Bladger was paying the penalty for his soaking in the yard on Monday afternoon, and was in bed with a bad chill, hoping against hope that he would be about in a week, to play his usual, and, to him, very important part in the match that all Bradbury was excitedly discussing.

Phueeep!

A disappointed home crowd was already streaming from the ground, while the enthusiasts from Bradbury were doing all they could to sound like a multitude. As the teams left the field, Pat strode along the gangway, just ahead of them, feeling that all was well with the world, that his great team was greater than ever, and that they would be great enough for Garrow.

Terry Dale walked back to the dressing-room with his skipper.

"Perhaps the critics won't be quite so confident about Garrow licking us now! I'll bet they're not cheering this result at Garrow today, and it ought to buck our boys up a lot."

"That's right!" said Sandy Beale. "Got to go through it in the next few weeks. Meet Garrow in the Cup; and then, with scarcely a breather, a heavy Christmas programme. Well, we'll know after Christmas how we stand. If we don't drop any points between now and the end of the year, there'll be more than a sporting chance of us going up into Division Two for next season."

"Let's hope we will pull it off, and, by Jove, Sandy, I should like us to beat Garrow and meet one of the big clubs in the Third Round. Of course, it's ten to one we'd be outed then, but it would be something to have met one of the giants!"

"That's right!" said Sandy.

As they entered the dressing-room, Pat was hurrying up the changing.

"Get a move on ye, bhoys! There's a foine tea waiting for ye at the hotel opposite the ground,

and the driver of the charry wants to get off as soon as possible as he says it looks like coming up misty, and we're not after spending half the night on Halford Moor! It's been snowing a lot lately, too, and the roads up there are bound to be in a bad state."

It was certainly not a pleasant prospect. In fact, the drive over the bleak, lonely snow-bound moor, and then the tortuous journey through a crowded industrial area with cobbled roads and greasy tram-lines was not in the least attractive this raw December afternoon. But the Pirates were heartened at the thought of a good meal in the warmth and comfort of the big hotel opposite the ground. Though Bradbury Town paid nothing to the Pirates who had come to their rescue and put them in the front rank again, they did what they could for their comfort. Old Homfrey, the chairman urged on by his pretty daughter saw to that.

It was a happy little crowd that streamed from the now almost deserted ground across to the hotel where, in a pleasant private room, with a roaring fire, and a tempting-looking spread on the table, old Homfrey and Jean were waiting for them, in company with the secretary and another director. Nosey Parker was not present. Although he had escaped much more lightly than the unfortunate Bill Bladger, the young director had a slight cold in the head, and was taking the greatest care of himself.

Old Homfrey took his seat at the head of the table, and Jean sat at the foot of it, flushed and smiling.

"Poor Bill Bladger!" she said. "He'll never be able to account for this victory; he felt certain that we should go down with a bump owing to his absence! When I saw how you boys were going all over them I wished I'd borrowed his flute!"

"Thank goodness you didn't!" jerked her father. "You're quite excitable and trying enough without any wretched musical instrument, and you'd probably have got us thrown out of the stand!"

Terry, glancing a little shyly at the pretty face, wondered how anyone could call her trying. Just then Jean was speaking to Sandy Beale.

"How did the new car go, Sandy?"

"Oh, she's a beauty! I didn't mean to bring her, but the guv'nor detained me in the office, and as I should have had an awful rush to get the charry I told him it would be only sporting of him to let me have his new four-seater, and as he prefers a closed car in the winter, he let me have it. I'm taking Terry and Pat back with me, would you care to come along, too?"

"Rather!" cried the girl. As soon as the meal was over, Sandy went out into the yard, switched on the

lights of a roomy four-seater car with a long, racy-looking bonnet, and glistening grey paintwork, and started up an engine that after a few coughs and splutters in the raw evening air, settled down to a steady, gentle purr.

"Faith it's a foine car!" said Pat, buttoning up his overcoat.

The other Pirates making for the charry, glanced enviously at Terry in trench coat and cap. He had lifted the bonnet, and was listening with professional air to the engine, noting the design and general layout of the chassis.

Jean came out—a dainty figure muffled up in a grey squirrel fur coat and a grey broad-brimmed felt hat.

"Like the hood up or down, Miss Jean?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, down please!" said the girl. "I hate being boxed in!"

Terry had hoped that Pat would sit in front with Sandy, and that he would occupy the rear seat with the charming vision in grey. But Sandy Beale had other views. He asked Jean if she would sit in the back with Pat as Terry was an expert, and he wanted his opinion of the engine, wanted him to notice its behaviour at certain speeds. Jean did not appear to mind in the least where she sat, and Pat's one idea was to get home quickly. He did not know the difference between a carburetor and a magneto, and did not care.

The car purred out into the slushy road just ahead of the charry, traversed streets crowded with Christmas shoppers, and then commenced the stiff climb of the road leading up to the moor. The new car behaved beautifully on the hill, though Sandy—an experienced driver who knew he was handling an engine not yet run in—did not attempt to let her anything like all out.

And then, as they came out on top of the moor, he suddenly applied his brakes, for the powerful electric headlights merely reflected a white blanket of mist.

Click!

He had switched off his headlights.

"Bit thick!" said Terry.

"That's right!" said Sandy, a little anxiously; and he was wishing he had not borrowed his father's new car, as he crawled along in second speed, eyes strained into the white mist. With the headlights off it was just possible to see a few yards ahead.

Honk! Honk!

A motor-cycle, engine throttled down, yellow silk handkerchief tied over the lamp, went gingerly past them. A car loomed up out of the mist and crawled ghostlike past them.

"Faith, I'm feeling like a poor sailor at sea!" said Pat.

"But it's rather fun!" said Jean. Bump!

"Lock her over to the right!" called Terry sharply, and the car bumped off the moor on to the road again and straightened up.

"Look here, Terry, you've got eyes like a cat, and better nerves than mine," said Sandy, pulling up. "You'd better take the wheel, it's getting a bit too thick for me in every sense of the word."

"All right! I'll take her till—what's that?"

A short distance ahead of them came a crashing sound, and as they listened intently, a voice came faintly to their ears:

"Help! Help!"

Terry sat up straight, and as he listened his handsome face looked grim in the swirling mist.

"Come on, Sandy! Quick! Pat, you stop with Miss Jean!" he cried urgently, and the next moment he had jumped out of the car and was rushing through the mist, Sandy following close on his heels.

Through the mist loomed up a motor-cycle which was on its side in the snow-covered road. Alongside it was a young man in overalls, being overpowered by two big men who wore masks, who had their caps drawn over their eyes, and their overcoat collars turned up.

Terry and Sandy were the speed merchants of the Pirates, and in a flash they were upon the two men. Terry's fist drove straight between the slits in the black mask of the man who was raising a short, stout stick. Sandy—who was no boxer—had his man by the throat.

Terry's man went down into the snow without a sound; Sandy, having got his victim purple in the face, flung him on to the moor. The man who had been attacked and who was now dabbing at his grazed nose, beamed upon them.

"Dear old friends in need, I thank you! You have interrupted some very uncleanly work at the cross-roads, but the dear lads were quite misguided, you know. I recognised them both in their Guy Fawkes get-up—error number one! I am not carrying a large sum of money—error number two. I was not biffed out by the fall—error number three. The moor was not deserted—error number four! Bad shooting, what?"

Both young men stared curiously at the stranger. For all his knutish dress and manner there was nothing soft-looking about him, and a decidedly shrewd light shone in his mild blue eyes.

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

"But what was the idea?" gasped Terry.

"Dick Turpin act—sheer highway robbery, old top! I know these chappies you've made such a mess of. They were sacked from the Halford Motor Engineering Company last night. They happened to know that I was twenty-one to-day and came into a bit of money, and I suppose they thought I'd have it on me to take to Bradbury. I'm no scrapper, but you chaps are giddy experts in the mangling line. I say, I seem to know your faces," he added, raising his motor-cycle and causing the shaded rays of light to fall upon his rescuers. "Aren't you two of the jolly old Pirates I was watching put Halford through the hoop an hour or so ago?"

Terry introduced himself and the skipper of the team, and the young man—who looked older than his twenty-one years—said his name was Desmond Ducker, and that he had just finished a course of training with the Halford Motor Company, and, after stopping to watch the match, was setting off to Bradbury.

"Well, you'll be able to go on all right!" said Terry, who had been examining the machine with the aid of a small pocket torch. "But what about these chaps?"

"Leave them to hop it when they recover. I reckon you have given them more than any jolly old magistrate would. I say, I can see better on this jigger than you can in a car, so if you follow my tail light you ought to be all right. You in the trade, Mr. Dale?"

"With the Bradbury Motor Services."

"Oh! Know anything about Scott's Garage?"

"Only that the old man has been neglecting it lately, and I'm told it's going down hill."

"Oh! Well, I'll potter along in front of you. Hallo! There's a charry coming up behind your bus."

Leaving the two masked would-be thieves, Terry and Sandy went back to the car, and explained to Pat and Jean what had happened. Then Terry went round to the worried driver of the charry containing the others of the party, and told him to follow his rear light, as he would follow that of the motor-cycle in front.

"All aboard?" came the voice of Mr. Desmond Tucker through the mist.

"All right!" shouted Terry.

"I'll start up my engine, then give a toot to start off the procession. Two toots to signal that I'm going too fast. Catch me?"

Terry shouted to the effect that he understood the pilot's instructions, heard the roar of the engine, sounded the electric horn, and then the car, the charry, and a mail van behind followed in the wake of the young man who had taken the attempted highway robbery so casually, leaving the two bold robbers dazed and badly mauled on the snow-bound moor.

There was not much difficulty in following the red light, and Mr. Ducker, with the aid of the yellow handkerchief over the lamp of his motor-cycle, had little difficulty in finding his way. Then, reaching the other side of the moor, they began to descend a hill, and ran out of the mist as abruptly as they had entered it.

"So long!" shouted Mr. Ducker, turning in his saddle. "Hope to see you again. Good luck next Saturday—and, if I don't see you again, a Merry Christmas!"

Then he opened out and raced off down the hill, his red tail light disappearing in the distance. Terry, thinking of the new engine, followed at a much more discreet speed, though they were leaving the charry far behind.

"Run chap!" said Terry.

"That's right!" said the skipper of the Pirates.

Terry handed over the wheel to his chum after he had negotiated a stretch of dangerous tram-lines, and for the rest of the trip he talked to pretty Jean, whilst Pat O'Hagan, with his coat-collar turned up, dozed and dreamed of a triumph a week that day.

Morton's Move!

JAMES MORTON was a man who believed in doing himself well. Thanks to his hold over Horace Parker, he was drawing a good salary for his position as assistant manager of the mail order department at the big stores, and he lived in very comfortable lodgings.

On the Thursday night before the Second Round of the F.A. Cup, he was seated in his comfortable sitting-room talking to a sullen and rather frightened-looking young man. This was Clegg, the part-time pro for Bradbury Town, and one of the players ousted from League matches by the audacious Pirates, a mechanic in the employ of the Bradbury Motor Services, Limited.

Morton knew it was up to him to make a move. Parker had told him that if that move succeeded he would sack the elderly man who had served his father for years, and make him manager with another two hundred and fifty a year. Five pounds a week was a big bait, and Mr. Morton wanted to be able to hold his job down by the time Parker senior returned in the spring.

"It's all right up to a point, Mr. Morton," Clegg was saying. "A really good kick would crock him all right, and he'd come to start her up all right. He's got the most powerful swing of any chap in the works. But Terry Dale's no fool; he

Bradbury School. It was true that the Pirates had insisted that no hardship should fall upon the professionals, and that Clegg was drawing his regular wage—though he only turned out occasionally for the reserves—but in his jealousy he was blind to that.

"I'll break Dale all right!" he said savagely. "Those engines are proper kickers with the least bit too much ignition. I saw a fellow flung across the shop once; the kick broke his wrist, and the fall broke his leg. I'll lay the engine I'm on will be the biggest kicker that man ever touched! I can't understand where you come in, Mr. Morton."

"Oh, I'll be coming into the team with you when we've cleared out those glorified schoolboys, and, of course, I want to please Mr. Parker, Clegg. It's a wonderful bit of luck that I thought of you! By the way, you'd better make a big song of trying to start the engine with the switch off! Don't call in Dale too early, or it would look suspicious."

"You leave it to me!" said Clegg, as he rose.

There was a grim smile upon the face of James Morton. He was leaving the dirty work to Clegg, the paying to Nosey Parker—and he was the man who would reap the benefit!

It really was a clever move!

I am staying—for a little chin-wag, upon which important developments may depend. I have to rush now. So-long!"

He darted off, and Terry, after gazing a little blankly at his dapper retreating form, resumed his walk towards the bus depot.

He wondered what on earth the man he had aided on Halford Moor a week ago wanted to talk about, but he quickly dismissed it from his mind. Terry could think of nothing but the big match that afternoon—for which the Pirates had been strictly training—putting in long walks, and doing physical jerks, and getting a certain amount of ball practice in the big gym placed at their disposal by the headmaster of Bradbury School.

The Pirates were quietly confident. But so were the men from Garrow, and the critics seemed to think that the youngsters who had gone in a body to Bradbury Town—and who now, even in the London papers were more often alluded to as the "Pirates," instead of the official name of the club—would be up against the biggest task they had yet faced.

Terry crossed the yard, and made for the workshop, clad in blue overalls, his head bare, for, despite the cold, he had not stopped to put on coat or cap before going on his errand.

He saw Clegg swinging the engine

THE BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

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Below is a full list of Sections now established. The Football Editor's notes about the REALM Football League will be found on page 169.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY



Look out for this cover next Wednesday—it features a top-hole instalment of our champion footer yarn.

A special, rousing long instalment of

"PAT'S PIRATES!"

More about the Pirates' great fight in the Cup. Next week's corking instalment is too good to miss!

Another side-splitting complete yarn!

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It takes more than old "Gumboll" to suppress the one and only Pete! His latest adventure is one long laugh! Tell your pals about Pete—they'll be glad to meet him!

Poor old Dusty!

"UNLUCKY FOR DUSTY!"

Dusty never has any luck—except the bad kind! He thought that he had got rid of Corny the Camel—but that ungainly mascot turns up once more!

Another long instalment of

"DON O' DARKTON!"

and the first cartoon of a full-of-fun new series—

"THE BINGO BOYS!"

These lads are a joke—you'll start chuckling the moment you see them!

Very many other special features.

ORDER IN ADVANCE

sees that the spark is well retarded before he swings an engine."

Morton nodded.

"Yes, so far as the lever is concerned. But suppose, by some accident, the mag had been put a tooth or two forward, that the full retard of the lever left the mag well advanced? See the idea?"

Clegg saw it, and an almost hungry light came into his eyes. Morton had been telling him that Terry Dale was the mainstay of the Pirates, that if he was crocked they would go to pieces. Pritchard was still on the injured list, and Crake was playing again. If Terry Dale was crocked there was no reserve—the power of the Pirates would be broken.

"I'd be risking the sack!"

"Hang it, you've got to risk something! You get ten pounds for the job, you've played inside-right, and Mr. Parker will go all out for you to play in the Cup. They've no reserve, and it will be a choice of playing you or taking the field with ten men. Whichever they decide on means a blow that will put them back, if not break them!"

Clegg was breathing quickly. He hated Terry Dale, the youngster who was responsible for the dramatic recovery of Bradbury Town, represented by a team of old boys from

The "Accident"!

TERRY DALE walked along Bradbury's most bustling, busy street about eleven o'clock on the morning of the day when the Pirates were to play in the Second Round of the F.A. Cup. He had never known the place so busy; Christmas shoppers had held him up at the oil and colour shop, where he had been to get some gold-size that was needed for a cylinder joint, and of which the storekeeper had carelessly run out. Christmas shoppers were gazing into gaily decorated windows, and excursionists from Garrow joined the throng.

"Hallo, old top! I've been trying to get your address. How goes it?" Terry swung round as a man tapped him on the shoulder, and, with a start, recognised Mr. Desmond Ducker.

"I'm glad to see you again!" he said, holding out his hand. "But why did you want my address?"

"Little business proposition," said Mr. Ducker mysteriously; "but I am not going to talk about it now. Football is the order of the day, eh, what? I'm going to see you put the row into Garrow this afternoon, but to-morrow morning, dear old friend, I should be glad if you would blow into the Crown Hotel—where

of a chassis on which he had been employed, and, as he handed the gold-size to his mate, he heard Clegg calling to him, and crossed over.

"I can't get the brute to show a sign of life!" growled the mechanic, quietly pressing down the switch he had been keeping in the off position under the pretence of adjusting the throttle opening. "You might give one of your hefty swings, Dale!"

"Right-ho!" said Terry, walking blindly into the trap with his usual good nature in helping a man.

He walked round, checked the position of spark and throttle, then went round to the front and seized the starting-handle.

"Stand ready to accelerate once she fires, Clegg," he said, and, with a swift movement, pushed down the handle for a sharp swing.

Bang! There came the sharp sound of a backfire. The handle spun back. It shot Terry back against another man, sent them both tumbling to the floor, and a suppressed cry of agony came from the tight-set lips of the star Pirate!

(Next Wednesday's exciting long instalment is loaded with footer thrills! Order your REALM in advance!)



(Continued from page 169.)

through cracks and crevices in the tumbled ruins that surrounded him on all sides.

And somewhere within a few yards of him—if he was still alive—old Thomas Crabtree was fixed in a similar predicament! He had made no response to Don's anxious shouts, and it was more than likely that he had been killed outright, or was mercifully unconscious of the terrible peril that threatened him.

Even in those moments of mental agony and uncertainty the lad was unselfish enough to think first of the old mill-owner, and hope and trust that he had been stunned, and knew nothing of what was happening.

Finally, as he took a grip on his dazed faculties, Don Desmond proceeded to weigh the chances of their being rescued before the creeping flames reached them.

It was obvious that the tremendous crash that had been caused by the collapse of the mill must have echoed through Darkton like ten thousand claps of thunder and shaken the whole town to its foundations.

Crowds of alarmed people would be attracted to the scene of the disaster and the local fire brigade would lose no time in putting in an appearance. But would anyone dream for one moment that there were two human beings buried beneath the heaped, blazing ruins of the mill?

At that time of night everyone connected with the mill would have long since left the premises, and neither Don Desmond nor Thomas Crabtree would be missed until inquiries were made as to their whereabouts. And by then it would be too late to render them any aid.

Don lay perfectly still, straining his ears to catch any other sound beyond that of the crackling flames—which seemed painfully close at hand. Was it only his imagination, or could he hear the dull roar of hundreds of excited voices? Then his heart leaped as he caught the brazen clangour of a gong, which told him that the fire-engines were speeding to the scene of the disaster.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

It was a sound that was bound to set the whole town agog with excitement and curiosity, and Don could imagine the crowds of people who were swarming from their houses and flocking in the direction of Crabtree Mill. Now he could distinctly hear the clamour of many voices, the warning shouts of the firemen as they leaped down from their engines and proceeded to unship their hose and other appliances.

Don Desmond seemed to be enveloped in a blood-red mist, which was due to the leaping flames glowing dully beyond the curtain of smoke. His eyes were smarting, and every breath he drew was an agony to his tortured lungs. There was a piece of timber several feet long lying close beside him, and he managed to wedge this in such a way that it lessened the danger of the debris overhead collapsing upon him.

By now the heat was intense, and he almost gave himself up for lost. There was a roaring inferno of fire within less than three yards of him, and crimson tongues of flame stabbed and licked viciously in his direction.

Gruff voices were now audible somewhere close at hand, and the lad realised that the firemen were clambering up over the remains of the building beneath which he was buried. Showers of dust pattered

Win Your Xmas Box!

MUST BE WON! £500 MUST BE WON!

This sum of £500 will be paid to the reader who can send us a correct or most nearly correct forecast of the ten matches (to be played on Saturday, December 18th) named on this FREE COUPON.

All you have to do is to strike out IN INK the names of the teams which you think will lose, or where you expect a draw, to strike out both teams—then sign your name IN INK, write, type, or print your full address, and post the coupon to:

BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL No. 9,
7-9, Pilgrim Street, Ludgate Hill,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

The Closing Date is THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16th.
Any coupons arriving after that date will be disqualified.

RULES WHICH MUST BE STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

1. All forecasts must be made on coupons taken from this journal, or from any of the issues of the journals which contain the competition offer.

2. Any alteration or mutilation of the coupon will disqualify the effort. When more than one effort is submitted, coupons must not be pinned or in any other way fastened together.

3. If any match or matches on the coupon should be abandoned, or full time is not played for any reason, such match or matches will not be considered in the adjudication.

4. In the event of ties the prize will be divided, but no competitor will be awarded more than one share of the prize.

5. No correspondence will be allowed, neither will interviews be granted.

6. It is a distinct condition of entry that the Editor's decision shall be accepted as final and legally binding in all matters concerning this competition.

7. No responsibility can be accepted for any effort, or efforts, lost, mislaid, or delayed. Proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery. Unstamped or insufficiently stamped efforts will be refused.

Coupons from "Answers," "Family Journal," "Home Companion," "Woman's World," "Pictorial Magazine," "Football and Sports Favourite," "Sports Budget," "Union Jack," and "All Sports Weekly" may also be used.

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COUPONS MUST NOT BE ENCLOSED WITH ENTRIES IN ANY OTHER COMPETITION.

CUT HERE.

FREE COUPON.

Football Competition No. 9.

Matches Played: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18th.
Closing Date: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16th.

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NEWCASTLE UTD. v. LEICESTER C.
SHEFFIELD UTD. v. BIRMINGHAM
ARSENAL v. TOTTENHAM H.
CLAPTON ORIENT v. READING
MIDDLESBROUGH v. SWANSEA TOWN
PORT VALE v. NOTTINGHAM F.
WOLVERHAMPTON W. v. GRIMSBY TOWN
MILLWALL v. CRYSTAL PALACE
NORTHAMPTON T. v. GILLINGHAM

I enter FOOTBALL COMPETITION No. 9 in accordance with the Rules and Conditions as announced, and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final and legally binding.

Name.....

Address.....

9..... B.R.

CUT HERE.

£500 WON!

RESULT OF FOOTBALL COMPETITION No. 5.

Twelve competitors correctly forecast the results of all the matches—played on SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23rd, 1926—on the coupon. THE PRIZE OF £500 has therefore been divided among the following:

A. Burgins, Hobbs Barn Cottage, Canley, near Coventry; W. Carter, English Bicknor, Coleford, Glos.; F. B. Ebdon, 41, Russell Street, Reading; Mrs. Edwards, Ewr Roydon, Bethel, Carnarvon; W. A. Ennison, 2, Allen Street, Liverpool; G. E. Hanby, 31, Army Street, Clapham, S.W.4; Mrs. F. Hynes, 5, The Quadrangle, Sarn, Bridgend, Glam.; L. Morgan, 16, Robert Street, Pentre Rhondda, Glam.; S. Morrish, 54, Lena Street, Bristol; E. M. Pring, 44, Magnolia Road, Chiswick; C. Watte, 4, Kings Road, Evesham, Worcs.; Mrs. Vickerman, 120, Newsome Road, Huddersfield.

down, and several loose pieces of bricks and masonry fell unpleasantly close to him.

He shouted as loud as he could, and never had anything sounded sweeter than the voice that answered him.

"Hallo! Who's that? Is there anybody down there? Listen, Bill! I thought I heard someone call out."

"There's two of us down here. I must be just underneath where you're standing," shouted back Don.

"I can't move an inch, and there's a fire blazing away within a couple of yards of me."

"All right, chum! Keep your pecker up," responded an encouraging voice. "This way with that hose, Bill! Steady! That's the style!"

The next instant a fierce hissing, like a thousand engines letting off steam dinned in Don's ears, and a wave of scorching vapour caused him to wrap his coat tightly around his head and shoulders. Then followed

a steady downpour of icy cold water that soaked him to the skin and brought immediate relief.

A hose had been directed almost full on the flames that had been threatening him, and when he raised his head from his dripping coat a few minutes later it was to find that the glare of the conflagration had all but vanished, save for clouds of hot steam, and that he was able to breathe freely.

Then the last crimson spark was snuffed out, and the young footballer could hear the rasp of picks and shovels and the ring of axes as the firemen fought their way steadily towards him. Narrow beams of light from their lanterns penetrated through the tangled chaos of splintered beams and masonry, and he was able to guide them in the right direction.

The next thing he knew a circle of light was flung full upon him, and he found himself blinking into a

smoke-blackened countenance that was topped by a gleaming brass helmet, while strong hands reached down to hoist him out into the open air.

"Bust my buttons, if it ain't young Desmond again!" exclaimed one of the firemen. "Him as disappeared and was found down at the bottom of the old Clayton pit-shaft. You allus seem to be in trouble, chummy! No bones broken, are there?"

"I'm as right as ninepence. Don't you trouble about me!" urged Don huskily, as he filled his laboured lungs with the cool night air. "Mr. Crabtree's still down there. He was standing within a few yards of me when the crash came. I—I don't know if he is still alive. I called to him several times, but he didn't answer. Let me give you a hand. I tell you I'm not a bit hurt!"

It was useless for the firemen to attempt to argue with the young footballer. Don refused to stir an

inch until the old mill-owner had been found, and he was oblivious to everything else save the task of rescuing his good friend and benefactor from the ruins of the mill.

It was a ticklish job. Great lumps of masonry and an inextricable chaos of splintered beams and rafters had to be lifted carefully away. It was not until fully ten minutes later that old Thomas Crabtree was discovered, lying face downwards amid the debris, with a great balk of timber pinning him down by the legs.

Don uttered a cry of horror as the man was tenderly extricated and lifted up. The mill-owner was limp and seemingly lifeless. His face was deathly pale, and crimson strains streaked his white hair.

"He's still alive, but I reckon he's badly injured," said one of the firemen gravely. "Better get him to the hospital at once. Are you sure there's no one else down there, young Desmond?"

Don shook his head dumbly. There was a great lump in his throat that prevented him from speaking. His vision was blurred as he followed the firemen and their burden down towards the road, where every living soul in Darkton seemed to have gathered.

In the foreground were a couple of fire-engines and an escape, which had not been required.

A roar of excitement went up as the little group was seen picking its way down the sloping side of the still smoking heap of ruins.

"By goom, there were two of them buried under there, and t' firemen have got 'em out!"

"They're carrying one of them. Looks as though he may be dead. Why, it's Gaffer Crabtree himself!"

"And danged if t' other one isn't young Don Desmond!"

Cheer upon cheer burst from the crowd as they realised that the two people who had been dug out of the wreckage were none other than the owner of the mill and the popular young captain of the Rangers F.C.

It was not until he had reached the road and turned round that Don Desmond realised the full extent of the terrible disaster that had occurred that night. The spectacle that met his gaze brought a gasp of consternation and dismay to his lips.

The Crabtree Mill had practically ceased to exist. Where the big factory had stood there was now nothing save a huge mound of bricks and rubble, splintered beams, and twisted girders, from the midst of which wreaths of smoke were still curling.

It was the towering chimney-stack that had collapsed, crashing clean across the centre of the mill, causing the whole building to crumple up like a house of cards. Had it not been that the general offices were situated right at one end of the structure, thus escaping the full force of the disaster, Don Desmond and Thomas Crabtree would have been crushed to death beneath hundreds of tons of bricks and masonry.

The Crabtree Mill had only been opened that morning; now it was razed to the ground and wrecked beyond repair. Not a wall was left standing. All the new looms and other machinery that had been installed were smashed and battered to fragments. Old Thomas Crabtree's generous attempt to aid Don Desmond and his chums, and the hundreds of unemployed operatives in Darkton had come to naught. The thousands of pounds he had spent on re-opening his mill might just as well have been thrown into the sea for all the good it had done!

(Look out for another rousing long instalment of this great yarn next Wednesday.)

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4

SCHOOLBOYS' OWN