

GRAND NATIONAL, BOATRACE & CUPTIE STORIES—FREE REAL PHOTO!

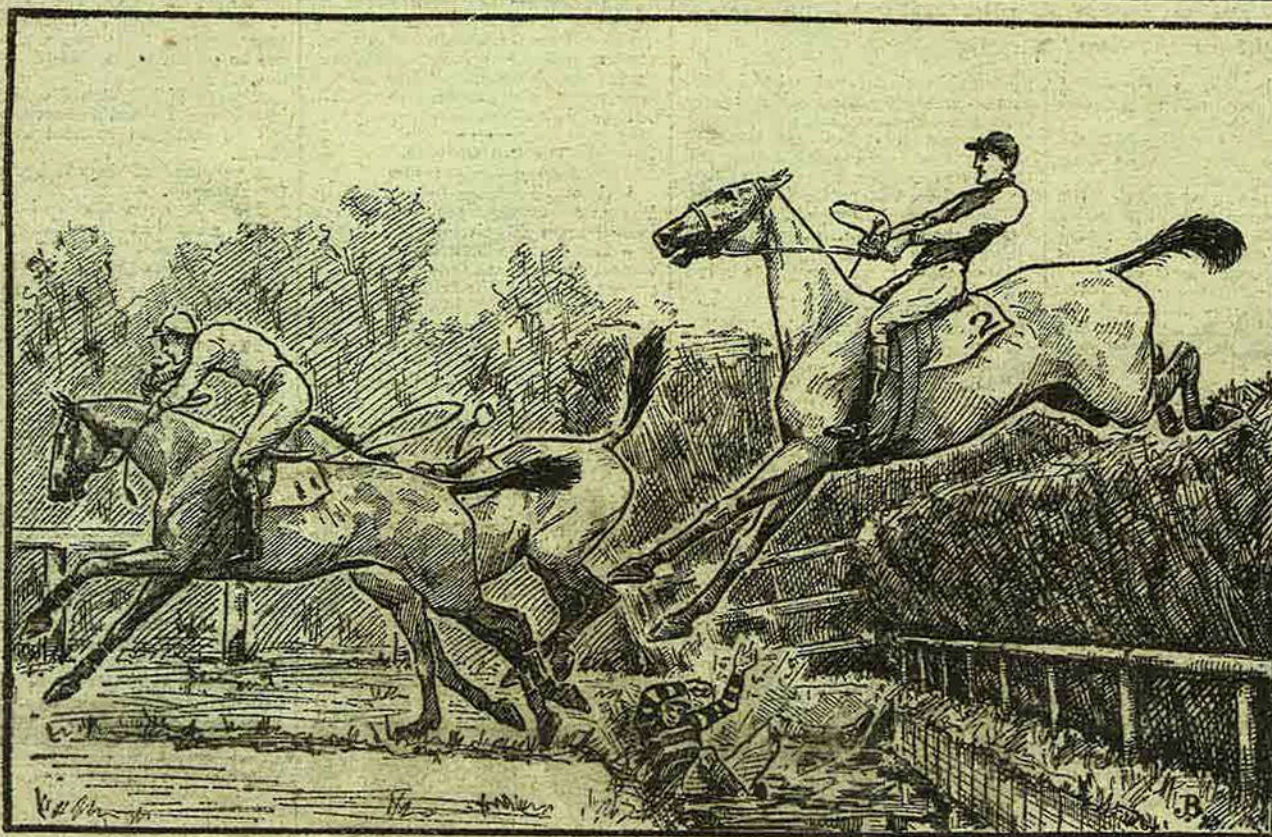
The BOYS' FRIEND 2d

SIXTEEN BIG PAGES!

No. 1,137. Vol. XXIII.—New Series.]

THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

[Week Ending March 24th, 1923.]



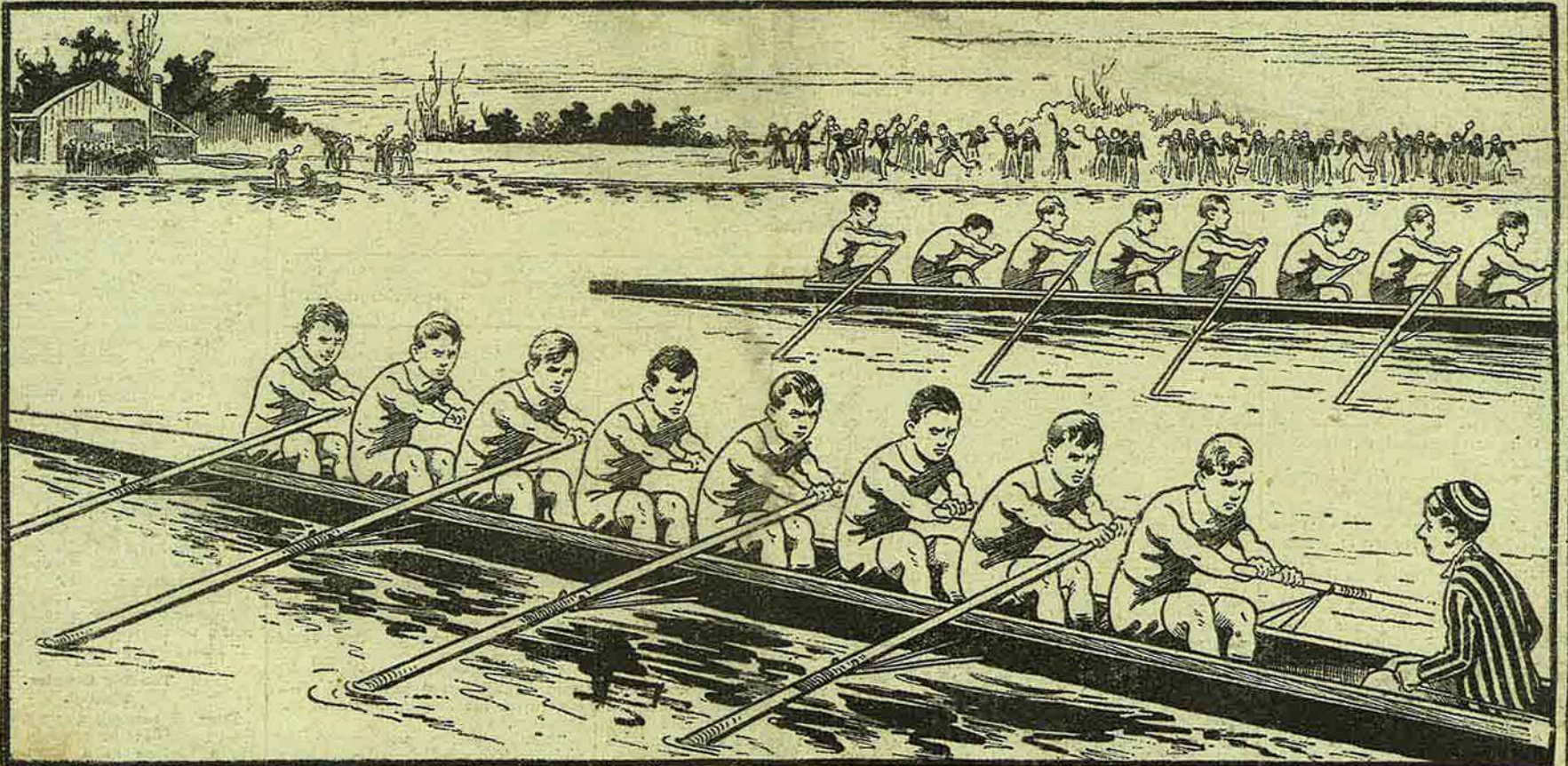
OVER THE WATER-JUMP IN FINE STYLE!

(A thrilling incident from "A Rank Outsider!" a great story of the Grand National, in this issue!)

THIS HAND-COLOURED
REAL GLOSSY PHOTO
GIVEN FREE IN THIS
NUMBER!



ROBERT McNEAL,
West Bromwich Albion.



THE GREAT ROKWOOD BOATRACE—A VICTORY FOR THE CLASSICALS!

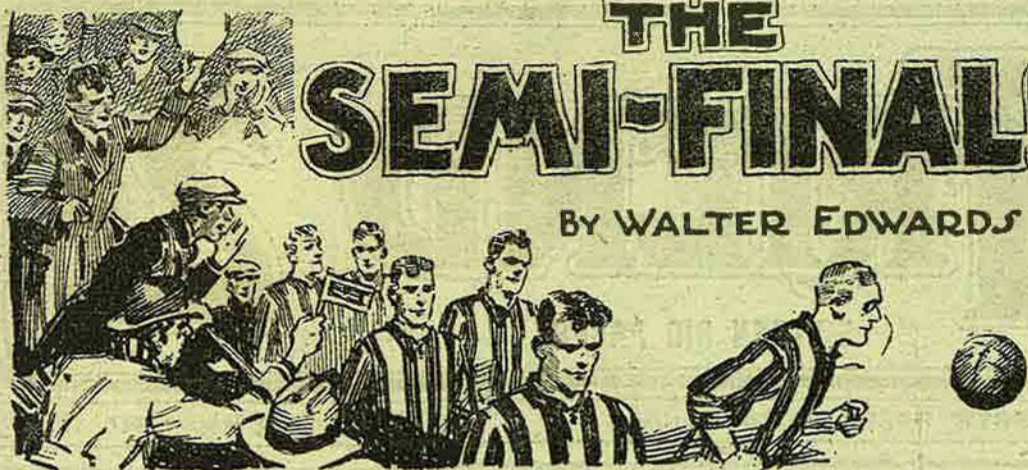
(An exciting incident from "Rivals of the River!" the splendid story of Jimmy Silver & Co., included in this number!)

Read "SCUND THE ETERNAL!"—the Most Amazing Adventure Story Ever Written—in this Issue!

AN ENTHRALLING STORY OF CUPTIE FOOTER!

THE SEMI-FINAL!

BY WALTER EDWARDS



Hercules Samson saves Rollo Dayton's life, and Chelsea Villa reach the last stage in the fight for the Cup!

The 1st Chapter.

The Insult!

The rumble of traffic, a faint murmur, filtered into the mellow, oak-paneled smoking-room of the Belgrade Sporting Club...

There was an atmosphere of well-being and tranquility about the whole establishment, and many were the well-known personages who would have given an open cheque for the right to pass beneath its imposing portico.

But the famous club was exclusive, and only men who had made a name for themselves in the world of sport could hope to be elected; and there was always a waiting list...

It was at the Belgrade that famous "Blues" were to be encountered every day of the week, whilst those members who might have a liking for rubbing shoulders with big-game hunters and famous explorers were seldom disappointed.

Many were the New Rich who had pulled the strings to gain admittance to the club, only to be turned down, whilst a number of impecunious youngsters with a talent for sport and the instincts of a gentleman had been given the run of the place.

The lofty smoking-room, with its comfortable saddlebag chairs, low Moorish tables, and thick Oriental carpets, harboured a good sprinkling of members one evening towards the end of March, the company including Lord Romilly, one of the greatest sportsmen of the age; the Hon. Rollo Dayton, the famous all-round athlete and Chelsea Villa's amateur centre-forward; Dr. Dagnall, also a Villa amateur; Homer Winterholme, the well-known editor; and Captain Adrian Bland, the most progressive promoter of the day and the man who had done so much to kill the Big Purse, the causer which was eating into the heart of professional boxing.

Other members were grouped about the fine old fireplace, for Rollo Dayton and Dagnall were two of the most popular people in the club.

The former, a fair-haired youngster with the complexion of a schoolgirl and a lazy drawl, was lounging in an armchair, polishing a gold-rimmed monocle with a silk handkerchief, and an air of reverence, and the intent expression upon the handsome features proved that the making or breaking of empires would have been a small matter compared with the delicate task in hand.

Dr. Dagnall, unlike Rollo, was a tanned, thick-set fellow who looked as though he would have proved useful in a rough-and-tumble or a Rugged serum.

The members were discussing the forthcoming semi-final games. "Personally, old eggs," declared Rollo Dayton, "I think Chelsea Villa stand a jolly good chance of beating Manchester, even though those priceless lads are supposed to be right on the top of their form."

"I don't think we've much to worry about, old man," put in the Harley Street specialist. "After all, we've got a good all-round side, to say nothing of Hercules Samson, who can do all the saying that is necessary."

"A queer bird, Hercules!" smiled Bland. "But a marvellous winger!" This was quite true; for Hercules, the eccentric little fellow with the bird-like features and enormous horn-rimmed glasses, had proved himself the greatest outside-right the game had known for many years.

Chelsea Villa did a wonderful stroke of business when Hercules signed forms for them.

"Where does the Chelsea-Milchester match take place?" asked Harcourt, the racing motorist.

"At Berry," answered Rollo. "It's a top-hole ground, but I'll bet a hundred pounds to a guinea bite that it won't be big enough to hold the crowd. What is more, old eggs—"

"Jumping snakes!" cried a harsh voice. "Can't you people talk of anything but football? It's nothing else but football, football—and low, professional football at that! Give it a rest, for you get on a fellow's nerves!"

Every eye turned to the speaker—a tall, thick-set man who was standing with his broad back to the window. He was clean-shaven and prematurely bald, with hatchet features which had been tanned almost black by a tropical sun.

He scowled as his dark eyes flashed round at the astonished faces of his brother-members.

"I'm sure we're all very sorry to disturb you, old egg," drawled Rollo Dayton quietly. "But if you really wish for peace and quietness, why don't you go into the writing-room or the library?"

"Or what's the matter with the cemetery?" asked Dr. Dagnall.

A wave of angry blood mantled the big man's hatchet features.

"It is over six years since I was in the club," snapped the disgruntled member; "and the changes I have noticed appal me! Insolent puppies and—"

"Yes, and we've also noticed a change since you've been back, Dane," put in Rollo Dayton. "You've only been here two days, during which time you have done nothing but grumble and find fault and make yourself a general nuisance. One would imagine that you owned the place, whereas you are neither useful nor an ornament. I—er—hope I make myself quite clear?"

Dane flushed and bit his thin lips. He realised that he had gone a little bit too far on this occasion, and a glance at the faces of the men who were gazing freezingly at him showed that he was anything but popular.

"I merely made a remark about this everlasting football discussion," he growled. "I suppose I've a right to an opinion?"

"Most certainly, Dane," returned Lord Romilly in mellow tones. "What is your opinion?"

Dane hesitated for a moment, but his words had the sting of a lash when at last he spoke.

"I think, in the first place, that it is a disgrace that England should go crazy about these Cupties," he said, "although I am not up against football as a sport. It's the professional side of the business—business, mark you—a money-making business—which disgusts me!"

"Able-bodied young men, paid gladiators, get an easy and comfortable living at the expense of the foolish public, which is led by the nose into supposing that it pays its shilling or half-crown to watch sport! Sport, mark you?"

Dane snapped his fingers and gave a hard, sardonic laugh.

"These paid gladiators, who would have been loafers or worse but for their luck in getting a job with a professional football team, know no more about the sporting side of football than a cabbage knows about Greek verbs. They've found an easy way of earning a few pounds a week, and that's where their interest ends! "Yet you—men of the world,

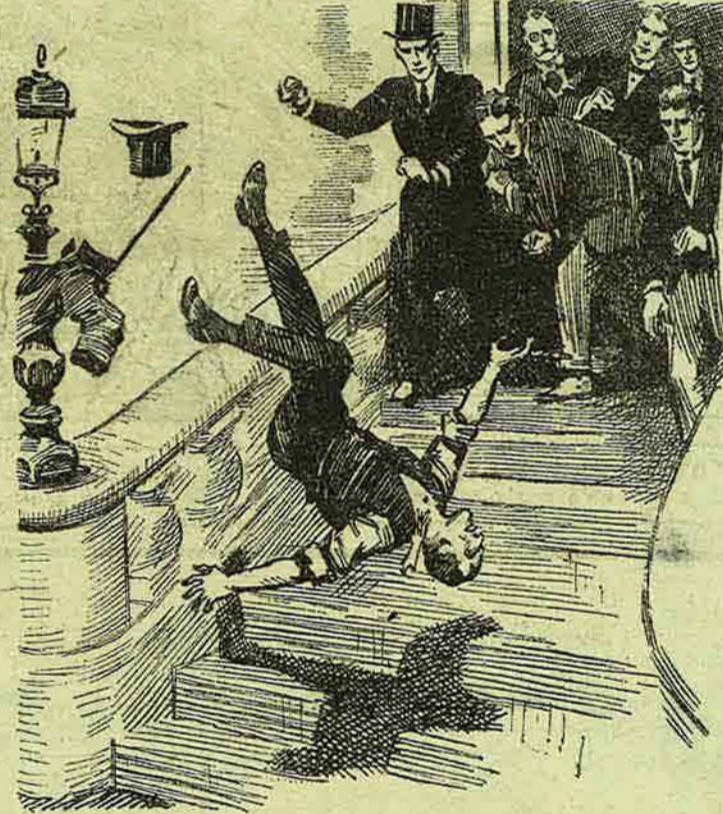
presumably threatened with intelligence—knowing what I say is strictly true, have been talking for the past hour about these infernal Cupties! You've done nothing but debate the chances of one set of muddled oafs against those of another! It's positively outrageous, a scandal, that such a thing should happen within a decent club!"

Dane paused, as though to allow his words to sink in.

"Go on, old egg!"

It was Rollo Dayton's drawing voice which prompted the fellow to continue.

"And there's another point which I



EJECTED! —two—three!

"On the count of three," said Dr. Dagnall, as Dane was swung backwards and forwards. "One Dane cleared the whole flight of steps and landed with a thud on the muddy pavement!"

may as well drive home now I'm fairly started," continued Dane, taking a couple of steps toward the men standing round the fireplace.

"Not only do these paid footballers care nothing for the sporting side of the business, but they are willing to take bribes to let their teams down—provided the bribe is big enough! That's the type of man you worship, gentlemen! They're all traitors at heart—traitors to their team and traitors to the fool public which pays money to watch their antics!"

A dead silence settled upon the smoking-room as Dane's harsh voice died away, and quite a number of members looked uncomfortable as they glanced from Rollo Dayton to Dagnall.

Dane, it seemed, did not know that the two friends played for Chelsea Villa, otherwise he would have thought twice before delivering his harangue.

Rollo fixed his mild blue eyes upon the flushed features of the traducer. "All your remarks are very illuminating, my dear Dane," he

drawled, very quietly; "but you appear to have lost sight of the fact that many professional teams play amateurs."

"What difference does that make?" snapped the other man. "Any amateur who turns out for a professional side has an axe to grind! You can take my word for that. They're all tarred with the same brush. And what the so-called amateur doesn't get in the way of wages is made up to him in the name of expenses! Perhaps you didn't know that?"

Rollo shook his fair head. "No, I did not," he returned; and his voice was toneless, his blue eyes hard as points of steel.

There was a curious tension in the atmosphere, and the members looked uneasy whilst they waited for the storm to burst, for they knew that Rollo would not allow the insults to pass.

"Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

Rollo Dayton looked thoughtful for a second or so. Then he answered, in measured tones:

"Yes; I would like to know when you are going to apologise, my dear Dane," he drawled. "You see, I happen to play centre-forward for Chelsea Villa!"

The 2nd Chapter. Asking for Trouble.

A dramatic silence followed Rollo Dayton's words, and every eye turned upon Dane's tanned features. The fact that he had been guilty of a most unfortunate faux pas did not appear to worry the fellow.

"I suppose you think you've been very clever in allowing me to run on?" he snarled, taking a step toward Rollo.

"Not at all," drawled the amateur

and mild blue eyes, looked curiously effeminate at that moment, and Dane made the fatal mistake of underrating his man.

The big fellow had made something of a name for himself in amateur boxing circles, and he was fully convinced that he would be able to dispose of the fair-haired youngster in something less than a round.

"I—er—don't wish to do anything rough, old egg," drawled Rollo; "but I really think it would save a lot of bother and fag if you did apologise."

Again Dane broke into a roar of laughter; and the other members felt almost sorry for him as they thought of the hiding that was in store for him.

Rollo, for his part, had not the least desire to fight, either with or without the gloves, for he knew that he was the better man.

"I really think that Dayton is entitled to an apology, Dane," put in Lord Romilly quietly. "Any man would insist upon it, and—"

"Any man would, I know," broke in the big fellow, emphasising the second word; "but you can't expect me to go on my knees to a tailor's dummy!"

A tinge of heightened colour crept into Rollo Dayton's smooth cheeks, but he managed to hold himself in check.

A murmur of disgust broke from the assembly.

"It will serve the cad right if Rollo gives him the hiding of his life!" growled Dagnall audibly. "The rotter ought to be kicked out of the club!"

"Hear, hear!" put in half a dozen members, in complete agreement.

"Did you mention something about his giving me the hiding of my life, Dagnall?" asked Dane, whose hatchet features were not pleasant to behold. "I did," returned the doctor. "And I warn you that he could do so. It is only his good nature and sportsmanship which is saving you!"

"Then that for his sportsmanship!" snarled Dane, snatching up a copper ash-bowl and jerking the contents into Rollo Dayton's face.

That cowardly act was the last straw; but the amateur did not leap out of his chair and throw himself upon the other man. Leisurely—very leisurely—he took a silk handkerchief from his breast-pocket and wiped the cigar-ash from his pale features, after which he rose—still leisurely—to his feet.

He ignored Dane, who, with clenched fists, was waiting for the attack which did not come.

"Gentlemen," drawled Rollo, polishing his monocle, "this is a matter which cannot possibly be settled in the smoke-room—"

"We'll settle it anywhere!" growled Dane, whose big frame was quivering.

"So I suggest," continued Rollo, as though he had not heard the interruption, "that we adjourn to the gymnasium, where I shall have to teach this—er—hog a lesson!"

Humming softly, with a suspicion of a smile upon his lips, he walked from the room; and there was something so ice-cold about his demeanour that Dane began to wonder whether, after all, he had made a mistake.

But then he thought of his undoubted prowess with the gloves, and a confident grin passed across his face.

The gymnasium at the Belgrade Club is one of the finest in England, boasting a swimming bath, a boxing ring, and every appliance known to physical culture experts.

It was towards the boxing ring that Rollo Dayton led the members.

"Do you prefer gloves or bare knuckles?" he asked, turning steely eyes upon Dane.

The other gave a contemptuous laugh.

"We'll have the gloves," he returned. "You are too young and beautiful to die."

Rollo nodded and removed his coat, which he handed to Dagnall.

"Hang on to that, old egg," he murmured, as he commenced to roll up his shirt sleeves. "I shan't keep you more than a few minutes."

Neither man wasted any time, and within four or five minutes of entering the gymnasium they were facing each other, within the roped square.

"Time!" said Lord Romilly.

The 3rd Chapter. Ejected.

Dane, it seemed, was more fighter than boxer, for he rushed straight at Rollo Dayton in a manner which would have swept a less experienced boxer clean off his feet.

But the youngster was ready for him.

Judging matters to a nicety, he met the rush with a straight left, which caught his man clean between the eyes and rocked him, after which he put over a right which sent Dane reeling across the canvas to the ropes.

Such was the dramatic start, but the only surprised person in the gymnasium was the tanned man from the tropics. He had looked upon the affair as a walk-over, but one taste of Rollo's quality convinced him that he was in for anything but an easy journey.

He was not disheartened, however, for he felt certain that he would win in the long run. A powerful man, he banked upon being able to out-fight his slim opponent.

He was not given much time for thinking, however, for Rollo was after him in a flash. Dane covered up and crouched, but he could not save himself from a succession of punches which seemed to splinter his ribs.

He managed to work his way out of the tight corner, but not without absorbing further punishment; and then he settled down to fight.

So, standing toe to toe, the combatants slammed each other with right and left, the blows ringing dully through the lofty gymnasium.

Left, right; left, right!

It was a "slogging match," in all truth, but it was Dane who eased up and fell into a clinch; and in carrying out this manoeuvre he shipped a thump to the jaw which would have robbed the average man of consciousness.

Somewhat dazed, he clung to Rollo like grim death.

"Break, Dane!" commanded Lord Romilly sternly; but a number of seconds elapsed before the order was obeyed.

Dane skipped out of distance, crouching, his small eyes peering over his gloves; and then, with something very like a snarl upon his lips, he leapt at his youthful opponent with the ferocity of a panther.

And again he was quickly taught that this method of attack would not pay with a human iceberg such as Rollo Dayton.

The amateur, who was breathing easily, measured his man as he leapt, and the left he pushed out thudded against Dane's mouth with a force which jerked the sleek head back in a most unpleasant manner; and the left was followed by a right which also landed upon the thin lips, causing the big man to grunt and give ground, his evil eyes smouldering with a terrible light.

In common parlance, Dane had bitten off considerably more than he could masticate, and he realised that his one chance of beating his opponent was to end the affair with all possible speed.

The plan was excellent, of course, but it did not work out smoothly when he tried to put it into execution. Instead, he found himself running into smashing rights and lefts, which seemed to rain upon him from all angles; and the tremendous power behind them was the one thing they had in common.

Dane fought desperately, lashing out wildly, in the hope of registering a lucky blow; but he was being knocked from one side of the ring to the other when Lord Romilly's mellow voice brought the first round to an end.

Rollo looked quite fresh as he walked to his corner and sat down, but Dane, on the other hand, looked much the worse for wear. His lips were cut and bleeding, whilst his left eye was puffed and already changing colour.

It had been a gruelling three minutes, but the fact that he was so badly spent proved that he was not in the best of condition.

He gulped greedily at the cool air as two members waved towels, and all the while his brain was working at top speed, groping for a plan with which to defeat the calm youngster in the opposite corner.

Rollo was seated in his swivel chair, and from the quiet manner in which he was chatting to Dagnall he might have been in the stalls of a theatre.

The minute intermission flew by, and Lord Romilly's voice brought the men from their respective corners.

Again Dane tried his rushing tactics, only to receive a punch to the mouth which put him flat upon his back; and he remained upon one knee until the count of eight, when he dodged cleverly and missed a right swing which would undoubtedly have brought an end to the contest.

Dane was dogged, and as strong as an ox, and he still hoped against hope that he would land a mighty blow which would put his man down for the count; and to gain this end he

took risks which time and again brought him within an ace of the K.O.

Rollo, however, did not take advantage of these openings, for he was determined to punish Dane as he deserved. It was not that the youngster was callous or vindictive; he was merely convinced that a hiding would do the bad-tempered, ill-mannered fellow a world of good.

Yet it is doubtful whether Dane appreciated the lesson, for with each passing second his rage increased; and for a boxer to lose his head is fatal to his chance of success.

Dane was a positive glutton for punishment, and the blows he absorbed in a desperate effort to contact with Rollo's jaw would have put many a professional pugilist down for the full count.

But he kept on coming up for more, and Rollo Dayton did not spare him. Tight-lipped with eyes which were hard and merciless, he met each rush with a terrific right and left, and by the time the second round came to an end Dane presented anything but a pleasant spectacle. Badly battered, he tottered to his corner and dropped into his seat, yet the light of battle still gleamed in the depths of his dark eyes.

"I'll get him yet, the puppy!" he muttered, as he gulped the towel-driven air. "He's asked for it!"

His two "seconds" worked like men possessed, and the beginning

Rollo Dayton's throat in a murderous grip.

"I'll do for you!" he hissed, increasing the deadly pressure as the youngster reeled backwards. But Rollo's surprise was only momentary, for he ripped up a terrific punch which caught his man clean on the solar plexus, causing him to give a groan of agony and crumple up like a wet sack, his mouth gaping, his dark eyes glazing.

He dropped to the canvas in a huddled heap, and remained still.

"Well, and what are we going to do with this beauty?" asked Dagnall, when Dane, thanks to the doctor's expert attention, showed signs of returning consciousness.

"The dust-bin isn't quite big enough," murmured Harcourt regretfully, "and the rag-and-bone gentleman doesn't call until Wednesday!"

"All we can do," said Lord Romilly quietly, "is to tell him to leave the club and not to show his face again. We've no use for his sort. A most unpleasant person."

Dane gave a little groan, opened his eyes, and looked round in a dazed manner; then, little by little, everything came back to him.

His bruised features twisted into a grin.

"Carrrion, eh?" he sneered.

"Gloating over the body!"

"Get up!" snapped Dagnall.

"Get up and get out!"

The big man flushed as he rose to

coat and walking stick after him. But the big fellow was not a bit grateful, for he snatched up his belongings, waved his walking-stick threateningly, and shouted until he saw a grim-looking policeman making for him, when he turned tail and fled.

"And that, my peerless old eggs, is that," drawled Rollo Dayton, as the knot of men strolled back to the smoking-room. "I don't think I've ever met a more poisonous lad in my life!"

"You're right, old man," agreed Dr. Dagnall, "and that African sun seems to have given him a dickens of a paddy! I thought, at one time, that he would get positively cross with you!"

A laugh rang out at the remark, and then a serious expression crept into Lord Romilly's handsome, clean-cut features.

"I fear," he said, sinking into his armchair by the fireplace, "that we have made a very dangerous enemy in Dane, for he is not the type that forgives and forgets. To my mind, I do not think that he is altogether sane."

"There certainly is a strange look about his eyes, especially when he's roused," put in Dagnall thoughtfully.

"However, we must hope for the best, and should he try any tricks we must book him a nice, comfortable padded cell in a little hotel called Colney Hatch!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured the other members; but they little

packed long before this hour. Every available perch upon telegraph-pole or tree was occupied, and a number of adventurous youngsters climbed on to the roof of the grandstand, from which dizzy height they made faces at the irate limbs of the law who called upon them to descend.

The local band was brightening the hour with lively tunes, whilst the crowd mingled voices in a song called "If Winter Comes," apparently oblivious of the fact that the particular season had already come and departed.

Gathered in their dressing-room, the Londoners presented the picture of health, even Hercules Samson looking as robust as a well-nourished sparrow. He obviously regarded the semi-final as a ceremonial occasion, for he was wearing a morning-coat, the tails of which almost trailed the ground, a lavender waistcoat, and a wide-brimmed silk hat which threatened to slip over his ears and suffocate him.

Vivid yellow gloves, enormous brogue shoes, and an umbrella completed the sartorial treat.

Hercules, upon meeting the other players at the London terminus, had commented somewhat acidly upon the fact that they looked decidedly shabby in their tweeds, and it was only under protest that he finally agreed to travel with them, for which gracious concession they had thanked him with tears in their eyes.

The walk from Berry station to the ground had been anything but enjoyable, for many were the remarks of a personal nature which were shouted after Hercules; yet he strutted on, with a mischievous twinkle behind his horn-rimmed glasses, thoroughly enjoying the discomfort of his unfortunate team-mates.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if it was Guy Fawkes Day!" growled Giles, the cockney custodian as he slipped out of his overcoat. "But to 'ave to walk through a strange town with that scarecrow—"

Words failed Giles, but the disgusted expression upon his homely face was eloquent.

Hercules Samson turned very slowly and fixed the goalkeeper with a glance of withering scorn.

"And who are you, my dear sir, that you dare criticise my habilliment?" he thundered in a voice which reached the playing pitch. "Why, even that disfigurement, which you fondly imagine is a face, isn't on straight! Nature, my dear sir, played a practical joke upon you! Not another word, or I shall feel compelled to thrash you within an inch of your life—nay, within a quarter of an inch of your life! Enough! I have spoken!"

A ripple of laughter ran through the dressing-room, but Giles' contribution to the merriment was a black scowl. It seemed to him that he never got the better of a battle of words.

"How long have we to go?" asked Crispin, after a pause.

"Not quite a quarter of an hour, so you'd better look slippy!" answered big John Vaughan, the Chelsea Villa manager, running a shrewd eye over the players in search of Cupidic nerves.

"By the way, old egg," drawled Rollo, slipping his fair head through his jersey, "what team are they putting out against us?"

Vaughan consulted his programme. "They've made one alteration," he answered. "They're playing Hone in goal, instead of Maxwell. The backs are Doone and Strang; Hawes, Cole, and White are the halves; and the forwards are Stock, Trimble, Parker—he's the fellow you must keep your eye on, by the way; he scored five against Seardale last Saturday—Groat and Penny."

"H'm, a very useful lot of lads," commented Rollo. "Still, we'll give them a run for their money!"

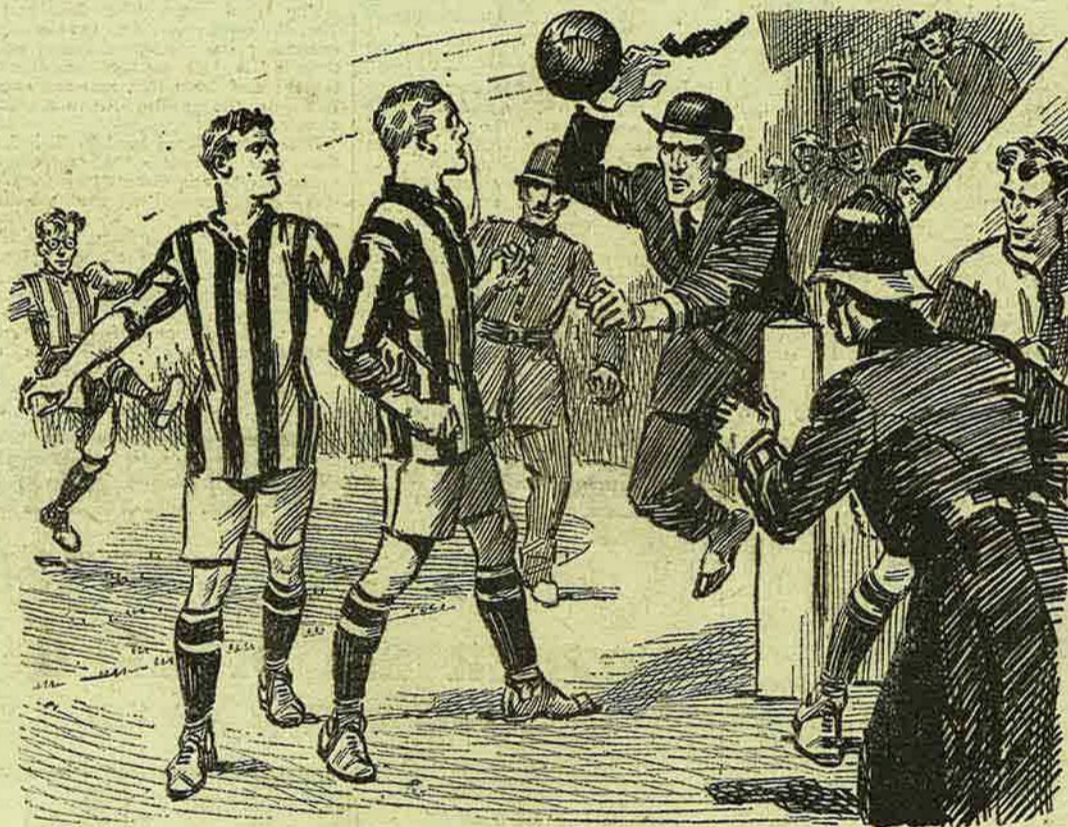
"You fellows ready?" asked the referee, looking in at the door.

"No, not by any means, my dear sir!" cried Hercules, swinging round upon the surprised official. "Do you think that the Berry secretary would mind putting my silk hat in his safe? I'm afraid it may wander away and get lost or run over. You see, it has never been to Berry before!"

The referee looked from the little winger to the grinning players, after which he tapped his forehead significantly and rushed away.

"Everybody O.K.?" asked Lewis, the lean-limbed skipper. Then, finding they were, he led the way from the dressing-room to the playing pitch, where the first sight of the blue-and-white jerseys brought forth a mighty roar of welcome.

(Continued overleaf.)



SAVED BY SAMSON! "I'll kill him!" shrieked Dane, whipping out a revolver and pointing it straight at Rollo Dayton's head! And even as he did so a football, propelled by Hercules Samson, struck the weapon from his fingers!

of the third round found him quite steady upon his feet.

This time he did not begin operations with a suicidal rush, but skipped round Rollo, waiting for the youngster to lead.

Rollo did not mind this change of tactics in the least, for variety, to him, was the spice of life; so he suddenly darted forward, feinted with his right, and pushed out a terrific left which again connected with his opponent's lacerated lips.

The blow caused Dane to wince and let out a wild yell; and a moment later he rushed forward and fell into a clinch, gripping Rollo Dayton's body with all the power of his mighty arms. He seemed to be possessed with the strength of a maniac at that moment, and, though the youngster fought and struggled until his muscles creaked, employing the rabbit punch again and again, he could not free himself.

"Break, Dane!" cried Lord Romilly, stepping to the ropes. "Break, sir!"

The big man took not the slightest notice of the stern command, and it was only when he pushed Rollo away and skipped backwards that the members understood what had happened during those brief seconds.

Dane had worked his hands out of his gloves, and these he threw to right and left; then, with a snarl upon his lips, he gave a spring and caught

his full height. He was obviously ready and eager for further trouble.

"Now," he said tauntingly, "if there are six men here who are capable of putting me out of this one-eyed club I should like to see them. You're just a crowd of low-down sporting toots."

"Are you going?" asked Dagnall in grim accents.

"No, I'm not, and that's flat!" cried Dane, working himself into a fury. "And if there are six men here—"

"Come on!" snapped Dagnall; and the next moment the big fellow was gripped in strong hands and propelled towards the door of the gymnasium, rushed along the corridor, through the vestibule, to the top of the broad stone steps.

Here he was lifted from his feet, kicking and struggling and yelling at the top of his voice.

"On the count of three," said Dagnall, as the human pendulum swayed backwards and forwards. "One—two—three!"

Dane cleared the whole flight of steps and landed with a thud upon the muddy pavement, whilst some thoughtful soul threw his hat, over-

realised to what lengths Dane was prepared to go in order to have his revenge upon Rollo Dayton.

The 4th Chapter. The Semi-Final.

The football ground at Berry-upon-Terno is one of the finest in the country, and the local football "fans" are justly proud of it.

The Saturday afternoon game is an event in the life of Berry, and there is scarcely a soul in the thriving town who could not tell you—off-hand—who scored the goals when, say, Blackburn Rovers beat Notts County in the final of 1891.

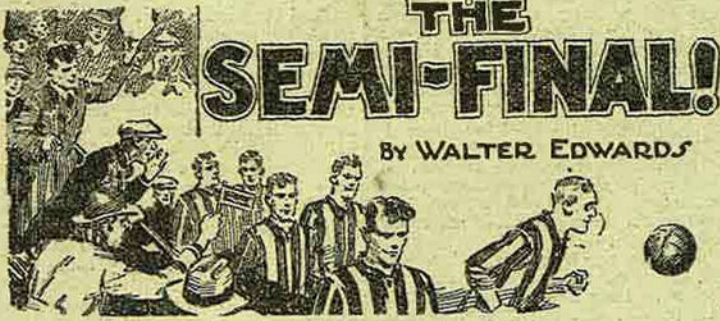
It will be understood, therefore, that jubilation knew no bounds when it became known that the Semi-Final game between Chelsea Villa and Milchester United was to be played at Berry.

The ground was built to accommodate seventy-five thousand people, but an odd thousand could always be squeezed in, even if the management had to use a shoe-horn for the purpose.

Many special trains were run from London and Milchester, of course, and the day of the match found the streets of Berry crowded with strangers, some sporting black and white colours of Milchester and others the blue and white of Chelsea Villa.

The game was advertised to start at half-past two, but the ground was

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY PRICE 2



THE SEMI-FINAL!

By WALTER EDWARDS

(Continued from previous page.)

The enthusiasts from London lost no time in greeting their favourites.

"Good old Sammy! Set 'em alight to-day, son!"

"Now then, Dayton!"

"Up, up, the Villa!"

The scene of riotous welcome was indescribable, and the whole ground seemed to rock with the volume of sound.

Milchester United also came in for its share of noisy encouragement, and the name of Parker, the centre-forward, was yelled from all parts of the ground.

He was a veteran of thirty-five, yet he was still one of the fastest forwards in the kingdom, as well as being a deadly shot.

The referee and linesmen also received a cheer, but the din died down somewhat when the opposing skippers and the official met upon the half-way line and shook hands.

A coin glistened in the warm rays of the sun, and the sportsmen from London contracted a temporary fit of mild insanity when it was seen that Lewis had won the toss. He set Milchester to face the sun, of course, a choice which necessitated a change of ends.

The rearrangement complete, the referee glanced at his watch; and five minutes later the whistle shrilled and the semi-final was in progress.

The 5th Chapter.

Chelsea for the Final.

Parker, the Milchester skipper, touched the ball to Grout, who at

once back-heeled to White; and the half-back, working to plan, sent a pass out to Penny, upon the wing.

Little Terle was upon the scene at once, and the simple manner in which he robbed his brother winger of the leather brought a roar of laughter from the crowd.

Grout rushed at the outside-left as though he meant to devour him, and there is no doubt that he did become savage when Terle pushed the ball between his long legs, slipped round him, and started off down the line as though he were in a hurry.

White, of course, was close upon his heels, but the Villa winger was just a shade too speedy for him; and it was not until Strang, the right back, put in an appearance that Terle's triumphant voyage received a check.

Strang had no parlour tricks, for he just barged into the winger, sent him flying, and cleared with a mighty kick which sent the ball well past the half-way line, where Stock trapped it, twirled round, and set off for the Londoners' goal area.

Crispin also set off, and he worried Stock until the winger was compelled to pass to Trimble, who lost no time in transferring the leather to Parker.

And the veteran centre-forward, tall, slim, and almost completely bald, slipped between Lewis and Perne; but in the stolid Gideon he came up against a brick wall.

The big back did not seem to hurry himself, yet his long leg shot out and hooked the ball clean off the centre-forward's toe; and a second or so later Hercules Samson had taken Gideon's pass and was pelting away

down the wing with prodigious kangaroo-like leaps.

The vast crowd roared its delight as the eccentric little fellow flashed along the line but its delight increased tenfold when he suddenly pulled up, gripped the ball between his knees, and took a flying leap over Doone's shoulder.

It was a remarkable feat, and so unexpected was it that Hone was standing in open-mouthed wonder when a stinging shot from Hercules whizzed past his nose and flashed into the net; and what Parker said to the luckless custodian need not be recorded.

A deafening roar of cheering greeted the goal, of course, and Samson's name rang round the ground; but he refused to have any sort of demonstration upon the field.

"Stand back!" he thundered, shaping up as the players rushed at him. "What do I, Hercules Samson, the greatest winger the world has ever known, care for the plaudits of the mob? Nothing! I might consider the offer of an earldom as a

ANOTHER TIP-TOP PROGRAMME IN THE "BOYS' FRIEND" NEXT MONDAY!

Tell all your pals not to miss it!

mark of my country's appreciation of my genius, but this din—Bah! Indeed, two bahs! And do you know why I say 'bah'?" asked the little winger, gazing up at the referee.

The official, who did not know what to make of Hercules, shook his head. "I couldn't say!" he confessed.

"Why, because I am the black sheep of the family, my dear sir!" cried the wizard of the wing.

Shaking with laughter, the referee, who had nearly swallowed his whistle, walked away toward the half-way line; and in a very short time the game had been resumed, Penny being sent off along the wing.

But again little Terle proved too good for him, robbing him and sending a pass along the carpet to

Britton, who made a few yards and passed to Rollo Dayton.

The amateur, who was being "bottled up" by Cole, slipped the leather to Dagnail, who returned it almost at once. Rollo found himself up against Cole and Hawes, but he shouldered them off and kept his course goalwards; and it was not until Doone tackled him that he passed back to Dagnail, who promptly sent Samson away to the corner flag.

Wasting not a second, the little winger placed a perfect centre, and it was Britton's hard head which sent the ball beneath the crossbar and just out of Hone's reach.

To say that the Villa's supporters went wild with delight is to state the matter mildly, for the sound which broke from all sides of the packed ground was hideous, barbaric, a medley of discordant sounds.

"Wake up, United!" shouted the Milchester supporters.

"What about it, Parker?"

The veteran looked very grim as he kicked off for the third time that afternoon, and no sooner did Trimble return his pass than he set off upon a run-through, which proved to be one of the outstanding features of the game.

It seemed that nothing human could stop him, for after beating Dayton and Lewis, he slipped between Storm and Gideon, finishing a magnificent effort by scoring with a ground shot which crashed against the bottom of an upright and tore into the net.

The goal gave the Milchester United supporters an excuse for exercising their leathern lungs, and they made full use of the opportunity; and from that moment until half-time, the ground was in a state of uproar.

Both sides played hard football for that first forty-five minutes, and every player was quite ready for his short breather when the whistle shrilled.

"It's been a top-hole game up till now, old egg," said Rollo Dayton, linking arms with Dagners as they strolled across the playing pitch.

"It has, old man," agreed the doctor, whose rugged features were flushed and grimy. "There's a dickens of a crowd here to-day!"

"Look how these johnnies are packed!" said Rollo, as they neared

the grandstand; and scarcely were the words out of his mouth than a harsh voice made itself heard above the din.

"I'll kill him! I'll kill him, I will!" it cried shrilly; and at that moment Rollo Dayton caught sight of the hate-distorted features of Dane. The big man's face was terrible to behold; madness gleamed from the depths of the dark eyes.

"I'll kill him!" shrieked Dane, as Rollo approached him; and the next moment he whipped out a revolver and pointed it straight at the amateur's head; and even as he did so a football sped through the air, struck the weapon from his fingers, and almost snapped his wrist.

Rollo Dayton swung round, to find Hercules Samson beaming up at him.

"A goal, I think, my dear sir!" cried the eccentric little winger. "Tut, tut! In fact, three tut, tuts!" he added, as Rollo tried to express his thanks for the prompt action which undoubtedly saved his life.

Dane, meanwhile, was in the grip of two burly policemen, and he laughed shrilly as he was led away; and it proved to be the laugh of a madman.

Of the second half of the dramatic semi-final little more need be written, for the first thirty minutes was a tooth-and-nail struggle which failed to produce one goal.

But with ten minutes to fall time the ball went out to Hercules Samson, who promptly tricked Hawes and started away for the Milchester goal. Doone, with a jutting jaw and hard eyes, advanced to meet him, and his chagrin was complete when the winger contrived to flick the ball clean over his head, slip round him, and take a pile-driving shot at goal.

The force behind that kick must have been tremendous, for in saving it, Hone was carried across the line; and this proved to be the last goal to be scored in the Semi-Final which Chelsea Villa won by three to one.

THE END.

(You simply must read "The Millionth Chance!"—next Monday's startling story of Rollo Dayton and that master-criminal, the Duke! Make sure of your BOYS' FRIEND by asking your newsagent to save a copy for you every week!)



HEALTH AND SPORT

Conducted by

PERCY LONGHURST.



If you are in need of any information concerning health, sport or general fitness, write to Mr. Percy Longhurst, c/o The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for a reply. All queries are a confidence between Mr. Longhurst and the reader, and are always answered by a personal letter and never in these columns. The information is entirely free, and is the best obtainable.

The Need for Exercise.

If someone were to ask you the question "Which kind of fellow ought to exercise most—the strong or the weak?" what would be your answer?

I'm quite sure somebody would say "The strong. He is able to do it all right."

Now that answer would be quite wrong. And although no one can be more willing than myself to assist the strong lad to become still stronger by giving him useful tips, hints, exercises, etc., it is really my weaker readers I most want to get interested, as they are the ones who most need exercise. They must not run away with the notion that the exercises described and recommended from time to time in my weekly notes are not intended for them. It is just because they aren't very strong that they should do them.

There are lots of shy fellows lacking in self-confidence, aware of their physical weakness, who keep away from gyms, boxing clubs, and so forth on the plea that they're "not good enough," or "not strong enough to do what other fellows do." Bless you! It's exactly for those modest chaps that gyms are intended.

If the instructor is a sensible man he will take care that the new member who does not come up to the physical standard of the others isn't put to things for which he is not physically capable. It is his job to make that chap as capable as the rest of the class.

That is the object—the chief one, anyway—in my mind when I put together this weekly article. I'm far less concerned with helping a fellow whose biceps already measures fourteen inches to increase it to fifteen than I am with the very many others who fall a long way short of the fifteen inches of upper arm measurement.

"I'm not going to do that exercise any more, not if I know it! I did try it once. It made me ache, and I was stiff for days afterwards." Have you ever heard that said? I have: many

times. And very often "that" exercise isn't done any more.

Why, the fact that doing it once made the chap achy and stiff was the clearest proof that it was precisely the exercise that he needed to do. Those particular muscles that ached, and told him for days afterwards they had been ill-treated, were so unused to exercise they did not know what work meant; they were too weak to work without feeling the worse for it.

Now that is what I call a shameful admission. Those muscles should not have been so weak. If they were in decent condition, if they were fit, they would not grumble at work. They would feel all the better for it. And, the way to get them fit is to give them plenty of work. Plenty—but not too much, or real harm may be done.

Muscles need gradually training to become fit. They cannot and will not be rushed into fitness. Give them a little work to do at first; give it to them regularly, for that's more than half the battle. Gradually increase their work, and they will gradually become fit enough to do the extra work without becoming stiff and painful.

It is slow and gradual training that makes the strong man or the successful athlete. No untrained man, though strong as a mule, could run a Marathon race, for his heart, lungs, legs, and body would collapse and give in before he had done half the distance; but a very much weaker fellow, who had trained, would finish the race all right.

Think it over, you readers who are not strong, and make up your minds that you will try your level best to change your condition.

It will be my pleasure to help you, I hope.

Percy Longhurst

(Another helpful article next week.)

HERE'S A GREAT CHANCE FOR YOU!

ANOTHER £10 OFFERED TO OUR READERS!

THE HISTORY OF THE LUTON CLUB.

FIRST PRIZE £5.
SECOND PRIZE £2 10s.
and 10 PRIZES of 5s.

INSTRUCTIONS.

Here is a splendid footer competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find a history of the Luton Football Club in picture-puzzle form. What you are invited to do is to solve the picture, and when you have done so write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears under the puzzle, pin it to your solution, and post it to "Luton" Competition, Boys' Friend Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, so as to reach that address not later than THURSDAY, March 29th.

The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the event of ties the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide the value of all or any of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with the "Gem," the "Magnet," and the "Popular," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.



I enter "LUTON" Competition and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.
Name.....
Address.....
B.F.

You will be doing your friends a good turn if you pass this paper on to them when you have finished with it!

THIS IS THE YARN THAT CANNOT BE BEATEN FOR THRILLS!



By LESTER BIDSTON.

(Author of our recent success "The Space Destroyer!")

Thensla and the three voyagers escape from the monster ants and meet Uensl, the puppet king of Apadocia!

The 1st Chapter.

Britain is in a panic because a large part of Lincolnshire has disappeared in a night, leaving behind a blackened and charred coastline. Similar reports are received from China, South America, and South Africa. It is the opinion of Miles Belmont, an American scientist, that the calamities are caused by projectiles from another planet. To test the American's theory, Ken Thornton, Sid Kennedy, and Tim Baynes, three adventurous youths, set out for Venus in Pearl II, a space-ship, which they have constructed from a gravity-defying metal of their own invention. In a similar space-ship they have already visited Mars and Vulcan. They reach the planet Venus, but fall into the hands of some gigantic ants, or Spays, in whose stronghold they discover Thensla, a beautiful young Venusian girl, who is also being held prisoner by the terrible insects. The Spays use the three voyagers as human bait for catching the monster dragon-flies upon which they live. After many narrow escapes from death, Tim Baynes is badly mauled by a dragon-fly, and the little band of prisoners decide to make a dash for the Pearl, which is closely guarded by the Spays. Whilst Thensla and her friends are fighting the ant guard, Ken Thornton manages to force his way into the space-ship, but is horrified to find that it is being used as a council-room by the Spay leaders. He manages, however, to grasp a pair of revolvers before he is thrown from the Pearl, with which he works havoc amongst the guards, with whom his friends are still fighting outside. Suddenly, as the tide of battle seems to turn in favour of the prisoners, Thensla points to the entry of the amphitheatre in which the Pearl lies. "See!" she cries, "the Spays come!" Disappointed, the boys prepare to make a stand against the hordes of ants that are pouring into the great hall.

The 2nd Chapter.
Out!

With blanched faces and weary limbs, the voyagers stood a pace in front of Thensla, resolved to protect her whilst strength lasted, yet terribly aware of their pitiful weakness.

Already the foremost of the Spays shambled a bare twenty feet overhead. One, less careful than its calculating fellows, had actually reached the lowest level, and was gamely scuttling to the attack. Quite suddenly, Sid fired from the hip, a lightning snap, that abruptly ended the career of that too venturesome Spay. "Quick, chaps!" he cried: "the other side of the Pearl! There lies the passage along which I was first dragged to place decoy. Fifty yards inside, the place narrows to where we'll have a fighting chance. Come!" Taking Thensla by the arm, he swiftly circled the ship. There stood the narrow entrance, exactly as he had described it; but ten feet away a dozen Spays crept forward, craftily intent on taking the humans in the rear.

Equally surprised, for one tense second both companies stood as if carved in stone. Then Tim sprang forward with whirling arms and an ear-splitting yell that threw the amazed creatures into momentary panic by its very unexpectedness. Quick to seize the opportunity, Sid hurried Thensla forward, his comrades following, the out-maneuvred Spays making a belated and futile attempt to intercept them.

Within the passage, the four hunted beings broke into a heart-bursting spurt that carried them far ahead of the giant insects. Only when Thensla stumbled and would have fallen but for Ken's help, did they pause for breath. And as they gratefully inhaled even the hot fetid air of that confined place, a backward flash of Sid's torch gladdened all eyes by sight of an empty path.

All that is, with the exception of Sid himself. His face grew bleak with dread, and he turned to the others with a down-cast air that bespoke extreme dejection.

"Boys, I'm sorry," he said, "but I must tell you that somehow we've hit the wrong tunnel. Hereabouts the road should rise rapidly; instead, it goes down to goodness knows where."

"Oh, well, one way's as good as another," Tim said cheerfully. "We know this place is honeycombed with passages, and I suppose this'll take us above ground sometime." He rubbed his chin dubiously. "Though, bedad, I'm guessin' we'll be little better off when we get there."

"Let's hope we will," answered Sid. "Anyway, we hadn't much choice in the matter."

"And we've certainly got to go on," added Ken. "The Spays have not resigned themselves to parting with us. Look here they come!" He spoke bare truth. One, two, three. The foremost lurched into view, then scampered nearer with cold, persistent purpose.

"Hark!" Thensla cried. "The bell-message again!" The girl listened intently, and the amazed voyagers saw the advancing Spays stay their progress, and, with uplifted head and rigid antennae, take in the meaning of the sound of the bells.

"A warning to the guardians of the entrance pits," Thensla continued. "Also, I fear me, an indication of the way we have come."

"Then the sooner we get a move on—" Tim suggested.

"The more sensible we'll be," agreed Sid. "Ready, lady?"

"It is yes," Thensla replied. "It is, 'best foot upward,' as Tim says."

"Does he, bedad?" Tim grinned, and would have stayed to argue the matter out, but that Sid motioned him forward.

The ghostly bell-notes were still sending their eerie warning the length and breadth of Ant-town, and, until the last note had quavered into silence, the pursuing insects remained as if carved in stone; a fact the chums were quick to seize upon, and to take full advantage of, by putting their "best foot upward," as Thensla suggested.

Helped by the torches, a light they begrudged using, they sped along that black tunnel for nearly an hour; now dashing down long inclines at a steady pace, now toiling up short, steep rises with scant breath and bursting hearts. They must have covered a generous three miles since leaving the great hall of Ant-town, and they were beginning to despair of ever reaching the end of this black passage, when it began to broaden out and to mount in a long, steady rise.

Then, above and far ahead of them, a tiny star of light appeared, that, once sighted, increased in size with every step they took. By now the four fugitives were about all in, and calling on their last reserve of strength to maintain their hardly-won lead. Surprisingly, the least distressed of all was the Venusian girl. She ran lightly and unfatiguedly, even smilingly offered to help the blown, panting Tim—a suggestion which he

rejected with unmistakable vigour, to the secret amusement of his chums.

Very soon the way to the open shone bright and clear within a hundred yards of them, and now their headlong flight gave way to a cautious walk. Within thirty yards of the exit Sid called a halt, and gave a final warning word.

"Remember, we're diving into the unknown," he said. "So far, we're free of those behind us; perhaps because they were so sure of us that they haven't hurried." He glanced at the opening. "It seems strangely quiet. Are you sure, Thensla, that any will seek to detain us?"

"Quite sure," the girl answered. "There be many ways to and from this Spay-haunt, but every way is guarded. Always they fear raids of their winged enemies."

"Humph! Then, boys, the brutes are waiting for us; out of sight, but possibly, within hearing. Any ideas?"

In a moment the sharp blade had sliced the coil into a dozen short lengths. These Sid quickly distributed and touched with a flaming match. The dry twisted hair blazed up like tinder and gave off a black, pungent smoke.

"Come, boys, time's everything," Sid ordered. "Thensla, keep close to us, please." And without waiting a reply, he dashed ahead and was out in the blinding sunlight two yards in front of his companions.

For a moment his eyes ached with the too-sudden change.

Striving desperately to see, his eyelids blinking madly in the red glare, Sid at last made out a full score of Spays ringing the exit and rapidly closing in on them.

One huge creature already reared up, its gripping forefeet about to fasten on Ken's throat, when Sid's clearing vision took in the scene.

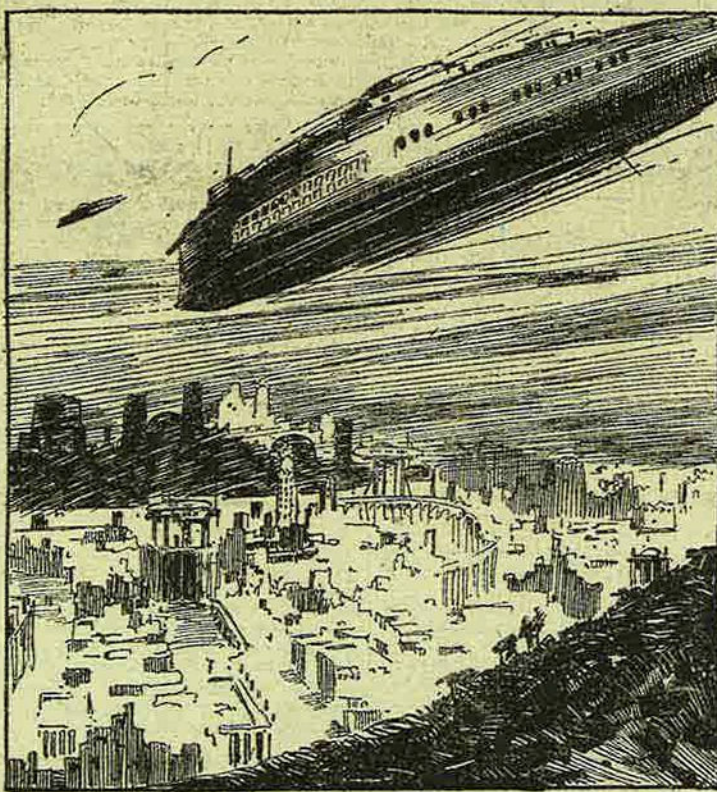
"Look out, Ken," he cried. And, on the word, he circled the thing's head with the dancing flame he held.

The Spay hissed like an angry snake and snapped at Sid's hand with its horned, vertical jaws. But it only succeeded in biting deep into the mass of flaming hair which Sid coolly thrust into its open mouth. That drastic lesson was enough for that particular creature, and, with a coughing whoof, it spluttered out the burning rope and scampered away.

This first encounter was typical of a dozen others, in as many seconds. Without the blazing torches their chance of breaking through that ring of horror would have been non-existent. But fire proved a mighty persuader, and, at last, they were away and into the close-matted trees of the forest.

Rescued!

Even now it was difficult to see how their dash for freedom would benefit the fugitives. Their original plan—the recapture of the Pearl—had proved abortive, and succeeding events had simply swept them on in



NAYS REACHED! Despite its clumsy appearance the Venusian air-train rushed past the outer buildings of the city of Nays and finally came to rest on a long, narrow roof in the centre of the city!

Ken looked suggestively at the revolver he carried. But before he could speak something attracted Sid's attention, and, signalling for silence, he dropped on hands and knees and crept towards the exit.

His figure, blackly silhouetted by the outer glare, moved without sound until within three yards of the open; farther he dare not go with any hope of concealment. But it was just enough for his purpose, and the anxious watchers saw him drop flat, advance an arm to the limit of his reach and just succeed in touching a dark mysterious bundle.

Ten seconds later he was joyfully exhibiting a precious twelve-foot length of the woven hair that formed the Spay's excellent rope.

"Boys, this is something to crow about!" he smiled, busy with a clasp-knife. "Tim, out with those matches of yours."

a resistless current that had now flung them back again into the flower-decked forest that had been the origin of all their trouble.

For ten long minutes they drove a blind path through the thickly-clustered trees. The atmosphere of the place stifled them, every breath they took was like swallowing fire; and though they had given their pursuers the slip for the moment, they were forced on by the certainty that the things were questing them, and would continue to do so until the issue was settled beyond doubt.

Thensla suddenly uttered a cry of surprised delight. With a wave of her hand—she was past speaking—she swung sharply away at right angles. Mystified, the chums followed, and within a minute the thinning trees showed the edge of the forest, a quarter-mile of open ground, and a portion of the great stone structure

that had first attracted their attention.

Almost before they realised it, they had left the forest and were wading knee-deep in stiff brown grass that fringed the outmost belt of trees. Thensla continuously waved her arms towards the wall and called aloud, as if she hoped to attract the attention of those behind it. Half the distance between forest and wall had been covered, the thick grass had given way to bare soil, and the harassed, panting group even dared to think that they had won to safety when Ken uttered a warning cry and swung round in a half-circle.

To the dismay and disgust of the voyagers, they saw that the edge of the forest had magically sprung into life. From right and left, from the portion directly fronting them, an uncountable army of Spays had broken cover and was converging at an amazing speed.

"Oh!" Thensla gasped, horrified. "The Watchers! I had forgotten them!"

The girl's meaning was plain. It was evident that a line of hidden sentries fringed the forest, and that, immediately the fugitives had broken cover, this force had swept forward in pursuit; indeed, it was simply the fact that events had been drowsily slow in that particular sector for days past, and the watch consequently lax, that had enabled them to break through at all.

"Any hope of your friends seeing us?" Sid asked the Venusian girl.

"But yes," Thensla answered. "Though I fear the Spays will have us ere help can come."

"Perhaps so," Sid replied quickly. "Boys, carry on with Thensla. And, as the others hung back rebelliously: 'Obey orders, old sons. Hesitate, and we're finished.'"

Sid's words left the others no choice, and dutifully enough they would have hurried the girl onwards but that she refused to move an inch. So, they watched their leader dash back to the fringe of grass, and, the nearest Spays within five yards of him, use the last of Tim's invaluable matches in firing the stiff, dry growth.

It was like applying fire to century-old thatch. One second a tiny spark, the next a roaring flame that danced ten feet high and spread in three directions with the rapidity of burning powder.

So instantaneously did the first spark break into angry fire that Sid was nearly caught by his own ruse. One wicked tongue of flame licked hungrily at his outstretched arm and seared the white flesh from wrist to elbow.

But Sid, at the moment, had no sense of pain. Beyond noticing that his sleeve was smouldering, and impatiently pressing his other hand on it, he was fully occupied in dodging three maddened Spays who had broken into the open even as he fired the grass. One he killed with the last bullet in his revolver; but it looked any odds on the remaining pair getting him, when Ken's timely arrival accounted for them with a couple of well-directed shots.

"Jove, Sid!" he gasped. "You've set the world on fire!"

"But not quite quick enough," Sid answered grimly.

And, as they hurried to rejoin their friends, Ken understood Sid's meaning. Despite the rapid spread of the flames, panic-stricken Spays were breaking into the open both right and left; panic-stricken, but venomously determined on revenge. Enormous numbers must have been shut in by the devouring flames, but enough survived and won to the open to constitute a very real danger to the forlorn group who were now too spent and weary to even make pretence of further resistance.

"Look, friends," cried Thensla. "It is not yet finished!"

Following the direction of the girl's outflung arm, the amazed voyagers took fresh heart at sight of a minute air-vessel that rose from behind the wall, poised as if looking for them, then swept swiftly in their direction. And, like bubbles rising in sparkling wine, a second, third, and fourth sprang into view.

Tired and despondent though they were, the chums uttered loud cries of admiration as the tiny vessels approached them. And, indeed, these wonder-ships deserved all the praise that was lavished on them. Only ten or twelve feet from tip to tail, shaped on the lines of a Whitehead torpedo, flashing every oblique ray of sunlight as if made of burnished gold, and without visible sign of wing or propeller, their symmetrical daintiness was a joy to behold. They approached at an amazing speed in an

(Continued overleaf.)

Introduce Lester Bidston's amazing story of Modern Adventure to ALL your pals! SCUND, Lord of Tarp, makes his appearance next week!



(Continued from previous page.)

underlying line almost overhead, then floated to earth as gently as thisledown.

Already dazed by the holocaust that raged behind them, their eyes smarting and weeping through the yellow fumes that surged forward in heavy billows, the voyagers doubted the evidence of their senses when Thensla casually chose a vessel and invited them to enter the others.

"But surely they're not real live ones," Tim protested. "Where are the pilots, anyway?"

"Pilots?" Thensla frowned over the strange word and shook her head. "I know it not, Tim."

"Where are those who brought those vessels, he means," Sid explained.

"Oh!" Thensla smiled understandingly. "They brought themselves. Those who control them are behind the wall, and they but wait for you to enter before guiding the cars back whence they came!"

And, as if to confirm her words, Thensla's tiny flier lifted six feet from the ground and floated motionless in the smoky air.

"Well, I'll be—elevated!" murmured Tim. "It's black magic!"

But following the others' lead, he climbed gingerly into the nearest vessel, and found a sloping seat waiting for him that left him reclining at an ease, as if seated in a racing motor.

No sooner were the four vessels occupied than they lifted from the ground. That they held machinery was evident by the steady throb that now ran through them, and by the shrill whir of a circular fan hidden by the stern. But without will or movement of the passengers they edged round in unison, and, once pointed in the right direction, began a steady climb into the blue.

And so adaptable is human nature, that Tim Baynes, who, ten seconds earlier, had looked upon his vessel as a new species of banshee, now leaned back in luxurious ease and waved an airy farewell to the foiled monsters who had so nearly put an end to all his hopes and troubles.

The City of Nayr!

"There gleams Nayr, city of Apadocia, and my home. And there—" Thensla's arm described a quarter-circle. "There crouches Tarp, whose master rules all!"

A tense silence followed the girl's words. There was something ominous in the very sound of Tarp, and they noticed how Thensla's lips drooped in a way that was expressive of dread.

"Then, Thensla before we arrive," said Sid quickly, "I have a favour to ask."

"In my father's name I can promise my preservers anything," the girl answered.

"We ask that none know of our arrival from space. That you keep our secret until we give you leave to speak."

"But," Thensla frowned, "my parents' people will desire to thank you. My father himself will certainly wish to do you public honour."

Sid looked questioning at Thensla, and saw that the girl was both mystified and hurt by his request. "I cannot explain now, but we have a very vital reason in asking for silence. Your father, we quite understand, must hear the truth. Well, we ask you to tell him, but to tell him privately, and to arrange a meeting between us. Do us this favour, lady. The reason you will know later."

Thensla looked searchingly from one to another of the chums.

"Voyagers from afar, you speak strangely. I understand you not at all." She spoke coldly and with a distant dignity. "But I owe you much—everything—so this I will do for you. Remain here when we touch Nayr, and I will send for you later."

The sarcastic intonation of the last word went right home to Sid. But his face set grimly. Whatever Thensla thought of him—and he valued her opinion highly—too much was at stake for a blunder to be made at the present critical stage. Better a thousand times, he thought, to forfeit her friendship than to chance

bringing ruin on the world—their own far-distant globe.

For the remaining minutes of that journey conversation lagged. But if Sid was miserably aware of Thensla's dignity, Ken and Tim were all eyes for their surroundings.

By now they had grown accustomed to travelling in the clumsy-looking air-train, whose build was similar in pattern to a Pullman car. Compared to the dainty little fliers that had lifted them over the Great Wall, this giant was as a steam-roller to a whippet.

The whole journey had been a dream of mechanical wonder. Once over the wall, they had alighted on a high, flat structure that held a score of tiny machines, and as many vacant berths, that bespoke a fleet absent on aerial duty. This place, Thensla had told them, was but an outlying station, one of many rude country

tained a startled look on Thornton. "I say, how'd they do their cooking? No fires—"

"No food!" Ken finished for him. "Oh, Tim! You and your grub!"

"Well, if they've no fires, they must eat everything raw. Ugh!" "Ask Thensla," suggested Ken. "No fear!" Tim stole a look at the silent girl. "She and Sid are not playin' by the look of 'em. I'm leaving the lady alone till she finds her smile again."

Literally eating distance, despite its clumsy appearance, the air-train rushed past the outer ring of buildings with scarcely any lessening of its speed, and finally came to rest with a barely perceptible jolt, on a long, narrow roof in the centre of the city.

News of Thensla's escape from the Spays had evidently preceded her. A great crowd lined the streets below, an excited gathering, whose roar reached up to those above.

But Thensla took this sign of her popularity with superb coolness, and, before stepping to the roof, she signed to the voyagers to rest on the floor of the vessel, and so remain hidden from those below. Then, with a single word—"Later"—to Sid, she left them to their own devices and crossed to the edge of the roof.

Her appearance was the sign for a burst of wild enthusiasm. The chums would have given much to have watched the scene, but by their own wish that was denied them. Beyond

continued to be left severely alone, Tim turned on Sid with a grin.

"You've got the lady on her dig all right," he said. "And no wonder. I expect she was lookin' forward to boosting us up sky-high, then you go and squash it all." He looked at his leader quizzically. "What's the game, Sid, besides wanting to annoy Thensla?"

"I didn't want to annoy her," Sid replied hotly. "But you're forgetting why we came here, Tim, or else you would understand why I asked that our arrival be kept secret."

"What do you mean? What harm can there be if the Venusians do know where we came from?"

"We came here because, rightly or wrongly, we think this planet holds the secret of our world-bursts. Because we think that somewhere on Venus a gun, a—something, is being used to smash old Earth. If we are right, old son, the people who have been paying us attention cannot love us, and if they got to know that we had been sent to investigate and scotch the peril, you can imagine how they'd welcome us—with a brick!"

"So they would, Sid. I understand now." Sid's words gave his chums food for thought. Their situation, desperate already, took on a sinister aspect at the suggestion of the stern task that awaited them, and of the penalty Earth would pay in the event of their failure. Sombre fears filled their

clear of the horizon, yet it never sets."

"I've noticed it," Sid agreed, with a smile. "And that settles a fruitful source of argument between our astronomers, if we ever return to Earth."

"What argument is that?" Ken asked.

"Why, it proves that Venus, though it travels round the sun as does our own planet, yet differs from ours in that it does not rotate, but always keeps the same face to the sun. That means, of course, that the part nearest the sun is baked by everlasting shine and terrible heat, and that the opposite side is eternal night and darkness. The city of Nayr is in what I will call the intermediate belt. Farther west you go from here, the lower the sun will sink. Beyond that will come cold daylight, and beyond that again a twilight that gradually deepens to unchanging night."

"But surely our scientists must have known all this," Tim protested. "For, after all, Venus is our nearest neighbour?"

"So it is," Sid agreed. "But from Earth its face is hidden by dense masses of cloud." He took a stump of pencil from his pocket and drew a crude map on the floor of the airship. "From what I've read of Venus, and what I've seen since first we landed, this is my idea of how the planet is divided into sections."

The others studied the map in silence, and it will benefit the reader to closely follow Sid's argument and look over Ken's and Tim's shoulders as they kneel on the floor.

"BOYS' FRIEND" FOOTBALL CELEBRITIES.

A brief narrative about ROBERT McNEAL, the International Left Half-Back of West Bromwich Albion, whose photograph is given away with this copy!

Now that Jesse Pennington is no longer seen in the jerseys of the West Bromwich Albion club, the long-service player of the team is Bobby McNeal, the left half-back. And though in the course of their distinguished career, the Albion may have had more brilliant performers, it is doubtful if any club ever had a more consistent or reliable man on their books.

It was as long ago as the season of 1910-11 that McNeal first gained a place in the Throstles team, but all the time since then—the years of war excepted, of course—he has been just a steady, hard-working player, seldom absent from the first eleven.

Some idea of the consistency of McNeal may be gathered from the number of appearances he has made in the League eleven. In the season of 1911-12 he was absent from only one League match; in each of the two following seasons twice absent, and in the season after these was only once missing from his place.

Then when normal football was resumed after the war McNeal played in every match in which his team

took part in the 1919-20 season, and, incidentally, our readers may be reminded that that was the campaign in which the Albion won the championship of the First Division with a record number of points and the scoring of over one hundred goals. Last season McNeal was only once absent, and though obviously he is not so young—perhaps not even so energetic—as he used to be, the time has not yet come when he could, with advantage to the team, be left out.

Sometimes we are apt to get the impression that professional footballers are always on the move from one club to another, but the popular little Bobby does not come under that head, for West Bromwich is the only premier club for which he has played, and one would be surprised not to find him finishing his career with the club which first set his feet on the ladder of fame.

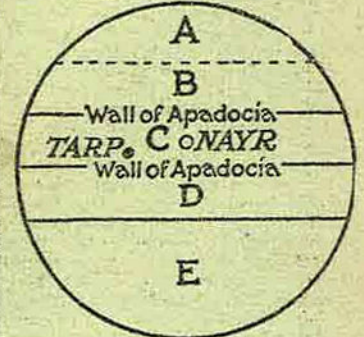
A native of Hobson, in Durham, McNeal is now about thirty years of age. A spare young man of 5 ft. 5½ ins., and a little over ten stone, he is a remarkable player, and a left half-back of the highest class. Discovered with Hobson Wanderers,

he was engaged as an inside-left by West Bromwich Albion in 1910.

Playing in this position against Barnsley in October of that year, Samuel Timmins, the left half-back, was injured, and McNeal had to fall back into the intermediate line. So impressed were his directors with his display in that emergency that he was chosen to appear at left half-back against Derby County, and has made the berth his own ever since.

Everyone has recognised his fitness, and the Football League have on four occasions chosen him for honours in their matches. His quickness in intervention and in tackling is a great factor, while few men of his height have been more accomplished in heading.

He places the ball with his head, and his ground passes to his forwards are invaluable. There is no denying that he is a half-back of the highest class and of remarkable stamina for one apparently so frail. In the spring of 1914 he realised a long-cherished ambition when he was chosen to play for England against both Ireland and Scotland. A little fellow with a big heart, and stronger than he looks.



- A Uninhabitable through heat.
- B Great Insect Belt.
- C Temperate Belt. Only part habitable by human beings.
- D If inhabited, by unknown amphibious creatures. Cold, twilight, water, and dense cloud.
- E Outer Darkness. Frozen and dead.

"Then the threat to Earth must come from this mid-belt strip?" asked Tim.

"I think so. And probably from, or controlled from, Nayr or Tarp. But that is what we have to solve, at whatever cost to ourselves. You will now see the importance of my wish not to court publicity."

"One last question, Sid. D'you think those abominable insects can do any harm to the Pearl?"

"Well, they can, and probably will commandeer a lot of the loose articles in it. The one thing they cannot do is to set it sailing in space, for the simple reason that it being our only link with home, I carefully triple-locked the levers before we set off on that first trip."

"That's to the good, then," Ken sighed. "Though whether we'll ever see the old Pearl again is very doubtful."

At that moment the door was flung violently back, and Thensla stood in the opening, her face white and troubled, her breath coming in quick sobbing gasps.

"Friends, I've had to leave you long because many wanted to greet me," she said. "But now come quickly, for there is trouble in Nayr—trouble that bodes ill for you and for me! Come!"

A King Without Power!

For ten long hours the voyagers remained in strict seclusion, hidden in a secret chamber whose position, so Thensla had told them, was known only to her father and herself. They had no idea of what had happened to so suddenly upset Thensla and to cause their hurried and undignified retirement into a room wherein Tim was even now seeking diligently for the hidden door. They only knew that food in plenty had been provided for them and that the subsequent rest had been very acceptable.

Quite suddenly a decorated panel that Tim was examining slid noiselessly back. He found himself facing

posts placed in distant corners of the land; central stations designed and organised to guard measured stretches of the wall.

Here their stay had been of short duration, no more, in fact, than was sufficient to transfer into the liner which now carried them so smoothly. What intrigued the voyagers—themselves constructional engineers of no mean ability—was the fact that the whole machinery of this huge vessel could have been comfortably carried in a week-end suitcase, and that Thensla had refused a pilot, and was actually captain, crew, and cabin-boy of the ship. Later, they were to learn that the Venusians had long ago discovered the secret of controlled atomic energy, and that this huculean driving-force from a thimbleful of power, was but one visible manifestation of its miraculous strength.

And now, after three hours of travel, after covering a distance of four hundred odd miles, they were approaching Nayr, capital of Apadocia.

"Thensla called it a white city," Tim murmured. "By the great Mike, she's right! It's surely built of marble."

"Something very like it," agreed Ken. "In fact, marble on our world wouldn't keep this colour for a week."

"No. But have you noticed that there's not a chimney, not a particle of smoke, over the whole place. That's queer."

Tim's face puckered into a dozen disturbed wrinkles.

"What's queer? What's biting you now, Tim?"

"No chimneys. No smoke." He

hearing an odd word or two of Thensla's reply to her welcome, they were condemned to unseeing inactivity, and when the girl descended to the interior of the building, the noise below quickly subsided, and the voyagers were left waiting with such patience as they could muster.

It seemed that Thensla was in no hurry to end their self-imposed vigil. As the minutes passed, and they

minds. The burden, now seen in all its terrible import, looked too heavy for their slender shoulders to bear. The fate of their world was balanced, for good or ill, on their capacity to outwit a people whose mechanical ingenuity showed itself amazingly fertile.

The silence was broken by Ken.

"Have you noticed, Sid, how low the sun lies? Always it stands just

WONDERS OF THE PAST

The Romance of Ancient Times told in Photo, Picture, and Story.

COMPLETE IN 24 FORTNIGHTLY PARTS. PRICE 1/3 EACH

A wonderful story of peoples of ancient times—of marvellous palaces and temples and buried treasure, with hundreds of beautiful photographs and COLOURED PLATES.

Part 1 contains many photographs and colour pictures with a full description of TOUT-ANKHAMEN'S treasure tomb—the latest and most astounding discovery of Ancient Egypt.

PART 1—On Sale March 20th.

Price 1/3 Order Your Copy TO-DAY!



Thensla and a magnificently-apparelled man who towered head and shoulders above her. Tim blinked and retired in stammering confusion as the newcomers entered the room, the panel moving silently back into place.

There was cause for Tim's confusion. Thensla had parted from them a pleasant girl of simple attire and unaffected manner. She reappeared a stately lady, a great important person robed in a close-fitting dress of silver net, and a headdress that was a coronet of a golden sun and eight shining planets. But, however magnificently attired, it was the old Thensla who stood smiling trustfully at them as if the disagreement with Sid had never been.

"Voyagers," she said, "at last I have brought my father, Mal Uensl, Ruler of Apadocia, to visit you. Before it has not been safe to come, for there are those who search for you, and doubt the story I told them that you were merely subjects from our more distant lands who had been prisoners, like myself, in the clutch of the Spays."

The chums looked with interest at Thensla's father, Uensl, Lord of Apadocia, and Sid remembered the girl's vehemence: "I hate Scund, I hate Tarp! Tarp rules all, and Scund rules Tarp!" If so, where did Uensl of Apadocia come in? he wondered. The man looked capable enough, standing well over six feet in height, proportionately broad, his great hooked nose, steady piercing eyes, and square chin denoting resolution and initiative in marked degree.

"Travellers," he said slowly and distinctly, "for that which you have done for me, my thanks. My daughter speaks a strange tale in a strange way. She tells me that you have journeyed through emptiness, from far-away Valda, the place you call Urth." He looked suspiciously from one to another. "Also, she tells me that you desire your arrival a secret from all. Why?"

They saw that this was a man who asked direct questions with the expectation of equally direct answers, and Sid immediately decided that he must lay his cards face upmost, if their every movement was not to be retarded.

"Lord of Apadocia," he answered, "your daughter speaks truth. We have indeed journeyed from Earth. The Lady Thensla has seen and touched our space-destroyer, now in the hands of the Spays. Except from yourselves, we crave secrecy, that our lives be not forfeit. Sir, somewhere in Venus-Atara—there live those who would wantonly and brutally destroy our world. Already myriads have perished from the scourge which, we think, finds its beginnings in Atara!"

Uensl and Thensla exchanged glances of understanding and dread. "A tale passing belief!" muttered Uensl. "And yet—"

For a time he remained sunk in deep thought. Then:

"Voyagers, that which you tell me whets my appetite for more. Grant that the wings of space have carried you here—in itself a miracle—yet, one world seeking to destroy another? Surely not! Let us hear your story from the beginning, and we may weigh your accusation and perhaps show you how you wrong us."

Carefully marshalling his thoughts, knowing that in trusting this Lord of Apadocia he was risking all, yet certain that no other way lay open to him, Sid gave a clear, concise account of the terror that gripped Earth from the time of the first disaster in Lincolnshire to the day their long journey started. Everything irrelevant was ruthlessly cut, he ignored all arguments for or against, building fact on fact simply yet with telling force.

"What has happened since we left Earth we have no means of knowing," he concluded. "We only know that Earth's need is grievous, and that we have journeyed through countless perils to prove or kill our suspicions that here lies the source of Earth's travail."

Uensl sat in frowning silence for long after Sid had finished—so long that he wondered uneasily if he had blundered irreparably in confiding in the very one who might be the responsible head of all that had happened. Then Uensl spoke, and settled that doubt for ever.

"Voyager," he said, "your words ring true. At least, they speak that which you believe, though whether that is truth or not I cannot say. My friends, listen to me, and in listening hear the confession of a man who hates himself, not so much for what

he is, as for what he might have been."

"Oh, no, sir—" Thensla began to protest.

But Uensl silenced her with up-lifted hand, his face set and sombre, and, despite his physical magnificence, as moodily dejected as the humblest of his subjects.

"In me, Lord of Apadocia, you see one who rules in name alone," he began. "On my shoulders rests the welfare of great lands, yet I am more servant than the least of my people. All power lies in my hands, yet I must answer for every deed I do. My thoughts carry out schemes, my tongue orders; but both thoughts and words are merely the echo of that which Scund, Lord of Tarp, puts into my brain and mouth! For Scund rules Tarp, and Tarp is the shadow that blots out happiness from Apadocia!"

"But who is this Scund?" asked Sid.

"Who is he not?" replied Uensl wearily. "He is Scund—the Eternal One. He has no beginning, and claims to have no end. One who, in his own words, devotes every minute and every thought to the well-being of Apadocia. In him is all power and all knowledge. He works in mysterious ways, he performs marvels. He has knowledge greater than is good for man—if man he is. He is a law unto himself, and a scourge to those who would live in simple happiness."

"Perhaps," answered Sid. "But we don't admit that as yet. What you have said shows that Tarp, if anywhere, is our journey's end. That is all to the good. Our search is narrowed down to one small area, where we had thought to hunt throughout a world."

"But to enter Tarp uninvited is death," said Thensla.

"Lady, on Earth we play a game called 'Bluff.' Possibly Scund plays it also, but calls it the 'Game of Life,'" smiled Sid. He turned again to Uensl and straightaway decided to throw a card in the very game he had mentioned.

"Sir, by the way that we have come others can follow. Should we fail to return or fail in destroying this threat others assuredly will follow, with anger in their hearts." He paused significantly. Then: "Uensl of Apadocia, your people groan beneath tyranny. Your country lies beneath the paw of Tarp, your cleverest and best in the bondage of Scund. Sir, in helping us to kill whatever mad design Scund harbours against our world, in helping to curtail or smash his grandiose schemes, you assist your own people to freedom and yourself to real kingship."

Uensl's head flung sharply up, his eyes grew quick with purpose. For one tense moment he stared through Sid, viewing a vision of an Apadocia free and happy, without the black shadow of Scund to darken his every

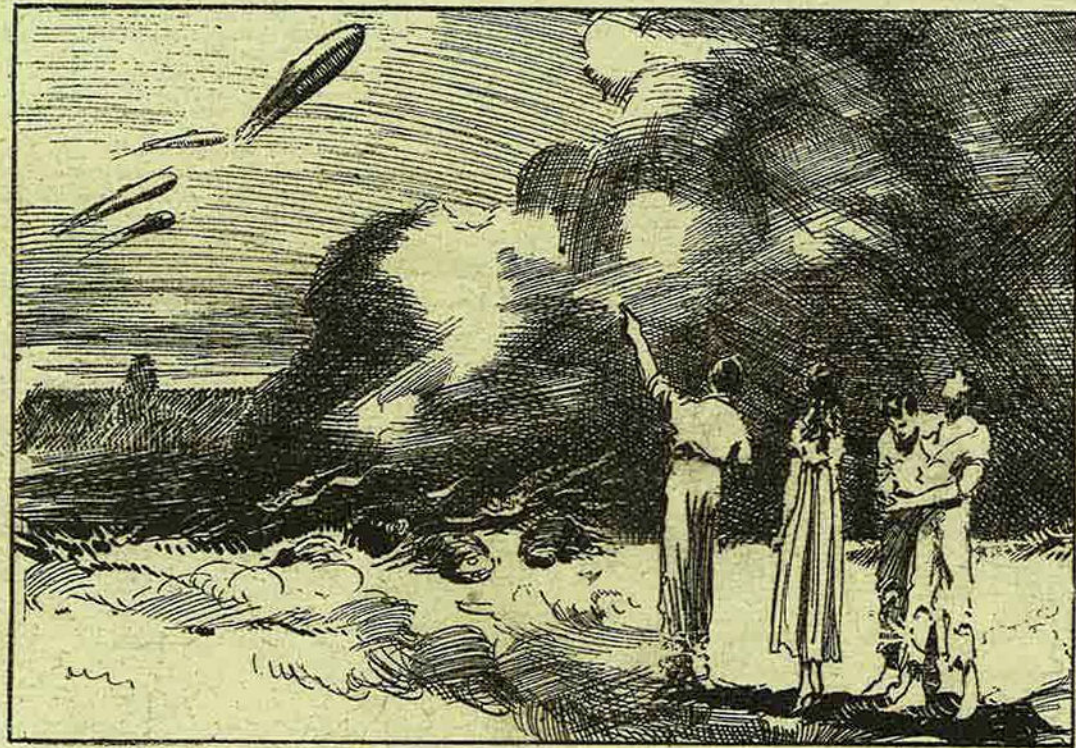
the disputants with impartial vehemence.

"My lord," she appealed, first to Uensl, "would you so belittle yourself as to strike the one who saved your daughter from worse than death?" Then, as Uensl's arm slowly lowered, she swung round on Sid. "And you, sir, question the honour of the most honourable of men. Know you that my sire's life has been one long martyrdom, that many times he has been within a span of flinging down defiance to Scund, only to remember that, living, he can do something to protect his people; but that, dead, he can do nought!"

With curling lip Thensla looked contemptuously at Sid from beneath her half-closed eyelids. Then her father placed his hand on her shoulder and moved her gently aside.

"For a time you angered me," said the king to Sid, "and almost I did that which would have branded me the coward you mentioned, in very truth." He looked steadily at each of the three youths in turn. "Travellers, you are young in years, but old in wisdom. You see your path stretching clear to your eyes, and you take it; you have a deed to do—you do it. But I, vacillating through the years, would balance in the scales of 'yes' and 'no' until the Great Judge himself calls me, with the question still unsettled."

"You have shown me the way. Doubt is ended. Henceforth honour



HELP AT HAND! Tired and depondent as they were, the three chums and Thensla uttered loud cries of admiration as a number of tiny air-vessels rose from behind the wall and swept in their direction!

Uensl brushed the hair impatiently from his forehead.

"But that is no answer to all you have told me. Yet how better can I explain than by telling you that Tarp is a city of dread, a closed and walled place where horrible things happen. In Tarp is concentrated the best of Apadocian brain power and craftsmanship. If a man or woman shows exceptional ability, then into Tarp they go, never to be seen again—for many enter, but none, save Scund and his officers, come hence."

"Then you think—"

"That there, if anywhere, is hidden your threat to Valda—or Urth, as you name it. Mere I cannot say, except that now and then a soul-shattering noise booms from Tarp, so terrible that all Nayt—its buildings and its people alike—tremble. That may well be your threat starting on its long voyage. It may be, voyager, but there are none outside Tarp who can prove it."

"And you have never been there?" asked Sid.

"Nor want to," answered Uensl grimly. "When Scund invites one into Tarp—well, one weeps, bids farewell to one's friends, and goes! Secretly the people brood and threaten, but none dare openly question the law of Scund the Eternal!"

"You have never defied him, then?"

"As well defy his Majesty the Sun," Uensl replied apathetically. "It seems, voyagers, you have journeyed on a useless errand."

thought. Then the fire died out of his eyes, and he sank despondently back in his chair.

"Voyagers, almost you had tempted me. But it is madness to seek the outwitting of Scund. No. As it has been so must it be for ever. Scund lives, and dies not. He is, and he is omnipotent!"

"But that is cowardly fatalism," protested Sid. He waited for Uensl to answer, but the king who was no king, sat moodily silent.

Then Sid, greatly daring, again spoke.

"Sir, you allow Scund to overawe you without, it seems to me, even challenging his misused power. In doing so, you fail in your duty to those who trust in you."

Uensl sprang to his feet, his jaw set, his face flushed dull red with fury. Two long, quick strides placed him directly facing Sid, his huge arm swept swiftly overhead, and his fist clenched as if he would strike the dauntless youth to the ground.

Ken and Tim, who had vainly sought to follow the quick interchange of words, were bewildered by Uensl's angry movements. But they understood enough to jump to Sid's side and to show the raging Venesian that he had not one, but three resolute youths to deal with.

In itself, that fact would have weighed little against Uensl's temper, but Thensla, equally quick to intervene, and understanding more than Sid's friends, sprang between that youth and her father, and castigated

lakes first place, and you and I, voyagers, work towards one end. That is—the end of Scund!"

"But remember, sir," said Thensla, "that Scund possesses potent powers, and that he gains his way by stealth. Defy him openly, and he crushes you. Like the Spays, he digs underground, and we, I think, must do the same."

Sid listened to Thensla's words with entire agreement. He only feared that Uensl would now fly from one extreme to the other, and play directly into Scund's hand.

"Lord of Apadocia, the Lady Thensla's words are pearls of wisdom. We have a plan to propose—one that will perhaps save you the necessity of clashing with Scund; or, at least, give you time to organise your resistance."

"Then state it," answered Uensl briefly.

And for several minutes Sid held the Venusians and his chums spell-bound by the daring of the scheme he proposed. Many times one or other of them protested against the risk of that which he suggested. But Sid, stubbornly purposeful, insisted on his way being tried before being condemned. And they finally agreed.

(How is Sid Kennedy going to discover Scund's secret? On no account must you miss next week's breathless instalment of this thumping fine yarn of modern adventure! Avoid disappointment by asking your news-agent to save a copy of the Boys' Friend for you!)

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

GOING ONE BETTER!

No exaggeration whatever! The new issue of the "Boys' Friend," now in your hands, is the biggest and brightest yet. It is our Great Sports Number. I want you to tell your pals about its all-round excellence. Pass this copy, when you have read the magnificent yarns, on to some chum who is not, as yet, a reader. You will turn him into an enthusiastic supporter. I am not afraid of any comparisons concerning this mammoth issue of the grand old paper which has kept the flag flying for so many years. It is splendidly representative of sport—and this is a week of great sporting events—while in fiction you have the best there is. I am careful to obtain the stories of writers who have fought their way to the tip-top of the profession.

TOPPING THE BILL!

Now, just a word about our gigantic programme for next week. It is prime! The "Boys' Friend" has thousands of calls upon it, and it has to lum along the track of progress, without any thought for calm moments of repose. That's neither here nor there, and does not matter in the least so long as the old "Green 'Un" has the most brilliant bill of fare.

"LOVELL'S WONDERFUL WHEEZE!"

That's Rookwood for next Monday. The yarn is a veritable scream! It is a wheeze, too! You know what Arthur Edward can do when he is on his mettle. Nothing to equal him! Next Monday he has a monster brain wave, as you will see. The Silverites have been keeping the pace fairly hot of late, but never aught like this, as Sir Walter Scott puts it.

THE SPORTING CHANCE!

Talking about top-notch tales, isn't it your considered opinion that as an author of sporting stories Walter Edwards is matchless. He has a style all his own. He calls a spade a spade, and his hefty hammer-blows come down crack on the nail each time. Next week's "W. E." yarn is of the Cup and Chelsea Villa. You will enjoy the story, and want to talk it over with the other fellow who has read it, too. It is a fair baffle, and the dexterous ingenuity of it gets hold of you. John Vaughan, the manager, takes a hand, and so does Hollo Dayton. We have heard before of cups that vanish—nothing specially new in that—but here we have a dazzling novelty. It is the treatment of the theme that captures one's imagination. You will say that it is refreshing. Walter Edwards dips his pen in bright magic when he gets going.

THE MOTOR CONQUEST OF THE SAHARA!

Nothing new under the sun, so they say, but it is quite a mistake. Next week's wonderful desert story—another of the splendid "Boys' Friend" 12,000-word completes—shows the contrary. In this yarn we read of the most romantic journey ever undertaken—a voyage across the wastes of the Central African desert in an entirely new type of motor-car, specially adapted for such a hazardous expedition. The car employed is a Citroen car, equipped with Kregresse-Hinstin track-laying attachment, and we get to know in this magnificent tale more about the mysteries of Africa than ever. And these mysteries are innumerable. So far civilisation has only run threads, as it were, across the Dark Continent. There are secrets yet, and the intrepid explorers of the coming splendid story show what can be achieved by modern science. Fiction travels very close to fact. Many of us read of the famous French expedition right through the Sahara solitudes. Well, the coming story is simply great! The plucky pioneers have a myriad perils to face in pursuit of a goal, and accomplish even more than they had set out to do, for, by a lucky chance, they find themselves in a position to rescue a man who has been left to perish in the wastes by a scoundrelly foe.

"THE PHANTOM PIRATE!"

Look out for another gripping instalment of this serial. It is packed with good things. I have been looking over some of the past successes of this author, and I am bound to say they one and all pale before this present achievement. "The Phantom Pirate!" is an eerie business enough to give one a fit of the creeps, while the adventure of it is immense.

ENTER SCUND!

Never did character in fiction have a more sensational entry! Everybody has been talking of Scund. He is Lord of Tarp. Lester Bidston's serial swooped away from the start. Speculation and expectation made things quiver with vague theories of the danger from the unknown. "Scund the Eternal!" is a story which has big claims. It tears aside the veil from the inscrutable. Now, next week Scund himself comes on the scene. Look out for him.

Your Editor.

A TIP-TOP STORY OF THE ROOKWOOD BOATRACE!



Rivals of the River!

By Owen Conquest.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

Knowles, the black sheep of the Sixth, attempts to win the Rookwood Boatrace for the Modern House by foul means, but his evil designs are thwarted by the Fistical Four!

The 1st Chapter. Rivals of the River.

"Pull, you beggars!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.
"Go it, Classicals!"
"Bravo!"
The towing-path swarmed with Rookwooders, both Classicals and Moderns. The Classicals were shouting at the top of their voices, as Bulkeley's crew shot by in their racing skiff.

"Classicals will win on Saturday!" said Jimmy Silver. "Just look at them, you chaps! They'll beat the Moderns hands down."
"Good old Bulkeley!"

It was the last practice before the Rookwood boatrace; and the Classical senior crew were in great form. Jimmy Silver & Co., being merely juniors, were not personally concerned in the great event. But, as Classicals, they took a deep interest in it. Any member of the Classical Fourth would have given a term's pocket-money to see Bulkeley's crew victorious when the race came off.

"We're going to win!" said Raby; the "we" referring to the Classical side of Rookwood generally.

"About a dozen lengths!" said Newcome. "Knowles won't be able to touch them."

"Not in his lifetime!" said Arthur Edward Lovell emphatically.
"Fathead!"

Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth put in that remark. Tommy Dodd, being a Modern, took quite a different view.

"My dear chap," said Lovell tolerantly, "you Moderns don't know anything about rowing—"

"Ass!"
"Best thing you can do," continued Lovell, "is to warn Knowles to keep off cigarettes till after the race—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Otherwise, you'll see him crack up!" grinned Lovell.

"You cheeky ass!" growled Tommy Dodd. "The Modern crew is going to walk away from Bulkeley's crowd on Saturday."

"Look at Knowles," murmured Mornington. "He doesn't look as if he thinks so."

The juniors glanced round. Cecil Knowles of the Modern Sixth was standing at a little distance, with his gaze fixed on the Classical boat. The Classical eight, pulling together in perfect time, were well worth watching, but Knowles' expression did not indicate that he found any pleasure in the sight.

His brow was dark, his thin lips tightly compressed, and his eyes had an angry gleam in them. Knowles was too busy with his own thoughts—not agreeable ones, evidently—to remember that he was not alone; and at that moment his looks betrayed his feelings very plainly.

The Classical juniors grinned. Knowles certainly did not look at that moment like a fellow who expected to win.

"Looks happy and confident—what?" chuckled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, Knowles!" called out Lovell. "A race isn't lost till it's won, you know."

Knowles of the Sixth gave a start, and spun round towards the juniors. His hard face crimsoned as he caught the grinning looks on all sides.

"What? What did you say, Lovell?" he exclaimed.

"I said buck up," said Lovell cheerfully. "You're not beaten yet. You won't be licked till Saturday, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Certainly a junior of the Fourth Form should not have addressed a prefect of the Sixth in that cheeky manner. Arthur Edward Lovell, in the exuberance of his spirits, was really allowing himself a little to much latitude. Knowles evidently thought so, for he made a furious stride towards Lovell, and caught him by the collar.

"Hallo! Leggo, will you!" roared Lovell.

Shake, shake, shake!

It was the turn of the Modern juniors to chuckle. Knowles of the Sixth shook Lovell a great deal like a terrier shaking a rat.

instead of shaking him, began to box Arthur Edward's ears right and left.

Lovell struggled furiously, punching recklessly at the prefect.

Jimmy Silver jumped up.

"Collar the cad!" he shouted.

"Down with him!" yelled Mornington.

There was a rush of the Classical juniors to Lovell's rescue. That the person of a prefect was sacred and not to be lightly touched by a junior was quite forgotten in the excitement of the moment. Cecil Knowles was collared on all sides and dragged away from Lovell, and in a moment he was sprawling on the towing-path.



HIS JUST DESERTS! Knowles gasped and spluttered as the thick green paint flooded his head and neck, and he struggled desperately in the hands of Jimmy Silver & Co.

But if Knowles was understudying the terrier, there was nothing of the rat about Arthur Edward Lovell. He struggled gamely.

"Let go, you Modern rotter!" he shouted.

"Knowles—" began Jimmy Silver.

Smack!

The back of Knowles' free hand caught Jimmy Silver across the mouth, and Jimmy sat down on the towing-path quite suddenly.

"Ow!" he stammered.

Lovell, with a savage wrench, tore himself free. He gave Knowles a shove that sent the Modern prefect staggering.

"Keep off, you rotter!" shouted Raby and Newcome together, as the Modern senior rushed at Lovell again.

But Knowles did not heed.

It was not only the chipping of the Classical juniors that had irritated him. It was the form shown by the Classical crew in the trial run, as all the fellows present knew perfectly well. Knowles was almost savagely keen on winning the rowing event, and the sight of Bulkeley's crew had roused all the bitterness in his bitter nature. It was a solace to him to take it out of Bulkeley's enthusiastic supporters in the Fourth Form.

He grasped Lovell again, and

That was too much for Tommy Dodd.

Tommy did not like Knowles personally, for the bully of the Sixth was not popular in his own House. But he was head of the Moderns and entitled to loyal support on that ground.

"Back up, Moderns!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

And Tommy rushed into the fray with a dozen Modern juniors. The Classicals met them more than halfway.

Bulkeley's eight, pulling down the river, vanished in the distance, quite unheeded now. There was a terrific scrap on the towing-path, Classicals and Moderns mixing up in a wild melee. Knowles of the Sixth, sprawling in the grass, was in the midst of the combat, which surged over him.

It was, indeed, rather unfortunate for Knowles that Tommy Dodd & Co. had rallied to his rescue in that prompt manner. They meant well, but the last state of Knowles was worse than his first.

He gasped and spluttered as he was trampled over by wildly excited juniors. He scrambled up, but a rush knocked him over again, and Tommy Dodd was hurled sprawling across him, and Cook and Doyle went across Tommy Dodd, and two or three Classicals were added to the heap.

"You fellows look pretty sick!" he remarked.

Groan!

"What did you expect?" said Tubby. "You can't wallop a prefect, you know. You were bound to catch it."

"Get out!" said Jimmy Silver faintly.

"Oh, buck up!" said Tubby encouragingly. "You're making a lot of fuss about a licking! Grin and bear it, you know."

Arthur Edward Lovell was not feeling in a mood for exertion, but he exerted himself to the extent of seizing a cushion and hurling it at the fat Classical in the doorway.

Crash!

Tubby Muffin went backwards into the passage, and landed there with a crash and a roar.

"Yaroooh!"

"Come back and have some more, you fat villain!" said Lovell in concentrated tones.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Under the pile Knowles squirmed and wriggled and spluttered.

"Go it, Classicals!"

"Buck up, Moderns!"

"Give 'em beans!"

"Back up!"

"Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

came in faint gurgling accents from the unhappy Knowles.

"Boys!"

It was Mr. Dalton's voice. The master of the Fourth hurried on the scene.

"Cave!"

"Look out!"

"Hook it!" gasped Lovell.

It was quite kaleidoscopic. As Mr. Dalton came hurrying along the towing-path the juniors scattered in every other direction. By the time Mr. Dalton arrived the stricken field was tenanted only by Knowles of the Sixth, who lay gasping, too winded to rise.

The Fourth Form master helped him to his feet, by what time the rival juniors of Rookwood vanished in all directions over the horizon.

The 2nd Chapter.

Lovell Butts In.

Jimmy Silver groaned.

Arthur Edward Lovell echoed his groan.

Raby mumbled. Newcome gasped. It was a scene of woe in the end study in the Fourth Form passage. The Fistical Four were suffering.

For quite a long time no sounds were heard in that celebrated study but groans and mumbles and gasps.

The chums of the Fourth rubbed their hands dolorously.

"He, he, he!"

Tubby Muffin looked into the study, and contributed a cachinnation to the chorus.

Tubby seemed amused.

"Ow, ow!" said Newcome.

"Ow! My hands!" moaned Raby.

Jimmy Silver grinned faintly.

"After all, it was worth it," he remarked.

"Was it?" groaned Lovell. "It doesn't seem to feel as if it was."

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy.

"Wow!"

"Knowles had the time of his life," said Jimmy Silver. "After all, we were bound to be licked for ragging a prefect. But Knowles had a really good ragging."

"Wow, wow!"

"Let's have tea," said Jimmy.

And he gave his suffering palms a final rub, and started getting tea. His chums more slowly followed his example.

The Fistical Four had been through it. Knowles' complaint to their Form master had been loud and long; and Mr. Dalton had administered what seemed to him an adequate punishment. To the Fistical Four it had seemed more than adequate.

Tea in the study revived them somewhat, and they began to recover their spirits. Lickings were not uncommon incidents in the career of the Fistical Four of Rookwood.

"I don't blame Dicky," said Lovell at last. "Dicky couldn't do anything else when Knowles yarned to him. Dicky's strong on discipline, and I don't blame him. But that cad Knowles—"

"That rotter Knowles—" said Raby.

"That beast Knowles—" said Newcome.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "After all, you did cheek him, Lovell."

Lovell snorted.

"Did he pitch into me for cheeking him, or because he could see that the Classical crew were in winning form?" he demanded.

"That's so," said Raby. "Knowles was as wild as a Hun about that. He could see that Bulkeley's crew will beat him on Saturday."

"The Moderns aren't a bad crew," remarked Jimmy Silver. "They've got some good rowing-men. But, swank apart, they're not up to Classical form."

"Nowhere near it," said Newcome. "And that's why Knowles tackled me," said Lovell savagely. "He wanted to take it out of somebody on the Classical side. He would punch Bulkeley if he dared."

"I suppose that's so," assented Jimmy Silver. "We may as well keep clear of Knowles till after the race."

"I'm not going to keep clear of him," said Lovell. "I'm going to make him sit up."

"Look here, old chap—"

"He's pitched it to Dicky Dalton that we ragged him, and got us licked," said Lovell. "Think I'm going to have my ears boxed by a Modern cad, and a licking from Dicky into the bargain. I'm going to rag Knowles."

"But—"

"Oh, rats! I tell you I'm going to rag him," said Lovell, evidently in one of his most obstinate moods. "Let him keep his paws for Modern cads; they may like having their ears boxed!"

"Old chap—" said Raby.

"They're holding a committee meeting in the Common-room in Manders' House after tea," said Lovell; "I had that from Towle. I'm going into Knowles' study while the dashed meeting is on, and when he gets back to his study he'll find a bit of a change there. I'm going to rag the place right and left."

"You'll be spotted," said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

"Rot!"

"You'll fall foul of Tommy Dodd and his gang, if you go over there at all," urged Raby.

"You fellows can ask the Modern cads to a boxing-match in the gym. They'll accept, and that will keep them off the grass."

"Yes; but—"

"I'm going!"

Arthur Edward Lovell spoke in a tone of finality. His chums knew that tone, and they ceased to argue. When Arthur Edward was in one of his mulish moods, as his chums termed them, he was not to be reasoned with, and they had to give him his head.

So all that the Co. could do was to take whatever measures were possible to make Lovell's raid as safe as they could.

After tea, the boxing challenge was issued to the Modern juniors, and accepted at once by Tommy Dodd & Co. Nearly all the Modern Fourth came over to the gym to see

the three Tommies matched against Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome. Arthur Edward Lovell strolled across the quad with a very careless air, and chose his moment for dodging into Mr. Manders' House.

His strategy was successful—so far. In the Sixth Form passage there was no one to be seen. Most of the Modern juniors were in the gym, and most of the seniors at the committee meeting in the Common-room. Cecil Knowles' study door was half-open, showing the room vacant.

Lovell dodged in, and closed the door quickly.

How long Knowles would be detained at the meeting he did not know, but he hoped that it would be long enough to allow him to rag the study thoroughly and efficaciously, and to get clear afterwards.

Alas for the strategic Lovell! He had barely had time to pour the ink into the clock when there were footsteps in the passage outside.

Lovell started, and put down the inky clock hurriedly. The footsteps were approaching Knowles' study, and he heard the voice of Cecil Knowles himself. He did not distinguish the words, but Knowles' rather strident tones were unmistakable.

Lovell stood for a moment in utter dismay.

He had not had time to carry out the ragging; only the parlous state of Knowles' clock was there as evidence of his intentions. To be caught at this stage of the proceedings was too cruel. His palms still tingled from his last licking. To bag another licking without having carried out the rag was really too rotten for words. Lovell glanced at the window, but there was no time to get it open. Acting rather upon instinct than thought, the Classical junior made a dive for the bed in the alcove. The Sixth Form studies at Rookwood were bed-rooms as well as studies, as the high and mighty Sixth did not sleep in dormitories like the smaller fry. Almost before he knew what he was doing, Arthur Edward Lovell had plunged out of sight under the bed.

A few seconds later the door opened. Lovell could only hope that Knowles had come back to his study for some temporary purpose and would go again. That hope was soon knocked on the head.

"Come in, Frampton." Frampton of the Sixth came in with Knowles, and the door closed again. Knowles came across the study to the fireplace.

Lovell suppressed a groan. He suppressed it very carefully, knowing only too well what to expect if the Modern senior found him hidden in the study. There was nothing for Lovell to do but to wait—and hope! But his spirits, lately so exuberant, sank down to zero.

The 3rd Chapter. Foul Play!

Knowles of the Sixth stood before the fire with his hands driven deep into his trousers-pockets, and a dark frown on his brow. Frampton sat on the edge of the study table, swinging his legs and regarding his chum curiously. There was silence in the study for several minutes—much to the hidden junior's surprise. He could see no reason why the two Modern Sixth-Formers should stare at one another without speaking, like a pair of boiled owls, in Lovell's opinion. It was Frampton who broke the silence at last.

"Well? You asked me to come here, Knowles. You said you had something to say."

"About the race on Saturday," said Knowles.

"Well?"

"I watched Bulkeley's lot at practice to-day," said Knowles. "They're in great form."

Frampton made a grimace. "I know! Topping form! Bulkeley drives his men a bit harder than you do, Knowles. He's a good skipper."

"Perhaps he's got better men," said Knowles sourly. "His men don't smoke cigarettes when they're in training for a rowing match."

Frampton had taken out a cigarette. He paused, and threw it into the fire.

"You're right!" he said. "It's throwing away our chances. But, dash it all, Knowles old man, you don't set us a very good example, you know!"

"Never mind that," said Knowles. "Look here, Frampton, I'm keen on this race. The Classics swank no end about getting the better of us in sportin' events—they claim to row better, and row better, and swim better, and play football better—"

"They do seem to bag things, somehow," said Frampton. "Still, I don't want to work under a dashed slave-driver, like Bulkeley's men. No need to break one's neck winnin' pots and things!"

"That's all very well; but we want to win this," said Knowles. "It's a big thing, and will set off a lot of lickings we've captured in other events. It's the same day as the Oxford and Cambridge Boatrace—and it's made nearly all Rookwood forget the University race. You won't hear a fellow speaking about Oxford or Cambridge; it's all about the Rookwood boatrace; the school's thinking of nothing else."

"I know that. But—"

"If we bag it, it means no end of kudos; it will shut the Classics up about their football wins, and it will be something for us to talk about if they get the better of us at the cricket and—"

"We all want to win," said Frampton, staring at Knowles. "You're preaching to the converted, old bean. But if you're so jolly keen you might have tried a bit harder earlier on to pull the crew together."

we going to let them walk over us all the time?"

"Not if we can help it. But—"

"We can help it!" said Knowles in a low voice.

Frampton started. There was something in Knowles' tone that startled him.

"Dash it all, what are you thinkin' of, Cecil?" he asked uneasily. Knowles set his lips.

"I'm goin' to pull it off, by hook or by crook!" he said in a low, concentrated voice. "As the matter stands, we're licked. It's partly our own fault—but it's too late to think of that. Bulkeley isn't goin' to crow over us at rowin' as at everything else so long as there's a shot in the locker. Are you game to help me dish them for the race?"

"But—but how? What—"

"I don't see why we should stand on ceremony with them," said Knowles. "We're up against Bulkeley and Neville and that lot all along the line. I've got a key to the boat-house."

"What's the good of that?" muttered Frampton. "It wouldn't occur to Bulkeley that anybody might tamper with his craft," said Knowles, with a curl of the lip. "He's too jolly unsuspecting for that. But such things have been done."

"Good heavens, Knowles! If it came out—"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Do you think I'd let it? They won't find anything wrong with the boat when they turn it out to-morrow. That will dawn on them half-through the race."

"It's bound to come out later that the boat's damaged."

"It's risky—"

"Rot!"

"Well, I'm your man! But—"

Frampton slipped from the table.

"Don't let's say any more; I've heard enough. If anybody should hear us—"

"Who could hear us in this study, you nervous ass?"

"Enough said, anyhow. It's a go!" said Frampton. "Let's get out. We don't want fellows to think we're confabbing together; there'll be talk enough after the boatrace—"

"It's all right," said Knowles. He followed Frampton from the study.

The room was left vacant—save for the Fourth-Former under the bed in the alcove.

Arthur Edward Lovell lay motionless there—silent, almost overcome with horror and dismay at what he had heard.

He had not had the remotest intention of playing the eavesdropper; but every word spoken in the study had been as audible to him as to Frampton and Knowles.

For some minutes after the two Modern seniors had gone, Lovell lay motionless in his hiding-place, his brain almost in a whirl. But he realised at last that now was his chance of escape, and he crawled out from under the bed.

It was deep dusk in the quadrangle. Lovell opened the window cautiously and dropped out. He did not care to take the risk of being seen to leave Knowles' study.

Two minutes later Arthur Edward Lovell dashed into the end study in the School House, pale and breathless. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were there, in excited

I'll make Knowles ashamed to show his face in the quad. I'll—"

"Keep your head, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You won't!"

"I will! I—"

Lovell spluttered. "I'm going to Bulkeley. I—"

"Easy does it. Listen to your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver coolly. "You won't, old chap. Bulkeley wouldn't believe you, and Knowles would deny every word. What proof have you got?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell. That was a new view to the rather headstrong Arthur Edward.

"Besides," said Jimmy, "we don't want a scandal in the school. Only those two cads are in this, the other Modern rowing men are all right. We don't want to disgrace a Rookwood House because of two sneaking rotters. The rest of Knowles' crew would lynch him if they knew he was plotting to win the boatrace by foul play."

"That's so," said Raby.

"But," spluttered Lovell—"but, you ass, Jimmy, are you going to let them beat Bulkeley by dirty tricks?"

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver politely. "This study can deal with them. If Knowles and Frampton can sneak down to the boathouse in the middle of the night, so can four other chaps—us, for instance."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"Knowles won't get at the Classical skiff, even if he has a key to the boat-house," said Jimmy Silver. "Leave it to your Uncle James."

"But—"

"Old man, your greatest fault is that you keep on butting like a billy-goat," said Jimmy Silver. "Not a word outside this study, I tell you."

"So long as we stop the rotters," said Lovell.

"That's the game."

And—in the deepest secrecy—the Fistical Four discussed the matter in the end study, and laid their plans. Over in Manders' House Knowles of the Sixth was feeling cheery and confident—so confident that his men, who had their own private doubts about the race, felt quite bucked and encouraged, little dreaming upon what grounds Knowles based his confidence of success.

But certainly Knowles would not have felt so confident had he known of the intentions of Uncle James of Rookwood and his faithful followers. Fortunately, Knowles did not know.

The 4th Chapter. Twice Beaten!

Midnight!

There was a glimmer of starlight on the river as it rippled and murmured past the Rookwood raft. Dark and silent, locked for the night, lay the boathouse. Not a glimmer of light shone from the boat-keeper's cottage near at hand. Two dark

forms came stealing down from the direction of the school as midnight sounded from the clock-tower of Rookwood. Both of them were muffled up in overcoats, with caps pulled down low over their brows. They lurked in the shadow of the boathouse, one of them trembling slightly, the other cool, determined, with a cynical grin on his thin, hard face.

"Safe as houses!" whispered the latter. "Keep your pecker up."

"I'm all right!" muttered Frampton sullenly.

"You've got the electric torch?"

"In my pocket."

"Good."

Knowles fumbled for the key and drew it out. He inserted it in the lock of the boathouse door.

Frampton stood close to him, casting fearful glances into the deep shadows. Certainly the coast seemed clear enough; but the less determined of the two plotters was tormented by a guilty conscience. As was said of old, "the thief doth fear each bush an officer!" Frampton caught Knowles' sleeve suddenly.

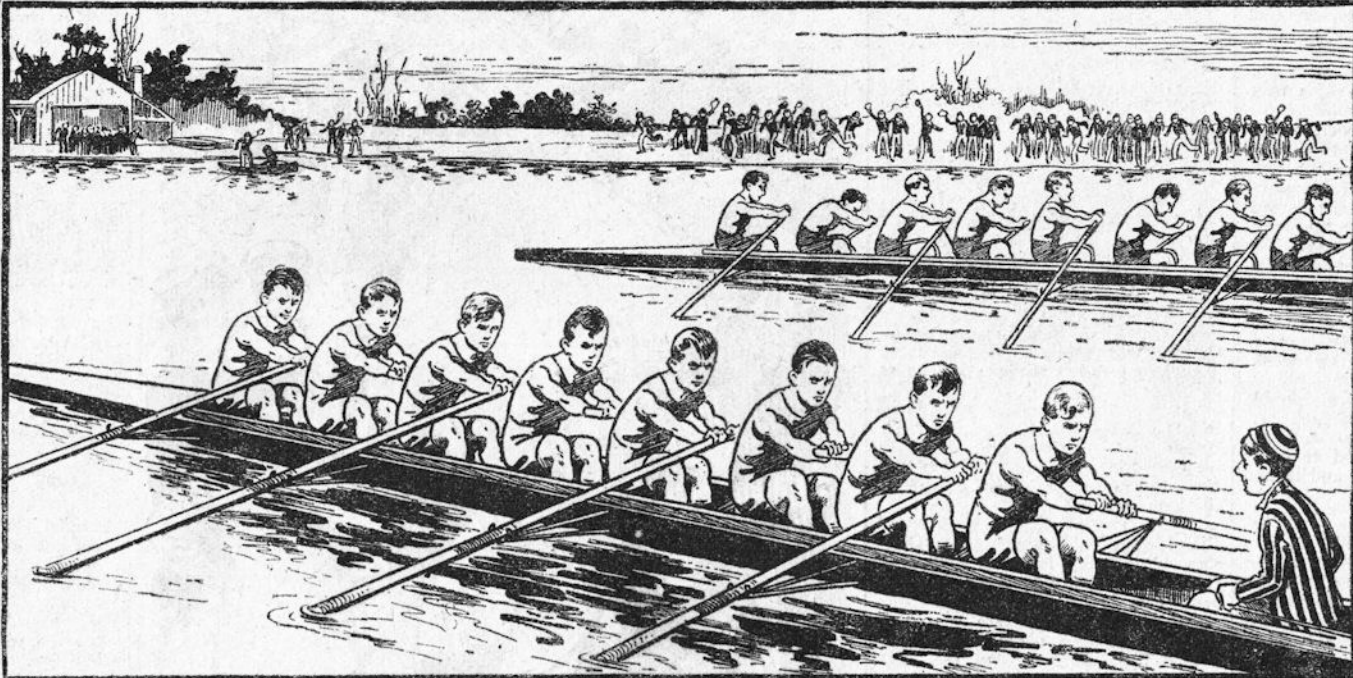
"Hold on!" he breathed. "I—I heard—"

"Nothing."

"I—I think I heard—"

"You coward!" hissed Knowles, startled himself by his comrade's fears. "Pull yourself together! We—"

(Continued on page 502.)



A CLASSICAL WIN! The Classical skiff drew ahead—half a length—a whole length—two lengths—and then the Classical crowd on the towing-path went nearly insane. Caps were hurled in the air, fellows thumped one another on the back, and there was a mighty roar of "Good old Bulkeley! Bravo! Bravo!"

Knowles gave an angry shrug of the shoulders. He wanted to win—he was passionately set on winning—but he had not wanted to put in the steady, resolute work that was needed for a win. He longed to beat Bulkeley & Co., but he had been very unwilling to give up his little pleasures, such as cigarettes in the study and occasional late hours and little runs out of bounds, and slacking generally. Now he found himself, on the eve of the race, with a crew that was pretty good—but not a winning crew. Bitter regrets for his slackness did not help him.

"No good goin' into that!" snapped Knowles. "We could have done better; but with a set of slackers to drive—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" urged Frampton.

"Well, never mind that!" said Knowles more amicably. "The fact is we're up against it. I've timed the Classical crew, and at practice they've covered the distance with five minutes to spare over our best. And they weren't going all out to-day. The race is a goner, unless—"

"Don't see where the 'unless' comes in. You're not hoping that Bulkeley will fall downstairs and break his neck, I suppose?"

"No such luck!" said Knowles sourly. "I've been thinkin' it over, Frampton. If the Classics beat us this time we may as well shut up shop for good. They've won both the House matches and the swimming cup. Are

"Who's to hint that we know anything about it? Nobody knows I have a key to the boathouse; I'm not supposed to have one. Bulkeley has a key, as captain of the boats."

Frampton laughed slightly.

"Bulkeley couldn't be suspected of damagin' his own boat," he said.

"I don't care what they suspect—but they can't suspect us."

"I don't see how they could. But—but—"

"I've mapped it all out," said Knowles, almost in a whisper. "I've got a drill—"

"Knowles!"

"Nothin' will show—only when they're fairly goin' it will gradually begin to tell. Just about enough to give us a sportin' chance."

"I—I say, Knowles, it's an awfully rotten trick!" muttered Frampton, whose face had become quite pale.

"Does that mean that you funk it?" sneered Knowles.

"N-no! But I—I don't like the idea. I—I'll back you up if you're determined on it. I'd like to set those cads down, of course."

"I'm determined on it. I'd rather risk bein' sacked from Rookwood than let them pull it off!" said Knowles bitterly. "I want you to hold the light for me, that's all. We slip out at midnight and get down to the boathouse. The boat-keeper will be snoring in bed; not a soul will be awake anywhere. Easy as fallin' off a form! It won't take us a quarter of an hour."

discussion of the boxing-match with the Modern juniors, just ended. That discussion ceased suddenly as the chums of the Fourth caught sight of Lovell's face.

"What the thump!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Lovell sank into a chair.

"The rotters!" he gasped.

"What—"

"The scoundrels!"

"Who—which—"

"I'll stop them, though," gasped Lovell. "I know all about it. I'll jolly well give Bulkeley the tip!"

"What the merry dickens—"

"Drilling holes in the Classical boat!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Knowles—Frampton"—Lovell grew incoherent—"midnight—sneaks—rotters—midnight—Knowles—drilling holes—boathouse! Sneaks! Rotters! Cads! Foul play! Rotters—yarrrooooooh!" Lovell wound up, as Jimmy Silver caught him by the shoulder and shook him forcibly.

"Now explain what you're babbling about!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Leggo! I tell you I'll stop them and—"

"Explain, you ass!" howled Newcome.

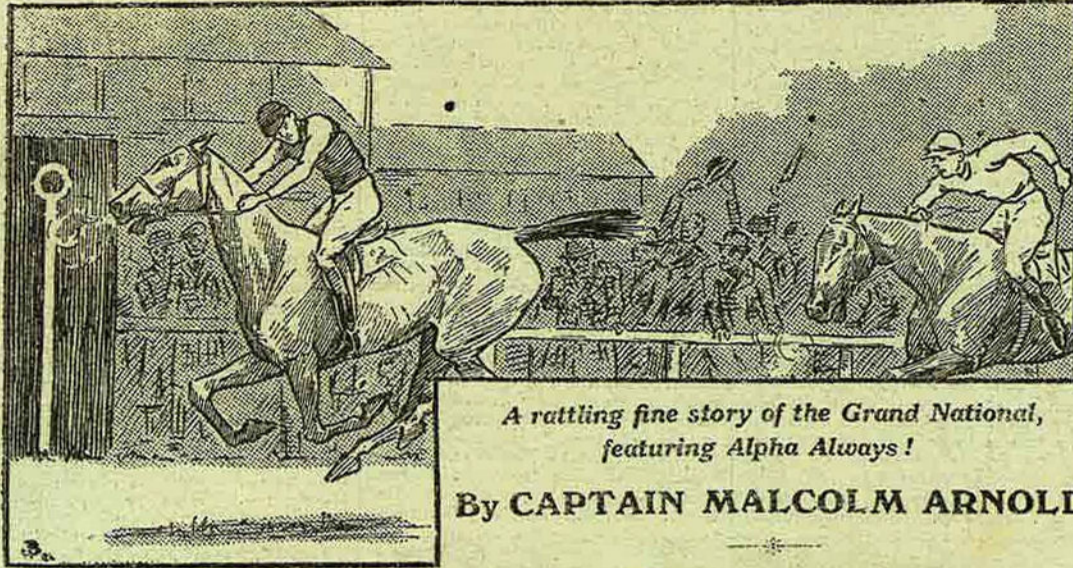
And Lovell, recalling himself at last, explained. The Co. listened in horrified amazement.

"The awful rotters!" gasped Raby.

"I'll show 'em up!" panted Lovell. "I'll make Rookwood ring with it!"

It's a winner!—"LOVELL'S WONDERFUL WHEEZE!"—next Monday's splendid story of the Chums of Rookwood School!

A RANK OUTSIDER!



A rattling fine story of the Grand National, featuring Alpha Always!

By CAPTAIN MALCOLM ARNOLD

The 1st Chapter.

The Outsider's Chance!

"Stop, sir, stop! You're too late! You're too late!"

The ticket-collector on the barrier made an effort to close the wicket-gate, but, with a leap, the tall, slender figure in the light check suit had dashed through, and, tightening his grip on his valise, began to sprint up the platform for all he was worth, darting in and out among the spectators who had gathered to watch the departure of the Fishguard express. For already the train had started, and it was moving slowly out of the great station.

"Hi! Stop there! Stop there!"

Vicious officials made attempts to interfere with that running figure. One porter tried to grab him by the arm, but an energetic elbow caught the man in the chest, sending him reeling against a truck, and, tearing along, the sprinter passed the guard's van and drew level with the first coach.

"Hi! Look out! Look out!"

A freckled-faced man, glancing out of the door of a first-class compartment, saw that swift-footed figure and, as it drew level with his door, he reached for the handle and swung it open.

By this time the train was half-way up the platform, and was gathering speed with every yard. The door clanged outwards, and a quick cast saw the valise land in the centre of the floor; then, just as another official made a wild grab at the youth, he leaped for the opening.

His hand closed on the handrail and he tried to step on the footboard; but he missed it by inches, and next moment he was being dragged onward, clinging with his hands on the rail.

From the platform a shout of apprehension went up as they saw the little, virile figure swept off its feet.

By this time guard and passengers were aware of what was happening, and from every window heads were thrust out, while stout after stout echoed down the length of the train. Next moment they saw the head and shoulders of the passenger appear in the open doorway.

He leaned down, gripped at the taut arm, and began to lift the hanging one up.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, the taut, clinging figure was drawn inward, until at last he was able to get his foot on the floor, and another heave saw him in the carriage.

"Phew! That was tough work, my friend!" the rescuer observed as he dropped back into his seat and mopped his brow.

The man he had rescued leaned out and, catching at the swinging door, banged it to; then thrust his head out through the aperture and made a gesture to the guard, who was glaring at him from the little window of the van.

"All right, guard!" he called.

He withdrew his head, tucked down his waistcoat and jacket, readjusted his tie; then, drawing out a handkerchief, proceeded to dust the grime from his well-washed trousers.

His hat had fallen on to the floor, and, as he was completing his toilet, his rescuer, with a grin, picked up the head covering and held it out.

"While you're about it you might as well give this a once-over," he observed dryly.

The slim youngster took his hat, then held out his hand.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," he remarked in a slow, level voice. "I really don't think I'd have been able to get in here if you hadn't come to the rescue."

There was absolutely no trace of excitement or emotion of any kind in that calm, assured figure, and the tanned man opposite him shook hands, then went off into a shout of laughter.

"Say, but you're the limit!" he remarked at last. "I've met some cool customers in my life, but you have the beating of them all. Don't you know you were within an inch of death just now, my friend? We were travelling at a good twenty-five miles an hour before I yanked you in here."

"I don't think I had an opportunity of studying the speed," came the quiet retort. "But I'll take your word for it. In any case, we certainly were travelling fast."

He seated himself in the corner opposite his rescuer and placed his valise on the hat-rack.

"They started the train five minutes before time," he remarked presently. "At least, I thought I'd five minutes to spare when I got to the station."

There was a rattle at the inner door, and the guard appeared in the corridor, swinging the barrier aside and coming into the compartment. His gaze fell first on the placid face of the youth on the left, and he came forward.

"Look here, sir, I shall have to take your name and address," he began in his official way. "You gave a fine exhibition there, I don't think! You might have broken your neck. Don't you know that you ain't allowed to board a train when it's moving?"

"The train had no right to be moving, guard," came the quiet reply. "You are not due out of London until twelve-five, and it's only twelve o'clock."

He showed the time on a small wristlet watch, and the guard snorted.

"You're quite wrong, sir. Twelve o'clock is our time, and always has been on every Fishguard express I've been on."

"Oh, what's that?"

The lean, clean-cut face widened for a moment.

"You say this is the Fishguard express?"

"Course it is!"

The youth shrugged his shoulders, turning a humorous face towards his rescuer.

"I have made a mistake," he drawled. "I want to go to Newbury to the race-meeting there."

The tanned listener went off into a gale of laughter, holding his broad sides.

"By gum, that beats the band!" he chuckled. "Nearly break your neck, then find yourself in the wrong train. Ho, ho, ho!"

Even the guard had to allow his official visage to relax slightly.

"The Newbury train starts from the right platform," he remarked. "You'd any amount of time to catch it. But you'll never get to Newbury to-day, sir. We go sham, straight through to Fishguard with only one stop."

The youth settled back in his corner and, drawing out a gold visiting card-case, selected one and handed it to the guard.

"I'd better pay you for my journey to Fishguard as well," he remarked. "Otherwise you'll be adding another charge of travelling without payment."

He drew out a pocket-book and the fare was duly handed over, then, mollified by the generous tip which he received, the guard thawed.

"Well, sir, under the circumstances, if I don't hear anything more about it from headquarters, we'll call it a do," he began. "I reckon you had pretty 'ard luck, taking it on the whole."

He left the compartment, and the broad-shouldered man opposite grinned to his fellow traveller.

"I've heard talk of cool Englishmen, but you're the coolest thing I've ever come across!" he remarked. "I just there isn't another passenger in the train but what's arguing and talking over this affair—and you seem to have forgotten it already!"

The youth was pulling contentedly at a cigarette, and a pair of very steady blue eyes were turned to the speaker.

"Oh, I'm thinking of it all right!" the calm voice said. "I meant to have had a day at Newbury, but it appears to me now that I shall be kicking my heels in Richmond Harbour for an hour or two."

"You're interested in racing, then?" the youth nodded.

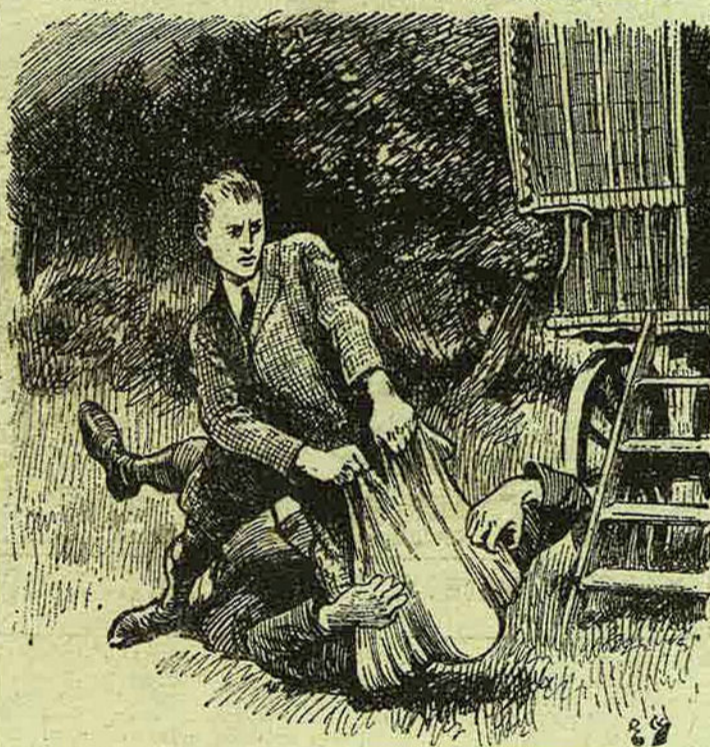
"There's nothing better in the world than seeing a good horse win a good race," he returned quietly; and his companion smiled.

"You've got the appearance of a man who knows how to handle a horse, too," he commented, eyeing the slim, lithe figure approvingly. "From the look of you, I reckon you could ride somewhere about ten stone two."

"That's quite right," came the reply. "I'm just exactly ten stone two."

The tanned man was silent for a moment, and a thoughtful frown appeared between his brows, then presently he laughed a trifle unsteadily.

"Well, as you're a lover of horseflesh and you like the game, maybe you'll feel sorry for me," he began, "for I own this year's Grand National winner. And I'll



THE CAPTURE OF BLACK DAN! Alpha Always leaped to the ground, and the next moment a potato sack fell over Black Dan Daly's head and shoulders; then, with a quick jerk, he was tripped up and rolled over on the ground.

never get the chance to run him on the big course at Aintree."

He slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out a card, handing it across to his vis-a-vis.

"I might as well introduce myself," he went on. "I don't suppose you've ever heard of me or the horse, but it will interest you."

The name on the card was studied for a moment, and the youth looked up.

"So you are Denis O'Darrell," he said. "I always wondered why your father allowed that American syndicate to buy King Doyle from him six years ago."

"King Doyle! And how the dickens do you know anything about that transaction?" Denis O'Darrell stared in amazement at the calm-featured youth.

"I know that King Doyle went to Kentucky, and over there swept everything in front of him for two years. King Doyle has left behind him a fine record and some excellent horses. But I always understood that there was no need for your father to sell the horse, and I can't understand why he did it."

A shadow crossed Denis O'Darrell's face.

"Who are you, might I ask?" he demanded in his quiet, Irish brogue.

"My name is Always—Alpha Always," came the quiet reply.

Denis shook his head.

"Never heard of you before," he admitted. "But you seem to know a great deal about the inner history of race-horses, for as far as I know there weren't half a dozen men knew what happened to King Doyle."

He took out a cigar and lighted it, puffing for a moment, his eyes fixed on the youthful face opposite.

"My father had to sell King Doyle," he returned at last. "He was in a corner—being blackmailed—and he had to take the option of selling his horse or having his stables burned to the ground."

The tanned face went hard for a moment.

"And it looks as though history's going to repeat itself," Denis O'Darrell said unsteadily. "I've Larryowell in my stables now, and he's a direct descendant of King Doyle. He's a four-year-old, and is just the finest jumper that ever cleared a stone dyke."

"Larryowell," said Alpha Always, screwing his eyes together. "Yes, he's a chestnut, rising five, entered for the Grand National, handicap weight ten stone seven pounds. Now I know why your name was familiar to me, Mr. O'Darrell. Larryowell has been training at the stables at Garlower, but the rumour in London is that it won't run in the big race."

The broad-shouldered man gave a sigh. "I came across to cancel it," he remarked. "I meant to withdraw the horse's name, but, Mr. Always, I didn't have the heart to do it, and I'm going back to have just one more try to give him the chance of running."

His big hands closed till the knuckles gleamed white under the healthy skin.

"The horse was never better, Mr. Always," he went on, with enthusiasm that told of complete trust and admiration. "He's a great, big, rangy steed, and a natural jumper, for he's got the stamina of a camel. I've rode him cross-country, backed him almost, and never once has he failed me. He's been the king of my stables for these last two years, and I've never been—never been allowed to race him!"

"Why not?"

"I've got enemies, Mr. Always, in my village," O'Darrell went on, "and they've set a mark against me. It's an old business, and we needn't go into it. It dates from the days of my father's time. He got mixed up in some way with a bad lot, and although he's dead, they still carry on their vendetta against me."

and would give anything to get him across to Aintree to figure in the race."

"I would, Mr. Always," came the quick reply. "But I daren't risk it. They are on the look-out for me. They watch day and night, and before I could get him into the horse-box they'd have got him. It's just a case of revenge, and I'm powerless."

"And what about your stables at Garlower?"

"They're mortgaged up to the hilt," Denis O'Darrell returned. "I'd be leaving them this year, anyhow."

He squared his broad shoulders.

"I'm bordering on the forties, Mr. Always," he said, "and I can tell you this much. All I possess in the world is a bare two hundred pounds. I've been training and owning horses all my life, and it will be a hard job for me to start afresh, but maybe I can get an opening somewhere in England as—a stable-hand."

There was a note of grim tragedy in the quiet voice, and Alpha leaned forward suddenly, placing his hand on the broad knee.

"You saved my life about a quarter of an hour ago, Mr. O'Darrell," he remarked. "That puts me in your debt. What you have told me just now has given me an opportunity of repaying it. I shall be very glad to come across with you to Ireland to see Larryowell, but you have got to make me one promise."

"What's that?"

"You do not scratch Larryowell from the National until I give you permission, is that a bargain?"

Denis O'Darrell studied the cool, calm, expressionless face for a moment, then he nodded his head.

"It's a bargain!" he said. "But, for the life of me, I don't see how you can help in any way."

The youth in front of him leaned back and pulled at his cigarette.

"And before we leave Fishguard, Mr. O'Darrell," he went on, "I want you to wire to your bookmaker and make a wager. I think you said you had two hundred pounds."

"That's all I own in the world, Mr. Always."

"Good! Then put it on your horse, for it's he's as good as you think he is, he shall have his chance at Aintree, or my name is not Alpha Always!"

The 2nd Chapter. Alpha Means Business!

The little village of Garlower lies some fifteen miles away from Rosstare, in the heart of the Wexford moors, and late in the afternoon Denis O'Darrell and his slim young companion climbed into the seat of a high dogcart, and, leaving the little railway-station, drove through the straggling streets of the old Irish village to turn up a narrow roadway that lay between the fields.

As they clattered past a red-roofed inn a burly, black-bearded man emerged into the porch and stared sullenly at the trap and its occupants.

O'Darrell gave no sign of recognition, but when he had passed the inn he touched his companion on the arm.

"That was Black Dan Daly," he said quietly, "and he's the man who's behind all my troubles. He owns two-thirds of the village, and he and my father were bitter enemies in the old days."

"And you've no chance of getting at him?" Alpha Always asked.

"Not a hope," said Denis. "He works underhand, and not one of his men would betray him. Two years ago I was forced to put three or four of my animals into auction. They fetched ruin prices, because Black Dan attended and prevented any decent bidding from being made. It's the same everywhere; I can't get any men to work for me, and I have to buy my fodder at top prices. He has ground me down, Mr. Always, and I shall be glad to leave my home."

The sturdy cob between the shafts carried the dogcart up on to the moors, and they followed the winding road until a red-roofed house, with a high wall around it, hove in sight.

Alpha Always caught the lines of loose-boxes and stables beyond the house, and, as they swung through the gateway, a groom came out to hold the cob while they dismounted.

"Everything all right, Jerry?"

"Yes, your honour; everything's fine, an' Larryowell's better than ever!" the groom returned, smiling all over his freckled face as he touched his cap to his master.

Alpha was led into the house, where a meal was ready, and Denis introduced the youngster to his wife, a sad-faced woman, whose manner showed obviously that she was ill-at-ease.

There were indications that straitened circumstances ruled in that quiet household. The meal was a very simple one, and the rooms were bare and shabby.

Denis apologised to his guest for the uncomfortable bed-room he was led into.

"We're down to the last link, you see, Mr. Always," the burly trainer admitted. "But we'll try to make you as comfortable as we can."

Before they turned in that night Alpha had been taken into the loose-box and introduced to the steeplechaser. Even under the yellow light of the lantern, the great chestnut looked its breed. Its magnificent chest, its powerful flanks, its long, rangy limbs and muscular quarters, indicated tremendous leaping power and extraordinary endurance.

Larryowell came forward, and thrust his soft muzzle into his master's chest.

"As gentle as a lamb," his owner said, patting the sleek head, "and yet as brave as a lion. You'll have the leg-up on him to-morrow morning, Mr. Always, and you can test him out then."

On leaving the range of loose-boxes Alpha Always was behind Denis O'Darrell, and he caught a movement

from the shadows on the left. A moment later a figure slid over the top of the wall and vanished.

"Who was that?" Always asked. Denis O'Darrell shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I've got used to it now, man!" he said. "It doesn't pay to inquire too deeply into these sort of things. I tell you I'm simply surrounded by spies day and night, and no doubt that was one of Black Dan's men. They'll be wondering why you're here, and, for your sake, you'd better be cautious."

He laughed quietly. "I've told 'em you're a gentleman jockey who has come across to spend a few days with me as a paying guest. It was the best tale I could think of, Mr. Always, and it will do as well as any other."

When they parted for the night, Denis O'Darrell held Alpha's hand for a moment.

"Remember, Mr. Always," he said, "I don't want to run you into any unnecessary risks, and if Black Dan Daly should think that you're here in connection with Larrowwell, it'd be better if you left as quickly as possible."

Alpha Always smiled. "That's rather like meeting trouble half-way, Mr. O'Darrell," he returned. "We'll wait and see what Mr. Daly thinks."

They parted then, and Alpha, undressing, slipped into bed and extinguished the light.

For a long while he lay in the darkness, then, unable to sleep, he rose and crossed to the old-fashioned window, drawing back the heavy curtains. It was a clear, moonlit night, and the windows of the bedroom looked out over the stable-yard, with the lines of loose-boxes.

The observer at the window could see the road running up to the moor, and presently his eye caught a faint beam of light shining on the right under a little clump of trees.

Finally the murmur of voices came to him, and, peering down at the high wall of the stables, he saw two figures emerge from the darkness and stand for a moment in the moonlit road. Always recognised one of them as being the thick-set figure of Black Dan. The other was a tall, thin individual, in close-fitting breeches and a thick coat.

They were too far away for Alpha to hear what was being said, but it seemed to him that the taller figure was listening very respectfully, and at last Daly, with a final nod of his head, turned and walked off to the left, while the taller figure remained behind in the roadway.

Finally it sauntered up to the gate, and peered through into the dark stable-yard; then, apparently satisfied, the man turned, thrust his hands into the capacious pockets of his heavy coat, and went off down the road.

Alpha watched the man until he turned off the road, heading for the direction of the trees, and, turning round, the observer sought his bed again.

With the first signs of dawn Alpha was awake. The clatter of a bucket drew him to the window again, and he saw the little wizened groom crossing the stable-yard towards the loose-boxes.

The glorious vista of moor and the cloudless sky tempted Always, and, after locating the bath-room and having a cold tub, he dressed himself, and found his way through the rambling old house to the back premises, out into the stable-yard.

Jerry was in Larrowwell's loose-box when the slim, well-knit figure in the close-fitting check suit appeared in the doorway, and the old groom touched his cap.

"Mornin', sir!" Jerry said.

"Good-morning, Jerry!" Alpha crossed to the horse, and watched while the creature slaked his thirst.

"Best bit of horseflesh in all Ireland, sir!" quoth Jerry, running his hand along the sleek neck. "I don't think you're very far wrong in that, Jerry!" Alpha agreed. "But, anyhow, help me to saddle him, and I'll give him a run."

"Mebbe the master wouldn't like it," Jerry protested.

Alpha laughed. "Oh, I don't think he'll complain, Jerry!" he said; and, taking the matter into his own hands, he led the tall, rangy chestnut out into the stable-yard, and commenced to remove the cloth.

Jerry produced a saddle and bridle, and the chaser was prepared. Then Alpha mounted.

The gate of the stables was a five-foot one, a hefty barrier. Larrowwell began to dance on his tiptoes, sidling across the yard, and feeling at his bit with quick, forward jerks of his long snake neck.

"All right, my beauty—all right!" Alpha Always patted the glossy flanks. Jerry turned to cross to the gates, but he was still half-way from the barrier when Alpha raised his shout.

"All right, Jerry: stand clear! He wants to go, and I'll let him!" The groom whipped round as the clatter of hoofs broke out.

At an end of his fidgets now, Larrowwell felt that quick touch of the spurless heels, and his long, glossy body stretched out in a quick rush, heading for the gate.

"In the name o' faith, what—what—"

Twenty yards from the gate Alpha steadied his mount, then, gathering the horse in for the leap, he sent Larrowwell straight for the barrier. The great chestnut rose like a bird, sweeping up

and over the locked gate, to come down neatly and cleanly on the hard road.

By the time Jerry had reached the barrier, the chestnut was pounding up the rise, tail flying, head high, a rioting creature, glorying in its own matchless strength.

"Did you ever see the like?" said Jerry to himself, staring first at the horse and his rider, then at the great gate. "Takin' it right up to it, too, warn from the stable! I've never heard tell of such a thing!"

At the head of the slope, Always checked the impetuous run, and turned on to the moor. Great clouds flew up from his powerful hoofs as Larrowwell sped on over the springy ground.

The clump of trees came into view, and Alpha saw a dingy caravan drawn up close beneath them. It was from there that the light had come on the previous evening.

As Larrowwell's hoofs beat the turf the door of the caravan opened, and a sleepy-looking man in his shirt-sleeves came out on to the short flight of steps.

Alpha recognised the figure in the tight-fitting breeches. The swartly, black-haired gypsy stared hard at the horse and rider as they surged past.

Three or four hundred yards farther on Always glanced back over his shoulder. He was just in time to see the gypsy emerge from the caravan again, and, leaping to the ground, the fellow made off at a sprint across the moors, heading for the main road to Garlower.

"You're a pal of Black Dan's all right," said Alpha to himself. "And you seem to be mighty interested in my movements."

Farther on at the end of the moors Alpha sent the chaser at a ditch and wall, and the way that Larrowwell cleared the obstacle indicated that Denis O'Darrell had not been over-prejudiced.

With the bridle over his arm, Alpha walked the chestnut quietly across the paddock, reaching a broken-down gate; then, when the horse was rested, he climbed into the saddle again and commenced to jog quietly back through the hedge-lined roadway, heading for the canal.

He had just negotiated a sharp bend when, from the hedge on the left, a couple of rough-garbed figures leaped out and held up their hands.

"Stop, you! Stop, you!" one of them called.

They were butty, tough-looking fellows, and they were carrying heavy cudgels.

Larrowwell pricked his ears and began to trot at the bit, but Alpha Always held him in hand and brought him to a halt a few paces away from the men standing in the road.

"What do you want, my friends?" his cool voice drawled.

There was a rustle from farther up the road, and another figure emerged, the stocky one of Black Dan. At the same moment Alpha heard footfalls behind him, and, looking round, saw yet another rough-garbed man slip out of the hedge on the left.

There was no sign of any emotion on Alpha Always' face, but he realised that he had walked into a trap, a trap of Black Dan's setting, and he waited now while the man came pacing down towards him.

The men with the cudgels fell back on either side of the hedge, keeping a sharp look-out on the horse and his rider. Black Dan halted in front of Larrowwell and made a mocking bow to Always.

"Good-morning, Mr. Always," he remarked. "I've been watching you. It was a fine exhibition of horsemanship you gave back along there in the pasture!"

"Glad you liked it, Mr. Daly," Alpha

"Mebbe you're thinkin' of buyin' him, Mr. Always?" he went on. "But if that's the case, let me tell you that Larrowwell is not for sale."

"I didn't know that Mr. O'Darrell wanted sell him. But if he did, I can't see how you could interfere in the matter!"

"Oh, can't you? Well, mebbe if you ask Mr. O'Darrell he'll be able to enlighten you," came the harsh reply.

And a snigger came from the burly ruffians lounging in the ditch.

Black Dan Daly came up until he was standing beside the saddle, and his heavy face was scowling as it was raised to look into the clean-cut, handsome one above.

"If you'll take my advice you'll go back to where you came from, Mr. Always," the thick voice rumbled. "You're not wanted here, and if you go pokin' about into other folks' affairs you'll find yourself in trouble."

He put out a podgy hand and placed it on the chestnut's flank.

"This horse doesn't leave Garlower until I say the word," he added, "and that won't be for a long while yet, if at all."

The sheer arrogance and calm self-confidence in the man's voice and manner began to have its effect on the listener.

"You seem to have very great powers in this district, according to your own opinion, Mr. Daly," Alpha Always said with steady quiet. "Have they appointed you president, or what?"

The dry intonation in his voice was not lost on Black Dan: a vein appeared in his temple, and he clenched his fists.

"You keep a civil tongue in your head, Mr. Stranger," he snapped. "I'm tellin' you fair and warnin' you—"

"Then you can save your breath, my good man," Always replied crisply. "I have no intention of listening to your

"Quick, quick! Get him! Get him!"

The loud, angry voice of Black Dan Daly rose in a howl of rage, and, leaping from the hedge, he began to run after the flying chaser, with the other three men pounding along behind him.

Alpha, smiling grimly to himself, was holding Larrowwell in as the great animal tore up the slope. Swiftly the cries of his pursuers died away, but he kept the horse on at a steady canter, and followed the winding road, until ahead of him he saw the canal and the bridge.

A shout from the right attracted his attention, and, looking over his shoulder, Alpha Always saw the dishevelled figure of Black Dan appear on the top of a stile.

It was only then that Alpha realised that he had taken a short cut over the fields, knowing that the road wound round in this direction, in order to reach the canal.

Black Dan was standing on the stile, waving his hands and bawling to someone whom Alpha could not see; but as Larrowwell trotted on down the road, and turned into the last stretch that led to the bridge, the meaning of Black Dan's signals became plain.

A lanky figure was sprinting down the canal bridge towards the bridge, and Alpha recognised the gypsy fellow of that morning's encounter.

"The bridge—the bridge! Open the bridge!"

Black Dan's harsh voice rose to a shriek, and a quick, cold thrill ran through Alpha Always as he realised what it meant.

The gypsy reached the iron wheel that controlled the bridge, knocked the block aside; then, gripping at the spokes of the wheel, the lithe, muscular fellow began to turn it.

Larrowwell was fifty yards away from the bridge when it first started to move. It began to tilt upward, leaving a gap on the far side.

A howl of triumph from the field on the right sounded, and Black Dan and his confederates swarmed over the stile and began to run towards the road, brandishing their cudgels.

It seemed as though Always had run into yet another trap, and Black Dan was muttering savage threats as he came sprinting over that broken ground.

But the clatter of iron hoofs sounded again, and down along the hedgerows came Larrowwell, moving like a streak of lightning.

"Look—look! They're goin' to try it! Look at him!"

One of the pursuers stopped short in amazement.

The lithe gypsy, standing at the wheel, saw that great chestnut streaking down towards the bridge, and, putting all his strength into the effort, the man began to turn the wheel faster and faster. Wider and wider sprang the gap between the far bank and the edge of the bridge; higher and higher rose the narrow wooden structure.

"Now, Larry! Now, old man!" Lying flat on the horse's back, Alpha Always set the great-hearted creature streaking across the last few yards, and drove it headlong on to the bridge, that was now at a dizzy angle.

Digging his heels into the heaving flanks, Alpha urged Larrowwell on to a final effort, and the great horse responded. The sinewy legs clattered up that crazy slant, and, gathering himself for the leap at the end of the bridge, Larrowwell shot into mid-air, forefeet forward, hind-legs wrapped up as a cat leaps from a roof.

There was a twenty-foot gap between the edge of the bridge and the solid bank of the lock. The chestnut flashed across the space, and landed easily and deftly on the other side.

The crash of a report sounded, and a shower of slugs and shot whizzed over Alpha Always' head.

Larrowwell went off like mad up the road, and Alpha, glancing over his shoulder, saw the gipsy in the act of shouldering a huge, bell-mouthed gun. The bronze face of the man was twisted into a look of absolute rage, and he had evidently fired at the plucky horse and rider in his blind fury at being beaten.

On the edge of the bank stood Black Dan and his three panting confederates, and the burly, thick-set leader shook his fist at the flying horseman as he tore on in the quiet moorland road.

Half an hour later Alpha Always was recounting his grim experience to a horrified host and hostess in the quiet breakfast-room of the trainer's quarters.

"It's just as I feared," Denis O'Darrell said. "They won't even stop at murder. You'll have to go, Mr. Always; your life's not safe if you stay here."

The grim-faced youngster nodded. "You're quite right, Mr. O'Darrell," he said. "I've got to go, and I'm going—but I'm taking someone with me when I go!"

He nodded towards his host. "I'll need your help, Mr. O'Darrell," he ended, "and I think you'll agree it's a great scheme!"

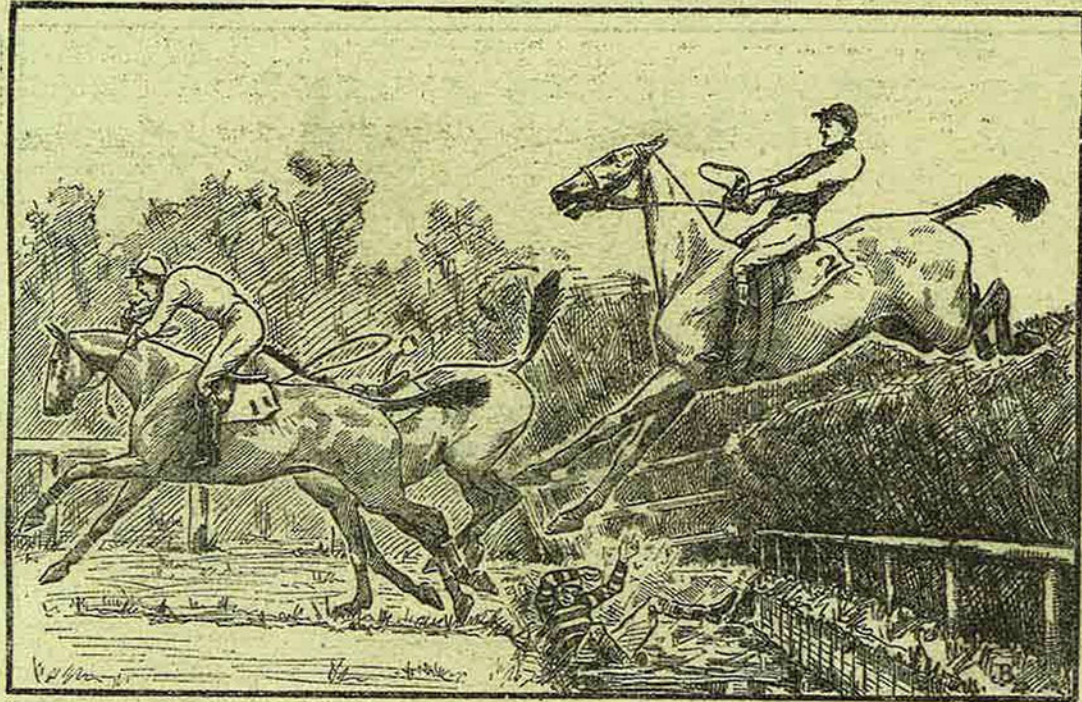
The 3rd Chapter. The Great Bluff!

The interfering Englishman had developed cold feet very speedily! Black Dan himself had seen the figure in the check suit enter the train at Garlower Station that afternoon at two o'clock, and had laughed over his triumph.

At dusk, as usual, Black Dan arranged for the watch to be kept over the trainer's house and stables, and later in the evening he met O'Darrell, riding quietly into the town.

Black Dan halted the trainer. "I hear you've lost your guest, Mr. O'Darrell," he drawled. "Mebbe he didn't like the atmosphere around Garlower."

These two ancient enemies eyed each other quietly, and O'Darrell nodded. (Continued overleaf.)



THE WATER JUMP! Norton lumbered into the leading horse, and its rider was thrown. Alpha Always, driving Larrowwell on at the jump, had a vision of the jockey sprawling in the muddy water!

Alpha pulled Larrowwell round into the road and drummed on down it. About half a mile farther on the roadway crossed a bridge that spanned a canal. It was a movable bridge of the old portcullis type, and Alpha saw that it was operated from the far side of the canal by a wheel and winch.

Beyond the canal was stretched a field and fallow with hedges and ditches and stone walls galore, and Alpha, swinging his mount through a broken-down gateway, sent Larrowwell off on a hard twain beat, taking every obstacle as it came. And ditch and hedge and wall were cleared turn by turn, daintily, dexterously, without loss of strength or stride.

A long paddock gave Alpha a chance to test Larrowwell's speed, and he sent the chestnut on with heels and hands. The great animal stretched himself out like a greyhound, and the thunder of his hoofs on the turf echoed and re-echoed across the silent valley.

At the far end of the pasture Alpha drew rein, and, slipping out of his saddle, he went up to the horse's head and patted the sleek muzzle. Larrowwell, less astride, head extended, sent feather after feather of hot steam from his great lungs into the crisp morning air.

There was a slight lather on him, but the breathing was steady and unbroken. "You've covered a good three miles, and I believe you could do twice as much," Alpha said to the beautiful beast. "By Jove, Larrowwell, you're going to get to Aintree and face the starter for the Grand National, or I'll eat my hat!"

At first it had been mere idleness for Denis O'Darrell that had made Alpha Always accompany him to Ireland; but now, after that proof of what the great chestnut could do Always found himself as keenly interested in the horse's fate as his owner.

By hook or by crook he would get Larrowwell through that watching cordon of enemies and give him his chance at the greatest steeplechase in the world.

returned in his cool, nonchalant voice. "But it wasn't so much the rider as the horse, you know."

Black Dan folded his arms and looked at Alpha from under his thick, black eyebrows.

"And what might bring you all the way from England to quiet Garlower?" he went on. "Surely it wasn't just for the sake of having a morning ride on Larrowwell?"

Alpha shrugged his shoulders.

"I might have come on a worse mission, Mr. Daly," he said. "He's a nice piece of horseflesh, and is worth coming a long way to see!"

The burly man in the road came a pace nearer.

warnings, and I never take any man's advice. I do just as I please, and if Mr. O'Darrell will let me take Larrowwell out of his stables, I will be very glad to do so."

"You'd be a dead man, before you'd come out a mile, you young fool!" Black Dan snarled.

Alpha gathered the bridle tighter into his hand.

"Oh, so you're a murderer as well as a bully? Well, you look the part!"

He gave a quick jerk to Larrowwell, and the horse reared slightly. Taken by surprise, Black Dan fell back a pace, and Alpha Always laughed.

"Apparently a bully—and a coward, too!" he called mockingly as he steadied his steed again.

A black cloud spread across Black Dan's heavy features, and, with an angry exclamation, he leapt forward, waving his hand to the men in the hedge.

"Quick, boys, give this impudent hound a lesson!" he snarled.

There was a shout, and the three watchers came headlong from the hedges, swirling their cudgels as they ran. Black Dan made a leap for Alpha, but, with a quick move of his foot, Alpha slipped out of the stirrup and his heel landed full on Black Dan's face. A swift outward thrust saw the burly ruffian roll over, sprawling into the ditch.

Next moment Alpha had recovered his stirrup again, and, digging his heels into Larrowwell's flanks, he sent the startled chestnut into the air with a quick, cat-like leap.

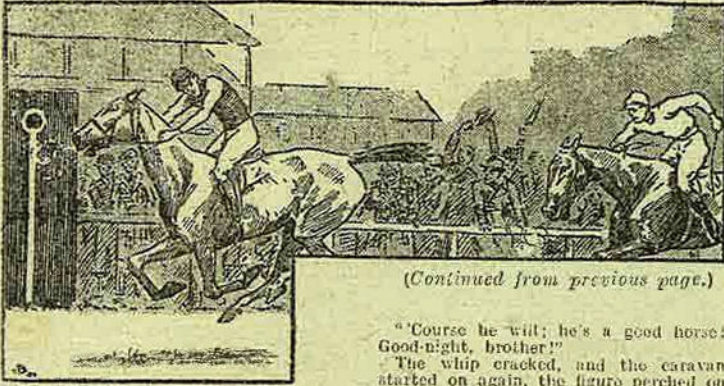
The man from the left had almost reached Larrowwell now, and, as the horse reared, he made a vicious blow with his cudgel, aiming at Alpha. But that sudden, deft swerve and the flashing hoof made the ruffian falter in his aim, and the heavy weapon just missed Alpha's shoulder by inches, coming down on Larrowwell's broad back.

There was a whinny and a shrill neigh, and the next moment the chestnut was off down the narrow road like a rocket.



ALPHA ALWAYS.

A RANK OUTSIDER!



(Continued from previous page.)

"Perhaps it was the people about here he didn't like," O'Darrell returned, "though I doubt very much if he's afraid of any of 'em, all the same."

The dogcart went on into the town, and Black Dan paced up the road. He reached the moors and struck across them, heading for the coppice of trees.

That lean, virile gipsy, Dave Rowell, had proved himself a remarkably faithful watchdog, and Black Dan was anxious to retain his services. The caravan under the trees made an ideal watch-tower, and no movement that took place in the training stables escaped the watchful, black eyes of his hired associate.

Black Dan had vowed that he would drive O'Darrell out of the country, a poorer and homeless, and he was now on the very brink of attaining his wishes.

O'Darrell's property was mortgaged up to the hilt, and Black Dan knew that the trainer and his wife were living from hand to mouth. Larryowell was all that was left to them, and to gain possession of that wonderful beast was Black Dan's ambition.

When the moment came he would buy Larryowell at his own price—a price that a bankrupt man would be glad to take.

The house and stables hove in view, and Black Dan, crossing the springy heather, saw the light bulk of the caravan under the shelter of trees. A faint, ruddy glow from the front of the caravan guided him, and he halted beside the fire, calling:

"Aro you there, Dave?"

There was no reply, and Black Dan, crossing to the little flight of steps that led up to the door, seated himself, producing his pipe and tobacco-pouch. It was obvious that Dave was out on some of his night-raiding efforts, and Black Dan Daly was quite content to wait until he returned.

Very leisurely Black Dan filled his pipe; then, after feeling about in his pocket for matches, he half rose and reached out towards the glowing fire.

As he did so the narrow door of the caravan behind him opened noiselessly, and a figure in close-fitting breeches appeared.

Daly, stooping, was a fair target. The man leaped to the ground, and next moment a great potato sack fell over Daly's head and shoulders; then, with a quick jerk, he was tripped up and rolled over on the ground.

He began to fight, trying to shake himself out of the smothering folds; but his captor clung to him like a leech, and they rolled under the caravan, locked in a fierce grip.

Daly's head came in contact with one of the wheels, and, half dazed, his stocky figure relaxed for a moment. Instantly a stout cord was wrapped round his shoulders and chest, and drawn tight there, pinning his arms helplessly; then his ankles were trussed up, and he was lifted like a sack, to be carried up one of the narrow bunks that creaked under his weight.

He tried to call, but the smothering folds of the sacking choked back his cries, and, after a mad effort to release himself from his bonds, the infuriated schemer dropped back into the bunk again, half mad with rage.

And presently other sounds came to him—the quiet tread of a horse's hoofs, the creak of harness, and the rattle of chains; then, a few moments later, the caravan moved off, tossing to and fro as it lurching along on its stout wheels.

One violent jerk sent Black Dan rolling over the edge of the bunk, to fall with a heavy thud on the boards of the floor, and he lay there, muttering fiercely in his canvas covering.

At last the rough jolting ceased when the caravan reached the main road, and lying prone on his back, Black Dan listened to the steady plod-plod of the horse's hoofs and the creak and fret of the caravan springs.

Like a flash the truth came to him at last. Gipsy Dave had double-crossed him, had made him a prisoner, and was bearing him away.

Again he made a mad effort to try and release himself from the bonds, but they only tightened over his thick wrists and ankles, and he dropped back inert and breathless.

A half-hour passed, then suddenly the caravan halted, and, through the muffling folds of the canvas sacking, Black Dan Daly heard a voice, a drawing, familiar voice. It was Andy Kildare, one of his associates.

"On the move, aro you, Dave?" it said.

"Yes; finished my job up there. Goin' along to Wexford now."

"An' do you think that old bag of ragsment'll take you to Wexford, Dave?"

"Course he will; he's a good horse! Good-night, brother!"

The whip cracked, and the caravan started on again, the figure perched on the little seat breaking into a loud, unmelodious whistling—a whistling that effectively prevented that smothered cry from coming to the ears of Black Dan Daly's confederate.

Dave had passed through the cordon, and had nothing more to fear now. Hot rage ran like livid fire through Black Dan's brain as he lay there, impotent and helpless.

On and on, over rough roads and smooth roads; on and on, through the long hours of the darkness that crazy caravan trundled steadily seaward.

Black Dan must have fallen into a broken sleep at last, for he was awakened by someone tugging at the sack, and he found himself seated on the edge of a spit of sand, with a cluster of boulders

the dangerous slopes, and he caught his breath sharply.

Only a madman would have attempted to drive the caravan down that ghastly track. Always caught the expression on the savage face, and nodded his head.

"I think you were asleep when we came down here," he remarked. "It's a good job for you that you were. I never thought old Larry would have done it!"

"Old Larry?"

Black Dan jerked himself to a sitting position, and his eye travelled again to the nag tethered to the wheel.

"Yes, Mr. Daly; that's Larryowell, although his own mother wouldn't know him now, would she?"

The little figure in the close-fitting breeches stretched himself out on the sand and laughed quietly.

"Gipsy Dave is in the hayloft and his own horse is in Larry's box," the calm voice explained. "I knew your men would be on the look-out, and I had to leave a horse in the loose-box, or they would have smelt a rat! Poor old Larryowell didn't like being turned into a piebald nag either, but we managed him all right, and even your own man was deceived when he stopped me on the moor road. Perhaps you heard him, Mr. Daly?"

A muttered exclamation was the only response, and a long silence fell—a silence which was broken at last by Alpha Always rising to his feet with a grunt of satisfaction.

From seaward there came the quick hoot of a tug, and, glancing into the bay, Black Dan saw a powerful paddle-boat coming steadily inshore. It was one of the Rosslare tugs, and an hour later it was anchored two hundred yards from the beach; then a huge barge, rowed by a dozen stalwart sailors, came seaward, to ground on the sand.

"Afraid you're too late for that now, Mr. Daly," he said. "O'Darrell and his wife have packed and cleared out. They left for Rosslare this morning with old Jerry and all their luggage. The bailiffs are in the training quarters, and from what I can see of it there they'll stay until doomsday, for O'Darrell's gone for good!"

The surly faced schemer shook his clenched fists above his head.

"I know where he's gone," he raved, "and I'm goin' to follow him. They got Larryowell away right under my very nose, but the Grand National's not run yet, and Black Dan may beat them even now!"

The 4th Chapter. A Great Victory!

The great day at Alutree! Stands and enclosures were packed with excited eightseers, and all around the course at every jump and ditch little knots of waiting figures assembled to witness the most punishing race of the year.

All day long streams of vehicles had been arriving, and charabancs, motor-cars, and buses jostled each other as they crept into their parks.

The paddock, alive with well-dressed men and women, was the centre of attraction, for already some of the splendid chasers were on view, although half an hour was to elapse before the great race was staged.

Pressing their way through the interested throng came two men, one of them a lean-faced, ferrety-looking individual, the other a short, thick-set figure in coarse tweeds.

The fatfaced man was moving slightly ahead of his companion, and he seemed to be in search of something, for he kept

out eagerly. "I've put my shirt on Larryowell, I tell you, dad!"

He lugged his arm under that of the jockey and they began to walk across the paddock together, the ferret-faced man pacing along on the other side of the victim.

It was Black Dan's cunning pretence of intense enthusiasm in the chances of Larryowell that deceived Fairway. They reached a line of motor-cars, and Daly led the way to a big limousine, opening the door.

"I won't ask you to drink, but I've a lunch-basket here, and maybe a sandwich or two wouldn't go wrong, eh?"

He drew a basket out from under the seat and opened the lid, displaying a tempting pile of sandwiches wrapped in a neat napkin.

Fairway hesitated, smiled good-humouredly, then, stepping on to the foot-board, he entered the limousine. As he did so Black Dan whipped a sandwich from behind him and aimed a vicious blow at the steeplechase jockey's head.

It caught Fairway full on the temple, and sent him sprawling on the heavily-padded seat opposite.

"Quick, in with you, quick!"

The foxy-faced man jumped into the limousine, closing the door, and hurried himself on the half-stunned lard.

Ten minutes later the limousine was backed out of the line, and driven by the ferret-faced rogue, swept through the gates into the road, turning away from the racecourse.

Black Dan, an unpleasant smile on his face, went back to the paddock and vanished in among the throng.

That dastardly enterprise of his had cost him two hundred pounds in the way of bribes; but he felt it was worth it.

Reaching the grand stand, the ferret-faced man found a good position and settled himself to wait for the race.

Alpha Always, chatting to Lord Emley, in the members' enclosure, felt his sleeve twitch, and, turning round, found himself looking into the anxious face of Jerry.

"Quick, Mr. Always, quick! The master wants to see you at once. It's all up with him—Larryowell won't run!"

With a word of apology to the old gentleman, Alpha wheeled and took Jerry by the arm.

"Larryowell won't run? What the deuce do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Jerry was hurrying him across the members' enclosure now, and he spoke into voluble speech.

"It's Fairway, Mr. Always," the old fellow stammered. "We can't find him nowhere. The master's been searching all round the place, but he can't be found, and the numbers will be up in a minute, and Larry hasn't anyone to ride him!"

"Quickening his pace, Alpha Always crossed the paddock and reached the line of loose-boxes, where he found Denis O'Darrell standing outside one, a look of blank dismay on his tanned, keen face.

Larryowell, ready saddled, with a groom at his head, was in front of his owner, and, as Alpha came to a halt Denis turned to him.

"You know I engaged Matt Fairway to ride Larry," he said. "Well, although he was here this morning, he hasn't turned up now, and I'm afraid it's finished. I can't get anyone to ride Larry now."

"But where is Fairway?"

"Goodness only knows! I spoke to him this morning, and he was all right, but he's vanished, and although I've searched everywhere, he can't be found. There's the kit over there in the stable, and—"

The clamour of a bell sounded from the paddock, and a rare scramble and bustle began. Gaily-clad figures appeared as they rose on to the saddles, and chaser after chaser, led by their grooms, commenced to stride across the paddock towards the entrance into the course.

"Done!" Denis O'Darrell moaned. "Absolutely done! The numbers are going up now."

With a quick leap Alpha reached the loose-box and began to divest himself of his immaculate garments.

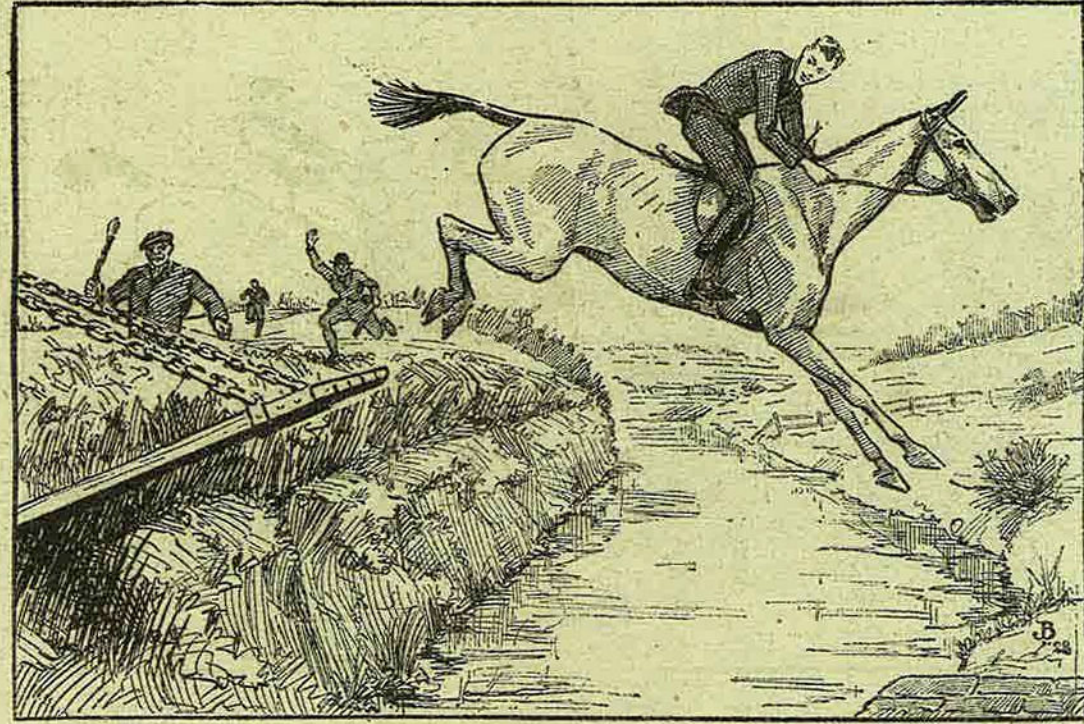
"By James, you're not going to be done, O'Darrell!" he called. "Send in my name—I'm privileged to ride as a jockey, and I'm going to ride Larryowell. Quick, man, look alive! Get permission to put me up. Sharp's the word!"

By the time that O'Darrell returned he found Alpha Always in the jockey suit awaiting him.

"It's all right," O'Darrell gasped. "The committee have permitted me to let you ride. Go on, old man—and good luck!"

So it came about that the throng gathered on the opposite side of the enclosure saw a great chestnut horse slip out of the entrance and go drumming down towards the start long after the rest of the competitors had filed past. And the great, raking stride of that superb animal, the poise of its head, and the effortless swing of its limbs made many heads go down to study the number and seek out the name on the programme:

"Larryowell, owned and trained by D. O'Darrell, Ireland. Jockey, M. Fairway."



ALPHA TAKES A RISK! Larryowell's sinewy legs clattered up the crazy slant, and, gathering himself for the leap at the end of the bridge, Alpha's mount shot into mid-air. The chestnut flashed across the twenty-foot gap and landed easily and dextrally on the solid bank of the lock.

round him, and in front a stretch of grey, morning sea.

The sack had been jerked from his bullet head, and he blinked for a moment; then, turning his red-rimmed eyes round, he caught sight of the lithe, brown-skinned figure of his captor.

"You skunk—you skunk, Dave Rowell! You—"

The clothes were Dave's, the figure was Dave's, but that keen, smiling face with the crop of crisp yellow curls had never belonged to Romany.

Alpha Always slipped his fingers under his belt, and dropped into a squatting position beside his captive.

"Dave was not guilty, Mr. Daly," the cool voice said. "At the present moment, unless someone has found him, he's lying in the hayloft above Larryowell's stall."

"You—you—"

Words failed Black Dan, and he stammered for a moment unintelligibly, his eyes rolling wildly around.

He saw that they were in a quiet cove on the coast, and ten yards away from them, on the verge of the sand, stood the battered gipsy caravan. Tethered to one of the wheels, munching contentedly at a feed-bag, was a begrimed, mottled nag, swathed in canvas sacking.

The head was rough and unkempt, and there was rind up to the forelocks, caking in the morning sun.

"By heavens, you'll pay for this!" said Black Dan Daly, finding his tongue again. "Don't think you can get away with it. They'll be searching for me!"

"I shouldn't wonder," Alpha Always returned quietly. "But you won't be easy to find, Mr. Daly. They'll search all the main roads first, of course, and they'll hardly think of looking in Valberry Cove for a caravan."

But before the barge had reached the beach, Alpha Always had hustled his prisoner into the caravan again, and had gagged him as he lay in the bunk.

"You wanted to get rid of me, Mr. Daly, and I'm going—but I'm taking Larryowell with me, just as I said I would!" was his parting remark as he closed the narrow door behind him and went down the steps.

By dint of much exertion, Black Dan Daly managed to raise himself so that he could see through the little window of the caravan, and he was a silent and helpless witness to the embarkation of Larryowell.

He saw Alpha Always strip the horse of its shabby covering, revealing the grotesque, piebald patches; watched the horse being led along the narrow plank into the barge; then the huge barge moved off to the waiting tug, and a slug was dropped for Larryowell. Finally the sleek horse was lifted on board.

A farewell hoot on the siren sounded, and the tug, with the barge in tow, steamed out of the lonely little bay, leaving Black Dan Daly to watch the trail of smoke until it had dispersed in the warm spring air.

Late in the afternoon a travelling tinker espied the derelict caravan, and came to the conclusion that it might be a suitable home. Daly was discovered and released, and he began his long trudge back to Garlowe again, reaching there in the small hours of the morning.

Then, and not until then, did he discover the fate of Gipsy Dave.

"Mr. O'Darrell had him locked up for stealing Larryowell," one of Black Dan's followers reported; "and he's in goal now, while that old nag of his is in the compound."

"I'll make O'Darrell swallow his words!" Black Dan said.

His informant shrugged his shoulders.

slipping from group to group as he reached the range of loose-boxes. At last he turned and gave a warning nod to the man behind him, then, hurrying forward, he halted beside a well-set-up individual who was seated on a form near to the high fence.

"Hallo, Matt, how are you, old chap?"

Matt Fairway looked up at the speaker for a moment, then shook his head.

"Sorry, old fellow, but I don't think I know you," the steeplechase jockey returned.

The ferret-eyed man laughed. "Well, that's a nice thing! Don't remember old Pritchard, eh? Why, I used to be with Mr. Walls when you were riding for him six years ago!"

A popular jockey makes many acquaintances, and it is not always advisable to deny knowledge of a stranger. Matt Fairway, a good-natured type of youth, grinned and held out his hand.

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Walls lately?" he asked.

"No, not a great deal. I've been in Ireland," the ferret-faced man returned. "Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Kelly!"

Black Dan Daly held out his huge fist and shook hands with the jockey.

"From Ireland, are you, Mr. Kelly?" Fairway remarked. "Then you ought to be interested in my mount to-day. I'm riding Larryowell for a compatriot of yours, Mr. O'Darrell."

He little dreamed that that information was already well known to the man who stood before him.

ANOTHER INTERESTING FOOTER CHAT!



The Semi-Finals.

The excitement over the Cup competition has now reached the intensive stage so far as the remaining clubs are concerned. It only seems yesterday that sixty-four football teams started on this season's competition brim full of hope. Well, already sixty out of the sixty-four have had their hopes dispelled for another season, leaving four to fight the Semi-Finals this week-end. I have heard it said more than once that the great beauty of the Cup competition is that every club which is among the sixty-four has hopes of winning the trophy. This may be a slight exaggeration, though it is quite certain that the real basis of the knock-out competition is the hope which springs eternal season after season.



JACK CARR (Middlesbrough).

A Thrilling Semi-Final.

But, though every one of the sixty-four clubs may not expect to win the trophy, we can rest assured that each of the last four, not only expects to win and hopes to win, but the players of each side are fully convinced of their ability to do so. Last season the semi-finalists were Tottenham Hotspur and Preston North End; Huddersfield Town and Notts County. Strangely enough, in the previous season the Spurs and the North End were also in the Semi-Final—played on the same ground at Sheffield—and the results of the two Semi-Final meetings were exactly reversed, the North End winning by two goals to one last year, while the Spurs triumphed by that margin the year before.

The Spurs v. North End Semi-Final of last season was one of the most amazing matches I have ever witnessed at this stage of the competition. In the first half the Tottenham men were much the better side, and at the interval they were leading by a goal to nothing. So completely had the Lancashire men been overplayed that it seemed there could be only one result to the game. But when the second half started there was demonstrated very fully the uncertainty of the game. North End came back from the dressing-room like giants refreshed; they threw their whole weight into attack, and before the Spurs' men were able to recover from a succession of terrific onslaughts the Preston forwards had scored two goals, which enabled them to win the match.

A Triumph of Tactics.

Really, the result was a triumph of tactics. These Preston men made up their minds in a quiet talk at half-time that it was neck or nothing for them. In throwing all their weight into the attack they ran a risk; but, being a goal behind, they had to do it. And, although the great effort which they made obviously took a great deal out of them, the fact that they were a goal to the good seemed to give the defenders the necessary inspiration.

Many Managers from Newcastle.

By the way, writing of the North End reminds me that they have recently been added to the number of clubs which have an ex-Newcastle United player as manager and coach. He is James Lawrence, who kept goal for the Novocastrians in the old days. Lawrence is a man who can think as well as act, and in his time has been chairman of the Football Players

Union. For a few months he was manager at South Shields, but the directors of that club decided that the absolute need for economy in these hard times compelled them to dispense with the services of the manager.

The number of Newcastle players who have received appointments in a managerial capacity is one of the most interesting side-lines of modern football. Peter McWilliam, at Tottenham; James Howie, at Huddersfield; Jobey, at Wolverhampton; Hewison, at Northampton; Gosnell, at Norwich; and, last but by no means least, William McCracken, the off-side king, who has gone to Hull.

These appointments are really very excellent compliments to the Newcastle club and the way the management there has brought up the players to think. It is understood that McCracken has signed a five years' agreement for Hull City, and if he merely manages, but does not play, this will mean that one of the most interesting personalities the game has ever known has passed from the arena.

Knew What He Wanted.

A Middlesbrough team in these days without two or three members of the Carr family in it would look very strange. There are four of the brothers already on the books, and a couple of others who are said to be coming along. At the moment, however, Jacky Carr, the outside-right, is the most famous member of this footballing family, and during the present season he has been singled out by the selectors of both the England International sides and the Football League eleven.

There is a good story told of the day when Jack Carr signed for Mid-



CHARLES HANDLEY (Tottenham Hotspur).

dlesbrough which shows that the lad has a will of his own. When interviewed by the directors of the Middlesbrough club, he was asked what wages he would require.

"Three pounds a week," came the reply.

The directors responded with an offer of two-pounds-ten-shillings. Whereupon the future England outside-right said:

"I won't take it. In fact, rather than accept that sum, I would go back to work at South Bank." And he started to walk out of the room.

He was called back, however, and given his three pounds a week.

A Tottenham Find.

There have not been a great number of stars unearthed during the present season; but Tottenham Hotspur think they have discovered a fine young inside-left in Charles Handley, who, like his partner, Dimmock, comes from the neighbouring suburb of Edmonton. Handley scored three goals in the First and Second Rounds of the Cup this season. He is small, but clever.



(Another splendid article next week.)

RESULT OF BURY COMPETITION.

In this competition two competitors sent in correct solutions of the pictures. The first prize of £5 has therefore been divided between:

SARAH COOPER, Ivy Cottage, Wordsley Green, Wordsley, near Stourbridge.

VIDA LOVE, 20, Enmore Green, Shaftesbury, Dorset.

The second prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following five

competitors whose solutions contained one error each:

Susanah Cooper, Ivy Cottage, Wordsley Green, Wordsley, near Stourbridge; William Downes, 45, Wordsley Green, Wordsley, near Stourbridge; Stanley Love, 20, Enmore Green, Shaftesbury, Dorset; A. Jones, Vine Cottage, Dudley Road, Ventnor; Frances Morton, 7, Eyre Street, Pallion, Sunderland.

The ten prizes of 5s. each have been added together and divided

among forty-five competitors whose solutions contained two errors each. The names and addresses of these prize-winners can be seen on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Bury has suffered much from lack of cash, and, considering the lengthy struggle it has had, has performed numerous remarkable feats. In 1902-5 Bury carried all before it. The forward line was fine, the combination was magnificent, and the club won every match, including the final!

Learn how to make or repair any article in the home

Without any study or training you can learn immediately to do no end of money-making, money-saving jobs around the home and the garden. Every spare minute you can turn to the best account and enjoy the skill and knowledge that will enable you to tackle almost any job you care to, and carry it out with success.

THE AMATEUR MECHANIC

Edited by Bernard E. Jones.

Will tell you and show you how

to do over four hundred jobs as good as a tradesman. No technical knowledge or previous experience required and there is no waiting to study or learn.

YOU CAN MAKE

A Pair of Riveted Boots. A Garden Path. Glues and Varnishes. Locked Doors Extra Secure. A Model Flying Machine. A Hot Water Towel Rail. A Gramophone. Perambulator Hood. Theatrical Scenery. A Mattress. Frames for Pictures. Furniture Revivers. Plaster Casts. Invisible Inks. Fine Fretwork. Line Blocks. Gramophone Cabinets. Dextrine Adhesives. Artistic Bedroom Fitments. A Clothes Post. A Pair of Hand-sewn Boots. Signs in Chipped Glass. Cements. Door Bolts, Hinges, etc. Acids for Etching Metals. Anti-Freezing Solution. A Self-Closing Door. Castings in Metal. Celluloid Varnish. Roller Blinds. Machines for Stoning Raisins. Bent Ironwork. Sundial Pedestal. Stencil Plates, etc., etc.

All these jobs you will be able to do with the skill and speed of an expert when you have "The Amateur Mechanic" to guide and correct you with its simply-worded instructions and its 6,000 wonderful photographic and other illustrations.

YOU CAN MEND

Leather Couches. Cane-seated Chairs. Old China. Chair Bottoms. Modern Watches. Old Clock Dials. Stepladders. Oilcloth. Hot Water Pipes. Windows and Doors. Picture Frames. Pianos. Knives and Forks. Plastering. Gas Fittings. Speaking Tubes. Cooking Ranges. Metal Vessels. Pocket and Pen Knives. Leather Bags. Grandfather Clocks. Defective Floorboards. Spectacles. Excessive Outflow at Taps. Dining Chairs. Mirrors, Mantelboards, etc. Violin Bows. Dutch and French Clocks. Floor Tiles. Typewriters. Iron and Brass Bedsteads. Cabinet Fittings. Linoleums and Matting. Oil Paintings. Venetian Blinds. Shelves and Rails. Hot Water Apparatus. Boots and Shoes, etc.

What others have done you can do

Mr. STANLEY, of Nottingham, writes: "I must say that I am thoroughly delighted with THE AMATEUR MECHANIC. I am very glad indeed that I answered the advertisement, as I feel amply repaid."

"I have not paid for a pair of boots mending since receiving your AMATEUR MECHANIC. I am not a practical man, but the simplicity of the diagrams and the clearness of the explanations can be read by the most amateurish of amateurs."—J. R. H., Birmingham.

Mr. A. HERBERT, of Forest Gate, writes: "THE AMATEUR MECHANIC is all you claim, and above my expectations. I regard the books as the best investment I have made this year, and I am very satisfied with them."

FREE

An illustrated booklet which shows you some of the pages from the work itself, with their wonderful illustrations. It is quite free and will be sent to you post free. Write your name and address on the coupon and post it to us to-day.

POST THIS TO-DAY!



NO MONEY REQUIRED

Simply Sign and Post this Free Coupon.

To the WAVERLEY BOOK CO., LTD. (B.F.G. Dept.),
96, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Please send me, without charge, your Free Illustrated Booklet, containing all particulars as to contents, authors, etc., of "THE AMATEUR MECHANIC"; also information as to your offer to send the Complete Work for a merely nominal first payment, the balance to be paid by a few small monthly payments, beginning thirty days after delivery of the Work.

NAME
(Send this Form or a Postcard.)

ADDRESS

B.F.G. 1022.....



Rivals of the River!

By Owen Conquest

(Continued from page 501.)

his head in the place of it, fairly bonneting him.

The key he had left in the lock was jerked out and flung into the river, splashing out into the middle of the stream.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, his assailants vanished. Knowles was left sprawling, and clutching frantically at the paint-can on his head, from which paint was still exuding in horrid streams.

He sat up, dazed, dizzy, smothered, blinking, the unhappiest plotter in the wide world.

Four shadowy forms vanished in the distance.

Not till they were close to the School House again did Jimmy Silver & Co. venture even to chortle. Then they chortled gleefully.

"Our win!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Knowles!" moaned Lovell. "How long will it take him to get that paint off his napper? I fancy he will be looking rather green to-morrow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy he will chuck it up now!" chuckled Baby.

"He's got to," grinned Jimmy. "I pitched his key into the river. He can't get into the boat-house now, unless he does it with an axe. But I fancy Knowles is thinking just now chiefly of a wash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Physical Four climbed over the leads to the box-room window—five minutes more, and they were back in bed in the Classical Fourth dormitory.

Meanwhile Cecil Knowles was busy. He was scraping off paint. He scraped and scraped till he felt that he could venture to get back to Rookwood without leaving a green trail behind him. Under the daubs of paint his face was white and furious when he crawled into his study again.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were foremost in the crowd the following day, prepared to make the welkin ring for a Classical victory. When the rival

boats took up their station, it was generally remarked that Knowles looked pale and worn, and far from being in great form. His adventures of the night had told upon him.

But there was bitter determination in his looks. His foul play had been defeated; but a faint hope still lingered of winning by fair play—his last resource. Bulkeley glanced at him with a nod and a smile, little dreaming of the narrow escape he had had from his rival's plotting, and quite unconscious of the debt he owed to the end study. Knowles replied to his smile with a black scowl.

"They're off!" roared Lovell at last.

"Put it on, Classics!"

"Play up, Moderns!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. led the rush along the towing-path after the racing skiffs. From the Rookwood raft to Coombe Bridge there was one continuous roar. Tommy Dodd & Co. yelled encouragement to the Modern crew, but their yells were almost drowned by the enthusiastic roar of the Classics.

The Classical boat led, but Knowles & Co., with a desperate spurt, passed them, and then the Moderns roared gleefully. But it was soon seen that Knowles & Co. had shot their bolt. The Classical skiff drew ahead again—half a length, a whole length, two lengths—and then the Classical crowd on the towing-path and the bridge went nearly insane. Caps were hurled in the air, with a reckless disregard to what became of them afterwards, fellows thumped one another on the back with mighty thumps, and there was a roar that might have made Stentor himself stop his ears.

"Classics win! Good old Bulkeley! Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!"

"Three lengths!" yelled Lovell.

"Hurrah!"

The Modern crew held on gamely, but the game was up. The Classical skiff shot away, and led by four lengths at the finish. The river rang with cheers for the winning crew. But in the privacy of their own quarters Jimmy Silver & Co., while giving Bulkeley's eight duo credit for their achievement, agreed nem. con. that the end study had done a very great deal towards winning the Rookwood boathouse.

THE END.

(See that you read "Lovell's Wonderful Where!"—next week's rollicking story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the popular chums of Rookwood. Order your BOYS' FRIEND in advance and seee disappointment!)



A RANK OUTSIDER!

By CAPTAIN MALCOLM ARNOLD.

(Continued from page 506.)

That first fence took its toll, as it always does, and Alpha, avoiding one swerving animal, drove Larrywell over the obstacle, landing side by side with a great bay horse ridden by one of the crack chasers of the day.

Only the perfect jumper, matchless in stride and endurance, can hope to finish that grim ordeal, and even then chance plays no small part in the game.

Alpha had steered Larrywell, for the impetuous chestnut, finding himself in that huge company, was inclined to race madly from jump to jump. But the steady hand of his rider, and the pressure of the knee guiding him, brought the fiery animal into control again and again, and at the end of the first time round Larry was pounding along five lengths behind three other horses, Old Tay Bridge, All Whites, and Norton.

Behind Larrywell was a long gap, for the rest had struggled off into that hopeless disorder that Grand National fields always reveal.

On and on, riding steadily, quietly, nursing the strength of his young mount, Alpha watched the riders ahead. He knew just what that magnificent jumper, Old Tay Bridge, was capable of, and the other two were also chasers of the top class, with skilled, careful riders to control them.

And so the sixty-to-one chance dreamed on gallantly, allowing yard after yard to creep between him and the leader.

At the ditch came the first signs of disaster. All White leaped a trifle short, and Norton, rising to follow, lumbered into the leading notes as it scrambled for foothold.

Norton's rider was thrown, and Alpha, driving Larry on at the jump, had a vision of the jockey sprawling in the muddy water. All White was pounding on ahead, but Larrywell had crept up a bit now, and with Old Tay Bridge leading, the trio streaked on round the sharp bend and swept up the slope to the next leap.

The little knot gathered to watch the jump, raised a cheer as the great animal took off, rising almost side by side; then again horsemanship came into play, for Old Tay Bridge's rider managed to steal a good three yards in that next spurt.

Once again Larrywell shook his head as though to follow, but Alpha steaded him.

They were pounding on now down the last stretch, with one final obstacle, then the long run in to the post.

Old Tay Bridge, sure-footed, steady, rose to the barrier, cleared it cleanly, then All White and Larry breasted the leap together. Always heard the crackling of brushwood, and flung a glance over his shoulder.

All White had leaped short, and was struggling through the thick bushes, his rider urging him on.

The vision slipped behind, and Alpha, gathering Larrywell together, began to race after the leader. Old Tay Bridge was a good five lengths ahead when that wild, mad scramble for home began, and the veteran did his best. But that fierce, young chestnut was not to be denied, and so, foot by foot, yard by yard, length by length, the long, lean head drew nearer and nearer, until at last the red nostrils were level with the flanks, the saddle; then, with Alpha high in the stirrups, swaying on each beautifully-timed thrust of that wonderful body, Larrywell swept on and on, the great clods flying from his hoofs, his red nostrils distended, the foam flicking from his mouth.

Like a streak of light the beautiful chestnut thundered past his rival and slammed home to a two-length victory, while the watching crowd yelled its approval again and again.

History had repeated itself once more. A Grand National had been won by a rank outsider.

The mysterious case of the abduction of Matt Fairway was never satisfactorily settled, but that jockey, who was found late in the afternoon, huddled up in a lonely part of the roadway, found no fault with the after arrangements that O'Darrell made with him, for he received his cheque, as well as a handsome bonus.

And that same night a little group of men dining together had to listen to a small speech by the tanned Irish trainer, a speech that referred to the quiet, slim, pale-faced youngster who set on his right.

"You gentlemen may say that that Larrywell won the Grand National at Aintree," Denis O'Darrell said; "but you are wrong! He won it between the shafts of a gipsy caravan over in Ireland—and his driver then was his rider to-day. The foal is to Alpha Alpha!"

THE END.

(You simply must read "The Adventures of the Sahara," next Monday's special 12,000-word story. Make sure of your BOYS' FRIEND by ordering it from your newsagent TO-DAY!)

Yours for 6d. only.

THE GREATEST BARGAIN

TERMS over put before the British Public by one of LONDON'S OLDEST ESTABLISHED MAIL ORDER HOUSES.

Free An absolutely FREE GIFT of a Solid Silver English Hall-marked Double Curb Albert, with Seal attached, given FREE with every Watch.

Specification: Gent's Full-size Keyless Lever Watch, improved action; fitted patent recoil click, preventing breakage of mainspring by over-winding.

10 YEARS' WARRANTY.

Sent on receipt of 8d. deposit; after approval, send 1/6 more. The balance may then be paid by 9 monthly payments of 2/- each. Cash refunded in full if dissatisfied. Send 6d. now to

J. A. DAVIS & Co.
(Dept. 87),
26 Denmark Hill, London, S.E.5

100 MODEL \$5.15 CASH

12 1/2 Months

is all you pay for our No. 800A "Mead" Marvel—the best cycle ever offered on such exceptionally easy terms. Brilliantly plated; safety enamelled, lined in two colours. Sent packed free, carriage paid.

15 DAYS' FREE TRIAL.

Fully warranted. Prompt delivery. Money refunded if dissatisfied. Old machines exchanged. Big bargains in slightly factory soiled mounts, tyres and accessories 25% below shop prices. Buy direct from the Factory and save pounds. Write TO-DAY for testimonials and illustrated art catalogue.

Mead Cycle Co. (Inc.) (Dep. B.635) Birmingham.

NERVOUS FEARS

How many people fear meeting others, travelling in Trains, Trams, Tubes, or Buses, mixing in Society, going into a Restaurant, or of having anything important to do? Such Nervous Fears are ruinous to any man or woman's chance of success in life. Become Nervous-Strong, Self-Confident, Bright, and Happy by sending immediately 3 penny stamps for particulars of the Monte-Nerve Strengthening Treatment GUARANTEED CURE OR MONEY REFUNDED.

GODFREY ELLIOTT SMITH, Ltd., 543, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C. 4.

RHEUMATISM CURED WITH TWO BOXES OF URACE.

112, Bon Accord St., Aberdeen.

"Dear Sirs,—Being unable to dance through Rheumatism in my feet, I tried Urace and it has worked wonders. I am as light on my feet as a fairy, and dancing as good as ever, everybody tells me. I bought one 1/2 box and one 1/4 box, and all I can say is, Urace for the Rheumatic Race is it."—Yours thankfully,

W. H. SMART, Comedian.

URACE, and URACE alone, can cure Rheumatism. It directly attacks the cause—uric acid—dissolves and expels it from the system, and prevents its reappearance. That is why it CURES and CURES QUICKLY. 1/3, 3/, and 5/- per box, from Boots, Timothy White & Co., Taylor's, and all Chemists and Stores, or direct from the URACE Laboratories, 102, Woburn House, Store St., London, W.O.1.

URACE TABLETS

1/3, 3/, & 5/- From Boots and all Chemists.

£2,000 Worth of Cheap Job Photographical Material. Cameras, etc. Send at once for CATALOGUE AND SAMPLES. FREE—HACKETT'S WORKS, JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL, E.

Our Reputation is in every piece

SHARP'S SUPER-KREEM TOFFEE

WIRELESS Make Your Own Set.

The mysteries of Wireless made clear WIRELESS FOR ALL - - 6d. and its sequel SIMPLIFIED WIRELESS - 1/- At all booksellers or 1/9 post free from RADIO 3, Devereux Buildings, W.C. 2, PRESS.

DON'T BE BULLIED!—Learn the Wonderful Self-Defence without Weapons. For small boys and men (also women). Send NOW Four Penny Stamps for Splendid ILLUSTRATED SAMPLE LESSONS, or 3/6 for Large Portion of Course.—DEPT. X, SCHOOL OF JIJITSU, 31, Golden Square, Regent Street, London, W.1. Personal Tuition also given.

100 AUSTRIA & HUNGARY STAMPS Free to applicants (or Blue Label approval) one 2d. post. Mention Gift 264. B. L. CORN, 10, Wave Crest, Whitstable.

STOP STAMMERING! Cure yourself as free.—FRANK B. HUGHES, 7, Southampton Row, London, W.C. 1

All you require—Boots, Suits, Costumes, Esquimaux, Overcoats, Accordions, Watches, Rings, Cutlery, Clocks, etc., from 4/- monthly. Catalogue free Home or Abroad from **MASTERS, LTD., 8, Hope Street, Exeter.**

CANADA Life on a Canadian farm is the life for a lad who loves the country.

Fair wages and good opportunities.

Apply—SUPERINTENDENT OF EMIGRATION, 1, Regent St., London, S.W. 1., or to any Canadian Government Emigration Agent, or licensed booking agent.

YOURS for 1/-

AN EXCEPTIONAL OPPORTUNITY

High-grade Registered Professional Italian Model Melodeons

Superb Solo Melodeon; hand some Polished Cabinet, with 12 Old Metal-bone Bellows; 16 Keys and 8 Bass Chords

This instrument is the acme of perfection in construction, and a magnificent example of carefully studied musical detail, unequalled for excellence of tone and power. 2/- deposit only is required, and we will dispatch this Superb Melodeon to your address. If entirely to your satisfaction, balance is payable 3/- within 7 days, and 4/- monthly until 35/- is paid—or complete balance within 7 days 30/-, making Cash Price 31/- only.

J. A. DAVIS & Co. (Dept. 88),
26, Penmark Hill, Camberwell, London, S.E. 5.

BLUSHING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, SHYNESS, TIMIDITY.

Simple 7-day Permanent Home Cure for either sex. No Auto-suggestion, drill, etc. Write at once, mentioning "B.F." and get full particulars quite FREE privately.

U.J.D., 12, All Saints Road St. Ann-on-Sea.

YOURS FOR 6d. ONLY

This handsome full-sized Gent's Lever Watch sent upon receipt of 6d. After approval send 1/- more, the balance is then payable by 6 monthly instalments of 2/- each.

Simpson's Ltd., (Dept. 123), 94, Queen's Road, Brighton, Sussex.

When Answering Advertisements Please Mention This Paper