



A FINE NEW FOOTBALL SERIAL,
By CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS RE-WRITTEN.

PAT CLARE, the skipper of the Blackdale School "footer" team, was in a quandary. An important match was coming off, and he wanted his cousin, Phil Nugent, to have a place in the eleven, not because he favoured him as a relation, but rather owing to the fact that he thought that he was a good player. The committee opposed Nugent most strongly, but at last Pat got his way. When he told Nugent, that worthy was not grateful. He was a lad who possessed a very bad temper, and it riled him very much to think that it was necessary for so much discussion to be gone through before he could be put into the team to fight the Ramblers. Phil's feelings towards his cousin were rather mixed, and this was only natural in view of the fact that Clare was the son of a very rich manufacturer; and Nugent was a dependant on his uncle, with very different prospects to that possessed by Clare. He was treated generously, and had nothing to complain of, but at the same time, the thought that he was a dependant on Clare's father was not at all palatable to him. Therefore, he was not overwhelmed with good feelings towards his cousin, although Pat was the best fellow in the world.

When the great match was played it ended in a draw, owing to the fact that Nugent incurred a penalty by fouling one of the opposing team in a most palpable manner, at a moment when he allowed his temper to get the better of him. At another time, instead of playing an unselfish passing game, he tried to shoot a goal himself, with the result that he missed, and threw away a splendid opportunity of the school team's scoring.

After the game was over, Pat spoke to Nugent about his bad play in the dressing-room. "You have dished us beautifully, Phil," he said bitterly. "I've warned you before about losing your temper—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Nugent savagely. "Of course, you want to throw the blame on me. Upon whom should it be thrown, then?" demanded Clare warmly. "You deliberately fouled that half, and the penalty kick was what did us. You threw away the game, and I'll take good care that you never have another chance to serve us like that."

"What do you mean?" said Nugent, drawing a sharp, hissing breath, while his eyes glittered under his dark brows. "I mean that so long as I am captain of Blackdale you shall never play for the school again," exclaimed Clare sharply, and he turned away.

The next moment he was reeling across the dressing-room. Nugent, beside himself with rage, had struck out savagely, full at the young captain's face, and the blow, taking him unprepared, sent him with a crash to the floor.

The upshot of it all was that a fight was waged between the two, the rest of the team seeing fair play. Pat won, giving his opponent a thorough licking, a licking which Nugent could not forgive. No sooner had the mill ended that Pat got a message from the doctor saying that he wanted to see him at once. Wondering what was the matter, Pat hastened to the presence of the great man, to find him very stern-looking.

He held a letter in his hand from Pat's father, which stated that owing to a sudden financial loss he would be obliged to remove Pat from the school.

and asking that his son might be allowed to come over and see him. Having informed Pat of the state of affairs, the doctor bade him cycle into the neighbouring town of Blackfield, and see what was really wrong.

When Pat arrived at his home, the servant conducted him to his father's presence, and there Pat had a great surprise. He hardly knew his father, so changed was he since he last saw him. His forehead was lined with care, and his whole face was pallid.

As soon as his eyes fell on Pat he stepped forward with the words:

"Pat, my boy, can you ever forgive me? I am ruined—ruined!" And breaking down altogether he sobbed like a little child.

Terrible Blow—Facing the World.

PAT'S eyes were fixed on his father in horror and dismay.

"Father—a beggar!" Daniel Clare covered his face with his hands.

"A beggar, Pat!" The boy sank into a chair.

The news seemed too terrible to be true, and yet a glance at his father's haggard face was enough to convince him that it was so.

But, like the brave and generous lad that he was, it was not of his own ruined prospects that he thought at that moment, but of his father's misery.

"Courage, father! Don't give way. I can't bear to see you like this," he said, with a catch in his voice. "We will face it together, dad!" Daniel Clare groaned aloud.

Reproaches upon the lips of his son would not have cut him more deeply than those words of deep and generous affection.

"I don't care for myself, Pat," he said, in a weak, broken voice. "I'm an old man, and it does not matter much for me. But you, my brave lad—you will lose everything; you will have to begin the world at the bottom of the ladder. I have thrown away your chances—I have ruined you!"

"Don't speak of that, dad," said Pat, in deep distress. "Tell me how it happened," he went on, hoping to draw his father's mind away from the self-reproach which, it was clear, tortured him more than all his losses.

Mr. Clare passed his hand over his brow. "It was Abel Darrell's doing!" he burst out, bitterly and passionately. "I was a trusting fool, and he has ruined me!"

Pat started. The name of Darrell called a face to his mental vision—a sweet, laughing, girlish face—the face of Madge Darrell, his playmate from childhood.

Her father was a manufacturer, of Blackfield, and had always been the friend of Mr. Clare, and the boy and girl had been great chums.

"Madge's father, dad!"

"He has ruined me," Mr. Clare went on, not heeding, probably not hearing, Pat's words. "It was through him that I came to invest in the Sonora Copper Mine, and when I was once involved he found it easy to lead me on, always ready with some specious explanation, and now—"

"I—I never heard anything of this before, dad," faltered Pat.

"I always hoped for the best. It always seemed that fortune was on the turn. Darrell always promised me better things. But the good time never came. Instead— You know what has happened. I have told you. It is all over now!"

"But—but why?" stammered Pat.

Why had Daniel Clare, the richest manufacturer in Blackfield, entered into that miserable speculation at all? That was what puzzled the lad. In broken, faltering tones his father told the wretched story—a tale of bad trade, financial losses, a once flourishing and substantial business gradually undermined, though still presenting a fair front to the world, finally of rash speculation, in the desperate hope of retrieving all previous losses by a great coup, and the inevitable result.

One name continually recurred in the wretched story, that of Abel Darrell. It was he who had been Daniel Clare's evil genius; he who had taken advantage of the manufacturer's credulity and failing judgment; he who had reaped most of the profit from his ruin. And at this Pat started again, and turned very white.

"But Mr. Darrell must be hard hit also, father."

Mr. Clare gave a dry, mirthless laugh. "He has taken care to secure himself; he will not suffer. It is only I and the other dupes who will suffer. He has feathered his nest!"

Pat was silent, utterly dismayed.

He recalled the thin, narrow face of Abel Darrell, the shifty grey eyes, the thin, hard lips. He had never liked the man, but he had respected him as his father's friend. Was Daniel Clare's suspicion well founded? Had Darrell deliberately plundered the man he had called his friend? Pat could not help thinking that it was possible.

But Madge's father! It seemed too terrible.

Mr. Clare had let his head sink upon his arms on the table. He seemed completely worn out. A feverish excitement had kept him up hitherto, but it was gone now, and the inevitable reaction followed.

There was a tense silence in the room. Pat's thoughts were deeply troubled. Whether Madge's father was really so guilty as Mr. Clare deemed him time would show. After all, that was not a very important question now. To a man hurled to the bottom of an abyss it matters little who hurled him there.

The situation had to be faced, but it was clear

that Mr. Clare had not the strength of mind to face it. Pat's heart was very heavy.

"Father!" The old man did not move.

Pat bent quickly towards him and touched him on the shoulder.

Mr. Clare raised his head. His face was quivering strangely, and his eyes had a dazed expression. He looked at Pat as if bewildered.

"You here, Pat? What— Ah, I remember! I sent for you," he said confusedly, pressing his hand to his brow.

"Dad, you're not well. Let me—"

"I remember now," his father went on, in the same strange tone. "There's something wrong. I wouldn't send for you before, Pat. I didn't want to spoil your game. I knew how your heart was set on beating the Ramblers."

The tears were running down the boy's cheeks. He rang the bell violently.

"James," he said rapidly, as the servant appeared, "my father is ill. Help me to get him to his room—quick!"

The manufacturer, who appeared now only half-conscious, went unresistingly to his room, and Pat sat with him there while James went post-haste for a doctor. Mr. Clare did not speak again; he lay breathing hard, his eyes wide open and staring at Pat, but evidently without recognising him.

Pat sat dumb, stricken with a misery that had never before come into his young life. The look upon his father's face terrified him. He felt that he was face to face with a loss compared with which the loss of fortune, the loss of worldly position, counted as nothing. What if his father were to die?

His heart was like ice at the thought. He could have cried aloud as it forced itself into his brain. He strove to drive it away, but it returned; it would not leave him. What if he were to lose his father?

"Oh, dad, dad," he groaned aloud, "I could bear everything—everything but that!"

Would the doctor never come?

It seemed an age to Pat, but it was really a very short space, before wheels were heard on the gravel, and the physician appeared. Dr. Manners shook hands with the boy, whom he had known from childhood. His face was grave as he turned to his patient.

He sent Pat downstairs. He did not seem to see the boy's pleading look. In the study below, Pat flung himself into a chair and waited.

He watched the clock. The ticking of it was the only sound in the silent room. The hand seemed to crawl round the dial, the minutes passed with leaden feet.

What if he were to lose his father?

How small, how trivial, everything else appeared beside that!

He sprang from the chair, and began to pace the room hurriedly, with irregular steps. His throat was strangely dry; his eyes seemed to be burning.

"Pat, my boy!"

He sprang to meet the doctor as he entered.

"Doctor," breathed Pat, "he will not—you do not think—"

"Courage, my boy! Your father will be seriously ill. I am going now to send him a nurse. But we shall pull him through. But you, Pat, must have courage; you must not give way, for your father's sake."

"I shall not give way," said Pat. "Oh, the poor old dad! It's because of me that he feels it so acutely. If I could only make him understand how little I care for it—for the money, I mean," he said, with a sob.

The doctor nodded. He understood the boy's feelings.

How he endured the misery of that night, and of the days that followed, Pat Clare hardly knew.

Hours of daylight and darkness, equally fraught with anxiety and suffering, slowly ticked away—slowly—slowly.

While Mr. Clare lay muttering and moaning in the grip of brain-fever, and the occupants of Holly Lodge moved about with light footfalls and hushed voices, Pat waited in racking anxiety to know the worst.

The boy hardly slept, hardly ate. The healthy cheeks became wan; the bright, merry eyes dull and haggard. Few would have recognised Pat Clare as the splendid footballer who had led Blackdale College against the Ramblers only a few days before.

At last the time came when he was to know the worst, and he listened dazedly to the words of Dr. Manners. Mr. Clare would live—and the boy gave a great sob of relief at that—but he must prepare himself for a shock, the doctor said pityingly. The boy did not speak; his dumb inquiry was more pathetic than words as he looked at the doctor. Mr. Clare lived, but the light of reason was gone. He might recover—he would recover, in time—but for the present Pat must prepare himself.

And then the brave lad's long-tried endurance gave way, and Dr. Manners caught him as he fell in a dead faint.

Mr. Darrell Makes an Offer to Pat.

PAT It was a clear, cold morning. Pat was walking in the grounds of Holly Lodge, his hands deep in his pockets, his eyes bent upon the path as his feet steadily crunched the gravel.

He started and looked up at the sound of his name.

"Madge!" he exclaimed, his face brightening at the sight of the girl.

"Oh, Pat, I'm so sorry!" she said softly, as she gave him her hand. "You know, I have been away from Blackfield, but as soon as I heard I came straight home."

"Thank you, Madge!" said Pat, feeling a lump in his throat. "I—I suppose you know all that has happened?"

"Yes, Pat; and I can't tell you how sorry I am, and how sorry papa is, too."

Pat's brow contracted a little.

The mention of Mr. Darrell brought back his father's words to his mind—words which had almost slipped his memory in the stress of the last few days.

"Papa wishes to see you," the girl went on, little dreaming of the thoughts that were in her companion's mind. "He has written to Philip at the school. Pat, I want you to drive over with me, and let papa have a talk with you. You must come, for I told him I would bring you with me."

Pat did not know how to refuse.

With his father's words ringing in his ears, he felt that he could not meet Abel Darrell without shrinking from him. How could he touch the hand that had dealt Daniel Clare this crushing blow?

His silence puzzled and pained the girl. Her clear eyes were looking at him with a glance he found it difficult to meet.

"Pat," she said, in a low, firm tone. "I don't understand you. Has anything occurred to make you doubt papa's friendship or mine?"

Pat writhed inwardly. It had been his first thought to hide the truth from Madge, and here he was betraying it already.

"What nonsense, Madge!" he said, as lightly as he could. "As if anything could make me doubt your friendship."

"Then you will come to Fern House with me?"

There was no help for it. Besides, Pat realised that sooner or later he must meet Mr. Darrell again. It was as well to get it over, much as he shrank from it. But as for accepting help from the man who had wronged his father, not even his regard for Madge could make him do that.

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Clare sent the ball in with a low, rapid shot that puzzled the goalie. The next moment he was bowled over by the Nomads' back.

FOOTBALL FORTUNE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

It was a short drive to Fern House. It was the first time Pat had passed the gates of Holly Lodge since he had been called home from Blackdale College, and the brisk morning air and Madge's companionship somewhat revived his drooping spirits.

Madge was glad to see the change in him, and to see something of his old self creeping back into his looks and tones.

But at Fern House depression seemed to settle upon Pat again, especially when he found himself alone with Mr. Darrell in his study. Mr. Darrell's greeting had been kind, and his manner unusually gentle. But Pat had never liked him, though for Madge's sake he had tried to. And now the thin, narrow face seemed to him more vulpine than ever, the grey eyes more shifty. Had that man wronged his father? He believed so, and it was hard—very hard—to conceal his thought.

To his amazement, as soon as they were alone Mr. Darrell referred to the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"I need not tell you, Pat," he said, "how sorry I am that this terrible affliction has overtaken my old friend. But the most painful part of the matter to me is, that it should have led Mr. Clare to look with distrust upon one who has always wished him well, and who has served him to the best of his ability."

"What poor Clare has told you I can guess from what he said to me in a last interview—words which I would never have forgiven, Pat, if what has happened since did not fully show that he was not accountable for what he said. Both of us invested deeply in the Sonora Copper Mine, but Mr. Clare plunged more deeply than I ever dreamed of doing. I believed it was a sound concern, but my natural caution prevented me from going in too deep. Clare, unfortunately, was not in a mood to be cautious. The result is, that while I have lost heavily by the smash, your father has been utterly ruined."

Mr. Darrell's manner was sincere, and Pat could not conceive any motive that the mill-owner could have for deceiving him. Why should the rich manufacturer take the trouble to mislead a penniless boy?

Pat could not wholly banish his distrust. But he felt that it was unfair to believe anyone guilty of base treachery, with no proof but some hasty words uttered by a man on the verge of brain fever.

In the boy's frank face his thoughts were very clearly shown, and Mr. Darrell had no difficulty in reading them. He smiled slightly as he continued:

"But I chiefly wanted to see you to talk about the future. What are you going to do? Mr. Clare will be a helpless invalid for many years to come, however much we may wish for a speedy recovery. He must be taken care of. Listen! I have influence which will obtain for him admission to a convalescent home on the South Coast, where he will have every attention and care, and where his chance of ultimate recovery will be greatly increased. Unless you have a better plan to propose, I shall see to the arrangements at once."

Poor Pat! He had no better plan to propose; he had no plan at all. He could only stammer out incoherent thanks.

"Very good. That may be considered settled then. Now about yourself. You have got to begin at the bottom of the ladder, but I can give you a lift. I shall be able to give you employment in my office up at the works, and though it will be nothing dazzling, it will be a beginning, and there is no reason why you should not rise, if you choose to be painstaking and reliable. You write a decent hand, and the rest you will soon pick up; and I can give you a pound a week to start with. You will be able to live on that, with the consciousness that you are earning your living. What do you say?"

What could Pat say?

He could only accept the offer and falter out his thanks, and ask Mr. Darrell's pardon for ever having distrusted him.

"That is all right," said the mill-owner. "As I have said, I do not blame you, and it is all over now. The same offer that I make to you I make to your cousin. You will start together in my office, and, I hope, will rise together. I shall keep an eye upon you both, and when you deserve promotion you will see that I shall not have forgotten you. There are plenty of good berths going for men who are worth their salt, but you must make a beginning. You will find this a good deal better, my boy, than leaving Blackfield, and venturing into unknown paths. Here, too, you will keep up with your old friends, and I hope soon to see you playing for Blackfield in the football field. And now I won't detain you any longer."

Mr. Darrell shook hands with Clare, and he took his leave. He met Madge in the garden. The girl was waiting to hear the result of the interview.

"I am going to enter Mr. Darrell's employment, Madge," said Clare.

"I am so glad," said the girl simply. "I was afraid you would leave Blackfield. You will be with us still. I am so glad."

Elmhurst Gives Clare Some of His Mind.

It was Philip Nugent's last day at Blackdale, and he looked round his study with a sad glance, his heart very heavy.

He, like Pat, had accepted Mr. Darrell's offer with gratitude. They were nothing else to be done. He had been entirely dependent upon Daniel Clare, and now, like his cousin, he was thrown upon his own resources. Life in the mill office at a pound a week seemed but a dreary prospect, compared with the career that would have been his had not fortune played him so scurvy a trick. And there was something like resentment in his heart towards the unhappy man whose rash speculations had ruined himself and others. Yet, to do him justice, he strove to drive away that feeling, remembering that in his early boyhood, when he had been left an orphan, it was only his uncle's kindness that stood between him and destitution.

He looked round the study, his eyes dwelling upon the old familiar objects he was not to see again. Henceforth his lines would be cast in less pleasant places. He had packed his box, and the trap would soon be ready to drive him over to Blackfield. His brow was clouded at the thought of leaving the old school.

Tap!

Pat Clare came into the study.

Since the Ramblers' match and the fight at the football-ground there had naturally been bad blood between the cousins, and Philip's look was rather grim as he fixed his eyes upon Pat.

Clare met his eyes frankly, and held out his hand.

"I've come over to take a last look at the school, Phil, and to say good-bye to the fellows," he said. "It's the last day at Blackdale for both of us. We are going to begin a new life to-morrow. We have had our rube here, but that is all over now. I want to bury any little differences we have had, and start fresh on a friendly footing, if you are willing. What do you say?"

Philip Nugent, with all his faults, was not proof against an appeal like this. He took Clare's hand, and gave him a warm grip.

"You're right, Clare. I'm more than willing. We'll leave our quarrels behind with our schooldays. We have got a rough time coming, and we may need to stand by one another. Now, sit down, and let's have a chat for the last time at Blackdale."

Clare's fine eyes glistened, and his whole face showed how pleased he was by his cousin's reception. He had had his doubts as he came to the study.

The cousins had a long talk in a strain of unaccustomed friendliness, until all too soon the time came to go.

Their friends had collected to see them off. Even Nugent's play in the Ramblers' match was forgotten now that he was leaving Blackdale, and every face was friendly.

"It's rotten for you to be leaving us like this, Pat!" said Lovell, as he gripped his chum's hand. "I don't know what we shall do without you, and the footer team will go to pieces."

"No, it won't, Arthur," said Clare, with a faint smile. "There are plenty here to take my place, and help to win football honours for the old school. Good-bye, old chap, for the last time!"

And the trap bowed away, and the boys of Blackdale sent a ringing cheer after the captain who had been popular there with all from the Sixth Form down to the youngest fag.

And the next day the new life began.

Pat began it with the determination to be cheerful and contented, and to win his way upward by hard and steady work. That was the right spirit in which to tackle his task, and he found it answer. It was not a pleasant change after the life at Blackdale, but Pat Clare was given to making the best of things. In honest work well done there is always a satisfaction for a healthy mind, and Pat found it so.

Holly Lodge had been sold, with the rest of Mr. Clare's property. All claims upon the ruined mill-owner had been met, but, as Mr. Darrell had foretold, there was absolutely nothing left. Pat had his clothes, his books, and a few boyish possessions, and a few pounds in the bank. For the bread he ate he was dependent upon his own exertions; and as he began to see more of the world, he became more sensible of the great help Mr. Darrell had been to him in giving him an opening inexperienced as he was. He was very grateful to the mill-owner, and as Pat did nothing by halves, by this time his doubt and distrust of Abel Darrell had quite faded away.

Pat knew a good deal of mill life, for he had sometimes been over his father's place in the days when Daniel Clare was the richest manufacturer in Blackfield. He soon became accustomed to the busy scenes, the busy voices, and the ceaseless whir of machinery. If he thought of the days when Blackfield had been no more to him than a sooty smudge on the horizon, and longed for the quiet close and the green playing-fields, he did not allow such thoughts and longings to make him discontented.

With his new associates he was soon on good terms, as he usually was with everybody—with one exception. That was Glyn Elmhurst, Mr. Darrell's confidential secretary.

Elmhurst seemed to take a dislike to Clare from the first day of his coming to the mills; and although he made no open show of hostility, Clare could not fail to be aware of the feelings with which the secretary regarded him.

He had never, to his knowledge, done anything to offend the man, and he wondered why Elmhurst should feel an apparently causeless antipathy. The explanation came suddenly one evening.

Work was finished at the mills, and the hundreds of hands, released from toil, were streaming out of the great gateway. Clare's work was done, and he had put on his hat, when he felt a tap on the arm, and turned to see Elmhurst.

The secretary was a somewhat slim but well-built man, with a black moustache, and black eyes that had a ratty gleam in them.

"I'm just going, Clare," he said, in an off-hand way. "Wait for me a minute or two, and I'll walk into Blackfield with you."

Clare wondered why Elmhurst should seek his company, but he nodded assent, and they left the works together.

They proceeded some little way in silence; and then Elmhurst, glancing at Clare out of the corner of his eye, said abruptly:

"You were at Fern House yesterday evening, Mr. Clare?"

"I was there," answered Pat, in astonishment, wondering what on earth that had to do with Mr. Darrell's secretary.

There was a significance in Mr. Elmhurst's look as he said this that made Clare colour with anger.

"I don't see how that can interest you, Mr. Elmhurst," he said coldly.

"But it does interest me," said the other, with a glitter in his eyes. "I am no fool, Patrick Clare! I can see what your little game is."

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you?" said Elmhurst, with a sneer. They had stopped, and were looking at each other. "Understand this, then—that I have but to say the word to have you thrown neck-and-crop out of the mills."

Clare flushed scarlet.

"You are insulting!" he exclaimed. "If that is all you have to say, we may as well part here."

"Let us part here by all means," said Elmhurst. "I have said all that I wanted to say, and you are a fool if you don't take warning! The heiress of Blackfield Mills is not for you, Pat Clare, and you may as well understand it first as last. A word to the wise is sufficient. Good-night!"

He strode away before Clare had a chance of replying.

Pat walked homeward swiftly, disturbed in his mind. The secretary's plain speaking had shown him two things—that Elmhurst believed he intended to take advantage of Madge's girlish affection for him to make a bid for the mill-owner's money, and that it was Elmhurst's intention to do that very thing himself.

"The cad!" muttered Pat wrathfully. "The rotten bounder!"

And he half regretted that he had not replied to the secretary's warning with a right-hand full upon the taunting, sneering mouth.

On the Football Field.

THE next day was Saturday. After the "hooter" had given the signal for knocking off, most of the hands hurried home for a "clean-up," and then streamed off towards the Blackfield Athletic Grounds, where the Blackfield Ramblers were to meet a visiting team in the afternoon. Some of the Ramblers were in Mr. Darrell's employ, and Pat Clare naturally gravitated to the football-ground as soon as he found himself at liberty.

A keen player himself, he liked to look on at a well-contested game, and he knew by old experience that the Ramblers were hot stuff.

The mere sight of the level stretch of green made Clare's eyes glisten. He longed to be in the old school colours, and fighting a stiff battle for Blackdale. He recalled the last match on the school ground, and his heart beat quicker at the recollection.

The talk of the people around him soon drew his attention. They were speaking of an accident that had just been rumoured through the crowd.

"It's Dixon, our inside-right," said a mill-hand whom Clare knew by sight, in answer to his inquiring look. "He's had a skid on his bike, and broke his collar-bone. He won't be able to play against the Nomads, for certain sure. It looks like a licking for us."

"But Oakley can play a reserve?"

"No one who's a patch on Dixon," the mill-hand replied, with a shake of his head. "You ought to have seen Dixon!"

"I have," said Clare, smiling. "I've played against him."

"Have you? Then you know what he's like! Hallo, what does that chap want? Why, he's calling to you, sir!"

"To me?" said Pat, in surprise.

A man was pushing his way towards them, and as he caught Pat's eyes, he called out:

"Will you come with me, sir? Mr. Oakley wants to speak to you!"

"Certainly!" said Clare.

And, willingly enough, he followed the man inside.

Oakley, the Rambler captain, who had led the town contingent against Blackdale College, came forward and shook hands with him.

The skipper's face wore a worried look, of which the information he had just received told Clare the cause.

"I spotted you in the crowd, Clare," said Oakley, in his hearty way, "and as soon as I saw you I said to myself that you were the chap to get us out of this beastly fix."

"What do you want me to do, Oakley?"

asked Pat, though he began to guess now what was coming.

"Our inside-right—Dixon—has skidded on his bike like a howling ass, and broken his beastly collar-bone," said Oakley. "Of course, it's rough on him, but it's rougher on us, for we are left without one of our strongest players, and we have to meet a very strong side. We have got to play somebody in his place. We had only one man who was anything like his form, and he, never thinking he would be wanted, has buzzed off like a giddy lunatic to watch a League match. But if you'll play for the Ramblers I shall be glad instead of sorry that he's gone."

"Play for the Ramblers?" repeated Pat, his eyes dancing.

"Yes; there's a good chap. I have seen you play, and I know your quality. I know what you are like on the footer-field from bitter experience," said Oakley, laughing. "We've got some things here that will fit you like the paper on the wall, and—"

"I'm a bit off my form—"

"Never mind. I know you. Will you play?"

"If you feel sure I should be useful to you, Oakley."

Oakley grinned.

"I've an idea that you will be more useful to us than any other chap on the field, not excepting myself," he said. "There's modesty for you! But it's a fact. After that you can't refuse!"

"All right!" laughed Pat. "I'm your man!"

"There's your dressing-room, then. Bundle into your rags," said Oakley. "The kick-off's at three!"

And in a very short space of time Pat Clare was arrayed in the colours of the Blackfield Ramblers, and a fine figure he looked as he rejoined Oakley.

The Rambler captain looked him over with an approving eye.

"You look as fit as a fiddle," he said. "I may tell you that we have got a stiff fight in front of us, and we shall have a tussle for it."

"Who are the visitors? I haven't heard."

"Barkley Nomads. They are a bit rough, but decent fellows in the main, and jolly good at footer. They licked us last time we met them, and we are all anxious to level up this time. When I found that Dixon couldn't play I felt like tearing my hair; but now we've got you, I reckon it will be all right."

"Spare my blushes!" laughed Pat. "I will do my best."

"That's all I ask. As a matter of fact, the Nomads are rather a big order for us. Belton, their captain, has been a professional, and he plays quite up to his old form. Hallo, it's time we showed up!"

The Nomads were already in the field, taking shots at goal with a practice-ball.

The Ramblers streamed in, Clare with them, his eyes sparkling, his face bright with the pleasure of once more finding himself in harness.

He ran his eye over the opposing team, and had to admit that Oakley was right in saying that they were a strong lot, and that Blackfield would have all its work cut out to win.

Belton, who had played in League matches, and who was now employed at the Barkley Ironworks, as were many of his men, was a fine athlete, with a somewhat bulldog-like expression. It was clear that he meant to win, and Clare guessed that if he found the game going against him he would not err on the side of gentleness.

The two captains tossed for choice of goals, and the visitors won. There was a brisk wind, which the home team had to face. They kicked off, and immediately the Nomads swooped on to the ball, and brought it into home territory.

The Nomads' attack was sharp and brisk, and they worked their way right up the field, in spite of a good defence by the Ramblers. Right up to the home goal came the rush of the visitors.

Before, however, the leather could be sent in, a home back trapped it, and sent it whizzing into midfield, and Pat, who was watching for his chance, was on it like a flash.

Pat was his old self now. The rush and excitement of the game were like wine to him. His cheeks flushed and his eyes gleamed. He played up bravely for the Ramblers, as in other days he had played up against them for his school.

He was on the ball and away with it like lightning and like lightning he raced through the Nomad halves. The backs rushed in to tackle him, while the whole field was sweeping in pursuit; but Pat did not lose his coolness and judgment for a moment.

He eluded the right-back, who slipped on the turf and went down, and then steadied himself to shoot.

The left back, seeing nothing else for it, was charging at him desperately. Clare knew what was coming, but he did not allow it to disturb him. He sent in the ball with a low, rapid shot that puzzled the goalie, and the next moment he was bowled over like a ninepin—but the ball was in the net. And there was a roar of cheering from the delighted onlookers.

"Goal!"

"Goal!"

Clare, unable to save himself, went rolling along the turf, while the joyous shout was ringing round the field. The charge of the Nomad had sent him flying.

(This magnificent new football story will be continued on Saturday next. You can still get the early parts of "The Book of Football" by ordering from your newsagent.)