

NEW STORY OF CALCROFT SCHOOL!

TWO LONG, COMPLETE STORIES!

The

Boys' Realm.



FULHAM'S FORWARDS SWARMED ROUND THE PROSTRATE GOALKEEPER; BUT HE MANAGED TO RISE, AND, SHOULDERING OFF HIS OPPONENTS, RAN ONWARD WITH THE BALL. INSTANTLY THE WHISTLE BLEW.

STORIES OF SPORT & ADVENTURE.

EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

BORROWED PLUMES.

(Continued from the previous page.)

"You ought not to call him a weedy bouncer," said Clara. "We have all misjudged him. You know the reputation of the Thrustles, and Mr. Snope has done wonders."

"I admit," said Arthur honestly, "I can't understand it; but there it is in black and white, and there's no getting away from that. Sorry I didn't get him into the Holmdale team now. We can do with a player like that."

And he congratulated George Henry heartily when he met him again. Mr. Snope received his congratulations meekly enough. He said that he knew he had been always misunderstood, but that he was glad the Holmdalers were now finding out his true quality.

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. He was more than ever mystified, but there seemed to be no doubting the truth of Mr. Snope's claims to be considered as a footballer.

And now came about the change George Henry had calculated upon. Clara Northcote felt that she had treated him harshly. She had always concealed her contempt for the weedy, lackadaisical fellow who affected to sneer at manlier men than himself, but she had always felt it. Now she felt that she had despised him unjustly. He had only been hiding his light under a bushel, and, put to the test, he had come out with real brilliance.

And so, by gracious kindness, she sought to make amends, raising all sorts of hopes in George Henry's heart, and all sorts of jealous fears in Arthur's. Mr. Snope felt that he was going ahead, that it was only a question of time before he completely cut out the captain of Holmdale Rovers.

He counted upon certain success now, and gleefully anticipated his victory. And Arthur made matters worse for himself by treating George Henry very off-handedly. The bumptious manners of Snope got on his nerves, he said; but Clara seemed to think that envy had something to do with it.

"You are coming down to the match?" Arthur asked, one Saturday afternoon a few weeks later, as he met Miss Northcote with George Henry.

The girl shook her head. "I was thinking of driving over to Carford, to see Mr. Snope play Lynford," she said. "You know, he is Carford captain now."

A look of sudden alarm came into Mr. Snope's face. Arthur was looking at him, and he saw that the prospect of Clara coming over to the match at Carford was far from pleasing to George Henry.

"Oh, very well!" said Arthur, much hurt. He had always regarded Clara's presence at the Holmdale home matches as a matter of course.

"Not at all; I couldn't think of it!" said Mr. Snope hastily. "It won't be much of a match at Carford to-day; and—and—I know, I'll come to see Young play, Miss come up to the Carford standard. I out to you where the play doesn't come up to the Garford standard. I haven't seen a Holmdale match for a long time."

"Why doesn't he want Clara to see him at Carford?" muttered Arthur to himself. "Is it possible there's any humbug about it, after all? My hat, if he comes to the Holmdale ground to-day, I'll put him to the test!"

Miss Northcote, who had not fully intended to leave Arthur in the lurch that afternoon, assented to George Henry's proposition; and when the enclosure at the Holmdale ground filled up that afternoon, Clara and George Henry were there at the front.

The kick-off was to be at three. Holmdale were playing Ranthorpe Rangers, a team not at all up to their mark, and Arthur anticipated an easy victory. He came up to George Henry and Miss Northcote at a quarter to three.

"I want you to do us a favour, Mr. Snope," he said seriously.

"Certainly!" said George Henry. "Thanks! It's lucky for us at this juncture that you've taken up footer and made such a success of it."

"I don't quite understand you," said Mr. Snope, rather uneasily.

"We're a man short."

George Henry's jaw fell.

"Chapman hasn't turned up!" exclaimed Arthur. He did not explain that Chapman had stayed away at his own special request.

"We want a forward in his place. It's a bit of luck you being here, Snope!"

"I should be glad to, but—"

"Of course, you will pick your own position!" said Arthur. "You play inside-right over at Carford, don't you? I'll put Blount outside, and give you his place."

The sweat stood in big drops on Mr. Snope's brow.

"I'm sorry—" he stammered.

Arthur looked at him in astonishment.

"You're not going to refuse?" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid I must."
"Why?"
"You see, I haven't my football things here."

"It isn't five minutes to your diggings. I'll send a chap up to fetch them."

"But—you're really very kind, but—"
"Now, this is too bad!" exclaimed Arthur, turning a distressed countenance upon Clara Northcote, who was regarding George Henry in amazement.

"Here we are, a man short, and here's Snope, the best amateur footballer in the county, and he won't play for us. What do you think of that, Miss Northcote?"

Clara frowned.
"Mr. Snope!" she exclaimed. "Surely you cannot be serious; you cannot intend to refuse!"

"I—I'd oblige if I could!" stammered George Henry, wishing the earth would open and swallow him. "But—but I really don't feel fit just now, and—and—"

"I see; it's stage-fright," said Arthur—"that's all. You'll play. Of course, you couldn't possibly refuse. Thanks!" Without waiting for Mr. Snope to reply, he shouted to his comrades: "It's all right, chaps. Snope's volunteered!"

"Bravo, Snope!" shouted the Holmdale footballers.

"But—but I haven't—"
"And now about getting your things," said Arthur. "There's no time to lose."

"But I haven't—"
"I'll send a man at once," continued Arthur, taking not the slightest notice of George Henry's feeble expostulations.

Mr. Snope's face suddenly brightened.
"All right," he exclaimed; "don't trouble!

Strangers in the crowd looked at the inside-right, and asked what it was, and what it was allowed on the ground for. And they gasped when they were told that it was a footballer and an embryo Bloomer. They said that appearances were against George Henry, and certainly the Holmdale folk had to admit as much.

The whistle blew, and the visitors kicked off. They started the game with rushing tactics, but Holmdale soon drove them back. The home forwards bore down into the visitors' half, passing the ball with beautiful precision—till it was passed to George Henry. When it came to him in the centre, he hadn't the faintest notion in the world what to do with it.

The ball dropped fairly at his feet, and he stared at it, and a grinning Ranger half took it away and sent it to midfield. The crowd gave a yell.

"What's the matter with Snope?"
"Chuck him out!"
"You silly ass!" shouted Arthur Young. "What did you let him do that for?"

"How was I to stop him?" exclaimed George Henry sulkily. But Arthur was not stopping to listen; he was busy. The Rangers were stopped short of the home goal. The ball was brought back into their half, and again the attack was forced home. The Rangers fell back to defend their goal, and the Rovers pressed them hard.

Again the ball came to George Henry. It came to him on the chin, and laid him flat on his back. As he lay dazed, the field swept over him, and the Rangers, respited, rushed the ball over the half-way line.

George Henry staggered to his feet. He was shaken and bruised, and his nice new

The astounded Ranger reeled away, more startled than hurt, and his comrades gave a roar of rage. There was a yell for the referee, and the whistle went shrilly. For that smack had been dealt within the dreaded penalty area, and there was no contesting that the Rangers were entitled to a penalty-kick.

Arthur Young gasped with mingled rage and laughter. The kick was taken, and there was a shout from the Rangers backers in the crowd.

"Goal!"
As the teams walked back to the centre of the field, Arthur Young took George Henry Snope by the arm. Snope looked at him stupidly.

"Look here," said Arthur, in a low voice, "you're a thundering humbug. You've never played football before in your life!"

And George Henry, dazed, bewildered, and feeling that not even for Clara Northcote's sake could he go through the rest of that dreadful game, gasped out the truth.

"No; I haven't. Let me get off the field, for mercy's sake!"

"Then if you're not captain of Carford, who is?"

"My cousin, George Herbert Snope."
Arthur gave a whistle.

"Oh, I see! You horrible humbug!"
"Let me get away. I'll never do it again. I'll always tell the truth. Only let me get off the field before they start kicking that fearful ball about again!" implored George Henry.

Arthur Young grinned.
"You humbug! You sham! You daw in borrowed plumes!"

"I'll never do it again. Lemme go. They're just going to—"

Arthur let go his arm.
"Cut it!"



The penalty kick was taken, and there was a shout from the Rangers' backers in the crowd. "Goal!"

I'll fetch them myself, and I'll be back before three."

Arthur Young read his thoughts as clearly as if they were written in his face.

He intended to pretend to fetch the things, and keep away from the ground, and turn up after the match with some plausible excuse.

"Right-ho!" said Arthur, with a beautiful expression of unsuspectingness. "I'll come with you, Snope. We shall have to hustle, so I'll race you to your digs."

The unhappy Arthur groaned in spirit. Arthur passed an arm through his, and ran him almost off his legs. George Henry was breathless and gasping when, after a pelt of three minutes, they reached the lodgings. There was a delay, owing to Mr. Snope having lost his key; but Arthur hammered at the door, and it was soon opened, and he ran Mr. Snope up to his room.

He groaned inwardly as he dressed, hurried continually by Arthur, who asked him about a dozen times if he was trying to be late for the match. He was dressed at last, and the Holmdale captain accompanied him back to the ground. It was five minutes to three when they entered the pavilion.

The unhappy recruit threw off his ulster. His skinny, weedy figure was not exactly that of a footballer, and his breathless, wheezy condition did not impart to him the aspect of an athlete. The other fellows looked at him in amazement. Was this animated scarecrow the champion of Carford? What did it all mean, anyhow?

"Come on, chaps!" exclaimed Arthur Young, and the footballers turned out into the field.

The Rangers were already there, taking shots at goal with a practice ball. The teams lined up, and the two captains tossed for choice of goals. As the adversaries faced one another, it could be seen that the home team were the better lot, with the exception of George Henry.

football rig-out, which he had bought for appearance sake, and, as a matter of fact, had never worn before, was soiled and muddy from top to toe. He limped after the Rovers, groaning to himself.

"This was football!"
And he had been idiot enough to be inveigled into playing it.

George Henry could have kicked himself hard at that moment, only he considered that he had been already sufficiently kicked.

The game had surged away right up to the home goal; George Henry, in the Rangers' half, was a solitary and conspicuous figure. The crowd gave him a good deal of attention, not of a complimentary kind.

"Hallo, Calves!"
"Taking a rest there, Bones?"
"Thinks he's Robinson Crusoe."
"He don't know where he are, for a cert."

There was a rush of feet, a surge of players. The ball was coming back amid a press of players, and suddenly George Henry was in the midst of them. A Ranger back collided with him, and he went down, and the defenders surged past him. On came the Rovers with the ball. George Henry staggered up, and ran. He did not know or care whither, his only thought being to escape from that rough crowd.

He made straight for the Holmdale goal, as it happened, and the crowd watched him with amusement and wonder.

A roar, a rush of feet behind him. The Ranger forwards were on the ball, and breaking through Holmdale, they brought it up the field. George Henry rushed on blindly, but the Rangers were faster. A forward, dribbling the ball, passed him, and shouldered him aside. George Henry's temper had stood many trials in the last half-hour. That was the last straw. He reached out and gave the offending forward a sounding smack on the side of the head.

Mr. Snope needed no second bidding. Like an arrow he flew for the exit, and disappeared. The Rovers, a man short—which was a distinct advantage in this case—kicked off again. They managed to equalise before half-time. No longer cumbered by the terrible George Henry, they showed their quality. After the interval they bucked up with a will, and the only other goal scored was taken by Arthur Young for the Holmdale Rovers.

The Rovers went off the field winners of the match by two goals to one, and their backers cheered them heartily, as they deserved. When Arthur joined Clara Northcote, the girl was looking puzzled. She did not know what to make of Mr. Snope's remarkable play, or of his sudden disappearance from the ranks of the Rovers.

"What ever has become of Mr. Snope?" she exclaimed. "And is it possible that he played like that for Carford?"

Arthur laughed.
"He's gone," he said. "I sent him off the field so that he shouldn't lose us the match; and for his own sake, poor beggar! He is about the biggest humbug I ever heard of, but I think he's had his punishment."

And he explained. Clara listened in wonder.

"What a wicked-wicked story-teller!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I shall tell him what I think of him when I see him again."

But Clara did not see him again. George Henry Snope reached his diggings that day sore in body and in mind. He was aching in every limb, but his bodily aches were not so bad as his anticipation of what was to follow.

He felt that he could not face the overwhelming chaff and ridicule which would greet him now that the truth was out. He wrote to Mr. Northcote resigning his position, and the next day Holmdale knew him no more.

It cannot be said that he was missed very much. After he was gone, Arthur Young came to a satisfactory understanding with Clara. And they could never speak of George Henry Snope and his performances upon the football-field without laughing. Wherever George Henry wanders, it is safe to say that he will never be found upon the socker field again, or masquerading as a footballer in borrowed plumes.

THE END.

(Another fine football story on Saturday next.)

Don't Miss
"SEXTON BLAKE IN THE CONGO,"
which starts in
"THE BOYS' FRIEND"
ON TUESDAY NEXT.