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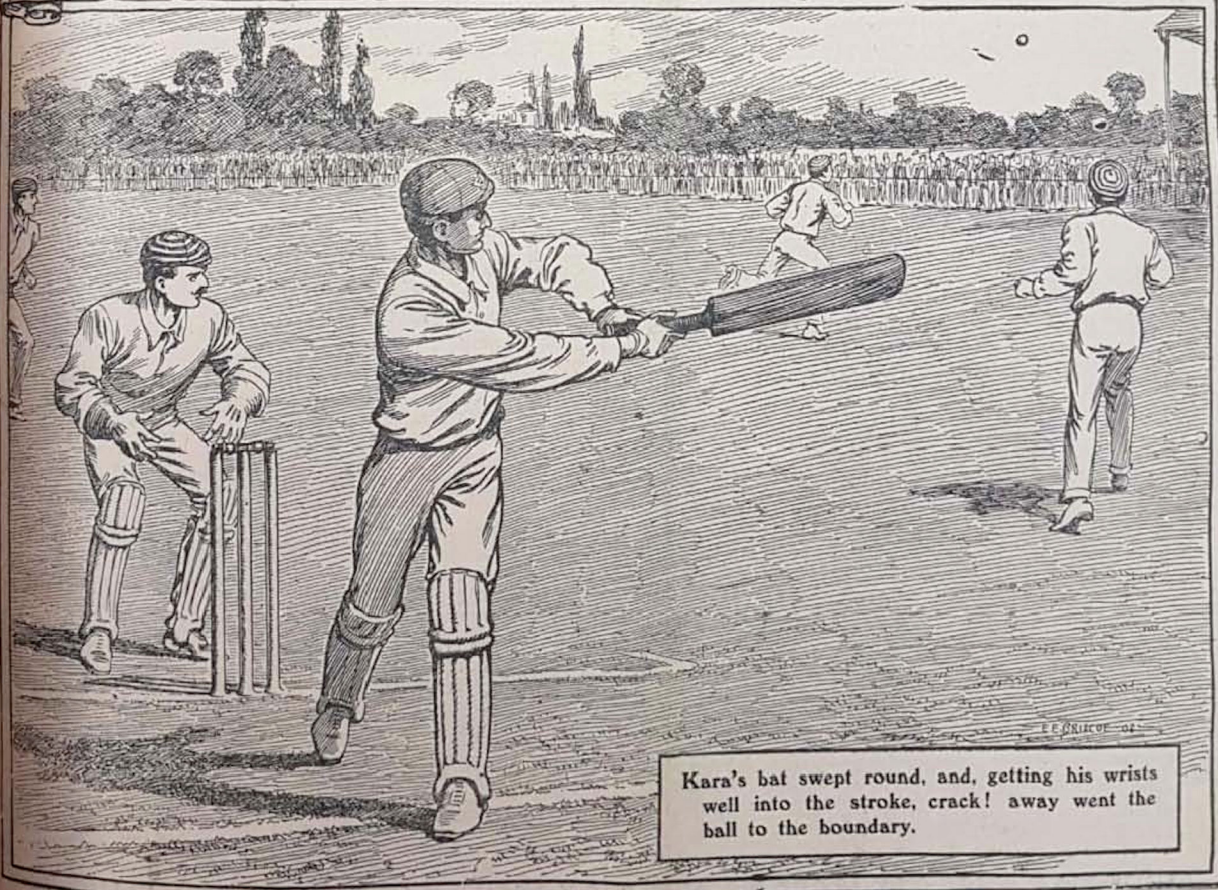
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EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 1908.

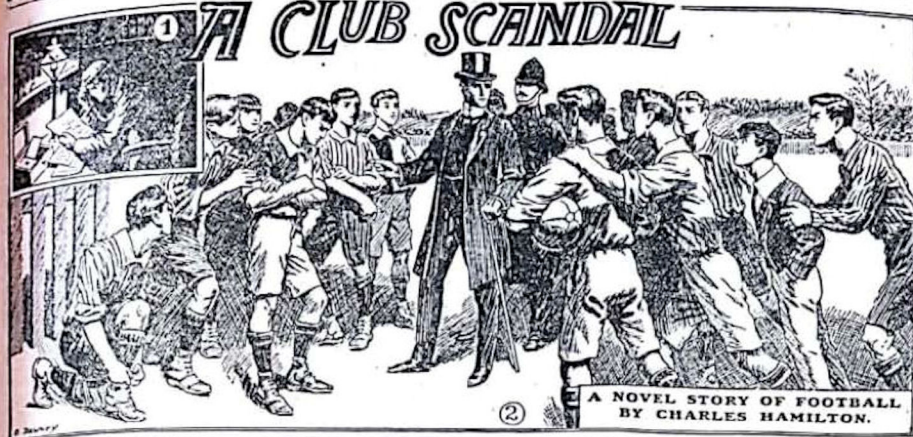
THE MASTER BATSMAN

By Arthur S. Hardy.



Kara's bat swept round, and, getting his wrists well into the stroke, crack! away went the ball to the boundary.

THE CLUB SCANDAL



1. Arthur Jobson was seated at a table, with books and papers before him. 2. Arthur Jobson could not speak. His head was drooping; his whole attitude one of dejection and despair, and he dared not raise his eyes from the ground.

The 1st Chapter.

Don't believe it! Jack Russell, captain of the Fendale Fliers, dashed out the words. His face was flushed, and he seemed inclined to follow up the hasty words with a blow at last, and Luke Barnard started back. The Ted Burrows, Jack's chum, and one of the fastest forwards in the Fendale Football Club, laid a restraining hand on his captain's arm. "Ready on, Jack?" "I don't believe it!" "I don't believe it!" "I don't believe it!" "I don't believe it!"

place at Barnard, put his hand on Arthur's shoulder. There was not much similarity between the courses as they stood side by side. Jack was medium size, sturdy, well-built, with an open, frank face, and honest blue eyes. Arthur Jobson was slightly taller, slimmer, and though well put together, nothing like his cousin's form. His face was fair, his eyes light blue, and not altogether steady in their glance. "Anything wrong?" he asked, looking round. "Nothing," said Jack quietly, "only Barnard has something to say to you." "Well, go on, Luke?" "It's hardly fair to put it like that," said Barnard, "but I don't mind. My uncle says that you were betting on the Longley Racecourse last Thursday—"

still burning with anger. But ere he had gone a dozen paces his mood changed. The hot colour died out of his face, and a wretched pallor took its place, and a dumb misery grew in the place of the rage in his eyes. His hasty pace slackened, and his head drooped, and muttered words fell miserably from his lips. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

The 2nd Chapter.

A Guilty Conscience. JACK RUSSELL looked worried as he walked down Fendale High Street. It was Saturday afternoon, and the young captain of the Fliers had left the office where he was employed in good time to get home before the afternoon's match. The young footballer's face was usually bright and sunny, but just now there was a cloud upon it, which he did not seem able to dispel. The Fendale Fliers were playing that afternoon what was the most important match of the season to them. Highfield F.C. were the most powerful opponents they ever met, and upon the victory or defeat of the afternoon depended, to a large extent, Fendale's position in the local league. All through the week Jack's thoughts had been on the match—excepting, of course, when he was at work. Jack Russell was not the kind of fellow to neglect his work in thinking of sports. But the match meant a great deal of anxious thought for the young captain, and now a new anxiety had been added.

speak about his private concerns to the secretary of a junior football club; and besides, Johnson's uncertain eye and quivering lip betokened that it was not his fault, Jack's heart sank. Why should Johnson lie to him? What did this mystery mean?

"I must be off," said Arthur abruptly. "You are playing this afternoon?" "Yes, I told you so yesterday." "You don't look well," said Jack. "If you like, I'll put Barnard in your place in the centre-half, and play another fellow for him left. If—"

The 3rd Chapter.

Forbidden to Play. JACK RUSSELL, troubled as he was in mind, looked at his cousin, bearded up as usual as he was on the ground. On the footer field there was no time to think about anything but football, and he banished every consideration from his mind but the success of the game. Fendale Fliers were looking in good trim, with the solitary exception of Arthur Jobson, who was pale and preoccupied. The Highfield fellows were in good form, too. Their captain, Yorke, was a young engineer, and a fine fellow, and well known to Jack Russell. They were friendly rivals for league honours. The Highfielders were early on the ground, and they had come determined to win. Round the ground, outside the lines, a goodly crowd had gathered to see the game. It was only junior football, but the Fliers and the Highfielders could always be depended upon to put up some really good play. Close upon two hundred people were looking on, prepared to cheer good play on either side.

for it. But what did he bring a policeman with him for? To give the signal to start the game was out of the question. The referee stood silent, staring like a lost soul at the approaching figures. Jack burst out at Mr. Sunderland to his cousin, and from his cousin back to Mr. Sunderland, in wonder and strange doubt. Arthur Jobson's face was white, his head drooping. What did it all mean?

Steadily the landowner advanced to the very centre of the field, between the opposing teams, the constable in the middle, Mr. Sunderland hostile in their glance, were eyes, mostly Sunderland. His face was very hard.

He held up his hand, signing back the smallest footballers as they crowded forward.

"What does this mean, sir?" exclaimed Jack Russell.

Mr. Sunderland looked at him sternly.

"You know perfectly well what it means, Russell," he said. "I am sorry to have to interfere at such a moment, but you have known for some time what to expect."

Jack looked thunderstruck.

"I sir? What do you mean, I knew what to expect? Even now I do not know why you are here, or what you intend to do."

Mr. Sunderland gave him a searching glance.

"Is it possible, Russell, that you, who are, as I understand, the captain of this club, do not know anything about its financial position?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Jack indignantly.

"The gentleman smiled sarcastically.

"Then your secretary has not acquainted you with the true state of affairs. You are not aware that no rent has been paid me for this field for the past two months."

A thunderbolt falling at his feet could not have amazed Jack Russell more.

He looked for a moment as if his head were turning round.

"The field not paid for?" he gasped, at last.

"Why, Jobson has paid you for it every week regularly."

"Jobson has done nothing of the kind," said Mr. Sunderland, coldly and incisively.

"He has made excuse after excuse, saying that the subscriptions have not been paid up, and so forth, until I thought it high time that if the members could not pay their subscriptions the club should be dissolved."

"The subscriptions are all paid up, to the last shilling," said Luke Barnard.

"There is some mistake," said Jack Russell dazedly.

"There is no mistake," said Mr. Sunderland, all right, Mr. Sunderland. Do you mean to say that Jobson told you—"

"He told me they were not, certainly, as an excuse for not paying the rent of the field. I believed him, but when I saw the very significant tone of Mr. Sunderland's voice—"

"now it looks to me as if there were some even less creditable cause for the arrears of payment. That, however, is a matter for you to settle money yourself. I do not desire to interfere. Are you prepared to pay now?"

Jack did not answer the question. He turned to his cousin with almost anguish in his face.

"Arthur, what does this mean? For mercy's sake explain before I do any more—"

"A thief!" said Luke Barnard.

"Hold your tongue!" said Ted Burrows fiercely.

Barnard bit his lip, and was silent.

Silent, too, was Arthur Jobson. He could not speak. His head was drooping; his whole attitude one of dejection and despair, and he dared not raise his eyes from the ground.

Jack touched him on the arm, but he did not move or speak.

"Arthur, can't you say anything?"

A low groan broke from Arthur Jobson—a sound so charged with misery that even the most indignant of his club-fellows relented, and felt compassion for him. His eyes were cast on the wretched youth, and a spot of crimson was burning in the centre of each of his pale cheeks. But his eyes never moved from the ground.

Jack started away from him. He could have no further doubt now. Arthur Jobson had not paid the field rent—he had lied to the owner and his fellow-members. And where was the money? The blacklegs of Longley Racecourse could have told.

Jack passed his hand over his brow. He caught York's glance, and his face went crimson. The scene was terribly humiliating; the scandal that was certain to ensue was bitter in his mouth; but to have his horrible exposure before a rival club, that was very bitter, too. He saw only sympathy and compassion in York's face; but even sympathy and compassion called him at that moment.

"Well," said Sunderland, in a cold, sharp voice. "I am waiting for an answer to my question. Can you pay me?"

Jack Russell shook his head.

"Two months arrears, is that a few shillings, at all events?"

"I do not feel inclined to pay twice, anyway," said Luke Barnard. If Jobson has spent our money, I will share the blame with him, but I do not intend to pay for the fault. He kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Sunderland, and did not trust himself to look at Barnard.

"No, I suppose not," said Jack miserably. "The money is owed to you, and we will pay it—or, rather, I will pay it. I can save it out of my salary. But we have no money here—"

"I have received promises enough from Jobson," said Mr. Sunderland.

"Oh, hang it!" broke out Ted Burrows.

"You know Jack Russell is the soul of honour, and you ought to take his word, and you know it!"

It was an injudicious speech. Mr. Sunderland was already angry, and he did not relish being told what he ought to do by a lad of seventeen. His eyes glinted.

"I am quite out of my mind," he said icily. "I ought to have aware of what I ought to do. I ought to have turned you out of this field weeks ago, as I have not been paid for the use of it; but it is not too late to be firm. Unless the rent is paid up now, you will not be allowed to play here this afternoon!"

The footballers looked at each other in utter dismay.

Some of the Highfielders growled. They had come some distance for the match, and it was not pleasant to have made their journey for nothing.

"Shame!" exclaimed several voices.

Mr. Sunderland frowned. He was not an unkind man, but he was very much annoyed, and he could be very obstinate. A frank appeal in the first place would probably have moved him, but his persistence in his action only made him determined to carry it through. He was as hard as a rock now.

"Take your choice!" he exclaimed harshly.

"I am waiting!"

"I have told you that we have no money here, sir. I have enough in the post-office saving-bank, but I cannot get at it now, as you know."

"I suppose," he shouted the Highfielders. "Get off the ground!"

"Kick him off!"

Mr. Sunderland's eyes flashed, and he cast a defiant glance round. The policeman gave the footballers a warning look as some of them pressed forward.

"It will be my duty to prevent any violence, gentlemen," he said.

Jack Russell held up his hand.

"I am sorry about this, but it's not my making a row. Mr. Sunderland is acting wrongly in his rights. I think he's hard; but that's no matter. We cannot play."

There was a loud murmur.

"I am sorry about you fellows," said Jack. "You've had a journey for nothing, and the match is off. I am sorry. I can't say more. You count the match against us, as far as that goes. We're going, Mr. Sunderland."

The footballers walked away to the dressing-room, and changed into their everyday clothes. The crowd had taken up the cry of "Shame!" and Mr. Sunderland was nearly mobbed as he walked off the ground. Only the presence of the constable saved him from a more serious fate.

Jack Russell came out of the tent with a grim, gloomy look on his face. Arthur Jobson had disappeared. Ted Burrows tapped his chin on the arm.

"Shall I walk home with you, Jack?"

Jack shook his head.

"I'll go alone, Ted. I want to see Arthur. I don't know what's to be done."

"I suppose there's no doubt that Jobson—"

Burrows paused.

Jack smiled bitterly.

"That he has embezzled the money? There cannot be any doubt. He has as good as admitted it."

"It's horrible, Jack! I can't say how sorry I am."

"I know you are, old fellow. The committee had to meet this evening, and now what is to be done? There will be a scandal." Jack gave a groan.

"Most of the people on the ground suspect what was on; and, of course, the Highfielders will talk. Our own fellows will be full for some time, as well as you."

"They all feel for you, Jack."

"Yes, I believe they do, excepting Barnard. But they don't feel for Arthur; they despise him, and they deserve it. But—but—"

"There won't be more scandal than we can help. Nobody thinks of any—any arrest, or anything of that sort," said Ted awkwardly.

"He deserves it."

"He is a scoundrel, Jack, as the best of us might be, by a set of scoundrels, I believe," said Ted. "Think the best of him that you can, and we'll try to get him out of this."

Jack pressed his chin's hand, and, with a heavy sigh, he walked away. He left the ground, and turned his face towards the town, the most miserable boy in the county at that moment, with the possible exception of Arthur Jobson. But where was Arthur?

THE 4TH CHAPTER. The Shadow of Disgrace—A Friend in Need—Goal.

RUSSELL!"

He walked along, buried in thought, and he looked round. A dark expression came over his face as he recognized Luke Barnard.

"What do you want, Barnard?"

ing on the race—at all events, you said you did not believe me. Was I right?"

Jack Russell nodded.

"Yes," he said quietly, "you were right. I was wrong. I did not believe you, and I was wrong. I admit it, and I owe you an apology."

Luke Barnard was taken aback.

He had expected hot and angry words from Jack Russell, and he was prepared to reply in kind; but he was really surprised at him, and made him feel uneasy.

He had been spurred on by a jealousy of Arthur, and an obstinate feeling of opposition towards Jack himself, and he had been fully satisfied as to the excellence of his own motives. Now, as he looked into the white, pain-stricken face of Jack Russell, a sudden sense of meanness smote him.

He felt that he had acted ungenerously, and an uncomfortable sense that Jack regarded him as a cad, and was right in so regarding him, caused a flush to come into his cheeks.

"I did not mean to hurt you when I spoke," he said awkwardly. "I always thought you favoured Jobson. I mentioned the matter, because I thought he was going to the dogs, and ought to be stopped in time."

"I dare say you was hasty, and did you an injustice," said Mr. Russell, "if so, I am sorry for it, and I hope we shall part friends."

"Part!" said Barnard. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I shall resign the captaincy of the Ferndale Fliers, after—after this. I hope you or Ted Burrows will take my place. That's all."

"I'm sorry, I've been a rotten cad," broke out Barnard suddenly. "You shan't go! I—I admit I've looked forward to a chance of filling your place, but now—now it seems different, somehow. You shan't go—and as I have a club and a cousin, and you shan't have a club and a cousin, anyway, we'll have a whip round for the money—"

"I shall pay that, Barnard—every penny."

"But about the resigning—you shan't do it! I'll be bound the committee don't let you!" exclaimed Luke Barnard.

Jack Russell smiled faintly.

"I'm going to resign from the club altogether," he said, "and I wish my cousin may leave him if I can. But I'm glad to see friends, Barnard, after the rube we've had. There's my hand if you like to take it."

Barnard grasped it warmly.

"I'm glad you shan't leave the Fliers," he said, "as they parted."

Jack Russell walked on towards his home. Barnard stood hesitating some minutes, and then he set off at a rapid walk, but the direction he took led him towards the house of Mr. Sunderland.

Jack's brow was moody as he reached his quarters. He wanted to see Arthur, to think out with him what was best to be done, yet he dreaded the interview. He pushed open the door of the little sitting-room. The room was dusky in the winter afternoon. But Jack saw Arthur at once.

The secretary of the Ferndale Football Club was seated at a desk, and a freshly-written sheet lay before him. But he was not writing now. His head had fallen upon his hands, and the tears of utter misery and dejection were streaming down his face. His body was shaken by slow, heavy sobs. He did not hear Jack enter.

Jack's heart was heavy as he came towards his cousin, and he caught a glimpse of the letter Arthur had written.

"Dear Jack, I am going, and you will never see me again. Try to forgive me—"

There were tear-blots on the written lines. Jack touched his cousin on the shoulder.

"Arthur!"

Jobson started to his feet with a cry.

"Jack! Oh, I did not mean to see you again!"

Jack passed his arm round the unhappy lad's shoulder and drew him to the seat again.

"Calm yourself, Arthur," said Jack quietly.

"I know all about it, and I won't say I think you are not to blame. A chap who touches another fellow's money is a—"

"I won't say what; there isn't a word to describe him properly. But I know you have acted like a devil. It was all in the hands of others."

"The bookmakers had it," groaned Arthur.

"I thought I had a dead cert. I risked the club's money on it, and I meant to replace it with my own winnings, and buy the club a new set of goalposts with the balance."

Jack smiled miserably.

"And you lost, of course?"

"Yes, somehow; and then I tried again, to replace my loss, but somehow I was wrong against me. Oh, it's been awful! I had to lie to Mr. Sunderland. I lied to you. I lied to others. I have made lying entries. Oh, Heaven! sometimes I have felt that I was lying, but I was in the hands of others. He sobbed convulsively. "I don't deserve any pity; I ought to have known. But I never meant to steal, you believe that, Jack?"

"I believe that," said Jack.

"It was horrible; knowing the time must come when—the fellows would think me a thief!" Arthur shuddered.

"Now it has come, and I'll show up before you in a week. I wish I had cut and run sooner. But I shall go to-night."

"We must think about our future plans, Arthur. But you are not fit now. When you are a better man, I will discuss them with you. I am not going to desert you. If I had been sharper this might never have happened."

"It was my own fault—my own fault!"

There was a silence in the room for a long time, while the winter dusk deepened, broken

only by Arthur's convulsive breathing, and the sound of his sobs.

In the dusk he recognized Mr. Sunderland's visitor with a hard glance.

Arthur shrank in his seat. Jack looked at him coldly. "After you come for the money, you will find fellows and our—"

Monday, for I speak hastily, Russell, and I don't mean to say that you are to claim the money due to me. That game to-day, it was the thought that I had made me angry. But I have reflected on the matter, and I admit that I was sorry for it."

Jack Russell coloured.

"Forgive me, sir. I should not have done like that. But I am so troubled now—"

"I understand," said the gentleman, "and I pardon your hasty words. You are here as a friend. You know I have taken a great interest in the Ferndale club, and that I let you be the captain, and lower than I could have obtained at any other club. I will let the more you are left unpaid. But I understand the circumstances now. I have just seen a letter of yours, Luke Barnard."

Jack started.

"He writes me that you have decided to leave the club, Russell."

"I must, sir. I stand by my own side, very decently, of course; and the more I shall not desert him in letting him go."

Mr. Sunderland grasped the boy's hand warmly.

"Well spoken, my lad! I like you very much, and I feel that it was an interest in the club, and you must not leave it. I will give you money due to me. I shall cancel the debt from a friend. You may go to the office, Arthur Jobson, I have a paper which will show matters stand, and I think this will be given another chance, and I'll help him to get on his feet."

Jack could not speak. The tears came into his eyes, speaking more eloquently than words. Arthur gave a sob.

"I don't deserve it—I—"

"The words about my lad, that you are good is not dead within you," said Mr. Sunderland kindly. "You shall have a letter another town, for you had better leave it for a time, and your cousin shall be captain of the Ferndale Football Club. I agree!"

"I don't know what to say," said Russell brokenly. "I don't know how to thank you for what you have done for me."

"And that is settled."

Mr. Sunderland, who felt that the cousins should be left alone just then, got up and left. Arthur was sobbing, but with a hope his despair at his face.

"God bless him!" said Jack.

"Indeed—indeed, God bless him!" said Arthur. "He shall never have reason to repent his kindness, Jack. I swear it!"

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THE EXP. (Next week "KING OF THE ROAD," a new motor story by HENRY ST. JOHN, commences.)