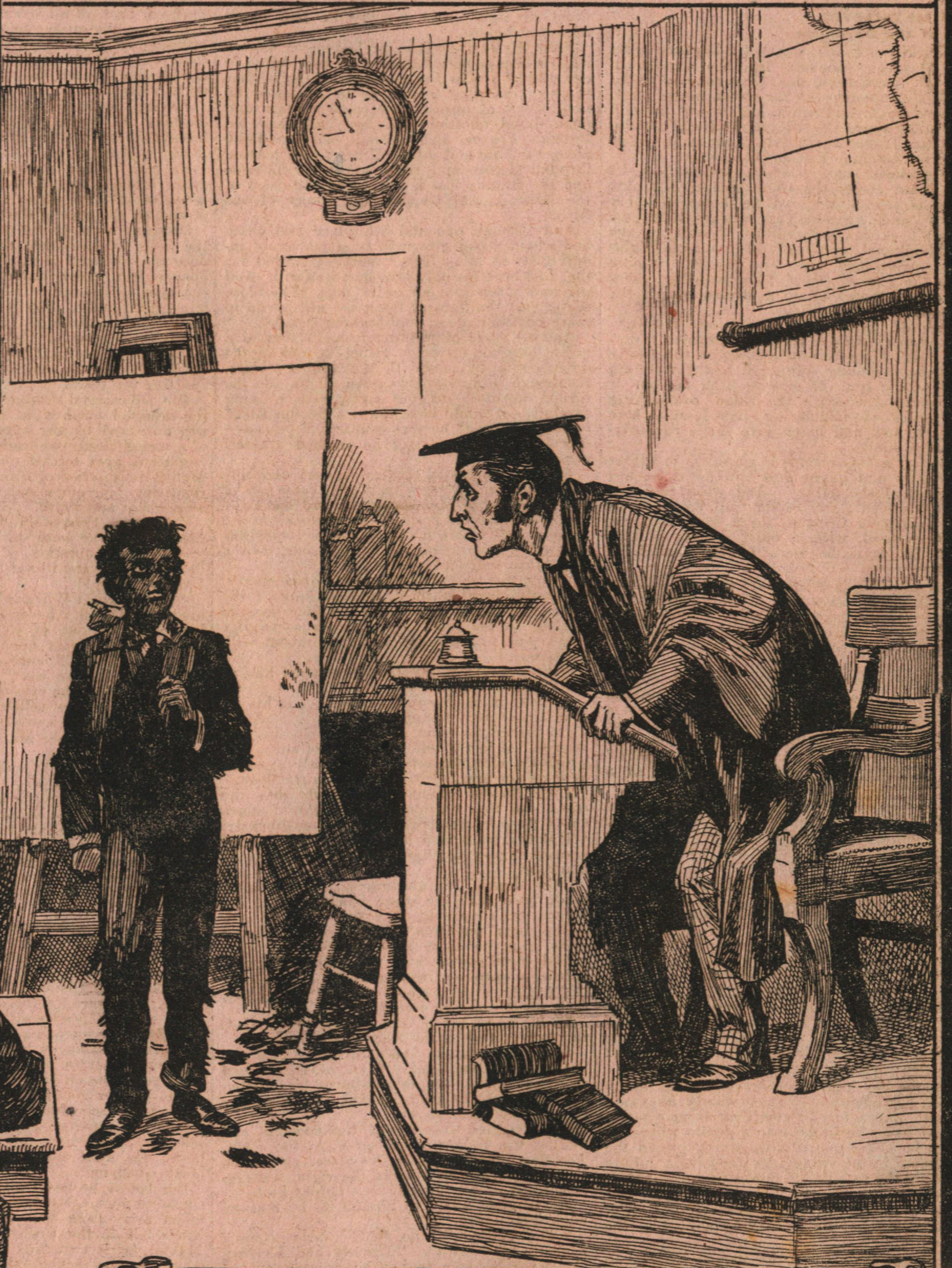
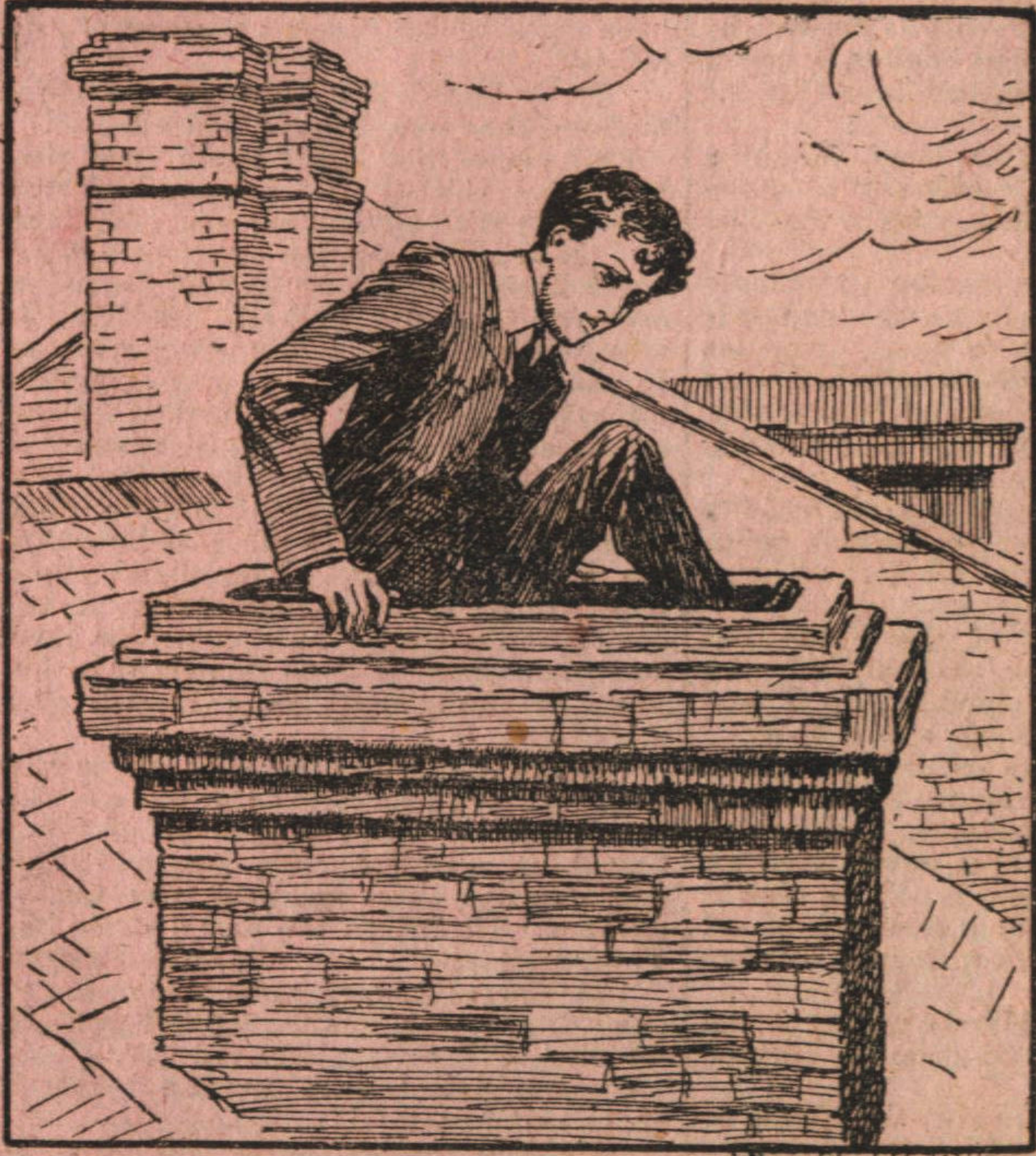


NEW SCHOOL TALE! COMPLETE JACK NOBLE YARN!

The Boys' Realm

THE GREAT SATURDAY SPORTS JOURNAL.



DICK MASCOT'S
SCHOOLDAYS
- BY ALAN GALE -



JACK NOBLE'S NEW RECRUIT.

A ROLLICKING COMPLETE TALE OF PELHAM SCHOOL.

THE 1st CHAPTER. The Football Fever.

WHAT began it, probably, was the fact that when Ponsonby came to Pelham, Pelham was living, breathing, talking, and dreaming football. Pelham was a footballing college, and there they took the great game seriously, and played it hard, from the captain of the school down to the youngest fag. And just at this time there was a crowd of matches on. The season was on the wane, but that only made the Pelham fellows all the keener on the game. It was their way to stick to the winter game to the very finish, and then they would play cricket in a desultory fashion, and sigh for September. Ponsonby came suddenly into the midst of it, and caught the infection, so to speak.

Ponsonby went into the Third Form. He would have found any Form very keen on the same topic. The Sixth had every possible date booked up, at home and away, and Lecky, the captain of Pelham, had been leading them to victory after victory. The Fifth were equally busy. The Shell and the Fourth, who formed the junior team among them, were keen enough if not quite so successful. Clifford, the captain of the Juniors, had never been able to get his eleven quite up to the mark, and more than once they had been defeated by the Third-Form team, captained by Jack Noble. But in the Third Form there was more keenness than anywhere else in Pelham; and it was in the Third that Ponsonby found himself.

There were a great many things that Ponsonby could do. He could paint, and he could write poetry, and he could talk upon those subjects, and upon many others. But, as Bob Russell remarked, he might have spouted poetry by the yard, and dilated until he was hoarse upon the Correggiosity of Correggio, without finding a single listener in the Third Form at Pelham. But if he had been a witness of a Cup Final at the Crystal Palace, or if he had had a nodding acquaintance with a League player, he would have been sure of a respectful hearing in the Form-room.

And that, as we have said, was really what began it.

Ponsonby was one of those fellows who never could take a back seat quietly. If the Third-Form had had any artistic tendencies to speak of, he would have talked art to them; if they had any poetical leanings, he would have explained the deep mysteries of Sordello. As they talked nothing but footer, he talked footer, too, and, as his way was, he out-Romeod Romeo even at that.

As it happened, Jack Noble, the captain of the Third-Form team, was in need of a new recruit the day Ponsonby came to Pelham. McIlvaine, the outside-left, was lame from an accidental kick, and was likely to remain out of the matches for a week or more. Jack was casting round for a new winger. There were plenty of candidates, for every fellow in the Pelham Third would have given his little finger for his cap for the eleven; but Jack was hard to please. There was a match with St. Winifred's juniors on the Saturday that week, and Jack wanted his team right up to the mark. The place was still unfilled, when Jack's attention was drawn to Ponsonby.

"There's a new chap here who's talking footer a lot," Bob Russell remarked. "Chap named Ponsonby. He might do."

Jack looked doubtful. "That slim chap," he said, glancing across the quad. towards Ponsonby. "He doesn't look as if he had much in him: but he ought to be able to get over the ground with those long legs. I wonder if he can play."

"He says he's played a lot."

"Well, I'll give him a trial."

And Jack walked over to the new boy, and tapped him on the shoulder. Ponsonby looked at him inquiringly.

"Play footer?" said Jack.

"Well, yes, rather," said Ponsonby. "I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but I was considered pretty decent at my last school."

"What's your particular line?"

"Well, I've usually played forward, but I can play all right at half, and I'm a pretty good back; and I've kept goal, too."

"I'm supposed to be, that's all I can say," he remarked. "I don't know about taking up footer here, though. You see, at my last school they really played the game."

The Third-Formers glared at Ponsonby. His manner was patronising, to say the least of it, and they did not like a new fellow to look upon their football from a superior standpoint. Some of them, however, could not help being a little impressed. It seemed hardly possible that Ponsonby would talk like this unless he could back up his words, when he could so soon be put to the test.

"They did, did they?" said Macalpine.

"Yes," said Ponsonby. "You see, you chaps are pretty keen, I know, but I don't know about playing Third-Form footer. I ought to have a place in the junior team."

"The Shell and the Fourth keep that to themselves," said Jack Noble. "They wouldn't admit the Third, even if we wanted to go in, which we don't. We've licked them hollow in two or three matches, and we get ahead of them every time, at home and away. If you can really play footer, you're booked for the Third-Form team. But—to put it plainly—we want something more than gas."

"I'm willing to play, if you like," said Ponsonby. "I hear you want an outside-left for Saturday. I'm better at centre-forward, but I'm willing to play outside, and I'll do my best for you."

"Come along to the ground, and let's see what you can do," suggested Jack.

"I would, gladly, only I've hurt my foot," said Ponsonby. "It will be all right by Saturday, though, and I'll play."

Jack sniffed again. "Do you think we're going to play a chap in an out match who hasn't shown us what he can do?" he exclaimed.

Ponsonby gave a shrug. "You can suit yourself," he said. "I don't want to play particularly. The footer here isn't up to what I've been used to. I only want to make myself useful, that's all; but suit yourself."

Jack hesitated. "If you can play we'll be glad of you," he said. "I don't know where to pick up a winger like McIlvaine."

"Well, I'll be ready on Saturday."

"If you could show us—"

"How can I, when I've hurt my foot?"

"Well, I'll think about it."

And Jack walked away, feeling rather puzzled. He did not know what to make of Ponsonby. But if there was anything in what the fellow said, he would be a valuable recruit, and as the match with St. Winifred's was likely to be a hard tussle, Jack would have been glad of any help.

And although the damage to Ponsonby's foot, whatever it was, prevented him from joining the fags in footer practice, it did not prevent



Ponsonby made a wild rush to escape, but the footballers were all around him, and he could not get away. He was dragged and rushed and pushed, and rolled here, there, and everywhere.

him from explaining at great length what he would do on Saturday when they met the St. Winifred's fellows. He certainly had a great book-knowledge of the game, wherever he had picked it up, and Jack began to think that he had done the new fellow some injustice in doubting him at all, and in his own mind he settled upon Ponsonby as the new winger.

THE 2nd CHAPTER. Mac Has His "Doots."

"PONSONBY!" said Lecky of the Sixth, wrinkling his brows in an effort of reflection. "Yes, I know the name. There was a chap of that name at Redclyffe."

"That's the school this chap was at," said Jack Noble. "So it's all right."

It was Friday evening, and the match was on the following day. It had occurred to Jack Noble that Lecky of the Sixth, who knew everything there was to know about football, might be able to give him some information. Lecky had a cousin at Redclyffe, the school Ponsonby had been at before he came to Pelham, and if Ponsonby had done the great things he claimed to have done, it was possible that Lecky had heard of him. So Jack hied himself to the captain's study, and broached the subject.

Lecky gave the matter some thought.

"Yes, it's right enough," went on the captain of Pelham College. "I remember seeing a Redclyffe school magazine, and Ponsonby was mentioned in it. He was one of the best forwards, I think they said, that Redclyffe had had. I don't know whether that would be your Ponsonby."

"Well, I suppose so," said Jack. "It agrees with what he told us himself. I suppose it's all right, and I'm sorry I doubted him."

And Jack allowed his doubts to be set at rest.

Jack Noble being satisfied, the rest of the Third Form had no hesitation in believing in Ponsonby, and the new boy found himself quite a hero in the Third Form-room.

He told stories of his football doings at Redclyffe to a circle of interested listeners, and he had a telling way of relating a story, too. The Third listened almost breathlessly to descriptions of games won almost single-handed, of goals scored at the last moment in the teeth, as it were, of baffled goalkeepers.

"Well, if he can play footer as well as he can talk it," said Macalpine, "why, St. Winifred's won't have a look in."

"What ho!" said Bob Russell.

"Oh, it's all right," said Jack. "I've asked Lecky, and he has a cousin at Redclyffe. I must say that Ponsonby does blow a little about his prowess. But it's right enough, he can play, and has played, and he was a big gun at his last school."

Bob nodded. "Well, if Lecky says so, it's so," he remarked. "I'd prefer a chap not to gas so much, even if he can do things."

"Right! But if he's done all those things, I suppose it's natural that he should like to talk about them a little. Anyway, it's not all gas, so that's all right. He'll play up for Pelham Third to-morrow."

"That's about his foot?"

"That's well, he says."

Saturday morning dawned bright and fair. It was a clear, cold day, ideal for football. The Third Form at Pelham looked forward eagerly to the match of the afternoon.

St. Winifred's was about two miles from the school, and, as the match was away, the Third

Form had to start pretty early to get to the ground for the kick-off at half-past two.

Noble had ordered a brake to take over the eleven, and a great many of the Third who were not playing were going over on bicycles, or on foot, to see the match, and yell for Pelham's victory.

The brake came round to the door after dinner, and the Pelham footballers came down with their bags in their hands.

Jack looked round for Ponsonby.

The new fellow was there, as gay and confident as ever. He was talking footer to Macalpine, and telling him of a wonderful match at Redclyffe, of which he said that an account had been printed at length in the school magazine.

Mac looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Let me see," remarked the Scottish junior. "Let's have it right. You say the ball had been played behind your flag?"

"That's it."

"It was sent out, and then the halves lost it, and you rushed in and captured it, and dribbled it away, with six or seven of the other side round you?"

"Just so."

"You walked over their forwards, and beat their halves, and strolled round the backs, and slammed the ball in the net, though they had a first-chop goalkeeper?"

"Exactly."

Mac closed one eye in an expressive way. "My dear chap, I suppose you don't doubt my word?" said Ponsonby, turning red.

"No; but it's remarkable."

"You mean it was a remarkable feat?"

"No; I mean it's remarkable that a chap who could do that should gas about it afterwards," said Mac, with a shake of his head.

"Oh, really—"

"Get in!" said Noble. "The brake's here. There's no time to waste."

"It's in the school magazine at Redclyffe!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Got a copy?" asked Mac.

"Well, no, not at present; but—"

"I thought not."

"Look here," exclaimed Ponsonby warmly, "I can jolly well get a copy, if you'd like to see it!"

Mac grinned. "I jolly well would," he remarked.

"Then I'll write to Redclyffe to-day."

"Do."

"Jump in," said Jack.

The footballers mounted into the brake, Macalpine tapped Noble on the shoulder.

"Are you taking a reserve?" he asked.

"Why?"

"I'd take a reserve winger, if I were you, that's all."

Jack looked at him quickly. "Are you thinking of Ponsonby?"

"Yes."

"But Lecky says—"

"I don't care; he talks too much. Chaps who talk too much never can do things," said the Scottish junior obstinately. "Take a reserve."

"Well, I'm taking Smith minor and Hodges," said Jack. "Either of them can play outside-left at a pinch. But I think Ponsonby is all right."

"I hope he is."

And the brake drove off.

THE 3rd CHAPTER. Ponsonby Stands Down.

JACK NOBLE glanced at Ponsonby several times during the brake drive. The new recruit was talking cheerfully, asking the fellows what the St. Winifred's side were like, and discussing the prospects of the match. He seemed to be in the most cheery humour, and looking forward to the match with sanguine expectation. It was impossible to doubt him. Jack was quite satisfied.

The brake bowled along through the lanes, and St. Winifred's came into sight. There were fellows crowding on the football-ground, in readiness for the match, and there was a shout as the Pelham brake came up.

It stopped with a flourish, and the Pelham fellows sent back an answering yell, and scrambled down as the brake stopped.

Ponsonby jumped out before the vehicle had fairly come to a stop, and missed the step, and rolled on the ground.

"Oh!" he gasped.

He did not rise. He made an effort to do so, and sank back again, with a groan.

Jack jumped down beside him.

He knelt down, and tried to help Ponsonby to rise; but the new winger pushed him back.

"It's no good," he gasped. "I've twisted my ankle. I may be able to get up soon, but it feels bad."

Jack looked dismayed.

It was the cruellest of luck for the new winger to hurt his ankle just before an important match.

"I'm sorry," he said. "What rotten luck!"

Ponsonby groaned.

"Yes, it's beastly!"

"Does it hurt much?" asked Macalpine, with a lurking grin on his face.

"Awfully!"

"How beastly! But how jolly lucky, too, that we brought reserves with us," said Mac. "We should have had to play a man short."

Jack started.

He understood at once the curious expression upon the Scottish lad's face, and he looked quickly at the new recruit stretched on the ground.

Was it possible that the whole affair was humbug, and that this was Ponsonby's dodge for getting out of an awkward situation?

But if he was playing a part, he was doing it extremely well. His face seemed to be twisted up with pain.

"Help me to the bank there," he said faintly. "I'll sit down for a bit, and see if it gets any better. I hope I shall be able to play."

Jack helped him in silence to the grassy bank at the side of the road, and Ponsonby sank down there, with a gasp. He bared his ankle, and felt it over very carefully; but it certainly did not show any outward symptoms of being rocky. But then, Ponsonby was certainly the person to know best what it felt like.

The Pelham footballers went into the ground, leaving Ponsonby to rest. After a few minutes he limped in after them. Jack Noble looked at him rather coldly as he came into the dressing-room. Pelham Third had changed for the match, and they were ready to go into the field.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked Noble.

Ponsonby gave a painful gasp.

"Rotten!" he said. "I should only limp if I went on, so you'd better not play me. I'm awfully sorry."

"You ought to be."

"Well, I suppose you can't blame me, Noble. I haven't twisted my ankle on purpose. Accidents will happen."

Noble did not reply. Smith minor was already in his football things, and Jack signed to him to come into the field with the team.

The Pelham eleven went out, and Ponsonby sat down to watch the game.

It was a hard and fast game. St. Winifred's Juniors were in good form. Pelham Third were very fit, but they missed McIlvaine on the wing; but they gave the home team a good tussle.

In the first half the score was level, goal to goal, and when the footballers came off Jack came up to Ponsonby.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Oh, all right!" said Ponsonby cheerfully. "I'm only sorry it's too late for me to play."

"It isn't," said Jack. "The St. Winifred's skipper has agreed for our reserve to stand out, if I prefer, and they'll let me play you."

Ponsonby's glance dropped.

"I—I think that's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "It's awfully decent of the St. Winifred's fellows, too! It's really giving you an advantage, as you play a fresh man in the second half."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"The question is, whether you really ought to take advantage of it?" suggested Ponsonby. "You see, if you win, you'd hardly feel that the game was really yours."

"I'm the best judge of that," said Noble.

"Oh, yes, of course, but—"

"The question is, how do you feel?"

"Well, I think I'm all right," said Ponsonby, in a doubtful sort of way. "I've been sitting down for some time. I'll try my ankle."

He rose to his feet.

Then he sat down again with a gasp.

"It's no good," he said; "it's almost as bad as ever if I throw my weight on it. I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to play."

Jack looked at him very grimly. Yorke, the St. Winifred's junior skipper, came up, and glanced at the two of them.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he said. "It's hard cheese on you having to play a second-best chap, and if your man is well, there's no objection in the world to his going in."

Jack Noble shook his head.

"He's not fit," he said. "His ankle is hurting him again. We'll keep the same team to the finish."

"Oh, all right!"

Ponsonby looked a little uneasily at Jack's grim face.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he said.

"Oh, rats!"

"What do you mean, Noble?"

Jack did not answer. The teams turned out into the field again, and the whistle went for the resumption of hostilities.

The second half was keener than the first, and Pelham Third were hard put to it to keep their end up.

Yorke and his men came down upon the visitors' goal time and again, with a deadly determination that put the Pelham defence to the hardest tests.

Twice St. Winifred's got through, and the leather found a resting-place in the net, and the crowd round the ropes yelled themselves hoarse with delight.

"Goal, goal!"

Three for St. Winifred's and one for Pelham—and only twenty minutes more to play! The prospect was dark enough for the visitors.

"Hang it, this won't do!" muttered Mac, as the side lined up after the last St. Winifred's goal. "We shall be grinned at when we get in, and no mistake, if we go back like this!"

Jack set his teeth.

"There's twenty minutes yet," he said, "and I've seen a game lost and won in five. Play up!"

And the Pelham Third played for all they were worth.

Fortune smiled on them once more. A determined attack brought them well up to the home goal, and a back played the ball behind the flag.

From the corner-kick Macalpine captured the leather and sent it in, with a fast shot that gave the goalkeeper no chance.

And five minutes later Jack Noble sent in the ball from long range, and took the goalie by surprise, and it found a lodging in the net.

Pelham had equalised. Both teams were looking well gruelled by this time, and some of them did not seem to have a run left in their legs; but they were determined to fight it out to a finish. Neither side wanted a draw.

There were ten minutes more to play. The minutes ticked off. The referee glanced at his watch.

"Now, then!" muttered Jack Noble.

He had received a centre from Lawson minor, and he was away with the ball at lightning speed, and the whole line of Pelham forwards broke away in fine style. They came sweeping up the field, passing like clockwork, and the St. Winifred's forwards and halves seemed to be left standing.

A heavy back charged Jack Noble off the ball as he was about to kick, and he rolled on the ground. The ball was kicked out, but a Pelham half was ready for it. Bob Russell was on the spot. He sprang forward, and his head met the whizzing leather, and it whizzed back—right into the goalmouth.

The custodian made a wild clutch at it, and his finger-tips scraped the leather without stopping it, and it shot into the net.

Jack Noble picked himself up dizzily.

"It's a goal!" gasped Bob. "The winning goal!"

"Hurrah!"

And the next moment the whistle rang out shrilly. But Pelham Third did not care—they had taken the winning goal, and the victory was theirs almost on the stroke of time.

THE 4th CHAPTER.
Ponsonby In His True Colours.

PONSONBY was very silent in the brake going home. No one spoke to him, for one thing; and that was discouraging. He began to talk once or twice, but the chilling silence that met his remarks caused him to relapse into silence himself. The Pelham footballers were in a gleeful mood. They had beaten St. Winifred's by the skin of their teeth, so to speak; but they had done it, and the victory meant points to them in the junior schools' competition. But even in their satisfaction, they had nothing to say to Ponsonby. The conviction was growing in every mind that Ponsonby was a humbug, and when they thought how he might have let the side down, the Pelham juniors were wrathful. Jack had depended upon him, and he had failed his side at the last moment, the most grievous sin possible in the eyes of a footballer. True, Pelham had pulled off the match after all; but they owed no thanks to Ponsonby for that. He had led his side to rely upon him, and had failed them at the last moment, and there was no more to be said. Even Jack Noble could no longer believe in him.

Ponsonby found himself treated very differently after the return to Pelham. That morning he had been a hero, but the glory had departed now. It was in vain that he explained that he couldn't help twisting his ankle—that accidents would happen—that if he had been able to play Pelham would have scored a dozen goals to nil.

"Oh, get off!" said Macalpine bluntly. "I never believed for a minute that there was anything wrong with your ankle. It was a dodge."

"Oh, really—"

"You can't play footer for toffee."

"I can show you an account of a match in the Redclyffe school paper—"

"Well, show it, then, and shut up till then!"

And Ponsonby, upon the whole, thought that advice rather good. He wrote a letter to Redclyffe in the sight of all the juniors in the common-room, and posted it in public, and announced that the magazine would arrive on Monday.

His manner was so confident that some of the fellows wavered in their belief.

They waited for Monday.

Monday came, and so did a packet by post for Ponsonby. When the Third Form came out after morning school, there was the packet in the rack, addressed to the new fellow.

Ponsonby smiled as he took it down.

"Now, we'll see," he remarked.

The Third Form gathered round him. Jack Noble turned red.

"Well, if I've done you any injustice I'm sorry," he remarked. "But let's see the thing, anyway—I don't believe you yet."

"Nor I," said Mac, with emphasis.

Ponsonby opened the packet with a flourish. There was a copy of the Redclyffe school magazine inside, and he unfolded it. He opened the paper and looked from page to page. Then he held it up, with his finger on a column marked "Athletic Reports."

"Read that!" he said loftily.

Jack Noble took the paper and read the report aloud. It was a description of a game of football played by Redclyffe against Northmoor. It finished as follows:

"All through the game Ponsonby was to the fore. It is safe to say that without him the Redclyffe side would have been knocked to pieces. His passing, his dribbling, and his kicking were equally brilliant, and Northmoor never showed any capability of handling him at all."

Jack Noble ceased.

There was amazement in every face. There was no doubting statements in cold print like that, and the Third Form felt that they had done the new fellow an injustice. But the peculiar grin still lurked on the features of Macalpine. Jack looked at him.

"That's plain enough Mac," he remarked.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, I'm sorry I doubted you, Ponsonby," said Noble, in his frank way. "But it did really look fishy, you know. Look here, will you play for us on Wednesday? We're playing the Newland Athletic, and it will be one of the toughest matches of the season. We shall be lucky if we pull it off. Will you play?"

"Yes, rather!" said Ponsonby. "I don't bear any malice, though I think you fellows might have trusted me."

"Then that's settled."

"Hold on a second," said Mac. "It's just barely possible that Ponsonby may have another accident just before the Athletic match"—Ponsonby turned red—"so suppose we get up a match here and now," said Mac cheerfully. "We've got an hour, and we'll play a scratch match, and give him a chance."

"Good!" said several voices.

"It's a good idea," assented Jack Noble at once. "It will be good practice, and we need it; and it will give Ponsonby a chance to show what he can do."

"I don't know if my ankle is quite sound yet," muttered Ponsonby.

"You said it was quite well this morning," said Mac.

"Yes, but—"

Mac linked arms with the new winger.

"Come on, old chap!" he said, quite affectionately. "I'm so anxious to see you play."

And Ponsonby, looking very red, was hurried off to the junior football-ground. Nearly all the Third Form followed. Jack Noble speedily formed up two sides for the scratch match, and Ponsonby was put at outside-left. The new recruit was looking extremely uncomfortable.

"I—I'm afraid my ankle is still a little rocky," he remarked nervously to Noble.

"This may make it worse for the Athletic match on Wednesday."

"Never mind; we'll risk it."

"Yes, but—"

"Play up!"

And Jack kicked off.

There was a rush of juniors, and Jack passed out to Drake, when he had the ball, and Drake let it go further on to Ponsonby; but the outside-left did not take the pass. He was rushed off the ball by the opposing half-back, and the leather went up the field.

"You ass!" roared Noble. "What's the matter with you?"

"I—I—"

"Is that how they played footer at Redclyffe?" asked Mac maliciously.

"I—I—"

The juniors rushed after the leather. Ponsonby followed them limply. The ball came his way again, and he was in the midst of a struggling and excited crowd.

"Pass, you duffer—pass!" yelled Jack Noble.

The ball was at Ponsonby's feet, but he did not touch it. He seemed bewildered. It was

captured by an opponent, and whizzed into goal. Jack Noble rushed up to the new winger and shook him by the shoulder.

"What's the matter with you?" he shouted.

"My—my ankle!"

"Hang your ankle! You can't play!"

"I—I—"

"He can't play for toffee," said Bob Russell scornfully. "Blessed if I believe he's ever been on a footer-ground before! Why, he simply looked at the ball! I don't believe he's ever kicked one in his life!"

"I—I—"

"And he was going to make us rely upon him on Wednesday in a match like the one with the Athletic," said Jack, with a dangerous look. "You—you rotten spoofer!"

Ponsonby gazed helplessly at the ring of angry faces surrounding him. The scratch match was stopped now; it had served its purpose. The new winger was completely bowled out; the hollowness of his pretences was made amply manifest.

He could not play footer; he not only could not play, but he was utterly helpless in the game, and could not even attempt to keep up appearances.

And naturally the Pelham Third were wrathful.

They had been taken in. They had believed the most outrageous fibs; they had almost allowed themselves to depend upon the wretched spoofer in the toughest match of the season. They looked grim as they surrounded the wretched pretender. Ponsonby looked nervously from face to face. From the bottom of his heart he wished that he had stuck to the plain and unadorned path of truth, and not entangled himself in a hopeless network of falsehood.

"You'd better own up," said Jack Noble grimly. "You can't play footer?"

A new lie quavered on Ponsonby's lips, but he realised that it was useless, and the truth came out with a jerk.

"No!"

"You've never played?"

"N-no!"

"You've been telling whoppers all the time?"

"I—I—"

"Answer me!"

"Ye-es!"

"Well, of all the rotters!" said Bob Russell, in disgust. "But, look here, how did you rig up that school paper report?"

"That was Ponsonby I," explained the new recruit feebly. "There were two of us at the school, you see. I was Ponsonby II. But I—I—"

"Well, my only hat!" exclaimed Jack Noble. "So that was it! You passed off another chap's exploits as your own. And you took us in!"

Mac chuckled.

"Well, as he's such a blessed keen footballer, and can't play footer, we ought to give him a lesson," he remarked. "Now's the time."

"Good egg!"

"I—I don't want to learn!" stammered Ponsonby, easily reading the mischief in the grinning faces of the juniors. "I—I'd rather—"

"You've got no choice in the matter," said Jack Noble coolly. "You came on this field of your own accord to play footer, and now you're going to play it. You're not much good as a forward, half, back, or goalie; but we'll see whether you're any good as a footballer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby made a wild rush to escape. But the footballers were all round him, and he could not get away. What happened next seemed afterwards like a dreadful dream to Ponsonby. He was dragged and rushed and pushed and rolled here, there, and everywhere. His clothes were rent and torn, his hair was a tousled mop, his face was caked with mud, his senses were swimming, and his breath coming and going in short, wheezy gasps, when the footballers finally hurled him forth from the football-field. Ponsonby had never been through a ragging like that before, and he never wanted to go through it again. He crawled away from the footer-field feeling as if life were not worth living, and a yell of laughter from the Pelham footballers followed him.

Ponsonby's name was not in the list for the Third eleven on the following Wednesday. And never again was Ponsonby heard to talk football, or known to come anywhere near the football-ground if he could possibly help it.

THE END.
(Another splendid, complete tale of Jack Noble in next week's BOYS' REALM.)

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THE BEST 1/2^d. PAPER FOR BRITISH BOYS.

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warned Tony that he had discovered something.

"What is it?" he murmured. "The bolt of the secret door is withdrawn," the native murmured; "therefore, someone has entered the chamber and has not yet returned. Give me thy hand, sahib."

He took Tony's firm hand and guided it beneath the bush. The Hussar's fingers touched a long bar of steel.

"When that is pressed to the right," said the native, "the trapdoor in the pathway is closed and can be walked on without betraying its secret. But now, with the bolt withdrawn, a man's weight will tilt it upward, so that he may descend the steps into a passage which leads to the chamber."

"Then we must not enter by it to-night," the Hussar said. "But there is the other way—through the waters of the fountain."

The native pulled his robes tightly around him. "I have little inclination for a bath at this hour," he whispered, with a smile, which the darkness concealed; "but—and thou wilt show me the way—I will follow."

They crossed the path, and approached the wide basin. Tony slipped over the side and entered the cool depths. His companion followed him, drawing a sharp, hissing breath through his teeth as the icy water closed on him.

Drawing one deep breath, Tony plunged into the fierce jets, and fought his way through to the edge of the high cup in the centre. The native, after one failure, in which the water-jet, catching him fairly on his neck, sent him staggering back again, bowed his head and butted through, panting like a half-drowned dog, to Tony's side.

Then the two drenched men clambered up on the marble side of the wide cup, and, leaning over, peered into the chamber beneath.

A strange sight met their eyes.

In the Secret Chamber—Trapped!
A S Tony's eyes grew accustomed to the light shining beneath, he saw the figure of a man stretched on a divan in one corner of the chamber. The man's face was covered completely by a mask of some dark material, but the lines of the stout body could not be mistaken.

"'Tis the rajah! Allah protect him!" the native trooper murmured hoarsely.

Some six paces away from the divan stood a huge form. A long scimitar was clasped in the black hands, the point resting on the floor. For over a minute Tony kept his eyes fixed on the sentinel, then at last a movement revealed the coarse, brutal features of the giant Nubian wrestler, whom Patsey had punished so severely in the mosque square.

"Sayid, the Nubian," said the native, recognising the man. "Ahmed chooses his slaves carefully. In all Gilapur he could not have found a viler wretch."

Tony did not make any response. The secret of the chamber was his at last, and he knew that to make use of it he would have to move quickly. Already one of the three days' grace granted by Ahmed to the British garrison had gone. There was much to be done, and but little time to do it in.

From the top of the cup through which the two adventurers were peering to the floor of the chamber was a drop of at least eighteen feet. Too far to risk with that mighty sentry on the alert beneath.

It was evident, however, that the old ruler was in no immediate danger. The black was there simply to prevent his escape or rescue, and certainly he seemed fit for his post.

"I want old Patsey here," Tony thought. "I shouldn't stand a ghost of a chance against that hulking brute in a wrestling match."

The friendly native leaned over and touched his arm.

"If the sahib would like to enter there, his servant can show him a way."

"Without that fellow seeing us?"

"Even so. The dog must remain where he is, and we will be able to move without noise."

"Good!" said Tony. "Then we'll start at once."

Another plunge through the icy fountain saw them safely in the garden. The native seemed to have cat's eyes, for he walked straight to the path without hesitating. Tony heard a faint click, and knew what it meant. The trooper had pulled back the bolt which secured the trapdoor in the path.

The tall, shadowy figure stalked forward a couple of paces; then, stooping down, pressed heavily on the tiled path. Tony had hard work to repress the cry of surprise which arose to his lips as he saw the whole width of the paved way tilt suddenly upwards. A faint waft of scented hot air came to his nostrils; then the native beckoned to him.

"Hasten, sahib," he murmured. "We must not let this remain open too long."

Tony stepped forward, and, feeling the first of a long flight of steps beneath his foot, began to descend slowly into the darkness. Half-way down the stairs he heard a soft thud as the trap closed above them; then the native hurried down to his side.

"All safe, sahib!" came the low whisper.

"That's what you say, old chap," Tony murmured doubtfully; "but I'll hang on to my little gun, all the same."

He felt a hand tug at his robe, and followed. The passage seemed of extraordinary length, but at last his guide halted, and, brushing aside a heavy curtain, entered a narrow chamber, in which a dim lamp glowed.

A heap of rugs and cushions in one corner caught Tony's eye. The native pointed to a silver jar and platter standing beside the heap.

"This is Ahmed's room," he whispered; "but from these things I think that his highness, the rajah, uses it as a sleeping-chamber."

"In what direction lies the big chamber in which he now rests?" Tony asked.

The native pointed a long finger at the curtain.

"We are within ten paces from the room," he said quietly. "It is at the end of the passage. But I have remembered something which may please the sahib to know. Sayid, the Nubian, is deaf."

"By Jove, is he? That's good news!"

"So we need not fear discovery," the man went on; "and if we but play our parts well, we may even succeed in—"

A dull thud reverberated along the passage outside. Both men swung round and faced the curtained door.

"What was that?" Tony whispered.

The brown face of his companion had suddenly become ashen with fear. "It—it was the trapdoor, sahib," he murmured; "someone is entering!"

For a long moment Tony stood quite still, listening intently.

"Sayid! Sayid! Curse it! I had forgotten that the dog was deaf!" a cruel voice cried.

"The prince!" groaned the trooper.

"Your Highness has chosen his servant well," another voice said. "The deaf can hear no wrong."

The sound of approaching footsteps grew louder and louder.

Pulling himself together with an effort, the young Hussar sprang into the centre of the chamber, and, reaching up, dragged the shred of wick out of the shallow lamp, plunging the room into darkness.

"Behind the door, quick!" he breathed.

Noiselessly the two sprang for the curtain, pressing close against the wall. The feet stopped outside the door, then the curtain was jerked aside.

"The dog has allowed the light to go out," Ahmed said. His voice sounded so close to Tony that the trooper knew that by stretching out his hand he could have touched him.

Then a faint scrape sounded in the passage—the Mohammedans are fanatics, but they appreciate the Western means of ignition, the handy match—and a yellow gleam filtered through the heavy curtain.

Ahmed came forward into the gloom, while his companion, guarding the flame, followed him.

The shadowy forms beside the door escaped the new-comers' notice. Ahmed was picking his way carefully towards the lamp, while his follower's whole attention was centred on keeping the match alight.

The native trooper leaned out towards Tony, and with an abrupt gesture pointed towards Ahmed. Then, like a great panther, he leaped forward.

Tony was with him in an instant. He knew what the gesture meant. He was to tackle the prince before he could reach the lamp, while the trooper attacked the match-bearer.

"A-h-h!"

A strangled scream went up as the native's hand gripped at the attendant's throat. Ahmed spun round on his heel. The falling match gave him a fitting view of the two struggling men; then, before he could open his mouth to shout, Tony was upon him.

The rush with which the young footballer had crossed the room sent the thin prince reeling among the soft cushions. Tony's hands gripped at the lithe body, and a fierce struggle ensued.

The room seemed to be full of men, gasping and sobbing for breath. To and fro over the floor Tony and his wiry foeman rolled, battling like wildcats.

It was a fight to the death, and they were silent now, saving their breath for the struggle.

Moore had always appreciated the sinuous grace of the thin prince, but he found now that the man was made of iron. The feel of the tough sides beneath his straining arms told him that he thanked his lucky stars that he, too, was in perfect condition.

Ahmed fought like a wild beast. Once Tony felt the teeth sinking into his arm, but a powerful drive of his fist speedily checked that, and Ahmed did not attempt it again.

The utter darkness of the place only added to the grimness of the fight. Tony knew that to loosen his hold meant discovery. And, try as he might, the prince found it impossible to release that terrible bond of flesh and bone around his frame. How long the fight lasted Tony was never able to say. It could only have been a matter of minutes, but to him it seemed hours. But at last, when he felt as though he would have to give up and release his hold, he felt Ahmed's struggles weakening.

"Dog accursed!" the shrill voice wailed out in the agony of defeat.

Thud!

A heavy body crashed down close to Tony. Then a pair of hands came groping through the darkness, and rested on his arm.

"Sahib?" came the whisper.

A thrill of joy ran through the Hussar. His faithful native had also proved victorious.

"It is I," he said gaspingly. Ahmed lay quite still beneath him, and, bending down, Tony passed his hand over the hot face. It remained quiet beneath his touch. He had crushed the breath out of his enemy's body!

"Allah be praised!" said the trooper. "He hath aided us. Come, sahib; let us leave here ere it be too late."

Tony rose to his feet, trembling with exhaustion. The two started for the door. The big trooper reached the curtain first, and, forgetting his caution, flung it aside and leaped out. Tony heard a harsh yell of rage sound from the passage.

"The Nubian!" he cried.

The doorway at the foot of the passage was glowing with light. He saw a black, tremendous form loom above the crouching figure of the trooper; the great scimitar flashed in the air.

Whipping his revolver out of his pocket Tony fired.

Crack!

A scream of pain rang out when the smoke from the charge clouded the scene.

Dropping on one knee Moore bent forward, waiting for the fumes to clear.

The smoke cleared away, and the Hussar caught sight of his companion leaning against the wall. One hand was pressed against the side of his head, and, with a throb of alarm, Tony saw a dark stream trickling down the white robes.

Beyond the native a black heap lay on the stone floor—a heap which neither moved nor groaned. Ahmed's slave was dead!

One bound brought Tony to the side of his wounded friend. The native trooper groaned as the Hussar touched him.

"The dog bit as he died, sahib!" he murmured. "Leave me! I will only be a burden to thee now."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" the soldier cried indignantly. "We'll sink or swim together, old chap!"

He supported the wounded man, and began to walk along the passage. Unfortunately, he turned in the wrong direction. Instead of landing at the foot of the stairs he found himself inside the big chamber.

The masked man was sitting up on the divan, his hooded face turned towards the door.

Through the eye-slits Tony saw a pair of dark orbs gazing at him searchingly. He led the stricken native trooper up to the divan, lowered him on the soft cushion, then turned to the silent figure.

"I am one of the Blue Hussars, your Highness," he said, in English; "and have come to help you!"

The stout rajah leaped to his feet with a hoarse cry of joy. Tony observed for the first time that the ruler's hands were manacled behind his back.

"One of the British soldiers?" cried the ruler. "Allah be praised! My deliverance is at hand!"

As the words left his lips a mocking laugh sounded from the passage. Tony started up and dashed towards the door. But he was just a second or so too late. The heavy iron barrier clanged to in his face, and he heard the creak of the thick bars as they shot home.

"Trapped! Trapped, you fools!" the voice of Ahmed screamed, from without. "You have walked into a trap of your own making! And now you will pay the penalty!"

(Another splendid instalment will appear next week.)

ARTHUR REDFERN'S VOW.

A Rollicking Tale of School Life. By CHARLES HAMILTON.

A Fresh Start.
THAT Jimmy Crew would give him away without a single scruple to save himself Ransome knew only too well.

The game was quite up! "Have you anything to say, Ransome?" said the Head. "If you have a confession to make, and choose to make it to me now, I will send the police away when they come. For the sake of the school, and of your people, I will avoid making the matter public, and content myself with expelling you from St. Dorothy's."

"I—I confess!"

"You admit that Redfern minor brought the banknote to you?" said the Head sternly.

"Ye-es!"

"You pretended to recognise it as your own, and kept it?"

"Yes," said Ransome, with livid lips.

"And you deliberately accused an innocent lad of theft in order to cover up your own wickedness?"

Ransome did not speak.

"Any other punishment I shall spare you. The truth will be publicly announced to the whole school, to clear Redfern minor, and you will be expelled. That is all. I only hope that the lesson will not be lost upon you—that its severity will lead you to abandon your pursuits, and turn to better ways."

The Head quitted the study.

Ransome threw himself into a chair, his face ghastly. The door closed. The cad of the Sixth was left alone with his miserable thoughts. All his plotting—all his cunning—all his cynicism and his worldly wisdom, had led him to this!

In the ruin of his wretched schemes, the cad of St. Dolly's realised—too late—that it would have been better for him if he had "played the game."

There was a thrill of suppressed excitement in the crowd of boys in the great hall at St. Dolly's.

The whole school was assembled, and the morning sunlight, streaming in at the windows, gleamed on excited faces.

All knew the cause of the assembly. Ransome was to be expelled.

The boys listened with almost painful attention as the deep voice of the Head rolled through the silent hall.

With clear and concise words Dr. Cranston told of the discovery that had been made—that Redfern minor was cleared of all suspicion—that

Ransome, of the Sixth, had confessed his guilt, and was to be expelled from the school.

Ransome stood there—silent, shivering. Then the Head turned to him.

The cad of the Sixth shrank under his scornful glance.

"You are expelled, Ransome! You will leave St. Dolly's this morning, never to return. And I trust that the other lads, whom you may have attempted to initiate into your own wicked ways, will take warning by your fate!"

At which the members of the Smart Set looked very uneasy and sheepish.

Ransome went slowly from the room, and disappeared. Ten minutes later there was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle. Ransome was going to the station.

There was no one to bid him farewell.

The Smart Set were afraid of becoming identified with him, of giving themselves away by any show of friendship at that moment; and scared, too, at the perils they now saw Ransome had been leading them into.

Ransome went alone, without a handshake or a friendly word.

He vanished from St. Dolly's, never to reappear, and the whole school seemed to breathe a sigh of relief when he was gone.

In the quadrangle, Redfern minor was surrounded by a crowd of congratulatory juniors. Classics and Moderns were vying with one another in making much of him. Arthur Redfern glanced at them, and smiled as he turned away. There was a touch on his arm; he looked round; it was Knowles.

The Modern prefect looked curiously hesitating.

Arthur nodded, with a look of wonder.

"You know it?" said Knowles abruptly.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I don't want to say anything against a fellow who's down, and who's gone now," said Knowles, knitting his brows a little. "But—but I can see now that I played the fool. I was only being used by Ransome. He played on me as he might have played on a fiddle, and I never saw it till now."

"I'm glad you see it now."

Knowles laughed rather ruefully.

"Well, I should have to be blind not to see it now, now that the fellow has been shown up so thoroughly. Of course, I know now that he wrote that anonymous letter. I can see that he was at the bottom of all the trouble we've had this term. It was his game to set me against you, and I was wax in his hands. I—I wanted to say that—that now I can see how things were, I—I am willing to make a fresh start, if you are."

"Good!" said Arthur heartily.

"What do you say, then?" said Knowles, colouring a little. "Shall we try—to pull together, to sink any little private differences we may have, and—try to undo the rotten work Ransome has been doing here, and stand together for the honour of St. Dolly's?"

Arthur Redfern held out his hand silently, and gripped that of the Modern prefect. That was his answer, and it was a sufficient one.

The two seniors went into the School House together, and more than one glance of surprise was turned upon them as they chatted on the best of terms. And as they went in a shout rang in the quadrangle.

"Hurray for Redfern minor!"