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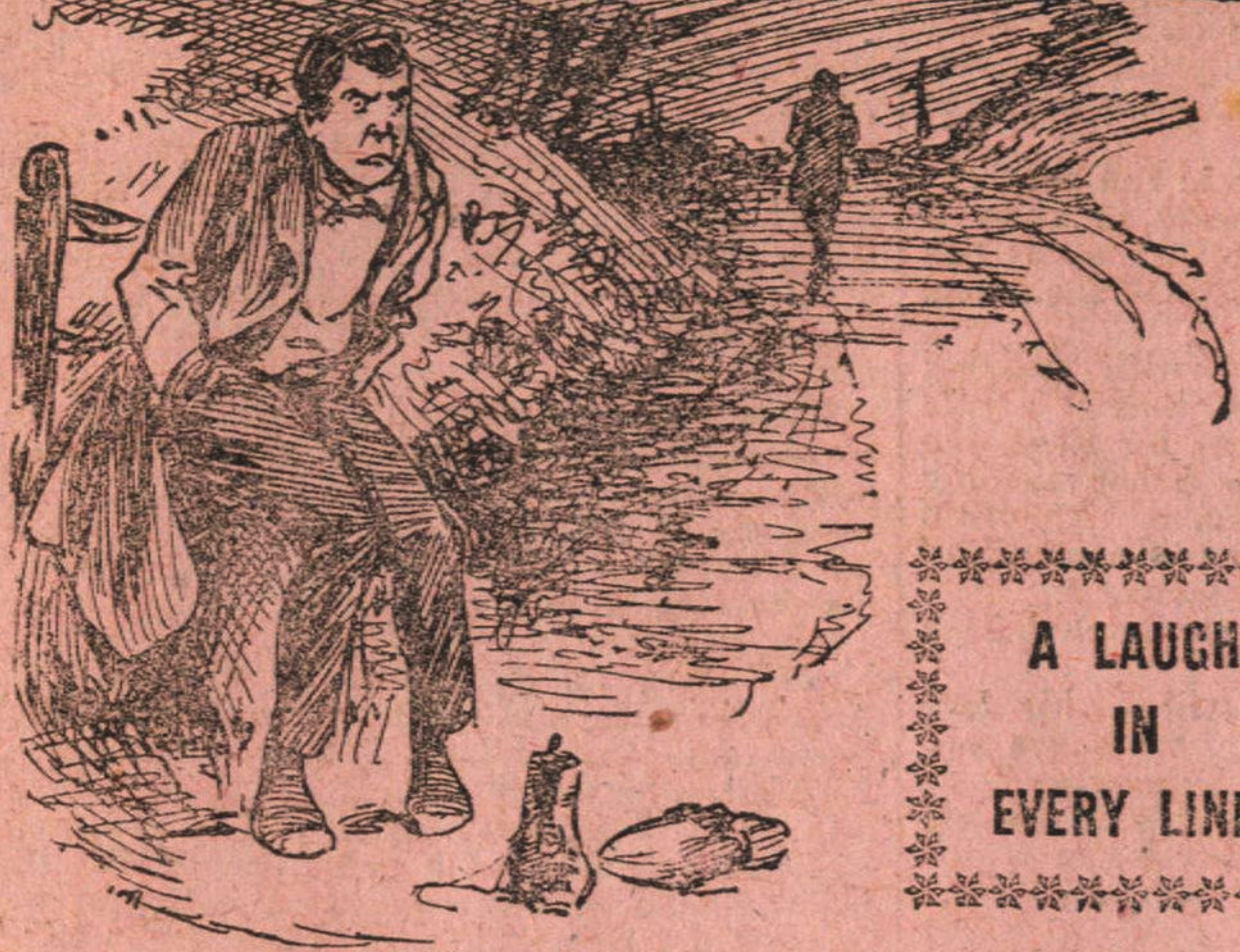


LORD KINNAID,
the Father of
English Football
(Photo by Russell.)

Great New Football Story To-day

CLIFFORD THE CRESTFALLEN

A Rattling, Complete Tale of
JACK NOBLE and PELHAM SCHOOL.



A LAUGH
IN
EVERY LINE.

THE 1st CHAPTER.

A Couple of Invitations.

"I've thought out a simply ripping jape," said Clifford enthusiastically. "It'll be the jape of the term at Pelham."

"What! Against the Noble crowd?" asked Bayne diffidently.

"Yes, you ass, against the Noble crush, of course," said Clifford. "It simply will make those cads wriggle. I'll tell you what the idea is, and you see if you won't agree with me."

"Oh, thanks!" Bayne's tones were slightly sarcastic. "Of course, if you're not quite sure you can trust me, don't let on."

"Shut up, and listen!" Clifford took his caddy's arm, and drew him into the study shared by them. "Well"—after he had closed the door against all possible overhearers—"you know the Pettifogs?"

"General Pettifog, who lives at the Hall, two miles away? Yes, rather! Hot stuff, too, he is. His wife's the same, but he's got a stunning daughter. The general's a terror though, so don't start any monkey-shines with him, my son. He hates boys generally, and Pelham boys in particular. But you might as well go on and get the wheeze off your chest."

"He's going to have a whist drive on Tuesday night. Let's write a letter, inviting Jack Noble and, say, Bob Russell! They'll swallow the bait like lambs. Think what asses they'll look when they get there, and find they weren't really invited!"

"Don't see how you're going to do it," objected Bayne, not greatly taken with the idea. "I'd rather not go using that old spitfire's name; I—er—respect him too much!"

"Funk!" said Clifford disgustedly. "Who'd know we'd written it? I'm going to do it, anyway."

"What about paper? Got a sheet with Pettifog's crest on?"

"No, and don't need it; think Noble's got the wit to notice such a minor detail as all that? Why, he'll be so bucked up with himself that he'll never think about it. We'll use a sheet of plain notepaper."

"We will!" snorted Bayne. "Not me, thanks! Don't bring me into it! I refuse to be drawn into this conspiracy!"

"Then I'll do it myself," said Clifford. "Here, gimme a pen and ink and paper!"

Bayne shrugged his shoulders, went to a locker, and took out his writing-case. There were several sheets of plain blue notepaper there, one of which Clifford took. Then, spreading himself out over the table, he began to write, putting his tongue out, his nose within two inches of his work. "How shall we word it?" he asked, looking up.

"Please yourself!" snapped Bayne, who had picked up a copy of "The Boys' Herald," and who was already deeply immersed in its thrilling contents. "I told you I wasn't going to have anything to do with it."

"General and Mrs. Pettifog, of Ailsa Hall, request the pleasure of Messrs. Jack Noble and Bob Russell's company at a whist drive on Tuesday, the 22nd inst. Whist from 8 to 12.—R.S.V.P." he read out aloud. "How'll that do, you giddy owl?"

"Rotten!" sniffed Clifford, turning one shoulder to his friend. "I advise you to chuck up the idea."

"You wouldn't if you saw this," said Clifford, rising to his feet, and snatching "The Boys' Herald" out of Bayne's hand, and thrusting the note in its place. "Ain't I pretty good with my pen?"

Bayne glanced at the note, and his interest was aroused. There was no doubt about it; Clifford had achieved a triumph of penmanship. The handwriting was a perfect imitation of the splashy style adopted by many young ladies of the present day.

"What do you go and use a girl's fist for?" he asked, surprised.

"Why, ain't it likely that the old fossil will make his daughter send out the invitee? Think he'd do it himself? I tell you, you want brains to get on in this world. What

d'you think of it?" asked Clifford, who was flushed with his success.

"Best leave it alone; something'll go wrong, and make you sit up," was Bayne's non-encouraging response.

"Rats to you! Why, it's a perfect dream. Ha, ha, ha; I fancy I see the faces of these rotters when they show up at the Hall, only to be turned away like a couple of common cads!"

Bayne made no reply; while Clifford slipped the sheet of paper into an envelope, sealed it, and addressed it in the same handwriting.

"Care for a stroll?" he asked. "I reckon I'll go down to Pelham and post it."

Bayne grumbled, threw his "Herald" at Clifford's head, then snatched up his cap. In half an hour they were back at the school again, Clifford chuckling, scarce able to contain himself with delight of the prospect of getting in some measure equal with his Third Form enemies.

The following morning, two letters were handed to Jack Noble. Clifford, from his seat at his breakfast-table, glanced over to the Third Form captain. He chuckled to himself as he saw the youngster open his own note first. Then, after Jack Noble had scanned it closely, and a whistle of surprise had broken from his lips, he opened the other. The first whistle was nothing compared with the blast that came from him at the sight of his second communication.

"Noble," said Mr. Slaney, from his seat at the end of Jack Noble's table, "take a hundred lines for misbehaving yourself at meals!"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir!" said Jack; but it was plain to see that his interest was not with lines, with Mr. Slaney, or anything else connected with impositions. He was staring at the envelopes of his two letters as a man in a dream.

"What's up, old chap?" asked Bob Russell, sitting next to him. "Bad news from home?"

"No, but it's jolly queer," said Jack Noble. "I'll tell you about it when we get up to our study. Shut up now, or old Slaney'll be showing more lines on to us."

Clifford did not notice Jack's perplexity; he was too busy gloating over the fact that his rival had received the bogus invitation to worry about anything else. And so Jack Noble puzzled it out until breakfast was over, when he walked arm-in-arm with Russell to their study. Once inside, Jack Noble showed his two letters to his chum.

"Now, what do you make of it?" asked Noble, wrinkling his brow. Bob Russell read the first one; it was the note written by Clifford. The handwriting disarmed him, and when he saw his own name mentioned, he whistled his surprised delight.

"I think it's ripping, you know," he said. "Wonder why the old chap thought to invite us two, eh?"

"Can't say. Now, look at this," said Jack Noble, and shoved the other under Russell's nose. Bob glanced at it, and then he too grew perplexed. For the second missive was another invitation from General Pettifog to Jack Noble and friend to attend a whist drive on the following Tuesday. But whereas the first was handwritten, the second was an engraved card, bearing the crest of the Pettifogs; a gorgeous affair altogether. "Mr. J. Noble and Friend" had been written on the blank line. Small wonder that both Jack Noble and Bob Russell stared at each other, for, while both handwritings were those of a lady, they were totally different in style.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Noble.

Russell made no reply, but turned over the note that Clifford had written, and scanned its back. Something there that he saw made him take it to the window to examine it more closely.

"Whoever wrote this was a bit of a slacker," he remarked. "I always understood that it was bad form to send off a letter to a stranger that was blotted or smudged. Look at this smudge here on the back."

Jack looked at it. A small, dark mark was to be seen; but Jack, on examining it still more closely, saw the imprint of a finger. Clifford had evidently touched the paper unknown to himself with an inky digit.

"The young lady who wrote this," he observed "must have cut her finger at one time, for here's the mark of a scar on it."

"Where?" asked Russell quickly, snatching the paper away. "By Jove!" he cried suddenly. "You're right! Now"—he paused—

"I wonder, now—" he said thoughtfully, "By Jove! I believe I'm right."

"What's your idea?" asked Jack Noble, mildly curious.

"I wonder if this is a jape?" asked Russell. "I happen to know quite well that Clifford has just such a scar on his left-hand first finger. He sometimes has a way of making the print of it with ink, when he's not thinking. Remember how he once wrote us a letter threatening he would get us into all sorts of trouble if we didn't disband the Third Eleven? Remember how he made his finger-mark under his signature, just to make it seem more impressive?"

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack Noble. "I see the wheeze! He's written this thing, trying to make us look fools by turning up to the party. Here, I wonder if we kept that letter? If we could just find it to make sure, we'd think out some plot to get even."

But though they sought, they could find no trace of Clifford's letter. They gave it up finally, and returned to the subject of the general's invitation. Russell picked up the envelope in which the card had come, glanced inside it carelessly, then took out a slip of paper, which Jack Noble had overlooked. It bore a few words in the same handwriting that had addressed the envelope. Russell read them aloud.

"I hope you will accept the enclosed invitation, and bring a friend. While you are here, I have a little subject I would like to broach to you. Kind regards.—Yours sincerely, ELSIE PETTIFOG."

"This one's genuine enough, anyway," commented Jack Noble. "That's a ripping girl; pity she's got such a rotten name. We'll go to that party if we can get off, eh, old chap?"

"Rather! Wonder what it is she wants to speak to us about?" asked Russell. "And I say, I wonder if Clifford really did write this other one?"

"We can find out easily enough," said Jack. "There are no two finger-prints alike, they say. Well, we'll go into Clifford's study, and make him give us a whole set of his, and if this one corresponds with his scarred finger, then we'll know who wrote the thing. If he did, we'll find a way of getting even with him!"

"Great Scott, Bob!" he continued, bursting into a wild laugh. "Wouldn't it be a lark if we were to send him this card? By Jove! We'll hoist him with his own petard! We'll get some ink-eraser, and rub out my name, and write his there instead. What do you say? Shall we do it? He'll never twig! When he finds out that we're really going to the party, he'll think it's his invitation that's taken us to the Hall!"

"Good wheeze," returned Bob. "But we first must make sure that it was he who wrote this thing. If we're mistaken, we can't very well go and make a fool of him like that."

Without further parley, they adjourned to Clifford's study. In that sanctum they found Clifford and Bayne. As they opened the door they saw that Clifford's face was wrinkled, as though he had been laughing quite recently. Jack Noble put that down to guilt on the Shell fellow's part. But he was a youngster who never did things without first making sure.

"Well," demanded the captain of the Junior Eleven, ungraciously. "And what the dickens are you doing here? Get to your own kennel! We don't want rotters like you about here! Get out! Quick, now!"

"Certainly," replied Jack Noble blandly. "Only first I want to ask a favour of your highness. Lend me half a dozen sheets of exercise paper, will you? Can't find any about the place."

"Go to Putney!" said Clifford sullenly. "Find your own beastly paper! You'll not get any here, I'll tell you!"

But Jack Noble, across whose mind an idea had flashed, reached out for a dozen or so sheets of the paper in question, which were lying on the table in front of Clifford. In stretching out his hand he, as though by accident, upset Clifford's ink-bottle, then stood surveying the damage he had done with an exaggerated air of concern.

"Oh, what a clumsy ass I am!" he said. "Look what I've done, Clifford!"

Clifford, over whose hand the ink had spilled, spoiling his shirt-cuff, said something far from polite in agreement. But Jack Noble noted with pleasure that, so far, his scheme was working out well; it was Clifford's left hand that was inked.

"Sorry I can't stay to mop it up, you know," Jack Noble went on. Then, absent-mindedly, he snatched at the sheets of paper again. Clifford was quick enough to intercept him. He placed his fingers on the topmost sheet. Jack let go his hold, and appeared to be concerned again about the damaged tablecloth.

"It was a beastly mess I went and made," he said. And picking up a handkerchief of Clifford's that happened to be lying on the table, he proceeded to mop up the mess. Clifford gave a yell at this further destruction of his property. He grabbed at the handkerchief; Jack let him have it, but, with a quick motion, picked up the sheet of exercise paper that now bore all five of Clifford's left-hand finger-prints.

"Tooral-tooral!" he chuckled, kissing his hand, and starting for the door, while Russell, convulsed by the coolness of his chum, was bent almost double with mirth. "Sorry I can't stop. Oh, by the way, I've been invited to General Pettifog's whist drive on Tuesday. Have you?"

Clifford looked up, glaring. Then he smiled craftily.

Jack Noble, by his clumsiness, had spoilt one of his—Clifford's—handkerchiefs and a tablecloth; but Clifford could afford to overlook these minor details in his glee at the success of his plot. Jack Noble, the worm, had nibbled at the bait—nay, he had swallowed it, hook and all!

"Lucky beggar!" he said, with a change of manner. "Wish I had been invited to it. Don't see why the Third Form should get everything!"

"Oh, you'll get invited!" Jack said cheerfully, when once the door had closed behind himself and the captain of the Junior Eleven. "You'll get invited all right. I say, Russell, old man, I deserve a pat on the back! I got those finger-prints neatly enough, didn't I?"

(Continued on the next page.)



Clifford shot forward like a stone out of a catapult, and down came the suit of armour from its pedestal with a mighty crash, flying to pieces.

And there's one of them tallies exactly with the one on that invitation. Well, now we need have no scruples about getting even with the silly ass—eh, old hoss?"

"You bet your boots!" agreed Russell, examining the sheet of paper on which were plainly to be seen a perfect set of identification marks. "Now we'll fake up the general's card—eh, what!"

"But hold on a minute!" Jack suddenly remembered something. "We mustn't alter it till we've shown it to the Head to get his permission to accept. If we do, we'll spoil our chances of seeing the fun! Oh, Cliffy! I'm afraid your brains ain't strong enough to think out a really decent jape! Never mind; you make it all the easier for us to jape you!"

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
The Uninvited Guests.

YES, the lordly Clifford was very simple, in spite of the fact that he thought himself just about the wisest being in Pelham School. He was not the least bit suspicious when, by the afternoon's post, there came an invitation from—apparently—Ailsa Hall for him to attend the whist drive to which he had invited Jack Noble. There was nothing about the invitation to arouse anyone's suspicion, anyhow. It was there, with the general's crest on, and with his name written in a firm masculine hand. Russell had made a good job of it with the ink-eraser, while Jack Noble had shown himself to be quite as clever with his pen as Clifford—nay, more clever, for he did not leave any incriminating finger-prints on the card.

"By Jove!" he said. "Who'd have thought it? 'Mr. Clifford and friend' invited. I'll take Prince! That silly block-head Bayne wouldn't help me to get Jack Noble on toast, so he shan't have the pleasure of seeing the success of my jape. Oh, it'll be ripping to see Jack Noble and Bob Russell kicked out of the Hall on Tuesday night!"

And each day until the eventful Tuesday night he chuckled whenever he thought about it. He swaggered about the school, telling all his cronies—and enemies, too—about his invitation into society. He had been invited to meet the county, he said, puffing out his chest. Jack Noble? "Oh, yes, maybe Jack Noble is invited, too, but you fellows will hear something more about Jack Noble's invitation on Wednesday morning," he said, with a grin.

Yes, he grinned; and so did Jack Noble and Bob Russell, with more cause for amusement. Jack Noble had only one fear, and that was soon dispelled.

He wondered whether the Head, when Clifford went also to ask permission to accept the invitation, would suspect the joke. But the Head apparently was only too proud of the fact that four of his boys had been invited to this social function to suspect anything. And so Jack Noble breathed freely again.

The great night arrived, and Jack Noble and Russell, Clifford and Prince all dressed up in their Sunday best, with white waistcoats and ties, and put their best tiles on. But at the last moment Clifford failed to find his pumps. Russell had taken care of that; he didn't want Clifford to get to his destination too soon.

"He'll find 'em, maybe, to-morrow," Jack Noble's best chum laughed. "As it is, he'll have to borrow someone else's."

Not a particle of pity crept into the heart of either Jack Noble or Russell at the coming downfall of the Shell fellow. There was only an unholy joy at the prospect of turning the tables on Clifford.

And so, whilst Clifford was raging about the school looking for his missing patent-leathers, Jack Noble and Russell started off in ample time to reach Ailsa Hall by eight o'clock. It ended in Clifford's borrowing Bayne's best pumps without leave; they were the only ones he could get anywhere near his size. His understandings were not elegant. As it was, those he did borrow were a size too small, and by the time Clifford had walked a quarter of a mile in them he was suffering badly.

"I'll have to go back and put my boots on," he said at length, to his champion, Prince. "I can't walk another step in these beastly things."

"Well, you'll have to walk back in 'em," replied Prince impatiently. "Why the dickens didn't you arrange to do so before, and carry your pumps in your hand?"

"Did you?" snapped Clifford, as a twinge of pain shot through his sensitive corn unkindly.

"No; but I've got a pair of pumps that fit me," retorted Prince.

The weather was, for a wonder, quite dry; that was why neither had found it necessary to journey to their destination in their boots. After a deal of arguing, Clifford suggested that Prince should go back and fetch the captain's boots. Prince undertook the errand with a bad grace. Another fifteen minutes were so lost, while Clifford sat on a milestone and waited for his crony to return.

"You've been a beastly long time!" was all the thanks Prince got when at length he returned with a pair of boots under his arm. "I wish I'd not asked you to come with me, but got somebody else!"

There was a bit of a quarrel right there in the evening's gloom, after which Clifford donned the boots. Nothing further happened to retard their progress to the Hall.

Jack Noble and Bob Russell arrived there

at five minutes to eight, and, after a little hesitation, rang the bell. The Hall presented an awesome spectacle to the two schoolboys; lights shone through the many windows, while the open space in front of the door was thronged with carriages, from which alighted handsomely-dressed women and men. For the first moment or so, so nervous did they feel they were tempted to turn their steps and go back to Pelham.

Then Jack Noble happened to remember the treat in store for Clifford, and he took a grip on his courage, seized Russell's arm, and marched him up the steps.

A gorgeous footman was standing just inside the entrance; so splendid did he look that again Jack Noble felt his knees wilter. However, the footman showed no desire to pitch the boys out. Instead, he gravely asked their names, while another man, almost the first one's double, took their hats and overcoats.

"Mr. Noble and Mr. Russell, of Pelham!" announced the footman, in stentorian tones. Nobody seemed to pay any attention, though, and the boys had time to pull themselves together. The sight of all these people in evening-dress rather startled Russell.

Just as they were wondering what to do, a florid-faced gentleman, whose face seemed an odd contrast to the wide shirtfront that was immediately below it, came into sight, accompanied by a stout, sleepy-looking boy of about Jack Noble's own age. The sight of the boy put the young guests at their ease immediately—they knew him slightly; he was Archibald Pettifog, the general's only son. The red-faced gentleman was the general himself.

"Hallo, hallo!" said the general, eyeing the two Third-Formers with his habitually savage expression. "What have we here? What have we here? Friends of yours, Archibald? Friends of yours?"

The general had a habit of saying everything twice, and the second time was generally brought out in a series of barks. Archibald made himself Jack Noble's friend for life by opening his half-closed eyes, and holding out his hand frankly.

The general's son wasn't such a sleepy fellow as he looked. Jack just then, in his gratitude, put him down as a decent fellow. He shook the hand sheepishly, then introduced Russell.

"My friend, sir," he said to the general. "He was invited with me."

"H'm—h'm! I remember; I remember. Elsie's doing. Wanted to have a chat with you boys about some foolish football game. You're Noble—eh?" barked the general. "Then if you are, we'll find my daughter. We'll find my daughter, I say!" He glared at Jack Noble ferociously. "Archibald, find your sister—or take them to her. Young dogs! They'll be far happier with a girl than with old fogies like us—eh, Mrs. Brampton?"

A stout old lady, who did not seem to like being called an old fogey, tried to smile at the general's joke, while Archibald led the two Pelhamites off in search of Miss Pettifog. On their way Jack fell back, and whispered a few words into Russell's ear.

"I'm rather sorry for Clifford," he said. "Fancy him having to face the general! Wonder what Miss Pettifog wants to talk to me about football for?"

Before Bob could answer Archibald halted them both before a remarkably pretty girl of nineteen, who was talking to, or being talked to by an insipid young man, whose chief feature seemed to be an eyeglass.

"Here's Noble, from Pelham, sis, and his chum," he said. "Thought I'd let you know they'd come. Buck up and say something to them; then we'll go off to the grub. Hate these beastly whist-drives! It's jolly having fellows of one's own age here, so's we can dodge the rotten part."

Miss Pettifog smiled sweetly on them, while Jack and Bob blushed furiously. It was an awful pity, they concluded, that such a nice-looking girl should have such an awful name as Pettifog.

But Elsie wasn't going to be so easily sidetracked by her brother.

She said a few formal words of adieu to the insipid, eye-glassed young man; then, taking Jack's arm in hers, led him off to the dining-room.

In the dining-room she supplied the Pelhamites with cakes and ginger-wine, helped herself to a portion as well; then, as they all sat in the window, she began to talk to them on the subject she had in her mind.

"I've heard so much about you, Jack," she said. "I've seen you play, too. I'm awfully fond of footer, you know. I'd like to play myself. I can't, though," she added, with a sigh. "But I want to ask a favour of you."

Jack said he was willing to do anything for her; and he meant it.

"Are you booked to play next Saturday afternoon?" she asked.

Jack pondered on the question; but Bob Russell answered promptly, with his mouth full of cake:

"No, Miss Elsie. We were, but the other fellows have scratched. We are going to play a match, Sixth versus School, just to fill in the time. Why?"

"Because I can get you a game, if you'll play. It'll be a good win for you, if you do win, and it's in a charitable cause. You know the ironworks at Lesterfield? Well, all the men are locked out by their employers, and there's a lot of misery resulting. But there are several young fellows—apprentices—who've hit on this way of making money to keep themselves and their friends. They've formed together in a football-team, and are trying to arrange

matches. I'm greatly interested in them, and I thought, perhaps, if you'd play against them they'd stop here. You can use the big field at the back of this house, you know. There'll be a charge to watch, of course, and all the takings go to the cause. Now, will you help me?"

Jack Noble was just on the point of stating that he was willing to walk through fire or water for her sake, when an interruption occurred, which made him and Russell remember the great jape of the evening.

"Elsie! I say, Elsie!" came in the general's peppery tones. "Elsie! I want to know if you've invited all the school to turn up at this whist-drive? I say, did you invite all the school to this whist-drive?"

Jack Noble hugged himself with delight; Russell's face became as calm as that of a little cherub in a church window. As for Elsie, she looked up in wonder to see her father standing in the doorway of the dining-room. Archibald was so surprised that he swallowed a mouthful of cake at a bolt, and choked violently.

"No," the girl said. "I only invited Jack Noble and a friend. Why?"

"Because," said General Pettifog, his face going purple—"because, I say, there are two more arrived, and I was only wondering."

Russell gravely kicked Jack Noble on the leg, which made Jack undergo paroxysms inwardly. "He's come!" he whispered. "Oh, my! Poor Cliffy!"

"I must see who these others are," said Elsie, rising. Jack Noble and Russell, forgetting their manners, followed, and saw Clifford and Prince standing in the hall; Prince looking uneasy, Clifford quite at home.

"I'm sorry I'm late, you know," the captain of the Junior Eleven said, advancing, and holding out his hand to the girl; "but the fact of the matter is some cad hid my shoes, and I had a hunt for them. How do you do? How do you do?" Then, catching sight of Noble and Russell, who seemed quite at their ease, and not a bit out of it, as he had calculated, his eyes opened wide.

"I'm very well, thank you," said Miss Pettifog coldly, ignoring Clifford's hand. "But really, you know, I haven't the honour of your acquaintance. You are Mr.—"

Clifford's self-assurance began to vanish; this reception was not what he had anticipated. He had expected to be welcomed with open arms. And Prince, who had been nervous of coming all along, heartily wished he'd stayed at the school.

"Er," said Clifford, stammering somewhat—"er, my name's Clifford, and this is my friend, Prince. We're of the—er—the Pelham Junior Eleven, y'know, and—er—and—"

He paused, for he saw Jack Noble was grinning slyly to Russell. For the first time an awful suspicion assailed him. When he saw the chilly look on the face of Miss Pettifog, and the ever-deepening purple of the general, his knees began to shake; his tongue became dry with horror.

"Er—I hope there's no mistake?" he stammered. "Unfortunately, I left my invitation card behind. But I am Clifford, all right."

Jack Noble was grinning behind his hand; he was merciless. He knew well enough that, miserable though Clifford's position was, his own would have been quite as bad had Clifford's little plot worked out as expected.

"H'm!" grunted the general, fixing Clifford with a severe eye. "H'm, I say! Seems to be some mistake here—seems to be some mistake here!"

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered the wretched Clifford. By this time there were very few guests in the hall; they had, for the most part, little knowing the comedy that was being enacted near them, retired into the drawing-room. There was only the insipid, eye-glassed young man present, besides the actors in the scene, and two footmen.

"Hearkee, young puppy!" spluttered the general, striding forward, and grasping Clifford's shoulder. "Hearkee! If this is one of your confounded jokes, let me tell you you've come to the wrong shop! Yes, the wrong shop! Be off, now! Be off!"

Clifford stared dumbly around him. Miss Pettifog, who had not been taken by Clifford's looks, was cold; the footmen were grinning surreptitiously, while young Pettifog was staring open-mouthed at the captain of the Junior Eleven. Jack Noble was almost black in the face with suppressed mirth; Russell was as calm as a summer sea.

"Show these boys out, Binkers!" the general next said, turning away in a passion. "The insolent young puppies!"

The footman stepped forward to obey. Clifford, as wretched as any fellow well could be, backed up, and, as luck had it, stepped on to the patent-leathered toe of the eye-glassed young man. Now, this gentleman was just in the humour to show his detestation of boys, for Jack Noble and Russell had, so far on in the evening, monopolised the company of the general's daughter, which company he himself desired.

Hence, when Clifford's beefy form descended full weight upon his elegant toe, his temper was ruffed. Unthinkingly, he gave Clifford a sharp dig in the back with his knee. Clifford shot forward like a stone out of a catapult, stumbled, and came up short against a complete suit of armour standing there—a suit worn by the general's ancestor in the Wars of the Roses. Clifford instinctively clutched at this to keep from falling; but it failed him. It was very precariously balanced on its pedestal. Down it came with a mighty crash, flying to pieces.

The helmet flew afar, catching the general in the small of the back.

Other parts struck the elegant young man, while Clifford fell full length, buried by the main pieces.

The noise brought several guests out to ascertain the cause; and when they saw Clifford rising to his feet, red and angry and dusty, they lifted their eyebrows in surprise.

The general, when the shock was over, threatened to fall down there and then with apoplexy. His face went blue—a blue which almost reflected itself on his shirt-front. Clifford, the tears in his eyes, stood regarding his enemies blankly. Jack Noble and Russell felt a little bit uneasy. The only one who did not seem put about was young Archibald, who was grinning hugely, and even went so far as to clap his hands.

Then, while the general choked, Clifford lost all sense of good form, though he never had had much. His whereabouts was forgotten in the blindness of his rage. He guessed all this to be the result of Jack Noble's plotting, and a lust for vengeance rose uppermost in his soul.

"It was you, you cad!" he howled, hurling himself forward, past Miss Pettifog, shoving Archibald aside, and aiming a wild blow at Jack Noble, who stepped back. "It was your doing! I'll kill you for this!"

It was a disgraceful scene, and in the midst of it Jack Noble felt a great shame that this fellow should be a Pelhamite. But the fat was in the fire. He couldn't, of course, begin to remonstrate. He merely stepped away from his white-faced enemy. Just then, as Clifford followed him up, the general regained his speech.

"Throw 'em out!" he barked. "Binkers, what are you doing? Throw 'em out, I say! This house isn't a bear-garden!"

And Clifford was seized by the two stalwart footmen, literally frogmarched out of the hall. He was dropped to his feet on the steps; then a footman planted his shoe behind the Shell fellow, and Clifford never felt the ground again till he landed on all-fours on the gravel at the foot of the steps. Prince, seeing the footmen approach him, gave a mad yell of fear, and saved them the trouble of ejecting him by breaking into a run and almost throwing himself outside.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Archibald. "What a joke! I never had so much fun since I don't know when!"

But Jack Noble was not quite so amused; he hadn't calculated on such a violent scene. He glanced sideways at the young lady, to see her lip was curled contemptuously. He was sorry. He at length took her arm in his and drew her into the dining-room again.

"Look here!" he said honestly. "I'm awfully sorry, you know, that this thing's happened."

The girl glanced over her shoulder, out into the hall, where the ruins of the armour still lay scattered about. "It isn't your fault, Jack," she said. "It was that—cad's fault!"

"But it was my fault," he answered openly.

And, as her eyes opened in wonder, he made a clean breast of it, sparing neither himself, Russell, nor Clifford in the confession. As the girl listened her face changed until it was dimpling with smiles. At last, as he finished, she broke into the heartiest laughter. Archibald was choking long ago.

"What a joke!" she cried. "And it serves Clifford right!"

"Then you're not vexed with me?" inquired Jack Noble anxiously.

"Well," she said, with another silvery laugh. "I'll try and forgive you, on one condition. If you will get your team to play that match, I won't think any the worse of you."

"Thanks awfully!" he cried. "You're a brick! I'll do that much for you. But I hope—I hope you don't think all Pelham chaps behave like Clifford did just then?"

"Don't be afraid of that," she answered. "But I wouldn't tell papa about your share in this. Now, I must go to the others. You two and Archie will be able to find something to do to amuse yourselves? What is not much in your line, I know. Good-bye till supper-time!"

"She's a stunner!" said Bob Russell, as she left them. "We'd play a dozen matches to oblige her—eh, old chap?"

"A hundred," said Noble fervently, wiping his brow with his handkerchief. "Phew! She might have made things hot for us, you know. Wonder what Clifford'll have to say when we get back to Pelham School?"

"He'll have to keep his mouth shut about it; the more he says, the worse he'll look himself," replied Russell grimly. "Did you say you had a gym. upstairs, Pettifog?"

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
The Charity Match.

MISS PETTIFOG—it really was a horrid name for such a nice girl—spared no pains to make the match a success.

She worked just as hard to get support as she had worked in the last election, when her father had been candidate for his division, and she had canvassed for him.

She saw to it that posts were erected in the field at the back of the Hall, that the field itself was in good shape for a match; she had rooms placed at the disposal of the teams in which to change, and she went about the country in a motor, getting promises from wealthy friends to be present.

The general, who was not a bad old sort at heart, gave a ten-pound note as a starter, whilst others gave sovereigns. It looked a good thing for the ironworks' apprentices.

At three o'clock on the following Saturday afternoon both teams were ready for the fray.

The ironworkers were a heavier lot than the

Third Form of Pelham, and promised to be no mean foemen. But Jack Noble's eleven were a tried band of footballers, and had won many a hard-fought game with the odds heavily against them, and had very few fears as to the issue of the coming match, though every man knew well enough not to underestimate any foe—unless, of course, that foe happened to be Clifford.

Clifford, by the way, for the few days that elapsed between his ejection from Ailsa Hall and the match, had lain low, brooding over his downfall. Jack Noble had kept the matter quiet in the school, which was more than Clifford would have done had his enemy's positions been reversed. Archibald's tutor, a gentleman who had been something of a footballer in his school and college days, acted as referee, and the two teams lined up to commence.

Prosser, the centre-forward of the visitors, kicked off, avoiding Jack Noble cleverly, and letting his outside-left have the ball. Outside-left made the most of his opportunity by sailing along the touchline with it close to his feet, hotly followed by all of the Pelham forwards, who, however, did not overtake him before he had it past the half-backs. He was a heavy lad, and grassed MacIvaine neatly, but was brought to a check by Bob Russell, who charged him pluckily, and succeeded in worming the leather from him. Russell planted his boot fair, and lifted it right over the heads of the 'prentice forwards, causing a general scramble for it.

Jack Noble won the race, and began one of his wonderful dashes straight up the centre of the field, sending the opponents' forwards flying, and ably backed by his own line. Once a big half-back, of eighteen years or so, plunged heavily at him; but Jack Noble gave an adroit twist of his foot, and passed to Lawson minor, his inside-left, who was ready and willing.

Lawson came to grass in a hurry, though, and the ball was nearly lost by Drake, who made a gallant effort to save it. The 'prentices' centre-half saw him, and attempted to take it from him. Drake was taken unawares, back-stepped, and cannoned violently into Jack Noble, who, however, kept his feet, and once again secured the ball.

For quite five minutes the ball barely left the centre of the field, though it was scarcely ever away from anyone's toes. Then, seeing a chance, Green, the visitors' centre-half, landed a beauty in the middle, and sent the leather soaring away over the heads of Jack Noble's forwards.

The attackers of the 'prentices were quick enough to seize their opportunity. They made the best of it, outwitting the Pelham half-backs and backs with a series of passes that were pretty to see. But they still had Taffy Evans, the Pelham Third Form's goalie, to deal with, and Taffy was quite ready to pit his wits and skill against the drives of Prosser.

Twice Prosser strove to get past Jack Noble's last line of defence, but twice failed. Then, at the third attempt, being hotly pressed by Fighting MacAlpine, Pelham's right full-back, he misjudged a shot, and sent the ball into the corner.

Taffy showed what he was made of by turning aside the corner-kick in his best style; still, though, the Third Form's goal was heavily attacked, until Mac got his boot to work, and drove it to Russell, who made a short dash, until he saw a chance to put it into safe keeping. Jack Noble was there. He sailed along the field again, with the leather at his toe, until those deadly half-backs had to be tackled.

This time, however, Jack was lucky. He sent the big centre-half to the ground with a shoulder thrust, and slipped through. The full-backs were not quite such a hard proposition; but they were enough, combined with the 'prentice goalkeeper's weight, to put another check to Jack's intention to score. Thanks, however, to another badly-judged kick from a half-back, Drake secured the leather, crossed over to his chum, Lawson minor, and ran along the edge of the ground, until, nearly at the corner, he centred, and left the rest to Jack Noble, who never halted in his stride, but made a rocket-like shot at the goal. Goalie fisted out, but not strong enough.

The second time, as Valence sent it up to the goal again, he clutched it; but Jack gave a war-whoop, and charged the man, ball and all. Goalie fell to the ground, holding out the sphere, striving to keep it from crossing the line; but Drake came along, and kicked it out of his hands.

Into the net it went, making first goal for Pelham, amidst enthusiastic applause from the spectators, who included many ladies.

That goal was the last scored before half-time. When the referee blew his whistle, the team ceased play, all in a bunch towards the left side of the field, and were glad to do so, for both attack and defence had been so stubborn that no progress one way or the other seemed to have been made.

"Bravo, young scamp!" cried the general,

clapping Jack Noble on the back, as the teams went inside the Hall to the dressing-rooms provided. "Play up! Play the game! Play the game, I said! Knock spots off 'em!"

"Try my best, sir!" said Jack Noble, with a grin.

"I like that young rascal!" the general said to his wife and several more who were with him. "He's a sportsman, he is; but he's also an innocent youngster. Innocent, I said! Look at his face, and see!"

And the general, who prided himself on being a good judge of character, looked complacently around him. The fact that he saw his daughter laughing didn't strike him as being at all strange. He put that down to the girl's natural enjoyment of the game and the success of her scheme of charity.

Miss Elsie, needless to say, was thinking of a time when Jack Noble hadn't been so innocent and cherublike as he looked.

The game was taken up again with renewed enthusiasm after the interval. From the kick-off it seemed as if the visitors were going to force the pace to make things even.

Jack and his men fought valiantly to keep their score ahead; but five minutes after the whistle blew there was an irresistible rush from Prosser, the 'prentices' centre-forward, in which all opposition was swept aside. Taffy could do nothing with the terrific shot he made.

Though he tried his best to save a goal, so furiously did the ball come his way, striking him a stinger on the arm, that he was wheeled quite around, and saw the ball lying snugly against the back netting. The score was even.

"Now, boys," called Jack Noble, as Taffy prepared to kick out, "don't let 'em whack us! Buck up, Pelham! On the ball, there!"

Taffy kicked out, and Drake took it on the head, glancing it off into the middle of the field, where there was a hot scuffle for several minutes, the visitors' backs resuming their stone-wall tactics.

Jack Noble worked like a Trojan, but they were too heavy for him.

Time and again he recklessly charged a man twice his weight, only to bite the dust ignominiously. He was like a terrier, was Jack. The more rough usage he got, the harder he fought for his school's glory.

But though his comrades ably followed his example, putting all they knew into the work, they could not bring the score ahead. Still, the visitors failed to add to their laurels until the game was to within five minutes of its close.

Then it was that Jack Noble and Lawson minor got in a fine piece of combination work that fetched out round after round of applause from the spectators along the touch-lines.

Dribbling back and forth, passing, dodging, they worked the leather past the solid line of defence until Jack Noble saw a chance to shoot, which he took. But misfortune began to assert itself. Jack braced himself, saw he had plenty of time to drive, and let go with all his might.

He felt a terrific tug at his kicking-foot. Instead of kicking the ball, he turned almost a complete somersault, and lay staring up at the sky, with a dim idea in his head that he had been fouled. But the referee did not blow his whistle, and so Jack came to another conclusion.

Looking down, he saw his left bootlace had come untied, and that was no doubt the result of his accident.

And, what was worse, the enemy had the ball, and were dashing madly goalwards with it. It was a final spurt—a sort of "do or die" rush. And it carried.

On came Prosser like a bolt from the blue. He threw every ounce of weight into his kick. It whizzed past Taffy Evans's head so fast and so close that the Welshman ducked. The referee blew his long blast just as Taffy picked the ball disgustedly out of its resting-place. The apprentices had won by the odd goal out of three.

"Well played, everybody!" shouted the watchers, clapping their hands, whilst the players sought their dressing-rooms. "A good game!"

"Ay," roared the general, strutting up and overtaking Jack, who again had to undergo the back-patting ordeal. "A good game, and worth the money! Hang it—I said, hang it—I'll give another five! Jack, my boy, I like you, and you may come to the Hall and see Archibald whenever you like. Whenever you like, I said!"

"Thank you, sir!" answered Jack. "Glad you liked it. Glad we've lost, too, in a way, because if we had won, these other fellows might have thought they didn't deserve their money."

"Well, you are an unselfish youth. I said so, and I mean it," the general said. "I like you."

"And thank you, ever so much!" Miss Elsie said, coming forward. "And you may consider yourself forgiven now," she added, with a smile. "It was a ripping game, Jack!"

The only one who was not at all satisfied with the world for the rest of that day was Clifford, who, cutting the Sixth versus School match at Pelham, had stood outside the field watching the game.

It was beastly hard lines, he told himself. That Noble worm seemed to get all the plums, while he found only kicks for his share. But he lived in hopes of one day getting even with his bitter enemies of the Third Form at Pelham.

(Another splendid, complete Jack Noble yarn in next week's Grand Number of THE BOYS REALM.)

PETER JACKSON OF MANCHESTER.

OUR POWERFUL BOXING SERIAL.

By INNIS WOOD.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

PETER JACKSON, Oxford undergraduate, champion middle-weight boxer of England, and Rugged Blue for his 'Varsity, is a sturdy Manchester lad, dogged, indomitable, and as open and honest as the day.

CATO CARFAX, an unscrupulous rascal, who is in love with Peter's sister Nellie. Nellie will have nothing to do with Cato, but the man is determined to make the girl accept him.

On the death of his father, Peter has to leave the 'Varsity in order to support his mother and sister, who are penniless. He falls in with Jem Boyd, a once-famous pugilist, who has opened a boxing saloon in Whitechapel.

Boyd, knowing what a clever boxer Peter is, persuades him to turn professional, offering to train him and put him up as champion of the world. Peter accepts this offer, and, later, manages to make a deadly enemy of Dan Ralli, an unscrupulous crook.

Meanwhile, Carfax is deep in a scheme to bring the lad and his mother and sister to the gutter. To do this he knows he will have to put a stop to Peter's boxing career.

He makes numerous attempts to get Peter into his clutches and to ruin his boxing career, but fails every time, and in the end, thanks to Boyd and his other staunch friends, Peter at one stroke reduces Carfax practically to ruin.

The latter vows to wreak his revenge on the Manchester lad.

Carfax kidnaps Mrs. Jackson and Nellie, and imprisons them on a small island off the coast of Scotland by the mouth of the Clyde. Peter and his friends, learning of their whereabouts, hire a special train to whisk them up North that they may rescue his (Peter's) mother and sister. Carfax starts from London at the same time, journeying by motor, and a grim race ensues between himself and Peter.

Carfax gains a slight lead, but all his hopes are dashed to the ground when his car overturns in a snowdrift.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

An Act of Providence.

CARFAX got out, and ran as well as his numbed limbs would let him.

At Dumfries he saw a special waiting under full steam at a siding. He made his way to it, and found the engine-driver alone on his box.

"You're waiting for a London special," he said, "to take its passengers on to Port Patrick?"

"That's right!" said the driver, staring aghast at this white-haired, frozen-faced snow monster, with its eyes of lurid fire.

"My motor's broken down," he said. "I'll give you two hundred pounds to let me ride in your cab, and another one hundred pounds to say nothing about it to anyone except your mate."

"Let's see the three hundred poun'!" said the Scot's cautiously.

Carfax climbed into the cab, and drew out a wad of notes.

"There are eighty five-pound notes there," he said. "Count out sixty, and give me back the rest."

"You'll no' make it the lot, I'm thinkin'?" said Donald, his hands shaking with greed.

"Yes, if you'll stop the train a minute out-

side Port Patrick," said Carfax, who had arrived at his point in exciting the man's cupidity.

"It's a bargain!" said Donald, shoving the notes quickly into his breast. "And you'll no' have need to say anythin' to me, mate. He's a poor, worthless loon, and'll think himself well off with a handfu' o' siller. I'll just tell him you're a frien' o' mine, and that'll shut his mouth."

Carfax grinned sardonically, and nodded assent, as the stoker climbed up into the cab, and Donald whispered a few words to him.

"The train's signalled," said the stoker. "We're not to draw across. They'll just come over to the car, and when we get the signal, it's right away."

"Then you'd better get in back o' the cab, me friend," said Donald, "or someone might be seein' you, and raise questions."

Carfax crouched low under cover of the weather-board in the rear of the cab, every pulse in his body drumming with anxiety. He heard the special roar into the station, and the next few minutes seemed to hold for him an eternity of anguish, as each moment it seemed more certain that someone would come and discover his presence there, and defeat his last hope.

"We're off!" said Donald suddenly, throwing his hand on the clutch, and, with a shudder and a scream from the whistle, the engine started.

Carfax sat back in his corner, and laughed noiselessly till his ribs ached.

He had cheated Providence, after all, he reflected, as the train roared and rattled through the now starlit night. It did not occur to him that his present position might be just as much part of an invincible design and foresight, as had been those delaying snowflakes which had brought him into it.

Donald was as good as his word, and slowed the train down almost to a halt a minute outside the station.

Carfax, with a nod and a brief "Good-night!" swung himself to the ground, and, darting along the line, turned off by a railway-shed, vaulted a low wall, and raced along the road for the town.

He reached the wharves a good four minutes before Peter and his party got free of the station.

It was nearly six in the morning, and there were plenty of folk astir, but no offices open. He knew the place as well as he knew the Strand, but as he made his way, exultant and resolute, to the quay where he had ordered his launch to be ready for him, he suddenly halted, fear and rage and dismay gripping at his heart and icing his brain.

His launch was there, right enough, and, as he had ordered, under full steam; but on the quay, directly above it, and as if guarding the steps leading to the water's edge, were three stalwart policemen.

For the first time in his lawless life Carfax,

(Continued on page 787.)



Murphy, with a wood-chopper's big axe clutched firmly between his fat palms, had placed the hideous head on the low stump of a tree. "Take that!" he cried, swinging the sharp blade round. (A laughable incident from "Colonel Chinstrap," the rattling, complete Army tale, in this week's "Boys' Herald"—1d.)

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