

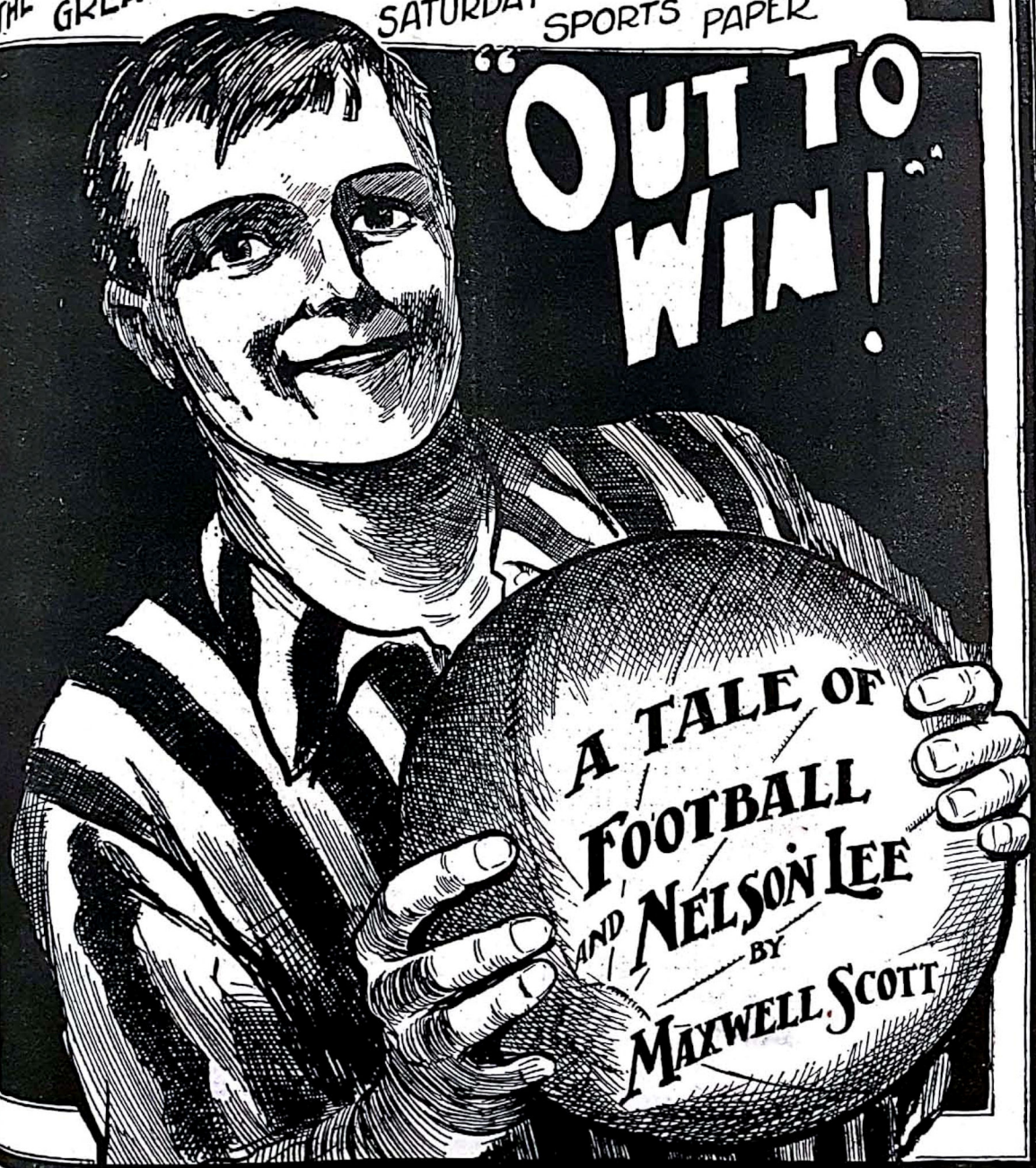
OUR FIRST GRAND FOOTBALL NUMBER!

THE Boys' Realm

THE GREAT

SATURDAY SPORTS PAPER

“OUT TO WIN!”



JACK NOBLE'S LITTLE PLANT

A Rattling, Complete Tale of Pelham School.



The Pelham Gardeners.

It was a fine day, Jack. A summons, a sentence of death, or what?"

From the look of hopeless horror on Jack Noble's face it was evident that the girl-eyed care he craved was of a really terrible nature. Jack looked up vacantly to Bob, who sat beside him with genuine anxiety. Then, seeing himself together, he thrust the fatal envelope into Bob's hand.

"Read it, old chap, for you're in it, too," said Bob, with bitterness. "Whatever can have done to deserve it. I really don't care, but there it is."

Jack took the card and scanned it with a frown. On it, in a spidery copperscript handwriting, was the following: "Miss Hillingford presents her compliments to Jack Noble and Robert Russell, and requests the pleasure of their company at tea this afternoon at four o'clock."

Bob read, and dropped the card like a hotinder.

"Cockney?" was all he could gasp.

"That's the meaning of it," demanded Jack in agitation. "What can have sent the old girl on her tracks, of all people?"

"Don't if I know," spluttered Bob, grinding his teeth. "But it's a rotten shame, a howling shame, and then there's the unfortunate."

"Shame! How can you?" growled Jack angrily.

"I shall. I'll refuse. I'll see her hanged before I go!" protested Bob, lashing himself a fury.

"No, deep down in his heart he knew they were doomed."

Miss Hillingford was the Head's sister. A domineering old maid, with a wonderful capacity for managing everyone's business, in her own way.

Formerly, she usually found enough to employ her energies in directing her brother's affairs. But every now and then she would take it into her head to inquire into the physical welfare of the boys of Pelham, and then there was trouble for someone. Ever Dr. Hillingford seemed powerless to prevent.

Some time ago her mind that something had been done in this or that direction, she had cast about in her mind for a suitable person or persons to take on the job.

She had pitched on the unfortunate Miss Hillingford as the captain of the school, to listen to the suggestions, and carry them out.

On one memorable occasion, for instance, he had been charged with the task of promoting and supervising the use of umbrellas among the boys on the cricket-field.

Jack Noble was ordered to see the fashion of the day leaves round their straw hats, and to be quite positive that such measures were beneficial in keeping off sunstroke.

Jack had done so sweetly he could not remember.

It was to Jack and Bob as if their names had been for the invariable prelude to some cruel and unjustified, when Miss Hillingford had been an invitation to take afternoon tea.

Jack and Bob were most emphatic, if the invitation was to go about carrying a stick or a string a kilt, or in any way to carry a laughing-stock for all the rest of the school, they would not accept it.

Jack would be apply such an extreme punishment as to have just swallowed a dose of his own blood to borrow their hearts.

Jack had had an identical invitation for the last half-holiday, and had looked in to take a look at all his friends.

He discovered that there were some on the same list, he began to buck up, and by that time it was necessary to get on to clean collars for the

They ought to resist that fatal tendency of modern youth, and seek solace in more genteel occupations, such as—

"Wearing kilts," groaned Bob, fearing the worst.

"Playing marbles," hazarded Poddles, under his breath.

"Crochet-work," thought Jack to himself.

However, it was none of these things, as it turned out. The panacea for these ills, according to the old lady, was gardening.

"Gardening! Great cabbage-stumps! Well, it might have been worse, they decided, heaving a simultaneous sigh of relief so furious and fervent that their hostess thought it must be due to that third helping of circulars.

However, now that she had revealed her motive, there was no need to beat about the bush. The scheme, in fact, had all been cut and dried.

All boys suspected of cherishing secret longings to go cawwing through space or water on aeroplanes or submarines, must start and cultivate nasturtiums at once as a healthy corrective.

She had even decided on the prizes which were to be awarded at the end of the term to the occupants of the study who had the best show of plants in bloom upon their window-sill.

The first was an electro silver pickle fork, the second an embroidered table-cloth, the third a bound copy of "Vegetable Marrows, and How to Grow Them for Pleasure and Profit," a most inspiring work, as she assured them.

The part that the three Third-Formers were to play in the scheme was also arranged. The good game had not been able to get her brother's consent to the competition being made compulsory for the whole school; but, at any rate, the boys from the Shell downwards would have to participate. Miss Hillingford would see to that.

The work of the trio would be to popularize the scheme among the juniors by example and precept, and they could think of anyone else who could assist in this respect. Miss Hillingford would be glad to receive their names.

At that, with one eager voice, the trio cried: "Cliffy—Clifford, of the Shell!"

Clifford was the best and finest fellow in the world, they assured her. Moreover, he was simply doted on gardening, and, in fact, was quite an acknowledged expert on lettuces and London Pride—the only two plants they could think of for the moment.

If only Cliffy were given charge of this part of the work, success would be guaranteed. What was more, his pals—Prince, Bayne, and Birkett—were just as enthusiastic horticulturalists as he, and the five together would make a really strong and influential committee.

Miss Hillingford was inclined to agree. After all, the boys to take the lead in work of this sort should be the seniors. So, tea being over, they were allowed to escape.

Next day it was Cliffy's turn, and when he and the other members of the influential committee had found what they had been landed in for, and by whom, their first desire was to rush straight off there and then, and take vengeance on their hated enemies.

However, once Miss Hillingford had her victims in her claws she was not so easily got rid of. The Pelham School Horticultural Society was to be formed at once, and Cliffy was given to understand that this was his job.

It was to be a regular school secretary and manager generally, and the others were to help him. There were window-boxes to be made—fifty, perhaps, or more—but that would be only a little pleasurable occupation for their half-holidays.

Neatly typewritten notices had already been prepared, and these were handed to him at parting, with instructions to post them on every notice-board in the school.

Cliffy, almost stupefied with helpless rage, snatched them from the good lady's fingers and fled, without so much as a "thank you!"

An hour later the news of it was all over the

school. The youth of Pelham first gaped, then tittered, then shrieked outright.

For further particulars and information as to "Clifford, How See" ran the notice, and the youth of Pelham applied like one man. Applications for window-boxes, seed and agricultural implements to be delivered promptly by return, simply rolled in.

Here a sample of the kind of thing with which the hapless Cliffy was bombarded.

"Please supply to Mr. Lawson minor, Esq., The Nook, Laboratory Lane, Slaney Park: 1 window-box, as advertised; 1 cartload best leaf mould; 1 ounce chemical manure; 1 nasturtium seed (warranted to hatch); 1 pint of potted periwinkle ditto (unbotted); 1 pint of corned peckles; 1 G ramium; 1 X ramium. Also a plough, lawn mower, and thrashing machine for cultivating same."

Poddles wanted "rubber plants only," he wrote, as it was his intention to float his window-box later on as a rubber company and get a quarter of a million for it.

Jack and Bob confined their "leg-pulling" to a polite request that their window-box should have a model gate, painted white, in the middle, and two railway signals, painted red, at each end. They also wanted it fitted with a worm trap in the bottom and covered with wire netting to keep off the nightingales and blue-bottles.

Meantime, Miss Hillingford sent word every day to know how the manufacture of window-boxes was progressing, and received various evasive answers.

She came herself at last, to find Cliffy struggling feebly with his meat saw and sixpenny tack hammer, while the rest of the committee sat round sulking and upbraiding him for a duffing owl.

Considering the amazing skill they were supposed to have shown in the building of the yacht Shark, all this was perplexing and disappointing.

However, Shark himself was now deputed to lend them a hand, and the speed with which he botched up window-boxes of all shapes and sizes was amazing.

At last, every applicant was supplied, and the order given to "go," or, in other words, to plant them low and with what they liked.

There was a heap of mould in the Head's garden from which they could help themselves, and, as has been said, Cliffy had packets of seed for the sowing, and the boys were not to be disappointed.

Jack and Bob decided to stake all on geraniums, cuttings of which were also supplied free gratis. Having stuck these in and poked and prodded them for a few days in an effort

to make them grow faster, they promptly lost all interest in them, and let their thoughts drift to amusements, yachting, and other feverish delights.

The result of this neglect was that the plants thrived exceedingly, and one day, to their astonishment, a patch of brilliant scarlet appeared outside on the window-sill. It was actually a flower.

They were utterly staggered at the sight.

Immediately their drooping interest in horticulture revived again. They craned their necks out to see how rival window-boxes were getting on, and saw, to their indignation, what they had never noticed before, that Lawson minor had quite a fine show of nasturtials and sweet williams, while other windows were no less gay with blooms.

"Here, this is rot!" said Jack, highly annoyed. "We can't be left behind like this. When is the date of the beauty competition?"

"About three weeks' time," answered Bob, giving the unfortunate geraniums a shake as a warning that they had better buck up or look out for squalls.

"What about watering them with ink—red ink suggested Jack, for the plants were of a scarlet variety."

"Or burying a dead cat under the roots," said Bob.

"No, we'll draw the line at cats. We might try kipper-though. It's kipper-day to-morrow at breakfast."

"Meantime, a drop of ginger-beer can't do 'em any harm, and it may just fix 'em up a bit," said Bob, emptying a stone bottle they had been keeping in reserve in the cupboard over the plants.

"It seems an awful waste," said Jack, watching the proceedings regretfully.

"Waste, be hanged. We can't let every fool in Pelham get ahead of us in this fashion. We can grow flowers, I reckon, just as well as any of 'em; only we've been slacking, that's all."

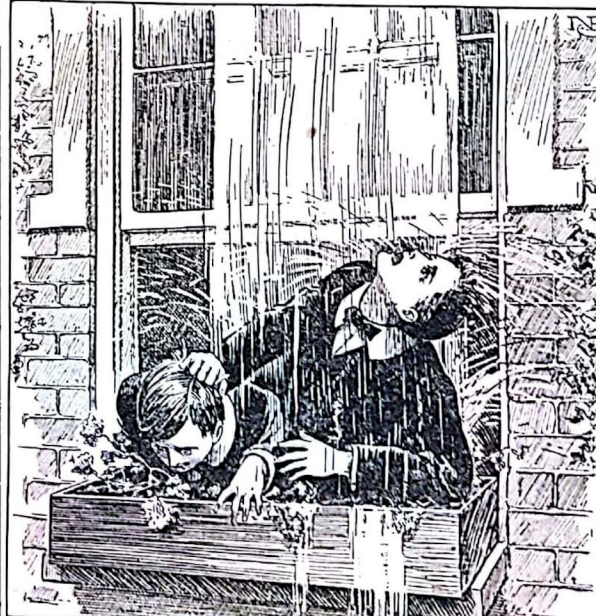
"How's Cliffy's lot getting on?" inquired Jack, pushing his head out of the window, and turning his eyes upwards, for the Shell's new quarters were on the next floor, and its captain's study immediately above theirs.

Again, to his indignation, he saw that their rival's window-sill was a perfect mass of blossom, easily the finest display of the lot.

"The crawling sneak!" spluttered Jack. "Just put your head out here a minute, Bob, and look what Cliffy's been up to while we weren't noticing. Why, his window's simply stuffed with—"

Wouch!

(Continued on the next page.)



Without any warning at all, half a pailful of water came hurtling down from the window above, striking Jack in the face, and nearly overbalancing him into the quad, below.

