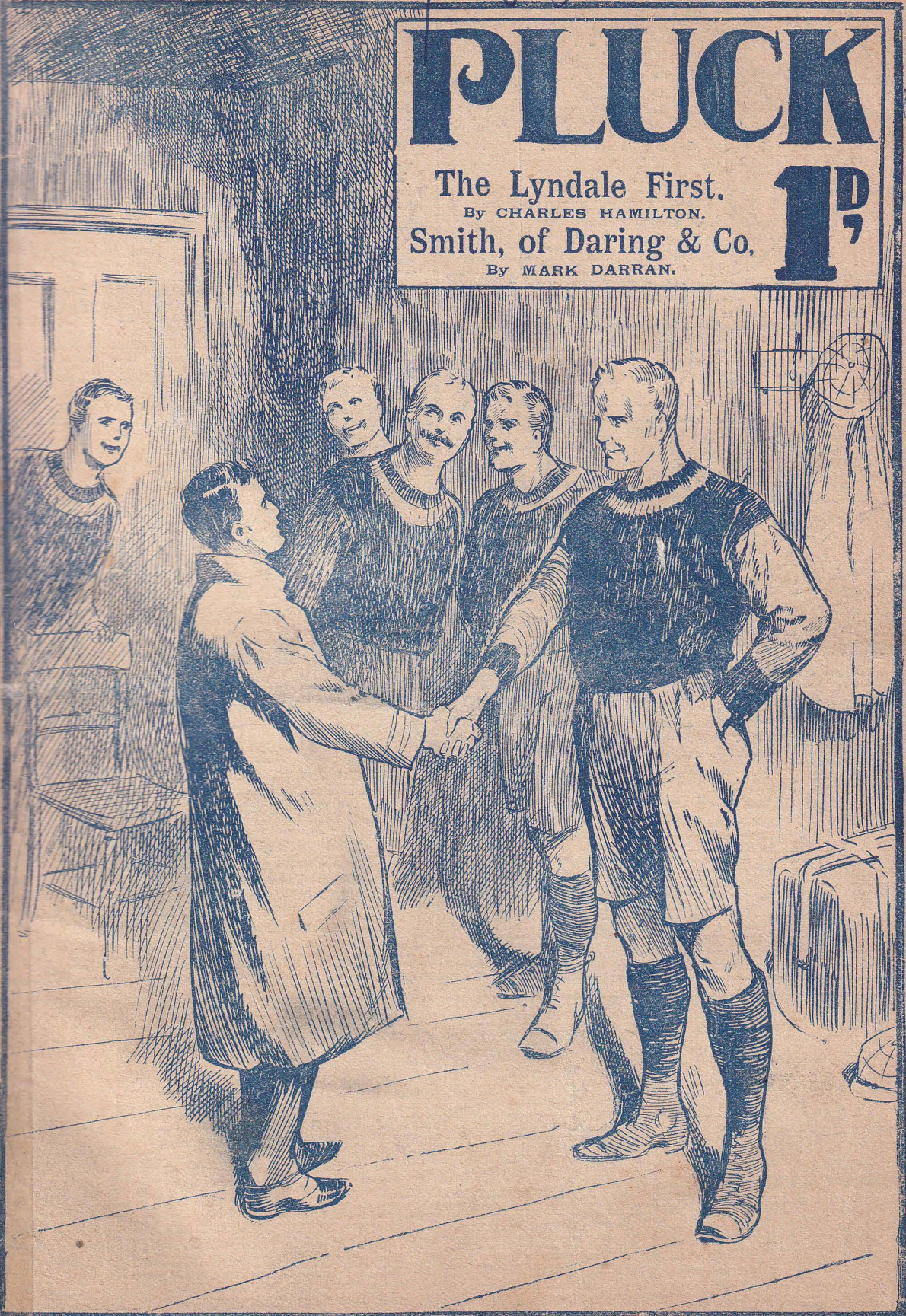


THE LYNDALE FIRST; or, From Fifth Form to Football League.

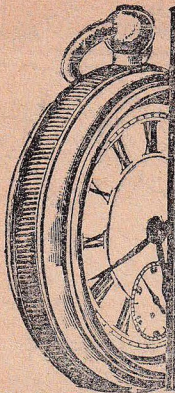
PLUCK

The Lyndale First.
By CHARLES HAMILTON.
Smith, of Daring & Co.
By MARK DARRAN.

1^d



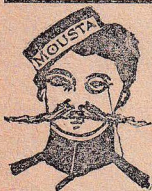
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[VOL. 4, No. 105, NEW SERIES.]

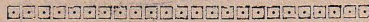
THE FIRST LONG, COMPLETE STORY



THE LYNDALE FIRST

or, From Fifth Form to Football League.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.



CHAPTER 1.

The Lyndale First Eleven—Straight from the Shoulder.

"HALLO, Goring!" Cleveland, captain of Lyndale College, looked up as Goring, of the Sixth, came into his study. There was a slightly worried look upon the Lyndale skipper's face, as if he did not expect the coming interview to be a pleasant one.

George Goring caught that slight expression, and his own brow wrinkled a little.

"I wanted to speak to you, Cleveland."

"All right; go ahead!"

"It's about the football eleven," said Goring.

"I thought it was. Well, I've made up my mind about that, Goring. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but—"

Goring's eyes gleamed.

"But you have decided to put in Harry Russell instead of me?"

"Yes. I admit there isn't much to choose between you," said the captain of Lyndale; "but without disparaging your play at all, I think Russell is our man. I know a good many of our Form think you ought to have the preference because you're in the Sixth and he's only in the Fifth; but as footer captain, I'm bound to pick the best material wherever I can find it."

"I've no objection to that, of course," said Goring, biting his lip; "but I'd like to be satisfied that you have picked the best material, Cleveland."

"About that, my opinion is the only one to be considered," said Cleveland sharply. "I'm sorry, as I said, to disappoint you; but I've made up my mind."

"If you've made up your mind I've nothing more to say; only—"

"Only what?" asked the Lyndale skipper impatiently, as Goring paused.

"Well I don't fancy you're doing the team any good by putting your cousin into it, that's all," Goring said spitefully.

Cleveland rose to his feet, his brow very dark.

"Look here, Goring, I can make allowances for your disappointment; but if you mean to insinuate that I have put Harry Russell in because he's my cousin—"

"I didn't say so."

"No, but you hinted it jolly plainly; and I tell you that such an idea would only come into the mind of a rotten cad, and that's plain English for you, Goring!"

Goring flushed.

"There's no need to insult me, Cleveland. I didn't mean to accuse you of favouritism, but all the same—"

"Well, there's no need to discuss the matter further," interrupted the Lyndale skipper. "I've decided, and there's the end of it. You ought to take a thing like that in a sportsmanlike spirit, without cavilling. Russell would, in your place."

George Goring shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you told Russell yet?" he asked.

"No; the formal announcement won't be made until after the committee meet to-night. I've told you in order to set your mind at rest, as you asked me."

"Many thanks," said Goring, with a slight sneer.

His lips were set tightly as he quitted the study of the Lyndale captain.

In a few days' time an important match was coming off at Lyndale, and the finest forward in the first eleven, as it happened, had just left the school. That the vacant place would be given to either Harry Russell or George Goring was certain from the first, but which of them would secure the coveted cap was for a time doubtful.

Both were keen footballers, and splendid players of the grand old game. Of the two, Russell was more popular in the school; but Goring, who was a prefect, and belonged to a higher Form, considered the vacant place as his by right, and the captain's decision was a deep wound to his vanity.

"Hang it!" he muttered to himself, as he strode down the corridor, in the direction of the Fifth Form studies. "It's sheer favouritism, and nothing else; but perhaps there's a chance yet."

And a cunning look came into his eyes as he tapped at Harry Russell's door.

"Come in!" called out a strong, cheery voice.

Goring walked in. Harry Russell, the occupant of the study, gave him a pleasant nod. Russell was in the Upper Fifth at Lyndale, and he was a splendid specimen of young British manhood—tall, deep-chested, straight as a pine. He

had handsome features, and a pair of very cordial and pleasant blue eyes.

"Going out?" asked Goring, as he noticed that Russell was in cycling clothes, and just fastening the belt of his Norfolk jacket. It was Wednesday, which was a half-holiday at Lyndale, and a clear, cold October afternoon.

"Yes," said Russell cheerily. "I'm going over to Blackfield for a spin, and to see the match there. It's a League match, you know. The Northbrook Rangers are visiting Blackfield United. Northbrook are a fine team, by all accounts, and the game ought to be a good one."

"Yes, I know; I'm going, too," said Goring. "But if you're not in a hurry for a few minutes—there's plenty of time, I believe; the kick-off's not till half-past three—I'd like to speak to you."

"Certainly," said Russell. "Go ahead!"

"It's about the vacant place in the first eleven," said Goring. "It's between you and me, as you know."

"I believe it is."

"And we're considered to have pretty equal chances, so far as our own merits are concerned."

"Yes, I imagine so. You don't mean to hint that anything beside our merits will be considered in making the selection?"

Goring laughed rather unpleasantly.

"Oh, no; of course not! Only the fact that you are the captain's cousin naturally makes the thing look a little bit suspicious if he chooses you over the head of a higher Form fellow."

"I don't see it at all."

"Well, that's my view, anyway; and so I want to make a proposition to you."

"Make it, by all means, though I don't quite see what you are driving at."

"It's this. Our chances being about equal, are you willing to take your chance like a sportsman and put an end to unpleasant rivalry—that is to say, will you agree to toss up for it if I do?" Goring produced a shilling from his pocket. "Best two out of three or sudden death, whichever you like," he said. "It's as fair for one as the other, and will save Cleveland from a very unpleasant position. The loser to withdraw his candidature for the eleven. Nothing could be fairer."

Russell shook his head.

"You won't agree?"

"No, I can't."

"It's as fair for one as for the other."

"I know that; but this isn't a question to be settled by chance. If I'm wanted to play in the eleven, I want to be free to play. The same with you. The decision rests with the captain and the footer committee, and not with us at all."

Goring sneered.

"Oh, you may as well out with it!" he exclaimed angrily.

"You won't take your chance, because you think you've got a certainty."

"How do you make that out?" asked Russell, with a dangerous glitter in his blue eyes. He was generally a quiet and even-tempered fellow, but Goring's tone was very hard to bear.

"Because you're sure of the cap through favouritism, that's how!" said Goring hotly. "You can pretend as much as you like, but I know your underhand—"

Biff!

His speech was suddenly interrupted, as Russell, with flaming face, stepped forward and struck him upon the cheek with his open hand.

George Goring reeled back, his face going white save where the mark of the blow showed up a vivid red.

"That for your cowardly lie!" said Russell between his teeth. "You cur!"

Goring was choking with rage.

"You shall pay for that!" he hissed. And he sprang at the other like a tiger. But it was only to reel backwards from a right-hander, delivered with terrible force straight from the shoulder, and he went down with a crash that shook the study floor. He lay dazed for a moment, and then slowly rose to his feet, looking like a demon.

"If you want this to go further, you've only got to say so," said Russell quietly, as the Sixth Former showed no desire to renew the combat; and he walked out of the study.

Five minutes later he was on his machine, pedalling swiftly down the long country road to Blackfield, en route to the football ground to see the League match between Blackfield United and Northbrook Rangers, which was to lead to consequences of which the Fifth Former of Lyndale was as yet far from dreaming.

CHAPTER 2.

Split in the Enemy's Camp.

"HURRAH!"

Harry Russell joined heartily in the cheer.

He had reached Blackfield, put up his machine at the football ground, and taken his place amongst the rapidly-growing crowd of spectators.

Blackfield v. Northbrook was a match between two teams in the Second Division of the League, and it excited great local interest. At least six thousand spectators were on the ground, most of them Blackfielders, but with a goodly contingent of Northbrook folk, who had followed their favourites. Among the crowd Russell recognised several Lyndale fellows, who had taken the opportunity of the half-holiday to cycle over for the match, and among them was George Goring. Goring caught Russell's eye, and immediately scowled and looked another way.

"Hurrah!"

The shout rang forth as the teams scampered into the field.

Blackfield were in red shirts, and the visitors in blue-and-white. Both teams looked fit and keen, but the Northbrook men were, if anything, the finer lot. Russell especially noted the visitors' captain, a fine, tall, upstanding fellow, with fair hair and merry eyes, whose name he saw by the programme was Frank Clyffe.

Blackfield won the toss, and chose a goal, and Northbrook kicked off against the wind, which was growing rather keen. The afternoon was sharp and bracing, but there was a suspicion of fog in the air, which as yet, however, kept off.

The game was a lively one from the start.

Both teams were keen attackers, and the pace set was hot. Cheers greeted every bit of good play, but naturally the cheering for Blackfield predominated.

It was the Northbrook team, however, that scored the first success.

From a tussle in the visitors' half, a Northbrook half escaped with the ball, and passed to the captain at centre as he was charged by two or three Blackfielders. Frank Clyffe was away with the leather like lightning. The Blackfield halves were nowhere, and the backs tried to stop him in vain. Straight for the goal he went in a fine rush.

There was a moment of breathless suspense. Russell, and everybody else, was on his feet. How would that gallant attempt, almost single-handed, materialise? There was only the goalie to fear. He was a tried custodian, but he was not equal to the shot the Northbrook captain sent whizzing in. He missed it by inches, and from the Northbrook backers came a wild cheer as the leather was seen climbing up the back of the net.

"Goal!" yelled the Northbrook men. "Goal—goal!"

And after a moment's hesitation the Blackfield crowd joined in the cheering of the fine feat of the visitors' captain.

"Goal—goal!"

Harry Russell cheered as loudly as any.

He was a football enthusiast. He played the game splendidly himself, and he had a keen eye to good form in others. And he had never seen a better bit of play than that of Frank Clyffe, the Northbrook captain.

The teams lined up again, and the next goal was taken by Blackfield, and the first half ended with the score level.

"A jolly good game, Weston!" said Russell to a Lyndale fellow near him. "I never saw a player up to Clyffe's form, and I've never missed a chance of seeing a League match, either. I should like to know that chap."

Weston nodded.

"Yes, this is a bit above our game," he said. "But I say, Russell, what is Goring scowling this way for? Have you been rowing with him?"

"We had a little tiff," said Harry shortly.

Weston grinned.

"And you dotted him one, I suppose, to judge by that lump on his dial?"

"He came for me, and I had to."

"I suppose it was the footer? I thought he would be wild at being left out."

"But he isn't left out yet," said Russell. "Cleveland hasn't decided."

"Yes, he has, only he won't announce it till to-night," said Weston. "I have it from him that you are the man, and he told Goring so. I saw Goring coming to your study, and I fancied there might be a row."

Harry Russell's brow darkened.

So Goring had known that the decision was already made when he came to Russell's study with his "sporting" offer? Anything in the nature of deceit or meanness was especially disagreeable to Harry Russell, and he felt a profound feeling of contempt for the rival who had tried to trick him.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"PHANTOM GOLD."

A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
the Famous Detective.

AND

"JACK BLAKE OF ST. JIM'S."

A School Tale,
By Charles Hamilton.

IN "PLUCK," 1d.

"What's the trouble?" asked Weston, as Harry's brow unconsciously darkened.

The re-entrance of the teams into the field saved Russell from the necessity of evading the question. He joined in the cheer that greeted them, and all attention was immediately turned to the game.

The change of ends gave the Northbrook men the advantage of the wind, and they made the fullest use of it. Again and again they charged through the Blackfield men, and shots were rained upon the home goalie, but he stood the test nobly.

At last, however, the ball came in from a Northbrook foot, and the visitors were two up.

"Hurrah!" yelled their backers.

The fight was now hot, and mostly in the home half. But the Blackfield defence was good, and for a long time, although they could not get going themselves, they kept the enemy at bay. It was getting near time, and the spectators grew keen.

"Now, then; buck up, Blackfield!"

"One more, Northbrook—just one more."

"Buck up, Blackfield!"

"On the ball, Northbrook—on the ball!"

Finally, with a splendid bit of passing, the Northbrook forwards brought the ball through the defenders right up to the home goal. A winger sent it in with a high, whizzing shot, and the goalie sent it out again with his fist. But, alas for Blackfield! In an instant the head of Frank Clyffe had met the leather, and in it went, and it had lodged in the net before the goalkeeper knew that it was coming.

"Goal—goal!"

A few minutes later the whistle went, and the game ended in a fine victory for Northbrook by three goals to one.

Harry Russell stood with the crowd to watch the players go off the field, cheering as loudly as any, especially when Frank Clyffe passed. The Northbrook captain happened to catch the eye of the boy, and he smiled genially.

When the players had gone in, Harry went for his machine, and wheeled it out of the ground. As he did not require to be at Lyndale before seven, he joined some other Lyndale fellows in a visit to a tuck-shop known to some of them, and stayed with them until the time for their train. The evening had fairly set in when he lighted his lamp and mounted his machine for the homeward spin.

It was a good ten miles from Blackfield to the school, and part of the way lay by the road across Blackfield Moor, a lonely and desolate place after dark. As Russell pedalled out of Blackfield, he saw George Goring on his machine a little ahead, and rode on to join him. Goring recognised him, and scowled.

"What do you say to riding home together?" asked Russell cheerily, as if nothing had happened between them. He was never a fellow to bear malice.

Goring was of a different nature, and he was, besides, in a bad temper, as a puncture which he had had to mend had delayed him for the last hour.

"Keep your company till it's asked for!" he said.

"Oh, all right," said Russell carelessly.

Goring, scowling, pedalled harder and shot ahead. Russell followed at a slower pace. Goring's ill-humour did not affect him much, but he did not want to force his company upon the ill-tempered Sixth Former. He kept Goring's light just in sight as he rode along the dim path over the misty moor.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed suddenly—"hallo! What's the row?"

A sudden shout had come from the misty distance ahead, and a sound like that of a cycle falling in the road. Goring's light disappeared.

"Hallo! He's gone down. What can be the matter?"

Quite forgetting Goring's manner to him only ten minutes before, Russell put on a spurt to reach the spot to render any assistance he could. And as he dashed on at a scorching pace, a wild shout came from the misty road ahead.

"Help—help!"

It was not Goring's voice, but that of a grown man. But the voice of the Lyndale fellow followed in fainter accents.

"Help—help!"

With a whizz Russell dashed up and sprang from his machine, which went reeling to the side of the roadway. In an instant he took in the scene before him, and sprang forward with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

CHAPTER 3.

An Adventure on the Moor—Harry Russell Makes a Friend.

DIM and misty as was the road over the moor, a glance was sufficient to show Harry Russell how matters stood as soon as he was upon the spot. An athletic young fellow, whom Harry recognised at once as Frank Clyffe, the captain of the Northbrook footballers, was

struggling with two burly roughs, who were striving to get him down in the road.

Close by lay Goring's machine, and near it Goring himself, apparently insensible. Goring had evidently jumped from his machine to help the object of the footpads' attack, and had been struck down by the bludgeon of one of them. His face was deadly white, and there was a streak of blood on it.

Russell's eyes blazed with anger and indignation. With out a moment's thought of the danger, he sprang to join in the tussle. Frank Clyffe had just sunk into the road, under a swinging blow from a heavy cudgel, and the two ruffians, fastening upon him like wolves, did not for the moment observe the new arrival upon the scene.

Crash!

Russell's fist, clenched and as hard as iron, caught one of them behind the ear, and he went to the ground with a thud, and lay dazed. The other, with a foul oath, turned upon the young Lyndale fellow, his cudgel uplifted. Harry would have gone down under a murderous blow, but Frank Clyffe clutched at the rough in time and dragged him aside, and the cudgel missed its mark. The man cursed savagely, and swung it up again, but this time Harry was too quick for him. Springing forward, he drove his fist full into the brutal, bristly face, and the ruffian dropped like a log. The first man, however, was on his feet again now, and he threw his arm round Russell's neck from behind, and dragged him to the ground.

"Quick, Seth!" he panted.

Russell struggled desperately, but he was at a disadvantage, and the scoundrel's grip was on his throat now, and his senses were swimming. But Frank Clyffe was on his feet now, and he sprang to his rescuer's aid.

A stunning blow sent the rough to the ground again, and the man called Seth, as he got upon his feet, was sent reeling by another right-hander from the stalwart footballer. He fell close to Goring, who had just come to himself. The Lyndale Sixth Former promptly gripped him, and plumped down on his chest. The ruffian struggled madly to rise, intent now only on escape; but Goring had the advantage, and he meant to keep it.

"No, you don't!" he said coolly. "I've got you, Seth Ball—I know you, you see—and I mean to keep you."

Frank Clyffe turned anxiously to Russell, who lay in the road gasping for breath, and Seth Ball's companion took advantage of his inattention to disappear in the mists of the moor. Ball himself was still struggling, but Goring kept him pinned down.

"Are you hurt, my brave boy?" cried Frank Clyffe, as he bent beside Harry.

"N-no," gasped Russell; "only a bit out of breath. The beast nearly throttled me, and I think he would have finished me if you hadn't thumped him just in time. I'm all right now." And he rose to his feet with the footballer's aid.

Frank Clyffe gripped his hand.

"I believe I owe you my life," he said, in a low, earnest voice. "I stayed on in Blackfield, you see, after the team went home, to visit a relation of mine who lives on the other side of the moor. These two rascals must have followed me, thinking I was worth waylaying, and they jumped out on me suddenly, and the chap who was with me took to his heels and left me to face them alone. I dare say he thought I was running, too; but I had no time, the brutes were on me too quickly. They would have bludgeoned me and probably finished me off if you hadn't come along. I like the way you sailed into them. You know how to use your fists, and no mistake."

"I'm jolly glad I happened to be coming along," said Russell, cordially returning the footballer's grip of the hand.

"Haven't I seen you before?" said Clyffe, looking at him closely. "Weren't you at the football-ground in Blackfield this afternoon?"

"Yes, I was there, and saw you play. It was splendid!" said Russell.

Clyffe laughed.

"Well, I'm not a man of many words," he said; "but I shan't forget this. And if you ever want a friend, my boy, you've only got to come to Frank Clyffe, at Northbrook!"

Russell nodded with a smile, little thinking at the time what those words were to mean to him in the future.

"Hallo! Here's Ganthony!" exclaimed Clyffe.

A man came through the mists into the road. He was a medium-sized, well-built man, with a dark face and heavy jaw. He was looking somewhat sheepish.

"So you've come back?" said Clyffe ironically. "You're too late for the fun, Ganthony; though, of course, you hurried so as not to miss the fighting."

"I came back as soon as I found that you had not got away," said the other sullenly. "What was the good of stopping to face a gang of them? I thought you had cut it, too."

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"I hadn't a chance. And I might have been murdered if these two lads hadn't come to my help," said Clyffe. "Of course, you didn't wait till all the danger was over before you showed up again, did you?"

"No, I didn't," said Ganthony, with a scowl. "I didn't know it was over."

Clyffe said no more, but his expression was one of very evident disbelief.

"What are you going to do with this fellow?" sang out Goring. "Will you march him into Blackfield and give him up to the police?"

Frank Clyffe looked reflective.

"Too much trouble," he said, shaking his head. "I've a stout cane here, and I think a hiding will about fill the bill. Shove the brute over on his face, and I'll tan him. That will do him more good than prison, and save trouble."

Goring grinned.

"Right you are! He's a regular scoundrel, and well-known between here and Lyndale. Give the brute socks!"

"Lemme go!" yelled Seth Ball, as he was dragged over, with his face in the road, and Frank brought the cane into action. "Lemme go, you beasts! I'll—I'll—"

He struggled furiously, but Ganthony lent his aid, and he was pinned down fast, and given such a flogging as he had never had in his life before.

"Now, let that be a lesson to you," said Frank, breathing hard. "Let the brute go!"

Seth Ball was allowed to rise, and, muttering incoherent curses and threats of vengeance, he vanished into the mists.

Frank Clyffe shook hands again with Russell and Goring, and thanked them both in his hearty way, and then they parted. The two lads mounted their machines, and rode off towards Lyndale, while the footballers took the road to Blackfield. The late exciting happenings had banished the remembrance of the disagreement between Harry and Goring, and they rode to the school together.

"Hang it, how my head aches!" exclaimed Goring. "That brute gave me an awful rap. I'm glad we tamed his hide for him. He'll remember it."

"I fancy he'll remember it if he ever meets you on a lonely road," said Russell, with a slight laugh. "But, I say, what a splendid fellow Clyffe is, isn't he? I like him immensely."

"Yes," said Goring carelessly. "Pretty decent, for what he is, you know."

"What he is? What do you mean?"

"Well, he's a professional player, you know," said Goring, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Harry's eyes flashed a little.

"That's nothing against him," he replied hotly. "A man who plays the game for a living has nothing to be ashamed of, provided he plays a clean, straight game. That's the point."

Goring laughed.

"Oh, don't fire up!" he said. "I don't want to say anything against the man, of course, though he's a bounder!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Russell impatiently. "He's not half such a bounder as you are, George Goring, at all events. He's ten times a better man than you will ever be!"

And Russell put on a spurt and shot ahead. He had had enough of Goring's company. The Sixth Former scowled as he rode after him, and they arrived separately at Lyndale School.

CHAPTER 3.

Lyndale against St. Hilda's.

LYNDALE was in a state of considerable excitement about the forthcoming match. It was the biggest event of the season at the college, and from the most high and mighty prefect down to the smallest fag, all the Lyndale fellows were keenly interested in the question whether Lyndale would beat St. Hilda's, or whether the Saints would beat Lyndale.

Cleveland, who, as football captain, took the matter very much to heart, was satisfied with his team. It was composed of seven Sixth Formers and four out of the Upper Fifth. Of the latter, the best man was Harry Russell. Indeed, his chums said that he was the best man in the whole team, not excluding the captain himself.

In the trial matches before the great fixture Harry showed up to great advantage, and Cleveland was more and more satisfied with his selection.

But Harry's place in the eleven had caused some heart-burnings, several older fellows in the higher Form considering that they had a better title to it, and chief among these was George Goring.

Goring was not a bad fellow at heart, but he was over-sensitive and jealous, and disposed to think a good deal too much of himself and his abilities. He had the idea

in his head that the captain had shown favouritism towards Russell, and he refused to be convinced that it was otherwise. As a matter of fact, nothing was farther from Cleveland's thoughts. He was Russell's cousin, and they were great friends, but he would have turned out his own brother to improve the quality of the team, and most of the Lyndale fellows knew it, and did him justice. But there was a discontented minority.

The quarrel between Russell and Goring had gone no further openly, but there was bitter blood, and the prefect lost no opportunity of sneering at the Fifth Former, and hinting that he had won his cap in the college team by underhand influence. Russell knew very well what he was doing, but there was nothing he could take hold of, as it were, and so he was forced to grin and bear it. But his dislike of Goring intensified, as was natural, and more than once he was sorely tempted to pick a quarrel with him.

The day of the match came round, and all Lyndale were glad to see it dawn bright and dry and clear. The eleven were in high spirits.

The ground was in fine condition, and the team in excellent fettle. Lyndale looked forward to a victory.

"We shall lick them, I fancy," Cleveland remarked to Russell, as they waited for the arrival of the St. Hilda's fellows. "They gave us a fearful licking last time; you remember the score, five goals to two. I hear that they're a bit stronger this time, too; and Wade, their captain, is said to be a terror. But the team we've got together is the best Lyndale has played for a long time. I don't think it could possibly be improved."

"Goring thinks it could be," remarked Weston, who had overheard the remark, with a slight laugh.

The Lyndale skipper's brow wrinkled a trifle.

"Goring is a conceited ass!" he replied shortly.

There was a shout. The St. Hilda's brake was driving up with the Saints aboard, waving their caps in reply to the cordial Lyndale greeting.

The Saints were certainly a strong team, as Cleveland had said.

Wade, their captain, was a broad-shouldered fellow, and he had the reputation of being a regular Bloomer for goal-getting. Cleveland greeted him cordially, and ran his eye over the team critically. Strong they certainly were, but the Lyndale skipper fancied that upon this occasion the home eleven would hold their own, and a little more.

The kick-off was for three o'clock, and before that time the ground was thronged. All Lyndale had turned out, and a good many Saints had come over, as well as a crowd of villagers. The doctor had honoured the match with his presence, and all the Lyndale masters were there with Dr. Dimsdale. Close by the ropes stood George Goring, with a group of cronies, a bitter expression upon his face.

"It's perfectly sickening the way Cleveland cracks up that cousin of his!" he said. "I'll lay a lot that we shall see Russell let the side down in the match."

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Phillips, of the Sixth, who had had his own pretensions to the coveted cap. "If he does, Cleveland ought to be asked to resign."

"And he will be!" exclaimed Goring viciously.

"Oh, rats!" struck in Weston. "Give the chap a chance."

"He's got a chance, to lose for Lyndale!" sneered Goring. "And that's what he'll do, you mark my words!"

But most of the Lyndale fellows, especially the Fifth, had a better opinion of Russell evidently, for he was cheered as he came into the field with the rest, looking very handsome and fit in the school colours.

Wade won the toss, and gave the home team a sharp wind to play against. Cleveland kicked off, and the opening of the game was watched with intense interest.

Wade quickly showed that he was in his best form. In the first few minutes of the game he brought the ball up to the home goal, and, though his shot did not materialise, it showed his quality. Then the Lyndale forwards, with a fine bit of passing, took the ball up the field right through the Saints' defence, and thus early in the game the Saints were forced to concede a corner.

Cleveland nodded to Russell to take the kick, and he did it, and a few seconds later the air rocked with cheering, for the leather had gone to Cleveland, and he had slammed it into the net with a fast shot that gave the goalie no earthly chance.

First blood to Lyndale!

Wade kicked off at the restart with a grim, determined look. He saw that he had a harder nut to crack than he had counted upon, and he had told his men to buck up. Their play now showed that they were "bucking up."

The Lyndale goal was besieged, and the attack, hot and heavy, did not pause for a moment till the home goalie, bewildered by the rapidity of the shots, at last allowed the leather to escape him, and it lodged in the net.

"Goal!" roared the Saints' partisans.

Some lively but ineffective play followed, the ball keeping mostly to midfield. Presently Wade captured it, and dribbled it onward, neatly beating the home halves; but a home forward had marked him, and with a lightning-like rush, robbed him of the ball, and sent it again to the half-way line, where Cleveland was upon it like a shot, and away with it in a twinkling. And that forward was Harry Russell.

The home forwards manfully backed up their captain, Russell sprinting in splendid style to get into line; and by a fine piece of work, passing with almost machine-like exactness, the Lyndale front line brought the leather right up to the Saints' citadel.

And then a St. Hilda's back, losing either his temper

eyes, hands, feet, and body ready; but he was not quite equal to that shot.

The leather flew from Russell's foot, and a roar of cheering followed as it lodged in a far corner of the net.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Good old Harry!"

"Bravo, Russell!"

Weston turned to Goring and his friends with a grin.

"What price that?" he asked. "Who's letting the side down now, George—hey?"

"Oh, rats!" said Goring. "Anybody could have taken that kick!"

"A penalty goal isn't much," said Phillips.

"Rot!" said Weston. "Look at the Saints' goalie, all



A feeling of alarm crept into Harry's heart. He staggered forward and knelt down beside the Sixth Former. (See page 7.)

or his judgment, charged Cleveland from behind as he was about to kick, and sent him sprawling.

There was a roar at once.

"Foul!"

"Penalty!"

"Foul!"

The referee's whistle shrilled out. Play was stopped. The Saints looked rather blue, for the foul was undeniable, and it had occurred right in the dreaded penalty area.

With tense looks the players stood round while a home forward prepared to take the kick. Cleveland, who was very shaken by his rough tumble, signed to Harry Russell to take it. The whole field hung breathless on Russell's movements. No eye was truer, no kick was surer, at Lyndale School. The goalie was watching with all his

eyes and hands! It was a splendid kick. Hurrah—hurrah! Good old Russell!"

And he added his voice in stentorian tones to the rest.

The first half was now nearly at an end, and no more scoring was done before the whistle went, so the teams went off with Lyndale two up against the visitors' one.

Naturally, the Lyndale fellows were in high good humour with themselves and with things in general.

"I tell you, chaps," said Cleveland impressively, "we're the better team this time, and we've got to give them a licking that will last them for a bit. They've been awfully cocky since they beat us with five to two, and they want a lesson."

"And we'll give 'em one!" said Russell cheerfully. "Are we downhearted?"

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"No!" chorused the team.

And they did not look downhearted as they lined up again to face the merry men from St. Hilda's, not so merry now as at the start. The change of ends brought the wind in the faces of the Saints, and those same faces were less confident now than they had been. But there was plenty of fight left in them, and they gave the home players a keen tussle from the blowing of the whistle.

For a long time play was in midfield, neither team fairly getting away, but at last the Lyndalers worked their way down, and brought the ball into the Saints' half, and closer and closer to the goal. A rapid, ineffective shot was easily sent out by the goalie, and then a St. Hilda's back skied the ball, and it came down over the half-way line; but a Lyndale head was ready for it, and sent it back, and a Saints' half, who captured it, was immediately robbed of it by Russell.

The Fifth Former dribbled it a little way. Four Saints were closing in on him, and he had no chance to pass effectively, and, acting with the swift decision which is the making of a footballer, he shot for goal. The goalie wasn't expecting it, and his hasty clutch was a second or so too late. The ball was in.

"Goal!"

Cleveland gave a chuckle.

"Three for us, kids! Scott, this is ripping!"

And that was not the end of the bad luck for St. Hilda's. It was beginning to be plain that they were outclassed by the home team, but they were very reluctant to admit it. They fought well and bravely, and every success of the home players was hardly won. But twice again in the next quarter of an hour, the cheering of the Lyndalers announced goals to the school.

"Five up!" said the Lyndalers to one another.

"Glorious!"

"And two of them taken by Russell," said Weston; "and one other as good as taken by him. Who's letting the side down now, Goring & Co.?"

But Goring & Co. were silent.

Russell's splendid play had set their predictions at naught, and they had not a word to say for themselves. And, in fact, admiration of good play, and rejoicing in the school's success, had banished envy from almost every heart amongst Russell's rivals—from everyone, probably, except Goring. He, perverse to the last, persisted in his bitter humour, and only reflected that if the cap had been given to him those ringing cheers might have been for him instead of for Harry Russell.

The Saints had realised by this time that victory was hopeless, but they meant to make it a fight to the finish. And one last flicker of success cheered them. Wade, getting through the home defence by a fine burst, ran the ball up and sent it in, and a second goal was scored by the Saints.

But a few minutes later the Lyndalers were shouting over another success. Cleveland, receiving the ball in a long pass from Russell, slammed it into the net, and Lyndale were six up.

Phoop!

The shrill blast of the whistle was heard, and the Lyndalers were checked in the full tide of success. Time was up. But it had been a glorious victory.

"Six to two!" shouted the Lyndalers. "Who's downhearted now?"

But they cheered the visitors too, heartily, in recognition of the gallant fight they had made, and when the St. Hilda's brake bore her defeated champions away ringing cheers followed them down the road.

CHAPTER 5. A Fight to a Finish.

"STOP!"

The unpleasant, grating voice fell sharply on Harry Russell's ear, and he frowned a little as George Goring stepped into his path. After the football match he had gone down to the village, and he was returning along Lyndale Lane in the dusk of the October evening, when he caught sight of Goring coming towards him.

There was something in the Sixth Former's manner which warned Harry that trouble was coming, and he was ready for it. Goring stopped directly in his path, so that Russell had no choice, whatever he wished, but to come to a halt.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked impatiently.

"I want a few words with you," said Goring, with a sinister look. "I wanted to nail you after the match, but those fools were making such a fuss of you, and then you slipped off to the village."

"I had to go there on my own affairs, and I didn't know that you wanted to see me," answered Russell coldly; "and I don't see what you want now."

"Don't you?" sneered Goring. "Then I'll explain. I'm going to give you a hiding, or you are going to give me one. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly. But what's the row?"

"You know well enough. You did me out of my cap for the eleven by treachery, and if you think I am going to take it lying down you are mistaken."

"You said that before, Goring, and I told you that you lied," said Russell. "I knocked you down once for your lie, and I'm quite ready to do it again, if you want more. I don't seek any quarrel with you, but I'll stand words of that sort from nobody."

"You'll have to stand them, though—and a licking besides, if I can give it to you!" said Goring between his teeth. "I came here to meet you, so that we could have it out without any meddling or interference. There's plenty of starlight for a fight, and we don't want seconds or any fuss. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Russell's temper was usually good, but of late Goring had tried it sorely, and now it was fairly up. Goring had sought this quarrel, and Harry was determined that he should have reason to remember it.

The spot was one where, as Goring had said, they were not likely to be interrupted. There was a wide border of grass beside the lane, partly shadowed by the row of great trees behind, but partly open to the starlight. It was a clear, cold evening, and the stars shone like points of fire in the grey heavens.

The two lads removed their coats, and faced each other with grim faces and gleaming eyes. They mechanically shook hands, and then the fight commenced. At any other time Harry Russell would probably have shown his superiority in a very few minutes, but the case was exceptional now. He had been through a hard, gruelling football match that afternoon, and was now returning from a somewhat long walk. Consequently, he was far from being in his best form, though as full of grit and pluck as ever. Goring, on the other hand, was very fit, and he was so full of rage and malice that it lent him additional strength to avenge his supposed wrongs. And so matters looked very even when the tussle commenced.

There were no rounds and no rests—the two faced each other and fought; that was all, and so Goring's freshness naturally told. He smiled grimly as he got his fists home again and again on Russell's face, and his eyes gleamed with exultation when a heavy right-hander sent Harry with a crash to the ground. But that fall seemed to do Russell more good than harm; it woke him to new energy. And when he faced his foe again his eyes were glittering, his lips were set, and his whole expression was that of a grim and relentless determination. And Goring soon found that he was not to have things his own way any longer.

Russell's guard was by no means perfect, but his attack was fierce and unsparing, and his fists rattled upon Goring's face and chest to a lively tune. Confused by the rapid attack, Goring gave ground, and Russell, rushing in, stretched him on his back with a terrible right-hander. Goring rose slowly, breathing hard.

The Fifth Former stood back, his hands down, to give him ample time to recover ere the fight recommenced, and after a few moments Goring came up to the scratch again. He was more cautious now, but it availed him little. His vision was somewhat blurred by that last blow between the eyes, and his wind was giving out. Harry sailed in with a will, and again Goring went heavily down.

"Is that enough?" said Russell quietly. "I am quite satisfied to let the thing end here, if you are, Goring."

"Hang you!" muttered Goring, as he rose painfully to his feet. "I'll lick you, or you shall kill me!"

And he rushed at Russell again. This time his rage seemed to carry the day, and Russell's luck was not so good. The Fifth Former went down under an upper-cut which caught him on the chin and jarred every tooth in his head. And Goring, carried away by animosity and the fear of defeat, struck him again as he rose, and laid him heavily on the grass.

"You coward!" muttered Harry between his teeth.

He sprang up as if endowed with new strength, and attacked Goring fiercely. Before that attack Goring's defence seemed to be nowhere.

Biff, biff! went Russell's fists on his face and chest, and his feeble attempts to get to close quarters only added to his punishment. Finally both Russell's fists came crashing together in his face, and he dropped like a log.

Harry himself was exhausted, and could hardly keep his feet. There was no doubt that the fight was ended now. Goring did not move. Russell put out a hand to the nearest tree to steady himself.

"Are you done?" he said thickly. "Have you had enough?"

Goring neither moved nor spoke.

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A feeling of alarm crept into Harry's heart. He staggered forward, and knelt down beside the Sixth Former. Goring's eyes opened at the same moment, and he fixed a glare of hatred upon his conqueror. With a last effort of savage spite, he struck the Fifth Former as he bent over him, and Harry reeled away from the blow. But he did not return it.

"You cur!" he said thickly.

He picked up his jacket and put it on, and moved unsteadily out into the road. Goring still lay on the damp grass, groaning. Neither of the boys dreamed that an evil, savage face was watching them from the shadows of the trees. Neither guessed that close at hand, with spiteful eyes and snarling face, lurked Seth Ball, the poacher and ruffian.

Russell turned towards Lyndale, and then looked back at Goring.

"I'll—I'll help you, Goring, if you like."

"Curse you!" moaned Goring feebly.

Russell's eyes flashed, and he turned away and set off towards the school. He did not turn his head again, so he did not know that George Goring had sunk back on the grass in a dead faint. He tramped on unsteadily towards the school. His head was dizzy, and he was exhausted, and it cost him an effort to reach the college gates.

"My only aunt!" cried Weston, meeting him as he went in. "What have you been doing to your face, Russell—battering into a motor-car?"

"No."

"You've been fighting somebody?"

"Don't I look like it?" said Russell, with a faint smile.

"Well, whoever it was he gave you a tussle for your money," said Weston, surveying him critically. "By Jove, you have been up against it, and no mistake! But who was it?"

"Goring."

"Oh, was it? Yes, he was awfully ratty over the match and the fuss the fellows made of you," said Weston, with a nod. "I hope you licked him."

"I'm afraid I've licked him a bit harder than I meant to," said Russell. "Some of you might go down the lane and help him in."

"Oh rats!" said Phillips, who was Goring's chum. "You haven't completely crippled him, I suppose? He's given you something to remember him by, at all events."

"You might go, Weston," said Harry, ignoring Phillips.

Weston looked at him curiously.

"Certainly I'll go, with pleasure!" he said. "I dare say I shall meet him on the road."

And Weston walked towards the gates, followed by Phillips and one or two others. Harry Russell hurried to his room, to clean off as well as he could the traces of the fight, though, of course, there was no getting rid of cuts and bruises and swellings.

The news of the fight soon ran through the school. The general opinion was that Goring had only received what he had been asking for, and that it served him right. Cleveland came into Russell's room later, however, looking rather serious.

"You do look a sight!" he said, with a slight grin. "I'm sorry this has happened, but I suppose it was bound to come, as Goring took your success in such a bad spirit. But what have you done to him, Russell? It's nearly calling-over, and he hasn't turned up yet. Did you hurt him?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I did. I had no choice."

"Well, I hope he'll come in soon," said the captain unasily. "Weston and the others have had time to get to the village and back, and there's no sign of them yet." And he quitted the room, with a puzzled and unquiet look upon his face.

After call-over, Russell went to his room to lie down for a bit, feeling utterly played out. He did not sleep, but simply lay resting, trying to soothe his headache and the painful throbs of his injuries. Exactly how long he remained there he did not know, but suddenly he was disturbed. His door opened, and Cleveland looked in.

"Russell!"

The Lyndale captain's tone was hard and cold. It surprised Russell, who had never been spoken to like that before by his cousin. He sat up on the bed and stared at Cleveland.

"Yes; what is it?" he asked.

"You're to go to the doctor at once."

"What's the matter?"

There was no reply. Cleveland was gone.

Considerably amazed, Russell rose from the bed.

He looked in the glass. He looked a shocking sight to go before the doctor, but there was no help for it. He put on a clean collar, and brushed his hair, to make as decent an appearance as he could, and then left the room and made his way to Dr. Dimsdale's quarters.

CHAPTER 6. Condemned.

DR. DIMSDALE adjusted his pince-nez, and fixed his grey eyes upon Russell as he entered. The doctor's face was usually kindly enough, but now it was hard and stern. He had evidently taken the affair very much to heart, Russell thought. A fight between a fellow in the Upper Fifth, and a Sixth Former and prefect, was certainly a serious matter. But there had been no need for it to come to the doctor's ears at all, so far as Russell could see. Who had told him about it?

And why was Russell alone sent for? Goring had been the aggressor, and at all events equally culpable, and he was not in the room.

And at the thought, a troublesome idea came into Russell's mind. He knew that Goring had been hard hit. Was it possible that he was—was hurt—that he was not able to come and be hauled over the coals?

Goring had made himself extremely obnoxious to Harry of late, but that thought was a very unpleasant one.

For nearly a minute the doctor regarded the boy in silence without speaking, and in that interval Russell's uneasiness intensified. He ventured to break the silence himself.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Russell," said the doctor, at last. "I sent for you, but I hardly know what to say to you. How can I express my feelings—my astonishment that a Lyndale lad should be guilty of such unheard-of brutality—my detestation of your conduct? I wonder you are not ashamed to hold up your head in my presence."

Russell flushed red.

He felt that the rebuke was undeserved. Goring had been the aggressor, and had forced him into the fight. But he could not say so. He could not appear to desire to throw the blame upon the other party.

He stood silent, red and pale by turns, while the doctor's eyes searched his face.

"Why did you do it?" said Dr. Dimsdale. "I could understand, though I could not excuse, a fight between you, as I have learned that there has been a great deal of mutual ill-feeling of late. But what you did—"

"I didn't mean to hurt him much, sir," faltered Russell.

"We fought, and he would not give in, and so it went on to a finish."

The doctor's brow darkened.

"Do you mean to say, Russell, that the injuries you have inflicted upon Goring were all inflicted in fair fight?" he cried.

Russell turned scarlet.

"Yes, I do," he said hotly. "Who dares to say that—"

"Silence! That is not the way to speak to me."

"I beg your pardon, sir. But the fight was fair. Goring himself will tell you so."

"Goring tells a very different story."

Russell stared at the doctor in amazement.

"I don't understand you, sir," he faltered. "Goring says the fight was not fair?"

"Yes."

"Then he lies!" cried Russell hotly. "He lies? It was fair on my side from start to finish. There was one foul blow struck, and it was struck by him."

Dr. Dimsdale frowned.

"Goring's condition bears out his statement," he said drily. "It is impossible that his hurts were inflicted in a mere fight. He has undoubtedly been beaten in a savage manner while he lay upon the ground, and he will not be able to leave his bed for weeks, according to the medical gentleman who is now attending him."

It seemed to Russell that his head was turning round.

Was the doctor mad, or was he?

"I don't understand this," he said, bewildered. "I swear that we fought fairly, and when I left him, I offered to help him to the school, and he refused my help. I know he was hard hit, but nothing like that."

"You were evidently carried away by passion, and unable to control yourself," said Dr. Dimsdale coldly. "I should never have expected such conduct of you, Russell. But what I chiefly sent for you for, was to tell you my decision. You will, of course, understand that, after this occurrence, you cannot remain at Lyndale."

Russell looked dazed.

"Cannot remain at Lyndale?"

"Certainly not. There is no place in this school for such a ruffian as you have proved yourself to be."

"But—"

"You can offer no excuse for your conduct. You have acted in a manner that would put to shame the lowest hooligan in a London slum. You have brought disgrace upon yourself and upon the school you belong to. I should hesitate to flog a member of the Upper Fifth; but in any

event, a flogging would not meet this case. You are not fit to associate with the other boys here. You must leave Lyndale."

Russell stood silent, his chest heaving. His chief feeling was that he was the victim of injustice. He had defended himself, that was all, in a fight that was forced upon him, and this was his sentence. And Goring, the aggressor, was apparently to escape scot-free! The boy's heart swelled, and his eyes flashed.

"Then you are going to expel me?" he cried.
 "You have left me no other course," the doctor said coldly. "As I said, you are not to associate with the Lyndale boys."

"And Goring?"
 "Goring was to blame for fighting, of course. But Goring's conduct does not stand on a level with yours. He was not guilty of brutal hooliganism."

"Neither was I!" cried Harry indignantly. "I can't make this out; but if Goring says I hit him when he was down, he lies. I can't understand his saying so."

"He says so because it was true."
 "It isn't true, sir," said Russell earnestly. "Ask any of the fellows—they will tell you I am not that kind of chap. Cleveland will speak for me."

"You are evidently under a strange misapprehension," said the doctor icily. "Cleveland condemns your brutality as much as anyone. It was Cleveland who informed me that Goring had been brought home insensible from your brutal attack."

"Insensible?" gasped Harry, in amaze. "He was sensible when I left him."

"How can you tell me such a wanton untruth?" thundered the doctor. "Weston and Phillips found him lying senseless in the grass by the roadside, covered with bruises and blood. He did not recover consciousness until a quarter of an hour ago, after a physician had been sent for from the town."

"And—and he said——" gasped Russell.
 "He said what had happened when I questioned him. That while he lay fainting in the grass, only half-conscious, you set upon him and used him savagely."

"It's false—false, every word of it! I——"
 "Silence! Do you think I shall believe such a palpable untruth? Goring was evidently speaking truthfully, that was perfectly plain to all present, Cleveland included, and I understand that Cleveland has always been your friend. The unfortunate victim of your savagery lies ill now—seriously ill. If it will help to bring an honest feeling of shame to your heart, I will tell you that he asked me not to punish you for this shocking outrage, confessing that in the first place he challenged you to fight."

"Yet he accused me of——"
 "Yes. Why do you persist in denial when the facts are clear?"

"And Cleveland turned against me?" said Harry hopelessly.

He remembered the Lyndale skipper's manner when he brought the doctor's message, and had no doubt about that. The captain of the school, his cousin and chum, thought as badly of him as the rest.

"Certainly," said the doctor. "After seeing poor Goring's state, every right-minded boy must have turned against you. And after what has happened, you would find it the reverse of comfortable, I think, to remain at Lyndale. You would undoubtedly be sent to Coventry by the whole school. I shall not publicly expel you, in consideration of the good record you have borne up till now. But you must leave Lyndale in the morning, Russell. To-night I am writing to your father to fully explain the reason of your going home."

Russell gave a start. His father!

That stern, upright man, to whom anything in the nature of meanness or cowardice was abhorrent. Would he believe him guilty of this? How could he doubt it, when he would have the doctor's word for it—when all circumstances were so heavily against the unhappy boy? Indeed, in one dizzy moment Russell wondered himself whether it was not true—whether he had not, in some lapse of self-control, acted as the doctor believed. He had not believed that Goring was so seriously hurt; but there was no doubting the evidence of the boys who had found him and brought him in, of the physician, too. What was the meaning of it all? There was something mysterious in the affair that baffled Russell, and at this time his brain was not of the clearest. He was dazed, confused, and his head was still aching from the encounter with Goring.

How could he face his father's anger, perhaps his condemnation?

But there was no choice. On the morrow morning he was to leave Lyndale, and face home with this black disgrace fastened upon him for life!

Never!
 The world was wide, and if he were driven out of Lyndale,

he would not go home under such a cloud. The world was wide!

Something of pity crept into the doctor's stern eyes as he looked at the white, strained face, and saw the shame and misery there.

"I am sorry for this, Russell," he said, in a more gentle tone, "but you have left me no choice, and you must leave Lyndale to-morrow. Until then, I should advise you to keep to your room. You may go."

Without a word, Russell turned and left the room.

He was dazed, bewildered, and too miserable to feel angry. He went blindly up the stairs, and in the Fifth Form corridor a howl greeted him.

"Boo!"
 "Coward!"

Russell panted, and a blaze came into his eyes.

Phillips was standing at the door of his study, with several more fellows. He strode up to them, his face in a flame.

"Hooligan!"
 "Who kicked a chap when he was down?"

"You must be mad!" said Russell hoarsely. "Did any of you ever know me to do anything of the kind? I ask you fairly."

"Well, you've done it this time," said Phillips. "There were the marks of boots on Goring's clothes, and he was bruised all over. You can't crawl out of it. You did it, you hooligan, and you're going to be kicked out of Lyndale for it, and serve you right."

Russell turned away, sick at heart. It was useless to row with Phillips, and every other face he saw was equally hostile. He went moodily towards his own room, followed by derisive jeers. In the passage he met Cleveland face to face. The Lyndale skipper stood aside, with a face like stone, for him to pass.

"You, too?" said Russell bitterly. "I thought you might have stood by your own flesh and blood, Cleveland, if all these curs turned against him."

"They've turned against you for a good reason," said the Lyndale skipper shortly. "In the name of all that's decent, Russell, why did you do it?"

"Goring picked a quarrel with me, and I had no choice but to fight him."

"You know I'm not speaking about that."

"Ah, you believe his lie, then, that I hit him after he was down?"

"It was no lie, and the marks on him and his clothes prove it," said the captain of Lyndale. "I'm surprised at you, Russell. I know Goring was a bitter brute to you for a long time, but I never expected you to break out like that. You never used to be a blackguard or a coward."

"And you think I'm both now?"

"I know you are."

"And it's no good my telling you that I fought him fairly, and never did anything that you wouldn't have done in my place?"

"No good at all, when the evidence of my own senses is against you," said Cleveland, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You're not the kind of fellow I believed you were, Russell. I know I'm your cousin, and I'm jolly ashamed of it, I can tell you! The sooner you get out of Lyndale the better for all concerned!"

And he walked away, leaving Russell pale with rage and misery.

Straight to his room went Harry now, and he did not leave it again that evening. He had no desire to face the jeers and taunts of the boys who had made so much of him only a few hours before. And in the morning he left Lyndale. The world is wide!

CHAPTER 7.
A Friend in Need.

NORTHBROOK!"
 Harry Russell started as the porter called out the name of the station.
 Northbrook!

The name touched a familiar chord in his memory. He had left Lyndale at an early hour, and taken the train at the local station for the junction, where it was to meet the London express.

To London and to home, however, Harry Russell was determined not to go. He felt that he could not face it. What right had he to go home with this black disgrace upon him? How could he face his father's stern brow, his mother's tears? He felt that he could not; he would not. His career—the career his parents fondly planned for him—was ruined. But somewhere in the world there must be a place for him, as for everybody, and he would try to find it.

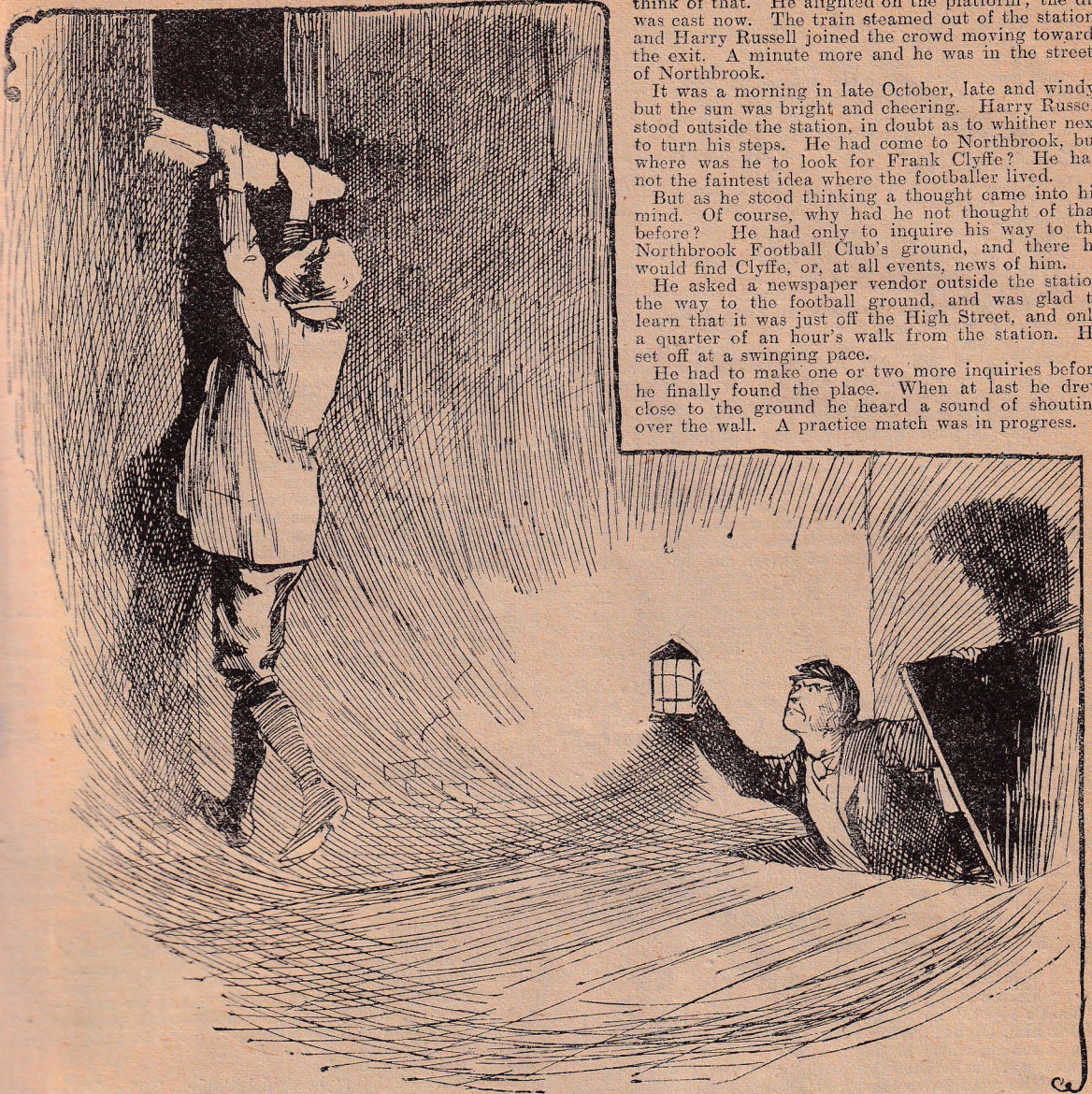
He looked back at Lyndale, on the old grey roofs behind the trees, with eyes blind with tears as the train passed within sight of the old school. But Lyndale vanished, and

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The ruffian was already on the ladder, so Harry drew himself up to the window-ledge and stood up outside, holding on to the wall. (See page 17.)

he sat with a heavy heart trying to think out some plan for the future. He would not go home, that he was determined upon. But where should he go? What was he to do?

The train passed through station after station, the familiar names making no impression upon him, until at length the sing-song voice of a porter announced "Northbrook."

"Northbrook!"

Harry's eyes flashed for a moment with a new thought.

Back into his mind came the recollection of the football match at Blackfield, and the events that had followed it—the adventure on the moor, and the words of Frank Clyffe—"If you ever want a friend, you've only got to come to Frank Clyffe, at Northbrook."

If he ever wanted a friend! He had never wanted one more sorely than at the present moment. He knew that the footballer had meant what he said; the words had come from his heart, sincere every one of them. And here he was at Northbrook!

For a moment or two Harry hesitated, his brain in a whirl with new thoughts that rushed into it; then he sprang up and turned the handle of the carriage door. The train was beginning to move again when he sprang out. His box was booked for London, but there was no time to

think of that. He alighted on the platform; the die was cast now. The train steamed out of the station, and Harry Russell joined the crowd moving towards the exit. A minute more and he was in the streets of Northbrook.

It was a morning in late October, late and windy, but the sun was bright and cheering. Harry Russell stood outside the station, in doubt as to whether next to turn his steps. He had come to Northbrook, but where was he to look for Frank Clyffe? He had not the faintest idea where the footballer lived.

But as he stood thinking a thought came into his mind. Of course, why had he not thought of that before? He had only to inquire his way to the Northbrook Football Club's ground, and there he would find Clyffe, or, at all events, news of him.

He asked a newspaper vendor outside the station the way to the football ground, and was glad to learn that it was just off the High Street, and only a quarter of an hour's walk from the station. He set off at a swinging pace.

He had to make one or two more inquiries before he finally found the place. When at last he drew close to the ground he heard a sound of shouting over the wall. A practice match was in progress.

"Is Mr. Clyffe here?"

The groundsman who had come to answer his inquiry looked at him curiously.

"Yes; he's at practice. What do you want?"

"I want to speak to him. Not now, of course, but when he's disengaged."

"A friend of his?"

"Yes."

"Been in the wars—eh?" the man asked, with a slight grin, noting the signs of the previous day's combat on Harry's face.

"Yes," said Russell, flushing.

"Well, you can come in if you like," said the man civilly enough. "Stand there, and you can see them at practice. That's Clyffe at centre of the pinks."

Harry looked on at the animated scene with a good deal of interest.

The Northbrook men were practising, two sides of half a dozen opposing each other, one lot in pink and the other in green.

The boy knew at once the Northbrook captain, with his fine athletic figure and swift, elastic movements.

He watched him with admiration as he moved to and fro,

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evidently streets ahead of any player on the ground, either green or pink.

And another player Harry recognised, too—the man Ganthony, who had deserted Clyffe when he was attacked by the footpads on Blackfield Common. Ganthony was playing in the green forwards. He seemed a fair player, but rather inclined to rough-and-ready measures.

Russell watched the practice match with all his eyes, so to speak, his attention fixed upon the Northbrook captain, a hero in his view, and rightly so. He started as a hand fell upon his shoulder.

He turned, and saw a burly, red-faced man, with a good-humoured expression, which somewhat reassured the Lyndale lad.

"Hallo! What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Mr. Clyffe, sir," said Russell. "I'm waiting till he has time to speak to me."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said the red-faced man, with a grunt. "Well, there's no harm in that, I suppose. The practice will be over in a few minutes."

Russell wondered whom the red-faced man was, but he did not like to ask. He seemed to know all about it, though, for in a few minutes more the players streamed off the field, and entered the dressing-rooms. The red-faced man followed them in, and Harry was left standing alone.

In about ten minutes, however, the red-faced individual reappeared, and beckoned to him.

"Come in here if you want to see Clyffe."

Harry, his heart beating, obeyed. He followed the red-faced man into a room where there were half a dozen people, and his heart sank. He had wanted to see Frank Clyffe alone, but here was the Northbrook captain among a crowd. Ganthony was one of them, and he looked at Harry as he entered, and evidently recognised him. An ugly expression came over the Northbrook forward's face. Frank Clyffe was speaking to someone, and did not immediately turn his head, and it was Ganthony who spoke first.

"Hallo, here's the young cockchafer!" he exclaimed, with a rude laugh.

Russell turned red. The other footballers turned to look at him, and he felt uncomfortable and out of place. After all, why had he come there? For the moment he wished that he had never set foot on the Northbrook football ground; but it was only for a moment.

Frank Clyffe turned towards him with the rest, and knew him at once, and an expression of real pleasure came upon the footballer's handsome features. The captain of Northbrook came forward quickly with outstretched hand, and gave Harry a cordial grip.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed heartily. "So it's you? Morgan said there was some chap wanted to speak to me, but I didn't guess it was you, or I'd have come out at once. I'm really glad to see you. It's very kind of you to look me up like this."

The footballer's frank, cordial manner banished all Harry's doubts at once, and he forgot Ganthony's ill-natured greeting. Ganthony, however, seemed bent upon making himself disagreeable.

"That's right," he said, with a sneer, "kill the fatted calf for him, Clyffe! What's the kid doing here instead of being in school, where he ought to be?"

"Shut up!" said Clyffe wrathfully. "Don't mind him, chappy," he went on to Harry. "He can't forget that you came to my help the night he ran away and left me to fight the footpads alone. He's never got over it, you see. Chaps," continued Frank Clyffe, "this is the youngster I've told you about, who chipped in, and I firmly believe saved my life, when a couple of roughs had me down on Blackfield Moor. Ganthony could tell you all about it, only he had taken to his heels and left me to face the music alone."

A laugh at Ganthony's expense followed, and the forward scowled and muttered savagely to himself. The others took no further notice of him, but crowded round Harry, all eager to shake hands with him and give him a welcome.

"So that's the kid, is it?" exclaimed the red-faced man. "Give us your flipper, young 'un! You're the right sort, you are. As for you, Ganthony, the less you say the better. The kid is worth a hundred of you, and that's plain English! You're a rotter, if you want to know your trainer's opinion of you! You haven't the pluck of a grasshopper, and your manners would disgrace a pigsty! So you shut up!"

Ganthony scowled and walked out of the room.

"I'm just off to my digs," went on Clyffe to Harry. "Will you walk down with me, and we can chat as we go? I hope you're staying in Northbrook, for if so we can show you a good match on Saturday. Burton are going to visit us, and it will be a tussle."

"I should like to see it," said Harry, with sparkling eyes.

"You're staying in Northbrook?"

"No, not exactly. I don't know."

Russell spoke hesitatingly, and Clyffe looked at him curiously. However, he asked no questions till they were out of the Northbrook ground, and walking away towards the "digs" of the captain of the Northbrook team.

"Now, what's the trouble?" said the Northbrook captain cheerily. "I can see that you've been in the wars, young 'un, and that you've got something on your mind. If I can be of any help to you, you've only to say so. What are you doing in Northbrook?"

"I came to see you," said Russell. "I remembered what you said to me—you know—that night on the moor. I don't know whether you can be of any help to me or not, but you said if I ever needed a friend—and Heaven knows I need one now!"

"You'll find me as good as my word," said Clyffe quietly. "What's the trouble? Not run away from school. I hope?"

"No; but I've left Lyndale."

"And how?"

"I've been expelled."

Clyffe gave a low whistle, expressive of astonishment.

"Expelled?"

"Yes," said Russell, his face crimson. "You see, I'm not disguising anything from you. But if I had deserved it I should hardly come and tell you about it."

"I am sure of that. I don't think you can have done anything to deserve being expelled," said Clyffe. "You acted like a plucky and generous lad that night I met you, and I formed an opinion of you I sha'n't change without good reason. There's something wrong, I suppose—some mistake somewhere?"

"I don't understand it myself," said Russell frankly. "It's a horrible business. I cannot face my people at home, and I'm turned out of Lyndale."

"Tell me how it was."

Without concealing anything, so far as he knew, Russell gave the Northbrook captain a full account of his rivalry with Goring, and of the fight in Lyndale Lane, and of what had resulted.

Clyffe listened with an expression of deep interest and attention, here and there asking a question.

"It's a strange story," he said. "I need not say that I believe you. But it's a deuced strange affair from beginning to end, Russell, and no mistake." He shook his head in a very puzzled way. "For if you left this chap Goring in possession of his senses, how did he come to be insensible when the others found him? Could a young fellow be deep enough and rascally enough to play such a part and invent the yarn for the purpose of getting you into trouble?"

"He was bitter enough against me," said Harry. "But I certainly shouldn't suspect him of anything of the kind if—if there was any other possible explanation. He may have fainted after I left him, and so have been insensible when the chaps found him. But as for the rest of the story—"

"If he invented it he must be a thorough rascal, and I don't see how you will ever bring it home to him," Clyffe remarked thoughtfully.

Harry shook his head.

"No chance of that!" he said bitterly. "The doctor was satisfied of my guilt, and he expelled me from Lyndale. The other fellows all hissed me as I left. Even my own cousin, the captain of the school, who had been my chum, turned against me."

"Then they must have considered the evidence remarkably strong, and that all was as Goring declared. It's a queer business."

"But you believe me, don't you?" said Harry, with a quick breath.

"I have said so, Russell. And you'll find me a man of my word, too. Have you formed any plan as to the future yet?"

"No. I don't know what to do. But there's one thing I'm determined upon, and that is that I won't go home unless my name is cleared!"

"About that, of course, you're the best judge," said Clyffe, with a nod. "Meanwhile, until you decide what to do, what do you say to taking up your quarters with me?"

Harry shrank a little.

"Oh, thank you!" he cried. "But—but no—I didn't mean that—"

"I know you didn't," smiled Clyffe; "but I do. Come, you can't do better, and I shall be glad to have you. Then we can talk it over, and make plans for the future. I suppose your idea is to look out for employment of some kind?"

"Yes," said Harry hopefully. "I have a little money—enough, I hope, to keep me until I find something to do."

"Have you thought of anything you can do?"

"Not yet."

Frank Clyffe suddenly stopped and looked at Harry.

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running his eye over him with an air of keen criticism, somewhat to the lad's astonishment.

"I wonder!" murmured the Northbrook captain—"I wonder—"

Harry looked at him in amazement.

"You play football?" queried Clyffe.

"Rather!" smiled Russell. "They thought me pretty good at the game at Lyndale. That was the cause of Goring's enmity, as I told you."

"Exactly. But I mean, do you play a first-rate game? Are you fond of it, and do you put your heart and soul into it?"

"I play up pretty well, I believe," said Russell, rather puzzled by these questions. "But what has that to do with it? I can't play football for a living, can I?"

"Why not?" said Clyffe. "I do."

Harry Russell gave a jump.

"By Jove," he cried, "how I should like it! But it's no good, Clyffe. They thought me a good player at Lyndale; but public-school football is nothing like League form. But, by Jove, how I should like it!"

"I don't want to hold out hopes that may never be realised," said the Northbrook captain soberly. "But you've got the build of a footballer, and are old enough. If you really play the game well, there's room for you in the football world, and right here in Northbrook. You may know that we're not a rich club, and some of our men have been tempted away from us, and the powers that be are on the look-out for fresh talent. If you've kicked goals in Lyndale First you ought to be good enough to go into our reserves, with a bit of licking into shape by Morgan, our trainer. Anyway, I'll speak to Mr. Wharton, our manager, about it, when I go down to the ground this afternoon for practice. I know he'll give you a trial on my recommendation. It won't do any harm if it doesn't do any good. How do you like the idea?"

"How do I like it?" said Harry, with a lump rising in his throat. "I don't know how to thank you!"

"Pooh! That's not necessary; besides, you don't know that anything will come of it yet," said the Northbrook captain, with a smile.

"Whether anything comes of it or not, I shall be equally grateful," said Russell. "But I'll play up my very best, Clyffe, and, anyway, try not to bring discredit on you. If I could only get into Northbrook Rangers second team it would be glorious!"

Clyffe smiled at his enthusiasm.

"Well, we'll put it to the test as soon as possible," he said. "Now, here we are at my diggings. And if you'll allow me to advise you I think the first thing you should do is to write to your father, and let him know that you are safe. He may be alarmed at your not turning up, you know, and think all sorts of things. You needn't give him your address, you know, if you don't want him to see you; in fact, I'll ask Morgan to post the letter over at Blackfield. But, you know, it's wrong to cause your parents any anxiety, even if they are down on you, as you anticipate your pater will be."

The letter was written and posted. In it Russell told his story and declared his innocence of wrongdoing, though with a sad conviction that his protestation would weigh little against the doctor's letter, which was by this time in his father's hands. He added that he was safe, with friends. The letter posted, he felt it as a weight off his mind. And something of his old spirits returned to him when Frank Clyffe came back from afternoon practice at the Northbrook ground and announced that the manager of Northbrook Rangers had agreed to give the captain's protegee a trial on the following morning.

CHAPTER 8:

Russell Joins the Rangers.

HARRY RUSSELL'S heart was beating fast as he walked down to the Northbrook ground on the following morning with Frank Clyffe.

He had had a good night's rest, and he was feeling very fresh and fit. With the new prospects that had opened before him, his depression of the previous day had passed away. He had not, of course, forgotten so soon the misfortune which had come into his life. But he had driven all present thought of it out of his mind, and determined to think of the game he was to play, and the game alone.

To find employment so soon, and employment so congenial, would be splendid, and he was resolved to do his very best under the critical eyes of the Northbrook manager. He saw Clyffe glance at him with approval once or twice, and that was encouraging.

"You feel all right, Russell?" the Northbrook captain asked, as they arrived at the football ground.

"First-rate!" said Harry cheerfully. "A little bit excited, of course. I can't help wondering how it will turn out, you know."

"If you want my opinion, I fancy it will turn out all right," said Clyffe, with a smile. "But keep cool, and do your level best, and a fellow can't do more. Here's Mr. Wharton!"

A stout, pleasant-looking gentleman with white whiskers was coming towards them. Clyffe presented Harry, and Mr. Wharton looked over him and shook hands with him cordially.

"So this is your friend, Clyffe," he said. "Well, I must say he looks a likely lad. Anyway, I shall be very pleased to see what he can do."

To the manager, Clyffe had merely said that Harry was a friend of his, who had been compelled by circumstances to leave school sooner than he had intended, and was looking for employment, and would be glad to find it on the football field. There was no need to explain further than that.

Morgan, the trainer, gave Harry a pleasant nod.

"It seems we are to give you a trial," he remarked. "Well, I shall be glad if it turns out all right, but I warn you I am a critic. Never mind, we'll see what you can do. What position do you generally take?"

"Winger," said Russell. "I played inside-right in Lyndale First."

"All right. There's going to be a scratch-match this morning between two full teams, and I'll put you in as inside-right. You can take a rest, Ganthony."

Ganthony shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I don't mind!" he said. "It will be amusing to watch the kid, too."

"He may be able to show you a few points," said the trainer, who seemed to like giving the unpopular forward a "dig" whenever he had a chance. "Your play has not been up to high-water-mark for some time."

Ganthony bit his lip.

Frank took Russell into the dressing-rooms and found him the necessary rig-out, and very fit and handsome he looked in the Northbrook blue-and-white.

Harry's cheeks were flushed, and there was a sparkle in his eyes, as he turned out into the field with the players.

The scratch match was being played between two full elevens, and so there was a good opportunity of testing the new candidate and seeing what he could do. Harry found himself opposed to the side captained by Frank Clyffe, who were distinguished from their adversaries by green shirts. His own captain was a big, good-looking Scotsman named Clyde. He was rather sorry he was to play against Frank, but the Northbrook skipper gave him a cheery word of encouragement as the teams turned out.

"Buck up, kid, and do your best!" he said. "Nobody can do more than that!"

"I will!" said Harry. And he went on with the determination to put into the game all that he had in him.

Mr. Wharton and the trainer stood looking on as the scratch match started. Ganthony stood near them, watching Harry Russell with a sneer upon his face.

The Greens kicked off, and were soon rushing the ball through the territory of their opponents, and Frank Clyffe came sweeping down upon the goal, dribbling the ball in fine style. But suddenly Mr. Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo! Look there!"

Morgan the trainer rubbed his eyes.

"The kid—he's beaten Clyffe!" he exclaimed.

It was true! Harry Russell had robbed the Northbrook skipper of the ball in the neatest kind of way, and was off with it like a shot, dribbling it fairly through the Green halves.

A look of astonishment was on Clyffe's face; he had not expected that. But Russell was away with the ball. The field was in pursuit, but only the backs had a chance to stop him. Both of them were rushing at him with deadly intent, and the Green goalie was watching keenly for a shot.

One flashing glance Harry gave round him; he had out-paced his own comrades, and there was no one well placed to receive a pass. He retained the ball, and, with a rapidity and skill that opened the trainer's watchful eyes, he dodged the backs, deceiving them and escaping them, and sprinted right on for goal.

Right on, the goalkeeper watching him like a hawk, ready for anything. Now he is going to kick, and the goalie's eyes gleam. But at the last moment he changes his feet, whiz goes the ball from his left into a far corner of the net, beating the goalie by a foot or more!

"Goal!" gasped Morgan.

"Bravo!" shouted Mr. Wharton.

The goalie gave a queer kind of grin as he picked up the ball and pitched it out. Frank Clyffe gave Harry a slap on the shoulder.

"Bravo, youngster!" he cried. "It was as fine a thing as I have ever seen! Now we know your quality you won't have a chance like that again. But it was splendid—splendid!"

Harry flushed with pleasure. He knew that he had played

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well, very well, but praise from the Northbrook captain was praise indeed.

The teams lined up again, and the game restarted, the Blues a goal to the good. As Clyffe had said, Harry had no chance of another sensational break, but he put in some first-class play, helping his side very considerably. He did not take another goal, but his passing was excellent, and he showed himself a sound, reliable player.

Mr. Wharton's expression grew more and more approving. "By Jove, Morgan," he said, "I like that youngster! There's nothing showy about him; he can be brilliant when he gets a chance, but he's quite content to be useful, and he never shoots when he ought to pass, though he's a good shot. He's not selfish. I like him!"

The trainer nodded emphatically. "So do I, sir. I fancy that Frank Clyffe has done the club a good turn by bringing him here. Why, he's hot stuff—regular mustard! Of course, there's no two opinions about taking him in."

"Hardly. I shall be glad to sign him on for the Rangers. You'll improve him in one or two minor points, perhaps; but his football is sound—in fact, splendid. Look here, Morgan, we can play him in the reserves on Saturday. The second team is weaker than I like to see it, and they're going to meet Blackpool Reserves, who are in good fettle. I fancy this young fellow will be a boon and a blessing to our side."

"Certainly, sir." When the players came off and changed, Frank Clyffe beamed congratulations upon Harry. The lad looked at him anxiously.

"You think I'll do, Clyffe?" The Northbrook skipper chuckled. "Think? I know you'll do. Did you see Wharton's face?"

"No." "Well, he's delighted. He'll jump at the chance of signing you on."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Russell, his eyes sparkling. "This is a stroke of luck for me, Clyffe, and I owe it all to you."

"Rats! You owe it to your play." Morgan put in his head at the door. "Bring your friend along to the manager's room, Clyffe, please," he said.

"Right you are." And the Northbrook skipper led his protege into the presence of the manager of Northbrook Rangers.

"You're willing to join us?" asked Mr. Wharton genially. "Willing, sir!"

The manager laughed. "Well, I take it you are willing," he said; "and I am just as willing to sign you on. I may say that I am highly satisfied with your performance to-day, Russell—highly satisfied. I believe that you will do the Rangers credit. We are glad to have you."

"You are very kind, sir." "Not a bit of it. Of course, you're going into this as a professional? Have you thought about the screw—ahem!—the salary?"

"No," said Harry simply. Mr. Wharton smiled his genial smile. "So you're willing to leave that to me?"

"Quite willing, sir." "Well, I shall do the fair thing by you. Shall we say thirty shillings a week for the start?"

"It is more than I expected, sir." "Then I take it you are satisfied with it? Good! Then we will fix it at that, and from this moment you are a member of the Northbrook Rangers."

Harry seemed to be walking on air when he left the manager's room with his friend. Frank Clyffe was extremely satisfied, too. He had done his protege a good turn, and his club one at the same time, and he had reason to be satisfied.

"I wish I could show you how grateful I am," said Russell, with something like a catch in his voice. "It's splendid!"

"That's all right," laughed Clyffe. "Northbrook Rangers are lucky to get you. Thirty bob a week is all right for a start, but you'll be drawing the maximum pay before long. Now, as to digs. My landlady is a good old soul, and I think she can put you up, if you'd like to live under the same roof as myself. What do you say?"

"I'll be jolly glad to," laughed Russell. And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 9

The Reserve Match—Harry Distinguishes Himself.

FROM Fifth Form to Football League! It was certainly a great change that had come into the life of Harry Russell; but, though he had regrets for the way the change had come, it would not be correct to say that he regretted the change itself. He loved the grand old game, and to earn his bread by playing it was an honourable ambition, and there was a good chance of winning distinction in the ranks of the Northbrook footballers. And so Harry threw himself into his new work with heart and soul, and showed a form that quite won the heart of Morgan the red-faced trainer.

Mr. Wharton was very pleased with him, and most of the Northbrook men gave him a cordial welcome. There was only one who seemed to take exception to him, and that one was Ganthony. The forward had disliked Harry ever since that night on Blackfield Moor. He had run away from danger, and his conduct contrasted with Russell's in a way that was very humiliating to himself. He could not be expected to like the lad, but he did more than dislike him. From the day of his coming to Northbrook, Ganthony was his enemy.

The trainer's remarks had something to do with this strong feeling on Ganthony's part. Ganthony was not a fellow to be liked, and he had got on Morgan's wrong side. The fact that Harry Russell excelled in the position which was Ganthony's own was not allowed to pass without comment by the trainer, and many a time Ganthony cast evil glances towards Harry after some caustic observation from Morgan.

Harry did his best to keep out of Ganthony's way, as he saw that the Northbrook winger disliked him, and so avoided anything like a quarrel. But once or twice, catching Ganthony's evil glances, he thought that an outbreak must come sooner or later. Not that he feared it at all. He was not in the least afraid of the winger; but he did not wish to signalise his joining the team by a row with one of the players, and so he was anxious to keep the peace.

Saturday came. The Northbrook team were playing at home, and the reserves were going to Blackpool to meet that town's second team. And by the order of Wharton Harry Russell went with them.

The Northbrook second team were not a strong lot. Their skipper, Clyde, was a fair player, and the goalkeeper was pretty good, but the rest seemed to Russell a "scrappy" lot. And when he looked over the Blackpool fellows he had his misgivings. He soon found that they were shared by Clyde.

"We shall have a rough time here," said the skipper, in the dressing-room assigned to the visitors. "There are some fine players in the Blackpool Reserves. See to it, you fellows, that you keep our end up."

The Northbrook fellows promised that they would. In his heart Harry Russell resolved to play the game of his life that day, and do his very best to snatch a victory for the Northbrook blue and white.

Although it was only a reserve match, a goodly number of spectators had turned up, quite a couple of thousand people lining the ropes.

Harry—who, of course, had never played before any crowd so large before—felt a little strange as he looked out on what seemed to him an ocean of faces. To his companions—many of whom had played in the first team before League crowds—the number seemed small enough. But Russell was not nervous. He knew his own quality, and he was ready to do his best, and he had nothing approaching the feeling of "stage-fright."

The rival teams ran into the field, and the band, which had been discoursing sweet music, marched off, and a cheer greeted the boys in red shirts from the home crowd. The teams lined up, and the kick-off fell to the visitors, who had the sun in their faces. The ball rolled from Clyde's foot, but in a moment the Blackpoolers were upon it, and it was across the line, and with a rush the home players came up the field. The crowd cheered loudly as the red shirts rushed for the visitors' goal, the blue and white falling back on all sides.

It seemed from the start that Northbrook were outclassed, and that Blackpool meant to make short work of them. Right up to the goal mouth the homesters rushed the leather, and they sent in rapid shots, which the goalie had all his work cut out to save. But he did save, again and again, and his splendid defence gave the blue and white a chance to deal with the enemy.

A Northbrook back sent the ball out, and it was headed up the field, giving the eager forwards a chance. Clyde was quickly on the ball, and he went away with it, dribbling finely, till a Blackpool back charged him off the ball. Before, however, the Blackpoolers could take advantage of that, a nimble figure in blue and white was on the elusive leather, and rushing it down the field in a splendid burst.

"DAILY MAIL."

NEXT SATURDAY:

"PHANTOM GOLD,"
A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
the Famous Detective;

AND

"JACK BLAKE OF ST. JIM'S,"
A School Tale,
By Charles Hamilton.

IN "PLUCK," 1d.

Seth Ball gritted his teeth and his eyes glittered. He would never have a better chance. (See page 19.)



The Northbrook play became mainly defensive, but not successfully so; for just before half-time the ball found the visitors' net, and when the whistle went the score was level.

After the brief interval, Blackpool lined up with the sun in their faces, and this advantage for the visitors was well used by them. The Northbrook men began to attack, and Blackpool, for the first time, found themselves really hard pressed. They fell back round their own goal, and the blue-and-white besieged the home citadel, and Russell sent in a shot at goal that very nearly materialised—but not quite. Out came the leather again, and again he slammed it in, but the ball rebounded from the goalpost into the field of play. It was hard luck; and the next second a home back had it, and as the Northbrook men came on, he was forced to play it behind the corner flag.

With no uncertain voice the Northbrook skipper claimed the kick, which was conceded, and Russell was given the task. In a breathless silence he kicked, and the ball sped, and the stillness of the pause was changed to liveliest animation. But the rush of the Blackpoolers was of no avail, for Russell and his skipper perfectly understood one another, and in a flash, as it seemed, Clyde had slammed the ball into the net.

Two up for Northbrook!

Blackpool kicked off again, and showed that the prospect of defeat had "bucked them up" to good purpose. Their attack was strong and well combined, and the weaker side gave way before it. The crowd cheered a goal, and five minutes later another, scored by the home players. That the visitors were outclassed, as Clyde had said, could not be doubted, yet the visiting skipper hoped to pull the game out of the fire; for though Blackpool was the better side as a whole, they had no player like Russell in their ranks.

And later on came Russell's chance. From a tussle in mid-field he escaped with the ball, and while three of the enemy were almost upon him he sent in a long, low shot which materialised. Once more the score was level.

It was Harry Russell! Right at him ran the home backs, and Russell made a feat of passing out, deceiving them completely and diverting their attention from Clyde at centre, who was now coming up ready for a pass, and quite prepared to receive it.

Instead of passing out, Russell sent the ball into the centre, and Clyde raced it goalward. Only the custodian stood between him and success, but the Blackpool goalie was worth his salt. Clyde sent in a good shot, but the goalie saved, and the ball came out again from his fist; and then Russell, dodging the backs, who had turned their attention to Clyde, was on the ball in a flash.

There was a shout from the spectators. The ball rose from Russell's foot and whizzed into the net, foiling the goal-keeper, who had not looked for so instant a return of the leather. It was first blood to Northbrook, and some of the crowd cheered the fine feat.

"Bravo!" said Clyde, as they walked back to the centre of the field. "There's no getting away from the fact that we are outclassed, Russell; but I think we shall keep our end up if you play up as well as that to the finish."

Blackpool kicked off in a grim, determined humour. They did not mean to give the visitors another chance; and, as a matter of fact, Russell had no other chance in the first half. He was marked by the home men as a dangerous player, and they put "paid" to every attempt of his to get away.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"PHANTOM GOLD,"
A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
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AND

"JACK BLAKE OF ST. JIM'S,"
A School Tale,
By Charles Hamilton.

IN "PLUCK," 1st

It was close upon time now, and both teams were looking the worse for wear, but the visitors were noticeably the more spent.

The Blackpoolers, determined to snatch the game out of the fire, rushed the Northbrook men, and by sheer energy brought the tussle right up before the Northbrook goal. In went the ball, but the goalie was on the alert. He sent it whizzing out, and Blackpool's last chance was gone, for the Northbrookers, with a desperate effort, brought the play back to mid-field, and kept it there. And suddenly a lithe form in blue and white was seen streaking for the home goal.

Every eye was bent upon Harry Russell.

How he sprinted!

And though the defeat of the home team trembled in the balance, the crowd could not forbear a cheer as the plucky player made his dash for goal.

Three Blackpoolers were at his heels, but he outpaced them, and he dodged a half who sought to stop him, and the other halves were too far to be of any use.

But two backs were in his way, and they grinned at the idea of his passing them; but Russell was not thinking of attempting the impossible.

He swerved with a suddenness that gave them no chance, and took a shot at goal from a distance that was decidedly risky; but it was the only chance, for there was no chance of a successful pass.

And fortune, as it often does, favoured the bold!

It was a regular daisy-cutter, and the goalie threw himself down in a frantic endeavour to save, but in vain.

The ball was in the net!

The next moment Russell went down under the charge of a back, but he did not care—the goal was taken.

As he picked himself up, shaken and a bit dizzy, but flushed with success, the whistle went. The game was over, and Northbrook had won by four goals to three.

And Harry Russell, the new recruit, had done the hat trick, and kicked the winning goal!

No wonder the Northbrook players seized him, and bore him upon their shoulders to the dressing-room, while the crowd, forgetting the defeat of the home side in a sportsman-like appreciation of good play, cheered him to the echo.

CHAPTER 10.

A League Match—Harry Russell's Triumph.

FRANK CLYFFE met Russell with a hearty shake of the hand when he returned to Northbrook in the evening, and joined the Rangers' captain at their "diggings."

"I've heard about you," he said. "I congratulate you, my boy. The hat trick, by Jove! And you saved the match for our team! It was splendid! Clyde cannot praise you enough!"

Russell coloured.

"It's very good of him," he said. "I was lucky."

"It wasn't luck, it was sound football," declared Frank.

"I can't say how glad I am that I brought you into the Rangers' fold. Morgan is delighted. He's been saying, in his usual polite way, that you'll be putting me into the shade before long."

"Oh, that's bosh!"

"I don't know so much about that," said the Northbrook captain seriously. "I'm not likely to nourish any ill-feeling about it, if you do, Harry. I hope I'm a sportsman. I wish I could say the same for Ganthony."

"He seems to dislike me," said Russell. "I never gave him cause."

"He doesn't need cause, except his own jealousy and meanness," answered Clyffe. "But old Morgan isn't the most tactful chap in the world, either, and he adds fuel to the fire. He's got his knife into Ganthony, who has been unkind to him, though. He knows your success is a sore subject with the fellow, and so he harps upon it. But, as a matter of fact, what he says has occurred to all of us. You know we met Burton to-day at home?"

"Yes, and it was a draw."

"Yes; but it ought to have been a victory," said Clyffe ruefully. "Ganthony was to blame. He lost his temper, and fouled a Burton half in the penalty area, and the referee gave a penalty kick against us. Some of the fellows have been grumbling; but, as a matter of fact, it was fair enough. Ganthony fouled the man, and the rules of the game were made to be obeyed, I suppose. That goal made us even; otherwise, we should have licked the Burtons by three to two."

"It was hard lines."

"Worse than that, it was simply rotten," said Frank emphatically. "You know, Mr. Wharton is nourishing a hope of getting into the First Division of the League this season, and every point is a matter of importance. Now we count one for a draw instead of two for a victory, and it's all Ganthony's fault. And Morgan's been saying that he'd

better stand out of the next match, and let you play in his place."

"That will be humiliating for him."

"No doubt, as he thinks great guns of himself," said Clyffe, with a laugh. "But if Mr. Wharton takes my advice, that's what he'll do."

"Do you really think I'm fit to play in a League match, Frank?"

"Rather! A good deal fitter than Ganthony. To be plain, your play is better than his, and you can be depended upon to play a sportsmanlike game, and he cannot. And I fancy, old chap, that next Saturday you'll be playing in Northbrook First."

Russell's eyes flashed.

"If Mr. Wharton thinks me fit, of course I shall be glad," he said. "I'm sorry for Ganthony, though."

"It will do Ganthony good to take a rest for a bit in the shades of the second team," said Frank, with a laugh. "He's too swelled-headed, anyway. But it will mean that you have a bitter enemy among Northbrook Rangers, Harry, and you must look out for yourself. Ganthony is a mean fellow, and not above playing any dirty trick on anyone he hates."

"Oh, I shall be able to take care of myself!" said Harry cheerfully. "I'm sorry he's my enemy, but I fancy it dates from that affair on Blackfield Moor, and it isn't my fault."

The thought of playing in the first team was naturally an exciting one to Russell. He thought a good deal about it, and threw himself heartily into his practice daily at the Northbrook ground, winning golden opinions from the trainer and Mr. Wharton.

Of Ganthony's black looks he took no notice at all, determined not to see them, and not to be drawn into a row with the sullen winger if he could help it.

The week glided past, and Russell had fairly settled down to his new life now.

Indeed, at times, it seemed to him that his old way of life was a long, long way behind him, and he could hardly realise that he had been a professional footballer for less than a fortnight.

When he arrived on the ground on Saturday morning, as usual, the first person he met was Ganthony. The winger scowled at him savagely.

"So you've succeeded in worming yourself in, you cad!" was his greeting.

Russell looked at him calmly and contemptuously.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said.

"Don't you? You don't know that you've got my place for to-day's match, you understand—"

Russell set his lips.

"I know this much—that I won't take words like that from anybody!" he cried sharply. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Mr. Ganthony, though you've been trying to pick a quarrel with me ever since I came to Northbrook. But I tell you plainly that you had better measure your words when you are speaking to me!"

"Hark at the bantam crowing!" said the other mockingly.

"Why, for two pins, I'd twist your cheeky neck, and—"

"Hallo, Russell!" The voice of the trainer broke in. "I didn't know you had come. The manager wants to speak to you in his room."

"Very good," said Harry, and he walked away from the angry winger. Ganthony was turning away, too, with a sullen scowl on his face, when Morgan tapped him on the shoulder. Ganthony looked savagely into the red face of the trainer.

"Well, what do you want?"

"You've been trying to pick a quarrel with Harry Russell!"

"Suppose I have?"

"Well, I won't have it, that's all. Mind, I'm not going to stand any of your nonsense, Mr. Ganthony. You lost us a point on Saturday, and we could ill spare it. I can tell you, the directors are not in a very good temper with you about it. Mark my words, if you don't mind your P's and Q's, it will be the order of the boot for you!"

And the trainer followed Harry, leaving the incensed winger grinding his teeth.

"The order of the boot!" muttered Ganthony savagely. "So it's come to that—and all through that young whippersnapper! By James, I'll make him smart! I'll make him meet me, in spite of all the trainers in the world, and thrash him within an inch of his life!"

And this prospect seemed to afford Mr. Ganthony a good deal of satisfaction. There was, however, one point he did not count upon—that when he met Russell, it might be himself who would receive the thrashing. That had not occurred to him.

"You are going to play in the first team to-day, Russell," was the manager's greeting to Harry. "So buck up and do your best for Northbrook."

NEXT SATURDAY:

"PHANTOM GOLD,"
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AND

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A School Tale,
By Charles Hamilton.

IN "PLUCK," 1st.

"Trust me, sir," said Russell.

"Yes, I think I can," said the manager, with a smile.

"You won't do the hat trick against a League team, but I know you'll do us credit."

Russell looked forward eagerly to the afternoon.

The match was to be played away, at Burnley, and Burnley were a good team. Harry Russell went off in the train with the Northbrook side, the manager and trainer, and his face flushed as the crowd at the station cheered the parting train. Amid the cheers he heard his own name loudly shouted, and it gave him a strange sensation. Following the Northbrook team's "special" went other trains containing crowds of enthusiastic Northbrook fellows, who intended to see and cheer their own team on the Burnley ground. And when the Burnley enclosures were filled, at least three hundred Northbrook men were there, ready to yell and cheer with all their might against three thousand native throats.

Very fit looked the Northbrook team in the field. Harry had seen his own name in the programme in the place of Ganthony's, and he soon saw that the Northbrook supporters heartily concurred in the change, for they cheered him by name when the teams came into the ground.

"Russell! Russell!"

"Give us the hat trick again!"

Harry laughed and coloured, and Frank smiled at him.

"You see, you're a hero already," he said. "You must live up to your reputation, Harry."

The visitors lost the toss, and kicked off, and Harry soon found that the Northbrook First were of a very different quality from the second team. And his opponents were on a level immensely superior to his opponents of last Saturday. In fact, he was in a new world—the world of first-class football—and he felt that he required all his courage and all his skill to excel among these giants of the football world.

But he did not falter for a moment. He was a true British boy, game to the backbone, and he meant to do or die.

The exchanges were pretty even at first, and play kept pretty well in midfield, and it was the visiting team that first got going in good style.

Frank Clyffe captured the ball and passed to Harry, who streaked through the Burnley men, and gave it to his outside winger as he was tackled.

The winger was promptly charged off the ball by a Burnley back; but before the defenders could clear, Russell was on the spot.

He passed to Frank, and the next moment was charged over, while the Northbrook captain raced goalward with the ball, completely eluding the backs. The goalkeeper was not quite equal to the shot the Northbrook skipper sent in, and the ball lodged in the net.

"Goal!" roared the Northbrook three hundred, as one man.

The initial success was followed up well, and at half-time the visitors' score stood at two against the homesters' one.

The second half opened brilliantly, with a combined attack by the Northbrook men, who, passing with machine-like precision, brought the ball right down the field.

A home back played it behind the line, and Frank claimed the corner, and play was stopped for the kick. Frank himself took it, and gave Harry the chance of his first goal. In spite of the defenders' efforts, the ball went in from the Northbrook winger's foot, and again the doughty three hundred cheered and stamped.

"Goal!"

"Good old Russell!"

"Hurrah!"

"Buck up, Burnley!" said the home captain, as the teams went to the centre of the field again; and Burnley did buck up, but it availed them little.

Another goal was taken by Harry, after a brilliant bit of dribbling, and the Northbrook score stood at four to one.

It then wanted five minutes to time, and the Burnley men had given up hopes of victory; but they still resisted obstinately, to keep down the margin of goals.

But the Northbrook lads were irresistible.

Again the blue and white swept down the field, and the green shirts were massed for the defence, and again the defence proved inadequate.

The Burnley men fought to a finish, and the quality of the home goalie saved them again and again, but the Northbrook men were not to be denied.

The goalie saved with difficulty a fast shot from Frank Clyffe, and ran forward to hurl the ball out; but he had reckoned without Harry Russell. The young winger saw his chance and acted with instant decision. The goalkeeper had taken one step too many, and like a flash Harry charged him, sent him into his citadel again, and the ball bounced out of his hands, and it was a goal.

And a Northbrook voice piped: "Hurrah! Are we down-hearted?" And in a stentorian roar three hundred voices answered: "No!"

Frank's eyes danced with delight as he clapped Harry on the back. The referee's whistle went; the goal had been gained on the stroke of time. Northbrook walked off the field winners of a fine game by five to one.

For the second time since joining the Northbrook Rangers Harry Russell had performed the hat trick, and his comrades could not make enough of him. Mr. Wharton met him with a hearty handshake and a beaming face.

"Glorious, my boy!" he said. "You have the makings of an International in you, there's not the slightest doubt about that. It was a lucky day when you came to Northbrook. You'll play in the first team, as a matter of course, after this. Bravo!"

And from the Northbrook three hundred, gleefully swarming round the victorious team, came cheer on cheer for Harry Russell. The boy's heart was beating hard, and his face was flushed and happy. He was the youngest man in the team, and this success was his. It was probably the happiest day of Harry Russell's life.



The captain came forward and gave Harry a cordial grip.
(See page 10.)

NEXT SATURDAY:

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AND

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A School Tale,
By Charles Hamilton.

IN "PLUCK," 1^d

CHAPTER 11.
In Dire Peril.

"HALLO! I wonder what his game is?"

It was a few days after the League match in which Harry Russell had so brilliantly distinguished himself, and the young footballer, after leaving the football ground, practice for the day being over, had gone for a stroll before returning to his diggings. Many a time Harry had walked on an evening in the long lanes which lay in the direction of Lyndale, though he had never ventured within miles of his old school, for fear of being seen by someone who had known him in the old days. Sometimes Frank was with him, but on this occasion he was alone. And in the dusk of the November evening he had more than once glanced behind him with a peculiar feeling that he was being followed; and suddenly, as he happened to look back, he caught sight of a pursuer in the light of a lamp, and recognised Ganthony.

A frown crossed Harry's face. The Northbrook forward was evidently following him; but why? Was he intent upon picking a quarrel with him, which he could not do on the club ground in Northbrook? The doubt was soon decided.

The footsteps of the pursuer quickened, and he overtook Harry, who stopped, as he heard him hastening up, in the light of one of the lamps along the lane. The young footballer faced him coolly.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked. "You have followed me from Northbrook, and now, what do you want?"

Ganthony smiled evilly. His flushed face and glistening eyes showed that he had been drinking, but he was quite master of himself. He had drunk enough to make himself savagely quarrelsome and spiteful.

"I want to settle accounts with you, you young hound!" he said between his teeth. "You've done me out of my place in the first team, and the manager says you are to keep it. I have something to say about that, though."

"Then you'd better say it to Mr. Wharton, not to me," said Harry coldly. "I have nothing whatever to do with the arrangements, as you know very well. I obey the orders I receive, just the same as you do."

"Oh, you can't crawl out of it in that way!" sneered Ganthony. "You've been currying favour with old Wharton, and you've succeeded—"

"That's a lie," said Harry, "and you know it! But I don't want to bandy words with you. What do you want with me? I don't want to talk to you."

Ganthony's reply was to aim a savage blow at his face.

Harry warded it easily, but he did not strike. It cost him an effort, but he still kept his temper.

"I don't want a row with you, Ganthony," he said, as calmly as he could. He was thinking of the fight with George Goring, and of its results, and he was resolved never to allow his temper to get the better of him again. "I don't want—"

"You don't want a hiding!" chuckled Ganthony. "No, of course not; but, you see, you have no choice in the matter, young cockchafer! I'm going to give you the hiding of your life, so you may as well make up your mind to it!"

Harry smiled contemptuously.

"I'm not afraid of that," he said. "I don't want a row with any of the Northbrook team, that's all. I fancy I could give a good account of you, though, if I did."

"Try it, then!"

And Ganthony flung himself savagely at the young footballer. He was at least six inches taller than Harry, and as many years older, and he had not the slightest doubt of being able to get the better of him. Never was a man more woefully mistaken.

Russell was in splendid form, and, though not so tall as the older man, he was as strong, or nearly so, and much more elastic and active, and had a good deal more real pluck, as well as a knowledge of the manly art of self-defence.

He met Ganthony's attack with a guard that swept the forward's blows away, and let out his right full upon the man's prominent nose, and Ganthony staggered backwards, seeing a whole Milky Way of stars all of a sudden. Unable to save his balance, he sat down in the middle of the lane with a thump, and stared stupidly at Russell.

Harry smiled slightly. He stood ready for the fellow to renew the attack, and Ganthony was not long in renewing it. Springing to his feet, he dashed at Russell like a mad bull.

Harry gave ground a little before his furious assault, but not a single one of the savage blows reached his face, and after a few minutes of sparring, the young footballer got in his left on Ganthony's chest with a force that made him stagger, and, following it up with his right, laid him flat on

his back in the dust. This time Ganthony was much longer in getting on his feet.

Russell, unhurt and quite fresh, looked at him calmly as he picked himself up. Ganthony was beginning to realise now that he was no match for the young footballer, but he was in too great a rage to desist. He came on again more cautiously, his eyes burning with hatred.

"Oh, why don't you have some sense?" exclaimed Russell. "I could wipe up the ground with you if I liked, and you know it! Why don't you clear?"

Ganthony gritted his teeth, and came on viciously. And at that moment there came a hoarse, savage voice from the dusk, beyond the circle of light cast by the lamp, and it cried:

"Go for him, guv'nor! I'll help you!"

And at the same moment a burly rough rushed at Harry from behind, whirling aloft a stick in his right hand.

The footsteps behind him warned Russell of his peril before he heard the voice, and he made a rapid spring to the side of the lane.

The stick swept downward and whistled through the empty air, and the rough halted suddenly. In the light Russell saw his face. He had thought the voice familiar to his ear. It was Seth Ball, the ruffian of Blackfield Moor.

It was evident that Ball had recognised him, and was bent upon revenging himself for the rough handling of that night on the moor.

The ruffian called out to Ganthony: "Come on, guv'nor!" And he rushed at Russell again.

Ganthony was not slow to accept the invitation. He knew now that he was no match for Russell, and a love of fair play was not a trait in his character.

With a savage satisfaction in his face, he rushed to help the poacher.

Russell hesitated for a moment. It went sorely against the grain to run, but he was pitted against two full-grown men, one of whom was armed with a cudgel, and evidently intended to use it. It was folly to engage with such heavy odds. And so, ere the scoundrels could close upon him, a rapid leap carried him out of their reach, and then he sprinted up the lane.

"After him!" panted Ganthony. And they gave instant pursuit.

Little use it would have been, under ordinary circumstances, for either of them to give chase to the swiftest forward in the Northbrook team.

But the lane was dark, and Russell did not know the ground well, and so his running powers were at a discount. The laboured breathing of his pursuers was growing fainter behind him, when suddenly, missing a sharp turning in the dark, he crashed into a hedge. The shock dazed him, and he reeled back into the lane dizzily.

The noise had been heard by his pursuers, and they guessed what it meant. They rushed on, and caught sight of him again. Harry was in less condition now than before for a fight against odds, and he again sprinted on, but at a reduced speed. There was a pain in his side, and he knew that he had hurt himself when he crashed into the hedge. His teeth came sharply together.

For fear of another such mishap he dared not go at a great speed, nor did he feel fit now for a burst. The ground was rougher under his feet, and he feared that in the dark and hurry he had left the lane, and taken some by-path away from it. His breath came in a heavy panting, and he could hear the footsteps of his enemies behind.

Seth Ball's voice came through the darkness, with a chuckling note in it:

"We've got him now! I know this field; there's a high fence round it, and he—"

He lost the rest; but the words sent a chill to his heart. What would happen if he fell into the hands of these scoundrels now?

He would put up a good fight certainly, but the end could not be doubtful. One well-aimed blow from the poacher's cudgel would finish the matter. Ganthony had no thought of inflicting serious injury—at least, he believed not; but it was different with the rough. Seth Ball was not likely to stop short of the worst extreme of hooliganism; he might not stop short of murder. Harry knew the character borne by the rough, and he knew how Seth Ball hated him.

Crash!

In the darkness Harry had again run into an obstacle which he could not see, and he reeled back breathless.

The shock was not so great as before, but the object was less yielding than a hedge, and Harry's hands, which he had wisely held out before him as he ran, were bruised and hurt. A dim, gloomy mass resolved itself out of the darkness before him, and he had no doubt that he had run into a barn or outhouse of some kind.

"There he is!"

Harry's head was reeling dizzily, and his foes were close

at hand. If Ball's words were correct there was no escape from the field. He was about to turn desperately at bay when a new thought flashed into his mind. He felt his way along the wall of the building till he came to a door, which opened under his touch. He passed in, into densest blackness. There was a smell of dirty straw, but he could see nothing. The absolute silence convinced him that the building was untenanted by either man or animal. He felt his way round the wall slowly and carefully, and as he did so he heard a muttering of voices without.

His hands touched the rough wooden rungs of a vertical ladder. It was what he sought, and had hoped to find, and he drew himself up the ladder into the loft over the lower chamber. As he passed into the loft the sound of voices showed him that Ganthony and Ball were in the apartment below.

"Do you think he hid in here?"

It was Ganthony's voice.

"I reckon so, gov'nor."

"I'd like to find him. I owe him a little account."

The poacher chuckled.

"So do I. Him and another. I've paid one!" He chuckled again in the darkness. "Now I'm going to pay him in the same way. He's sure to be here."

"Got any matches?"

"Yes; and a lantern. I slept in this barn last night, and I know my way about it. I expect he's in the loft. We'll soon have him out. What have you got agin him, gov'nor?"

"I hate him!" Ball chuckled again.

"Right! He won't be worth hating when I've done with him!"

"Here, look here, no murdering business, you know!" exclaimed Ganthony, in alarm. "I won't stand that, my man! Nothing of that kind!"

"Don't you be afraid, gov'nor. I won't murder him. But I'll give him what he'll remember to his dying day, and if he ever plays football after I've finished with him, I shall be surprised. I gave the other a hot time, but this is the one I hate the most! This is the one who knocked me out; and I've got some of the marks still!" he muttered, with a curse. "Come on, let's have a look for him! What's that—rain?"

There was a sound of pattering on the roof.

"Yes. Lucky we're here!"

"Come on!"

A match flared in the dark, and there was a smell of oil as the poacher lighted his lantern. He moved towards the ladder.

Harry Russell had heard every word, and his heart sank. He was cornered there, and there was no chance of escape. He had hoped to find some place of concealment in the loft, but it was quite bare. He looked round him, and his eyes fell upon a square in the wall less opaque than the rest; it was a window at the end of the loft, and wide open. He moved towards it with beating heart, on tiptoe. The frame, as he now saw, was windowless. From without came a cold wind and pattering raindrops.

There was nothing else for it; the ruffian was already on the ladder. Harry drew himself up on the window-ledge, and stood up outside, and holding on to the wall. His hands just reached over the edge of the roof. He murmured a prayer as he clutched hold and drew himself up. The poacher had ascended the ladder, but in the half-darkness he had not seen Harry draw himself up to the window.

The wind blew the rain in his face as he drew himself up. He set his teeth, and threw all his strength into the effort. Slowly but surely he drew himself upon the sloping roof, and lay there, holding to the ridge, in imminent peril of sliding off and falling to the ground some thirty feet below. Barely had he gained the roof than he heard the voice of the poacher in the loft.

"Come on! He must be here!"

CHAPTER 12.

A Glimpse of the Truth.

RUSSELL lay quite still, hardly daring to breathe. He heard the footsteps of Ganthony and Ball in the loft, moving to and fro, and caught glimmers of the lantern-light through the opening of the broken window.

The two rascals moved about, muttering and grumbling. It was soon clear to them that Russell was not in the loft, and they had made certain of finding him there.

"Well, he's not here," grumbled Ganthony. "He's given us the slip."

Seth Ball came to the little window and looked out. A gust of wind dashed the rain into his face, and he started back with an oath.

"He can't have got out this way; he'd have broken his neck. He must have dodged round the barn, arter all!" he growled.

"Then he's in the field, and—"

"And he can stay there!" growled Ball. "Hark how the rain's coming down! I mean to stick here till it's over, Mr. Ganthony; and, if you take my advice, you'll do the same."

Russell's heart sank. He was lying on the sloping roof, holding on for his life, and the rain, which was now falling heavily, was drenching him to the skin. If the ruffians remained in the loft until the rain was over, what was to become of him? How long could he retain his precarious position?

The rain was growing heavier every moment. It was a November squall, and though it might not last long in its present fury, it would not be over very soon. What was he to do if the scoundrels remained in the loft? If only they would descend to the lower storey, he might be able to creep into the window again without alarming them. But they showed no disposition to do so. The loft was drier and more sheltered, and he heard the scratch of a match, and the scent of tobacco followed. The poacher had lighted his pipe, sure sign that he meant to stay where he was.

"He'll get clear off," said Ganthony, looking out of the window. The rain lashing down drove him away from it.

"Do you feel inclined to go out in that, Mr. Ganthony?"

"No; I can't say I do."

"Then stay where you are. A time will come yet."

Ganthony began to pace to and fro uneasily. Now that the excitement of the chase was over, he began to think of the possible consequences of that night's work. He was already unpopular at the Northbrook Club, both with players and directors. He felt that it was in Russell's power now to ruin him. The silence was broken only by his uneasy footsteps and his mutterings, mingled with the lashing of the rain on the roof. The poacher smoked on stolidly, but presently he looked curiously at his companion.

"What's ailing ye? Are you afraid of that young whippersnapper?"

"Hang you, no!" said Ganthony irritably. "Only there may be ructions over this. I wish you had never chipped in!"

"Keep your wool on," said the poacher coolly. "I chipped in on my own account, not yours. I recognised Harry Russell, and thought that my chance had come. It will come yet. I mean to repay him for that affair on Blackfield Moor. You know what I mean. You were there, Mr. Ganthony, but you cut and run when me and my mate jumped on the chap who was with you." He laughed evilly. "They've made that part of the country too hot to hold me, and I've changed my quarters, and it was a bit of luck that I should come upon young Russell over here in Northbrook. I saw in the paper the other day about Harry Russell, the new Northbrook forward, being put in to play Burnley in your place, Mr. Ganthony, but I never guessed it was the same. But now," went on the ruffian shrewdly, "I know it's the same, it's not hard to guess why you hate him, Mr. Ganthony."

"I don't see that I need make it a secret from you," said Ganthony, after a pause. "We may be of use to each other, Seth Ball."

Ball chuckled.

"That's my idea, gov'nor."

"Russell has cut me out at Northbrook. He plays in my special position, and the managing-director and the trainer both think he cuts a better figure than I do. It's all rot, of course; sheer favouritism—"

"Of course!" said Ball, with an unpleasant laugh.

"Anyway," said Ganthony savagely, "I'm determined that he sha'n't enjoy his triumph for long. I followed him this evening to bring him to account, and I was going to give him the hiding of his life—"

"Only it worked out the other way," grinned Ball. "If I hadn't come along you would have got the hiding, Mr. Ganthony."

"Well, he's better form than I expected," admitted Ganthony, biting his lip. "I sha'n't take him on again. The trouble is, that if he talks about this affair at the club, the manager may make it an excuse to fire me. He doesn't need me so much as he did now that he's got Russell, and I know he'll be glad to be rid of me."

"A bad look-out for you."

"Yes; but if he were deprived of Russell's services, he would want me back again," said the other, with a sinister look. "Now, you hate Russell as much as I do, Ball. You mean to go for him. Will a ten-pound note be any good to you?"

"Try me."

"Then I'll make it worth your while to help me." Ganthony's voice sank to a lower tone, but it was very distinct. "You said something about him not playing football again after you had done with him. Make sure of that, Ball, and there's a ten-pound note waiting for you. What do you say?"

"I'm on!" said the ruffian promptly.

"Mind, nothing dangerous, only—only——" Ganthony hesitated.

"I understand. I don't want to put my neck in the noose. Make it worth my while, and I'm your man. I can't live on air, but the figure you name will cover it. I'll hang around Northbrook till I get a chance, and then I'll go for him. Will you help?"

"Not for Joseph. I shall have to be able to prove an alibi for the time when it happens, for suspicion will fall on me of being mixed up with it."

"All right. I can easily manage it alone. Give me a chance at him with my cudgel, and I'll warrant he'll never kick a football again," said the poacher, with a brutal laugh. "You can trust me. He won't be the first chap I've laid out. There's a chap at the school he came from how could tell you that?"

"You mean the fellow who was with him that night?" asked Ganthony, with interest. "What have you done to him?"

"Again that evil chuckle.

"I gave him what I owed him," said Ball. "He held me while that footballer chap pasted me. I found him one night—it was funny, I tell you. He had fought with this here Russell, and Russell left him knocked out beside the lane. That was where I came in. I gave him a dose that I'll bet he hasn't got over yet, and won't for some time to come. When I get the chance—Hallo, what was that?"

"Only the roof creaking."

The poacher extinguished his lantern in case the light should be seen from the neighbouring farm. The rain was still pouring down.

"Was that why you left the place?" asked Ganthony.

"One reason. I don't know whether the fellow knew who it was that was pasting him; I fancy he had fainted," said the brute coolly. "But I thought I had better clear out. There were one or two other things against me, too."

Russell had heard every word, and his brain was in a whirl. He had hardly been able to keep from betraying himself as the poacher made the unexpected revelation, little dreaming upon whose ears it was falling. Fortunately, his involuntary movement had attracted no attention.

The mystery was solved at last! All that had been dark to him in that strange affair of George Goring was made clear as by a flash of light. And, though he was shivering with cold, drenched to the skin, he no longer regretted his plight, and he forgot both his danger and his discomfort in the excitement of the discovery. And there he waited patiently until, the rain being over, the two rascals left the shelter of the barn; when, stiff and cramped, he descended from the roof, and set off at as fast a pace as he could towards Northbrook.

CHAPTER 13.

The Clearing of a Name.

"HARRY, what on earth's the matter?"

Frank Clyffe jumped to his feet in amazement. He had reason to be amazed.

His door had suddenly opened, and Harry Russell had burst in, drenched, dripping, covered with mud from head to foot, and with his face red with excitement and exertion. He was panting for breath, his chest heaving spasmodically.

The hour was late, and Frank had been thinking of bed, but knowing that Harry was out, he had stayed up till he should come in. He gazed at the astounding apparition before him speechlessly. His expression was so bewildered that Harry, in spite of his exhaustion, burst into a laugh as he sank into a chair.

"I'm sorry to startle you, Frank!" he gasped. "I've been out in the rain, and——"

"I can see you have!" interjected Frank, recovering himself somewhat. "You'll catch your death of cold, you silly ass! Come up to your room instantly!"

"I've discovered——"

"Blow your discoveries! Come and get those wet rags off!"

"Yes, yes; but I've found out——"

"Shut up, and come along!"

And Frank fairly dragged his comrade upstairs to his room, and refused to listen to a word till Harry had stripped to the skin, and had been rubbed down roughly and thoroughly with a hard towel, which threw him into a glow, and probably saved him from a severe illness. Then the inexorable skipper bundled him into bed, and covered him up warmly, and warned him not to get up on peril of his life, and left him; and returned in a remarkably short space of time with a basin of hot milk, which he forced Harry to consume the greater part of before he spoke a syllable.

"Now, you ass," he said politely, when Harry settled back contentedly on the pillows, "now tell me how you got in

that state. Out in the rain, without even an overcoat; and taking a swim in a ditch, by the look of your clothes. What on earth have you been doing? How dare you risk the life of Northbrook's finest forward?"

Russell grinned.

"Now I've done all you asked of me, Frank, and you've got to listen."

"Go ahead!"

"I've made a discovery."

"Very well; I'll hear what it is now."

And Harry plunged at once into his story. Frank Clyffe's brow darkened as he listened to the first part, but gradually his expression changed to one of keen interest. When Russell had finished, he gripped the young forward's hand.

"I congratulate you, old chap!" he cried heartily. "I always said there was some mystery about that affair, and I was right. It's as clear as daylight now. Goring fainted after you left him, and the poacher found him so—or perhaps had been watching the fight—and after you were gone the cowardly hound set upon Goring. That accounted for the injuries he received, though, as the Lyndale fellows had no idea of what had happened, you can hardly blame them for setting it all down to you."

"They might have known me better," said Russell. "Still, I don't blame them. I remember when I went in, after the fight, asking some of them to go and look for Goring, because I thought he was hurt. They naturally jumped to the conclusion that I had done it all when they found him insensible. It never crossed my mind to think of Seth Ball—the hound—the villain! But now I wonder that I never suspected anything of the kind."

"It is easy to be wise after the event," said Frank. "No body thought of it. But now, Harry, your name's cleared if you can bring it home to the scoundrel."

Russell's face clouded a little.

"True; but how am I to make him confess?"

"That will want thinking out, but it must be done. By Jove, I have it!"

"What's your idea?"

Frank chuckled.

"I'll tell you. I fancy it will work." And the Northbrook skipper went on to explain the plan that had come into his head, and Harry Russell's eyes sparkled.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't have thought of that. But I believe it will work."

"And now go to sleep," said Frank. "You'll very likely be ill to-morrow, so not a word more. Good-night!"

He turned out the light and left the room, and Russell was soon sleeping soundly. He awoke the next morning with a cold, but the doctor, whom Frank had sent for, declared that it was nothing serious. However, he missed football practice for a couple of days, and then went down to the ground again. Frank Clyffe had said nothing of the story, and Ganthony, though he did not quite understand why Harry kept silence, was glad to escape so cheaply. Until now, Harry had always avoided him; now Ganthony did the avoiding. His motive was plain. He did not want any quarrel between him and Russell to precede the murderous work of the poacher.

On the following Saturday Harry Russell was quite fit, and he played again in a League match, and kicked the winning goal for his side. Mr. Wharton was now firmly decided, if he had not been before, Russell was to retain his place in the first team, and Ganthony was definitely relegated to the shades of the second.

"But only for a time," said Ganthony to himself, between his teeth.

A few days after the match, Harry Russell, leaving the football ground after afternoon practice, strolled out of Northbrook in the direction of the open country. He had rather given up evening walking since the affair with Ganthony and Seth Ball, except in the town, and Ganthony had wondered how Ball would find the chance he was looking for, of getting at the young forward. Now, as he saw Russell stride away, the envious footballer's eyes gleamed spitefully. He saw a slouching figure drop behind Harry Russell, following him at a distance. Seth Ball was on the track. Ganthony clicked his teeth.

"Northbrook Rangers will be glad to have the offer of my services for the next League match," he said to himself, with a grin.

Meanwhile Harry Russell strode on, apparently unconscious of the shadow that hung on his track. He left the lights of the town behind, and plunged into the shadowy lanes. The evening was dull and foggy, and a heavy mist hung over the fields.

The poacher's rugged face grew more dark and savage in its aspect as he followed his victim. Never once did Russell glance behind him; and onward he went into the darkness of the misty, lonely lane. So careless, so unapprehensive of

danger did he appear, that he broke into a lively whistle. The clear, musical sound came ringing through the mists to the ruffian who, clutching his heavy cudgel, stole closer and closer to the seemingly unwitting victim.

Russell had stopped. He stood, dimly visible by a sign-post, where another path crossed the lane, and apparently was trying to read the sign, almost invisible in the fog. Seth Ball gritted his teeth, and his eyes glittered. He would never have a better chance. He gripped his cudgel harder and stole up behind his victim—and Russell turned round! He did not appear in the least disturbed.

"So it's you, you scoundrel!"

The poacher sprang forward, striking savagely; but Harry swung up the stick he carried, and easily guarded the blow. It is doubtful if he would have warded off the next as easily, for the ruffian was desperate and determined, but Seth Ball had no chance to strike another. There was a footfall in the road, and a pair of strong arms were flung round the poacher from behind, and he was dragged to the ground. He struggled, in amazement and rage, in the grip of his new adversary, but he struggled in vain. He was gripped by a man whose muscles had been rendered steel-like by the training of the football field, and he was pinned to the ground a helpless prisoner.

"The cord, Harry!"

Harry Russell, with a smile, drew a strong cord from his pocket. Ball's hands were twisted behind him, and bound together there. Then Frank Clyffe jerked him to his feet. The poacher's face was convulsed with rage; he guessed now that he had been trapped. The young footballer's apparently reckless stroll, his careless whistling, his stopping at the sign-post, were all parts of the game. The ruffian had been tricked and trapped in the neatest kind of way. The poacher was puzzled, and mad with rage. He broke into a torrent of curses, which a vigorous application of Frank's boot soon put a stop to.

"Bring him along, Harry! The police will thank us for this little present."

The ruffian's jaw dropped. He had the best of reasons for dreading the police, and he knew how many charges were hanging over his head once the law had fixed its relentless clutch upon him.

"Held 'ard, gov'nor," he said, his cursing changing to a whine; "don't be 'ard on a pore cove! I was put up to this. I was straight; and if you lemme go I'll give you the name of the cove wot stooed me a tenner to knock out Mr. Russell."

"I happen to know it," said Russell. "I was on the roof of the barn the other night."

The ruffian gasped.

"Then you—you know—"

"I know how you maltreated George Goring in Lyndale Lane," said Russell sternly. "Yes, I know that, you cowardly hound!"

"I—I didn't mean to! Lemme go, gov'nor, for mercy's sake! The police are down on me, and—and I'll clear out—I'll do anything—"

"Will you tell the truth about that affair?" said Russell abruptly, facing the ruffian. "Will you tell Dr. Dimsdale, the headmaster of Lyndale, what you did to George Goring? I want that matter cleared up. Will you do it?"

"He'd—he'd send me to chokey, and—"

"I'll see that you have a chance to escape, if you tell the truth. But if you refuse, I'll get you the hardest sentence the law can give you, and I fancy that when the police once get hold of you they won't be in a hurry to let you go again."

Seth Ball knew that only too well. He saw here a chance of escape, and he was glad enough to seize it. A confession would cost him nothing, and a chance of escape was what he panted for.

"I'll do it," he said; "I'll do it, sir! I know you'll keep your word."

CHAPTER 14.

Justice at Last.

"HARRY RUSSELL!" Dr. Dimsdale opened his eyes wide in astonishment. "And what are you doing here, may I ask?"

The headmaster of Lyndale stared at Russell, who had tapped at his study door, and calmly entered in response to his "Come in!" Russell flushed a little under the doctor's gaze.

"I have made a discovery, sir, concerning that affair of Goring," he said. "I have come to tell you about it."

"Indeed; and what is this discovery?"

"I have a written and witnessed confession, signed by the man who assaulted Goring after I left him in the lane," said Russell.

"After you left him? I don't understand."

"If you will read the paper, sir, you will understand."

The doctor took the document, with a puzzled pucker in his brow, adjusted his pince-nez, and read it through. His face expressed at first astonishment, then relief and concern, and when he laid the paper down he looked very troubled.

"I am afraid I—that we—have done you a great injustice," he said slowly. "I will send for Goring."

He rang the bell, and the servant who answered it was told to send Goring to the doctor's study. Dr. Dimsdale's face was clouded.

In a few minutes Goring entered. He started on seeing Russell, and then looked at the doctor.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes. Read that paper, please."

Goring obeyed, and a strange look came over his face.

"Now, Goring, your statement was that, after leaving you, Russell returned and ill-used you while you were in a fainting condition," said the doctor. "What do you say now?"

"I spoke as I believed," said Goring; "I was only half-conscious. Russell had just turned away, and all seemed dark, and I felt blows being rained upon me, and kicks, and—and I lost my senses. It never occurred to me, then or afterwards, to imagine that it might not have been Russell. But you'll remember, sir, in the sick-room I told you that I couldn't understand how Russell had come to act in such a manner, and that I had provoked him, and he must have lost control of himself. I am jolly glad now to know that it wasn't Russell at all. I could never understand it." Goring turned towards Russell, and held out his hand.

Russell grasped his old enemy's hand warmly.

"I'm glad you take it like this, Goring," he said. "I never could quite believe that you had lied about me, yet there seemed to be no other explanation—until I found out the part Seth Ball had played in the matter."

Goring left the study to spread the story over Lyndale, and Russell sat down and related his late eventful history to the doctor, who listened with keen interest.

"Of course, I shall be glad to come back to Lyndale, sir," Russell concluded; "but I cannot desert Northbrook Rangers. I must play for them till they don't want me any longer, and I am sure my father will agree to that."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the doctor. "I could not counsel you to desert those who proved to you such friends in need."

And so it was arranged. And when Russell left the doctor's study he found that school had been dismissed, and the boys of his old Form were waiting for him in the quad, with most of the other Form boys with them. They burst into a ringing cheer as he appeared, and Cleveland was the first to shake him by the hand.

"We know the truth now, Harry," said the captain of Lyndale penitently. "We were a set of duffers to think badly of you, I know, but—"

"That's all right," laughed Harry happily enough. "Let bygones be bygones. I shall be jolly glad to be back in the old school, though I've had a ripping time away."

And there and then he was compelled to relate his adventures over again to a thrilled crowd, who listened breathlessly.

"From Fifth Form to Football League!" said Cleveland, in an awed voice. "My hat! You have been going it, Harry. And you're going to play for the Rangers still?"

"Yes, till the end of the season."

"Then we'll all come over Saturday and see you play—won't we, chaps?" And the boys of Lyndale cheered.

Russell's father, as he anticipated, willingly agreed to allow him to keep his engagement with the Rangers. Mr. Wharton could not have spared him, for Ganthony had been "sacked" for good and all. The story of his rascality was known all over Northbrook, and he left the town, and never ventured to show himself there again.

And the next match of the Rangers, being fortunately played in a town within practicable distance of Lyndale, was attended by the Upper Forms of that college in strong force, and loudest among the cheers which greeted Russell's play was the ringing "Hurrah!" of George Goring.

The end of the season is not yet, and so we can say no more of the ambition of Northbrook Rangers, but one thing is certain: that if the Northbrook club achieves the proud distinction of heading the table and passing into the First Division, it will be due, more than to anyone else, to the lad who won his way from Fifth Form to Football League.

THE END.

(Another of Mr. Charles Hamilton's school stories in next Saturday's **PLUCK**. The week after next **PLUCK'S Special Christmas Number**.)

NEXT SATURDAY:

"PHANTOM GOLD,"
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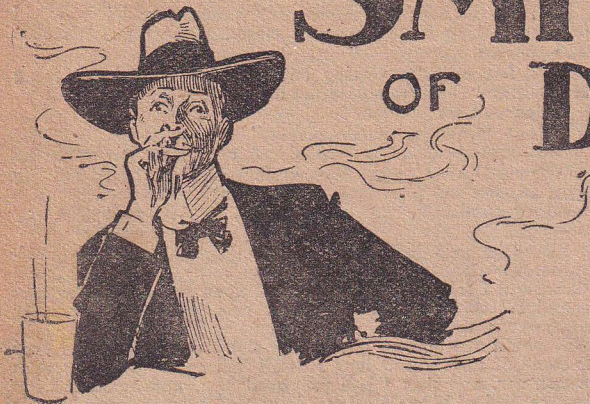
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A Detective Story.

By MARK DARRAN.

CHAPTER 1.

The Arrow Line—The Anger of Henry Leman—John Smith Makes a Suggestion—With Jabez Small.

MR. BRONSON, managing director of the Arrow Steamship Line, sat back in his office chair, and looked glum. Before him stood Mr. Marlow, his secretary, an anxious expression on his rather sallow face, for he knew that the wrath of his chief was to be feared. "So far as I can see, sir," he ventured, "Mr. Leman cannot possibly take action against us. It is not our fault that his son is a gambler, and—"

"Think I'm a fool?" Mr. Bronson snapped savagely, staring at a letter which lay before him on the desk. "I know well enough that he can't claim from us the money that his fool of a son lost on one of our ships, but I do know—and you would, if you weren't a fool—that he can do our line a great deal of harm if he publishes the facts. Sound well, wouldn't it, that the son of Leman, the millionaire, had been rooked of ten thousand pounds while aboard one of our boats?"

Mr. Bronson, looking more savage than ever, glared at his secretary, who fidgeted nervously before his chief's wrath.

"Don't stand blinking at me like a fool!" Mr. Bronson snapped. "Think of something, and remember that Mr. Leman is calling here this morning."

"I—I am thinking, sir," Mr. Marlow answered hastily. "I have an idea—"

"Yes?" Mr. Bronson snorted, as if quite convinced already that it would be of no use.

"Send for John Smith, of Daring & Co., sir," Mr. Marlow explained, his words falling one over another.

"Who the dickens is John Smith?" Mr. Bronson demanded in amazement.

Now that Mr. Marlow had made his plunge, some of his nervousness had left him. Besides, he felt that he had made a really brilliant suggestion.

"John Smith is the man who has never failed, sir," he explained. "It was he who cleared up the Morton Towers affair, and they say that—"

Mr. Bronson rose quickly to his feet, and crossed to the 'phone that hung over against the wall.

"Find John Smith's number," he ordered shortly. "Don't believe in him, but must do something."

The number was found, and Mr. Bronson spoke for a minute or two at the 'phone. Just as he hung the receiver up, an office-boy, looking rather terrified, entered the room.

"Mr. Leman to see you, sir," he announced.

It was pretty plain that Mr. Bronson, the terror of every man in his employ, was nervous, though he made a great show of being entirely at his ease. He sat at his desk before his desk, took up a pen, and tried to look stern and thoughtful.

"Show the gentleman in," he ordered. "You will remain, Mr. Marlow."

A few seconds later, the door of the office was opened sharply, and a big man, red in the face with anger, and brandishing an ugly-looking walking-stick in his right hand, entered the room. He was a fine-looking man, with the shoulders of one who has had to use his strength, and his face, though it was black with anger at the present moment, possessed a certain rugged handsomeness.

"Mr. Bronson?" Mr. Leman demanded sharply, glancing from Bronson to Marlow.

"That is Mr. Bronson, sir," Marlow explained hastily, waving a trembling hand towards the managing director, and at the same time edging nearer to the door.

Mr. Leman gripped a heavy chair by the back, in a way that made Mr. Bronson look nervous, but merely dropped it close to the desk and sat down on it.

"See here, Mr. Bronson," he said slowly, but very distinctly, and with a slight American accent, "I guess you know why I'm here?"

"Yes," the managing director admitted, in a curiously meek voice.

"It's about Malcolm," Mr. Leman continued, his tone rising, and his eyes flashing. His American accent, too, grew more pronounced as his anger increased. "That boy was robbed of a cool five thousand last month while on board one of your durned boats. Say, what do you mean to do?"

"What can I do?" Mr. Bronson asked feebly.

"Guess you can stop the boy losin' more," the millionaire answered quickly. "He's booked to sail with you to-morrow on the Levanter—"

"Touching at Gibraltar, Tangiers, and other places of interest," Mr. Marlow murmured mechanically.

Mr. Leman banged his clenched fist down on to the desk, causing Mr. Bronson to start back in alarm.

"You've got to stop the lad sailing!" the millionaire cried.

The door of the room had opened quietly, and a man of medium height, dressed in dark grey, had entered. He was an ordinary-looking man, unless one paid particular attention to the set of the jaw and the look in the eyes; and it was then that one realised the possibilities in the man.

"I should really let him sail," the new-comer observed quietly, advancing into the room.

Mr. Leman swung round on his chair, and stared angrily at the speaker.

"Who the blazes are you?" he snapped.

"John Smith," the man answered quietly.

"Guess there are dozens of 'em," Leman sneered.

"But only one of Daring & Co.," John Smith added slowly, turning to Mr. Bronson. "I think you asked me to call. I presume that it is about the losses incurred by the excited gentleman's son?" And he nodded towards the millionaire.

In his early days, before he had struck more than pay-dirt in the Yukon, Leman had known what it was to fight for his own, and at times even now the fighting instinct came out in him. He rose angrily from his chair, and advanced upon the man in grey.

"Sit down," the latter ordered quietly.

"I guess you'll take them words back first!" Mr. Leman cried. "I don't reckon to be called excited by any skunk who—"

"As you like," John Smith interrupted, with a shrug of the shoulders; "but I will tell you one thing before I go. Your son has realised the last of his securities, amounting to about ten thousand pounds, and he will certainly have lost that money before he returns on the Levanter to England."

Mr. Leman turned white, and dropped into his chair.

"Will you try to save him, Mr. Smith?" he asked hoarsely.

"I will save him if you wish me to," John Smith answered calmly.

Mr. Bronson, who had taken little part in the conversation, thought that it was about time to assert himself.

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"You are very certain of success," he remarked.

John Smith shrugged his shoulders, and turned towards the door.

"Daring & Co. have never failed," he answered.

"If you can save my son from further gambling—" the millionaire began eagerly, but John Smith interrupted almost angrily.

"I can save him if you wish it," he said. "This talk of failure is really a terrible waste of time."

"Then do it!" Mr. Leman cried.

John Smith turned to Mr. Bronson, his fingers on the handle of the door.

"Kindly reserve a cabin for myself and a friend on the Levanter," he ordered coolly. "We sail to-morrow."

Before Mr. Bronson could answer, John Smith had left the office and passed out into the street. A private hansom was waiting for him, and the driver touched his hat as he approached.

"Laburnum Villa, Paradise Road, Sloan Hill," John Smith ordered, as he stepped into the hansom, "and look sharp."

"Very good, sir."

It was nearly half an hour later that the hansom was stopped before Laburnum Villa, which was one of a row of houses built of a pattern, each with two bay windows, a small porch, and a strip of garden leading from the pavement. The only difference to be discovered was in the treatment of the gardens. Some were merely swept and kept tidily, but others boasted of quite a show of flowers.

The flowers in the garden of Laburnum Villa undoubtedly eclipsed those of any other house in the road, possibly owing to the attentions of the short, round-faced, little man, who was even now hunting industriously, a pipe between his teeth, for caterpillars and slugs. He looked up, however, as the hansom stopped, and just for a moment a startled look sprang into his little eyes. Yet it seemed remarkable that anything, bar danger, could startle this red-faced little man. The look was quickly gone, however, and Mr. Jabez Small was smiling pleasantly as he turned to meet John Smith.

"Quite a time since I have seen you, sir," he said, in a curiously soft voice. "Why, it must be since—"

"Since that affair of the gambling-house in Park Lane," John Smith put in quietly.

Mr. Jabez Small shook his head with the air of a father reproving a child; but, nevertheless, the startled look had come into his eyes again.

"Why not come into the house, Mr. Smith?" he suggested, leading the way in that direction. "We are only semi-detached, you know, and someone might overhear your—er—joke."

John Smith, a slight smile on his lips, followed the little man into the front room of the house, which was distinctly comfortably furnished, but refused an offer of refreshment. Mr. Jabez Small, rearranging the flowers in a vase, spoke over his shoulder to his visitor.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked. "I do not forget that you got me out of an awkward scrape once."

"You have got to go back to your old line, Jabez," John Smith answered.

Jabez Small stopped arranging the flowers, and faced John Smith. The smile had left his face, and there was a serious look in his little eyes.

"Can't be done, Mr. Smith," he answered with determination. "I'm respectable now—sidesman, member of the local council, and all that."

John Smith shrugged his shoulders, and lit a cigar.

"You will sail on the Levanter to-morrow," he continued calmly, "and I shall sail, too. Between us we have got to prevent a certain Malcolm Leman from being fleeced by a gang of card-sharpers, and—"

"And?" Jabez Small queried eagerly, his eyes sparkling.

"And fleece them in return, my friend," John Smith continued meaningly, "so that they have no funds left with which to continue their campaign."

Jabez Small's face fell, and he shook his head, just a trifle regretfully.

"My position won't allow of it, sir," he said slowly. "Suppose we were found out, and—"

John Smith stopped the little man by a motion of his hand, and flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Why argue?" he asked, with a slightly bored air. "I have already told you that you sail with me to-morrow."

"You can't make me!" the little man snapped, standing on his dignity.

"I should hate to use threats," John Smith murmured, "but I wonder what the dear, respectable people in this neighbourhood would think if they learnt that Mr. Jabez Small was the most expert card-sharp of his time, and that—"

"Don't, sir," the little man pleaded hastily, glancing round to make sure that the door was closed. "I'm really respect-

able now, sir, and it'd be a bit rough on me for you to give me away."

John Smith smiled slightly, and drew his chair nearer to the other man.

"Listen," he said, "and you will understand that this is really a most respectable business that I tell you that you are going to join me in—the suppression of vice, and the triumph of virtue."

"Humph!" Mr. Jabez Small grunted doubtfully.

Very shortly, John Smith related the story of how Malcolm Leman, the son of the millionaire, had been robbed of five thousand by card-sharpers, and how he stood in danger of being robbed of a great deal more. As Jabez Small listened, his little eyes twinkled, and his curiously-flexible fingers fidgeted as if they held cards again. At the end of the explanation, John Smith rose, took up his hat, and moved towards the door.

"I shall call for you at noon to-morrow, Jabez," he said, evidently quite convinced that the other would come. "I take all the responsibility, you know."

"And the money that we—er—win from the gang?" Small asked, with some eagerness.

"Once Malcolm Leman has got his ten thousand back, you can do as you like," John Smith answered.

Jabez Small unlocked his desk, and produced a pack of cards. He shuffled them skilfully and swiftly, dropped the pack on to the table, cut, turned up an ace.

"Respectability has not made you less skilful, Jabez," John Smith remarked, with a smile. "Turn up the king of diamonds."

Jabez Small cut again without hesitation, and the desired card lay face upwards on the table.

"I shall be ready to-morrow, sir," he said; and there was a twinkle in his eyes. "I shall put in some practice to-night."

"Remember that it is in a good cause," John Smith remarked meaningly, as he opened the door.

Jabez Small swept the cards up, and looked quite dignified. "Otherwise, sir," he answered, "I should refuse to return to my old—er—profession."

CHAPTER 2.

On Board the Levanter—Play Commences—John Smith Loses, but Jabez Small Wins—More Play.

DINNER was just over in the saloon of the Levanter, and the passengers, numbering close on a hundred, sipped their coffees and liqueurs contentedly. The sea was like a pond, with scarcely a ripple on it, so that everyone had put in an appearance at dinner.

At one of the small tables sat Malcolm Leman, his youthful face rather white, lines at the corners of his mouth, a restless look in his eyes. The two men with him were both gentlemen in appearance, save that they were almost too well dressed. The taller of the two was dark and swarthy, with eyes that held a slightly, shifty expression. The shorter man was fair, rather red complexioned, and his face held no expression of any kind. Even his eyes told nothing, for the lids had a habit of drooping half-down over them.

At the next table sat Jabez Small, cool and contented-looking, John Smith opposite him. The latter was sipping a liqueur slowly and smoking a cigar. Apparently his thoughts were far away, and he certainly did not appear to glance even once in the direction of Malcolm Leman and his two companions. When he spoke to Small, however, he proved that he had not been unobservant.

"Do you recognise the men?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes," Jabez Small answered. "The fair man is John Trew; the dark man is William Cairn. Those are not the names that they are usually known by, but they are the ones by which they are known here."

"And you—will they recognise you?" John Smith suggested.

Jabez Small laughed softly.

"Respectability has changed me," he answered; "and when they saw me I had a beard and moustache." He lowered his voice a trifle more. "When do we start operations?"

"To-night I hope," John Smith replied.

At the next table Malcolm Leman finished his liqueur quickly.

"We'll get away to the card-room," he said, in a voice sufficiently loud for the two men at the next table to hear. "This is the trip on which I have my revenge, you know."

"Hope so, I'm sure," Cairn answered. "It was beastly inconvenient for Trew and I to come, but we felt that we owed you the revenge."

"And I'm going to take it," young Leman assured them excitedly, rising to his feet. The three left the room.

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Half an hour later, or rather more, John Smith and Jabez Small strolled into the card-room, a fair-sized cabin next to the dining-saloon. The night was warm, and the place was deserted save by Leman, Cairn, and Trew, who were already busy with the cards. There was no money beside the men, but each had a slip of paper, which seemed to suggest that they were playing for stakes which they did not care to make public.

John Smith glanced at the face of Leman, for the faces of the other two men told him nothing, and he learnt all that he wanted to there. Leman's face was even more drawn; the eyes were glittering—he was losing. Even as John Smith and Small strolled into the room Trew and Cairn scrawled some figures on to their slips of paper, while Leman muttered something savagely in a low tone. Then he looked up and caught sight of the new-comers.

"I say," he said eagerly, "wouldn't one of you gentlemen like to come in?"

Cairn said something in a low voice, and there was a half-angry expression in his dark eyes.

"I hate this three-handed business," Leman said shortly, turning on the man. "Why not have four, and try a shot at poker? That's my game, you know."

Cairn shrugged his shoulders, gathered up the cards, and began to shuffle them mechanically.

"Cards!" Jabez Small chuckled, ambling across to the table, his little eyes sparkling. "I don't think I've played since a boy. Brought up strictly, you know—toys of the Evil One—and all that. But I've made my little pile now, and I'm ready to risk a bit of it."

A quick glance passed between Cairn and Trew, and the latter rose from the table.

"Won't you both join in?" he asked, in a pleasant voice. "This place is too hot for me, and I'm not keen on playing any more to-night."

"Come on, Smith!" Small cried boisterously, sliding into a chair. "Show yourself a man!"

"All right," John Smith answered carelessly, though he was really very pleased at the way affairs had gone; "though I'm not playing high."

"Farthings or nuts?" Jabez Small chuckled. "I leave it to our friends."

The stakes were named by Cairn, and they were by no means high, though substantial enough to be worth playing for.

"Can't we raise 'em a bit?" Leman asked eagerly. "You wait till you see how I win," Jabez Small chuckled, "and you'll be wanting to lower 'em!"

The game started, and the deal fell to Cairn. He dealt swiftly, with the manner of a man used to such things, and the four took up their cards. A low curse broke from Leman as he saw his.

"This is where I'm going to win!" Jabez Small announced triumphantly, outraging deliberately all the rules of the game. It was this mirthfully innocent manner of his that had made him such a dangerous sharper in the days gone by—the days before he turned, according to his own statement, respectable.

Just for a moment Cairn smiled. It seemed to him that at least one extra man had come aboard to be rooked, and he had no objection to commencing the process at once. John Smith was playing with the air of a man who doesn't care much what happens.

"You show!" Small chuckled at last. And Cairn, a confident look on his dark face, laid down the king, queen, knave, ten, and seven of hearts.

"I think that takes it!" he remarked. Jabez Small laughed with great enjoyment, and fairly banged his cards down on to the table.

"How's that?" he cried. They were diamonds, from the ace to the ten. He had won.

Cairn smiled, and did not even look annoyed. He had seen beginners start in this way before.

"We'll double the stakes if you like," he suggested. "Yes," Leman agreed eagerly.

"You'll be sorry," Jabez Small chuckled. "I'll chance that," Cairn answered.

Play recommenced, and this time it was John Smith who won. It was a considerable stake, too, and Cairn looked almost as wild as Leman, who was playing badly and recklessly.

For an hour this state of affairs went on, and at the end of that time Jabez Small was some three hundred pounds to the good. John Smith had lost a hundred; Leman had lost most of the remainder.

Small took up the cards to deal, then dropped them again. "I say," he said boisterously, "can't we have a shot at something that's more of a gamble? I used to play banker for counters, and I'd rather like to play it for something

more. Give you fellows a chance of getting your money back quickly."

John Smith nodded in agreement. He knew well enough that Jabez Small had been the most accomplished cardsharper of his day, but he had never seen him actually at work. He could not help admiring the man's beautiful assumption of innocence.

"I'm with you," Leman said quickly. "I want something more exciting. What do you say, Cairn?"

"Just as you like," the latter agreed indifferently, hiding his annoyance successfully. Never before had he lost like this, and he reckoned that banker would be his chance of recouping. It was a game at which he rather shone. One can usually shine as a banker when one is able to turn up practically any card at will when holding the bank. "Best out for bank."

The four men cut, and John Smith turning up the deuce of diamonds, had the bank allotted to him.

"Care to sell it?" Cairn asked quietly though there was an eager look in his eyes.

"Depends," John Smith answered carelessly. "What's the bidding?"

"Five pounds," Cairn said. "Ten!" Leman cried.

Jabez Small drew his winnings, principally in notes, from his pocket, and whacked them down on to the table.

"Twenty!" he chuckled. "Thirty!" Leman said sharply.

Jabez Small counted out some notes, and held them towards John Smith.

"Fifty!" he cried triumphantly.

Cairn shrugged his shoulders, unwilling to risk more, and even Leman made no further bid. Jabez Small took up the cards, and shuffled them clumsily. It was obvious that he knew very little about such games, or so Cairn and Leman thought. The face of John Smith expressed nothing, but inwardly he was thinking that this last venture of his was to be successful, and that once more Daring & Co. was to succeed, even in a curious case like this.

Still clumsily, Jabez Small cut the pack three times, and laid the four stacks of cards in a row.

"How will a five-a-card limit suit?" he asked, with a laugh.

Leman promptly placed a fiver before each of three packs, while John Smith contented himself with backing one for an equal amount.

"Can I put the fifteen on one card?" Cairn asked.

"Play it up!" Jabez Small chuckled. And Cairn placed the three notes on the pack nearest to him. "All ready? Go!"

The first pack was turned up—the one backed by Cairn—and that man smiled slightly as he showed an ace.

"Looks bad for me, but better luck next time," Small remarked.

The other two packs were turned up, showing a knave and a king; then Jabez Small turned up his pack.

An ace!

"Hallo!" he cried, sweeping in the stakes, for equal values always count in favour of the banker. "Luck's in, after all!"

"I'd like some of it," Leman muttered discontentedly. His face was painfully drawn now.

For the second time the packs were dealt, and for the second time Jabez Small won, only Leman's card beating him. The young man took his winnings eagerly, and a smile came back to his lips.

"I knew that the luck would change," he said huskily.

But the luck had not changed, for he lost the next five deals, Small scooping the pool every time—his winnings amounting to between two and three hundred pounds. He was excited, and showed it by a kind of boyish glee.

"Ought to have gone in for this kind of thing for a living," he chuckled; "should have been able to retire sooner then."

The very next deal Jabez Small turned up a deuce; all the other cards beat him, and so he lost the pool, which passed to Cairn. The nature of the play changed now, the banker winning from Leman and John Smith; but Jabez Small still went on winning; so heavily, indeed, that the bank made little or nothing.

Then Cairn lost the bank, and it passed to Leman. It became Cairn's turn to win, but Small still kept on his triumphant way; but the bank was soon lost, and it was John Smith's turn to hold it. He rose to his feet, however, and yawned wearily.

"Enough for to-night, gentlemen," he said. "Revenge to-morrow, if you like."

"On me?" Jabez Small chuckled, gathering up his extensive winnings.

"Yes!" Cairn agreed. And for the first time there was a savage look in his eyes. He had lost altogether more than



"You have the word of Daring & Co. for your safety," said Smith. And he turned and led the way in. (See page 25.)

he cared about, while Leman's losses had done him no good, as they had practically all gone to Small.

Once safely in the cabin that he shared with John Smith, Jabez Small took his winnings from his pocket and counted them. He looked tired, and the smile left his face.

"Eight hundred and forty," he announced; "and Leman lost fully four hundred of it."

"Good!" John Smith murmured, as he lit a cigar. Then an idea occurred to him. "Don't you think that Cairn and Trew will get suspicious if you win so much?" he asked. "Oughtn't you to lose sometimes?"

Jabez Small shook his head knowingly, and accepted a cigar.

"That is their usual game," he answered, "and if I adopted it they'd smell a rat at once. No; the thing for me to do is to go on winning, and showing no surprise that I do so. It's a game that the average sharper doesn't play, and that's where the beauty of it comes in."

John Smith flicked the ash from his cigar, and smiled. "Jabez," he said, with conviction, "it's just as well that you've turned respectable."

Jabez Small winked, and puffed away contentedly. "There'll be some who'll wish that I hadn't had a relapse into evil ways before this trip is over," he remarked.

CHAPTER 3.

The Second Night's Play—Small Wins Again—The Captain Objects—A Heavy Forfeit—John Smith Overhears Something.

CAIRN banged his cards down savagely on the table, and his face was black with anger.

"It's fiendish luck!" he snarled, glaring at Jabez Small, who, smiling broadly with the most evident delight, was raking in the stakes that he had just won.

This was the second night of play, and once more the luck had gone all in favour of Jabez Small, and Cairn and Trew,

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Despite the advantages of extra cards, could do nothing to stem the tide of ill-fortune.

"I'll be cleared out soon if matters go on like this!" Leman muttered, his face terribly drawn and haggard. The look of the gambler had gone out of his eyes, and it was only a kind of wild despair which showed in them. John Smith saw that, although he never appeared to glance at the young man, and it gave him hope.

"Going to have another cut in at banker," Jabez Small chuckled, "or have you had enough for to-night?"

"I should stop if I were you, Mr. Leman," a deep voice said behind the young man; and, turning sharply, he found that Captain Main, the commander of the ship, was standing behind him. There was a very stern expression on the sailor's weatherbeaten face.

"Why?" Leman demanded angrily, for he was young enough to object to receiving advice from anyone.

"You can't go on losing like this," Captain Main persisted, taking no notice of Cairn's black looks. "How much do your losses stand at at present?"

Malcolm Leman shrugged his shoulders, and lit a cigarette. The action revealed the fact that his fingers were trembling badly.

"What is that to do with you?" he demanded rather rudely.

It was Captain Main's turn to shrug his shoulders, and as he did so he glanced quickly from one player to another.

"As captain of this ship," he said shortly, "I could stop all play aboard of her. How much have you lost already, Mr. Leman?"

"About five thousand," the young man answered, with an exaggerated air of carelessness.

The captain's brows went up in amazement. He opened his lips as if to say something more; then hesitated, turned on his heel, and left the cabin.

"Interfering old fool!" Cairn muttered.

And so play went on until close upon midnight, and when that time came and the men rose from the table, Jabez Small was once more the only winner, while the principal loser was Malcolm Leman, who had lost nearly two thousand more since starting to play banker. The stakes had been raised this night. John Smith knew from this that the young man was getting near to the end of his funds, and was not sorry. It meant that the whole affair would be over the sooner.

Leman, looking fagged out and miserable, turned into his cabin; Cairn and Trew, looking distinctly savage, went up on to the deck; while John Smith and Jabez Small went towards their cabin. Before they reached it, however, a steward came up and addressed John Smith.

"The captain would like to see you, sir," he said.

"Good! I will be with him in a few minutes," John Smith answered quietly.

"Looks like being trouble, sir," Jabez Small whispered as the steward walked away. "Pity if the captain interferes before we have finished our little game."

"He won't," John Smith assured him.

"You can't tell," Jabez Small protested.

John Smith shrugged his shoulders, entered the cabin, and drew a square packet from one of his portmanteaus.

"I have never failed yet," he said, and passed out of the cabin.

Up on the deck there were still a number of men and women promenading; but John Smith, taking no notice of any one of them, strolled along to the captain's cabin, which was situated under the bridge. He knocked softly, and entered.

At a small table sat Captain Main, a pipe between his teeth, a look of determination in his eyes. As his visitor entered he dropped his right hand for a second into the drawer of the table, as if to make sure that something was there.

John Smith closed the door, and calmly drew the red curtains across the little windows.

"I should prefer the interview to be private, captain," he remarked. He seated himself in a chair, quite near to and facing the captain, and puffed away at his cigar.

Captain Main bit savagely at the stem of his pipe, and looked distinctly uncomfortable. Never before—and he had commanded passenger ships for a good many years—had he been placed in the position in which he now found himself; but he had no intention of going back. If the man before him had looked nervous, or defiant—anything different to this absolutely indifferent air—he would have known what to do.

"You sent for me, Captain Main," John Smith murmured, with a slightly bored air.

Then Captain Main, an angry expression in his eyes, his right hand dropping once more into the drawer of the table, said the thing that he had meant to say.

"There is card-sharpping going on aboard this ship!"

John Smith's eyebrows went up slightly, and he flicked the ash of his cigar neatly into a tray.

"I know," he answered, without the least sign of emotion. "Don't you think you might leave that revolver in the drawer to take care of itself? I can't see that you are in any danger."

Captain Main brought his hand up from the drawer, but the revolver came with it, and he laid it before him on the little table.

"A fine weapon," John Smith murmured. "A Smith & Wesson, I believe?"

The face of the captain was dark with anger, and he leant forward across the table.

"There is card-sharpping going on!" he said again, his voice husky with anger; "and it has got to be stopped!"

"I quite agree with you, captain," John Smith answered.

Captain Main stared. He had asked this man to his cabin with the intention of accusing him of card-sharpping, fully expecting a denial, possibly accompanied by threats, yet here was the man admitting—

"What do you propose to do?" John Smith inquired.

"There shall be no further play aboard!" Captain Main snapped, feeling himself on firm ground at last.

"I differ with you," John Smith murmured.

"I am captain of this ship!" the sailor thundered.

"I am John Smith, of Daring & Co.," John Smith answered. His tone was more alert, and he looked up and met the other's eyes.

Captain Main was staggered, and showed it. He knew the name of John Smith, of Daring & Co., well enough, and of their boast that they had never failed in anything that they had undertaken. But even if this man was really John Smith, his friend Jabez Small was a doubtful person.

"Small is a sharper!" Captain Main said doggedly.

John Smith lit a fresh cigar, and looked through the blue smoke at the old sailor.

"Most undoubtedly," he agreed; then corrected himself.

"I am wrong. He retired from the profession of card-sharpping some years ago, and has only returned to it to please me."

"To please you!" Captain Main roared, leaping to his feet. "You mean to admit that you have agreed with this man to fleece Mr. Malcolm Leman and the others?"

"Precisely," John Smith answered quietly.

"Then I'll have you in irons, and your friend, too!" the captain snapped savagely.

"I think not, captain," John Smith murmured, and at the same time drew a square packet from his pocket. He removed the covering of waterproof cloth, revealing a wad of notes beneath.

"Don't you dare to try and bribe me!" the captain cried angrily.

"I wouldn't waste time on it," John Smith answered, busily counting out notes, and thrusting a number of them towards the captain. "You will find notes to the value of ten thousand pounds there."

"Well?" Captain Main snapped, a look of amazement on his face, as he mechanically counted the notes.

"That is almost exactly the amount that Malcolm Leman came aboard with," John Smith explained quietly, "and therefore that is the amount that he has to lose. I pay you that amount, with full permission to hand it to Leman if you think fit, as a guarantee that I am working for, and not against him."

"I don't understand," Main said slowly.

John Smith rose to his feet, and his shoulders went up into their suggestive shrug.

"I don't see that you need," he answered coolly. "The money must be guarantee enough."

Captain Main stared at the wad of immensely valuable notes in his hands.

"Suppose these are forgeries?" he suggested, with a dogged air.

"A rude suggestion," John Smith remarked, a slight smile curling his lips; "and I can only say that you are quite at liberty to have them tested at Gibraltar, which I believe we ought to reach in two or three days' time. Good-night!"

Leaving Captain Main perfectly astounded, John Smith strolled out on to the deck, to find that the majority of the passengers had turned in. Here and there a man and woman still paced the decks, or sat in the shadows thrown by the cabins, but many parts of the decks were absolutely deserted.

John Smith, when nearly at the end of the deck, put out his foot to extinguish a cigarette-end which had been thrown, still alight, on to the deck. He sniffed sharply before doing so, however, as if the curiously pungent smell of the tobacco was familiar to him. It was, for the only man aboard who smoked cigarettes of that kind was Trew. Going on, instead of turning into his cabin, John Smith reached the end of the deck-buildings. He did not round these, however, but halted abruptly as a man's voice reached him. The speaker was evidently just round the corner of the buildings.

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"There's only one thing for it"—it was Cairn's voice, raised angrily, and John Smith caught every word distinctly—"this luck has got to be stopped by force soon, or there'll be nothing to go on playing with."

"You don't suggest murder?" Trew answered, in a lower tone, but quite coolly.

"No!" Cairn snapped. "There are easier and safer ways than that."

John Smith turned, moved softly away, and entered his cabin. He found Jabez Small, a smile on his ruddy face, counting out the night's winnings.

"We're doing well, sir," he chuckled.

John Smith seated himself on the edge of a bunk, and crossed his legs.

"Have you got such a thing as a revolver, Small?" he asked quietly.

The smile faded from the card-sharper's lips, and he produced a small, but ugly-looking weapon from his hip-pocket.

"Is there a chance?" he began hastily; but John Smith interrupted.

"Oh, I only wanted to know," he said carelessly.

CHAPTER 4.

In Gibraltar—The Guide—Made Prisoners—John Smith Tries Persuasion.

MR. JABEZ SMALL, very red in the face, for the day was a hot one, walked slowly along Waterport Street, the main thoroughfare of Gibraltar, at about five in the afternoon. John Smith, looking curiously cool considering the heat, was beside him. Their boat had touched at the famous Rock that morning, and the two had decided to go ashore, especially as Leman, Cairn, and Trew had already done so. The boat was timed to sail again that night, leaving at seven.

"And this," Jabez Small said savagely, waving a hand towards the names over the shops, for the heat had affected his temper, "is what the down-trodden British taxpayer pays for! Look at it—every confounded shop kept by a Spaniard or a Burmese! What do you think about it?"

"I don't think, my friend," John Smith answered; "it's too hot."

"You wait till I go back!" Jabez Small snorted. "I'll write letters to the local papers, and they'll put 'em in, too, now that I'm on the local council."

John Smith shrugged his shoulders. He, too, considered that it was a crying shame that all the money spent in Gibraltar—a place that has cost Great Britain a good many millions—should go to foreigners, but he realised that it was no use exciting himself about it. There would be time enough for that when he set himself out to alter the state of affairs.

"We had better be getting back to the ship soon," he said.

"All right! Sooner we're out of this beastly place the better," Jabez Small agreed; "it makes me sick to look at—"

The little man paused abruptly as a respectably-dressed Spaniard approached them, and swung off his hat with a lordly air.

"The Senors Smith and Small?" he queried, with a deferential air, speaking English with a foreign accent.

"How the dickens—" Jabez Small began; but John Smith silenced him by a meaning touch on the arm.

"Yes," John Smith agreed.

"I am Manuel Marcia," the Spaniard continued, bowing again; "a humble citizen of Spain, living in Gibraltar."

"Seem to be a good many of you—living on England," Jabez Small muttered savagely.

"It is that I know the Senors Trew and Cairn," the Spaniard went on, a rather eager look in his dark eyes; "and that I have seen them this very day. Indeed, they have honoured my humble roof, for we have met often in the years that are past."

"Well?" John Smith queried. He wondered what all this was leading up to; but his clean-shaven face expressed no emotion of any kind, not even curiosity.

"It is that the Senor Cairn has met with an accident, slight but painful," Manuel Marcia explained quickly, with an expressive movement of his hands, the fingers of which were stained badly by tobacco, "and so he sent me to search for you. There are things that he would like from aboard the ship before she sails."

"Could not Trew have gone?" John Smith asked quietly.

"The Senor Trew is of the most devoted of friends, senors," the Spaniard replied, with an airy wave of his hand. "He will not leave the Senor Cairn. That is why I have come to seek you."

Jabez Small nudged John Smith in the side, and whispered to him:

"Doesn't sound probable, sir."

"Precisely, my friend," John Smith agreed, in an equally low tone, so that the Spaniard could not hear; "and that is why we are going to do as this man wishes."

"There may be danger," Jabez Small whispered quickly.

"There probably is," John Smith admitted calmly, and turned again to the Spaniard.

"Senor Marcia," he said quietly, "we are ready to accompany you."

Manuel Marcia paused in the act of lighting a cigarette, then bent lower over the match. There was a curious smile on his lips, and a wicked look in his eyes. He flung the match away with a sweeping, picturesque motion of his arm, and bowed again.

"I am honoured, senors," he murmured. "It is not far—this way."

Manuel Marcia, chatting affably, and pointing out various places of interest, led the way down the main street, then turned to the right and ascended a hill. Here the houses were of a poorer description, and distinctly evil-smelling. Ragged children played everywhere, heavily-built Spanish women lounged in doorways, in the small wine-shops, and there were many of them, and dark-skinned men chattered and drank noisily. A winding flight of stone steps led upwards, houses on either side, and it was before one on the left that Manuel Marcia halted. He drew aside, hat in hand, motioning John Smith and Jabez Small to enter.

"Don't seem safe," the latter whispered.

"You have the word of Daring & Co. for your safety," John Smith answered, and turned and led the way in.

The door closed behind Manuel Marcia, and John Smith thought that he heard a bolt grate in its socket. He gave no sign that he heard, however. The Spaniard passed them, and led the way up a flight of ricketty stairs, John Smith following without hesitation. He knew well enough that some treachery was meant, but that did not stop him. He was really curious to know what form it was to take, and as for getting out of trouble—well, he had never failed to do so before. Manuel Marcia threw open the door of a room, and stood aside, bowing low.

"Enter, senors!" he said.

John Smith, closely followed by Jabez Small, stepped into the room. Instantly they were in the midst of a fighting, struggling gang of men, and they knew the form that the treachery of Manuel Marcia—bought by Trew and Cairn—had taken.

Down went Jabez Small at the first attack, a loop of cord round his wrists; but John Smith was not taken so easily. Even with half a dozen men on top of him he fought fiercely, and so well that it did not seem any too certain that he would be captured, until—

"Senor Smith," Manuel Marcia cried, and there was an ugly inflection in his voice, "I shoot straight—and it is not good to die too young!"

John Smith glanced in the direction of the voice, and saw that Marcia was covering him with a revolver. His muscles relaxed, and he made no further resistance as he felt cords slipped quickly round his wrists and ankles. Alive, he felt certain that he could escape, but dead—well, that would be the end of all things.

Besides, death would mean the failing of Daring & Co. to accomplish something that it had sworn to do, and it was the boast of John Smith that he had never failed. Therefore he lay still, and the cords were knotted securely round his wrists and ankles, so that he, too, was a prisoner. Every man of the Spaniards had left the room the moment the two Englishmen were secured, even Manuel Marcia going with them.

"Humph!" Jabez Small grunted discontentedly. "Is this what you call looking after me, sir? I wonder what the other members of our council would say if they could see me like this?"

John Smith shrugged his shoulders as well as his bonds would permit him.

"If I only had a cigar I should be contented enough," he answered. "For one thing, my friend, we can get Cairn and Trew locked up for this should we find such a move necessary."

"May never get out of this," Jabez Small muttered. "Why did I ever leave Laburnum Villa?"

"Because I told you to," John Smith said calmly, "as I tell you now that you have the word of Daring & Co. for your safety."

"But if—"

"They have never failed," John Smith interrupted sternly.

"May be about time for them to begin," Small growled. "These beasts have tied the cords so that they're cutting me in half!"

The door of the room opened, and Manuel Marcia, a

cigarette between his teeth, a cool smile on his lips, entered. He closed the door, and leant indolently against it.

"The senors honour me by making their stay long," he sneered; and Jabez Small would have answered angrily had he not caught a warning look in John Smith's eyes.

"I think not, Manuel," the latter answered coolly.

The Spaniard laughed evilly, and puffed away at his cigarette.

"Perhaps the senor has a way of breaking cords?" he suggested, with a sneer.

"Perhaps," John Smith murmured; "money will do much."

"Money!" Manuel Marcia ejaculated, an eager look in his eyes. Then he threw out his hands with an angry gesture, and spoke indignantly.

"It would be well for the senor not to suggest bribery!" he cried, with a beautiful imitation of anger. "He must remember that he is dealing with a Spanish gentleman."

"I was thinking of that," John Smith remarked; and Jabez Small, despite his bonds, sniggered.

If the Spaniard expected John Smith to say more he was disappointed, for the Englishman lay motionless. In this way five minutes passed, and it was Manuel Marcia who broke the silence.

"It is a bad time for money, senor," he observed, with the air of a man merely discussing an undesirable state of affairs.

John Smith turned further on to his side, and looked the man straight in the eyes. He had never doubted but that it would be possible to bribe this Spaniard—he had never known one who was not open to bribery—and he knew it for certain now.

"What did Cairn pay you for doing this?" he demanded shortly.

"Pay!" Marcia protested, throwing his glance upwards as if calling upon Heaven as a witness. "Have I not told the senor that I am a friend of Senor Cairn?"

"Then how much did you take in a friendly way?" John Smith persisted.

"If a friend chooses to make me a present of five hundred—"

"Pesetas?" John Smith suggested.

"Pounds. I am not a beggar!" the Spaniard corrected indignantly. But John Smith knew just as well that he was lying with regard to the amount. "Should I refuse it?"

"Anyway, you didn't," John Smith said drily; "and therefore my friend and I are prisoners. You say that you have received five hundred to keep us here. Now, I suggest that I pay you—"

"Yes?" the Spaniard queried eagerly, as the other paused.

"Five hundred more to let me go," John Smith concluded.

Manuel Marcia threw up his hands, and shook his head vigorously.

"Have I not told you that I am a Spanish gentleman, and cannot be bribed?" he expostulated.

"But a—er—present of six hundred?"

"Not even for seven," the Spaniard answered quickly, with a very greedy expression in his eyes, "even if the money is—"

"Safe?" John Smith suggested.

Manuel Marcia shrugged his shoulders, and lit a fresh cigarette.

"It is easy to promise," he said meaningly.

John Smith smiled. He knew now that it would not be long before he and Jabez Small would be free men.

"Feel in my inside pocket," he said. "You will find a cheque-book and a letter of credit on the Cosmopolitan Bank. They have a branch here."

The Spaniard drew the cheque-book and the letter from his prisoner's pocket, and fingered them gloatingly.

"A cheque for seven hundred pounds if you free us," John Smith said slowly.

"As a present?" the Spaniard demanded, with great dignity.

"Of course," John Smith agreed; and the other did not notice the sarcasm in his tone. "Cut the cords; you have my word that you shall have the cheque."

"In two hours' time," the Spaniard answered blandly, turning towards the door.

"Why not now?" John Smith persisted.

"Because I still have a regard for my life, senor," Manuel Marcia explained. "In two hours it will be free for me to leave for my own country."

Just for a moment John Smith hesitated, feeling inclined to bargain that the release should be now; then he decided that the time mattered very little.

"And I have the senor's word that he will take no action against me?" the Spaniard asked.

"Yes."

It was two hours later, almost to the minute, that Marcia himself cut the cords binding the two men, laid John Smith's cheque-book on the table, and placed pen and ink there, too.

"The senor's promise," he said, with a nervous look in his eyes. He knew that one of his own countrymen would have backed out of the bargain, and he wondered whether—

John Smith quietly wrote the cheque for the amount, though his fingers were so numbed that he could scarcely hold the pen, then led the way out of the house.

"Thank Heaven for that!" Jabez Small remarked, as he reached the street. "Pretty expensive, though, sir."

"Leman will have to pay for it," John Smith answered coolly.

"And what do we do now?"

"Rejoin the ship."

"But she has probably sailed for Tangier," Jabez Small said, rather ruefully, as he thought of Cairn and Trew left to rook Malcolm Leman.

"Most probably," John Smith agreed; "but we shall rejoin her to-night."

"Sailing-boat?" Small queried. "Hope not; always make me sick."

"I promise you that it shall not be that," John Smith answered.

CHAPTER 5.

The Levanter Gone—An Interview with the Admiral—In Pursuit—A Surprise for the Gamblers—Missing Money—Cairn Finds it—A Suggestion and Threats.

THE Levanter? a swarthy waterman said, in answer to John Smith's question. "She sailed two hours back, senor—yes, surely nearly the two hours."

"If the senor wished," a second boatman said eagerly, "it would be possible to sail after her, as she was only bound for Tangier, across the Straits."

"We're done, sir," Jabez Small said dismally, his little round face clouding; "and I'd—I'd give up my position on the local council to be able to stop those hawks rooking Leman to-night."

John Smith stepped into the nearest of the boats, Small following him.

"Where to, senor?" the boatman queried, with a lordly air.

"The flagship, and row fast," John Smith answered shortly.

The mention of the flagship caused a sensation. Two more men got into the boat, and she moved away from the quay rapidly. Her lateen-sail went up as she left the shelter of the other boats, and she bowled away merrily towards the little iron bridge guarding the inner harbour. Then the sail came down again, the boat shot under the bridge, and, once more under sail, she sped away towards the flagship of the admiral, Sir Henry Turner, which was reached in a short time.

"Wait here," John Smith ordered; and stepped, without hesitation, on to the gangway, at the top of which he was stopped by a sentry.

"Send my card to Sir Henry," John Smith ordered; and there was something in his manner which commanded obedience. Anyway, the card was at once despatched, and a minute or so later John Smith was requested to go to the admiral's cabin.

Sir Henry Turner looked up, a pleased expression on his face, as John Smith entered his cabin. It was dark now, and the electric light was burning. He held out his hand to his visitor.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Smith," he said cordially. "I have wanted to be able to thank you personally for your help ever since you cleared up that affair at the Admiralty. If it hadn't been for you, I fear that poor Kerr would have had a bad time of it."

"He would have been dismissed his ship, Sir Henry," John Smith answered coolly. "The order had already been written. I had seen it."

The admiral's red face showed amazement and a little incredulity.

"You seem to see and know most things," he remarked.

"It is my business," John Smith agreed coolly. "It is why we have never failed, Sir Henry."

Sir Henry Turner pushed a box of cigars towards his visitor, and offered him the spirit decanters. He accepted the former, but refused the latter.

"There is no time," he said quietly.

"Then you cannot stay this evening? We could have given you a decent time, Mr. Smith," the admiral said regretfully. "What has really brought you here?"

John Smith lit his cigar carefully. He was about to ask a considerable favour, but he did not hesitate.

"Sir Henry," he said quietly, "I was able to do you a favour not so very long ago, and I have come to you because I want you to do me one."

"Anything you like," the admiral answered readily.

"There is a torpedo-boat with steam up?" John Smith suggested.

"Yes," Sir Henry Turner answered; "but I don't—"

John Smith rose to his feet and took up his hat.

"Then I shall be obliged if you will have me and a friend of mine put aboard of her," he said, "with orders to her commander to follow the Levanter. I particularly wish to catch her before she anchors off Tangier to-night."

Sir Henry Turner gasped, then puffed away jerkily at his cigar.

"I'm afraid it can't be done," he said at last.

John Smith shrugged his shoulders, and moved towards the door of the cabin.

"I had always thought," he remarked, "that you were not one of the ungrateful ones connected with the Admiralty, Sir Henry."

The admiral jumped to his feet, and banged his heavy fist down on to the table with a force which threatened to break it.

"By gad, you're right, Mr. Smith!" he cried. "And I'll prove it now! You shall sail on that boat. She's lying just astern. She's about the fastest craft we've got."

Up on to the deck went Sir Henry, and after him went John Smith. In a minute a messenger had been despatched to the torpedo-boat astern, and she had scarcely received it before she slipped her moorings and came slowly alongside the flagship. Sir Henry himself descended to her sloping deck to give the necessary orders. These were soon given, and he stepped back to the gangway of his own ship.

"Good luck!" he cried to John Smith, who, with Jabez Small beside him, was standing on the deck of the torpedo-boat.

The little craft vibrated from stem to stern the moment her electric telegraph tinkled, and away she crept, pushing her blade-like bows finely through the water, towards the entrance to the harbour. The light from the lighthouse at the entrance fell across her for a moment, but her speed was nearly up, and when the beam of light came round again the torpedo-boat was nearly out of its range.

"If you would care to go below, you are welcome to my cabin, gentlemen," the youthful lieutenant in charge of the boat announced.

"Thank you; but I shall stay on deck," John Small answered. "I don't object to the breeze."

"You'll have plenty of that when she's fairly moving," the officer chuckled. "How about your friend?"

Mr. Jabez Small, who was trying to look quite unconcerned, worked up the ghost of a smile.

"I will stay here," he answered. "Feels as if the beastly thing'll shake to pieces at any moment."

"Well, you see, we're not a passenger boat in the ordinary way," the officer remarked, with a grin.

Out in the Straits of Gibraltar the sea was smooth enough, and the torpedo-boat nosed her way through it in grand style, kicking the salt spume back over her until it reached the men standing on her deck, and it would have wetted John Smith and Small to the skin if they had not been provided with oilskins.

"She's a beauty!" the officer in command shouted, his boyish face alight, having some difficulty in making himself heard above the wind screaming past.

"She'll catch the Levanter before her anchors are down," John Smith shouted back.

"Make circles round her!" the officer roared enthusiastically.

Gathering weight with every knot, the torpedo-boat rattled on as if bent on breaking a record or her own back, until John Smith, peering through a powerful pair of night-glasses, distinctly made out the Levanter right ahead. Apparently she was moving slowly, the engineers probably economising the coal, as they knew that it did not matter very much at what hour that night Tangier was reached, as none of the passengers would be likely to go ashore until the morning.

Hand over hand the torpedo-boat came up with the steamer, and, steered beautifully, swung alongside of her, running so close that John Smith and Jabez Small were able to jump on to her gangway, which had been left down.

Round swung the torpedo-boat, her mission accomplished; her commander shouted a boisterous good-bye, and the little craft leapt away into the darkness.

The passengers had come in a crowd to the bulwarks to watch the torpedo-boat, and Captain Main was amongst them.

"How the dickens did you manage it, Mr. Smith?" he asked, in surprise. "Never knew that the Admiralty had taken up ferry work."

"That is one of the secrets of Daring & Company, captain," John Smith answered, in a low voice, so that the passengers could not hear. He dropped his voice a tone more. "Where is Leman to-night?"

"Being rooked, as usual," Captain Main answered bitterly. "Then it's a good thing we've turned up," John Smith remarked, and led the way down into the cabin.

Cairn and Trew, both looking particularly pleased with themselves, were playing cards with Malcolm Leman. Now that the latter's funds were running low, nothing but the gambling game of banker would satisfy him; and he had already lost some hundreds of pounds since dinner, much to the joy of the two sharpers. They reckoned to have fleeced him entirely by the time Tangier was reached, so that they would be able to leave quietly at that port before it was discovered how it was that John Smith and Jabez Small had lost the boat at Gibraltar.

"Curse the luck," Leman muttered, as once more Cairn, who was holding the bank, swept everything before him with an ace. "Another three hundred or so, and I am cleaned out."

"Raise the stakes if you like," Trew suggested, anxious to get the affair over.

"Don't you think that they are high enough?" a quiet voice from behind the players remarked.

Cairn started, seemed to collapse in his chair, and turned ghastly white. Trew started, too, but he managed to keep his nerve.

"We thought that you had lost the boat," he managed to say.

"So we did," John Smith answered calmly, while the usually smiling Jabez Small glared at the two sharpers. "Got kidnapped in mistake for two other men, but managed to escape."

Cairn made a mighty effort, and pulled himself together. It was plain, he told himself, that Manuel Marcia had not given the game away. It was all right; these men knew nothing of the truth.

"Well, now that you have come, you may as well join in," Leman said impatiently. And John Smith was shocked to see how really ill the young man looked, and he was glad that the affair was nearly over. "My infernal luck can't be worse!"

"We're with you," Jabez Small agreed cheerily, taking the signal from John Smith. "I'll just trot off to the cabin and get some of those colossal winnings of mine."

A quick glance passed between Trew and Cairn as Small left the card-room, and it did not escape John Smith, though he seated himself quietly as if he had noticed nothing. He really wondered what was wrong, for he saw that the two gamblers were looking more than a little scared. He was soon to know, for a minute had scarcely elapsed before Jabez Small, his usually ruddy face a distinctly pasty hue, hurried in.

"The money is gone!" he gasped.

"You can't have looked properly," Trew said, in a low voice. "It isn't likely that you have been robbed."

Cairn, who had been licking his lips as if they had suddenly gone dry, spoke huskily.

"Yes, you can't have looked properly," he said. "Who is there aboard who would have robbed you?"

John Smith smiled, lit a cigar, and fixed his eyes on Cairn, who shifted uneasily before his gaze.

"This is not your first trip on the ship?" John Smith asked lightly.

"No," Cairn agreed, in a low voice.

"Then suppose you help my friend look for the money—you know more about these cabins than he does," John Smith suggested.

Once more a look passed between the two gamblers, then Cairn rose to his feet.

"Certainly I will help search," he said, rather hastily, a look of relief in his eyes; and as he passed Trew he took something from him and slipped it beneath his coat.

This also John Smith noticed, but apparently his one interest in life just then was the making of smoke-rings. He did not even glance down from the rings as Jabez Small and Cairn left the cabin.

The latter looked really quite jaunty now, and there was no expression of fear on his face, though it was still a trifle pale as he followed Small into his cabin. In fact, his lips wore a cunning expression, as if a brilliant idea had just occurred to him.

"Where did you put the notes?" he asked carelessly.

"In the bag there," Jabez Small answered sharply, pointing to a bag that stood on a shelf just below one of the bunks.

Cairn crossed to the bag, lifted it, and an exclamation escaped him. Where the bag had stood lay a wad of notes, bound together by a broad elastic band.

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"You would not make a good detective, my friend," he remarked, with a laugh, as he took up the notes and tossed them to Jabez Small. "You must have dropped them out of the bag when you moved it."

"Anyway, they're found," Small answered shortly.

And he knew, as well as if he had seen the whole business done, that the notes had been stolen—the two sharpers thinking him a prisoner in Gibraltar—and only just been replaced. Still, unless he received instructions from John Smith, he had no intention of making the accusation. It was enough for him that he had got the money back. It would teach him to be more careful in the future, that would be all.

Jabez Small moved towards the door, but Cairn, stepping hastily across the cabin, placed himself in the way.

"I have a few words to say to you, Mr. Jabez Small," he said, in an even, rather threatening, voice, "before we rejoin the others."

Jabez Small turned a trifle white, but that was all. In the days before he had turned honest and respectable, he had been in more than one tight place, out of all of which he had come successfully, and he had little doubt that he would come to no harm now.

"Say them quickly," he answered shortly, "or our friends will be wondering where we are."

"Let them wonder," Cairn snapped, "and listen to me." He grinned evilly, and drew nearer to Small. "I know you to be a card-sharper," he said, very distinctly.

Jabez Small shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. This man's methods were so crude that he had no fear of them, any more than he feared exposure now that he was under the protection of John Smith.

"I know you to be a thief," he answered blandly, "and that you stole these notes from me, thinking that you would escape with them before I left Gibraltar."

Cairn laughed softly, and dropped his right hand into his pocket. Jabez Small knew the meaning of the action, and that losses at cards had made Cairn a reckless man; but he gave no sign that he knew.

"We know so much about each other," Cairn sneered, "that I have a proposition to make."

"Well?"
Cairn bent forward eagerly, and there was an anxious expression on his face.

"We must become partners," he said quickly, "finish the rooking of that young fool Leman, and divide."

Jabez Small laughed really joyfully, until the tears came into his eyes.

"May I ask how much you have to divide with me?" he asked, when he had finished laughing.

From his pocket Cairn produced a small revolver, and there was an expression in his eyes that was not good to see. "I should advise you to join us," he said, in a low voice, "or else—"

The door of the cabin opened softly, a hand passed over Cairn's shoulder, and the revolver was snatched from his fingers.

"Or else?" the quiet voice of John Smith demanded.

Staggered though he was, Cairn, by an effort, managed to appear composed.

"It's a pity you came in so soon, Mr. Smith," he said, forcing a laugh. "I was just playing a practical joke on your friend—you spoilt it."

John Smith knew what had happened, but he also knew that the time had not yet quite arrived for him to settle permanently with Cairn and Trew.

"My sense of humour is very limited," he said. "Suppose we rejoin the others?"

CHAPTER 6.

More Play—The Two Aces—John Smith Acts—Waiting for the Two Men—Just in Time.

FOR the first time since the commencement of the cruise the weather was bad, and as the *Levanter* dropped anchor in the Bay of Tangier, it was to swing her bows round to a high wind, which brought with it a deluge of rain. The consequence was that the decks were deserted, the women flocked down to the saloons or their own cabins, and many of the male passengers found their way to the room where cards were generally played. This was the last thing that Cairn wanted, for to-night, he knew, was the last chance that he and Trew would probably have to turn the luck—by foul means—and he meant to make the most of it. He thought that he knew for certain that Jabez Small was a sharper, but he nevertheless felt confident that he could out-sharp him.

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As John Smith and Jabez Small returned to the room with Cairn, the first-named whispered to his companion.

"Make the exposure to-night," he said.

"Before the crowd?" Jabez Small asked, in the same low tone.

"Yes."

The five men seated themselves at the table, and other men drew round, attracted by rumours of the high play that had been going on aboard. Leman, a wild look in his eyes, addressed them generally before he began to play.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "to-night is my last chance to turn the luck!"

Play commenced, Jabez Small holding the bank, and for once that worthy won very little. Cairn and Trew won, however, but Leman still lost, until the expression on his face became gloomy as night.

The bank passed to Trew, who did not hold it long, though he managed to win during that time, and then it went to Cairn. A smile was on the latter's face. Even with the crowd close round him he meant to win.

One after another the packs were turned up, and one of them showed the ace of diamonds.

"We'll beat you this time," Jabez Small chuckled.

"I may turn up an ace, too," Cairn remarked, as he lifted his pack.

An ace it was—a second ace of diamonds!

Cairn went white. A deadly silence fell over the on-lookers. Jabez Small leant forward across the table, a curious smile on his lips. John Smith rose and moved round the table, though no one seemed to notice the action. Leman stared in amazement.

Then Cairn leapt to his feet and played a daring game—the only one that was possible. He threw out his right arm, and pointed at the smiling Jabez Small.

"Cheat!" he cried.

Still Jabez Small smiled, and his eyes were upon John Smith, who was standing behind Cairn. He nodded, as if to give a signal, and John Smith's arms shooting out went round Cairn in a hug that there was no shaking off.

Captain Main, a look of disgust and anger on his face, pushed his way forward through the crowd.

"Captain Main," Jabez Small said quietly, "oblige me by examining Mr. Cairn's sleeves and pockets."

Captain Main did not hesitate, and Cairn, hugged by John Smith, was powerless to resist. He touched the gambler's sleeves, and thirty or forty cards, all of high values, fell out. He searched inside the man's coat, finding pockets in places where such things are not generally made, and in each one he found cards.

"Good heavens!" Leman ejaculated, and collapsed into his chair. For the first time he realised what a fool he had been.

"When do we let Leman into the secret, sir?" Jabez Small asked, as he proceeded to undress. "He had staked his last note when we acted to-night."

"I shouldn't undress," John Smith answered.

"Why? I'm infernally tired!" Small asked.

John Smith took his revolver from his pocket, and examined the cartridges carefully.

"You had best do as I suggest," he answered. "You will soon understand."

"And what do you suggest?" Jabez Small asked quickly.

"Turn in, as you are," John Smith ordered, "and don't go to sleep."

"And you?"

John Smith dragged a portmanteau to a spot near the door, where the switch of the electric-light was placed. He seated himself on the bag, and leant back as comfortably as he could against the wall.

"I shall remain here, my friend," he answered.

A startled look came into Jabez Small's eyes.

"You don't mean that——" he began; but once more the other interrupted him.

"You will know soon!" he murmured, and switched off the light, plunging the cabin into darkness.

This sitting in the dark waiting for something to happen got on to Jabez Small's nerves badly; but John Smith, seated by the door, his eyes closed as if in sleep, showed no trace of emotion of any kind. His nerves were of steel, and they did not fail him now.

In this way an hour passed, and there was no movement, save the scratching of a rat behind the panelling. Eight bells—midnight—sounded on the bridge. The door of the cabin creaked, but John Smith did not stir. He felt the air move as a man passed him, and another followed. Then John Smith, without moving from his seat on the portmanteau, put up his left hand and switched on the electric-light.

In the middle of the cabin, blinking from the sudden glare, stood Cairn and Trew, and in their hands were pads of linen, which gave out a curiously sickly smell. Cairn was

the first to recover himself, and he swung round, evidently with the intention of making a bolt for the door.

A revolver went up, held in the steady fingers of John Smith.

"I should stay where you are," the latter observed calmly. "You might find it dangerous to try and get away."

Cairn and Trew, their faces ghastly pale, stood helpless. They had meant, as John Smith had foreseen, to make one last bold bid for the money won from Leman, only to find themselves in a tighter hole than they had been before.

"What can you do?" Cairn said in a husky voice, trying in vain to appear at his ease.

"Merely make sure of you until the morning," John Smith answered. And for a second his eyes turned to Jabez Small.

"You will find two pairs of handcuffs in my other bag," he said. "Put them on these men, and when you have done that throw those chloroform-pads overboard."

Jabez Small fetched the handcuffs, and had no difficulty in making the two men prisoners, for all the fight had gone out of them. But even then Cairn had a card to play.

"What good has all this done?" he sneered.

"It has saved Malcolm Leman from you," John Smith answered quietly.

Cairn laughed harshly, and seated himself on the edge of the lower bunk.

"Perhaps you will find that you are wrong in the morning," he said.

John Smith rose quickly from his seat on the bag, and tossed his revolver to Jabez Small. When he spoke his manner was hurried—hurried in a way that no one had ever seen it before.

"Guard these men!" he ordered briefly, and half ran out of the cabin.

Along the deck he went, stopped before a cabin near to the bridge, and tried to look in through the port. The curtain had been drawn across it. He tried the handle of the door, softly as any thief, then flung the door open, and sprang into the cabin.

Two quick steps he took forward; then he stood, with a revolver in his right hand, a revolver he had snatched from Malcolm Leman, who, pale as death, stood before him.

"Give it to me—it is the only way!" the young man cried hoarsely.

John Smith carefully closed the door of the cabin, dropped the revolver into his pocket, and seated himself coolly in a chair.

Malcolm Leman laughed painfully, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't even enough left to pay my wine-bill," he said. "I could face most, but not my father. I ought to have taken his advice long ago, but I thought that I knew best. He told me that the men who played with me were sharpers and——"

"He need not know," John Smith interrupted. "You can go back as if nothing had happened." He drew a roll of notes from his pocket, and threw them on to the table. "You will find fifteen thousand pounds there."

A tinge of colour crept into Leman's face.

"It means," he said huskily, "that——"

"There is one condition before you take those notes," John Smith interrupted sternly. He drew the revolver from his pocket, and laid it beside the notes. "Will you swear not to make such a fool of yourself again? It must be a promise that will allow me to give you that weapon back with safety."

"I swear!" Leman cried eagerly. "I have realised what a fool I have been for some time, but then I could not stop—my pride would not let me. But I swear now never to touch a card again!"

John Smith, as if quite satisfied, turned towards the door; but Leman hurried after him, and held out his hand.

"You have saved my life and my honour," he said gratefully, a suspicious huskiness in his voice. "What return can I make? This money is really yours, as you and Mr. Small won it——"

"For you," John Smith put in quietly. "Let me introduce myself fully. I am John Smith, of Daring & Co."

A look of understanding came into the young man's eyes.

"Then you——"

"Daring & Co. undertook to save you from yourself," John Smith explained quietly.

THE END.

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"PHANTOM GOLF,"
A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
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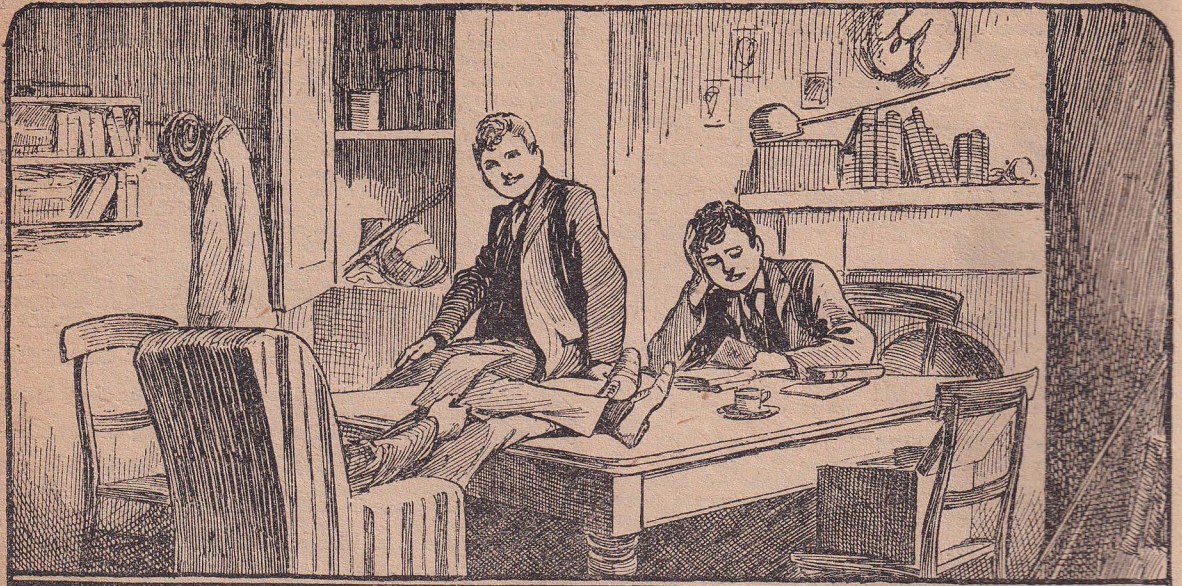
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"JACK BLAKE OF ST. JIM'S,"
A School Tale,
By Elizabeth Hamilton

IN "PLUCK," 1P.

Our School Serial.

Amusing Adventures Week by Week.



STUDY NO. 13

GLANCE OVER THE LIST OF CHARACTERS AND INTRODUCTION AND START THIS STORY NOW.

- LORD VICTOR STANBOROUGH** - - - Commonly called Vic. A member of Study No. 13.
FRED HAWLEY - - - - - An old Kingswood College boy, who goes in for one and every hobby. A sharer of Study No. 13. Accused of smoking in the dormitory.
CHRISTOPHER K. CONNELL - - - "An American." His ambition is to make a name for the school, and also for Study No. 13.

This story concerns the amusing and sometimes thrilling adventures of the "Uniteds" at Kingswood College. At the commencement of the football season the three chums were chosen to play in the school's trial game, on which a great deal depends. Bully Croft referees, and tries to spoil the "Uniteds'" chances for places in the first team, but fails. The "Uniteds" visit Kingswood on market day, and Fred buys a goat from one of Farmer Collins's farm hands. (Our story now continues.)

A Goat as a Pet.

FARMER COLLINS sprang to his feet, hurt both in person and dignity. He was also muddy, and when the other farmer he had been wrangling with began to utter roars of laughter, Collins lost his temper. He struck out viciously at the goat with his stick. On the spur of the moment Fred put out his arm, and the heavy blow partially numbed it; but Fred did not utter a word, and yet he was by far the most irritable lad Kingswood ever had.

But that was Fred's way. He had taken a liking to Arthur, the goat, and was quite prepared to defend it at any cost. Besides, Fred seldom lost his temper when merely hurt; it was only when someone riled him. At first Collins looked a little frightened.

"It was your own fault," he blustered, "and I'll—"
 "I know it was!" muttered Fred. "You are not going to hit Arthur, though. He's mine now."

"Yours?" bellowed the farmer. "Hand him over, you little thief! Didn't I tell you I wouldn't sell the animal? Hand it over, and I'll teach him a lesson. I'll—"

"Oh, dry up! You make me tired, 'cos you are always going to do things and never do 'em. Come on, boys! Let's show Arthur round the market. Ho, ho, ho! He's nibbled a bit off the Yank's jacket now. Funniest little beggar on earth—except Collins!"

"Waal, I'm jiggered!" gasped Chris. "Look at my legs, Vic. I'm ventilated all over! Stars and stripes! Call it off! I guess he'll have a bit off me in a minute!"

"Ho, ho, ho! No fear of that, Yank. He's a respectable goat; not a blessed American canned-beef sort of animal! Look out, Collins! He's going for you again."

"Give me that rope!" roared Collins. "Hi, fetch a policeman, someone! I'll give the young thief in charge! I'll—"

"That's it!" growled Fred. "Talk all the bunkum you can think of. Don't I keep telling you the goat's mine?"

"And don't I keep telling you it ain't? Hand it over, or I'll give you in charge, as sure as my name's—"

"Ho, ho, ho! Don't old Arthur squirm? What's the matter now, Collins?"

"Hand over that goat, or—"

"Well, I'm not deaf. No need to yell at us, 'cos we can nearly always hear an ordinary sort of shout. I wouldn't sell old Arthur for a fiver now!"

"Wouldn't sell him?" bellowed the farmer. "Wouldn't sell him? Why, he ain't yours!"

"Oh, yes, he is! I bought him just now."

Collins went blue in the face.

"How could you have bought him, when I wouldn't sell him?" he roared. "Didn't I tell you as—"

"The young gent is quite right," broke in the slow voice of Bill Steer, Collins's farm hand. "E bought that 'ere goat not ten minutes ago."

"How could he, you fule?"

"'Cause 'e did. Sold the hanimal myself. Who be the fule now?"

"You dared to sell the goat against my orders? I'll—I'll—"

"Why, you told me to sell it this mornin'!" retorted Bill Steer, more slowly than ever, if possible. "If you've forgot, 'tain't my fault."

Bill Steer had been in Collins's employ for many years, and there had been many lively disputes between man and master, but none of them came up to the scene that followed Bill's words.

Collins raved at the top of his voice, whilst Steer slowly blinked at him and smoked his pipe. Whenever Collins stopped for a breather, Bill chipped in with "Who be the fule now?" And the remark so riled his master that he was on the verge of personal assault.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Vic. "Nice sort of cool chap, Collins. Vote we go, boys, because that goat is certainly yours now, Fred. We didn't know Collins had changed

PLUCK'S New Serial, "Honour Bright," commences the Saturday after next.

his mind, and sent Bill Steer back to sell the animal, so don't see what we can do."

"I know what I'm not going to do!" growled Fred. "And that is, let Collins have the goat. A rotter who'd hit at animals like he did isn't a fit owner for old Arthur, and he has seen the last of him, whatever happens."

"Serves the grumpy old chap right. Did he hurt you much, Fred?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter! It's one thing for a chap to assault another, because he can take legal action against him, or whatever they call it; but a fellow's a rotter to ill-use an animal! The poor brute hasn't got any means of getting his own back. Ho, ho, ho! Believe Arthur's getting quite fond of me."

The goat certainly was trotting by his new owner's side like a dog, and had not even attempted to butt him. It was a peculiar thing, but every animal that came in touch with Fred seemed to like him, and yet the youngster was not particularly popular with acquaintances. It took time for people, young or old, to find out Fred's good points, but the lower animals seemed to discover them at once. It was a case of instinct being more trustworthy than intellect.

Still, Arthur had his faults, for he butted everybody he came near except Fred, and before the Uniteds and their new friend had been in the market ten minutes they were turned out. Arthur upset too many stalls and tempers.

The first thing the goat did when he got outside was to suddenly wrench the rope from Fred's hands, dash across the road, and dig his horns into the small of the back of a little man dressed in black. The little man uttered a most undignified yell and leapt into the air. Then he spun round on his heel.

The Uniteds were ready to sink through the earth, for of all the dozens of people in the street Arthur had singled out the very worst for his attack. The victim was "Buzzy" Harris!

There was a roar of laughter as the little science-master picked up his hat, and that was about the next worst thing that could have happened. Buzzy would almost prefer breaking a limb to being laughed at. Arthur turned round, and trotted back to Fred. An instant later Mr. Harris was also across the road.

"Whose—whose is that creature?" he gasped. "I—"

"Mine!" muttered Fred. "Lie down, Arthur!"

"Yours?" almost roared the little master. "Do you mean to tell me that you dare to lead a dangerous animal about the street like that? I—I say, how dare you—how dare you?"

"Arthur's quite safe, sir!" growled Fred. "He's rather fresh, I think, sir, but he doesn't mean anything."

It was rather a silly remark to make, because it caused the few people who were listening to laugh, and that, of course, was fatal.

Mr. Harris overflowed with indignation.

"How dare you purchase such an animal?" he demanded. "How dare you?"

"Arthur will be all right, sir, when I get him to the college. The walk will quiet him down, sir."

"When you—you get him to the college?" gasped Mr. Harris. "Do you for a moment suppose that you will be allowed to keep a—goat at Kingswood College? Boy, you must be mad! Take the creature back to the dealer from whom you obtained him—at once, Hawley!"

"Wouldn't Watson, the gardener, be able to take care of him for me until the end of the term, sir?" asked Fred, his rather stormy face clouded with disappointment. "I'd be awfully obliged, sir, if it could be managed, because I could take him home when we break up."

"The man Hawley got him from is a violent-tempered fellow, sir," chipped in Vic, ever ready to speak up for a chum, "and likely to knock the goat about. I know Watson would be able to find a home for Arthur until the end of the term, sir."

"Nonsense! The animal shall not be brought near the college! Take him back to the dealer at once, boy!"

"How long do you want him looked after for, Hawley?" muttered a sullen voice from behind.

"Hallo, Welby! To the end of the term."

The bully of Kingswood College did not answer for a moment or two, and Croft, who was with him, glanced up in surprise. Welby scowled at him.

"Can you suggest anything, old chap?" asked Vic quietly. "We'd be awfully glad if you could; isn't that so, Fred?"

"Yes; 'cos I don't want to lose Arthur if I can help it. I've never had a goat, and they are jolly nice little chumps."

"Do not be so absurd, boy!" fumed Mr. Harris. "I

wonder a lad of your age can be so foolish as to waste his money as you do. Take the goat back into the market at once!"

"If you like, Hawley," muttered Welby, "you can leave the brute at my place—ten miles from here, and one of the farm-hands will take it for you. I'll write a letter."

Blank amazement followed the senior's remark, Croft being more surprised than any of the youngsters. But even Mr. Harris was astonished, for somehow masters always seem to know which of their boys are chums and which are foes. For a moment the Uniteds were too astounded to speak. Welby glared at them.

"Do you want the letter, Hawley?" he muttered.

"Yes. Thanks! I'll go and get Bill Steer to take Arthur over."

And, without further remark, Fred slouched away. Welby scribbled a note and handed it to Vic, then walked off, with Croft following closely. A strange but very sweeping change was coming over the Kingswood bullies.

"I wonder Hawley cares to trouble strangers!" snapped Mr. Harris. "Remember, Stanborough, the goat is not to be brought to the college on any account. I do not hold with lads keeping pets to the extent Hawley does."

"All right, sir!" grinned Vic. "Come on, Yank! What do you think of Welby now, my son?"

"What I have thought of him for some little time, partner—ever since my fight with Croft. He's coming on, Vic—he's coming on. We know he's a sport on the field, and I guess it won't be long before he proves himself a sport off. What say you?"

"That you've just about struck it, Yank," said Vic quietly, as the two walked into the market. "Old Welby has not far to go to become a sport."

Which was distinctly true, for the Kingswood bully had done well. He had not been afraid to risk his chums' sneers, nor the laughs of those who were not his chums. He was showing the pluck he was famous for on the football-field, and pluck, if it is of the right sort, will carry a chap through almost anything.

Most certainly Welby had not far to go to become a "sport."

(Another instalment of this story in next Saturday's PLUCK. Our new serial, "Honour Bright," a story of school and the world, commences in PLUCK'S Christmas Number the week after next.)

Sandow Anecdotes

Incidents from the Eventful Life of Mr. Sandow.

Mr. Sandow—the celebrated strong man—did not have his greatness thrust upon him, but only achieved it by hard work and persistent efforts. His adventure at Brussels was the means of bringing him prominently before the public and securing a much-needed engagement.

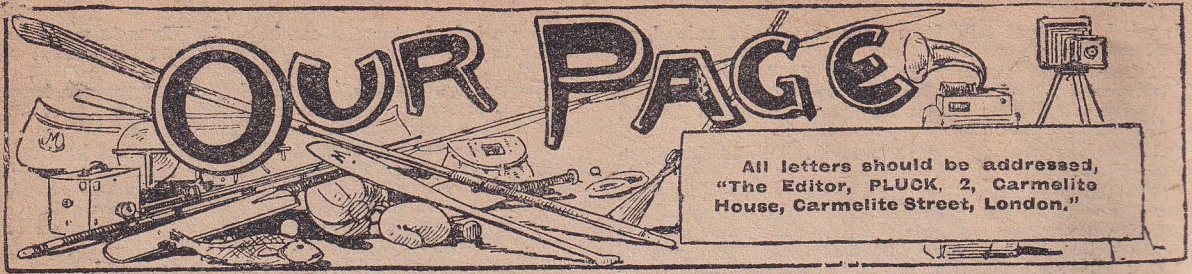
Sandow had tried to secure an engagement in the town as a strong man, but had failed, and as a last resource he played the following trick:

He went round the town at midnight, and, by means of his enormous strength, wrecked every weight-lifting machine there was.

Next day the papers were full of surmises as to "the gang of wreckers" who had destroyed property in this manner, for, of course, they did not think one man was able to do it. When the excitement had subsided, and the machines been the feat, Sandow went round the town again and repeated the feat. Then special police were put on to watch the machines and capture the offenders. Hearing of this, Sandow intended to be caught, and one night when "going the round" of machine-breaking, he was surrounded by a number of police. He allowed himself to be captured and taken to the station, where he explained that he had paid his money, and tried his strength in the ordinary way. He gave the names of several influential friends of his in the town, and when they identified him he was released.

Through this feat of strength Sandow was inundated with offers of engagements at more than double the salary he had previously asked and had been refused.

Any reader writing to No. 1, Sandow Hall, Victoria Embankment, London, W.C., will be supplied with a free copy of the booklet, "Sandow's Way to Strength," which shows how Sandow obtained this magnificent strength, and gives full instructions how readers may obtain similar muscular development and robust health.



All letters should be addressed, "The Editor, PLUCK, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London."

I have an important announcement to make to you this Saturday—one which will give me much pleasure indeed to make known to you. The next number but one—that is,

"PLUCK" No. 107, OUT SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH,

will be our Special Christmas Number. Extra long stories, and more of them, and a new serial will go to make up the finest Christmas Number that I have yet been able to place before you.

When I have revealed our next Saturday's programme—an extra popular one—I will state the contents of our Christmas Number.

Your first long, complete story in next Saturday's PLUCK will be a narrative of the adventures in Australia of popular and celebrated Dr. Nevada.

This is well up to the high standard of excellence exhibited in these stories. It is entitled

"PHANTOM GOLD!"

and is written around Dr. Nevada's thrilling experiences in Australia, the land of mystery, across which no human traveller has ever made his way. The vast centre of Australia is as unexplored and unknown as the district round the South Pole.

Your second long, complete story will be from the pen of Mr. Charles Hamilton, our popular school-story writer. Readers of his tale in this number, "The Lyndale First," will, without doubt, be more than pleased that we have another from his pen to follow so soon.

His story for next Saturday's PLUCK will be entitled

"JACK BLAKE OF ST. JIM'S,"

and I will ask you to read it carefully, for this reason: It will form the first of a series of school stories written around Jack Blake, who, I have not the

slightest doubt, will speedily make himself one of the most popular characters who have ever appeared in PLUCK.

I am thinking of asking Mr. Harry Belbin to let us have some more yarns of the Captain, the Cook, and the Engineer. What say you, my friends?

The programme of our Christmas Number, out Saturday, November 17th, will be: The specially-written star tale, "CAPTAIN HANDYMAN,"

By Captain Shand, an extra-long, complete story of adventure, I shall await anxiously your verdict upon this tale.

The specially-written star story,

"UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE,"

By the Author of "None But the Brave."

This will be a romantic tale of adventure and mystery.

A star school story,

"STEP BY STEP."

And the opening instalment of our new serial,

"HONOUR BRIGHT!"

You might please inform friends of our Christmas Number (price 2d.), and do not forget to order your copy in advance, as our special numbers sell out so quickly that regular readers have sometimes been disappointed.

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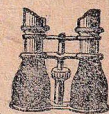
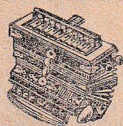
This picture depicts an incident from "Jack Blake of St. Jim's," by Charles Hamilton, one of the two complete tales for next Saturday's PLUCK. 32 pages. Price 1d.

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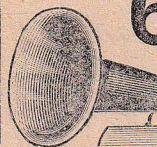
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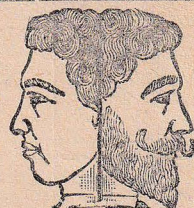
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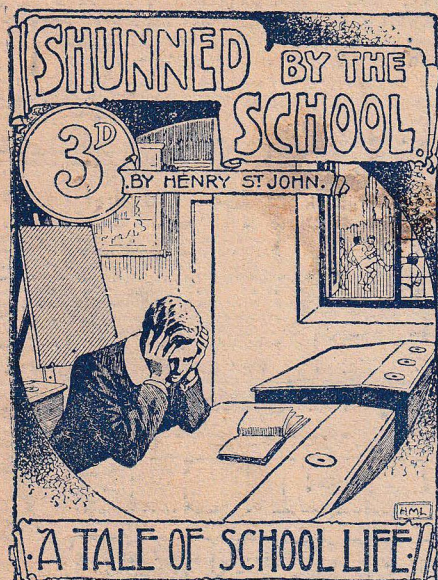
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