

New Serial Story To-Day.

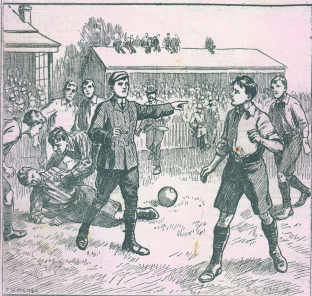
The UNION JACK 1st



Vol. V. No. 106 New Series. (Every Friday.)

THE FIFTH FORM AT FERNLEY

A ROUSING STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE. BY CHARLES HAMILTON.



THE SCHOOLBOY FOOTBALL MATCH. ORDERED OFF THE FIELD!

"GET OFF THE GROUND, DO YOU HEAR?" CRIED HILSTON ANGERILY. ENVELOPED WITH A BLACK SCOWL ON HIS FACE AND BITTER RAGE BARKLING IN HIS THROAT, TURNED AND WALKED OFF.

WE GIVE YOU FREE

As a large advertisement your choice of either of these handsome presents for selling FIVE useful articles of Jewellery at 6d. each.

NO MONEY REQUIRED.

Just send a postcard with your Full Name and Address, proposing to return the Jewellery within four weeks if you do not sell it. On receipt of your postcard, we will at once send the FIVE articles, which you can sell in a few minutes among your friends. When sold, you will send us the 5s. 6d. received for same, and we will at once dispatch absolutely free

THE PRESENT YOU CHOOSE.

Together with the Jewellery will be sent a Catalogue of other Presents which you may choose from, including **Crucifixes, Musical Clocks, Real Silver Watches, Real Gold and Diamond Rings, 6d., 4/6.** And even though you only sell two of the articles, we will present you with one of our **Handsome 'Globe' Timekeepers, Guaranteed for Three Years.** We want you to see our Jewellery, and judge as to the sales yourself.

You will receive the goods to-morrow if you send a postcard to-day. Address as follows—

Scottish Jewellery Emporium (Dept. A),
50, BALMAIN STREET, GLASGOW.



This Gold-Case Ladies Watch, warranted correct throughout, 1/10 for selling FIVE articles.



This Real Oak Devering's Clock, 1/10 for selling FIVE articles.



This strong skeleton, double bottom, two sets rock, iron for selling FIVE articles.



Fishes, comprising tables each Silver, Forks, & Spoons, five for selling FIVE articles.



6D. DEPOSIT

REAL SILVER WATCH - 6/6

Guaranteed throughout correct, and never goes wrong.

For advertisement only. We want 500 copies of this watch to be sold.

6D. DEPOSIT

We give a Handsome Chain Free.

On return of the watch we will send to you a new watch.

The Glasgow Watch Co. 115, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

WORK FOR ALL.

We give a **Real-Silver Timekeeper** and **Master Silver Watch Chain**, with guarantee to keep correct time for three years, or a **Lady's or Gentleman's** **Gold-Case** Ring, free to any person selling 500 copies of our advertisement within 21 days. You can sell these in an hour. Send name and address (Postcard will do).

BRITISH FINE ART CO., 115, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

Applications with regard to advertisement spaces in "Union Jack," "Harper," and "Punch" should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, E.C.



READ THE TRUTH.

We give you a ten-year warranted **Real Silver WATCH** or a real **Silver-mounted Umbrella**, including the **Lady's or Gentleman's** or other present as per list, for selling **SEVENTY-TWO (72)** Postcards (assorted), in ten beautiful colour pictures of sets. We allow five weeks for selling. Send name and address—postcard will do.

NATIONAL POSTCARD EXCHANGE, 50, Rosebery Avenue, LONDON, E.C.

TO INTRODUCE

our **Zenith Watches** we send a **Lady's or Gentleman's** **Real Silver Watch**, with jewelled movement, guaranteed for seven years, to any address on receipt of



6D. DEPOSIT,

and upon the payment of the last 14 Weekly Installments at 6d. each making a total of 7/6 in all. A **Handsome Chain** is given FREE. Note.—Our usual cash order price is only 6/6. Send at once to

J. & T. WILSON (Dept. F),
17, Oswald Street, Glasgow.



MOUSTACHES.

This amazing ointment you always long to possess is now available for sale. It is a most valuable preparation of our hair, which is the best in the world. It is a most valuable preparation of our hair, which is the best in the world. It is a most valuable preparation of our hair, which is the best in the world.

Send at once to **J. & T. WILSON (Dept. F),** 17, Oswald Street, Glasgow.

No. 1.

The First Part of

No. 1.

"THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL."

NOW ON SALE. PRICE SIXPENCE.

The 'Union Jack Library.' 1st

A WEEKLY STORY-BOOK FOR ALL

SPECIAL NOTICE! I WISH TO DRAW MY READERS' EARNEST ATTENTION TO THE NEW SERIAL WHICH COMMENCED ON PAGE 30 OF THIS ISSUE, UNDER THE TITLE OF "TROOPER AND BUSHRANGERS." THIS TALES WILL BE FOUND TO BE THE BEST SERIAL TALES EVER PUBLISHED IN THE "UNION JACK"—THE BRIFPER.

Our Long, Complete Novel.

THE FIFTH FORM AT FERNLEY.

A Rousing Story of School Life.

By CHARLES HAMILTON, Author of "The Secret of the School."

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Sister Blood.

HARRY TALBOT came down the steps of the School House at Fernley College with an unusual shade upon his frank, handsome face.

He was a fine specimen of young British manhood, and his frank, cordial nature added to his

name in the football field, made him a general favourite in the Fifth Form at Fernley.

Helston, the captain of the school, nodded to him as he walked across the quadrangle, and stopped.

"Anything up?" he asked, noticing Talbot's expression.

Talbot shook his head.

"No, not exactly. Helston. Have you seen my cousin?"

"Yes, I saw him go into the New House a few minutes ago with Knowles. You'll find him in his study."

Talbot knitted his brows for a moment.

"Is Knowles with him?"

Helston laughed.

"They are always together," he said. "Knowles is Herbert Langley's shadow. I hope you two haven't been seeing."

"Oh, no!" said Talbot. "We had a few words the other day about the football, you know; but it was nothing. My uncle is coming to Fernley to see us, and I want to speak to Herbert about it, that's all."

And with a nod to Helston he went up the steps of the New House. It was still called the New House, though it was more than a hundred years old. The School House was considerably more ancient.

Harry Talbot belonged to the one house at Fernley, his cousin, Herbert Langley, to the other. Their uncle, Squire Lowther, who had sent them to Fernley, considered this a judicious arrangement, for the cousins had never pulled together very well. They were the sons of Squire Lowther's two sisters, both dead, and for each of them he had a strong affection; and he was some-

times deeply pained by the evident lack of friendly feeling between them. To do Talbot justice, he was more than willing to be on cordial terms with his cousin; but his efforts in that direction had met with very scanty success.

Talbot tapped at the door of Herbert Langley's study. He had hoped to find him alone; but as he tapped he heard the murmur of voices within, and he was at a loss to guess



Taking a quick step forward, Herbert struck Talbot in the face with his open hand. "Is that enough for you?" he hissed. Talbot staggered back.

whom his cousin's companion was, Knowles, an Helston lad and, was looking at the door.

"Come in," called out the speaker.

Talbot pushed open the door and entered. Hubert rose as he entered. He was a youth of about Talbot's own age, with a well-built form, fair hair, and a somewhat thin, sensitive face. He looked questioningly at Talbot; he was not accustomed to receiving visits from his cousin.

The other occupant of the study was about Hubert's age, but more slightly built, with a yellow complexion and little, black, glittering eyes, that suggested one of a rat. He had his hand under the table when Talbot opened the door, but as he looked up and saw whom the visitor was, he withdrew it, and Talbot saw the cigarette between his fingers. He had just lit out of sight in case it should prove to be a snifter or a gambut at the door; but he cared nothing for Talbot, and he now returned the cigarette to his lips with perfect coolness.

"Talbot! I didn't expect to see you," said Langley dryly.

Talbot understood his tone. A couple of days before there had been hot words between the cousins, which, but for Talbot's perfect control of his temper, might have led to a serious quarrel. Since then they had not spoken.

"I want to speak to you, Hubert," said Talbot, with a glance at Knowles which would have made any decent fellow excuse himself and retire. It had no perceptible effect, however, upon Knowles, who appeared to be wisely absorbed in watching the spirals of smoke from his cigarette.

"All right," said Hubert carelessly, with a gesture towards a chair. "Go ahead!"

Talbot fixed his eyes upon Knowles in a way that even that thick-skinned individual could not mistake.

"I'd rather speak to you alone, Hubert," he said. "I'm sure Knowles will excuse me."

Knowles's yellow cheeks colored the merest trifle, and he made a movement as if to rise.

"I'll clear, if you want me to, Hubert," he said, addressing Langley, and taking no notice of Talbot. "I don't want to hear your little secrets, of course."

"Sit where you are, Cecil," said Langley. "There's no need for you to go. There are no secrets between my cousin and me that I know of."

Knowles nodded and sank back into his chair, and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

Talbot's eyes flashed for a moment, and he was strongly inclined to take Cecil Knowles by the shoulders and put him out of the room by main force. Knowles would not have had much chance if the sturdy Fifth Former had once laid hands upon him.

Knowles was the one boy in the Fifth at Fensley whom Harry Talbot heartily detested. There had long been a veiled hostility between the two, and Talbot more than suspected that Knowles's influence was cunningly used to incite Hubert towards him. He knew that Knowles was mean and spiteful, and he despised him accordingly; and Knowles repaid his contempt with a hatred that was more the less bitter for being carefully hidden.

Langley looked impatiently at his cousin.

"You can go ahead," he said. "You needn't mind Knowles. I have no secrets from my friends, anyway."

Talbot bit his lip.

"It isn't a question of secrets," he said. "I don't care to discuss purely private matters before a third person."

"I don't see what you can say that Knowles can't hear," said Hubert irritably. "Anyway, he's going to stay, and you can speak or not, as you think fit."

Talbot flushed scarlet. It was with difficulty that he kept back the words of anger that rose to his tongue.

He did not speak for a few moments, but when he did his voice was quite calm.

"Very well," he said quietly. "I will find another opportunity of speaking to you." And he turned on his heel.

"Hold on!" said Knowles, getting up. "Keep your word on, Talbot. Langley, old chap, I'll look in and see you again presently."

Talbot turned back, and Knowles opened the door and went out. He closed it behind him, but it did not latch. Neither of the cousins, however, observed it.

Langley looked angrily at his cousin.

"Well, you have driven my client out!" he exclaimed

"Now what on earth have you to say to make such a fuss about?"

"I got a very encouraging beginning for one who could open a photo-making arena, but Talbot did not allow himself to be disturbed."

"I had a letter from Uncle Geoff to-day," he said. "He asked me to tell you that he was coming down to Fensley to-morrow to see the House match."

Langley looked interested.

"I'm glad of that," he remarked. "I shall be able to show him—"

He paused abruptly.

"I hope we shall both be able to show him some decent play," said Talbot, more easy with his cousin now that the mischief-maker was gone. "Helston told me that you are to captain the New House; and, of course, you know that I lead our side?"

Langley nodded.

"Let the best team win," he said. "I know you School House fellows are reckoning on a certain victory, but you may find a surprise-packet in the New House this time."

"Well, I don't know that we're so cocksure about it," said Talbot. "I know your side will put up a good game. That's what we want. You know how keen Uncle Geoff is on football. He will enjoy seeing a really good game."

"You are very anxious to please him, said Langley, with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"I hope I am," said Talbot warmly. "I should be a rotten end if I were not anxious to please the man who sent me to Fensley."

"Oh, of course," said Langley, his sneer becoming more pronounced; "and without any ulterior motives at all!"

Talbot looked his cousin full in the eyes. Hubert Langley seemed to wince a little before that steady gaze.

"What do you mean by ulterior motives, Hubert?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped out Langley. "As if I don't know exactly well—"

He paused.

"Well, and what do you know so perfectly well?" said Talbot quietly, but his eyes beginning to gleam a little.

Langley made an irritable gesture.

"Well, since you want it plainly," he broke out, "you know very well that only one of us can inherit Lowther Down; and the one who gets most into Uncle Geoff's good books will be his heir. You know it as well as I do, and you know that the surest way to his favour is through his enthusiasm for football. That's your chief motive for slugging away at faster like a professional. I can see through you, Harry Talbot."

Talbot turned pale with anger, and he clenched his hands till the nails dug into his palms.

"It's a lie!" he cried hotly.

Hubert started to his feet.

"A lie, is it? You dare to come to my quarters and call me a liar!"

"I beg your pardon, Hubert," said Talbot, recovering himself; "I should not have said that. But you are mistaken—really you are. I never dreamed of the motive you impute to me. I want to please Uncle Geoff, of course, and I admit that has much to do with my desire to become a Freshlaw footballer; but, in any case, my own love for the game would make me slog harder than hard as I do. And as for that, I don't slog harder than a lot of other fellows who are trying to get into the eleven that's going to St. Frodo's."

Langley was silent, but there was a look of very strong suspicion upon his face.

It was clear that the idea to which he had just given utterance had taken a firm root in his mind.

"Come, Hubert!" went on Talbot, in a conciliatory tone;

"it isn't like you to be suspecting a chap of mean motives, and imputing all sorts of evil to him. Was it Knowles who put that idea into your head?"

Langley flushed angrily. As a matter of fact, the suggestion had come from Knowles, and it annoyed him extremely that Talbot should guess as much.

"I don't see what you want to drag Knowles's name into it for," he said. "Knowles is my friend, and if he saw anything being done against me in an underhand way, I suppose he had a right to put me on my guard?"

"Then it was Knowles? I thought as much! That fellow is a cad, and no more your friend than he is mine!"

"Not a word against Knowles! Did you insist upon his

testing the room so that you could malign him behind his back?" cried Hubert.

Talbot took a hard grip upon the back of the chair near him. It was some time before he could trust himself to speak.

"We are getting off the subject," he said at last, with broad calmness. "I didn't come here to speak about Knowles. Uncle Geoff will be here so-narrow, Hubert, and that's what I want to speak to you about. You said I haven't been on good terms—"

"Whose fault is that?"

Talbot might have said very truly that it was Hubert's own fault, but that would not have needed matters, and so he replied:

"Never mind that. I dare say there have been faults on both sides. Uncle Geoff is pretty keen, and he sees exactly how matters stand between us, and I know it worries him a lot. He wants us to be friends, and I don't see why we shouldn't be. Do you?"

Hubert laughed a little unsteadily.

"We never did pull together," he said.

"Suppose we let bygones be bygones?" suggested Talbot.

"We had a few words the other day. It was all about nothing, but you have assailed me since; and I don't want Uncle Geoff to come and see us spying each other like a couple of ill-conditioned dogs. I don't bear any malice, and I'm sure you don't. There isn't any cause of real disagreement between us. Will you shake hands, and start again?"

And Talbot held out his hand in his usual way.

Hubert hesitated.

He was really a good fellow at bottom, but he was jealous of Talbot, who was not only none of a favourite with their circle, but was by the Hubert's superior in the football field. And the poison instilled into his mind by Knowles was still working there.

"That's all very well," he said slowly.

"So far as keeping up appearances before Uncle Geoff goes, I'm willing to meet you half-way. Further than that, I don't see how either of us is to go without hurting. An amount of talking will alter the fact that we are rivals—both in football and for the instance that most came to me of us."

"As for Uncle Geoff's money, I had never given it a thought; and I never knew you had until to-day."

Hubert lit his lip.

"Perhaps so; but you can hardly expect me to take your word for it."

Talbot's eyes flashed. His temper, sorely tried during this peculiar interview, was beginning to fall him.

"I should expect any decent fellow to take my word," he broke out. "Have you ever found me led enough to tell a lie?"

"We wouldn't go into that. We are, as I have said, rivals, and it's no good, that I can see, disputing the fact," said Hubert obstinately. "I have already told you that it is my belief that you are going on strong on football for the sake of carrying favour with Uncle Geoff. Now, don't lose your temper. You asked for a plain talk, and I am giving you a plain one—straight from the shoulder. If you don't like it, you have only yourself to thank."

"You are right," said Talbot, breathing hard. "I was a fool, I suppose, to think that we could ever be friends."

"Oh, I don't know about that! I am quite willing to be civil, if you are. As you say, it would be bad form to snap at each other before Uncle Geoff. It wouldn't please him to know that we are already disputing about dead men's shoes!" And Hubert laughed unpleasantly.

"I have never thought about dead men's shoes, as you put it; and I don't believe you would have done so, or suspected me of doing so, but for Civil Knowles!" cried Talbot.

"Can't you let Civil Knowles alone?" exclaimed Langley angrily. "He is my friend, and I tell you I won't hear him run down. If you've got nothing better to say than that, you had better clear out of my study!"

Without a word more Talbot turned quietly to the door and opened it.

"You see?"

The words fell from his lips in tones of biting contempt. Civil Knowles, who had been standing close to the door he had purposely left ajar, listening to the talk within, started back, taken quite by surprise by the sudden opening of the door. He was caught in the very act.

"I—I was just going to knock," he stammered.

Talbot did not trouble to reply, but his look of disdain as he passed the spy made Knowles grind his teeth.

Hubert Langley stopped quickly to the door.

"Hallo, Knowles!"

His face clouded a little. From where he had been standing in the study he had not seen Knowles as Talbot opened the door, but Talbot's exclamations had told him enough.

Knowles hesitated to speak.

"Talbot nearly ran into me," he said. "I was just going to knock when he opened the door, and he jumped to a wrong conclusion. I suppose he's in the habit of listening at keyholes himself," he added bitterly. "You don't doubt me, Hubert?"

"Of course I take your word," said Hubert.

But he said it very half-heartedly.

Talbot went down the steps of the New House in a disturbed and dependent frame of mind. He had come there with the best intentions, but his visit could not be called a success. As a matter of fact, he had left the School House without any very sanguine anticipations as to the result of his visit to the other House.

The rift between him and his cousin was not to be easily bridged. Still, it was something that they should be civil to each other when Sirine Lowther came to Farnley. Even upon that point, however, Talbot had doubts, if it should happen that the New House got the worst of it at the match to-morrow.

His far from cheerful meditations were suddenly interrupted.

"Hallo, Harry! If you are not just going to attend a funeral, come along and let us have a go at the boiler."

Talbot's face cleared as he looked up and saw Dick Russell, his chum in the Sixth Form, and his study mate. Russell linked his arm in Talbot's.

"What are you looking so down in the dumps for?"

Talbot hesitated.

"I've just had a talk with my cousin."

"And that's the effect he has upon you?" grinned Russell. "Well, hang him! We are going to lick him and his crowd hollow to-morrow. Come and let us see what kind of form you are in. I tell you we've got to lick the New House or bust something."

And the two lads, with the rest of the School House team, were soon busy in the football field, and all signs of care were banished from Talbot's face. With Talbot, as with most healthy British boys, a good game was an antidote for mental worries. And he soon showed himself to be in splendid fettle for the to-morrow's match. There was a nod in purple for the New House when the two teams met on the match ground.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Talbot Interferes.

"DOST! Please don't, young gentlemen! Let me alone!"

It was an old man's voice, broken and quavering. Harry Talbot gave a start as he heard it and his eyes glowered with anger.

The football practice finished, Talbot and his chum were taking a stroll in Farnley Wood till calling-ave, and the sound of voices and laughter had come abruptly to their ears from beyond a turn of the winding footpath.

"Pleas don't, young gentlemen!"

SEXTON BLAKE AS CABDRIVER!

Read our Great Story next
week, entitled

"THE CABDRIVER DETECTIVE."

Order in Advance!

"It's old Caleb!" exclaimed Talbot. "And some such are interfering with him. I think I heard Knowles's voice. He's just the kind of sport to annoy him."

He quickened his pace, and in a few moments arrived upon the scene.

The old man was striking back against a big elm by the side of the footpath, his eyes glaring from one to the other of his tormentors like those of a frightened animal. Three or four boys lay fellows were round him laughing loudly, evidently hugely amused by his apprehensions. They were not really hurting him, but their rough homely play had shaken and shamed him almost out of his wits.

Old Caleb Cartlow was a well-known character about Fensley. He lived in a cottage in the wood, and was popularly supposed to be half-witted. Some of the village boys found a cruel amusement in tormenting him; and this kind of sport, as Talbot had said, was just suited to the tastes of Cecil Knowles and his set.

"Let me alone! It's cowardly to attack an old man!" quavered out poor old Caleb. "I've never done you any harm!"

"You ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum, you old, dirty boaster," retorted Knowles. He walked to his companions. "I say, chaps, the Haunted Foot is out for from here, let's give the old fellow a ducking. It will do him good. He looks as if he wants a wash."

The others greeted this proposition with a shout of approval. They were not in earnest, but old Caleb thought they were, and he yelled with terror.

"Let me alone! I—I—"

"Collar him, chaps!"

"Let him alone, will you?"

Knowles swung round at the sound of Talbot's voice.

The others, too, who had begun to hassle the old man, ceased as if he had suddenly become red-hot, as Talbot appeared upon the scene. Talbot's fists were clenched, and there was a flash in his eyes that showed he was not in a mood to be trifled with.

"Look here, Talbot," broke out Knowles angrily, "mind your own business, can't you? What has this got to do with you?"

"This much, that anybody who wants to duck old Caleb will have a fight on his hands first," replied Talbot coolly. "It was only a joke; we never meant to duck him."

"Nevertheless you were in earnest, anyway, and my opinion is that you are quite brute enough, Knowles, if the others would look you up."

Knowles flushed with rage. The other fellows were looking a little ashamed; but chance did not enter largely into the nature of Cecil Knowles. He was only brutal.

Clearly he would have liked to spring at Talbot like a lion, and drive his fist into the bandages, scornful loes. But the courage to do so was lacking.

"Have you taken the old lunatic under your wing?" he sneered, biting his lip. "We were only having a little fun with him, and there was no need for you to shove yourself in and do the heroic. We never meant to hurt him."

"It's a lie!" cried old Caleb. "You didn't care whether you hurt me or not. You are a coward and a villain!"

"Oh, am I?" cried Knowles, turning upon the old man and slinging a savage blow at him. "Let that teach you!" But his blow did not reach old Caleb.

Talbot's hand struck his wrist and knocked it aside. Knowles gave a howl of pain.

"You had better keep your paws to yourself," said Talbot, with a quiet grin. "I'll give you the next one on the nose, Knowles, straight from the shoulder; so I warn you."

Knowles made a great show of nursing his wrist, as if it were very much hurt. He did not intend to come to close quarters with Talbot.

"You struck me when I wasn't looking."

"Oh, cut it," said Talbot impatiently. "Do you mean that I dare not strike you when you are looking? If so, just meet me in the gym, to-night, and I'll soon underwrite you on that point."

"Oh, he'll forgive you before then!" said Dick Russell, grinning. "Knowles would forgive anything on a chap who can hit him, wouldn't you, Knowles?"

Knowles scowled blackly and turned away. Throwing his hands deep into his pockets he strode up the path towards the school, followed by his companions.

The chums remained alone with old Caleb.

"You're all right now, Caleb," said Talbot good-naturedly. "They haven't hurt you?"

"No," said the old man a little doubtfully. "They would have done if you hadn't come up, though. Thank you, Master Talbot. I am only a poor, old, half-witted man, but perhaps some day I may be able to serve you, and then you shall see that old Caleb can be grateful."

Talbot smiled and nodded.

It did not appear to him likely that the half-witted dweller in Fensley Wood would ever be able to serve him. He little dreamed at that moment that the time would come when he would owe his life itself to the gratitude of old Caleb Cartlow.

"You'd better keep out of the way of Knowles and his lot, Caleb," remarked Talbot. "Knowles won't go for me; but he hates being taken down, and he will make you suffer for what has happened to-day if ever he gets the chance."

The old man rumbled his thanks and hobbled away, and the chums turned toward the school, following in the track of Knowles and his companions.

"I say, Harry, Dick Russell remarked, "you were right in warning old Caleb that Knowles will make him sit up if he gets a chance; but you will need to keep an eye open yourself, for if Cecil Knowles hates anybody like poison that individual is yourself."

Talbot laughed cordially.

"I don't think he will ever be able to harm me," he remarked.

"I don't know about that. You know he plays for the New House to-morrow in Langley's team, and a foul kick is easily given in a game of football if a fellow is not watchful."

"I never thought of that," Talbot confessed. "I hardly think that even Knowles would go so far as that."

"That's because you are such a blessed old innocent," replied Russell. "The only question with him would be whether he had the pluck, not the inclination."

Talbot laughed.

"Well, I'll keep an eye open," he said.

"Hallo, there he is!" exclaimed Russell. "I thought he had gone with the others."

As the chums passed an opening in the wood they saw Knowles standing under the trees some little distance from the path. He had his back turned towards them, and was talking to a rough-looking man in a fur cap.

"That's Steve Lowe, the poacher," whispered Russell. "I've seen Knowles talking to him before. Hallo, he's looking at us!"

At a gesture from his companion Knowles turned his head and saw the chums and scowled at them. The two boys passed on carefully.

Knowles looked after them, gritting his teeth.

"How I hate him!" he muttered half aloud.

The poacher was watching his expression with a covert grin. He tapped the boy lightly on the arm. Knowles stared at him.

"You hate him?" said the poacher, grinning. "So do I. You ain't the only one he's meddled with, Master Knowles. What would you give to see him out—eh? You'd like to see him carried up to the school one day, wouldn't you, with Mack brutes all over him, and one or two boys broken—eh?"

Knowles's eyes glauced.

"Yes, I would like it," he said; "and I'd give a good deal to see it, both. But it's too dangerous, for all that."

The poacher shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I'd take the risk, if——"

"Not with my consent," said Knowles quickly. "I'll have no hand in it." Then he lowered his voice. "It might come at that some day, for all I know. Perhaps——"

He checked himself, as he caught the poacher's eager look. "I'll see you again, both. I must go up to the school now, or I shall be late for calling-over."

And with a nod to his disreputable companion Knowles hurried away. The poacher dashed away into the wood.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Football Match.

ZIE, up!

Harry Talbot heard the motor coming up the road, and ran to the school-gates to greet his uncle.

It was the day of the House match, a clear, fine October day, with a chill breath of winter in the air.

Squire Lowther jumped from the motor as it stopped at the gates, and shook hands with his nephew. He looked him over critically.

"You are looking fit," he remarked. "Where's Hubert?"

Talbot shook his head.

"I haven't seen him since our Form was disbanded. He's busy, I expect. You know he's captaining the New House to-day."

"And you are captain of the School House team?"

"Yes, Holston is only a looker-on to-day. He wants to see our form, and pick out the best men for the eleven that is going to hit St. Fred's. You may wager that we shall all play our best best. There isn't a chap at Fensley who wouldn't give his little finger to get into the first eleven."

"I suppose not." The squire looked at his nephew with appreciative glances, noting his fine, well-developed form, his well-set head, his clear and steady eyes. "You are pretty certain of getting your cap, eh?"

"Oh, no!" said Talbot immediately. "I hope I shall get it, of course, and I shall do my best; but I am very doubtful. You see, I am only in the Fifth, and I have to compete with a lot of Sixth fellows. It's really a big bit of luck for me to be captaining the School House to-day. Five of the House team are in the Sixth."

"I know you'll do your best," said the squire. "You know how it would please me to see you in the first eleven at St. Fred's for the big match. I played against them while I was at Fensley. It's true I was in the Sixth then. I shall keep my eye upon you to-day, so mind you back up, and play like an International."

"All right," said Talbot, laughing. "You may depend on me; but you mustn't expect too much, uncle. I don't want to disappoint you."

"I don't think you'll do that, my boy."

And Squire Lowther, with a nod to his nephew, left him, and went up the steps of the principal's house, and Talbot rejoined his friends.

"Your uncle seems a jolly old boy," remarked Russell. "He has come to see you do wonders with the leather, I can see."

"I'm afraid he will be a severe critic!" laughed Talbot. "He used to play for his county, and he will expect a lot of us."

"Well, at all events, I think we shall make a better show than the New House lot," Russell observed. "We shall beat them."

"I hope we shall."

"There's a weak spot in their second line."

"Kensley?"

"Yes, I think Langley must have allowed himself to be influenced by friendship to put Kensley into the New House team. I don't deny that he has played well in his time; but, between me and you, he smokes too many cigarettes to have much staying

power, and he is off colour; I know some of the others grumbled when he was put in."

Talbot nodded.

"Yes. It's an amiable weakness on Hubert's part; but he really ought to remember that football is not friendship, and that a captain's business is to make his team win irrespective of personal claims. However, it's his affair, not ours."

All Fensley College turned out to watch the game. They had no choice in the matter, for any boy who had not shown up in the match-ground would have found a wraithful prefect on his track. But, as a matter of fact, there was no need to use compulsion. A boy who had even expressed a wish to cut the football match would speedily have been cut himself by everybody else at Fensley.

When the players trooped out into the field, to be greeted with a roar of welcome, there were two who cast their eyes simultaneously towards one spot; and then, as they each observed the action of the other, both coloured and looked another way.

They were the two captains, and the spot to which their glances instinctively turned was where Loren Desmond sat by the side of her father, the Principal of Fensley.

But the girl's eyes were fixed upon Talbot, and she smiled with a bright smile to his glance, never noticing that of Hubert Langley.

Both Talbot and Langley were indeed with the desire



At that moment two figures crossed the quadrangle towards the principal's house. Hubert's eyes glanced more as he recognized Talbot and Loren Desmond.

NEXT WEEK: "THE CARRIAGE DETECTIVE." A Grand Tale of Buxton Blake, Tinker, and Pedro, the Dog Detective. Order Early.

to look well in Louis Deacon's eyes, and each had made up his mind to strain every nerve for victory.

Spacie Lawther, who stood by the doctor's side, looked over the two teams with an approving eye. As an old Fensley boy he took a deep interest and pride in the old school, and the sight of the two contingents prepared for battle made him feel almost a youngster again himself.

"By Jove! I like the look of the lads, doctor!" he exclaimed. "There's plenty of material there for a team to lick St. Freda's."

The doctor adjusted his glasses, and smiled.

"I think you are right, my dear sir. And I am glad of it, for St. Freda's won the last match, and we are very anxious to wipe out the defeat."

"Between those two lads there does not seem a pin to choose," the اسپر continued. "It will be a good game. How do Talbot look?"

Talbot and Langley looked, and Talbot rightly named the اسپر. A shade came over Hubert's face for a moment. He was so eager for victory, for many reasons, that he grudged even that one point in favour of his adversary.

Hobson, who refereed the match, signed to the men to line up, and then, looking at his watch, put the whistle to his lips.

On the School House side Talbot was centre-forward, with Dick Russell as outside right.

The New House captain was also centre of the forward line. Knowles was centre-half.

The captain of Fensley College blew the whistle, and the game commenced.

Langley kicked off, and the kick-off was followed by a plucky attack by the New House, which was met, however, with equal pluck by the School House, and a really thrilling combat commenced.

Twice the forward rushes of the New House brought them close up to the School House goal, only to be baffled and beaten by Talbot and his merry men.

Suddenly, from a thick press of players, Talbot sent the ball out to his outside right, and Russell got away with it, racing down the field like a deer.

Knowles and another New House half were in his path, but at the critical moment he passed to inside right, who got away, and, dodging the backs cleverly, shot for goal.

There was a burst of quick-drawn breath round the match-ground.

All now depended upon the New House goalkeeper, Jones.

But he was equal to the task imposed upon him. Throwing himself forward, he saved his goal by the skin of his teeth, as it were, and the New House boys crowded round the field shouted themselves hoarse.

But it had been a very narrow escape for the New House, and for a minute a shade of anxiety was upon Hubert Langley's face. He cast a quick glance at Knowles, who avoided meeting his eyes. As a matter of fact, Knowles ought to have stopped the ball when Russell passed to the inside right; and his failure to do so showed that he was not up to the play required of him against such foes as the School House fellows.

"You must play up, Knowles," Langley found an opportunity of whispering to him. "Keep an eye especially on Russell and Talbot. They have both marked your bad play."

Knowles nodded, and nodded as he turned his head away.

The game went on, faster and more furious, though with perfect self-control and sportsmanlike temper on both sides.

But Knowles's weakness at centre-half had, as Langley said, been remarked by the School House fellows, and it was not forgotten.

It was getting towards half-time when Talbot rushed the ball towards the New House goal, leaving Langley's forwards helplessly in the rear, Knowles rushing to oppose him. With a quiet glint Talbot played the ball round Knowles, and got past the baffled and confused centre-half and sped on guard.

The New House backs were spending to stop him, but too late, and he fairly slammed the ball into the net, in the eye of Jones, who was not so lucky this time.

"Goal!" roared all Fensley College, with one voice. "Goal!"

Hubert Langley gritted his teeth.

There was too much depending upon the game for him to take it in a sportsmanlike spirit.

Knowles's eyes burned with hatred as he listened to the thunderous cheers that greeted Talbot's exploit. He had more painful things to listen to, too, for his comrades were not backward in expressing their opinion of his play. There was muttered criticism, too, of Langley's action in losing such a leading duffer play for the House.

The teams lined up again, but when the whistle blew for half-time, as more goals had been scored, and the first half ended thus distinctly in favour of the School House.

"He did me that time, chappie," Dick Russell exclaimed to Talbot in the interval. "It was as good as a shove to see you tackle round Knowles like that. I saw Langley look at him as if he could eat him."

"It was his own fault," put in Greene of the Sixth. "What did he want to play Knowles for? What that chap doesn't know about football would fill a big book."

"Talbot calls it an amiable weakness on his part," grinned Russell. "I reckon the rest of the team don't feel very amiable about it. They are all ready to scold Knowles."

"I'm sorry for him," Talbot remarked. "His play was poor, but he's not up to a game like this, and Langley really has only himself to thank."

"You may be sorry for him," replied Russell. "But his feelings towards you are not so kind, I can tell you, and if he gets a chance of a foul in the second half, just you look out!"

Knowles was, indeed, in a temper for almost anything just then.

Hubert Langley had tackled him on the subject, and, though he had allowed friendship to influence him in putting Knowles in, it was in no way friendly strain that he spoke now.

"You gave the School House that goal!" he growled. "I never had any idea that you were in such absolutely rotten form!"

Knowles's eyes glowered. He could not afford to quarrel with Hubert, but he could give him a dig, and he gave it with pleasure. He knew how bitter it was to Hubert to lose his comrade's football praise.

"I couldn't help it," he snapped. "Talbot was too much for me. He plays like a blessed incarnation! There's no standing against him!"

Langley gritted his teeth spitefully.

"You couldn't stand against him, at any rate. The fellows are growling at me for letting you play. I shall get into trouble with Hobson, in all probability. For Heaven's sake, Knowles, play up in the next half! If you don't feel up to the game, my so, and I'll ask Talbot's permission to play a substitute."

Knowles turned pale.

"Yes—you wouldn't put such a slight upon me!" he muttered. "Just think—"

"Well, play up, then," said Hubert briefly. "I have set my heart on winning this game, and you have given the School House a goal. They can't give us a chance to equalize even if they can help it. We may not even be able to make it a draw."

"I'll do my best," said Knowles sulkily. "Talbot shan't get over me a second time."

The evil glint in his little watery eyes as he said this made Hubert look at him swiftly.

"What are you thinking of?" he said sharply. "No tricks, Knowles. I'd rather lose the game than win it by foul play."

"Who's talking about foul play?"

And Knowles turned sharply away. Hubert looked after him, seemingly about to speak again; but he changed his mind, and closed his lips.

He had said, on the instant impulse of his heart, that he would rather lose the match than win by foul play, and he had meant it when he said it. But immediately another and darker thought had flashed into his mind.

Would he really rather lose it? There was so much at stake. His uncle's good opinion, upon which as much might depend, and the admiration of Miss Lorna, which he possessed still more highly; and then his jealousy of Talbot's superiority of play! No! He must and would win, by whatever means! Fairly or foully, he must beat the School House that day, and if Knowles had any idea of—

He would not pursue the reflection, but strove to dismiss the whole matter from his mind. He himself would now

be guilty of anything unpardonable, but Knowles was his own master.

When the teams lined up for the second half, the School House was in high spirits and splendid form, while the New House was equally depressed, but less confident.

The kick-off was followed by an immediate invasion of the New House territory by Talbot and his men, and a determined rush was made for goal, but it was cleverly halted by the New House backs, the ball being transferred by Wilkinson to Langley, who tore away with it in fine style. Away he went, dodging Talbot, who was after him like a shot, and passing to his outside right when the School House halves tackled him; and then racing on, he received back the ball from his wings, and headed for the School House goal.

The School House fellows were parading after him in vain, and, by clever play, he deceived and beat the full backs, and kicked for goal.

A cheer trembled on the lips of the New House partisans, but it died away in a gasp of disappointment.

For the goal had not materialized. Langley had been a little hurried, or, perhaps, over-confident; at all events, the expected goal did not "come off," though it was a near thing.

His failure made Langley turn pale, and for some time after that it was noticed that he appeared to put little heart into the game. He was terribly annoyed and mortified, and he found it hard to conceal it.

He cursed himself, however, as a determined rush of the School House men across on the point of completely overhauling the New House defense, and threw himself into the combat with renewed vigor.

The fight was now getting hotter than ever, all the efforts of the New House to equalize having hitherto failed, but their determination never wavered.

Talbot seemed tireless, looking almost as fresh as paint after all the wear and tear of the game, and Hubert bitterly realized that victory could come in that one way, and he found himself fiercely hoping that something would happen to place Talbot hors de combat, and once he caught Knowles's eye with an instantaneously rising look.

Soon after this Talbot received the ball from Russell's foot, and dashed away, and found himself again opposed by Knowles, and it looked as if the incident of the first half would be repeated, for the School House captain dribbled the ball round the feet of the opposing half-back, and passed him like the wind. And at that moment a roar of surprise and execration rose from every side, as Talbot was seen to fall heavily upon his side. Knowles had deliberately kicked him, with a force that brought him to the earth with a clump; Holston knew his whistle, and the play stopped instantly.

Several fellows ran to pick Talbot up. Langley stood quite still, his eyes upon the ground, for he feared that if he raised them, someone would read in them the fierce indignation he felt. Knowles shifted uneasily, biting his nails, waiting for the storm to burst. It was not long in coming.

"Badly hurt, old man?" cried Dick Russell anxiously, as he helped Talbot to rise.

The captain of the School House was very pale, and his face was contracted with pain. There was a huge bruise heaving on his leg, and as he attempted to stand the agony wrong a faint moan from him. His leg bent under him, and he leaned heavily upon Russell's shoulder.

"I—I'm afraid I shall have to go off," he gasped. "I sha'n't be able to stand for a bit."

"Lean on me, old chap." Then Russell turned a duck, wretched face towards Knowles. "You did, you did that on purpose!"

"No, no," gasped Talbot. "I don't think so, Dick. He got excited, and—"

"I tell you I saw him deliberately kick you—the nasty brute!" cried Russell. "He ought to be kicked off the field."

"It was an accident," stammered Knowles, scowled by the looks of the fellows round him, his own side as well as the School House.

"That's a lie, Knowles!" exclaimed Holston sternly. "You did it on purpose. I saw you as clearly as anyone. You lost your temper, and were guilty of a cowardly assault, and you're not fit to play with a decent team, and you sha'n't either. Get off the field!"

"But—"

"Get off the ground, do you hear?" cried Holston angrily.

"By Jove, if you step to argue with me, I'll show you off myself."

Knowles cast a quick look at Hubert Langley. The New House captain gave a start. He stopped forward.

"Aren't you too hard on Knowles, Holston?" he exclaimed.

"We are all liable to get excited at times, and—"

The captain of Farnley turned upon him like a flash.

"Do you defend Knowles's action, Langley?"

"I didn't see it very clearly," muttered Hubert.

"Then you can leave nothing to say about the matter. I saw it, and so did a good many here, and I say it was a cowardly and brutal action, which would disgrace a heathen slave, and I repeat that if Knowles isn't off this ground in one second, I'll boot him off."

Langley had done all he could, and he said no more.

Knowles, with a black scowl on his face, and bitter rage rankling in his breast, turned and walked off the field, to be greeted by the crowd with a yell of contempt.

The captain of Farnley turned to Talbot.

"You can't go on like that, Talbot," he said. "Help him to the dressing-room, Russell. Both sides will play a man short till the finish."

And under those conditions the match was resumed.

The change was all in favour of the New House, which had lost its worst player, while the School House had lost its best. And it was soon seen that under those new conditions the New House was likely to get level if time allowed.

Unfortunately for Hubert's anticipations, time did not allow. The whistle blew for the cessation of play before any change could be made in the score. The School House, seriously handicapped as they were by the loss of their captain, accidentally defended their goal to the bitter end, and at the close of the game the New House had still scored nothing.

The School House had won the victory—one goal to nil.

And every School House boy, from the biggest to the least, cheered heartily in honor of the victory, the New House fellows joining heartily in the cheering.

"How do you feel, my boy?" Squire Leather asked, as he came in to see Talbot before entering home.

"Oh, yes," said Talbot brightly. "It's only a bruise, though a rather big one, and I shall be as right as rain presently. I am sorry I couldn't finish the match. But they have won without me, so it's all right."

"You mean that you won before you left," grinned the squire. "It was your goal that did the trick."

Talbot laughed.

"I owe that to Knowles. I should never have taken it if a player like Hubert, for instance, had been at centre-half."

"Perhaps; but it is an important point in football to pick out a weak spot in the enemy's line, as credit is due to you in any case," the squire declared. "I am sorry for Hubert; his play was good, though he did make a mess of that goal he might have had. What are they going to do to that fellow who fouled you?"

"Nothing, I suppose. It will be a long time before he is allowed to play again, though. I am afraid Hubert will get into trouble for playing him at all."

"Why did he, when a blind destiny could see that he wasn't fit?"

"He's his chance; and I suppose he didn't like to refuse him."

"A previous charm for my nephew to have," growled the squire. "A cowardly, spiteful wretch, I call him, and not fit for Hubert to chum with. Why, that kick was one of the most deliberate things I ever saw. Well, good-bye, my boy, and remember that I expect you to get into the eleven that goes to conquer St. Fred's."

And shaking hands with his nephew, the good old squire left the room; but before he quitted Farnley he sought his other nephew. He found Hubert Langley looking dull and depressed, and clapped him on the shoulder in his hearty, cordial way that was his like Talbot's.

"Back up, Hubert!" he exclaimed. "One side was bound to lose, you know, and you played a good game. But I hear that that fellow who kicked Harry is a chum of yours."

"Knowles is my friend," said Langley, dropping his eyes.

"If you take my advice, Hubert, you won't let him remain your friend any longer. I could pardon a chap who got excited and played roughly, but that wasn't the case with this fellow Knowles. He had planned that foul kick."

"I suppose Talbot has been running him down to you," said Hubert resentfully. "He hates Cecil Knowles and never will let him alone."

"Harry has said nothing about him except that he is your friend," replied the squire a little sternly, "and I'm sorry to hear you take a tone like that in speaking of your cousin, Hubert."

Langley did not reply.

"I thought you had made up your little differences," continued the squire; "why you should be ill friends passes my comprehension. I think you might be a little more cordial towards Talbot, if only to please me."

"We are not enemies," said Langley, with a short laugh. "But Talbot seems to have set out with the idea of making himself as disagreeable as possible to my friends."

"Cecil Knowles, I presume? You know my opinion of that fellow, Hubert, and I strongly advise you to have nothing more to do with him. He is a bad egg, and he might end by making you as bad as he is."

"I think you're rather hard on poor old Knowles," said Hubert; "I know he was to blame, but this doesn't seem to me the proper time for deserting him, when the whole school is down on him."

"Well, there's something in that," said the squire, modified. "It's right to stick to a claim at such a time, but I wish he was a fellow more worthy of your regard. Well, I must go now."

And the motor buzzed away with the good old squire.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Talbot to the Rescue.

SETH LOWE, the peacher, looked up with heavy eyes at the sound of steps on the footpath. He was spreading on the strip of grass that bordered the path through Fensley Wood, sleeping off the effects of an afternoon spent in drinking at the Golden Lion, and had finally been ejected, his departure accelerated by the landlord's beet. The consciousness of being absolutely "stony" was added to the natural depression following a debauch, and the ruffian was in a mood for any ill deed.

He turned an evil eye upon the person whose light footfalls had caught his ear. A girl was coming up the path. She had not as yet seen the peacher sprawling under the trees. Seth Lowe's eyes glared as he recognized her. It was Lorna Desmond, the daughter of the Principal of Fensley College.

He jerked himself to his feet, and stepped into the path. The girl's glance turned upon his evil face, and a slight nervousness was for a moment visible in her look, but she walked straight on, affecting not to notice him.

The peacher grinned evilly, and slouched into her path. The girl stopped.

"Please let me pass," she said quietly, though her heart was beginning to beat hard.

She could see that the man had been drinking, and there was no one near at hand to help her in case of need, unless a chance passer should be coming through the wood.

"No hurry," said Lowe, coming nearer to her, till the vile fumes of the liquor he had been consuming seemed to fan her face like a breath of plague. "No hurry, missy. Ain't you got a shillin' or two for a poor cove not to broke to the world?"

His evil eyes dwelt upon her, seeming to enjoy her terror. Lorna hastily opened her purse; she would have given all it contained at that instant to be rid of the brute whose presence terrified and sickened her.

The peacher's eyes gleamed greedily at the sight of gold, and he made a sudden snatch at the purse. The chain by which it was secured to the girl's belt did not give way with the jerk, however, and he dragged at it again fiercely.

A shrill scream of fear broke from Lorna as the savage jerk brought her close to the peacher, and, hardly knowing what she did, she pushed him away violently with both hands, tearing herself free, and turning to fly.

With a savage curse the peacher sprang after her, and his grip closed on her shoulder. She cried out again, almost fainting with terror.

At the moment a figure appeared in the path from the direction of the school.

It was that of Hubert Langley.

It was only upon rare occasions that Lorna Desmond met the Fensley boys, the principal being somewhat strict upon that point; but, of course, accidental meetings could not be helped, and Hubert Langley, who had seen Lorna leave the college, had strolled in the same direction, as it were by chance. He intended to overtake her, quite by chance, and accompany her in her walk. Thus he happened to arrive upon the scene as the girl cried out in the grip of the peacher.

Hubert Langley had plenty of faults, but want of pluck was not one of them. He took in the situation at a glance, and rushed towards them.

Without wasting time in words, he tore the ruffian back, forcing him to release Lorna, who tottered away, and fell, almost fainting, against an elm. The force of his thrusts had overthrown the peacher, who staggered and fell heavily.

Hubert sprang to Lorna.

"Are you hurt?" he cried anxiously.

"No—no—no!" The girl gave a cry. "Take care!"

Hubert swung round just in time. The peacher had jumped to his feet, and was springing at him like a tiger.

Hubert faced him grimly, and met him with a drive straight from the shoulder that staggered him, but the peacher recovered himself in a moment.

Five athletes as Hubert was, he was no match for the burly brute, and in spite of a rain of fierce blows, both Lowe pressed the attack, and aimed the plucky lad in an iron grip.

"Now it's my turn," he grated; and with a great exertion of his superior strength he forced Hubert down and began to shower blows upon the helpless youth, dashing his hard knuckles again and again into the boy's face with a Spanish enjoyment.

"Help, help!" screamed Lorna; and her wild cry rang far and wide through the wood.

Hubert struggled desperately in the ruffian's grasp, but he could not free himself. He could not even stop the rain of blows that was dazing him; and the peacher chuckled grimly at his vain efforts.

"Help, help!"

The peacher paused for a moment to turn a black eye at the girl.

"Hold yer tongue, curse you!"

Hubert made a desperate effort. But the knee of the peacher was now upon him, pinning his down, and the great fist, crashing into his face, almost stunned him.

Father, father!

It was the sound of running feet on the path.

And Lorna, who was about to lend her feeble aid to Hubert, turned towards the new-comer, and, to her joy, recognized Talbot.

He was in his running clothes, taking his usual sprint to keep himself in form, and he had heard the girl's cry from afar.

He seemed to come up the path like the wind; and the girl ran to meet him.

"Talbot! Help him!" she cried. "That brute is killing him!"

The peacher looked up snarling, undecided what to do, but he had no time given him to make up his mind.

Talbot was upon him like a tiger.

A swinging blow fell in the evil face sent him rolling away from Hubert, and as he picked himself up, with a howl of rage, Talbot, without waiting for an attack, went for him heavily.

Before he was fairly upon his feet, a second blow slammed him against a tree, dazed and confused, and as he reeled there, Talbot's left swung round, catching him on the side of the head, and sending him heavily to grass.

Lorna Desmond had run at once to Hubert, and was helping him to rise. Hubert's face was bruised and streaked with blood, and he could hardly keep his feet. He was as glad as Lorna of Talbot's timely assistance, and yet, as he saw the down-fall of the peacher at the hands of his cousin, a black bitterness crept into his heart.

He had fallen under Lowe's attack, and had been beaten

like a dog in the presence of the girl he loved. Talbot, like Cesar of old, had but to come and see to conquer.

And Hubert, briefly as he had suffered at the hands of the preacher, would have given words to see Talbot suffer as severe a punishment.

But there was little likelihood of that.

Talbot's vigorous attack had taken half the spirit out of the ruffian, and in any case his science would probably have been more than a match for the brute strength of Seth Lowe. In the manly art of self-defence, as well as in football, Talbot was one of the best at Fensley, and he was quite equal to a task that had proved too much for Hubert's power.

Lowe, however, was not inclined to take his defeat easily, and he came on again with dogged courage. Talbot's blood was up, and he did not spare his assailant. Carefully avoiding getting at hand-grips, when the preacher's superior size and strength would have given him an advantage, he kept his toe at arm's length, and punished him severely. No effort of Lowe could pass his guard, and the preacher's wild ruckus were met by terrible blows which sent him staggering but again.

Lorna and Hubert looked on, and the former's terror changed to a sense of security, and a tremendous admiration, as she saw the manly way in which Talbot handled his lurching antagonist.

At last Seth Lowe, throwing all his strength into a final effort, made a desperate attack, and Talbot met it with a right-hander between the eyes, which stopped him like a bullet, following that up with his left, in a clever uppercut, which caught the preacher on the point of his brittle chin, and fairly lifted him off his feet. He went to the ground with a fearful crash, and did not rise again.

Talbot's flashing eyes fixed upon him.

"Have you had enough, you beast?"

"I'll pay you out for this some day, mark my words," growled the preacher, blinking wildly at his conqueror from his closing eyes. "I'll murder you some day—"

"Get out of my sight before I start on you again."

The preacher picked himself up, dazedly, and slunk away into the wood, muttering savage curses upon the boy who had punished him so terribly.

And Talbot turned to Lorna and Hubert.

"I wish I had come along a bit sooner, old chap," he said. "The beast was hitting you when you were down, and you didn't have a chance. I thank he's sorry for it by this time, though."

"Thanks for helping me," said Hubert, with a gulp.

"Thanks, indeed!" said Lorna. "The man was trying to rob me when Langley came so bravely to my help, and I was afraid the horrible wretch would kill him. You will see him back to the school, Talbot?"

"Certainly, Miss Lorna."

"Thanks, I don't want any help," said Hubert earnestly. "You had better let us see you to the end of the wood, Miss Lorna, in case that scoundrel should return."

The girl assented; and they parted from her in the high road. Talbot would have asked permission to accompany her to the village had he been in a more suitable costume. Hubert, whose face was a mass of bruises, and whose eyes were closing, had no choice but to leave her, and so the couple turned back through the wood together.

They did not speak till they were well out of the girl's sight. Hubert walked with downcast eyes, bitter thoughts in his mind, bitter feelings in his breast. He could not forgive Talbot for having cut so much better a figure in Lorna's eyes, and he was thinking in his angry, suspicious way that Lorna was comparing them in her mind, to his dis-advantage. As a matter of fact, Lorna, while grateful to Talbot, and admiring his prowess, was a good deal more concerned about Hubert, who had suffered so much in her defence. But Langley did not know that.

Talbot, who read in Hubert's looks something of what was in his mind, did not speak, fearing to irritate him further by anything he might say. Hubert was not in a mood to be reasonable.

It was Langley who broke the silence.

"You were having your evening sport," he said. "There's no need for you to dawdle along with me. You had better cut off."

"I don't want to leave you," said Talbot.

"And I don't want to be seen to Fensley like a baby that has had an accident," explained Hubert angrily.

"I'd rather see you as far as Fensley, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind. You were more lucky than I in dealing with that brute, but that's no reason why you should put on airs to me."

"I had no intention of putting on airs," said Talbot quietly. "I think you might sometimes give me credit for a little decent feeling, Hubert, even if you are determined to dislike me. But I won't force my presence upon you. Good-bye."

He quickened his pace. But he knew that the preacher might still be lurking in the wood, and he did not go far ahead until Hubert was in the open fields. Then he sprinted on to the college at a good pace.

Hubert tramped on doggedly. He was dazed, and feeling played out, and one long he would have been glad of the assistance his money pride had rejected. Luckily, Knowles spotted him in the fields, and went to meet him.

He looked at Hubert in amazement as he came closer.

"Great pip, Hubert! what have you been doing?" he exclaimed. Then a gleam came into his eyes. He had seen Talbot come from the same direction as Hubert. "Have you been fighting with Talbot in the wood?"

He could hardly hide his satisfaction at the thought. He would have been intensely glad to see such an irreparable breach between the enemies.

Langley shook his head impatiently.

"No!"

"What has happened, then? Here, take my arm. You've been slogging with somebody, and somebody who could hit hard, too."

"It was Lowe, the preacher."

Knowles started.

"Seth Lowe?"

"Yes, the fellow you were talking to the other day," said Langley, with a quick look at his companion.

"What is your connection with him, Cecil?"

"What connection should I have with a character like that?" said Knowles severely. "What nonsense, Hubert. But why did he go for you? Was he drunk?"

"He had been drinking, I believe. He tried to rob Miss Desmond, and I interfered."

"That was plucky of you, I must say. And Talbot—"

"Talbot helped me," said Hubert curtly.

He did not pursue the subject.

"I suppose you'll speak to the doctor about this," Knowles remarked in a thoughtful way, as they walked on to the school.

"Of course, I shall have to give an explanation of the state of my face, and of course, I want the ruffian sent to prison. He's a danger to the neighbourhood, and a few months on the treadmill will do him good. He will be charged with attempted robbery. I'm sorry if he's a friend of yours, Knowles," added Langley, with a grin.

Knowles bit his lip.

"What not?" he said irritably. "How could that nephew be charged by a friend of mine? If he goes to prison it will serve him jolly well right!"

But there were very different thoughts in Cecil Knowles's mind—thoughts which he took care not to communicate to his chum.

ON SALE TO-DAY!

PART I OF

"THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL."

The Greatest Work dealing with our Great Winter Pastime ever issued.

Price 6d., Everywhere.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Question of the Eleven—Langley's Disappointment—The Quarrel.

THE indignation of the doctor knew no bounds when he heard of the happening in Furnley Wood, and he lost no time in communicating with the police-inspector Stripe, of Fersley, called at the school, and interviewed Talbot and Langley, and promised the doctor the speedy arrest of the ruffian poacher.

It was not so good as his word, however.

Either Seth Lowe anticipated the consequences of his conduct, or somebody had given him a friendly hint to keep out of the way. After walking to the school that evening with Hubert, Knowles had gone off on a long stroll by himself, and came in late for calling-over. He said nothing of what he had seen, nor did Hubert ask him any questions, but the latter could not help an uneasy suspicion arising in his mind. He knew that Knowles had some connection with the rascally poacher, though his claim showed no desire to take him into his confidence upon that subject. It looked to him as if Knowles had gone to see Lowe and warn him what he had to expect.

At all events, Lowe was not found, in spite of all the industrious efforts of Inspector Stripe. His usual haunts knew him no more, and the village was glad to be rid of him. Hubert did not speak to Knowles about him. He thought it best, upon the whole, to let that topic alone.

And, as a matter of fact, he had plenty of other things to think of just now. The time of the St. Freda's match was approaching, and the burning question at Fersley was the composition of the eleven, that was to go to St. Freda's and kick the "Salute" in their own territory. St. Freda's was a neighbouring college, not more than three miles from Fersley, and the rivalry between the two schools in matters of sport had been keen from old.

There were two matches pending, the first to be fought out on the St. Freda's ground, the second at home. Last season the two matches had resulted in—first, a draw; second, a victory for the Salute. This year all Fersley was eager to wipe out the defeat, and Hubert was determined to have no score returned in order to bring about that desirable consummation. His task was no easy one.

There were some first-class footballers at Fersley, and a still larger number who thought themselves first-class, and wanted a lot of convincing that they were not good enough to play St. Freda's.

But Hubert's motto was that football was not friendship, and he would have turned his own brother out, or himself for that matter, if he could have strengthened the team thereby. And so his claims, who had hoped a good deal from his goodnature, and the Sixth fellows, who thought they ought to be preferred to Fifth-formers, found themselves woefully disappointed, Hubert grimly going his own way, picking out the best material for the eleven wherever he could find it.

Upon the whole, however, he gave satisfaction, for the Fersley fellows were anxious, above all, for victory, and they knew they could depend upon Hubert to organize it. So those who felt a little sore at being neglected consoled themselves with the reflection that others were left out also, and that probably, after all, old Hubert knew what he was about, Knowles at all was the anxiety of Hubert Langley.

He had no many reasons for wishing to get into the eleven that the thought of being excluded filled him with sudden fury. And this all the more because it was becoming certain that Talbot would be in the team.

Hubert was openly enthusiastic about Talbot's football, and, indeed, Harry showed splendid form in the trial matches at Fersley. Hubert was a good and useful player, but he was not up to Talbot's form; in fact, he was not a patch upon his cousin. The bitterness which preyed upon his spirit certainly did not improve his form, or increase his chance of gaining his heart's desire.

He was anxious, however, in the football field, and for a time he was considered to have a good chance. Talbot sincerely hoped that he would be in the team, but Hubert was far from giving him credit for his good wishes. Judging his cousin by his own feelings, he suspected that his opinion

would afford Talbot a secret satisfaction, and that was the bitterest thought of all.

More than once, in these days, he was on the point of an open rupture with Talbot, for his jealousy and bitterness grew more keen every day. Talbot, however, was careful to avoid giving him the least cause for a quarrel, and, in fact, avoided him as much as he could. He had done his best to be friendly, but he had failed, and it is possible that he was getting a little out of patience with Hubert's toothy temper.

"That chap will have a row with you if you give him half a chance," Dick Russell remarked to his cousin. "He's as jealous as a cat, and if he is left out of the eleven there will be a squall."

Talbot looked deeply troubled.

"I hope Hubert will put him in," he said.

"Not much chance of that," replied Russell, with a shake of the head. "As a matter of fact, I heard Hubert say to George yesterday that Langley would make a decent reserve to take to St. Freda's, and that looks as if he isn't going to the eleven, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so. It will be a bitter disappointment for him. He seems to have set his heart upon it."

"Well, there will be a good many more disappointed," Russell remarked; "Langley can't complain. He will be in the same boat with a dozen others. But I believe your getting in will worry him more than his getting left out."

Talbot nodded.

"Very likely. I don't see why he should cherish such bitter feelings towards me; I've done my level best to be friendly."

"I fancy it's Knowles at the bottom of it. That fellow is never happy unless he's making mischief somehow or other," exclaimed Russell. "It's a bit of luck that he, at any rate, isn't coming to St. Freda's."

"All I hope is that he will not be able to egg on Hubert into quarrelling with me," Talbot remarked. "I am pretty sure that he will do it if he can."

"Well, if he does, you had better give Langley a good talking, and take some of the confounded nonsense out of him," growled Russell.

"Don't talk like that, Dick," said Talbot, looking pained. "Nothing in the world will ever induce me to go so far as that, whatever Langley says or does."

Russell gave a snort of glee.

"You mayn't have any choice in the matter," he said.

And the subject dropped.

It was the next evening that Cecil Knowles came into Langley's study with the air of one who had news to tell.

Langley had been rather neglecting his studies of late in his anxiety to improve his form at foster, and he was now deep in Cicero, trying to make up for lost time. There had been a meeting of the football committee in Hubert's study.

"They?" exclaimed Knowles, as he looked in.

Langley looked at him and pushed his books away.

"What is it?"

"I don't want to interrupt you."

"That's all right. I'm about sick of this confounded Latin. You have something to tell me. What is it?"

Knowles came in and closed the door.

"I'm afraid it won't be pleasant news, Hubert, old fellow."

A steady glitter came into Langley's eyes. He could guess now what it was.

"You may as well cut with it."

"Well, the committee's decided about Talbot. Hubert had made up his mind about it. He's in the eleven."

"You're sure of that?"

"I asked Hubert to make sure."

Langley rose from the table, looking deeply disturbed. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he moved restlessly about the room. It seemed as if he could not keep still. Knowles watched him with a covert look. Hubert did not speak for some minutes.

"Do you know anything about the rest of the team?" he asked at last, without looking at Knowles. "Have they decided about the lot?"

"I believe so."

Langley raised his head quickly.

"Can't you see that this is torture to me?" he cried hoarsely. "Tell me whether I am in the team or not, can't you?"

"I would, old fellow, if I knew, but I don't. I heard Hubert

say that he wanted to speak to you, but whether it's to tell you you're in, or not in, I really don't know."

"He wants to speak to me?"
 "I heard him say so to Greene."
 "Then I may as well go to him," said Langley, trying to speak calmly. "I'd rather know what his decision is at once, if he's made up his mind."

Knobbs nodded.
 "I'll smoke a cig, and wait for you here," he said. Hubert hurried from the study.
 The information imparted by Knobbs had made him too anxious to rest, and he was feverishly anxious to know the worst.

The worst, he felt it would be; for a long time his hopes of getting into the eleven had been dwindling.
 He tapped at the door of Hubert's study, under which the light gleamed, showing that the captain of Fenley was there.

"Come in!" called out Hubert's deep voice.
 Langley made an effort to pull himself together, and entered.

The captain gave him a friendly nod.
 "Hallo, you're the chap I wanted to see?"
 "You've got news for me?" muttered Langley.
 Hubert gave him a quick look.
 "Not what you're thinking of, I'm afraid," he replied;
 "I know it will be a disappointment to you, Langley, but it's the same with a lot of others. You must remember—"

Langley no longer heard him.
 It was all over, then! He was not to have his cap, and Talbot had got his! He turned pale with the rancor of passion in his breast.

"I wanted to tell you," continued Hubert, after a pause, during which he looked anxiously at Langley, "that I like your play, and if you are left out, it's simply because in the opinion of the committee and of myself, there is better material elsewhere. But, as I said, I like your play, and I have fixed on you as a reserve to give rise to St. Freda's in case of accident. Outside the eleven as at present constituted, you are, I believe, our best man, and we may want a reserve."
 Langley nodded.

It was a scrap of consolation, but only a scrap. What accident could possibly happen that would give him a chance to play as a substitute? The fellows who had got their caps would be too careful to do anything to risk losing them.

All right, Hubert. Thanks," he said. "Good-night! I've some construing I must do to-night."
 And he hastily quitted the captain's room.
 He returned to his own study, but his thoughts were very far from construing. He shut the door with a snap, and threw himself into a chair.

Knobbs threw away the stump of his cigarette, and glanced at him inquiringly.
 "Well, what had Hubert to say?"
 "I'm out of it, that's all," said Langley, with a wretched laugh. "I knew as much before I went to him, for that matter."

"It's bad luck," said Knobbs. "Hubert never simply informed with Talbot. I can't see that his play is so wonderful! But it's no good saying that to Hubert. He listens to everything Talbot says as if the fellow were an oracle, and takes his advice about everything."

Hubert's eyes gleamed suddenly.
 "Take his advice!" he exclaimed.

"Well, so the fellows say, and it looks like it. Talbot seemed mighty confident that his chum Russell would be in the eleven, and he is in. They are the only Fifth-formers in it, excepting Talbot. Then Talbot himself that Greene would be in, and isn't he? It seems to me that Talbot simply leads Hubert by the nose."

Hubert Langley's face set grim and hard.
 "I shouldn't wonder," he said slowly, "and if it were the case, it would be easy to guess to whom I owe my exclusion. Talbot would not say a good word for me." He ground his teeth. "He would be more likely to do everything in his power to keep me out."
 "He has a good deal at stake," Knobbs remarked, in a thoughtful way. "Squire Lovelock simply has football on the brain, and if Talbot plays against St. Freda's, and helps to beat them, it may mean a lot to him. Of course, he has calculated upon that."

"Of course he has," said Hubert, with rising rage, "the mean, coward!"

He rose hastily from his seat.
 "I say," said Knobbs warningly, "don't be hasty, you know. Between ourselves, you know very well that Talbot has done you an ill turn, and that you might have been in the eleven but for him. But Hubert's too popular for anything to be said against him, and any talk about favoritism would only get you into a row, without doing any good."

"I know that," said Hubert, with a bitter smile. "He has overreached me all round. But I don't see why I should take it lying down. Come with me, Cecil. I can't do any more of that rotten Latin to-night!"

Talbot was in the common-rooms, talking to Russell and Tovey, when Hubert and Knobbs entered. Talbot was in high spirits. He had received the news that his inclusion in the team had been definitely decided on, and he was naturally very gratified. He did not know yet for certain that Hubert would not play, though there was not much doubt upon that point.

He glanced up as Hubert passed close to him, struck by the unusual pallor of his cousin's face. Hubert caught his look, and to his distorted imagination there seemed to be triumph in it.

He stopped, looking Talbot full in the face, with a bitter sneer upon his lips.
 "Well, are you satisfied now?" he exclaimed.

His look and tone drew all eyes upon him. There was a momentary hush among the Fifth-formers in the room, and glances were exchanged full of significance. It was pretty certain that a row was in the wind.

"I don't understand you," said Talbot quietly. "I am glad to be put in the eleven, of course, if that is what you mean."

"Not so glad to be in yourself, as to know that I am left out, I suppose!"

"I did not know that you were left out."

"You did not know!"

"Not until this moment."

"It is a lie!"

The stillness was death-like then.
 Everyone wondered what Talbot would do. He was about the last fellow at Fenley to be given the lie with impunity.

He turned deadly pale, and for a moment his hands clattered convulsively.

For that moment the collectors waited tensely for what would come.

And then there was a low murmur as Talbot turned quietly away, without making any reply to the taunt.

Hubert broke in a mocking laugh.
 "Forward!"

Talbot swung round as if electrified at that word.
 "Do you know what you are saying?" he said thickly.

"Are you mad, Hubert?"

The bitter sneer was still on Hubert's face. The sight of it sent the blood coursing madly through Talbot's veins. He was seized with an almost irresistible desire to plant his clenched fist full in the sneering face. But with a giant effort of will he still controlled himself.

"You are excited now," he said, with strange quietness; "you will be sorry for this to-morrow, Hubert."

"I shall not be sorry for telling you what I think of you, and that I have discovered all your underhand dealings, and that I despise you, Harry Talbot!"

Talbot bit his lip till the blood came.

"You swindle me, Hubert. But you shall not make me quarrel with you. I do not think you would speak like that if you were calm."

And he made a step back. But his calmness, his perfect government of his temper, only added to Hubert's fury. Taking a quick step forward, he struck Talbot in the face with his open hand.

"Is that enough for you?" he hissed.

Talbot staggered back. The mark of the blow seemed to burn like fire on his deadly pale cheek. The moment the blow was struck, Dick Russell sprang forward. Hubert staggered under a fierce blow from Talbot's elbow.

"You said!" cried Russell fiercely. Then he turned to Talbot.
 "Harry, old man, you must fight him now, and give him the thrashing he deserves!"

Talbot recovered himself. He was at the end of his endurance, and he nodded a quiet assent to Russell.

Robert looked as if he would spring upon the boy who had struck him, but he restrained himself, and glanced at Talbot with a hostile smile.

"Are you going to leave it to your chum to fight your battles?" he asked.

"No," said Talbot, in a low voice, "you have incited me without provocation, Hubert Langley. I have stood all I intend to stand from you. Meet me to-morrow by the backhouse, and I will return that blow with interest!"

"I won't fail you," said Hubert; and he walked away with Knowles.

"You're in for it now, old chap," said Russell, linking his arm in Talbot's; "you did more than any other chap would have done to avoid a row, and now all that remains is to give that howler a thundering good hiding to teach him manners!"

And Talbot nodded, but his face was very gloomy.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Fight.

THE next day the quarrel between Talbot and Langley was the chief topic in the Fifth Form at Fensley. Even the approaching match with St. Freda's for the time sank into secondary importance.

The assault which had been given precluded the possibility of any compromise, and it was certain that a fight must take place, and from the characters of the two fellows, it was equally certain that the fight would be a hard-contested one and a sight to be remembered at Fensley.

The general opinion was in favour of Talbot, but Hubert's pluck and dogged determination were well known, and their form-dollars looked forward to a mill of unusually thrilling interest.

Talbot, to whom the whole affair was gall and wormwood, would have given a good deal to keep the encounter quiet, and to avoid the presence of a crowd; but that was impossible. The quarrel had been so public that it was hopeless to think of keeping the fight private, pretty nearly every fellow in the Fifth having made up his mind to be a witness of it.

Russell, who was Talbot's second, made arrangements with Knowles, who acted for Hubert Langley. Many curious inquiries came to Russell, wanting to know all about it, and Talbot's chum, knowing his principal's desire on the subject, politely told them to go and eat cake. Whereupon they applied to Knowles, who made no secret of the arrangements. It was sufficient for him to know that Talbot desired the secret to be kept to make him tell everyone who asked.

Consequently, after school was dismissed that evening, the Fifth-formers might have been seen—and, as a matter of fact, were seen—wandering their way down to the river in twos and threes and fours, having been apprised by Knowles of the exact spot and time chosen for the encounter.

Near the school backhouse was a spot, sheltered by trees, where fights of this kind were usually fought out by the boys of Fensley. It had the advantage of being secluded, any inopportune visit of a master being very unlikely.

Langley and Knowles were already on the spot when Talbot came down from the school with his chum. Talbot's face was grave and calm. He was, as Russell had said, "in for it now," and he had made up his mind to it.

George, of the Sixth, had constituted himself referee, with a voice of authority he cleared back the crowded Fifth-formers, and formed a ring for the combatants. The boys stood round in a circle, looking on with cheerful anticipation. For a moment Talbot's brows gave Knowles a quick look. He did not speak, however.

The adversaries stripped and tied the line. The usual preliminary of shaking hands was omitted, Hubert relying with an impatient shake of the head.

The fight commenced, amid a breathless hush of the crowd.

Russell watched his chum narrowly. He was uneasy what Talbot might do. He would not, of course, allow himself to be defeated if he could help it, but he was very

likely to try to spare his opponent and place himself at a disadvantage which might spell disaster.

And certainly in the first round Talbot acted wholly upon the defensive. More than once Russell, watching, saw an opening of which his principal did not take advantage. Hubert, however, never dreamed of placing himself under any restrictions. He was fighting for victory, far revenge for fancied wrongs, and he threw his whole soul into the contest.

The natural result followed. A half-hearted combatant, even if superior in strength and skill, will not stand long against a man in deadly determined earnest. Russell clinked his teeth together angrily as Talbot reeled back under a sudden assault, Hubert following up a right-hander with an upper-cut from his left, which drove Talbot fairly to the edge of the ring, and laid him in a heap there.

Hubert stopped back, his eyes glittering with triumph, and Russell picked up his chief and sprang his heated, bruised face.

"You see!" he said. "You howling see!"

Talbot stared at him.

"Now, draw it mild, old chap!" he expostulated.

"You see!" repeated Russell, with emphasis. "You gave that round away. Twice at least you could have dogged him, and you let him go. He has paid you as you deserve for it. Do you want to be licked?"

"He couldn't lick me, Dick. Without bragging, he is not up to a mill with me," Talbot replied. "You know that as well as I do."

"Yes, under ordinary conditions; but if you don't put some spirit into it he will knock the marbles out of you, and when you begin to get groggy he will go in and win," growled Russell. "You see how that round ended. A couple more like it will put you into a state so that a lad out of the Fourth Form could walk over you."

"Perhaps you're right, Dick. I'll back up. After all, perhaps it will be better to have the thing short and sharp, and get it over."

"I should think so."

Talbot faced his adversary again.

Hubert had been hardly touched in the first round, and Talbot's face showed plainly the traces of the two heavy blows he had received. Opinion, which had been almost wholly in favour of Talbot, was now round. Knowles's little fatty eyes were glittering with a newborn hope. He had never believed it possible for his chum to lick Talbot, though that had not prevented him from egging on Hubert to the fight. But now for the first time he began to fancy that the fight might end in the defeat of the boy he hated.

But a change came o'er the spirit of his dreams as the second round progressed.

Talbot had told Russell that he would back up, and he did back up, with a vengeance.

Hubert tried his former tactics, pressing Talbot hard, but this time he caught a Tartar. Talbot flinched, and Hubert fell blindly into the trap, and then, clump, clump went Talbot's right and left on his chest, followed by clump, clump again on his jaw as he staggered back, facing his guard, and down he went on his back, with a shock that shook all the breath out of his body.

He rose slowly and dimly with Knowles's help.

"That was bad," said Knowles, as he made a knee for his chest. "You will have to look out for his tricks, Hubert. How do you feel?"

"All right," replied Hubert doggedly.

He was far from feeling all right, but he regarded Talbot's success as a fluke, and refused to admit the idea that he had met his master.

Russell thumped his principal on the back.

"Satisfied now?" said Talbot.

"Well, that was better. A couple more like that and all will be over, bar shouting."

"I don't know. What Langley lacks in science he makes up in pluck. He is in deadly earnest. He will fight till he can't keep his feet."

The third round began.

Hubert was more cautious this time, and for a time there was nothing but sparring, and some sarcastic fellows standing round began to express satirical fears that they would be late for sailing-over if they stayed to see the finish, calling-over being still nearly two hours distant.

These remarks, and others like them, had set the slightest

effect upon Talbot, but they irritated the sensitive Hubert to rashness, and he began to use more force and less caution. And at last, seeing an opening, he rushed in, only to fall into a trap as before, his blow being swept up by Talbot's perfect guard, and Talbot's right coming into contact with his nose like a lump of iron.

There was a spurt of blood from the injured organ, and Hubert staggered, and Talbot stepped back instead of following up his advantage. His intention, however, was lost upon his maddest antagonist. Hubert sprang at him like a tiger, striking ferociously. It was only, however, to receive a second blow upon the same spot, which sent him to grass.

Knock's face was downward as he gave his knee to his dazed chief, and sponged away the blood flowing freely from his nose. His head hope of victory was quite gone now.

"Are you going on?" he asked.
 "Going on?" said Hubert ferociously. "Of course."
 "Well?"
 "I shall fight till I drop."
 "Right you are."
 "Time!" said Greene.

Hubert took the line again, but he was a little unsteady. He was getting decidedly groggy, and it was only the force, determined will within that enabled him to go on. Hubert was settling in his breast, his heart was throbbing with rage. He began to realize that Talbot had been only playing with him in the first round, and the thought added to his fury. Defeat loomed blackly before him, but he would not give in. He fought on with dogged pluck.

Talbot was heart-sick of it all. Gladly he would have ended, but while Hubert was able to go on he had no choice in the matter.

The fourth round went on, the fighting becoming hard and close, and both combatants receiving a pretty severe punishment. It ended in Hubert going down heavily under a terrible drive from Talbot's right.

But he came up gamely when time was called. It had now become clear to all that he had no chance, but he would not admit it himself. But when time was called for the fifth round Talbot spoke.

"Have I this gone the enough?" he said quietly.
 "Are you able to go on?" answered Hubert.
 Talbot shrugged his shoulders, and the round commenced. It did not last long.

Hubert was, so to speak, on his last legs. He was sinking with pain and exhaustion, and his sight was clouded. His attack was feeble, and his guard ineffective.

Talbot simply played with him, and at length Hubert went down again heavily. He groaned when Knock's hand wiped his up.

"You can't go on," said Knock, as he sat Hubert on his knee and sponged the cool water over his burning, bruised face. "You must check it up, Hubert."

Langley muttered a curse.
 "I will go on!"
 "Time!"

Langley staggered to his feet. But he was too far gone, and as he took a step towards his antagonist he fell again from sheer exhaustion.

"Time!"
 "We are done," said Knock.
 He helped Hubert up again. The defeated fifth-former stood leaning heavily upon his shoulder, unable to stand without assistance.

Talbot came towards him, holding out his hand.
 "Give us your fist, old fellow!"
 Hubert deliberately put his hands in his pockets.
 Talbot flushed, and turned away. Some of the boys heard Hubert, who mounted darkly, and walked away slowly, leaning upon Knock. The crowd broke up, discussing the fight with eager interest.

Talbot walked back to the school with Russell. He was dazed and gloomy. His victory afforded him no satisfaction. He realized that the breach between himself and Hubert was now too deep ever to be bridged. He could only hope that the news of the fight would not reach the square.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Attack of the Peacher—Seth Lowe Gets His Deserts.

HUBERT LANGLEY and Knock sat in the former's study. Hubert had been bathing his face, trying to remove as far as possible the traces of the combat behind the bathhouse. He looked much the better for his abstinence; but nothing could hide the black bruises, the dark rings round his eyes, and the swelling of his nose. He cursed angrily as he looked at his reflection in the glass.

There was a peculiar expression upon Knock's face. He seemed to have been lost in thought for some time.

Hubert threw himself into his chair and looked at his elbow. He was swollen and savage, and inclined to quarrel with anyone near him.

"So that's the end," he said, between his teeth—"he gets over me in everything! Oh, if I could only think of some plan of avenging myself!"

Knock's eyes glowered. He saw that Hubert was in the right mood for what he had to suggest.

"Do you mean that?" he said quickly.
 Hubert glared at him.
 "Mean it? Of course!"
 "A plan might be found," said Knock carelessly.
 "Hang your beating about the bush!" exclaimed Hubert impatiently. "If you've got anything to say, say it."
 "All right, keep your word on!" said Knock. "The Ferrier eleven is going to St. Freda's on Wednesday."
 "I know that."
 "And Talbot is going with them."
 "Well?"

"Suppose," said Knock, lowering his voice and leaning towards Hubert—"suppose he were disappointed?"
 Hubert stared.
 "What not? How could he be disappointed?"
 "Things might happen to prevent his going," said Knock, with an assumption of carelessness. "He might have an accident."

"An accident?" repeated Hubert slowly. The other's meaning began to dawn upon him, and he changed colour for a moment. "What kind of an accident, Cecil?"

Time had been when three words of indignation would have leaped to Hubert Langley's lips at such a proposition. That time was past, however. Hevy and hatred had so seared and warped his nature that he was ready for almost anything which would bring about the downfall of the object of his unreasonable anger. Knock knew his man.

"First of all," said Knock, "what are your ideas upon the subject? Would you like to prevent Talbot playing in the match?"

"I would give a year of my life to effect it," said Hubert, between his teeth; "but I don't see how it is to be done."
 "I think it would be easy. And you must remember, too, that if Talbot is not fit on the day of the match, Hubert will have to play a substitute. And you know whom he has selected as a reserve."
 Hubert's eyes glowered.
 "Myself."

His look became keen, eager. The thought had not occurred to him before; it never would have occurred to him without Knock's insidious suggestion, but now that it had come it seemed to take possession of him. All was not yet lost.

"Go on," he said, breathing hard—"go on, Cecil!"
 Then a sudden, chilling thought occurred to him. "But I shall be suspected—after what has happened to-day."
 "You won't be suspected," said Knock. "I have taken all that into consideration."

"Well, what is your plan?"
 "You remember what happened the other day in Ferrier Wood?"

Langley's brow clouded.
 "Yes. What has that to do with it?"
 "A good deal. Talbot handled Seth Lowe in a way that perhaps he not likely either to forget or to forgive. If Talbot fell in his way I should be sorry for him, if Seth got a chance to take his measure."

"But Lowe is gone; he hasn't been seen in Ferriby or the neighbourhood since that affair."

Knowles grinned.

"I dare say he is not far away," he said.

Hubert started.

"You know where he is?"

"Perhaps I do," said Knowles coolly. "But that's neither here nor there. The question is, when Lowe is able to be of use to us, and to do the very work we want done, shall we employ him?"

"He is no match for Talbot," said Hubert wearily. "Talbot knocked him into a cocked hat the other day."

"He won't have a chance to do it again. Both will be more cautious when his chance comes next time. Talbot's legs won't be of much use against a thick corked cudgel. What do you think?"

"He must not be much—much hurt!" explained Hubert, turning pale. "In Heaven's name, Knowles, what have you got in your head?"

"Nothing more than you have," replied Knowles easily. "Don't be alarmed; both Lowe is as good as his neck as anybody, and he will think twice before he puts it in danger of a noose. Don't be an ass, Hubert! The idea is to prevent Talbot playing St. Freda's, and nothing more. It will be easy to make sure that he is not fit without doing him any real injury."

"I suppose so. But Lowe, although he hates Talbot, will not do all that for nothing."

"You can't expect him to," said Knowles. "But he is so eager for revenge that he won't want a very great inducement. I think a couple of sovereigns will induce him to do exactly as we want. I can find one of these."

"I can find the money. That is nothing. But how—how are we to place Talbot so—so—"

Hubert faltered.

"I will see Lowe and settle that with him. I can easily let him know when he will have his chance. You see, it's quite impossible that either you or I should be suspected. Talbot will probably not see who attacks him; but if it gets out who his assailant is, then it will naturally be supposed that both Lowe did it for revenge for the way Talbot handled him the other day."

Hubert exhaled. The plotter, with Machiavellian ingenuity, seemed to have left no single point unguarded.

"It's settled, then?" said Knowles, looking at him.

"You've made up your mind?"

Hubert drew a deep breath.

"Yes."

And Knowles, after a few more words, left the room. Hubert was glad for him to go. He wanted to be alone just then.

He mused about continually, his brain in a whirl.

His dimly recalled that he was bringing a party to a place of black villainy—that if this plan were carried out he would never have a right to look honest boys in the face again. His better nature shrank from it. Several times he made a step towards the door, to call to Knowles to tell him that he had changed his mind.

As many times he turned back again, some thought rising in his mind to check the impulse. He thought of Talbot, lying bruised and bleeding under the peacher's cudgel, and shuddered at the picture. But then he thought of his playing St. Freda's, of his getting goals for Ferriby, of his schoolboys' cheering and Squire Lowther's congratulations, and the soft admiration beaming from Lorea Demond's dark eyes, and his heart hardened again.

If only there had been some other way!

But there was no other way. Knowles's plan was too easy one that could prevent Talbot's triumph.

And then Hubert reflected upon the other results of the plot. With Talbot left out he himself would certainly play, and he would have every opportunity to distinguish himself. What might not be the outcome of that?

Then, again, the picture of the dark wood, of the brutal peacher bending over his victim, of the murderous cudgel rising and falling, rushed into his mind, and he almost cried out with the horror of it.

"No, no! Never!"

His brain seemed to be burning. He went to the window and threw it open and beamed out.

It was getting dark in the old quadrangle. The chill November wind, which had stripped the old sines of their

leaves, lashed his brow with a cooling breath, and he grew calmer.

"No, I will speak to Knowles. It shall not be done!"

At that moment two figures crossed the quadrangle towards the principal's house. Hubert's eyes glanced over as he recognized Talbot and Lorea Demond.

The faint sound of Lorea's voice came to him, but he could not distinguish her words. But he heard Talbot's reply.

"I shall play so much better with you looking on."

Hubert Langley turned back into his room, a riot of rage and hate and jealousy in his heart.

He had often suspected that Lorea showed to Talbot more than the calm, quiet cordiality she extended to him, and he felt assured of it now. It was the last straw.

His doubts, his brief repentance, were gone—gone, not to return. From that moment his resolution did not falter. Talbot was far from dreaming of the dark thoughts that filled Hubert's mind.

The crowd avoided him, and when they were compelled to meet in class Talbot moderately kept his eye from Talbot's direction. But, considering what had passed between them, this was only natural, and it betrayed nothing.

Although the quarrel with Hubert worried Talbot somewhat, he had little time in those days to give thought to it. The close approach of the St. Freda's match absorbed his attention. He had been chosen as one of the representatives of Ferriby, and it was his business to keep himself in the pink of condition. This was not a hard task for one who loved football with his whole soul. It took up his time and attention, and saved him from mental worries.

And his form delighted Heblton, who more than once said that Talbot was the best footballer in the team, not excepting himself. And praise from the captain of Ferriby was praise indeed. It naturally gratified Talbot, and spurred him on to greater efforts. But every word of praise to him was bitterness itself to Hubert Langley.

Talbot's place in the team was inside right. Heblton had the centre place. During the days preceding the St. Freda's meeting the eleven met several sides picked from the Fifth and Sixth Forms, easily defeating them every time. Langley usually captained the sides against them, and his play more than once drew approving words from Heblton. There was not the least doubt that if a vacancy should occur in the representative team it would be given to Langley. And more than once Hubert determined that the vacancy should occur.

For a couple of days Knowles did not refer to the subject discussed in the study. If he was taking any steps in the matter he kept his own counsel. Hubert, anxious as he was, had a morbid dread of hearing any details of the plot. He was content, more than content, to leave it all to Knowles.

It was on the Monday before the match that he first referred to the matter.

"If there should be any unusual occurrence to-day, Hubert, keep an eye on your goal, and don't give yourself away," he drawled.

Hubert started, and looked at him.

But he checked his impulse, and asked no questions.

"All right," he said shortly.

And no more was said.

It was a fine, clear day, though cold. After afternoon school, Talbot left Ferriby and went down the lane towards the village with his light, springy stool. Hubert, who was looking out of his study window, saw him pass the gates, and turned pale. He knew that Knowles must have learned of his intention by some eavesdropping, and had made his arrangements accordingly.

Talbot went down the lane as far as the stile which gave access to the footpath through Ferriby Wood. He walked lightly over it. The footpath saved more than half a mile, and it was always used by the Ferriby boys.

He went on, tramping through the thick carpet of dead, damp leaves, without a thought of danger. He had followed the same path a hundred times before, and he had almost forgotten the existence of both Lorea. He had nearly reached the spot where his encounter with the peacher had taken place, when a rustle in the wood made him glance aside.

The stripping of the branches by the November winds enabled him to see deeper into the wood. He noticed with a start as he recognized old Caleb Carthen, who had looked

up at his approach from his occupation of gathering fallen boughe for Greenwood.

Old Caleb's eye as he saw who it was, and came hissing towards Talbot, signing to him to stop. Talbot good-naturedly halted.

"Good-day, Caleb!"

"Good-day, Master Talbot! Wait a minute. Old Caleb's got something to say to you."

"Go ahead," said Talbot, with a smile.

"I've heard about the way you thrashed Seth Lowe," said the old man, in a lowered voice, and with a cautious glance round. "They've told me about it."

"Yes?" said Talbot inquiringly.

"You keep an eye open for him," continued Caleb impressively. "He will never forget it. Don't give him a chance to take advantage of you."

"Oh, I'll keep my eye open, Caleb!" said Talbot. "But the fellow has cleared out of Farnley, you know. The police have been looking for him."

"The old man's look becomes yet more mysterious."

"The police don't know so much as old Caleb," he said.

"Do you mean that he hasn't gone?" asked Talbot, with some interest.

"Caleb nodded.

"How you seem him?"

"In this wood. He has been hiding near Farnley all the time. I've seen him more than once. I saw him this morning."

"This morning?" exclaimed Talbot, with a start. "In Farnley Wood?"

The old man nodded and chuckled, evidently pleased with the effect of his words. But he soon looked round again cautiously, as if in fear.

"Don't tell anybody I said so. Lowe would kill me. There's nobody to protect old Caleb. He would kill me if he knew that I had warned you."

"Thanks, Caleb!" said Talbot. "I am very grateful to you for putting me on my guard. I shall keep a look-out for the scoundrel."

Caleb went back to his work, and Talbot walked on, thinking of what the old man had said him. He did not feel the slightest sense of awe, but he knew that if Seth Lowe were lurking in Farnley Wood it would be well to be alert.

About ten minutes after leaving Caleb he was passing through the heart of the wood, the best part of the long, winding path. With Caleb's warning fresh in his mind, he looked round quickly at a slight sound, of which at any other time he would probably have taken no notice. It was well that he did.

A startled exclamation fell from his lips, and he swung swiftly round as a man springing from the thicket he had just passed, with a thick coarse cudgel raised to strike him down from behind.

He knew at once the body form, the hard, broad face and filthy fur cap of Seth Lowe, the poacher.

With a swift backward swing he escaped the downward sweep of the heavy cudgel. But he had not a second to spare. If he had faced round a moment later it would have been too late.

The force of his savage blow, the cudgel meeting with no resistance, made the reflex pitch forward. He had not calculated upon such prompt action on Talbot's part, and the result was that he nearly lost his balance.

Talbot was not slow to take advantage of it.

The poacher's look and action showed him plainly enough that a counterous assault was intended, and that he had to fight for his life itself under those lonely trees, or, at all events, to save himself from serious injury.

And so he acted with prompt decision and pluck. Before the poacher could recover himself, before the cudgel could rise for another blow, Talbot was upon him like a tiger. His right fist, clenching hard, struck Lowe fairly between the eyes, and was followed up by his left, which caught the poacher fairly upon the jaw. The poacher gave a hoarse groan, and staggered back, too dazed to act for a moment. That moment was enough for Talbot. Quick as thought, he dashed both his feet together in the brutal face with terrific force, and the reflex went with a crash to the ground.

The next moment Talbot had plucked him down, a knee planted upon his broad chest, and the cudgel, snatched

from his relaxed fingers, rose in the air in the boy's hand, threatening the poacher.

"Now, you scoundrel, it's my turn!"

The poacher's shrinking gaze turned upward towards the brandished cudgel. He ceased to struggle.

"Don't, don't!" he gasped.

"Why shouldn't I?" said Talbot grimly. "What did you intend to do to me, you scoundrel beast?"

The poacher did not reply. His starting eyes watched nervously the cudgel, which he expected every instant to descend with stunning force.

Talbot laughed contemptuously.

"It would serve you right if I gave you what you meant for me!" he exclaimed. "But fair play's a jewel, and I'll not use a good example." He rose, said, with a jerk of his arm, sent the cudgel whirling far away over the tree-tops.

"Now get up, you beast! I am going to give you the biggest hiding you ever had in your life!"

Seth Lowe rose to his feet. Hard as he had fared on a previous occasion at the hands of the Farnley lad, he was too awfully enraged by his failure to wish to avoid the conflict. He threw off his best jacket and cap, and rushed at Talbot.

And then and there Talbot gave him what he had promised—certainly the severest beating Seth Lowe had ever had in his life. Talbot, usually generous to a fault, was merciless now. The cowardly and murderous nature of Lowe's attack, and the thought that if it had succeeded he would have lost his chance of playing St. Paul's, banished all mercy, and he did not spare his enemy.

Lowe fought with dogged determination, but his obstinacy only added to the severity of his punishment. Again and again he went to ground beneath Talbot's terrible blows, until at last he lay prostrate, unable to rise.

And then Talbot, with a contemptuous smile at his wretched career, left him, lying in the path like some motionless animal that had been struck down, and went on his way.

The poacher raised himself on his elbow and groaned, and looked after Talbot as he went, grinding his yellow teeth and biting out foul maledictions. He had failed—worse than failed. Dim schemes of vengeance flitted through his savage brain—dim schemes that were to take definite shape on another day.

Talbot, his business in Farnley finished, walked back to the school by the lane. He met Samuel near the gates.

"I've been waiting for you, Hallo! what have you been doing to your knuckles?"

"Shoving them against Seth Lowe's shin," said Talbot, laughing. He told what had happened in the wood.

Samuel looked serious.

"The police will have to look after that chap. I say, you might have been knocked up and prevented from going to St. Paul's on Wednesday."

Talbot nodded.

"Yes, I thought of that, and I gave him something extra for that. I don't think he will trouble with me again in a hurry."

"I don't know. That fellow's a bog; he never knows when he has had enough. You must get into your things, and let the little bug go at the bottom. You feel all right?"

"Oh, right as rain!" said Talbot cheerfully.

They crossed the gate, and as they went towards the School House, Samuel came out of the New House. He stopped and talked to Talbot, turning quite pale.

The next instant, however, he turned quickly, and re-entered the street and disappeared within the New House.

The chance, this wandering football, did not obscure his peculiar action. They went on to their own quarters, Talbot little dreaming of the feelings his appearance, safe and sound, had excited in Samuel's brain.

Good Samuel went to Talbot's study. As he entered, Herbert turned from the window and looked him.

Lamphey had not left the window since he saw Talbot pass the gate. He was a prey to a wild surmise. For the first time in his life he knew the heavy burden of a guilty conscience. He did not regret the step that had been taken; he had too much at stake for that. But the thought of Talbot being brought in, bleeding and senseless from the blow of the poacher's cudgel, was painful and horrible to him. He could not turn his mind to anything else. He tried in vain to read, and he could not find the heart to go into the football field. He sat at the window, dull and listless, watching for

The first sign of news of what had happened in the wood. And so it came to pass that he saw Talbot enter the gates with Russell, and walk across to the School House as if nothing unusual had occurred.

He could not believe his eyes at first. His thoughts had been so engrossed by the results of the scheme, by the anticipation of what was to come of it, that he had not even considered the possibility of failure.

But it was clear that there had been failure, and complete failure. Langley's eyes were gleaming with rage as he turned to meet Knowles.

"You've scolded!" said Cecil, closing the door. "What rotten luck!"

"So this is the end of your scheming," sneered Langley—"this is the end of all your combated clever plans, is it?"

"No," said Knowles, gritting his teeth—"no, it isn't the end. Talbot shall never play against St. Fred's. I cannot understand it. I know that I can rely upon Lowe; and yet Talbot does not seem to have had the least hint. But one swallow does not make a summer. His luck cannot hold out for ever. This scheme has failed. The next will not!"

"What can we do?" broke out Hubert savagely. "We are in for it now, and it would be folly to turn back. How can we seal his chance on Wednesday—how? You have led me into this, Knowles, and you must find some way."

"And I will," said Knowles determinedly. "I made a mistake in depending upon anybody but myself. Both Lowe has failed; I shall not fail!"

And so long the cunning brain had hatched another scheme—a scheme simple, and yet seemingly impossible of failure; a scheme at which Hubert Langley caught like a drowning man at a plank. For he was heart and soul with the plotter now, and in a mood to stop at nothing to achieve the object upon which he had set all his hopes.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Day of the Match—The Telegram—Bad Luck for Farnley.

THE great day had dawned!

It was a whole holiday at Farnley. The brake which was to bear the footer team to St. Fred's was by no means the only vehicle that prepared to set off, for at least two-thirds of Farnley College had made up their minds to see the match, and all sorts and conditions of vehicles were requisitioned to carry them to the ground.

It was a fine, clear, cold day, and a lot of the fellows brought out their bikes for the journey, while a good many, especially juniors, set off very early on Blunk's pony. All were in high spirits. The day promised to be a perfect one for football. Holston, who was not given to boasting, had expressed his firm belief that Farnley would succeed in pulling off a victory this time. Confidence in the captain was unbounded, and his words were received even as the words of an oracle.

Hubert Langley took his place in the brake along with the eleven. He was very quiet and cool, though the thoughts that occasionally rose in his mind made his heart beat. But he had clearly realized the necessity for disinclination. When the blow fell there must be no room for suspicion that he knew anything about it.

Knowles was not among those who accompanied or followed the eleven to St. Fred's. Since the exhibition he had made of himself in the inter-house match a month ago, he had "cut" footer. And this morning he had borrowed Langley's bicycle and gone off for a long spin by himself.

The brake set off to the accompaniment of a roar of cheering. As they hauled along the country road, the fellows kept up a lively chat, with footer, footer, footer for its ineluctable theme.

Hubert Langley hardly joined in it. A somewhat anxious look had crept into his eyes. As the brake drove away from Farnley, he had cast a quick look up and down the road, and then dropped his eyes. Anyone who had observed him closely would have seen that he was expecting something.

But the fellows were too engrossed in their topic to take any notice of his looks.

Suddenly he gave a start, and his eyes glared. The brake was about half-way to St. Fred's. Far behind, from the direction of Farnley, a cyclist shot into view, speeding furiously after the brake.

"Hallo, there's a chap in a hurry!" remarked Green, looking back.

"Who, it's Harris," said Talbot, recognizing the fellow on the bike. "I thought he wasn't coming to St. Fred's. He said so."

"He's altered his mind, and he's trying to make up for lost time, I should think," Holston remarked. "What is he expecting like that for? There's no such heated hurry that I can see."

Harris, as he came nearer rang his bell incessantly to clear the road. But the Farnley fellows who were accompanying the brake were in no manner inclined to give him place, and he had to slacken down.

"He's got something in his hand," remarked Russell. "And how excited he looks. Scott! Is it possible that anything has happened?"

"Hang it!" said Green. "What could have happened?"

"I don't know. There's a telegram in his hand."

"By Jove, so it is! Who's it for, I wonder?"



Hubert sank down upon the edge of the bed, and broke into a fit of passionate tears. Russell walked to the window.



"Master Talbot!" Talbot's eyes opened. He shivered. Ice-cold water was being dashed into his face, and it had revived him. He stared listlessly about him.

"One of us," said Heiston, knitting his brows. "That must be it. Stop, Wilkins, please."

The brake came to a standstill.

"Bang it! I hope there's nothing wrong! Back up, Harris. What's the beastly row?"

A look of uneasiness had settled upon every face in the brake.

It was evident that the telegram had arrived for some member of the team after the departure of the brake, and that the doctor had considered it important enough to send it post-haste after them. The doctor had not yet left Fernley. He was to drive over in the dugout with Miss Lorna, in time for the match. What could the telegram contain to bring Harris scorching after the brake at such a rate?

The fellows in the road, realising at last that something was amiss, made way for Harris, and he jammed on the brake and jumped down.

"What is it, Harris?"

"Telegram for Talbot."

"For me?" said Talbot wonderingly.

He stretched out his hand to take it up the side of the brake.

"It came soon after you left!" gasped Harris, who was red with his excitement. "The doctor considered it best to open it, in case it should be important enough to send after you. I had my bike just ready to start on my trip, and he asked me to scorch after you with it. I—I'm awfully

sorry, old chap. I know what's in it, and the doctor says that if you take my bike and scorch over to Towmley you'll be in time for the Ipswich train."

Talbot had taken the telegram mechanically, and ere Harris had finished his explanation he had looked over the message conveyed in the dead-black lettering.

The sudden and terrible palpitations that came into his face as he read it, passed every eye to fix upon him with alarm.

"What is it!" exclaimed Heiston hoarsely. "Bad news?"

"My uncle!" gasped Talbot. "Oh, Heaven!"

He gave the turn to Heiston.

The captain of Towmley glanced over it, and his own face changed colour. He read it aloud to the anxious team.

"Your uncle severely injured. Motor accident. Feet the worst. He is asking for you. Come at once."

"DARRYL!"

There was a general murmur of dismay and commiseration. Dismay, for it was clear that Fernley would lose its best player in the great match; but to their credit, be it said, all present thought more of Talbot's misery than of their own cruel luck.

"Uncle Geoff dying!" gasped Talbot. His eyes were blind with tears. "He was coming in his motor to see the match. My poor uncle!"

"It may not be so bad," said Heiston hopefully. "Who is this chap Darryl who sent the wire?"

"My uncle's doctor. He must know."

Talbot dashed his hand across his eyes and started up.

"I'm awfully sorry, Helston; but you'll have to play without me."

"Don't think of that, old fellow. Cut off, and we'll do our best without you."

"There was no other telegram?"

It was Hubert Langley who spoke, looking at Harris.

Harris shook his head.

Talbot, who had forgotten his cousin's existence for the moment, turned towards him.

"Hubert, you had better come, too."

Langley shook his head.

"I shall not go. My uncle does not want to see me," he said, with a bitter smile. "He played his part well. You are the only one he thinks of, and I should only be in the way."

Talbot could not reply. It was evident that the agony had thought only of his favourite nephew, the Dr. Darvel would have recognised Hubert in the telegram.

It was a bitter sight to Hubert. If the agony were really dying it was hardly the time to feel resentful. Still, it was perhaps natural that the agony should have been forgotten should not choose to go.

"But—"

"I shall not go."

Talbot said no more.

He jumped down into the road, and took the Miss from Harris with a nod of thanks.

"The 1.5 from Thursday Junction," said Harris.

"Right! Good-bye, you fellows!"

"Good-bye, old chap!"

And Talbot was in the saddle, scurrying off towards the town from which the train started for Ipswich at 1.5; the train in which was to bear him to his work, perhaps to his death-bed. He considered at the thought, and pushed harder and harder in the effort to drive away his haunting fears by physical strain.

The train went on its way, but the cheery chat was over. The high spirits with which the team had set out were gone. Talbot was on generally found that the misfortune which had fallen upon him cast a shade upon the spirits of everyone. But that was not all. Without Talbot, whom Helston had confessed to be the best, or, at least, second best player in the district, how were they to beat St. Freda's?

It was cruel, when victory seemed within their grasp, to have their hope snatched away like this. True, they had a reserve; and Langley was a good player. But the difference between his game and Talbot's might easily be all the difference between victory and defeat. Instead of the glorious victory they had looked for the struggle would be at the best a very desultory one.

Langley sat very quiet and thoughtful. Some of the fellows looked at him curiously. He had been slighted; but the news which had cut up Talbot so much must have had some effect upon him. Still, if he felt fit to play it was all the better. If Fenley had been reduced to taking a chance substitute from the crowd that accompanied them to the field it would have meant simply ruin. Helston felt this. But he considered it his duty to give Langley his choice in the matter.

"If you don't feel up to playing, Langley, I will look out for a chap to take your place," he said, with an effort. "I don't want to hurt you."

Langley shook his head.

"I am perfectly fit, Helston."

Helston looked at him doubtfully.

"I have been thinking it over," continued Langley. "I think that wire overstated the case. My uncle is kinder to Talbot than he is of any; but if he were really dying I am sure that he would wish to see me. I don't think he could have forgotten me if things had really been so serious."

"But the doctor—"

"Oh, Dr. Darvel is an old fogey, and what he doesn't know will kill him."

"Well, I hope it's as you think, for Talbot's sake," said Helston. "I'm glad you look at it in that light, Langley. It's bad enough for us to lose Talbot; but if we had you too we might as well give it up at the start. It's jolly lucky you've kept yourself in good form."

"I don't see why we shouldn't pull it off yet," remarked

Greene. "By the way, if things turn out to be better than he expects at Louther Dene, Talbot will have a try to get here in time for the second half. You might stipulate with the Saints' skipper that he's to be allowed to play if he should turn up, Helston."

A steady glimmer shot into Hubert Langley's eyes.

Helston nodded.

"I don't think there's much chance of that, Greene. Still, one never knows, and I'll mention it to Davenport."

Soon afterwards they arrived at St. Freda's. The Saints gave them a cordial welcome. Davenport, the captain of the Saints, a fine, stalwart footballer, expressed a genuine sympathy when Helston mentioned to him what had occurred on route. He heartily concurred in the suggestion that Talbot should receive his place in the team if by good luck he should turn up in time.

"I can't say I have much hope of it," Helston remarked.

"But, one never knows; so if you have no objection—"

"None in the world," said the Saints skipper heartily. "Play your substitute until Talbot turns up if you like, and then get him in. I hope he'll come, for the sake of the game."

Presently the dignitary arrived from Fenley with the doctor and Loren, who were welcomed cordially by the Principal of St. Freda's. Langley glanced keenly at Loren. The bright smile was gone from the girl's face. It was plain to Hubert's judgment eyes that she was thinking of Talbot.

He snapped his teeth. The game would have but little interest for him if Talbot did not appear at the Fenley match.

There was a burst of talk in the dressing-room assigned to the Fenley contingent when Hubert entered it. Russell was consulting a time-table. Langley glanced at him with a covert smile. He knew what he was in search of, and that he would be disappointed.

Russell suddenly straightened up and pitched the time-table across the room.

"Hello, what's the matter?" exclaimed Jones.

"There's no train to bring Talbot back in time, even if he is able to leave Louther Dene," greeted Russell. "It's all up for him."

"What beastly luck!"

"I've been looking over the Saints," said Toole. "They are a strong team this time. Did you know that Davenport had played for the county?"

"Yes."

"Well, he has. They're all in fine fettle. What absolutely surprising luck that Talbot should be called away."

That was the general sentiment. But there was no help for it, and the lads of Fenley had to make up their minds to it.

When the teams lined up for play Langley had Talbot's place of inside-right. He looked a fine figure in the Fenley blue and white, and Helston's glance as it turned upon him was approving.

The Saints, as Toole had said, looked a fine lot. Davenport, their captain, was a regular man of war. He had kicked goals for his country, a circumstance of which his followers were justly proud. To tackle the Saints, Fenley needed to be at his full strength. But what pluck and determination could do, they meant to do.

Helston won the toss, which gave Fenley the initial advantage, their advantage being compelled to face a shooting end. Davenport kicked off, and the game began.

"Forward!" was evidently the motto of the Saints. They were in the Fenley territory in next to no time, attacking vigorously.

Round the match ground Saint and Fenleyite had fraternised, equally cordial. St. Freda's shouts were answered by counter-chants from the crowd from Fenley.

Davenport, receiving the ball from his right-winger, got away with it, and Russell, Fenley's centre-half, rushed to stop him. The Saints' skipper sent the ball with a long pass to his outside left, who rushed it forward. But Toole was in the way, and he cleverly beat the Saints' wings, and gave Langley the ball. Langley was clear of the press, and in front on, but the St. Freda's backs were alert. He passed to Helston in the nick of time, and the Fenley men went crowding down upon the Saints' goal. There was a dash of the Saints to defend their citadel, and a somewhat rough scrimmage ensued. Davenport received the ball, and sent it out to a winger, and away they went again, but not all of them. Langley lay upon the ground, unable to rise.

The next minute there was a roar. St. Fred's had sustained the Farnley defence, and the ball was in the net.

It was first blood to the Saints.

Langley rose, with assistance, looking very white and shaken. He had been severely examined by a charging team, but the Farnley fellows were not the men to complain. To Histon's anxious question he replied firmly:

"Let me get my breath and I shall be all right."

And he lined up with the others, with unshaken resolution. Nothing short of disablement would make him lose this chance he had bought so dearly.

Farnley looked off, and play was resumed.

But the spirits of the team were not what they had been. Fight as hard as they would they could not but realize that things were going heavily against them.

Sorely now they missed Talbot. Langley had done well in his place—very well. But now even Langley was in a bad way. He went on playing with splendid pluck, and did his best, but he was not what he had been, and at his best he had not been a patch upon Talbot.

The efforts of the Farnley men were soon confined to defending their own goal. Scarcely they defended it, too; but the Saints' attack was splendid. Just before half-time there was a roar of cheering from the St. Fred's crowd, and something like a groan from the Farnleyites. St. Fred's had taken another goal.

The whistle blew.

The first half ended, St. Fred's two goals to nil.

Jubilant were the Saints, and decidedly gloomy the fellows from Farnley. They had done their best, and they could not do better in the second half. Defeat loomed darkly before them. St. Fred's had kicked them last year, and history was to repeat itself.

"If Talbot were only here," growled Histon.

As if in answer to him there came a sound from afar through the keen winter air. Zip—zip!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

At Lowther Dene—A Race Against Time—The Second Half.

WE must now return to Harry Talbot.

He went along at a scorching rate on Harry's bike, trees and fields flying by him. He threw all his energy into his pedalling, but he could not drive from his thoughts the haunting fears that tormented him.

His good, kind old uncle, stretched upon his death-bed; he could have cried aloud at the thought of it. Rapidly as he sped through road and lane, the pace seemed slow to him. The match he had missed tided from his mind. He thought only of the squire, of his uncle's wish to see him ere he died.

Not the slightest suspicion of the genuineness of the telegram crossed his mind. It had been handed in at Ipswich, which was near Lowther Dene, and it bore the name of the squire's regular medical attendant. There was no room for suspicion. Besides, Talbot knew that the squire had intended to come to St. Fred's in his motor. Doubtless he had been starting when the accident occurred.

Tonday at last! His horse had been wanted; he was a quarter of an hour too early for the train. He put up Harry's (he at the station, and then feverishly paced the platform waiting for the train to come in. Would it never come?

After what seemed an age to the anxious boy, it came rattling in, and he jumped into a carriage.

Off at last!

It was a local train, and its pace was not great. To Talbot's wild impatience it seemed to crawl. He ground his teeth whenever it stopped and slow, country people took their place. More than one passenger glanced curiously at the pale, excited boy. He never heeded them; he did not know they looked at him. His thoughts, far ahead, were at Lowther Dene, in the chamber where the squire lay dying.

Ipswich was reached at length. Talbot tore out of the train before it stopped, rushed out of the station, and shouted to a cabman.

"Lowther Dene! Quick, there's a sovereign for you!"

"Right you are, sir," replied the cabby promptly.

And away they went at a rattling pace.

"Faster!" cried Talbot. "Faster!"

They were in the country road now. The cabby whipped up his horse. Faster they flew, but not fast enough for Talbot's impatience.

The old, familiar gateway at last! The gate was open, and the cab drove up the avenue, lined on either side with old oaks.

"Are you sure, sir?"

Talbot jumped out, tossed a sovereign to the cabby, and ran up the steps. The servant who opened the door stared in amazement at his white face and burning eyes.

"My uncle! Take me to him, quick!"

A soft, astonished voice came across the old hall.

"Is that Harry's voice? Harry, my boy, what on earth are you doing here?"

It was the squire. He had stepped out of the billiard-room with a cue in his hand. Talbot stared at him like two beetles of his species.

"Uncle!"

It was his uncle, alive and well; nothing but astonishment expressed in his looks.

"In Heaven's name, Harry, what's the matter?"

Talbot was weeping, quite overcome with the reaction. The squire sprung forward and caught him.

"Oh, uncle!"

In his relief, his joy, he gave way utterly, and burst into a passion of tears. The squire, aware that something serious must be the matter to overcome the plucky lad so completely, half-led, half-carried him into a room, placed him upon a chair, and put a glass of wine to his lips.

"Drink, lad."

Talbot swallowed the wine, and it helped him to recover himself. The tears were still wet upon his eyelids, but he was becoming calmer.

"Now, what's the matter?"

Talbot drew the crumpled telegram from his pocket, and handed it to his uncle.

"Look at that, uncle."

Squire Lowther read the message, and his face, at first amazed, darkened with anger.

"It is a hoax, of course."

"I suppose so; but I thought it was true, and—and——" The tears gushed into the boy's eyes again as he thought of the anguish of that journey. "Oh, uncle, thank Heaven you are well!"

The squire's face softened.

"I know what you must have felt, Harry," he said, more touched than he cared to show. "By Heaven, the accident which sent this telegram shall be made to suffer for it. The hoax! Yet what can have been his object? But where is Herbert?" the squire added abruptly. "If this was believed to be genuine, why did he not come?"

"The telegram mentioned only me," said Talbot. "I think Langley was hurt that you did not appear to have asked for him also, and he was afraid of being in the way."

"He should have known that I should not so slight him," said the squire, pinching his lips, and his brows knitting a little.

"I had to leave the Farnley eleven in the lurch," said Talbot, hastening in his generous way to defend his cousin.

"As you did not ask for him, Herbert thought you did not want him, and he considered it his duty to play for Farnley. He was our reserve, you know, and if both of us had deserted the team, Histon would have been in a fearful hole."

"Play for Farnley," repeated the squire, looking puzzled. "But since the match is postponed till Friday——"

Talbot stared at him.

"Postponed? It is not postponed?"

"Not postponed?"

"Certainly not. What could make you think so?"

"Your telegram."

Talbot looked dazed.

"My telegram! I never sent one."

"By Jove, the plot thickens!" exclaimed the squire.

"Do you mean to tell me that the match is being played at St. Fred's to-day?"

"Certainly; and they must be beginning now."

"I had a wire first thing this morning to tell me that the

match was postponed till Friday, in consequence of a slight accident to Devermont, the St. Freda's captain.

"This is the first I've heard of it," said Talbot.

The square passed the room with knitted noses.

"It's a plot," he exclaimed. "It's evidently a plot to get you off the field, Harry. Some of the St. Freda's partisans must have heard of the farm you were in, and put up this line to keep you off the ground."

"I cannot believe that of them, uncle," said Talbot, shaking his head. "I've always found them to be a set of real sportsmen."

"Who could have done it, then? Who else could have an interest in keeping you away? You see, you were the only one aimed at. No attempt was made to get Hubert away. It was you they feared."

Talbot gave a start at the mention of Hubert's name. The question of the square—who else could have an interest in keeping him away?—assumed a strange significance. A dark suspicion shot involuntarily into his mind. That the St. Freda's fellows were at the bottom of the crowd here he did not believe for a moment. Was it possible that Hubert had had a hand in it?

He took care not to communicate the dark thought to the square. His uncle, satisfied with his own explanation, went on:

"That's it, undoubtedly. That's why a wise man went to me assessing the post-ponement of the match. The telegram which you got on the way to St. Freda's might not have reached you until after you got there, and if I had been there in my motor, the whole game would have been given away at once. So I had to be kept away. Oh, the morals—somebody shall suffer for this!"

Talbot started up.

"It may not be too late to baffle them yet, uncle. If I could get to St. Freda's by half-time I could play in the second half. Where's a time-table?"

"No need for a time-table, Harry," said the square; "I know that line. There's no train for Towney Junction till four o'clock, and then you have three and a half miles to go to St. Freda's."

Talbot gave a groan.

"Oh, what a sticking block! But, of course, whoever played this rotten game on me counted upon that."

"Yes," said the square, with a gleam in his eye. "Dr! there's one thing they didn't count upon, Harry, and that is my motor."

Talbot gave a start. His face flushed, his heart beat with new-born hope.

"Your motor, uncle!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my boy. It is all ready, and I know the road like a book; I have been over it often enough." The square tapped his nephew upon the shoulder. "Back up, my boy! We'll beat them yet!"

And he rushed away to prepare for the race to St. Freda's.

His preparations did not take much time.

His long uncle and nephew were seated in the car, and the square took it out of the avenue, and with a rip, nip! they were off down the wide country-road.

The square, as he had said, was well acquainted with the route—at least as far as Fensley, owing to his frequent runs down to the school. Every turn of it, every short cut that was practicable for a motor, he knew like a book.

And, justice of the peace as he was, it must be admitted that the square did not open this country course himself to the limit of speed permitted by the law.

In fact, the way he searched was calculated to make any law-abiding citizen's hair stand on end.

But the square, who was accustomed to acting as his own chauffeur, was a splendid driver, and there was little fear of an accident, or, rather, none. But both uncle and nephew were quite willing to take risks for the sake of getting to St. Freda's by half-time.

Talbot's eyes gleamed as the wind blew in his face, and his heart beat in accord with the ruck and whirr of the car.

The pace of the square's big Daimler was very different from that of the crawling local which had brought him to Ipswich.

Forward, with a ruck and a ruck, with bare hedges and leafless trees flitting away alongside; forward, with scolding horn and a cloud of dust.

Twice red-faced, angry signals of the law stared up to view, and with wild protestations called upon the motorists

to stop, but had to content themselves with taking the number of the car as it rushed by. The square chuckled grimly. He did not object to a few faces if he could carry Talbot to St. Freda's in time.

Fensley!

Past the old school, and on through the village. There the square was compelled to slacken, and he did it reluctantly. Through the village they went as fast as they dared.

Fensley was behind now, and a wide country-road led direct to St. Freda's.

Zip, nip, nip!

Right on the car went tearing, the square sitting like a goggled statesman, staring ahead. Talbot flinched and cager with excitement.

The wind bore to them a sound of distant shooting.

Talbot thought he could distinguish the word "Goal!"

It died away, and Talbot's heart beat hard.

There was St. Freda's, the old tower above the bare chert. The car slackened, turning into the lane which led up to the school.

"Stop!" cried Talbot.

He looked at his watch. The car whirred to a standstill.

With a spring Talbot alighted and dashed away, the square following more at leisure.

A shout of amazement and welcome greeted Talbot's appearance in the football field.

The teams were about to line up. There was no time for explanation.

"I'm in time!"

Hubert clapped him on the shoulder.

"Get into your things, Talbot. Quick!"

Like a flash Talbot disappeared into the Fensley dressing-room. His things were ready for him; Russell hoping against hope, had seen to that.

He made a lightning change, and rejoined his comrades. There had been a delay of two minutes, at which the Saints' true sportsmen all, were far from grumbling.

While Talbot was changing, Hubert spoke to Langley.

Hubert had seen his cousin's arrival with eyes almost starting from his head, and black rage seething in his breast.

He had never dreamed of this.

That Talbot would discover the cheat as soon as he reached Leather Dene was, of course, certain; but knowing that there was no train that could bring him back in time, Langley had felt quite secure.

Neither he nor Knowles had reckoned upon this. But the first nip, nip! down after had sent a chill to his heart, a premonition of what was coming. When Talbot rushed into the field, Hubert felt that he could have killed him.

The jubilation of the rest of the team added to his rage, which he could scarcely conceal. He listened sulkily when Weston spoke.

"You'll be glad of a rest, Langley. After that change, you are not really fit, and this has happened hardly for you."

"I am perfectly fit," said Langley, between his teeth.

"Do you mean that I am to stand out of the second half?"

Hubert started.

"Of course," Talbot is here to take his proper place."

"The place was given to me," said Hubert angrily, losing all self-control in his rage and chagrin. "You have no right to turn me out now!"

"Come, don't talk nonsense!" said the captain of Fensley sharply. "You know very well upon what conditions you were put in. I can feel for your disappointment, but the game's the game, and you will have to retire. Don't make an ass of yourself!"

Hubert realised the uselessness of words. He ground his teeth with impotent fury as he made his way to the dressing-room. He passed Talbot cursing out, and gave him a look of such malignant hate that it made Talbot start. But there was no time for him to think about it, or about anything but the game. The men were waiting for him.

From all the Fensleyites round the match-ground a thunderous cheer rolled in greeting to Talbot as he took his place in the team. Hopes were newly raised, and the fierce high spirits of the team returned. All Fensley hoped now that they would at last regain, if they did not pull off a win.

Talbot was in splendid form. He knew that St. Freda's were two goals to nil, and he was determined to do his utmost to help to pull the game out of the fire. The anxious journey to Leather Dene had told upon him. But he had

got over that now. The knowledge of how much was required of him put him upon his mettle.

And the Saints soon found out the difference which the addition of one splendid player can make to a team.

The Fensley men, with renewed spirit, changed the tactics they had been compelled to adopt towards the end of the first half. Instead of confining their efforts to the defence of their own goal, they made a vigorous attack upon the Saints' territory. For ten minutes after the kick-off the Saints were hardly ever over the halfway line. Their forwards at last brought the ball into the Fensley ground, only to have it sent by Russell to Talbot, who neatly passed to outside-right, and received it back from him, despatching the opponents, and then let Robinson have it. Holston centred fairly, and took a goal, amidst a terrific roar from the school crowd.

The spare, who had joined Dr. Deamond and Lorna, cheered as loudly as any. Lorna was looking on at the game with an interest which had awakened with Talbot's return. Squire Lowther rubbed his hands.

"We shall beat them yet!" he declared. For the first he was a boy again.

Fensley and St. Freda's lined up again. It wanted yet twenty-five minutes for the whistle to blow. Time to equalise, if not to win, the Fensleyites told themselves. Time to take at least one more goal, was the opinion of the Saints.

The struggle recommenced, and the fight was well fought. Both sides were equally determined, and for a long time the result was doubtful. Now there was a surge towards the Fensley goal, then towards that of their opponents. The play became a little rough, but perfectly good tempered all the time. Presently Davenport centred and shot, but his attempt was baffled by Jones in the Fensley goal, and the Fensleyites levelled again. It began to look as if the whistle would blow without another goal taken, and the eager anxiety of the spectators had risen almost to fever-heat.

The spare was watching with all his eyes. Talbot had the ball; he passed to Holston, who sent it out to his right winger, who rushed it forward, and at the right moment let Talbot have it. Talbot centred and shot for goal.

"Hannah! Hannah!"

The score was even now.

Five minutes later the whistle blew. The game had ended in a draw. Considering what it had looked like at one time, a draw counted almost as a victory to Fensley. They all felt that if Talbot had not missed the first half they would have beaten the Saints hollow, and they gleefully anticipated what would happen when St. Freda's visited Fensley.

The match was over. Talbot had a perfect crater. His fellow-players were at enthusiastic as the rest. The doctor shook hands with him, and the spare wrung his hand till it ached. It was an hour of triumph for the player who had, at all events, saved Fensley from defeat.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Talbot Makes an Inquiry.

BUT what of Hubert Langley?

He did not stay on the ground to witness the triumph of Talbot.

With a heart burning with rage, he changed his clothes in the dressing-rooms, and then left the ground, nobody noticing his departure in the intense interest inspired by the game. He strode up the lane to the high-road and set his face towards Fensley, and started to doggedly tramp the three miles home.

How the game would turn out he hardly cared. His disappointment, and what he considered his humiliation, ranked too highly in his mind for him to think of anything else.

He strode on, his hands thrust into his pockets, his eyes bent moodily upon the ground, his face unusually pale now that the flush of excitement and anger had died out of it. Hubert was usually fit for a good deal more than the three-mile walk before him, but now he felt a strange weakness and lassitude, and he was fatigued before he had covered half the distance.

As a matter of fact, he had been more severely hurt in the game than he had admitted, and his keeping on until half-time had done him no good. He was in no fit state for a long walk, and he soon realised it. But he did not care to turn back, and so he tramped on doggedly towards Fensley.

He reached the school at last. Strongly quiet and deserted it looked, the winter sunlight falling into the almost old quadrangle. Two or three fellows were hanging about, and they asked eager questions about the progress of the game at St. Freda's. Langley snapped out unscrupulous answers, and went straight up to his own room, leaving the fellows in a state of considerable astonishment.

Langley threw himself upon his bed. He was exhausted, and all his nerves seemed to be on the jar. His passion of rage had settled down into a quiet, savage sadness and depression. He would have been glad to sleep, but sleep would not come. He could only lie and think about the failure of his plot, his bitter disappointment, with hatred and malice feeding upon his heart.

Knowles had not yet returned. After the visit to Ipswich for the purpose of despatching the bogus telegram, Knowles's intention was to go for a long spin and visit some relations in a distant part of the county, so that if necessity should arise he would be able to prove an alibi. He was, therefore, not likely to return yet.

Hubert looked at his watch. Ah, play was finished by now at St. Freda's. How had the game gone? He hardly cared. He could have found it in his heart to wish for Fensley's defeat, if that would only prevent a triumph for Talbot. Never had he hated his cousin so much as this moment.

Presently they would come trooping back to Fensley, Talbot with the rest; nobody giving a thought to him. He felt that he hated them all; that he hated all the world.

There was a step on the stairs. Langley sat up on the bed as Knowles opened the door and came in.

Knowles's face was surprised and greatly disturbed in expression.

"One of the fellows told me you had come back, Hubert!" he exclaimed. "What has happened? Why are you here? Has anything gone wrong at St. Freda's?"

"Anything!" said Langley bitterly. "Everything!"

Knowles gritted his teeth.

"Tell me what has happened!"

"Talbot turned up in time for the second half, and I was shoved out again to make room for him!" snarled Hubert.

The other stared at him blankly.

"How? What do you mean? He couldn't come!" snarled Knowles. "I tell you there was no train!"

"The spare drove him over in his motor just in time for the second half."

"My hat! I never reckoned on that!"

Knowles sat down, his brows wrinkling in thought. His little, watery eyes were gleaming with spite and annoyance.

"How did you do in the first half?"

"St. Freda's scored two goals to nil."

"How! And in the second!"

"I did not stop to see!" said Hubert, with a scowl. "I don't know and I don't care!"

"Fensley could hardly pull up so much heavier," Knowles said thoughtfully. "My word! I hope they were flaked!" he went on, clicking his teeth spitefully. "I'd give anything to see Talbot's colours taken down. I'd set him down yet."

"You will?" Langley said, with a savage sneer. "A lot of good your spite has been so far! We have not gained a single point, and now we have to face an inquiry into that telegram business—for nothing."

"An inquiry won't hurt us," Knowles said, shrugging his shoulders. "I've taken jolly good care to cover up my tracks. Whatever Talbot may suspect, he will be able to prove nothing." He started up. "Hallo, there they are!"

There was a roar of voices below the window.

It was the return of the eleven from St. Freda's.

Knowles went to the window and opened it. He looked into the dusty quadrangle, crowded now by the returning party from St. Freda's.

"Hallo, Greene!" he shouted. "How did it go?"

"A draw," shouted back Greene; "two to two!"

"Who kicked them for us?"

"Hibson and Talbot."

Langley ground his teeth as he heard it.

A little later, when Knowles went to his own quarters, he started a little to see a figure leaning against the wall, close by his door, evidently waiting for him there. It was Talbot. Knowles eyed him a trifle uneasily. He wondered what it portended. Talbot did not leave him long in doubt.

"I've been waiting for you, Knowles," he said quietly; "I want a few words with you."

His tone was very quiet and calm, but there was something in it Knowles was far from liking.

"Won't another time do, Talbot? I've just come in from a long spin, and—"

"No, another time will not do!"

"Hang it, Talbot, you speak as if I were under your orders!"

"You can refuse to listen to me if you like, but I warn you that if you do I shall go and say what I have to say to the doctor," said Talbot quietly.

Knowles laughed uneasily.

"I don't know what you're driving at," he said. "Still, if you've anything of importance to say, you can say it, I suppose. Come in."

He opened the door of his study and went in. Talbot, with compressed lips and a frowning brow, followed him, and Knowles shut the door and lighted the gas.

"Now go ahead. What's the trouble?"

Knowles spoke with an assumption of bravado, but he could not help winching a little under Talbot's close, steady eyes.

"I dare say you know," said Talbot, "that on the way to St. Freda's to-day I was called away by a telegram purporting to be from my uncle?"

"Yes, I've just heard an account of it. It appears to have been a hoax," said Knowles carelessly.

"It was a hoax. When I arrived at Squire Lawther's house I found him quite well, and he informed me that he also had received a telegram this morning, purporting to come from me, announcing that the St. Freda's match was put off till Friday."

"Really?" said Knowles.

"Yes. The result was that the inquiry was kept away, and I was sent off on a wild-goose chase, and but for an entirely unlooked-for circumstance I should have been prevented from playing in the St. Freda's match. Fortunately, my uncle brought me over in his motor in time for the second half."

"That was a bit of luck for you."

"Yes, it was lucky for me," said Talbot, looking Knowles straight in the face. "Now, what would you suppose was the object of those lying telegrams, Knowles?"

"Really, I haven't thought about the matter."

"Don't you think it is pretty clear that the object was to keep me off the ground, and prevent me playing for the school?"

Knowles affected to yawn.

"I shouldn't wonder. But, really, Talbot, although this is all, of course, very important to you, it doesn't interest me very much, and—"

"So you don't know anything about it?"

"If I! What should I know about it?" exclaimed Knowles, rather taken aback by this direct attack.

"You don't know who sent those telegrams?" continued Talbot, still looking Knowles straight in the face in a way that made him feel extremely uncomfortable.

"You insult me by asking such a question, Talbot! Of course, I don't know anything at all about the matter."

"Will you tell me where you have been to-day?"

"It's none of your business; but there's no reason why I should keep it secret that I know of. I have been to see an aunt who lives at Southey."

"Will you tell me at what time you arrived at her house?"

"I didn't particularly notice," Knowles was beginning to get a little pale, and he could scarcely hold his tongue. There was something in Talbot's quiet, deliberate manner that alarmed him, though he kept repeating to himself that, after all, Talbot could only suspect, and could prove nothing. Like most cowards, he flew to violence as he began to lose his nerve. "Look here, Talbot, who gave you the right to excoriate me? What the dickens do you mean by it, anyway?"

"I mean to get at the truth."

"Well, I've told you the truth, as far as I'm concerned, and I want no more of your confounded insinuations. Get out of my study!"

"I will go if you wish," replied Talbot, still very quietly. "If you prefer to be questioned by a detective, you can have your choice. Shall I go?"

Knowles turned deadly pale.

"A detective?" he said faintly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. My mind is determined to find out who was at the bottom of that cruel and cowardly hoax. He is now consulting with the doctor. He has told me that he intends to send to London for a skilled detective to inquire into the matter. He has made up his mind that whoever sent those telegrams shall be prosecuted, and punished as severely as the law allows. What that punishment will be I don't know; but if the guilty party turns out to be a Farnley fellow, at all events he will be expelled in disgrace from the college. That it was a Farnley fellow I am certain, and I have no doubt in my mind as to which one it was," said Talbot sternly, as Knowles sank into a chair. "You know best whether you will be able to prove an alibi which will account for all the time you spent away from Farnley to-day—whether, when you are confronted with the telegraph-clerk at Ipswich—"

"If I suffer, I shall not suffer alone," gasped Knowles;

"I warn you of that. You had better be careful what you do, Talbot."

Talbot's face contracted.

"What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean," said Knowles, recovering himself somewhat, and some of his cool impudence returning. "I don't know what you can prove, but take care that you don't prove too much, that's all."

"Tell me plainly what you mean," said Talbot hoarsely. "Or I will go straight to my uncle and acquaint him with my suspicions, and let the inquiry take its course."

Chief Knowles drew a long breath.

Talbot had as yet, then, said nothing. His motive was not far to seek.

He suspected that his cousin had had a hand in the telegram business. Had he believed Knowles alone to be at the bottom of it, he would not have troubled himself to interfere. He would have been more pleased that otherwise if Knowles had been expelled from Farnley.

Even with Hubert it was different. Although Knowles himself would never have dreamed of opening an enemy who was at his mercy, he was far too keen to make the mistake of judging Talbot by himself. It was not difficult for him to read what was in Talbot's mind. If Hubert Langley was implicated in the affair, he would do his best to avert an inquiry.

Although Knowles was incapable of such generosity, or even of understanding it, he was cunning enough to take advantage of it.

And as he realized what Talbot's object was in coming to his study he recovered his coolness.

"Will you answer me?" cried Talbot, stamping his foot.

"I warn you that if I leave this room unattended the master will go to the police, and that I shall give them what aid I can."

"I mean," said Knowles desperately, "that whatever disgrace falls upon me will fall equally upon Hubert Langley. Now do your worst!"

Talbot compressed his lips.

"How am I to know that that is the truth?"

"You had better go and ask Langley," muttered Knowles. Talbot gave a curt nod.

"I shall do so."

Knowles bit his lip. Talbot went out of the study, leaving he expected either in a very unattractive frame of mind.

Talbot knocked at Hubert's door.

"Come in!" greeted his cousin's voice.

Langley stared in surprise as he saw who his visitor was. A dark scowl settled over his entire face.

"What do you want?" he said abruptly. "Have you come to tell me of your success at St. Freda's? You can save yourself the trouble."

"No," said Talbot quietly. "I have come to speak about the forged telegrams, Hubert, which were sent to keep me away from the ground. I have just seen Knowles."

Langley changed colour.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. A Terrible Temptation.

"What has that to do with me?"

"A great deal, if Knowles is to be believed."

"If Knowles accuses me—"

"He does not accuse you, Hubert, but he has confessed, and he declares that you were his confederate," said Talbot, coming to the point in his frank, direct way, and looking his cousin in the face. "But it is impossible to believe a word Knowles says. He is quite capable of playing that trick to gratify his own spite, and then dragging your name into the affair for the purpose of shifting himself and evading punishment. Do you deny his statement? I only ask you to give your word; I know you will not lie."

Hubert assented.

"Thank you. But suppose I refuse to be catchword?"

"I don't see how you can call this being catchword," said Talbot mildly. "I think I have a right to ask you to satisfy me upon that point."

"Well, I differ from you entirely. I don't recognize any right of yours to question me. And I have only your word for it that Knowles has made such a statement," said Hubert indignantly.

"I did not come here as an enemy, Hubert, but as a friend."

"Keep your friendship for those who value it," said Langley. "I don't!"

"You do not understand law matters see," said Talbot, keeping his temper with difficulty. "Uncle Geoff is so sure of the hear played upon us that he is determined to call in the police to investigate the matter." Hubert started, but Talbot appeared not to notice it. "If you should, in an angry moment, have allowed Knowles to lead you into a proceeding which was unwisely of you or my decent fellow, Hubert, I should have no malice. I know at whose door the real guilt would lie. I should be perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones, and to persuade Uncle Geoff not to make further inquiry. I should be willing even to let Knowles escape to spare you. But, if you had no hand in it, I should not think of sparing that hand. He ought to be kicked out of any decent school. Now you see how matters stand. Will you satisfy me? I repeat that I ask only your word."

"No, I will not satisfy you. Get on with your previous inquiry!" said Hubert, between his teeth. "This is another of your devices to curry favour with the squire. You think you will be able to diagnose me to him. But I will baffle you!"

Talbot looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Very well. I can only draw one conclusion from your answer, Hubert. Good-night."

He walked to the door.

"Do your worst," said Hubert, with a harsh laugh.

"I shall do my best, Hubert," said Talbot quietly. "You have nothing to fear from me."

And he left the study.

Russell was waiting for him in his own room. He looked inquiringly at Talbot as he came in.

"Well, Talbot?"

"It's as I feared, Dick," Talbot replied, with a gloomy brow. "Knowles has confessed, and Hubert refuses to deny that he was concerned in it."

Russell nodded.

"And what are you going to do about it?"

"I shall speak to my uncle."

"And stop the inquiry?"

"Yes."

"I don't like the idea of Knowles getting off scot-free," said Russell.

"Neither do I," replied Talbot; "but he cannot be punished without the same disgrace falling upon Hubert. He knew that he was secure. Langley has dared me to do my worst. He is too proud to ask any favour at my hands. But I don't bear him malice. It is Knowles who is the guilty party; he is Hubert's evil genius. I would give a good deal to see him kicked out of Fernley, and Hubert freed from his influence."

Talbot did not find it an easy task to dissuade the squire from his purpose. Geoffrey Lovelock replied to his desire that the matter might be allowed to drop at first with a flat refusal. But he was not accustomed to refusing his favourite nephew what he asked, and finally Talbot talked him over. When the squire left Fernley, it was decided that the affair of the false telegram should be inquired into no further.

THERE was an unusual hesitation in Cecil Knowles's manner as he entered Langley's study. He did not quite know how Hubert would receive him after the interview with Talbot. Talbot, of course, would have revealed to Hubert that Knowles had given him away to save himself. Knowles felt that all his craft would be required to disarm his cousin's resentment.

He was right. Hubert was sitting at his table, trying to concentrate his attention upon some work, but without much success. Most of his firm were "keeping it up" below, but Langley was far from being in a humour to share in any joviality. To escape from his thoughts he tried to work, but he could not fix his attention upon his books. The words conveyed no meaning to his brain.

He had been expecting Knowles, but he was not surprised that his cousin had delayed his coming. He looked up as Cecil came in quietly.

"Talbot has been here?" said Knowles, plunging into the matter at once.

"You know he has."

"Yes, he told me he was coming to speak to you."

There was a brief pause.

"Well," said Hubert indifferently, "have you got anything to say?"

"You needn't put on frills, Hubert," said Knowles mildly. "I dare say your interview with Talbot wasn't very pleasant, but that wasn't my fault. After all, it was I who took the whole risk in the matter, and I took it for your sake."

"If you come to that, you hate Talbot quite as much as I do," said Langley. "Still, granting that you meant to do me a good turn, that's no excuse for giving me away to Talbot as you did."

"Don't you see," said Knowles eagerly, "it would have been all up with both of us if I hadn't. He knew I had sent the telegrams. I saw that he suspected you, too. If I hadn't let him know that you were in it, he would have gone to his uncle and blown the whole thing. You talk about my giving you away. How would you have figured if some honestly detected had roused out the whole matter, and the pair of us had been expelled from Fernley?"

"I'd rather that happened, or anything, than ask a favour at Talbot's hands!" cried Hubert passionately. "This has given him an opportunity to ride the high horse and do the magnanimous. That is the worst of it."

"I don't see that. In my opinion getting expelled is worse than anything else. Besides, a disclosure would have ruined you with your uncle."

"How do I know that Talbot will keep the secret? I know perfectly well that his heart is set upon casting me from my chance of inheriting Lovelock's Dene," exclaimed Hubert.

"Why should he keep a secret that is so much to my disadvantage? And then—to be at his mercy, to know that it is always in his power to speak!"

He ground his teeth with rage.

He was thinking, not only of his uncle and the inheritance that was at stake, but of Lorna Desmond.

What if she should learn of the perfidy he had been guilty of? How she would despise him! When he met her next would her glance be averted with cold contempt? The thought saddened him.

"You thought only of saving your own skin. Yet when we entered upon this scheme, you told me that the risk was practically nil. You allowed Talbot to frighten you into a confession."

"It's no use reprimanding now," said Knowles indifferently. "I never counted upon Talbot's jumping to the right conclusion so quickly, and, of course, I did not foresee that old fox taking the thing up so seriously and calling in the police. How was I to knowe it? You never thought of it yourself!"

Langley made a gesture of impatience.

"Well, it's no use talking. All the fat's in the fire, and we are worse off than if we had let Talbot alone. That's what it comes to, and that's the end of it."

"That's the end of it, if you allow him to frighten you," said Knowles contemptuously.

Hubert started. This was a new tone for Knowles to take with him.

"Do you think I don't feel just as wild about it as you do?" continued Knowles, his yellow face flushing, and his rusty eyes glittering with rage. "I am at Talbot's mercy just as much as you are, or more. He has only to open his lips to have me expelled from Fernley, perhaps sent to prison. He hates me like poison, and I have to stake my all upon his forbearance. He has spared me for your sake. If he could possibly derive a reason of punishing me without branding you, he would jump at it. Besides, you yourself say that he may not be able to resist the temptation to ruin your prospects with the spins; or if you have another row, he may lose his temper and speak out. Then out comes the whole story. What will be the result of that?"

"We shall both be kicked out of Fernley."
"Yes; but your uncle might forgive you. At all events, he would make some provision for you. That won't be my case. I shall be sent home to my stepfather, who hates the sight of me. He would be glad of an excuse for casting me off. He would make it a point to be vitriously indignant and unloving. If I were expelled from Fernley I should be shortly done in. Do you understand? A word from Talbot is sufficient to ruin me for life!"

Knowles's voice had become hoarse, and his features twisted as he spoke. He was in deadly earnest, more disturbed than Hubert had ever seen him before. It was a new experience to Hubert to see that cold, cynical nature shaken to its very depths.

Langley made no reply. As a matter of fact, he had been too busy thinking about himself to give much thought to Knowles's view of the case.

"Do you understand?" Knowles went on savagely. "I got into this for your sake. I never foresaw how it was going to turn out. We are both at Talbot's mercy, to wait his pleasure till the tale comes out, as it is certain to do sooner or later."

Hubert shifted uneasily.

"You speak as if there were some way of making him keep the secret."

"So there is!"

The malignant look that came into his companion's face made Hubert start and turn pale.

"What do you mean, Knowles?" he cried hastily.

Knowles laughed scornfully.

"Eh! Talbot is your rival in everything—in football, in love, and for a great fortune. You are content to let him win in everything!"

"I am not content," said Hubert fiercely. "But it's no use doing anything to make matters worse."
"They cannot be made worse. Talbot can ruin both of us. Even if we make up our minds to cringe to him for mercy—"

"Cringe to him!" hissed Hubert. "I would die a thousand deaths first!"

"We must get rid of him," said Knowles, leaving his voice and speaking in a fierce whisper. "There will not be the slightest risk. I hate him enough to kill him with my own hands. I could have killed him when he came into my study, but it is not necessary for either of us to run the risk."

Hubert was white as a corpse.

"Knowles, are you mad?" he said hoarsely.

"No; I know what I am about. I will not leave it in anybody's power to drive me out to beggary and ruin," answered Knowles. "And I tell you plainly that if you try to back out of this it will not pay you. Are you a coward? With Talbot dead, you would be the undoubted heir to Lovelace's Deas. You know perfectly well that you have thought of his death many a time, and wished for it, too."

"I may leave, but this—"

"You know that the spins torture him. He will be square one day, and you will be living on a pension. He will be the husband of Laura Desmond, and you—"

"Hold your tongue!" muttered Hubert, with a curse. The tempter's last words went to his very heart. The stab of a pistol. "Hold your tongue!"

Knowles gave a jering laugh.

"You know it is true. You know that Laura loves him. She does not like you, and if he tells her this story she will despise you. You know it."

Hubert gritted his teeth.

"What is your plan?"

The tempter had won.

"My plan is simple enough. There is one who hates

Talbot as much as we do, and who is willing to take all the risk, if he is provided with money to escape after the—after it is done."

"You mean the postler?"

"Yes."

"He failed once."

"He will not fail again. I know where to find him, and we can go to him to-night. He will be a ready tool. And, in the event of anything coming out, we are absolutely secure. Seth Lowe is known to hate Talbot, and to have made a murderous attack upon him once. There will be nothing to connect us with it. Even if Lowe should be captured, and should talk, such a story would be laughed at. But there is no danger of that." Knowles lowered his voice. "You know the Haunted Pool in Fernley Wood? Its haunts its secrets now. There will be one more added to them. Before anything is known, Seth Lowe will be gone from the country."

"But the money! I have a few pounds."

"We shall want fifty, at least."

"Impossible! If I were to ask my uncle for such a sum suspicion would be aroused at once."
"No need to ask your uncle for it. You will only have to write out an I O U for the amount, and I can find a man that will advance the hard cash."

Langley stared at him in amazement.

"Yes!"

"Yes," said Knowles coolly. "Since we have got so far, I may as well tell you a little secret. You asked me once what was my connection with Seth Lowe the postler."

"Well?" said Hubert.

"Well, as a matter of fact, he acts as a go-between for a certain bookmaker who has dealings with some of the South. You remember there was a chap expelled last term for betting with a bookie? Since then Mr. Tigg has been more circumspet, and he never appears anywhere near Fernley himself."

"You, Knowles—you make bets with a bookmaker?" exclaimed Hubert.

"Yes," said Knowles, with a sneer. "Why shouldn't I if I choose? I'm not the only fellow at Fernley who does. I can manage you. But that's neither here nor there. I've only mentioned it to explain to you how the money can be raised. You needn't see the man. I will make all the arrangements. You'll have to write the I O U. You can save up and pay it off afterwards. I will help. It's worth a bit, I suppose, to make sure of a fortune of five thousand a year, isn't it?"

"I—I must think about it," said Hubert, in an unsteady voice. "You must give me time to think."

Knowles suppressed the furious reply that rose to his lips. He dared not quarrel with Langley, but he was determined that his victim should not escape his coils.

"Very well," he said; "think as long as you like. But remember what there is at stake."

He quitted Hubert in a mood of suppressed rage.

"The cowardly fool!" he muttered. "But he shall not retreat. There is too much at stake for that."

There was indeed much at stake; but it was only Knowles who was in danger, and he knew it. That Talbot would really seek to disgrace Hubert with his uncle he did not believe, though he had succeeded in making Hubert believe it. The suspicion and jealousy which had completely mastered Langley considered that only too easy.

But Knowles knew very well that his own danger waited. If Talbot found a way of punishing him without making Hubert suffer, Knowles could not doubt that he would jump at it. And there was always danger that Talbot, irritated by Hubert's bitter enmity, would lose patience at last, and in an angry moment allow the secret to escape him.

To let his safety depend upon the forbearance and discretion of an enemy, to realize almost every day that he was at the mercy of one he hated, and who he believed hated him, there were few alternatives. Only Knowles would not have chosen either of them.

And there were other motives behind, deep in his cunning brain. When this plot had been carried out, Hubert would be left to Lovelace's Deas, some day to be a rich man; and he would be under the thumb of Knowles. At present, Knowles's prospects in life were dark. He had little to expect from his stepfather, who disliked him, and with good reason. A friendship, or a clerkship, with small salary

and hard work, was all that he could look forward to. But the squarer of a rich man's guilty secret would never come to court.

Poor Hubert, a tall-paw in the hands of his unscrupulous associate, had no idea of the deep, dark thoughts that thronged Knowles's cunning brain. Of late, he had come to like his man a good deal less than of old. He had grown unconsciously to regard him with a certain amount of distrust. But as he was far from seeing him in his true colours.

"He shall not retreat," muttered Knowles. "I must devise some means of keeping him up to the mark. His laziness and envy of Talbot have served my turn. What an I devise now to screw his courage to the sticking-point, make him set his hand to the plough and never look back?" A sudden glitter shot into the rainy eyes. "Eeet! I see it!"

A scheme had occurred to the plotting brain, seldom at loss for one, a scheme which involved the blackest of treachery. But that did not trouble Knowles.

"When the secret leaks out, and the fellow begins to send him to Coventry, he will imagine that Talbot has told about him. But I must be careful. There must be no room for suspicion that I had a hand in it."

He lost no time in putting his scheme into execution. To one so cunning the task was not difficult. It was easy enough to set a rumour afloat without appearing in any way to be the author of it. For the great topic at Fensley that evening, naturally, was the story of the forged telegram. A score of possible and impossible theories had been propounded upon the subject. It had excited remark that Talbot, the sufferer by the hoax, had little to say about it. It had nothing to suggest, and, indeed, appeared to dislike the subject.

That circumstance, of course, was immediately recalled, when a rumour, starting nobody knew exactly how or when, connected Hubert Langley's name with the telegram affair.

Talbot's generous nature was well known, and his silence on the topic which interested everybody else gave colour to the theory that he was aware of the culprit's identity, and was shielding him from the consequences of his action.

Shortly before bedtime Talbot strolled into the common-room, and immediately observed the missing gloves that were directed towards him. He wondered what was "up," but he was not long left in the dark. A bold sector of knowledge came up to him and tackled him directly upon the subject.

"I say, Talbot, do you know what the chap's saying?"

"Well, it's about three they were saying good-night," replied Talbot, with a laugh.

"Nonsense. There's a story got about that you know who sent those telegrams."

Talbot stared, and bit his lip.

"Was it really Langley?" exclaimed the questioner eagerly. "If it was, he ought to be jolly well sent to Coventry!"

Talbot's brows knitted with anger.

"Who says it was Langley?"

"Oh, I don't know! Everybody's saying it."

"Well, if anybody says it in my hearing he will get his head punched, that's all!" said Talbot, raising his voice and looking round.

"It ain't true, then?"

"Oh, rats!" said Talbot, walking away.

He went to find Russell. A fear had crossed his mind that his charm had been indissolved. But he found that the rumour had reached Russell, and that he was as much surprised at himself.

"Then how can it have got out, then?" said Talbot, looking decidedly worried. "Langley and Knowles would keep it dark for their own sakes, and nobody else knew except you and I."

"Perhaps somebody overheard us talking?" suggested Dick.

"Oh, maybe, Langley and Knowles have been peering somewhere, and somebody has caught something."

"It's a nasty bother, Dick! When this gets to Langley's ears he will believe that I set it afloat, so soon as I can."

"You can tell him—"

"He wouldn't believe me," said Talbot bitterly. "I shall have Knowles against me as usual. No; he's certain to get it into his head that I gave him away."

"Well, I'm sorry, for your sake," Russell remarked;

"but it serves him right. It was a rotten, dirty trick he played; and goodness will out, you know."

Talbot nodded gloomily. It seemed as if the very faces were against his attempt to get on a better footing with his cousin.

Hubert did not hear anything of the matter that night. He was feeling ill and depressed, and he did not come down. When he appeared at breakfast the next morning, he was looking pale and worn, and it was noticed that he was "off his head."

Occupied by his own thoughts he did not notice for some time that there was a change in the manner of his Farm-fellow towards him. As a matter of fact, the New House fellows were less disposed to believe the story than the School House boys. But when he appeared in dress with the rest of the Fens, he was not left in ignorance much longer.

While the master's attention was engaged elsewhere for a few moments, a School House fellow leaned over his desk and tapped Hubert on the shoulder. He turned his head.

"I say, Langley, have you been sending any more telegrams?"

The question seemed to strike the unfortunate lad like a bullet. He was totally unprepared for such an attack.

He stared at the joker wide-eyed, his face becoming so terribly pale that everyone observed it, and, of course, drew conclusions from it.

The master's voice was heard, and the lesson proceeded. But from that moment there was little doubt as to Hubert's complicity in the affair in the minds of his Farm-fellows.

More than once during the remainder of that wretched morning Hubert was sharply reprimanded for inattention. He could not think clearly of anything. His brain seemed to be in a whirl. When school was dismissed he gladly escaped.

The other Fifth fellows, even those of his own house, showed a desire to avoid him that could not be mistaken. Nobody spoke to him on the tender topic, but a good many spoke "at" him. If he passed near a couple of fellows talking, their talk was pretty certain to veer round to the subject of telegrams while he was in hearing.

Talbot had betrayed him!

That was the thought that was uppermost in his mind.

Of the real facts he had not the remotest suspicion. His thoughts fastened upon Talbot instantly, and he had no doubt upon the point.

Knowles met him in the quadrangle with a look of deep concern.

"This is a bad business, Hubert. We shall both be sent to Coventry. I thought he would let it out sooner or later, but I did not expect it so soon. Where are you going?"

"I am going to see Talbot," said Hubert, in a hoarse voice.

"Hubert's eyes glittered.

"He is in the gym. But will it do any good to—"

Hubert made no reply. He strode straight on towards the gymnasium, leaving Knowles standing alone.

Talbot saw Hubert come in, and his brows knitted. He read in the expression of his cousin's face that trouble was coming. Hubert walked straight towards him, and without a word he clenched his fist and struck full at Talbot's face. With all the force of fierce hate and revenge, he struck.

Just a quick guard turned the blow aside.

"Hubert," exclaimed Talbot earnestly, "you are mistaken, upon my word of honour. I do not know how the story got about. I have not said a single word."

"Liar!"

No more words were exchanged. Hubert was beside himself with fury. He sprang at Talbot like a tiger, and ere he had had no choice but to defend himself. He struck, and struck hard, and Langley rolled on the floor of the gym.

The blow dazed him. When he recovered himself, Talbot was gone. A hand helped him to rise; it was that of Cecil Knowles. Langley looked at him with awfully gleaming eyes.

"I have resolved," he said hoarsely. "You understand? I have resolved. And the sooner the better!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

In the Shadow of Death.

"T'S him! It's my turn at last!"

Both Lowe, the poacher, muttered the words between his teeth as he crept further back into the cover of the straggling hedge. The early evening had closed in. It was chilly, but very clear, a crescent of moon peeping over the tree-tops of Fernley Wood. The sound of footsteps in the direction of the village had caught the quick ear of the poacher, and as he glared out of his lurking-place he recognised the sturdy figure coming down the lane.

It was a half-holiday that day at Fernley, and Talbot had been to visit his uncle. He had returned by the usual train to Fernley Station, and set out to walk down to the school. It was after dark when he left the village, and he did not enter the footpath through the wood, but followed the lane. The path through the wood was seldom used after nightfall. But it was in the lane that a bitter enemy was waiting and watching for him.

Deeper into his cover sank the poacher as the boy's footsteps sounded nearer. His eyes, aglitter with evil passions, watched Talbot as he passed. His hand closed more tightly upon the heavy cudgel it held.

He had failed once before; he did not mean to fail now. He would run no risk this time.

The Fernley boy passed on unconscious that a foe was near. The poacher springing to his feet, Talbot turned at the sound, and as he did so the poacher's cudgel, aimed with deadly accuracy, flew through the air and struck him full upon the forehead with a stunning force.

Talbot staggered blindly, and with a low moan fell at full-length in the road.

With a bound of a tiger, the poacher was upon him. His huge fists were clenched, ready to shower savage blows upon his victim at a sign of resistance. But Talbot made no move. The blow of the cudgel had done its work. He was stunned and insensible.

The ruffian chuckled. He did not delay. He lifted the boy in his arms. To his great strength Talbot's weight was a mere trifle. In a few seconds he had plunged through the hedge, and borne his victim into the dark shades of Fernley Wood, which in this place bordered the lane. There, under the leafless trees, he stopped for a moment to listen. At that hour there were few passers in the lane; but he wished to make sure. He strained his ears to listen, but no sound of a footfall came to him. He was satisfied. His villainous deed had passed unseen, and he was safe.

He chuckled again, and plunged deeper into the wood. Avoiding the path, he made his way in the direction of the Haunted Pool, the inaccessible lair in his arms. He knew every foot of Fernley Wood, and never for a moment missed his way.

Once he paused and stared uneasily round him into the darkness of the trees. He had heard a rustle, or was it an echo? Perhaps some animal scared by his approach, skulking away among the trees. He listened for several minutes, and hearing nothing further, he was satisfied, and continued on his way.

Five minutes later he saw the steady gleam ahead of the pool.

A strange, ghastly spot in the dim light. Round the pool the trees stood grim and dark. Great bulrushes grew by the shallow margin, and floating plants lay upon the glimmering surface of the water. A spot of picturesque beauty by day, but by night eerie, weird. The tale ran that a cruel murder had been done in olden days by the shore of that lonely pool, and that the body of the victim had been sunk in the still waters, and that of a night the wrath might be seen gliding over the glimmering surface.

The poacher knew the place legend, but it had little effect upon his hard, callous nature. He bore his burden down to the margin of the pool. In one spot, where the thickly-growing trees overhung the water, the pool was of great depth, and it was here that the ruffian halted and laid his victim down. Talbot was still insensible. His face was deathly white, and a trickle of blood ran down it from the place where the cudgel had struck him.

But there was no moan, only hale and vigorous, in the poacher's savage face. He thrust his hand into a hollow of the bank, and drew out great stones one by one, and crammed them into Talbot's pockets. He had placed them there in readiness earlier in the day. Once the body, thus weighted, was plunged into the pool, the waters would close above it, never probably to disclose their secret to mortal eye.

A water-rat scuttled away among the reeds. The poacher started; and then, with a nervous care upon his nervousness, hastily resumed his villainous work. A minute more and all would be ready. Talbot showed no sign of returning to consciousness.

It was done! Both Lowe gave a grunt, and seized the unconscious boy to roll him over into the water. There was a rustle behind him. He started and swung round, and as he did so there came a blinding crash upon his head, and he rolled over helplessly across the boy. He stirred slightly, but in a fraction of a second the blow was repeated with even more force, and he lay quite still.

"Master Talbot!"

Talbot's eyes opened. He shivered. Ice-cold water was being dashed into his face, and it had revived him.

He started blindly about him. He was lying on his back, and above him was the tracery of leafless boughs against the moonlit wintry sky. A man knelt by his side, bathing his face with water scooped from the pool in his hat, and murmuring to himself. He gave a cry of joy as Talbot opened his eyes.

"Master Talbot!"

"Hallo, Caleb! Is it you? What has happened?" Talbot strove to rise, but sank back again, his senses swimming. Strange lights seemed to dance before his eyes.

"Don't move, Master Talbot! Wait till your strength comes back! You are safe now. He can't hurt you. I'm watching him. If he moves I will give him another smack."

This was so much Greek to Talbot.

"What do you mean, Caleb? What are you talking about?"

"Look!"

The old man moved Talbot's head a little, so that he could see the insensible poacher lying on the margin of the lake.

Talbot gave a gasp.

"I remember. Someone struck me down in the lane."

"It was that villain."

"But—but how did I come here?"

"He brought you here." The old man began to turn the stones out of Talbot's pockets. "See! He was going to sink you in the pool."

Talbot shuddered violently.

"My heavens!" He grasped the old man's hand. "You have saved my life, Caleb!"

Caleb Carlisle nodded.

"Yes. I had my eye on him. Old Caleb knew what he meant to do when he saw him hide the stones here to-day. Old Caleb knew." The strange old fellow chuckled. "I was watching him: He never knew that I followed him through the wood. Once I thought that he heard. He would have killed me if he had known." The old man cast an uneasy glance towards the still form of the poacher, as if not yet divested of his fears. "I saw him put you down here and fill your pockets with stones. What could I do? I am an old man. But when I saw my chance, I struck him from behind. I was afraid it would not be hurt enough, and then afterwards I was afraid that I had struck too hard, and killed him, after I gave him the second one. But he is not dead. I think it will be a long time before he moves, though."

"I shall never forget this, Caleb. You have saved my life. Will you help me to the school?"

"Catch hold of me—so. Can you walk?"

"Yes. My head's getting clearer. It aches, though, horribly." Talbot passed his hand over his forehead, upon which a lump half the size of an egg had formed. "The cowardly beast! Let him be there till the police come for him."

And, with Caleb Carlisle's assistance, he moved away slowly from the Haunted Pool.

Neither spoke again until they were clear of the wood and out in the lane. Then old Caleb, who seemed to have been thinking for a long time, said abruptly:

"You have a bitter enemy at the school, Master Talbot!" Talbot looked at him wonderingly.

"When do you refer to, Caleb?"
 "The boy who was going to make them drink me when you interfered, Master Talbot," said Caleb. "You remember?"

"Knewles!"
 "Yes, that is what you called him. How do you think Seth Lowe knew that you were coming from the village to-night, Master Talbot?"

"I don't know."
 "Because somebody told him," said old Caleb, nodding his head sagely.

Talbot started violently, as a glimpse of the old man's meaning broke upon him.

"Good heavens, Caleb, you don't mean that Knewles was a party—"

"I saw him meet the postster in the wood," said Caleb; "and soon after that Seth Lowe went and put the stones by the pool in the hollow under the tree. He put those there ready to sink you in the water, Master Talbot. How did he know you would be coming through this lane after dark? Trust old Caleb. That boy in bad all through. Keep on your guard, Master Talbot. When you stopped him terminating me that day, I saw in his eyes that he would do anything to have revenge upon you. Take care of him."

Talbot's brain was in a whirl.

That Knewles might have been a party to the murderous attack was probable enough; he was, as Caleb said, bad all through, and capable of anything.

But another thought had instantly rushed into Talbot's mind.

What of Hubert?
 He strove to dismiss the idea, but it would not leave him. Old Caleb, surprised by the agitation in his face, looked at him curiously.

"Caleb," said Talbot, turning towards him, and speaking in a husky voice, "don't mention to anybody else what you have said to me. Promise me."
 "Just as you like, Master Talbot."

Talbot breathed more freely. He felt that he could trust the old man, strange old fellow as he was. If the terrible thought that had come into his mind was correct, he knew what he would do.

His steps became slower and heavier. He began to doubt whether he would be able to reach the school. As he tramped on, leaning over more heavily upon old Caleb's shoulder, his mind grew confused and dizzy.

"I—I feel done up, Caleb," he gasped, at last. "That brute must have hurt me more than I thought. I can't go on."

He sank down upon a bank by the roadside. Old Caleb, distressed, and not knowing what to do, stood undecided. Talbot had kept up as long as he could, but his strength was gone now, and the pain in his head was increasing. He lay almost motionless.

There was a sound of heavy wheels in the road. Old Caleb turned joyfully, and ran towards the new arrival.

Three or four Sixth-formers of Fernley were returning to the school from some ramble, and hurrying along, for they were already late for sailing-away.

"Young gentlemen—young gentlemen," gasped old Caleb.

"Hallo, old fossil!" said Greene. "What do you want?"
 Caleb quickly explained, and the Fernley fellows at once hurried to Talbot. He had sunk into unconsciousness on the bank by the roadside.

"My lad," said Greene, "to have had a thump, and no mistake! Look at that lump! Look here, one of you chaps cut back to Mr. Murgrove's, and tell him to come up to the school. We shall have to carry Talbot in. Poor old chap! Caleb, old man, you're a jewel, and I'm sorry I called you a fossil!"

While one of the fellows scudded off for a doctor, the others raised Talbot in their arms to carry him to the school. He was in a dead faint, quite unconscious of what was going on. They set off at a swinging pace, soon leaving old Caleb behind. But the old fellow was satisfied. He had led Talbot in good hands, and he bided long to his cottage as the Fernley fellows bore Talbot to the school.

There was a buzz of inquiry and a rapidly gathering crowd as the Sixth-formers bore Talbot into the quadrangle and

headed for the School House. Talbot's white, set face splashed with blood, was regarded with looks of horror.

"Is he dead?"
 "Dead! Talbot dead!"

The words were repeated to and fro. Hubert Langley heard them as he stood looking out from the New House. He shuddered violently.

"Dead!" he muttered. "Dead! My God!"
 He crept against the wall. A savage clench was laid upon his shoulder; Knewles's eyes glared into his face.

"You fool! Do you want to betray yourself and me?" blazed Knewles. "Get to your room, and—"

Hubert shook his head off as if it were something leathern.
 "Don't touch me, Knewles! Don't touch me, I tell you!" he said shrilly. "Keep away from me, or I shall do you a mischief!"

Knewles glared at him in a fury of rage and terror. He saw that Hubert was overwrought, almost hysterical, capable of any folly at that moment.

"Hubert—"
 "Don't speak to me! Get out of my sight! Get away, I tell you!"

If Hubert could have killed, Hubert Langley would have died there and then. Knewles's look was perfectly damning. But he realized that persistence would do no good, and he moved away, a prey to haunting apprehensions.

Hubert Langley went blindly up the stairs, and staggered into his own room. He flung himself down on the bed, and burst into a fit of passionate sobbing.

Talbot dead!

At those words the scales seemed to have fallen from his eyes.

It was as if a flash of lightning had penetrated the mists of hatred and jealousy and suspicion, and in that terrible moment he saw his conduct in its true light.

Talbot dead!
 The words rang in his ears and haunted him. Dead—murdered! And he was the murderer! The postster's hand had struck the blow, but in the sight of Heaven he was equally guilty. How petty seemed all his motives now!

He was heir of Lowther Deane, of five thousand a year! He gave a shaking, miserable laugh at the thought. He would have given all the wealth of the Indies to recall that deed, to see Talbot standing before him alive and well, to feel that he was not a murderer! And Laura Deane's love—he had thought to win that by this crime. Oh, he had been mad, mad! Her love! He would never dare to look her in the face again, he would never dare to touch her hand.

What had he done?
 He had not been himself when he agreed to the villainous plot; Knewles had taken advantage of his weakness, had played cunningly upon his fears, upon his jealousy, upon his hatred! He had been nothing but a man's-paw in Knewles's hands. He could see that now, now that it was too late to save him.

But it was not fair to cast the blame upon Knewles. The plotter had used him, had played upon his hatred and jealousy for his own purposes; but he could not have played upon them if they had not been there. No, he himself had been to blame all along; he had allowed evil passions to prey upon his heart, to distort his judgment, to dominate all his thoughts. He had only himself to thank for what had come of it.

He groaned aloud in his misery.

What could he do? What could he do now? If that one fearful deed could but be recalled! If but Talbot had lived, how gladly he could have flung himself on his knees before him and begged his forgiveness. But he was dead—dead!—and he was his murderer!

"I did not mean it! I was mad, mad!" he cried aloud despairingly.

"Langley!"
 He sprang up.

Dick Russell was in the room, looking at him with a strange expression.

"I knocked twice, but you did not answer, so I came in," said Russell quietly. "Talbot wishes to see you."

Hubert stared at him wildly.

"You are mocking me," he said hoarsely. "Talbot is dead!"

"He is not dead. He was only stunned by the peacher, and he faints as he was being brought to the school."

"Not dead!"

"No."

"Talbot alive!" muttered Herbert dazedly. He could not realize it at first. He feared that it was a trick of the imagination.

But as he grasped the meaning of it, all that it meant to him, it was as a light coming out of great darkness.

He sank down upon the edge of the bed, and broke into a fit of passionate tears. Russell walked to the window. He knew pretty clearly how matters stood, but his opinion of Herbert Langley was changing. It came into his mind that this night might be a turning-point in the life of the unhappy lad who had stoned and reported.

The burst of emotion passed. Herbert rose, his heart lighter than it had been for many weary weeks. His mind was made up.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Friends at Last—The Second Match with St. Freda's—Conclusion.

TALBOT was in bed. The doctor had visited him, and pronounced that he was in no danger, but that he must be kept very quiet for some days. He was conscious, and though his head still ached, his faculties were quite clear. His desire to see Herbert had been expressed so earnestly that the doctor had assented, and directed that his wish should not be denied.

He was very pale and weak, and the great bruise on his forehead stood out blue-black against the pallor of his face. He looked up when Herbert entered. Russell closed the door and walked away, leaving them alone.

Herbert came to the bedside. Talbot saw the traces of recent emotion in his face, and his own softened.

He had not sent for his cousin to reprimand. He had sent for him to tell him that he knew all, that he would forgive all, if Knowles left Freddy. He was not prepared for the mood in which Herbert came to him.

Langley sank into the chair beside the bed. He struggled to speak, but for some moments the words would not come. Talbot looked at him, and was silent.

"Harry!" Langley found his voice at last. "I—I don't know how you'll receive what I am going to tell you. But I must say it."

"Go on, old chap," said Talbot, in his old frank way.

Herbert's eyes were fixed upon the carpet, and he was very pale.

"Has Love attacked you to-night?"

"Yes."

"He tried to kill you?"

"Yes."

"I was in league with him?"

Talbot caught his breath.

"You can tell the doctor if you like, but—if you can forgive me, Harry, I shall be a different sort of chap from this day forward. I—I don't know how it was, but I was not myself when I agreed—at least, when I heard them say that you were dead. I seemed to awake from a sort of dream, and when I—I realised what I had done, I would have given my own life to bring back yours, Harry. And then Russell came and told me that—that you were alive. I don't know if you understand me—"

"I think I do, old fellow."

Talbot's hand sought his cousin's, and Herbert gripped it. In that grip was the force of old grudges, the beginning of a new friendship, to last as long as life itself.

There was a long silence.

"As for Knowles," began Herbert at last, somewhat awkwardly, "you will guess that he was with me in this. He—it would be cowardly of me to throw blame upon him or to refuse to stand by him now, for we were both in it together—but—but I can tell you that I see him in his true colours now. I can see that I was only a tool in his hands, and I have made up my mind to have done with him. I shall tell him so plainly, and then I shall never speak to him again as long as I live. But—but if you want to punish him over this business, Harry, you will have to punish me, too. I can't desert him."

"You are right, Herbert," said Talbot. "I admit I should like to see Freddy well rid of Knowles. But if you are done with him, I am satisfied. I cannot say how glad I am to hear you speak like this."

And a long talk, in a friendly strain new to them, passed between the cousins, till the good matron came in, and turned Herbert out, and insisted upon Talbot's going to sleep.

Herbert went back to his own quarters with a light heart. He was not surprised to find Knowles waiting for him in his room. His face set grimly. He was ready for the interview.

There was an ugly sneer upon Knowles's face.

"So all your torments were for nothing," he said. "The dummy had his fall."

"Yes," said Herbert. "He failed."

"You have been to see Talbot?"

"Yes."

"To see whether he suspected anything?" said Knowles eagerly. "Does he think—"

"He knows all!"

Knowles turned deadly pale.

"Knows all? How? How could he know?"

"Someone," said Herbert grimly. "I have told him."

"You—have—told—him!" Knowles seamed severely able to articulate the words. "You have lost your nerve, and betrayed us both!"

"I have told him all, Knowles, and asked for pardon, and he has forgiven me, like the noble, generous fellow that he is," said Herbert steadily. "He will take no step against you, for my sake, and you have nothing to fear, so long as you do not seek further to injure him."

"He promised you as much before, and let out the secret," sneered Knowles.

"He did not," said Langley, raising his voice a little. "He denied having said a word about the telegram. I did not believe him then, but I believe him now. But somebody said enough to start a rumour, Cecil Knowles, and now that my eyes are opened, I am at no loss to guess who it was."

Knowles shifted uneasily.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I was a fool not to see it before!" Langley said bitterly. "You found it very easy to hoodwink me. If Talbot had let out the secret, he would have told of you, and he would have given you away so that punishment would come to you. But that did not happen. Your name was not mentioned. There was just enough cunningly whispered to make suspicion settle upon me, and, like the fool I was, I suspected Talbot, without realising it out. Have you done that you started that rumour for the sake of bringing me into line with you, to plot against Talbot's life?"

Knowles was silent. He began to realise that his denials over Langley was at an end—that the influence he wielded over his erstwhile champion had slipped through his fingers. The rage that consumed him was shown in the glitter of his little ratty eyes. But his anger was nothing to Herbert.

"That is all over," Langley continued. "I told Talbot that if he wished to punish you, I should have to stand by


The 20th Century

DAISY 4/-

AIR GUN

Simple, Strong and Handsome. Safe and Accurate. The Ideal Gun for Boys. Put together to stay together—with Pistol Grip, Prop-Sights, Nickel-Plated Steel Barrel and Polished Walnut Stock. Length 31 inches. Weight 1 lb. 13 oz. From all Dealers, or Wm. E. PECK & CO., (Dept. 21) 5, Broad St., LONDON, E.C.

Shooting or Darts



ON SALE TO-DAY: Part I. of "THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL," The Greatest Work Dealing with Our Great Winter Pastime Ever Published. Price 6d.

you, and he agreed that you should go free. But there must be no more plotting, Knowles. If you seek to injure Harry Talbot again, you will have us against you as well as him. I warn you what to expect."

Knowles groined his teeth.

"And you give up everything—you resign to Him your soul's fortune—"

"When I thought that Talbot was dead, that I was his murderer, I realised how little my soul's fortune would have comforted me, with the stain of murder upon me," said Hubert quietly. "The thought of the empire's money will serve some between us again."

Knowles had one more card to play.

"And Lorna Desmond—all you—"

Hubert winced.

That thought could give him pain, though it could not shake his resolution.

"Do not speak of that, Knowles. Lorna will choose the one she likes best, and, at all events I shall not better my chances by sleeping myself in prison, as you would have me do. Say no more. Everything between us is at an end. But I would prefer to part without anger. I do not reproach you—I know that I lost myself only too readily to your scheming. But it is all over now—and so is our friendship. Good-night."

Without a word, but with black bitterness in his heart, Knowles bowed and walked out of the room.

It was indeed all over, and he realised it. His days were his days no longer.

He was safe—that was something. Under these new circumstances, Talbot would hold his tongue; he had promised to keep the secret, and he would do it. The plotter had no punishment to fear; he was safe. But there was an end to his plans of vengeance—his dreams of wealth. He ground his teeth as he walked away from Hubert's room. But he could do nothing more. His string was drawn; henceforth Talbot had nothing to fear from his malice.

Talbot was up and about in a few days, though it was a good deal longer before the traces of the injury he had received were all gone.

The police had made a vigorous search for Seth Lowe. But they sought in vain. The poacher was traced as far as the railway-station in a neighbouring town, and there all trace of him was lost. He had fled, bearing the term of penal servitude which awaited him for attempted murder, and in the neighbourhood of Fensley he was not seen again.

Dr. Deansard and the squire, who resolved down to see his nephew as soon as he heard what had happened, greatly regretted that the wounded had not been held by the heels. But Talbot was not sorry. If Seth Lowe had been arrested, he might have told tales that were better left un told. Talbot, as well as Hubert and Knowles, breathed more freely when it became clear that the poacher was gone for good.

The refuse had received a part of the money which Knowles had raised upon Hubert's I.O.U. What was left was returned to Mr. Tigg, and Hubert, not without difficulty, found enough to add to it to get clear with the bookmaker, and receive his paper back. That was his first and last dealing with Mr. Tigg.

The story of the telegram was still afloat at Fensley. Many fellows looked askance at Hubert, and at first the movement was almost general to send him to Coventry. But Talbot had set his face against it from the first, and since the affair with the poacher, it was seen, with considerable reason, that the cause was crumbling together a great deal. They were evidently on better terms than they had ever been before, and that did not look as if the telegram story could be true. The long the rumour died out, and began to be forgotten.

There were, indeed, other and more interesting matters for the Fensley fellows to think of. The time was approaching for the St. Freda's visit, and the second match was the great topic now, and Fensley's prospects in it. Added to that, Goscoe opened his snaffle in an Inter-House match, and left a vacancy in the team. How it would be filled became a burning question; but the candidates were not long left in doubt. Helston, after consultation with the football committee that same evening, put his head into Hubert Langley's study.

"Well, I shall want you."

"To meet St. Freda's?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, Helston," said Langley. "I'll do my best to deserve it. You shan't be sorry for putting me in if I can help it."

"That's all right," said the captain of Fensley. "I'm glad to see you're on better terms with your cousin than you were, Langley. You'll be outside-right, you know—next to Talbot. I confess that I should have thought twice about putting you in good winger as you are, if you and Talbot had not warmed the hat-les. As it is, I think you will pull together first-rate. Anyway, we shall have a few trials before we meet the Saints, and we shall see."

And Helston did see, and the event justified his judgment. In the trial matches Langley and Talbot pulled together splendidly. Talbot was as pinnacled as Hubert by the new arrangement, and the squire was delighted when he heard of it.

The day came at last when the Saints came over to Fensley. Cordially the Fensley lads greeted them, and the match ground was crowded with spectators. Squire Lowther was there, with the doctor and Lorna, and old Caleb Cartlow had hobbled on to the ground to watch the play of the lad whose life he had saved, and to add his husky voice to the cheering. Old Caleb's days were passed in more comfort now than of old, for the squire had settled upon the brave old fellow a pension which was large enough to keep him from want, in gratitude to him for saving his nephew's life.

The match on the St. Freda's ground had ended in a draw, but both Saints and Fensleyites were determined that the second match should not do so.

Davenport and his merry men had come in the mood to conquer, but they found at Fensley forms worthy of their steel.

Squire Lowther rubbed his hands with satisfaction at the sight of Fensley lining up, with Talbot and Langley in the forward line in the Fensley blue-and-white. The squire had seen the change in the manner of the coaches towards each other, and it had given him more pleasure than anything else in the world could have given him to see his nephews true chums to each other. And so he was in a very cheerful mood now as he watched St. Freda's kick off and the game begin.

It was a splendid game, well fought on both sides. But the Saints soon found that the history of the previous match was not destined to repeat itself.

They found Fensley a little too big for them to handle this time. From the kick-off, the fighting was almost all in the Saints' territory, and after a quarter of an hour's splendid play, Talbot took the first goal for Fensley.

Lead and prolonged was the cheering, the squire's deep voice audible above the rest.

The teams lined up again, and St. Freda's made a big effort. They rushed the ball forward, but the Fensley backs were on the watch. Russell got the ball, and sent it away to Langley, who passed it away in fine style. By a quick pass to Talbot, he deceived the St. Freda's backs, Talbot sending the ball back immediately, and Langley centred and shot for goal, and there was a roar. The Saints' keeper grunted, and sent the leather out. It was the second goal for Fensley, and soon after this the whistle blew for half-time.

After the interval, the Saints recommenced the game with the determination to do or die. And Felle before scored for a brief while. Davenport taking a goal in fine style for his side. But it was only a flash in the pan. With brilliant play, the Fensleyites beat the Saints once more, and Helston slammed the leather into the net.

That was the last goal taken. When the whistle blew, the score was three goals to one, and Fensley had beaten her old adversary fairly and squarely.

A hurricane of cheering greeted them as they went off the field. Naturally, too, were the Saints cheered, for it was acknowledged on all hands that they had put up a good game, and, in fact, the quality of their play added to Fensley's glory in beating them.

And so we close our tale, leaving Talbot and Hubert, true chums now and for life, winning our fresh football honours for the old school and the Fifth Form at Fensley.

THE END.

Next week's story will be entitled "The Submarine Detective," a Story of a Stopping of Seven Million, Tenner, and Pedro, the Bloodhound.

NEXT WEEK:

"THE CARTRIDGE DETECTIVE." A Grand Tale of Gordon Blake, Tucker, and Pedro, the Dog Detective. Order Early.

OPENING CHAPTERS.

GRAND NEW SERIAL.

TROOPER and BUSHRANGER;

Or, THE LAST DAYS OF NED KELLY.

By **CECIL HAYTER**

Author of "The Quest of the Ruby Scarab."

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

No. 43.—The Escape.

The rain came down in one continuous swirling shower, and a strong easterly gale drove it slantwise west a force which stung like pellets from a twelve-bore. The sky was black as ink, and split asunder at half-minute intervals to emit a dazzling signing of fork lightning; whilst the thunder growled and banged overhead without letting up long enough to give one time to gasp for breath.

Hull a dozen coasting vessels in the bay had parted their cables and were sagging helplessly shorewards, sending up scared blue rockets for assistance; and her Majesty's cruiser Amphitryon was steaming frantically out between the heads, having shipped her anchors in the hope of riding out the gale in the open with plenty of sea room.

Melbourne had, gale, snowed, and remaining, ugly as sin, given as death itself, roared deserted, windowless walls to the full blast of the tempest.

Here and there an armed wander, in glistening markitish cape and overall, covered for shelter beneath the parapet or in the jutting angle of a guard-room, carrying their leather colleagues snugly cushioned below out of harm's way.

But the big yards and exercise grounds were deserted, the bare paving-slabs glistening wetly in the darkness.

In the upper corridor at the north-east angle of the main

building a wander, with a heavy bunch of keys dangling from a bright steel chain, was just opening the door of cell No. 43 on his final round of inspection for the night. Up and down the corridor two other wanderers paced anxiously with soft, noiseless tread—they had rubber on their boot-soles—and a loaded rifle over the crook of the left elbow. Now and again one of them would check for an instant and peer through the narrow observation-slits in the wall, which gave him an unobstructed view into the cell beyond.

Clang, clack! The heavy bolts shot back. There was a jingling of keys, a grating of the lock, and the narrow, massive door of No. 43 swung back.

It was a small, bare room, eight feet by ten, with a plain wooden bedstead secured to the floor in one corner, a table, a chair, and a few tin pans. Everything was scrupulously neat and clean, even beyond the requirements of the official regulations. A couple of battered books lay on the table, a privilege allowed in certain favored prisons.

And prisoner No. 43 was undoubtedly favored by all the wanderers but one. He was civil spoken; cheerful, in spite of illness; practical and prompt in obeying orders. Moreover, he had an air about him of one more accustomed to give a command rather than obey one. He gave no trouble, and his wander, almost to a man, treated him with respect and such leniency as the rules permitted.

The exception was a hulking brute of a wander named Macellan, a sailor, sea-tempered bully, with a doubtful record in the past—how he had obtained

his post as one quite knew—and an extraordinary fund of petty spite which earned him the hatred of every prisoner with whom he came in contact.

Nothing gave him keener delight than to bully and goad some unfortunate wretch till he could hear the man's teeth grating with impatient rage, and see him go white to the lips. Then, with a coarse laugh and a foot thrust, which his victim was powerless to resent, he would set him some perfectly undesired and unjust punishment.

When Macellan, in the course of his duties, came across No. 43 he started his usual bullying methods, and found, to his astonishment, that he and they alike were treated with contempt. This spurred him to increased activity, and he racked each brain as he could boast of for novel and ingenious methods of hating.

There were received in the same dignified, contemptuous manner; but there was a bulging glass in No. 43's eye which would have warned a less dense man than Macellan that his victim was becoming dangerous.

As recently as that morning he had "taken a turn at No. 43," as he expressed it, with rather astounding results.

After five minutes or so of foul insult and abuse Macellan had ventured to raise his hand to the prisoner.

No. 43 whipped round like a knife, his black eyes blaring



A jagged lightning flash split the heavens across, making everything as light as day, and showed No. 43 the figure of Macellan and three paces away.

with such extraordinary ferocity, and with such an air of command, that the bully instinctively fell back a pace.

"Look here, my man," said No. 43, in a low tone, "keep your dirty hands off me, or you'll be sorry for it! And listen to a word of advice. If you go on as you're going on, one of these big days you'll be killed! I won't call it murder, for one dose and murder varies such as you."

Bloodstain, agitated and speechless with rage, was nevertheless unable to say or do anything so long as that menacing dark eye fixed him.

The stoutest he could do was to bluster out something about reporting the prisoner for using threatening language. "And, anyway, it won't be you what 's the pleasure of your own No. 43. You're going to be tried and 'ung—that's your ailment—'ug by the neck, and the Lord 'ave mercy on yer bloodstain's soul!" With which utterly ineffectual vituperation he had taken himself off, vowing black vengeance in the future, and secretly convinced that there was something about No. 43 which made him feel at a disadvantage.

Jameson, the wander who now stood at No. 43's open door, was a very different type of man. He glanced in with a civil nod towards the figure on the bed, and instead of addressing him by number, as usual, slipped in an occasional air.

"Feeling better now, sir?" he said, in a low voice.

"Much better, thanks, Jameson," came the answer from the bed. "The pain from my old wound has been pretty bad. Fancy it's the damp things it on. Deems of a right outside, isn't it?"

"Bleedin' great pain, sir. Hope you'll be better to-morrow. The trial is fixed for the day after—Thursday."

"Ah, thanks! I'm glad they've settled the date at last. Ough!"

The conversation was an involuntary one of pain.

"Care to see the surgeon, sir? No! Well, good-night, sir."

"Good-night—oh, and—er—Jameson, by the way, could you lower the gas outside in the corridor a little? It shines straight into my eyes, and prevents my sleeping. Thank you. Good-night."

Jameson lowered the corridor gas, as requested. The big door clanged to behind him, the bolts were shot, and the wander, having completed his round of inspection, strolled away.

No sound had the sound of his footsteps died away than No. 43 least lightly from his bed, and stood a moment hesitating. His pains seemed to have vanished with unexpected rapidity, though that they were by no means wholly imaginary—a sharp involuntary facial contortion here witness.

A terrific blast of wind struck the building with hurricane force till it shook from roof to foundation, and No. 43 was able to hear nothing but the general din and creaking. As it swept by, however, he distinguished the faint steps of the patrol passing near, and seated himself on the bed till they should pass.

He gave a glance through the observation-dit into the corridor beyond. The light was very dim, thanks to Jameson having turned it down, and it was pretty certain that the patrol would not be able to see in it if he wished to, which was unlikely; for No. 43, thanks to his good reputation, was little bothered.

The man passed and re-passed, and still No. 43 sat motionless, for he knew that in a few moments the two warders would be deeply engaged in a game of cribbage, with which it was their habit to while away the long silent hours.

After a good ten minutes, through which he was quiet as a statue, he sprang once more to his feet, moving quickly and silently, and set to work.

His first act was to dive under the bed on hands and knees, and, grasping with his finger-tips, pull up a small segment of board a foot square from the flooring. This had been sent carelessly out loose by persistent scratching with a small-pointed fragment of iron. From the receptacle beneath he dragged first of all a small package of banknotes; there followed a long coil of linen. This was in thin strips, twisted and knotted at two-foot intervals, forming a rope four strands thick. The strands for the most part had been torn carefully from a sheet; but some of them bore dark, ugly marks and bloodstains. These had been bandages, secured one by one at No. 43's leg work after work in the hospital ward, and after hovering between life and death had gradually taken a turn towards convalescence. The fact that even then, when racked by the pain of healing wounds, and weakened

by loss of blood and a constitution temporarily shattered, he had yet concentrated his mind on acquiring those bandages for future use, proved him to be a man of indomitable will and iron determination.

The notes he stuffed carefully enough in his pocket, but the rope he went over critically first by knot, testing its strength. In two places he even went to the trouble of untying, retying, and retying before he was satisfied.

Coil upon coil, it made a length of a full thirty feet, and at one end was securely knotted a strong iron hook.

Again he plunged his arm into the square hole up to the shoulder, and brought out three strong iron spikes, roughly made from the handles of cooking pots; these were for climbing, and having laid them gently on the floor beside the rope, he was compelled to rest a bit by reason of a sudden leakage of pain.

In a few minutes, however, he was up again and working with a will at the centre iron bar of the three which guarded the window at seven-inch intervals.

The upper and lower sockets of this were solid masonry—good stout granite—yet at a touch the lower end of the bar moved. The granite had been carefully and painfully grooved towards the outer edge of the sill, and the hollow thus worn was filled by the dust of the hard stone worked into a paste with a little water. A wedge, and the lower end was free; two or three quick jerks to right and left—the bar itself acting as a lever—the upper socket lost its grip, and the bar came out, leaving a space through which a spare-built, active man might squeeze his way. No. 43 was both spare and active.

Once more he darted back to the thick glass of the observation-hole. Nothing was to be seen but the desolate, dim-lit corridor beyond, with its ordinary row of numbered doors. He left the sill, and bent down with his ear to the keyhole; there was nothing to be heard. The corridor was a long one, and the warders, intent on their game, were at the far end.

Returning, he found two coarse handkerchiefs round the end of the iron bar and stealthily threw up the window. It moved noiselessly, and without a jar. For days past he had gnawed the sash with pieces of fat from his steady meal and with wedges from his still unhealed wounds.

Then, picking up his iron spikes, bar, and rope, he tipped his way across the floor. A final glance round his cell, an instant's pause as a eddying rush of wind made the building quiver, and then, with a swift, deft movement, he caught the rope-hook firmly on one of the remaining bars, slipped and wriggled through the opening, but foremost, checked at the sill, then swinging his weight outwards into the night, grabbed the twisted bare strands, and slid down head over hand.

Five seconds—ten—and his feet touched ground. With a quick jerk of the wrist, he made the slackened rope wriggle like a snake, threw his arm upward at full stretch, then outward behind him.

The rope moved. The hook detached itself from the bar above, and the rope came fluttering down through the diving rain. No. 43 caught the metal hook with his free hand before ever it could reach the stone flag with a soft-take click, and gathering up the coils, darted across the courtyard.

On the further side was a strongly-built wall, towering up and shutting him in from the outer world and freedom. This he had known and been prepared for. Many a long hour he had studied it and scrutinized it in all kinds of lights, from early dawn, when it was in shadow, till the last rays of the setting sun struck it slantwise. Twenty-three times high, it was of massive granite blocks, one above another. That such he knew beyond all possibility of error, but the one factor he was uncertain of was the height of those blocks. Time and again he had tried to measure them by comparison with the size of some passing wander, but whether they were eighteen inches or twenty-four, he had never been able to determine, and between these two small measurements when multiplied by twenty-three lay all the difference between failure and success.

If eighteen, well then, his rope could reach the top when thrown at full arm stretch, and sooner or later the hook would find a precarious holding-ground on the upper edge; but if twenty-four, why, then it would fall short by some nine feet, and then he would be reduced to the doubly risky experiment of his climbing spikes, entailing time and noise.

Trooper and Bushranger

(Continued.)

He flung the rope. The weighted hook and chain upwards, grazed the granite a good five feet from the topmost line, and fell again. He caught it deftly, with a muttered exclamation of disappointment, and turned resolutely to the only possible alternative.

Taking the first of his spikes, he placed the point in the crevice just above the second line, and began tapping on the end with his heavy window bar, the noise of the blow being amplified by the handoverlark. It was tedious work, and more than once he glanced over his shoulder towards the couple of the wall away in the night, where a small light showed that an armed soldier was keeping watch in his little square tower, from which he could overlook both the courtyard inside the wall and the desolate stretch of waste ground without.

But the pale was light, and the moaning of the wind, and the hiss of the driving rain, drowned all lesser noises.

Next, reaching as high as he could, he drove in another spike four or five above the first.

Clutching his rope over his arm, and taking his third and last spike, he swung himself singly upwards, standing on the lower, and supporting himself by the upper, whilst he drove the remaining one in as far up as he could reach.

The concert was hard, and his blows uncertain in the rocky darkness of the night. When he struck the last blow a good half-hour had elapsed since he swung himself through his window. He was drenched to the skin, and dripping also with perspiration, for to a man in his weakened state the exertion was terrific.

Upwards again, and now his feet were on the second spike, his arm cracked round the topmost. Balancing himself thus, he flung his rope once more. It reached the top, held for a minute, and broke away, the hook sticking the edge with a metallic clatter. No. 43, clinging helplessly to his spikes, muttered a curse and waited. Apparently the second had not been heard. Again he tried, and this time the hook caught the farther edge, and jammed.

He swung his weight on to it and emerged up, gingerly, a little bit at a time, for a sudden jerk might dislodge the hook and send him crashing on to the stage below.

He was tired. A wound in his shoulder had reopened with the exertion, and his strength was failing him, but he gained the top, and sat straddle-wise across the wall, clinging with cracked fingers, for he felt sick and dizzy, and the force of the wind on that narrow perch was terrific.

Crouching down, he showed himself a breathless. Then, hauling up his rope, he retatched the hook, and dropped the loose end on the far side. To ascend down was comparatively an easy matter, for which a few seconds sufficed. His feet touched ground outside the prison walls, and freed the rope with a jerk. Even as he did so, a jagged lightning flash split the heavens across, making everything as light as day, and showed him the figure of Maclean not three paces away, with wide-open mouth.

[To be continued.]

"DAILY MAIL."

ORDER TO-DAY!

"THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL."

The Most Sumptuous Volume on the Great Game Ever Issued!

COMPLETE IN 12 PARTS. PRICE 6s.

The Skipper's - Weekly Chat.

NEXT FRIDAY.

In next Friday's issue our old and tried friends, Boston Blake, Tinker, and Pedro, will return in a wonderful, grand long, complete story, entitled

"THE GAMDRIVER DETECTIVE."

In this yarn, which will deal in a most fascinating manner with fun and adventure in the great metropolis, Boston Blake, in order to solve a mystery of a suspicious case, takes up the role of "caddy," and is duly assisted in his task of elucidating the great mystery by his two clever assistants, Tinker and Pedro, the King Detectives.

Will readers kindly assist me in my endeavour to make these stories known to every young man in the British Isles by telling their friends that Boston Blake will reappear next week, and also by advising them to order their copies in advance.

TO EVERY LAD WHO LIKES FOOTBALL.

I am going this week to make a special appeal to all my loyal friends on behalf of the new publication, the first part of which appears to-morrow, Friday, October 20th, under the title of

"THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL."

The Complete History and Record of the Association and Rugby Games.

This work is going to create a sensation among football enthusiasts. Each part will be contained in a cover, magnificently printed in colours, portraying some prominent football player, and these picture portraits will be so executed as to be worthy of being framed and hung in the room of any football admirer.

"The Book of Football" will consist of twelve parts, issued every fortnight, price sixpence each, and each cover, as I have said, will contain a specially printed picture in colours of some famous player on the field, and there will be twelve different covers in all. The first picture represents Brown, the well-known Aston Villa forward, dribbling the ball. Those who have seen this cover say that it is a very speaking likeness of the famous forward.

In Part I, W. I. Bassett writes, in his particularly interesting and instructive style, on "The Forward Game," and every number of the twelve parts will contain much of interest and instruction to those who follow football.

Remember, Part I. will be on sale to-morrow everywhere, price 6d.

AFTER BATHING, IS IT WISE TO RUN?

This is the problem which W. G. L. puts to me. He says that he and some friends have been arguing as to whether there is any harm in taking a good sharp run after bathing.

Certainly not, if the lad is in sound condition; in fact, it is a very good plan, because it helps the blood to circulate throughout the body much more vigorously and much more quickly than it would do in the ordinary course of events. A short, sharp sprint after bathing is a very good thing indeed.

A GOOD BOOK ON PHOTOGRAPHY.

H. T. T. asks me to tell him where he can get a cheap book on amateur photography.

My friend will find "Modern Photography," published by Upcott Gill, price 1s., a very good book. Another very useful book is "The Barnet Book of Photography," also price 1s. It can be obtained from almost any photographer's outfitting. But, after all, there is nothing like experience to teach a man how to take good pictures.

THE SKIPPER.

No.1. Now On Sale. No.1.

The Greatest Book on the Game:

THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL

The Complete History and Record of the Association and Rugby Games.

*Superbly Printed
and Illustrated.*

*Now
On Sale.*

*Written by the
Best Authorities.*

WITH SPLENDID COLOURED PORTRAITS SUITABLE FOR FRAMING.

Complete
in
12
Fortnightly
Parts.



BRAWN or ASTON VILLA

Price
6^D
Net.

This sketch represents the splendid coloured portrait of Brawn, the famous "Villa" forward. It is No. 1 of the Gallery of Famous Footballers, which should decorate the walls of every footballer's room. "The Gallery of Football" will consist of twelve of these splendid portraits, and all you have to do is to hand them to your picture-framer, who will return to you a set of pictures worthy of being treasured for a lifetime.

**THE BOOK OF FOOTBALL is the Book every
True Footballer MUST GET.**

It is the most Sumptuous Volume ever published on any Sport.

**Now
On Sale.**

**PRICE
6d.
NET.**

**Now
On Sale.**

SUCCESS, FAME & FORTUNE FOR $\frac{1}{2}$ ^{d.} A DAY.

Ready October 24th.

Education, Success, & Fortune for a Halfpenny a Day.

HARMSWORTH SELF-EDUCATOR.

A Home Road to Success in Life.

£50,000

Worth of Knowledge

for a **$\frac{1}{2}$ ^{d.}** a Day.

**Complete in 48 Parts, Fortnightly, Price 7d. each.
Part 1 will appear October 24th.**

The greatest educational work of the century. In the struggle of life it is brains that tell, and no one who means to succeed can afford to do without this work. This is the book of brains. It is the book that will teach you everything. The cost is trivial, yet it may mean fame, fortune, and success to you. It deals with your business and all its various branches. The work for the library or the kitchen, the workshop or the studio, the laboratory or the office.

YOUR BRAIN IS YOUR FORTUNE.

We give below a few of the subjects dealt with in this great work: Glass and Earthenware, Carving, Biology, Philosophy, Religion, Building, Cabinet-Making, Chemistry, Accountancy, Medicine, Auctioneering, Law, Army and Navy, Electricity, Dress, Engineering, Farming, Gardening, Geography, Astronomy, History, Cookery, Foods, Languages, Literature, Journalism, Printing, Music, Health, Shorthand, Typewriting, Mining, Shopkeeping, Railways, Ships, Textiles, Drawing and Design, Clerkships, &c.

ORDER PART 1 NOW.