

## Giants of the Past—D. R. Gent

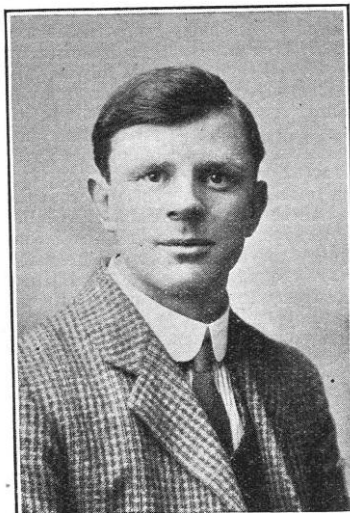
By LAURANCE WOODHOUSE

DAVID (more popularly known as "Dai") Gent must surely be one of the most "pigmiest" of giants who ever donned a Rugby boot, for he never weighed more than nine stone three pounds and he could never grow more than five feet two and a half inches. Indeed, "some giant!" Yet, like his prototype, he was a giant-slayer. You shall hear even to-day down in the West country how that on one occasion, when Gloucestershire were playing Somerset, a certain Somerset forward, one W. Gunningham, who stood six-foot four and weighed thirteen stone ten, gained possession of the ball. At this mountain of brawn and muscle Dai Gent hurled himself and brought the great man down. Gunningham fell awkwardly and was laid out, and the crowd roared with laughter for many a minute.

Dai Gent has had a very varied experience in football, for he played in his time for Gloucester, Gloucestershire, Plymouth, Cornwall, and England. Like another England scrum-half, F. E. Oakeley, he was a very clever dribbler, and this no doubt he owed to the fact that when he was a boy at Swansea Grammar School he played Association football, and that he played it pretty well is evidenced by the fact that he captained his school team. When he left the Grammar School he went on to St. Paul's College, Cheltenham. There he turned his attention to Rugby, and again proved his skill, for he was captain of the XV in 1903-04. It was during that season that that sound judge of the game, George Romans, the Gloucester back, spotted Dai Gent, and he was forthwith chosen to play for the Gloucester first team. This was rapid promotion with a vengeance, for Gloucester were a powerful team, and Gent never played for the second team. During that season he played nineteen times for the city. His second match was against Blackheath, with the redoubtable Gamlin playing back. Dai has often told me with a grin that in that match he had one fixed resolve, viz., not to let Gamlin lay a finger on him. From 1904 till 1911, Gent played regularly both for Gloucester city and the county. His city partner was J. Stephens, while W. V. Butcher, the Richmond and England player, partnered him for a while in the county games. In those days, Gent and Butcher worked the scrum alternately, Gent on the left side of the field, Butcher on the right. It was not, however, a very clever arrangement. His first county season was not a very successful one, as Gloucestershire lost every match, and Dai still possesses a wooden spoon which was presented to him in memory of the event.

As in the case of so many other famous players, Wales

were the first to recognise Gent's talents, and in the season 1904-5 he was first reserve to "Dicky" Owen for Wales. England, however, woke up to his value, and he played his first International for that country against the New Zealanders in 1905-6. He had a birth qualification for Wales, a residential one for England, but naturally his Rugby sympathies were with England, for he never once played football in Wales except *against* Welsh teams.



D. R. Gent

Gent was captain of Gloucestershire from 1908-11, and had the satisfaction of winning the County Championship in 1909-10, when Yorkshire were beaten in the Final by 23 points. That was undoubtedly a magnificent team, containing, as it did, six Internationals, viz., Gent, Johns, Hudson, Hayward, Berry, and Johnson. The backs were an "all-star" lot, consisting of Johnston, Hudson, Hayward, Spoors, Neale, Gent, and Stephens, and used to throw the ball about in the very best Harlequin manner.

Personally, it always struck me that, in spite of his lack of inches and weight, Gent revelled in defensive work. A really fearless tackler, he would go down in the most daring manner to the fiercest rushes. I remember in 1910 when England, who had previously defeated Wales at Twickenham, started hot favourites against Ireland, but only managed to effect a draw. On that occasion the Irish

forwards played the deuce with us, and but for really desperate work by Gent would have beaten us. To my utter surprise and disgust, Gent, after this wonderful display, was dropped against Scotland. Gent had previously had an unpleasant experience against Ireland at Leicester in 1905-06, when Ireland won by two goals and two tries to two tries. This match was played in a driving snowstorm.

Although excelling in defence, Gent was a fine little attacking half. He always got the ball away quickly and always preached the gospel that the scrum-half should not try to do much on his own, and he was adept at the reverse pass, in which he was a great believer. He ran up against some pretty stiff opponents, as Owen, Jago, Vile, David, and Braithwaite were all contemporaries of his. After his retirement from active service in 1913—he was then thirty years of age—Dai Gent took to writing on football matters, and I feel a little justifiable pride in the fact that I first brought him out, especially now that he has just written and published a very excellent handbook on the game he played and loved so well. Headmaster of a large school in Eastbourne, he should be the right man to teach the young idea the true spirit of Sport.