

The Biggest Halfpenny Complete Story - Book.



THE EMPIRE $1\frac{1}{2}$

Every LIBRARY Wednesday.

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July 9th, 1910.

"IN CUSTODY."



"My word," muttered the fat boy, "I had twelve stamps here a minute ago—twelve, all stuck together—and they've gone—simply vanished! I really can't make it out!"

W. HOLMES

him as a friend is nothing to boast about. Still, I had hoped to do him some good."

"And so you have, Allen. There's no doubt he's had a lesson this time to last him. As soon as your case is withdrawn we'll sit down to work and say no more of it. Frankly, you've been an ass, but I don't think you're likely to be an ass again—eh?"

"That I won't!" And there could be no doubt that Allen meant to keep his word.

The following day things were all arranged, and work resumed at the office at Kirkham Chambers, the only change in the business arrangements being that Moody's no longer acted as bankers to Aubrey, Chambers & Co.

The action of Blade against Silverstein was started, and it was agreed that Mr. Pegrain's loan should be repaid out of the proceeds of the result—and this, in fact, was what actually happened, for Silverstein did not care to "face the music" since he heard that his opponents had Mr. Pegrain at their back.

Only one other incident requires to be noted to complete this account of "the bolt from the blue," and that is something concerning Dudley.

On the morning after the case against Aubrey was withdrawn Dudley entered the private office with a pair of trousers folded up under his arm.

"The other day I lost some stamps," he said.

"Yes!" queried Jack wonderingly.

Dudley unfolded the trousers, and displayed the missing stamps sticking to them.

"I must have sat on them!" he murmured. "My mother found 'em!"

Jack and Allen, who was there also, roared with laughter.

"Shall I cut them out——" began Dudley.

"No!" laughed Jack.

"I thought I should like to explain how I lost the stamps!" said Dudley anxiously.

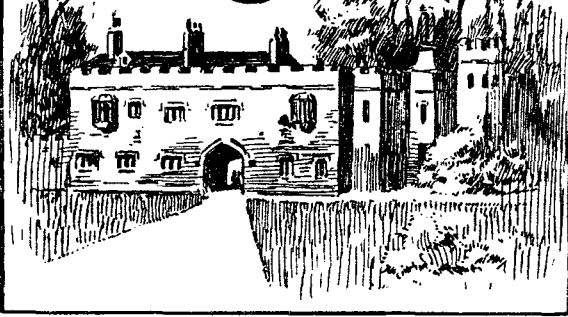
And amidst great laughter Dudley, much relieved to have made his explanation, returned to the outer office to proceed with his work.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Jack Rhodes next week, entitled "Jack Rhodes' Great Deal," by Alfred Barnard. Order your "Empire" Library in advance. Price ONE HALFPENNY.)

SPLENDID TALE OF SCHOOL LIFE.

THE RIVALRY OF ST. KIT'S



~ BY CHARLES HAMILTON ~

The Captain's Election.

TALBOT caught the junior's words through the din, and his face changed.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "What's that about keeping voters out?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lacy. "Let's get on to the voting, for goodness' sake! We sha'n't get away to-night!"

Talbot's eyes flashed.

"What are those juniors leaning up against the door for?" he asked. "It looks as if what Greene says is true. Silence, there! Open that door!"

Trimble was deaf.

Talbot spoke a few words in a low tone to Brooke, who immediately pushed his way down the hall—the juniors making way for him—and reached the door.

"What are you doing, Trimble?" he demanded.

"It's—it's draughty," stammered Trimble, "and—and we—"

"Stand aside!"

"But——"

Brooke took him unceremoniously by the collar and swung him away. His companions surged back as the Sixth-Former began to box their ears right and left.

The door, thus suddenly released, gave way with equal suddenness to the attack from without. It flew open, and a crowd of juniors tumbled in headlong.

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Greene triumphantly.

Blagden had been shoving his hardest against the door when it gave way. He came in like a shot, and rolled over. Pat Nugent fell over him, and sprawled on the floor, and the half dozen juniors behind came tumbling over the two leaders. Greene dragged Blagden to his feet.

"Buok up, Blaggy! I made the rotten bounders let you in!"

"Are we in time?" gasped Blagden.

"Yes, they haven't counted for Talbot yet."

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READ THIS FIRST.

St. Kit's is without a captain, and the school is divided into two camps, viz., the supporters of Eldred Lacy and those of Arthur Talbot. Pat Nugent, a new boy, accidentally overhears a conversation which reveals to him Lacy's true character, and he forthwith joins Talbot's partisans. While the election is taking place in the great hall, a junior named Trimble, at the head of a number of Lacy's supporters, takes up a position against the door in order to keep some of Talbot's voters out. Greene, of the Fourth, notices this, and raises a shout. "They're keeping our voters out!" he yells.

(Now go on with the story.)

"Hurrah!"

"Sort yourselves out!" exclaimed Brooke. "And look here, no more of this kind of thing, Trimble. This is carrying zeal a little too far."

Trimble made no reply. He shook his fist at Greene and Blagden. Brooke went back to his friends, and a semblance of order having been restored, the counting started. Blagden was chuckling gleefully.

He had been a good deal hurt in effecting the rescue of the imprisoned voters, but he didn't mind that, since they had got into the hall in time. He cheerfully mopped the red stream flowing from his nose.

"We've done 'em!" he said. "It was all due to the new chap, too. Young Tipperary warned me that Trimble had a lot of voters locked up in his study, and we made the cad give up the key and let them out."

"The horrid bounder!" exclaimed Greene. "That's just the kind of trick he would get up to. What a pity you didn't lock Trimble up in their place!"

"Silence!"

The counting was proceeding carefully. Pat Nugent had his hand up with the rest. The tellers finished their task, and compared notes. The results were the same, and the announcement was made, the whole hall listening with breathless attention.

"Arthur Talbot, one hundred and eight votes! Eldred Lacy, one hundred and four votes!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Blagden.

And Talbot's partisans burst into deafening cheering. The long, high hall echoed with the sound, and the very air seemed to rock.

"Hurrah!"

"Arthur Talbot is captain of St. Kit's!"

The election was over. Eldred Lacy, with a somewhat pale face and eyes burning, made his way from the hall, too enraged by the result to trust himself to speak to anyone.

For the "Empire" Library Next Week: "JACK RHODES' GREAT DEAL."

Many of his friends followed him, and the rest were silent and dismayed.

But the Talbot faction were by no means silent. They had triumphed; their candidate was elected, and they let themselves go in their exuberant satisfaction. The hall rang again and again with cheering.

A Study Row and an Eviction.

"You'll have to keep your weather-eye open, young Dublin," said Blagden, with a shake of the head.

It was the day after the election. St. Kit's had settled down into its usual calm again, and, after the excitement of election night, was pursuing the customary evenness of its way.

"Hallo! What's the trouble now?" asked Pat. He did not seem very much alarmed. Pat Nugent had a very cool way of taking things as they came.

"Lacy is going to claim you for his fag," said Blagden solemnly. "I was told by a chap who heard Trimble say so."

"That's a bad look-out."
"Rather—for you. Lacy knows that he owes his defeat to you now, and he means to make you sit up for it. There's nothing of the sportsman about Eldred Lacy. He's going to make you smart, and if you're his fag you'll be at his mercy."

"Can't I get out of it any way?"
"Not unless some other senior appropriated you first. I say, I've got a jolly good idea. Cut along to Talbot's study and ask him."

"Good wheeze!" said Pat, jumping up at once. "It's a chance, anyway."

And he lost no time in carrying out the idea. As he made his way towards the new captain's study he heard his name called down the corridor. He recognised Lacy's voice, and took no notice. A few moments later he was tapping at Arthur Talbot's door, and the voice of the new captain of St. Kit's bade him enter.

"Hallo!" said Talbot, in his genial way, with a kindly glance at the junior. "You're the new kid, aren't you?"

"Yes. My name's Pat Nugent."
"Ah, yes! I hear that it was you who let out some voters who were locked up in a study last evening."

"I helped," said Pat modestly. "I wanted to see fair play, you know."

"Quite right. Now, what can I do for you, Nugent?"
"I came to ask you a favour, Talbot."

"I'm always willing to help a new boy in any way. What can I do?"

"Will you let me be your fag?"
"Are you anxious for the post?" asked Talbot, looking at him, with a smile.

"Faith, and I am!"
"It isn't an easy one, you know. You'll have to share the duties of Blagden, my present fag. You may have the lion's share of the work."

"I don't mind a bit."
"Very well; I'll take you on, if you like."

"Thank you very much, Talbot! Is there anything I can do now?"

"No," laughed Talbot. "Blagden will show you the ropes, and he'll tell you at what times I'm free to help you with your lessons."

"Thanks awfully!"

And Pat, in a very satisfied frame of mind, quitted the captain's study. He had gained his object; and, once being installed as the captain's fag, he thought he would be pretty safe from the reprisals of Eldred Lacy. At all events, Lacy could not now claim him as a fag, and so he would not find it impossible to avoid his enemy.

"Talbot's a brick," said Blagden, when Pat rejoined him—"a jolly brick! But, my hat, you'll have to look out for Lacy after this!"

"I say, Nugent, I wish they had put you in our study," said Greene regretfully. "You'll have a horrid time of it in No. 9 with Jones and Hooper."

Considering the reception Blagden and Greene had given Pat on his arrival at St. Kit's, they had come to agree with one another remarkably well. The three were, in fact, kindred spirits, and their friendship dated from the evening of the election.

It was a disappointment to Pat that he could not become study-mate with his new friends. He pulled so well with Blagden and Greene that he would have been glad to share their quarters. But the powers had decided otherwise. The juniors generally went three to a study, and the third in Blagden's room was a youth named Cleeve, with whom the two chums did not agree very well. But he was a fixture there, and Pat was put in No. 9, where there happened to be room for him.

"Faith, it's rotten!" agreed Pat. "Suppose we could get Cleeve to change with me, and go into No. 9 with Hooper and Jones instead of me?"

"I've already asked him, the pig!" replied Blagden, with a shake of the head. "He won't. You see, our study is larger and lighter, and looks out upon the Close, and he likes it better. He actually had the cheek to suggest that, if I wanted a change, Greene and I should change into No. 9 ourselves, and let Hooper and Jones join him in our room."

"Awful bounder, Cleeve!" said Greene solemnly. "He's got cheek enough for anything. He's a toady of Trimble's, so we can't make things too warm for him."

Pat grinned.
"Now, look here," he said, "we three want to be together, and so we ought to persuade Cleeve to shift, somehow. You can't be expected to turn out of the quarters you're used to. Cleeve is a new-comer here, isn't he?"

"Yes; he hasn't been with us a month. And all the study furniture is ours. We bought it and paid for it; and Cleeve hasn't contributed a red cent. He gets the use of it for nothing, and never even stands a study feed, the blessed Shylock!"

"Then clearly he is the person who ought to go. He's the giddy intruder who ought to be ejected. Hooper and Jones are welcome to him."

"Yes; but they wouldn't like to have him. He's a mean beast, you know; and, besides, these two are pigs, and don't want to oblige us. They think we are cocky," said Blagden, with the air of one suffering under an undeserved aspersion.

"Sure, and it will be easy for me to make them want to exchange me for anybody under the sun!" grinned Pat. "If you start on Cleeve, and I start on Hooper and Jones, I dare say things will work out as we want them."

"But then we shall have Trimble down on us, you know."
"Who cares for Trimble?"

"Well, he's the biggest chap in the Upper Fourth, and, of course, he could lick any of us."

"I don't think so. I'd be willing to back myself against Trimble any day in the week," said Pat confidently. "I've had some rubs with him already, and he hasn't come off best. If he interferes I'll take him on, anyway, and see if I can't shut him up."

"All right!" said Blagden gleefully. "If you could lick Trimble that will settle it. He's a beast, and has the cheek to fag some of the Lower Fourth, just as if he were a senior. He wants taking down a peg or two."

When Pat entered Study No. 9 to commence operations there he found Hooper and Jones in possession, and their reception of him was far from agreeable. Both of them were big boys—much too big really to be in the Lower Fourth, but kept there principally by idleness and want of ambition. In a Form with boys mostly much smaller than themselves, they put on airs and developed bullying tendencies, and were pretty thoroughly detested by their fellow-Formers. But they were dreaded more than they were detested, and they usually succeeded in getting half their work done by smaller and cleverer boys.

They looked at Pat far from amiably as he entered. Nobody was anxious to share No. 9 with them, and for a long time they had had it to themselves. At St. Kit's the studies were far from roomy, and three was a squeeze at the best of times. Consequently, they were far from regarding with favour the advent of a new-comer.

"Hallo! What do you want?" growled Hooper, as Pat came in with his books under his arm. "What are you shoving yourself into this study for?"

"Not from choice!" said Pat cheerfully. "I'd just as soon go into the monkey-house at the Zoo, which, faith, wouldn't be unlike this, as far as the inhabitants are concerned!"

"None of your cheek! We don't want you in here. Do you mean to say that Slaney has shoved you in here without asking us?"

"Sure, and he has!"
"Well, don't make yourself a nuisance, or you'll get it!"

"Get what?"
"A thick ear, my son!" said Hooper darkly. "I've heard about you. You're the cheeky new kid that biffed Trimble. If you give me any of your cheek you'll get some biffing here that will make you look sick, I can tell you!"

"What-ho!" chimed in Jones. "Suppose we give him a hiding to start with Hooper?"

"Spare my tender youth!" said Pat, in mock terror. "As you are strong, be merciful; and don't be bigger cads than you can help."

Hooper and Jones looked at one another.

Pat was only fourteen, and of medium size for his age. He was certainly strongly built, and had a quick, keen eye and a firm mouth. But there was nothing particularly dangerous in his look—in fact, he didn't look half as tough as he really was. But his coolness made the two bigger boys feel a little uncertain.

Pat came to the table, and tried to find room for his books.

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There was none, and neither of the two occupants of the study showed the least desire to make room for him.

"Come, give us a little room!" said Pat. "Don't be hogs, you know! I've got to do my work here, and I must have a little space."

"You can sit on the floor, and shove your books on a chair!" said Hooper.

"Faith, and I won't!" said Pat Nugent.

"Well, you won't have any of this table!" answered Hooper.

"Won't you, please, kindly give me the tiniest bit of room?" asked Pat politely.

"No, we won't! So buzz off!"

"Ah, then I shall have to take it!"

With perfect coolness Pat reached out and swept Hooper's books and papers from the table to the floor. Another sweep of the hand, and he had cleared off Jones's property.

"There, you see," he said, with a sweet smile, "I thought I could make room. Please don't get excited, my dear schoolfellows."

But his dear schoolfellows were frantically excited. They jumped up, raging, and went for Pat with a rush. They intended to give him, between them, the biggest licking of his experience, and make him properly sorry for having provoked their anger. But, somehow, it didn't work out that way.

They had to deal with a lad who possessed strength, science, and boundless pluck. So far from quailing from the unequal contest, Pat met his assailants with a smile, his hands up for defence in a twinkling. His right flashed out, and what seemed to Hooper like a lump of iron caught him on the nose, and he staggered backwards and fell over his chair. The next moment Pat's left was on Jones's mouth, and Jones crashed against the table and rolled over on the study floor.

Hooper sat up, wondering whether there had been an earthquake, and Jones rose on his elbow and stared stupidly at his comrade.

Then they looked at Pat. He was standing smiling at them, and rubbing the knuckles of his hands.

"Come on!" he said. "That's a start. Give me some of that biffing you were talking about. I want to know exactly how you are going to do it!"

Hooper and Jones exchanged a sickly look.

"You're not tired already, surely!" continued Pat. "Here I am, awaiting instructions. Aren't you going to give me a lesson?"

"N-n-not just now," said Hooper, picking himself up. "We don't want to hurt you. I—I only spoke in fun, you know."

Pat grinned.

"And you—did you speak in fun, Jones?" he demanded. "Yes!" gasped Jones.

"Oh, very well; then I only slogged you in fun. But I'm an awfully funny chap, you know, and whenever you speak in fun like that again, I expect I shall slog you in fun in just the same way. We shall have a regular funny time, sha'n't we?"

"N-no—ye-es!" mumbled Hooper. "Of course, we're glad to have you in the study."

"I thought you would be, when you came to know me better."

Pat sat down at the table. He took a goodly share of it, and set to work. Hooper and Jones followed his example, but more slowly. They were still dazed, and did not quite know what to make of this tough customer.

They had learned, however, that it was not safe to attempt to jump on the new boy. Pat Nugent knew how to take care of himself.

Pat Nugent had just finished his preparation for the morrow, when Blagden put his head into the study. Blagden looked in surprise at the unusually quiet Hooper and

"Have you been having a row with those two?"

"Well, we had a little argument; but we're awfully friendly now."

"Then I want you to come and have a little argument in the end study."

"You were going to show me over the gym, after prep."

"Yes, I know; but we haven't done our prep," said Blagden ruefully.

"Cleeve has invited Trimble into our room, and we can't work while he's there. He often comes in there and jaws to Cleeve, and now he's fixed himself there to worry us because we dished him over the election. They won't let us work, and there will be a row with Slaney in the morning if our preparation isn't done."

"And you can't shift him?"

"They're both bigger than we are," said Blagden, with a shrug. "We've tried it before. But I think it would be fair for three chaps our size to tackle them—don't you? Trimble has no right to stick himself in our study and spoil our work."

"Right-ho!" said Pat. "Let's interview Trimble."

Blagden's study was at the end of the corridor. Its number was 16, but it was usually called the end study. The sound of voices proceeded from it, and Pat recognised Trimble's far from dulcet tones.

Trimble had dragged the table near the fire, and was sitting on it, with his feet on the fender. Cleeve, a lanky youth, with a sour face, occupied the only easy-chair. They were talking loudly, and eating roasted chestnuts—"our chestnuts," as Blagden wrathfully muttered in Pat's ear.

Greene was trying to get his work done with his book on his knees. He looked up hopefully as Blagden came in with Pat. Trimble glanced round. He gave Pat a scowl.

"So you've come back!" he sneered. "What have you brought the bog-trotter into this study for? Get out of it, Nugent!"

"Rats!" said Pat cheerfully. "It's you that's got to get out!"

"Perhaps you'll put me out?"

"Yes, perhaps I will, if you don't go quickly!"

"Give me another chestnut, Cleeve. Don't take any notice of the cheeky little beast!"

"Are you going?" asked Pat.

"No, I'm not, and there's an end of it!"

"Not at all; that's only a beginning," said Pat calmly. "Cleeve, my man, if that animal's a friend of yours, tell him to get out!"

"I'll give you a thick ear if I have any of your cheek!" growled Cleeve.

"Very well."

Pat took hold of the end of the table upon which Trimble was sitting, and tilted it. Trimble gave a yell, as he slid off, and was deposited in the fender. He scrambled up, considerably hurt and wild with rage.

"Go for him!" cried Cleeve.

Trimble did go for Pat, with a rush like a wild bull.

In a flash the two were locked together in a close embrace, and reeling about the study in a wild and whirling struggle. Trimble was considerably the bigger of the two, but he seemed to have met his match in Pat Nugent.

To and fro they went reeling, crashing into the table, and sending it flying, and then into Cleeve, and flooring him as if he had been shot. Blagden and Greene, shouting encouragement to Pat, jumped and skipped actively out of the way.

The struggling pair were slowly but surely nearing the door. Finally, with a herculean effort, Pat whirled Trimble out into the passage, and they were brought up with a thump against the opposite wall. Trimble, with all the breath knocked out of his body, relaxed his grasp, and Pat, exerting himself, sent him spinning along the passage.

Cleeve had rushed to his friend's aid, as he saw that Pat was getting the best of it, but Blagden and Greene had promptly fastened upon him.

Pat came breathlessly back into the study.

"Let him follow Trimble!" he exclaimed.

"Here, I say," cried Cleeve, "I—I, you know—I—"

(This splendid school tale will be continued next Wednesday.)

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LIBRARY

Next Wednesday!

"JACK RHODES' GREAT DEAL"

Is the title of next week's complete story. You will find this latest of Alfred Bernard's very good reading, or I am much mistaken.

P.S.—I should much appreciate a postcard to say how you like the Jack Rhodes Stories.

THE EDITOR.