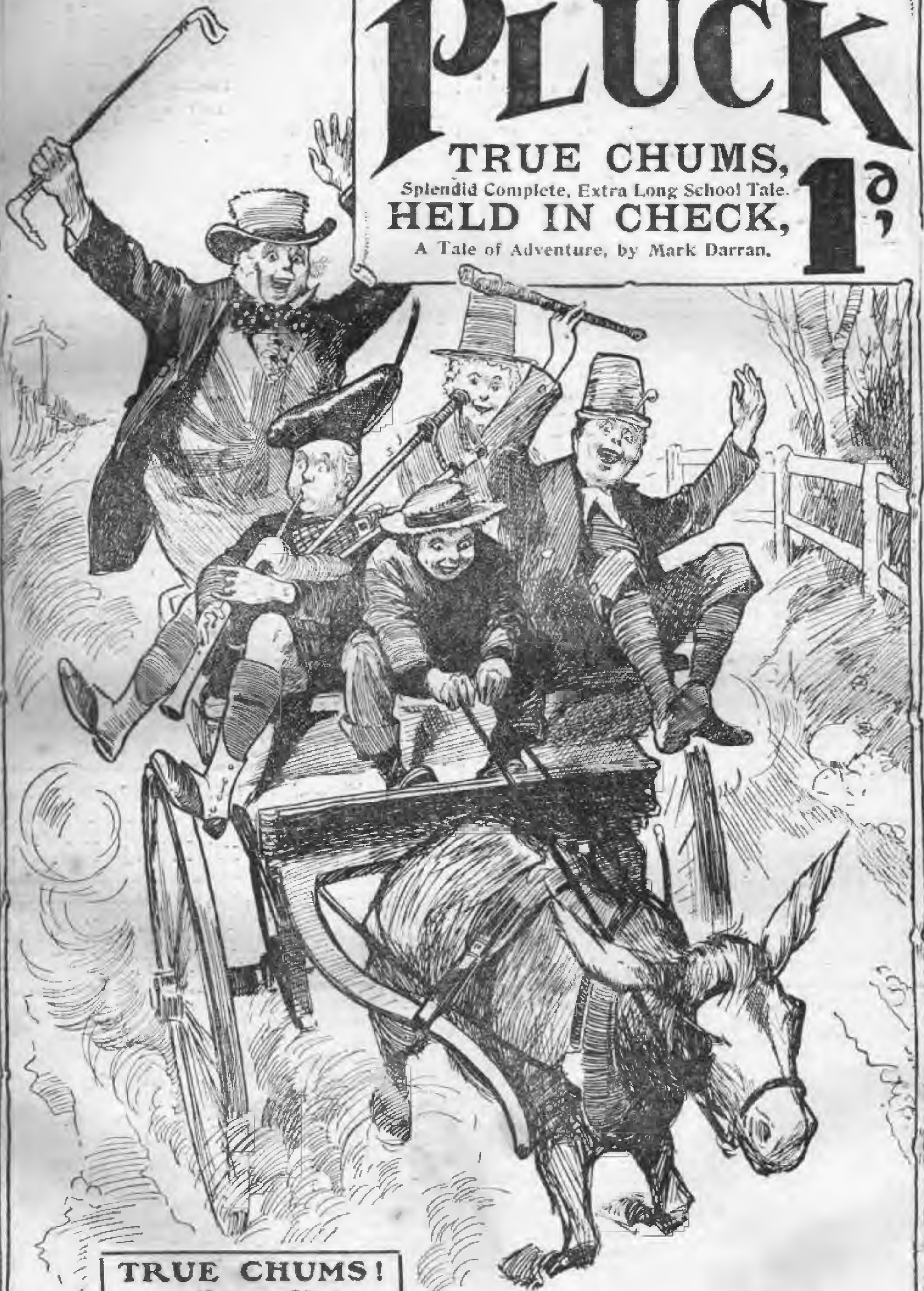


EXTRA LONG SCHOOL TALE by JACK NORTH

PLUCK

TRUE CHUMS,
Splendid Complete, Extra Long School Tale.
HELD IN CHECK,
A Tale of Adventure, by Mark Darran.

1⁰⁰



TRUE CHUMS!

(See page 5.)

NEW SCHOOL TALE.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

Brief account of last week's instalment:

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

This story opens at a football match at St. Kit's. The captaincy for the season of the first team practically rests between Eldred Lacy and Arthur Talbot, the respective captains of the two teams. Talbot wins the match by three goals to one.

Pat Nugent, an Irish and a new boy, arrives at the school just after the match. He is at once "collared" by the juniors, who try to exact a promise from him that he'll vote for Arthur Talbot as captain. He won't promise, so they bind him up and shut him in a cupboard in Lacy's study.

He goes to sleep, and on waking up, he hears voices—the voices of Eldred Lacy and his brother, Rupert Lacy, the squire of Lynwood. "You must ruin and disgrace Arthur Talbot, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But, ruined, disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity I shall no longer fear him!" Now go on with the tale:

Pat Nugent Takes Slaves.

Pat Nugent remained silent. What would happen if the brothers discovered his presence in the study he did not know, but he knew that it would be something extremely unpleasant to himself.

It was by no wish of his own that he had been placed in the position of an eavesdropper, and he did not feel called upon to risk a severe punishment by betraying his presence. He devoutly wished that the speakers would leave the room, or turn to less dangerous topics. A long silence followed the squire's last words, and Pat hoped that they were going. But he was disappointed.

Eldred Lacy's voice broke the silence; it was very strange and shaky.

"I don't understand you, Rupert. I can't imagine what you can possibly have to fear from Talbot. He is a nobody. The fellows say that the Head picked him out of the gutter and brought him up out of charity. It's quite certain that his parents are unknown, and he has no money but what the Head allows him. He's awfully keen on getting the Dunraven Scholarship, and I believe it's for that reason. How can a boggar's brat like Arthur Talbot be dangerous to us?"

"It is not necessary for you to know," replied the squire coldly, "and I have no intention of explaining. But you may take my word for it that what I say is correct. The question is, are you willing to help me in this?"

"I don't know. I can't say that I like Talbot. But—"

"You hate him."

"Well, perhaps I do. But—"

"But you are chicken-hearted," sneered his elder brother.

"Well, we will talk over this again. Meanwhile, strain every nerve to get in as captain. That will give you a power in the school that will be useful for our purpose."

"I shall certainly do that," said Lacy. "I mean to get in as captain if I can do it by hook or by crook."

"What means have you used—beside the ordinary ones, I mean? If money would be of any use, you can have as much as you want."

"I don't think that would help much. It would be sure to come out; and a fellow employing bribery in an election would be sent to Coventry by all St. Kit's."

"Then you are depending upon fair voting? I know little of the state of affairs here, but, after that football match, I imagine Talbot is more popular than you are."

"Possibly. But I have a card up my sleeve. My fag, Trimble, is a cunning rascal, and he is doing his best for me. He has invited half a dozen of the Lower Fourth to a feed in his study, and just before eight he's going to nip out and turn the key on them, so they'll be kept there till after the election. The voting will be very close, and half a dozen of Talbot's backers being away will be almost certain to turn the scale in my favour."

"By Jove, that is a good idea!" The squire looked at his watch. "I won't keep you longer, Eldred; you'll be wanted. The time's close now. Remember what I've told you."

"I am not likely to forget."

Pat, in the cupboard, drew a deep breath of relief. He heard the brothers quit the room, and the study door closed. He writhed in his bonds. Lacy had gone to the hall, and very soon the election would be held there. And here he was, tied up, helpless.

It was exasperating. For what he had heard had quite decided Pat Nugent. He knew little of Arthur Talbot, but it was certain that Eldred Lacy was not fit to be captain of the school. Talbot—the fellow against whom the treacherous pair plotted—he was the man who should have Pat Nugent's vote.

If Pat could help it, Lacy would never be captain of St. Kit's. He wriggled in his bonds, but they had been tied too well. Suddenly he heard a sound in the study. The door of the cupboard was opened.

"Hallo, you new kid!" It was the voice of Blagden. "Have you decided to vote for Talbot? It is just on eight. There's time yet. If you mean yes, grunt."

Pat grunted. Blagden bent over him, grinning, and removed the gag.

"You are going to vote for our man?"

"Yes!" gasped Pat. "Not because I'm afraid of you, you bounder, but because of—" He paused. Perhaps it would not be wise to reveal what he had accidentally overheard. "Because I've changed my mind."

"Right you are!" grinned Blagden. "I don't care a rap what your reason is, so long as you vote for Talbot. There you are."

His fingers worked rapidly. Pat rose, free, but feeling decidedly cramped. He was strongly inclined to start on Blagden, but he restrained himself.

"Come on!" said the junior. "There's no time to waste. They're beginning."

Pat followed him from the study. There he caught Blagden's arm and stopped him.

"Do you know Trimble, Lacy's fag?"

"Rather, the beast! What about him?"

"He's got some of our voters locked up in his study."

"How do you know?" demanded Blagden, in amazement.

"Never mind how I know," said Pat. "Sure, it's releasing them that wants doing. Are you going to do it? We've got to get Talbot in."

"You seem to have changed your tune a lot in that cupboard," said Blagden.

"Never mind that. Let's get a move on. I tell you it's a fact."

Blagden asked no more questions, but led the way to Trimble's study. The captain of the Upper Fourth was just coming away from it. He started as he saw Blagden.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "ain't you going to vote? There's no time to lose; they're just starting in the hall."

"We're looking for voters," replied Blagden. "Thought there might be some in your study."

"Ha, ha! You're joking, I suppose. Come along, and—"

Trimble was interrupted by a thumping on the door from the interior of his study. There was a din of voices within.

"He's locked us in!"

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE HOUSE-MASTER,"

A School Tale (Kitty Long),
By Chas. Hamilton.

AND

"THE FUGITIVES,"

A Splendid Tale of Adventure,
By Ernest Brindley.

IN "PLUCK," 1D.

"Let us out, you beast!"

"Trimble, you cad, open this giddy door, or we'll kick it down!"

Trimble scowled darkly. There wasn't much chance of the youngsters within kicking the door down, because it was a solid one of thick oak, but they seemed to be trying their best, and the noise was deafening. The key was in Trimble's pocket, and but for the presence of Blagden and Pat his trick would have been a perfect success. The hall, where all the school had assembled, was too far away for the noise in the study to be heard there. But Blagden's looks showed that he meant business.

"So that's your game, you cad!" he exclaimed. "You were right, Tipperary. Give me the key, Trimble, you howling rotter!"

"Sha'n't! You'll get hurt if you try to stop me!"

And the big Upper Fourth fellow tried to shove himself past the two. But they fastened upon him like cats and dragged him to the floor. Had Blagden been alone, Trimble would have made short work of him; but with Pat Nugent it was a different matter. Trimble was already aware of the quality of the new boy.

He made a tremendous effort and tore himself loose, and sprang away. His path to the hall was barred, and he turned and fled along the corridor. If he could dodge the juniors and escape to the hall, he would be secure in the crowd of his partisans. Schoolboy honour would prevent the juniors from calling in the aid of a master, and the half-dozen voters would remain locked in the study till after the election.

But Blagden and Pat knew as well as Trimble did how much depended upon his capture.

"After him!" panted Blagden. "We can't get the door open without the key! No, you go after him, and I'll slip round to cut him off from hall!"

Pat needed no second bidding. He was on Trimble's track like a shot.

The lanky captain of the Upper Fourth ran well, but the new junior was faster; and had he known his ground well, there is no doubt but that Trimble would have been captured in a couple of minutes. But Trimble knew the way, and Pat did not, and the corridors were dim and dusky. The captain of the Upper Fourth dodged through a passage unknown to his pursuer, and by the time Pat found the track again the fugitive was gone.

But Trimble was not destined to escape easily. He grinned to himself as the silence behind told him that he had eluded his pursuer, and ran swiftly in the direction of Hall, and all of a sudden uttered a wild yell as a dark figure sprang upon him from the shadows and bore him to the ground.

"Blagden—you beast!"

"Got him!" yelled Blaggy. "Come on, Nugent!"

The pair struggled desperately. Blagden was no match for Trimble, and the latter soon rolled him over and pinned him down, and then tried to tear himself away. But the junior clung to him like a limpet to a rock.

Trimble, panting with rage, as he heard Pat's running feet approaching, struck out savagely, and Blagden yelled as he received the clenched fists in his face. But he did not let go, though one of his eyes was closing, and his nose had begun to bleed.

"Nugent!" he yelled. "Where are you? Come on, or he'll get away! Oh, lor! Gr-r-rh! Help! Oh, my eye!"

With a final wrench, Trimble tore himself away. Too late. Pat was upon the spot, and he seized the captain of the Upper Fourth as he turned to fly, and ran him heavily against a wall. Trimble panted.

"Let me go, you new cad!"

"Rats!"

Pat jammed him against the wall, and kept him there. There was a loud shout from the direction of Hall. Blagden struggled up, mopping his nose with his handkerchief.

"Hold him—hold him!" he gasped. "He's squashed my nose, the beast! Hold him!"

"I've got him safe."

"Gimme that key, Trimble, you pig! My hat, hark how they're shouting in hall! They must be nearly through with the election, while we've been wasting time over that cad! Knock his head against the wall, Tipperary, if he won't give up the key! We shall be done, after all, if we don't buck up!"

Pat obeyed. Trimble's head was knocked against the wall till he saw stars. He dragged the key from his pocket and flung it savagely at Blagden.

"There it is, hang you!"

Blagden picked up the key.

"Let the brute go, Nugent. I've got it. Come on!"

Pat gave Trimble's head a final knock and ran after his friend. They sprinted for all they were worth back to Trimble's study. When they reached it, the noise proceeding from within was something terrific.

The crashing on the door showed that the imprisoned

juniors were wielding Trimble's chair against the solid oak. The din was incessant, Crash, crash, clatter! and a yell.

The door had not given way, but the chair had, and apparently somebody was hurt. Blagden thrust the key into the lock and opened the door.

"Come on, you——"

He got no further. The imprisoned juniors poured out like a hurricane. They knew nothing, of course, of what had happened, and only imagined that Trimble had changed his mind and come back to let them out. The corridor was dusky, and they were too excited to stop to think. They went for Blagden in a body, and in a moment he was floored under half-a-dozen vengeful youngsters.

"Thump him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Give the cad socks!"

"Let me alone!" roared Blagden. "Drag 'em off, Paddy!"

Pat had rushed to the rescue. But the juniors, as soon as they discovered their mistake, ceased to pommel the unfortunate Blaggy, and let him get up.

"You silly asses!" gasped Blagden. "Is this the thanks I get for letting you out? I'll—I'll——"

"We thought you were Trimble!"

"You silly, howling——"

"Is the election over?"

"I don't know. I hope not. Cut along, and we may not be too late yet."

The rescued juniors rushed away. At their head went Blagden and Pat, running their hardest. As they drew near hall they heard a loud shouting and stamping of feet. Was the election over? Were they too late?

The great hall at St. Kit's was crammed.

The election of the new captain was a question which stirred the school to its depths, and few were the boys who would willingly have absented themselves upon the great occasion.

The seniors, of course, had all the good seats at the front. The rival candidates were both on the spot, each surrounded by a group of friends and supporters. The body of the hall was packed with juniors, who kept up a ceaseless buzz of conversation.

That the election would be a very close one, and might be decided either way by two or three votes, was well known, and this made the general interest in the proceedings all the keener. Glances were continually thrown upon the clock, the hand of which was pointing very near to eight.

There was a louder buzz as Brooke of the Sixth was seen upon his feet. Brooke was Arthur Talbot's closest chum, and Talbot's partisans cheered him. Brooke had the honour and the pleasure to propose his friend Arthur Talbot for the vacant post of captain of St. Kit's.

The cheering burst forth again, louder than before, and the great hall rang from end to end. It was evident that Arthur Talbot had plenty of backers there.

Then Haywood proposed Eldred Lacy, and it was the turn of Lacy's backers to cheer. They did so with a hearty goodwill. It was not easy to tell which side made the more noise—in fact, the honours appeared to be about equally divided.

"Hallo, they're going to take the vote!" said Greene, of the Lower Fourth. He jumped up on a form and looked towards the door. "Where's that ass Blaggy?"

"Sit down, there!" came a shout from the rear, from those whose view of the proceedings was obstructed by Greene.

Greene took no notice.

"Blaggy ought to be here now, whether he brings the new chap or not!" he exclaimed. "Hallo, that must be him!" The door opened. "No; it's Trimble."

Trimble, captain of the Upper Fourth, entered the hall.

He was looking decidedly the worse for wear and tear. His collar was rumpled, his face dirty, and there was a red smear on his nose. His clothes were covered with dust.

"Hallo!" said Greene. "Trimble's been in the wars. Can he have been fighting with old Blaggy?"

"Sit down, there!"

"Sha'n't! I say, Trimble——" shouted Greene across the hall.

"Silence!"

"Trimble, have you seen Blaggy?"

"Silence!"

"Sit down!"

"Knock that young cad down!"

"Oh!" yelled Greene, as someone obeyed that order, and gave him a dig in the ribs that sent him to the floor. "Oh, oh, oh!"

"Shut up!"

"Silence!"

Something like silence was restored. Eldred Lacy looked towards Trimble, but failed to catch the eye of his foe. Had Trimble succeeded in locking up in his study the six voters

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IN "PLUCK," 10.

for Talbot, whom he had taken there for a "feed" with that intention? Lacy could not tell; but the fact that Trimble avoided his glance made him feel dubious.

"Vote! Vote!" was shouted now; and a show of hands was demanded for Eldred Lacy.

Up went a forest of hands, and the counting slowly proceeded.

Two tellers had been appointed, and as their results did not agree, the counting was again proceeded with. Meanwhile Greene, whose eye was on Trimble, noticed a rather peculiar action on the part of that young gentleman. He had been whispering among his friends, and now nearly a dozen of the Lacyites had withdrawn themselves, with exaggerated carelessness, from the crowd, and were leaning against the door.

"Look at those cads!" whispered Greene to his companions. "They're trying to keep Blagden out—that's their little game!"

"Silence!"

"Votes for Eldred Lacy, one hundred and four."

Lacy's backers cheered loudly. Trimble and his friends shouted themselves hoarse, at the same time stamping on the floor, and the din was tremendous. The row they made was not without an object. It served to drown the sound of shouting and kicking on the other side of the caken door.

Blagden and Pat Nugent, with the rescued voters from Trimble's study, had arrived. They found the door shut and held against them, and they were kicking and hammering at it with all their strength. But the Lacyites had their backs against it, some of them their feet, and the door would not budge, and the din within drowned the clamour without.

Greene jumped upon the form again.

The seniors were trying to restore silence to take the vote for Talbot, but Trimble and his friends were still going it for all they were worth.

"Fair play!" yelled Greene. "Open the door!"

"Shut up!"

"Silence!"

"Knock that young pig over!"

"Fair play! They're keeping our voters out!"

"Never mind the noise," said Eldred Lacy. "Let's get to the voting. We can't stay here all night!"

"Hands up for Arthur Talbot!" exclaimed Brooke.

Up went the hands in numerous array. Green jumped down from the form.

"Come on, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "They're keeping old Blag out; and if we want him let in, we've got to do the trick ourselves."

And, at the head of a party of Lower Fourth-Formers, he forced his way towards the door. This movement in the crowded hall was naturally attended by a great deal of confusion, and the resulting clamour made it quite impossible to take the vote.

"Sit down, you youngsters, there!"

"Order—order!"

"Turn them out!"

The seniors were looking worried and angry. The juniors, glad of any excuse for a row, joined in making the confusion worse confounded, shouting and stamping in all parts of the hall without any particular object. Greene and his friends pushed and thumped and shoved their way towards the door.

There was a shade of anxiety on Lacy's face. He guessed how matters stood, and he was very anxious for the voting to be got over before the door should be opened.

"They're trying to break up the meeting!" he exclaimed, loud enough for Talbot to hear. "They know I've got the majority, and they want to break up the meeting. They don't want fair play."

Talbot flushed angrily. He knew that the words were meant for his ears and for himself, and, as a matter of fact, the disturbance was mainly caused by his partisans. He rose quickly to his feet.

"Silence! Order, there!" he cried. "Greene, sit down, or get out of the hall! Behave yourselves, you youngsters!"

"They're keeping our voters out!" yelled Greene.

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 pretended not to hear.

"Open the door!"

Still 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.

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

"Are we in time?" gasped Blagden.

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

"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 our 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. 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. But the shouting died down when Talbot was seen upon his feet. The new captain of St. Kit's was about to speak.

"Silence for the captain!" cried Blagden.

"I haven't much to say," said Arthur Talbot, in his direct, straightforward way. "I thank you for electing me, and I'll do my best to make a good captain for the school."

Here he was interrupted by another burst of cheering, which occupied two minutes at least. He waited patiently till it subsided.

"I am glad enough to be captain of St. Kit's," he went on. "It's a post anybody might be proud to hold, and I am very proud to hold it." (Loud cheers.) "I shall try to see fair play all round, and that's the best thing I can promise. In conclusion, I thank you all once more." (Tremendous cheering.)

Arthur Talbot sat down. There was a slight flush in his handsome face, which made it all the handsomer. He was very pleased with his success, and he looked it, and he was gratified, too, by the cheering which greeted him, which, now that the election was an accomplished fact, many of Lacy's backers joined in.

Blagden thumped Pat Nugent on the back as the juniors swarmed out of the hall.

"It's you and I, Tipperary, who've elected Talbot!" he exclaimed. "We had a majority of four. If we hadn't got those chaps out of Trimble's study, Lacy would have had a majority of two. That's as clear as Euclid."

"Faith, we've spoiled their little game!" grinned Pat. "Lacy isn't the kind of chap we want for captain of St. Kit's. But I've formed a correct opinion of the nature of the beast. He'll be down on us pretty heavily as soon as he knows the facts."

"You're right!" agreed Blagden. "He's certain to try and make things warm for us; but I don't care. We've got our candidate in, and we can stand the rest."

Pat's Idea of Cleaning a Bicycle.

"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.

"Nugent!"

It was Trimble's voice. The chief of the Upper Fourth looked sourly at Pat. He was still looking much the worse for their last encounter.

"Well, what do you want, old son?" asked Pat.

"Lacy wants you in his study."

"Sorry, I can't come."

"Look here, you cheeky young imp, you'd better go, or Lacy will skin you for your cheek!"

"Sure and I'll risk that, Trimble dear!"

And Pat passed on. Trimble gave him a scowl and turned away. He went straight to his master, and about two minutes later Eldred Lacy cornered Pat in the junior's room. Lacy was looking the reverse of amiable.

"Why didn't you come when I sent for you, Nugent?" he exclaimed. "Listen to me. You're to be my fag, and if you don't mind your P's and Q's you will have a warm time, I can promise. Not a word. Do you know your way to the bike-shed?"

"No."

"Then I'll show you. Come on!"

"But——"

"Hold your tongue! You're my fag, and one of the duties of my fag is to clean my bike. You'll find it pretty muddy, but I expect you to have it spick and span when I want it again."

"Look here, Lacy, I tell you that——"

Pat had no chance to finish. The heavy hand of the senior fell upon his collar, and he was shaken till the teeth rattled in his head.

Then Lacy marched him off to the bicycle shed.

"Now, there's my jigger!" he exclaimed. "You see what you've got to do. Just set to work and get it clean."

Pat looked at Lacy's bicycle. It had certainly been through the mud lately. Lacy was a winter rider, and the roads round St. Kit's were none too good. The machine was caked with mud, and the cleaning of it would not be an enviable task.

Pat was looking decidedly rebellious.

"I'm not going to clean that beastly thing!" he exclaimed. "If you want that mud got off it, you'd better stand the porter a bob to do it. I'm not going to."

"I see that I shall have to give you a fesson, Nugent."

And, holding the junior with his left hand, Lacy began to box his ears with his right in the most brutal manner.

Pat roared and struggled, and lashed out with his feet, and Lacy received a kick on the shins which made him hop with pain, but that only increased his fury.

He boxed Pat's ears till the boy was nearly blind and dizzy, and then flung him savagely to the ground.

Pat lay where he fell, staring stupidly at the bully.

"Now," said Lacy, between his teeth, "that's for a start. If you don't do that machine thoroughly, that's nothing to what I'll give you presently."

And he walked out of the shed.

Pat rose to his feet. His head was singing, and his ears burned. He rubbed them ruefully, but the light of battle was in his eyes.

"All right, you beast!" he muttered. "All right, you howling spalpeen! Faith, and I'll clean your jigger for you, though when I've finished, I fancy you'd rather I had left it alone."

He grinned as he set to work.

His first action was to disconnect the chain, which he carefully divided into about a dozen pieces, and these pieces he scattered over the ground with a sweep of the hand. Then he removed the tyres, tied them into a knot, and pitched them into a corner. The mudguards were next removed by the simple method of dragging them off, and they were not worth much when he pitched them away.

Then he surveyed his handiwork with a smile of satisfaction.

He intended to make Lacy sorry that he had set him that task, and there was no doubt that the senior would be sorry when he saw his bike again.

"There, I think that will do," murmured Pat. "I shouldn't like to damage his bike, really, or there are a good many improvements I could effect. But I think that will do. Sure, and I fancy that's enough to make Lacy wish he had left me alone."

He quitted the bicycle shed. Outside he met Trimble, who grinned at him.

"You had to do it, you see," remarked the lanky Upper Fourth boy.

"Yes," said Pat serenely, "I had to do it. I think Lacy will be quite happy and content when he sees how I've done it."

His tone aroused Trimble's suspicions. Pat walked on, and Lacy's fag went into the shed. Pat hurried to get back to the juniors' room, where he found Blagden and Greene.

"Hallo, where have you been?" asked Blagden.

Pat explained.

The two juniors grinned, but they looked somewhat alarmed.

"I say, Lacy will be wild when Trimble tells him!" exclaimed Blagden. "He'll be on your track like a giddy blighound, young Dublin."

"I don't care. What right had he to tell me to clean his beastly old bike when I'm Talbot's fag?"

"No right at all; but that won't worry him. Hallo, here he comes!"

Lacy was bursting into the room with a face like a thundercloud.

Pat promptly dodged round the big oaken table.

"You little whelp!" hissed Lacy. "You impudent little beast, I'll teach you! I'll give you the hiding of your life!"

"You let me alone," said Pat. "I'm not your fag, and I'm not going to be. I warn you that if you're looking for trouble, you'll get it!"

Lacy panted.

The coolness of the junior, after what he had done, was like adding insult to injury.

He made a desperate rush round the table to seize Pat, but the nimble junior dodged him easily. For a couple of minutes an absurd chase went on round and round the table, and the ridiculous sight made the boys in the room roar with laughter. They uttered encouraging shouts to pursuer and pursued.

"Dodge him, Dublin!"

"Go it, Lacy!"

"Buck up, young Ireland!"

"On the ball, Lacy!"

"Go it!"

"Bravo!"

Lacy, realising what an absurd figure he cut, halted, panting, and the big oak table was still between him and his victim.

Pat was a little out of breath, but grinning genially.

"Trimble!" yelled Lacy, as his fag appeared at the door.

Trimble came in.

"Catch that young hound, and hold him!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Trimble.

Lacy rushed round the table again. Pat dodged afresh, and was promptly clutched at by Trimble. Up came his fist in a telling upper-cut, and Trimble, feeling as if his head had been suddenly knocked off, sprawled over on the floor.

But the delay, brief as it was, was almost enough for Lacy. His outstretched hand was not a couple of inches from Pat's shoulder as the junior jumped over the sprawling Trimble and fled.

Pat bolted through the doorway and raced along the corridor. Hot on his track went the panting senior, sure now of his prey.

But Pat had an object in view. He ran his hardest; but once he felt the touch of a stretching finger on his shoulder, and knew that he would be overhauled in a few seconds more.

Acting upon impulse, without stopping to think, he threw himself upon the floor, and Lacy sprawled right over him, and went down with a thump.

Pat was on his feet in a second and making for the captain's study.

Lacy, who had had a shock, was slower to rise. He was in a greater fury than ever, and his face was absolutely white with passion.

Pat knocked at the captain's door and entered. Talbot was at his table, working; but his look was kindly as he glanced at the junior.

"Hallo! What is it this time?"

"I just wanted to ask you a question, Talbot, if you're not too busy," said Pat, speaking quite calmly, though he was listening with all his ears for the footsteps of the pursuer.

"Certainly!" said Talbot. "Go ahead!"

"Now I'm your fag, am I bound to fag for any other of the seniors?"

"Certainly not! Of course, you're expected to be civil and obliging."

"Oh, yes. But I'm not bound to fag, am I?"

"No."

"Thank you. That's what I wanted to know. I've had a difference of opinion with Lacy about it, you see," explained Pat glibly. "He got a little excited, and so I thought I'd come and ask you, to set the matter at rest."

Talbot looked at him rather doubtfully. Before he had time to reply there was a thump on the door, and it flew open. Eldred Lacy, panting and furious, burst into the study.

Talbot looked at him in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter, Lacy?"

"I thought he had come here!" gasped Lacy, making a dive at Pat.

But the new boy promptly dodged behind the captain, who rose to his feet.

"What's the matter, Lacy? Calm yourself. What on earth's the matter?"

Lacy stopped, perforce, for the stalwart form of the captain of St. Kit's interposed between him and the junior.

"Get out of my way, Talbot!"

Talbot's eyes flashed.

"That's not the way to speak to me, Lacy. And you know you have no right to invade my room in this manner! Explain yourself!"

Lacy calmed down a little.

"I'm going to give that whelp a thrashing!"

"H'm! What for?"

"That's my business."

"Mine, too," said Talbot quietly, "as he's my fag."

Lacy stared at him.

"Your fag?"

"Certainly!"

"I wanted him for my fag, and——"

"Well, you're too late. He asked me to take him, and I took him. That was nearly an hour ago. I couldn't go

back on my word. And, as a matter of fact, you don't look as if you'd give him a very good time as your fag; so I can't be sorry for your disappointment."

"Oh, of course, you're following your usual system of cosseting the kids!" said Lacy scornfully.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, he's going to have a licking for what he's done!" went on Lacy fiercely.

"But what's he done?"

"He's taken my bike to pieces—ruined it! And——"

Talbot looked at the new boy sternly.

"Have you damaged Lacy's machine, Nugent?"

"Well, I haven't improved it," said Pat frankly. "He would make me fag for him, and he licked me for nothing. He's only got what he was asking for."

"I can see how it is," said the captain of St. Kit's quietly.

"You have a spite against Nugent, Lacy, and you wanted to give him a warm time. And I can guess your motive, too, which isn't a little bit creditable to you."

Lacy sneered.

"Then you uphold that impertinent little hound in cheeking the seniors?"

"Certainly not; but you had no right to interfere with my fag. I really think you had better let him alone."

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you. I'm going to give him a hiding."

Talbot's teeth came together hard.

"You are going to do nothing of the kind. I don't want trouble with you, Lacy; but I warn you that there will be trouble if you interfere with my fag."

Lacy panted with rage.

"So that's the first fruits of the election," he snarled.

"Your first exercise of authority as captain of the school is to back up the juniors in cheeking the seniors."

"I'm not going to allow bullying and brutality, if that's what you mean."

Lacy clenched his hands.

"Oh, talk plain English!" he exclaimed. "You're going to back up that whelp in his cheek. I suppose you promised him as much before he voted for you!"

"Get out of my study!"

"I say that——"

"Get out!"

Talbot's eyes were blazing; his fists were clenched. Lacy met his eyes for a moment, and the mean nature quailed before the strong, manly one. He gritted his teeth, and left the study without another word.

The anger died out of Talbot's face when he was gone. A worried look took its place. The insult of the mean-souled fellow had stung him to the quick, and he had been hard put to it to keep his hands off Eldred Lacy. But he realised that this was a bad beginning to his captaincy. Pat Nugent stepped to the door.

"Thank you, Talbot!" he said quietly.

And he, too, quitted the captain's study.

"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!"

A Study Row and an Eviction.

"I say, Nugent, I wish they had put you in our study," said Blagden 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 that were had decided otherwise. The juniors generally went three to a study, and the third in Blagden's room was a youth named Cleave, with whom the two chums did not agree very well. But he was a fixture there, and Pat was put into No. 9, where there happened to be room for him.

"Faith, it's rotten!" agreed Pat. "Suppose we could get Cleave 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, Cleave!" said Greene solemnly. "He's got cheek enough for anything. He's a toady of Trimble, 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 there, 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 blooming 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, those 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 change 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 No. 9 Study 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. 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.

(Another long instalment of this New School Tale in next Saturday's PLUCK.)

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE HOUSE-MA"

*A School Tale (Extra Long),
By Chas. Hamilton*