

A Tale of Specs, the Twins, and Co. **in this issue.**

PLUCK

1^d

THE LINCROFT HOUSEKEEPER.

By H. Clarke Hook.

THE RED RIVER MYSTERY.

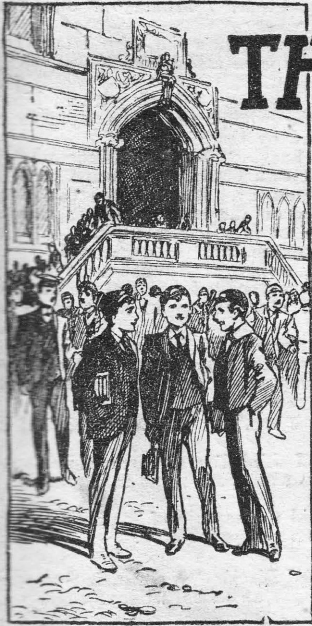
A Tale of Captain Frank Ferrett, Detective.



When it came to Lawrence's turn, he obeyed the order like a lamb, although the water was as cold as ice. He called attention to this; but the disguised Specs declared that it was almost boiling, and that it must be the fever in the lad's blood. (See page 4.)

NEW SCHOOL TALE.

YOU CAN START NOW.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The day PAT NUGENT, a young Irish boy, arrives at ST. KIT'S, an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school—ELDRED LACY and ARTHUR TALBOT being the two candidates. PAT is soon spotted by a crowd of juniors, and to stop him from giving his vote he is thrown into 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 LYWOOD: "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!"

PAT is eventually released from the cupboard, and after the election, which is decided in favour of TALBOT, becomes great chums with BLAGDEN and GREENE. These three friends take an instinctive dislike to ELDRED LACY, and continually get bullied by him. One day a curious meeting of the two LACYS and a strange tramp takes place in a lane not far from the school. The tramp, whose name is BLACK, is insolent to the elder LACY, who, instead of retaliating, tells his young brother to leave them. Now go on with the tale:

Pat's Danger.

THAT there was some secret here was plain, and Eldred Lacy would have given a good deal to know what it was.

He had been asked by the squire to come over that afternoon for a special purpose, which he guessed was something in connection with Arthur Talbot.

This meeting with the tramp, unlooked-for on the squire's part, had changed Rupert Lacy's plans. He was now only anxious to get rid of Eldred.

"But, Rupert—"

Rupert Lacy looked at him savagely.

"I've told you," he said, "that I'll see you another time. Can't you understand plain English? Then clear!"

"Oh, all right!" said Lacy sulkily.

The Squire of Lynwood stood with darkly wrinkled brows. "He's curious!" grinned Black. "The young gentleman wants to know all about it."

"Mind, not a word to him."

"I don't see why not. He—"

"You'll do as I tell you!" said the squire savagely. "You've come here to make money out of me. You want the price of your silence. I will pay it, but you will have to keep silent. Not a word to a soul."

"I'm agreeable to that so long as it's made worth my while."

"How did you come here?" said the squire restlessly, gnawing his moustache. "What freak of Fate guided you on my track, when I thought you were—were—"

"Dead," grinned the ruffian. "Come to think of it, you had reason to believe so. But I am alive, squire, and turned up like the bad penny. It's taken me some time to hunt you out, but here I am, you see, come to pay on to you for the rest of your life."

Rupert Lacy shuddered.

"Look here Black, you must not stay in this neighbourhood," he said quickly. "You must go away at once, and I will come to you and arrange—"

"You won't do nothing of the kind," said the man in the fur cap obstinately. "I know a good thing when I see it, and now I've found you I'm not going to let you out of my sight."

"Fool! Do you think I could run away and leave everything?"

"I don't know what you might do, but I know what I'm going to do, and that's keep an eye on you," said Black. "I know you of old, squire. You are too slippery a customer. I'm going to put up at the Dragon in Northley—unless you'd rather I came to Lynwood for a stay."

"Impossible! It would start everybody talking."

"Well, that wouldn't hurt me."

"You cannot come here. It would be better for you to leave the neighbourhood. I am willing to come to any reasonable terms—"

Black shook his head.

"I'm not going, that's settled. If you like to come to the Dragon to make terms I'll leave you alone at Lynwood. I shall expect you this evening."

"I will come."

"Mind you don't forget."

"I shall not forget."

The squire, with his teeth set hard, turned and strode back the way he had come, and disappeared down the snowy lane to Lynwood.

Black looked after him with an evil grin.

When the squire was out of sight, he, too, turned to leave the spot. He caught sight of Eldred Lacy in the distance, watching him. The prefect had stopped to watch the two men, but now he turned and strode away towards the school.

Eldred was in a state of utter amazement.

What was the connection between the squire and the disreputable ruffian he could not imagine, except that Rupert Lacy was somehow in the man's power.

The squire was little given to speaking of his experiences during his long absence from his native land. Lacy wondered whether there were dark episodes in that untold history. It looked like it now.

The sight of Pat Nugent, however, at the gates of St. Kit's banished the thought of Seth Black from his mind.

Pat was standing there, with his hands in his pockets, looking away towards the village of Northley, and he did not see the prefect coming from the opposite direction.

Lacy's eyes gleamed, and he quickened his pace.

Pat was not aware of his approach till he was close at hand; then, turning his head at a crunching footstep, he saw the prefect bearing down upon him.

He promptly bolted through the gateway. Lacy looked as if he meant business, and Pat knew by painful experience how hard the prefect could thump.

Pat went through the gateway like a shot, and the next moment there was a yell. Arthur Talbot was just coming out, and Pat had dashed into him with the force of a battering-ram.

The captain of St. Kit's staggered back, gasping, and Pat, dazed by the collision, sat down abruptly. As he scrambled to his feet Eldred Lacy was upon him.

Straight from the Shoulder.

Talbot came forward quickly.

"Hallo, hallo, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "What are you pitching into my fag for, Lacy?"

Lacy, heedless of the captain's presence, had started "pitching into" Pat with a vengeance, and Pat was struggling in his grasp.

The prefect made no reply. His sounding thumps still fell upon the wriggling junior.

Talbot's brow darkened. He made a quick step towards

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the prefect and grasped his wrist, thus effectually stopping the rain of blows.

Lacy glared at him savagely.

"Let me alone!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind! How dare you strike a boy in that brutal manner?" exclaimed Talbot, his eyes flashing. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Talbot, if you interfere with me—"

"I would interfere with anybody I saw behaving like a brute and a coward."

"You call me those names?"

"That's how you are acting. Let that kid go!"

"I won't!"

Talbot's teeth came together hard.

With a twist of his powerful arms he forced the prefect to release Pat, who tore himself away, and reeled, gasping, against the gate.

Lacy jerked himself free, and stood facing the captain, his eyes blazing, his chest heaving, his fists clenched. It looked as if he were about to hurl himself upon Talbot. But some last vestige of prudence restrained him, in spite of his rage.

"Do you know what he has done?" he said thickly. "He has snowballed me—his prefect—and tumbled me down a bank!"

"Well, if you chose to punish him in a proper way I shouldn't interfere between a prefect and a junior," replied Talbot; "but when you start acting like a hooligan—"

"You have no right to interfere."

"Don't talk rot! I think you'll be sorry yourself when you're cooler. If the doctor saw you treating a junior like that you'd get sacked, and you know it."

Lacy ground his teeth.

"You have picked on Nugent since he first came to St. Kit's," continued the captain. "I was told you were ill-using him in the close-to-day, and I've no doubt that that's why he snowballed you."

"It was, Talbot!" exclaimed Pat. "I don't see why the pig should have it all his own way!"

"You must not speak like that, Nugent. Cut off!"

"But, I say—"

"Scoot!"

Pat grinned, and scooted. Lacy made a movement as if to follow. Talbot stepped into his path, his face very grim.

"This is to go no further, Lacy," he said. "You understand me? If you touch my fag you'll have to reckon with me."

"If you choose to take the cheeky brat under your wing—"

"You can put it like that if you like. There's going to be no beastly bullying so long as I'm captain of St. Kit's."

"You may not be captain long!" hissed Lacy. "You—what are you? A nameless beggar's brat, picked out of the gutter!"

Talbot turned crimson.

"Lacy!"

"And you dictate to me, you nobody, you charity whelp—"

Smack!

Talbot's hand came across the speaker's face with a sound almost like a pistol-shot, and Lacy staggered across the road.

"Hallo, where yer coming to?" exclaimed a rough voice; and Lacy received a push which sent him back towards Talbot.

It was Seth Black again. His way to the village lay past the gates of St. Kit's, and he had been but a little distance behind the prefect.

Lacy took no notice of the ruffian. Talbot's blow had roused him to fury. He saw nothing but the flushed, scornful face of the captain of the school before him. He flung himself at Talbot like a tiger.

But the captain was angry, too. Lacy's insult had stung him to the quick. He met the attack willingly, his eyes flashing, and his right fist clenched, and seemingly as hard as iron, came crashing into the prefect's face.

Lacy gave a gasp, and went down as if he had been shot.

It had been a terrible blow, and the prefect lay dizzily on the ground, staring stupidly at the captain of St. Kit's.

Talbot, breathing hard, waited for a few moments to see whether he would rise and renew the conflict; but Lacy showed no intention of doing so.

Talbot, with a scornful look, turned away.

Seth Black had stopped to watch the encounter. His eyes were fixed upon Talbot now with a strange expression.

The captain of St. Kit's hardly looked at him. He strode away down the road to Northley, leaving the ruffian staring after him, with utter amazement depicted upon his coppery face.

"Well, I'm jiggered," muttered Seth Black—"I'm blooming well jiggered!"

Lacy staggered to his feet.

"Who's that chap, guv'nor?" asked Black, turning to him.

"What's his name?"

"What's that to do with you?" growled Lacy, who was in no mood for answering questions. "Mind your own business!"

"I reckon it is my business, if he's the chap I take him for," grinned Black. "What is he called here?"

"His name is Arthur Talbot."

"H'm! More or less, I suppose. I 'eard you call him a beggar's brat, and a charity whelp, and some more fancy names. What did you mean by that?"

"What I said," snarled Lacy. "But I don't see what it matters to you. Mind your own business, confound you!"

And he went in at the gateway. Black cast a dark look after him, and then hurried on the track of the captain of St. Kit's. He overtook Talbot in a few minutes.

"Can I speak to you a minute, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly," said Talbot, stopping. "What is it?"

Talbot was courteous to everybody, for it was his nature; but there was a good deal of disfavour in his look as he glanced at the ruffian.

Seth Black's gaze was fastened upon his face again.

"By thunder!" he muttered. "It's the same! I can't be mistaken! That's why he wanted me to get out of the neighbourhood, is it? I see his game."

"What do you want with me, my man?" asked Talbot impatiently.

"Only a few words, sir. I think I've seen you afore somewhere, and I'd like to know what your name is, if you don't mind telling me."

"My name is Talbot," said the captain of St. Kit's coldly, "and I have certainly never met you before."

And he turned away.

"Wait a minute," persisted Black. "I mean, is that your real name, or—?" He caught at Talbot's sleeve eagerly as he spoke. "I want to know."

Talbot's eyes flashed. He jerked his arm free and strode on. But Black, who seemed to be strangely excited, persisted, and the captain of St. Kit's swung round on him sharply.

"Look here," he exclaimed. "I don't know who you are, or why you should be curious about my affairs, but if you don't take yourself off at once you'll be sorry for it!"

The ruffian fell back, scowling darkly. Talbot strode on, and soon forgot the existence of Seth Black. But Black did not forget. And ere long Talbot was destined to have cause to bitterly regret that chance meeting.

After Lights Out.

Eldred Lacy put his head into the Fourth Form dormitory.

"Lights out in one minute!" he snapped.

It was his duty as prefect to see the lights out in the dormitory, and he was never very amiable about it. To-night he was in a worse temper than usual, owing to Pat's little joke in the afternoon with the snowballs, and the quarrel with Talbot, in which he had come off so decidedly second best.

"All serene, Lacy," said Blagden. "Don't be in a hurry, old chap. No need to break your neck about it, you know."

Lacy slammed the door by way of reply.

Blagden grinned.

"Lacy's in a beautiful tantrum," he remarked. "He's had a high old time to-day. Better not keep him waiting, kids. He's itching for an excuse to go for somebody."

"Still, he's no business to hurry us like this," said Pat, pulling off his boots. "We're entitled to time to get our togs off, I suppose. The other prefects—"

The door opened again.

"Not in bed yet? Nugent, you are always last. Do you want me to come and warm you?"

"No," said Pat, his eyes glinting at the prefect's bullying tone. "I'm warm enough, thanks. I've had a lot of exercise to-day, snowballing, and so on, and—"

Blagden and Greene broke into an involuntary chuckle.

Lacy scowled savagely.

"Get into bed instantly, Nugent."

"Faith, give me time to get my boots off!"

"I'll give you something else, confound you!"

And Lacy seized Pat by the collar, and shook him violently.

"Leggo!" yelled Pat.

Lacy took no notice. He shook him till his teeth rattled, and then hurled him upon the bed with a bump.

"Now, you young brute—"

Biff!

Pat had his second boot, which he had just taken off, in his hand. As Lacy released him, he hurled it, with un-

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erring aim, careless of the consequences. It smote Lacy full upon the nose, and he staggered back with a yell.

The next moment he went for Pat like a demon. Pat squirmed and wriggled under a shower of spiteful slaps, and he was gasping when Lacy, out of breath himself, finished with him.

The prefect gave him a savage look. "You see, it isn't always safe to be cheeky!" he sneered. "Talbot is not always close at hand to protect you. Now get into bed."

Pat finished his undressing, and got into bed without a word. He was aching all over, and his eyes were glittering; but there was nothing for it but to bide his time.

The last junior disappeared beneath his bedclothes, and Lacy, after a last scowling glance round, left the dormitory without saying good-night.

Then Pat sat up in the darkness. "Feel pretty sore, Tipperary?" asked the voice of Cleeve, from the gloom.

"Faith, and I do," said Pat. "But I'll make Lacy just as sore before I've done with him. Blaggy, old son, I shall wake you up presently."

"Hallo! Got some idea in your noddle?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'm game, whatever it is."

And Blagden was soon fast asleep.

Pat, after the pommelling he had received, was not much inclined for balmy slumber. It was no effort to remain awake. When the school clock boomed out ten, he slipped from his bed, and shook Blagden.

"Tain't time to get up yet," murmured Blagden drowsily. "Bell ain't gone. It's quite dark. Lemme alone."

Pat grinned, and shook him again. Blagden came out of his dreams with a start.

"Hallo! What's up?"

"I am, and it's time for you to be!"

"Oh, I remember! You've got some jape on! Nugent, old chap, it's a beastly cold night for a jape. Better forgive and forget, and—wooroo!"

Pat jerked the bedclothes off in a twinkling, and Blaggy sat up and shivered.

"Well, you are a determined bounder!" he said, bundling into his clothes. "What's the game? I'm ready."

"Come on, then. It's all quiet now, and we sha'n't be interrupted. Lacy's sure to be in the common-room, and the coast's clear."

"Where are we going, then?"

"To Lacy's room—or, rather, I am, and you'll keep watch in the passage while I'm there."

Blagden chuckled.

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors left the dormitory. They believed they left it sleeping behind them, and did not know that after they were gone, a figure hopped quickly out of bed, quickly drew on a pair of shoes and a coat, and followed them.

Cleeve was curious to know what the object of the nocturnal expedition might be.

The comrades reached the lower corridor, upon which the Sixth-Form studies opened. Most of them were dark, the seniors being in the common-room. From under some of the doors, where students burned the midnight oil, came a slit of light. But Lacy's study was dark. Eldred Lacy was by no means given to hard study, though it is true he had somewhat "bucked up" of late, since entering for the Dunraven Scholarship.

"Keep a good look-out," murmured Pat, and Blagden nodded, and stepped quietly down the passage, while Pat went into Lacy's room.

He lighted the gas, showing a dim glimmer, just sufficient for the work before him.

Pat wanted vengeance badly, and he set to work in a really scientific way.

He collected ashes and cinders from the dead fire in the grate, and bestowed them between the sheets of Lacy's bed with a liberal hand. Then he emptied a bottle of red ink into the water-jug. He took the matches from Lacy's box, dipped the heads in water, and replaced them. He un-earthed a can of cycle oil, and added a portion of its contents to the inkpots on the table. What was left he poured into Lacy's hat-box, where reposed the prefect's Sunday silk topper.

"There, I think that will about do," murmured Pat, with much satisfaction. He put up his hand to turn the gas out, and gave a start. He had caught a momentary glimpse of a shadow at the door. "Is that you, Blaggy?"

There was no reply, but he thought he heard a faint foot-fall retreating.

He turned the light out quickly, and left the study. In the dim corridor no one was visible, save Blaggy at some distance. Pat whistled softly, and Blagden rejoined him.

"All serene?" he asked.

"Yes. Did you see anyone about here?"

"No; I was looking the other way, on the watch for Lacy."

"I thought somebody was watching me."

"One of the kids followed us, I expect, out of curiosity. Let's get back to the dormitory, and see if they are all there."

The comrades hurried back to their quarters.

"Hallo, Cleeve's bed's empty!" exclaimed Blagden.

"Then it was Cleeve," said Pat. "I'm glad we know it, for he won't dare to sneak now. We'll slay him if he does."

"Where can the beggar have got to?" said Blaggy.

"Why doesn't he come back? If he was spying on us, there's nothing more for him to see."

But Cleeve did not return. They waited for him, but it was fully five minutes before he came back into the dormitory. He looked rather alarmed when he found the comrades awake and watching for him.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said feebly.

"Been on a little excursion?" asked Pat pleasantly.

"Been spying on us, you young cad!" exclaimed Blagden.

"N-no, I haven't."

"Don't tell lies!" exclaimed Pat scornfully. "It was you I caught a glimpse of, watching me at the door of Lacy's study."

"Well, what if it was?" said Cleeve sullenly. "There was no harm in it, was there? I wanted to know what you were up to, that's all. I'm not going to sneak."

"If you do, I shall make it warm for you," said Pat.

"But where have you been all this time?"

"There was a—a master coming out of his study," said Cleeve evasively. "I had to get out of sight, or he'd have spotted me."

"Well, why couldn't you mind your own business, and stay in bed?" growled Pat. "However, it's all right so long as you keep mum."

"Of course I shall keep mum."

And Cleeve tumbled into bed. The comrades followed his example, and were soon sleeping the sleep of the just.

But they would not have slept so peacefully if they had known the real cause of Cleeve's delayed return, and what was to follow.

Trimble's Trick.

There had been other juniors abroad that night. At the same time that Pat was busy in Lacy's study, Trimble and Cobb came out of the dormitory belonging to the Upper Fourth.

They were not bent upon mischief, like Pat, but their errand was a good deal less excusable. Trimble, as Lacy's fag, knew the habits of his master, the bad as well as the good, and was quite aware that the prefect was accustomed to smoking in his study when he could do so without fear of detection. He knew where Lacy kept his cigarettes. Like master, like man, is an old saying, and Trimble's ambition was to imitate Lacy, and the captain of the Upper Fourth considered cigarette-smoking as particularly doggish. He and Cobb were now bound for Lacy's study, to purloin some of the cigarettes, which they intended to smoke in the dormitory with a solemn pretence of enjoyment.

"I say, the bounder's at home," muttered Trimble, in dismay, catching a glimpse of light from Lacy's study.

"What rotten luck!" muttered Cobb.

"Beastly," said Trimble. "But wait a bit. What's Lacy doing with such a glimmer of light as that? And—and who's that sneaking round the door? It looks like Cleeve."

The figure Trimble had just discovered at the door was Cleeve's. It moved away, and fled towards the stairs as Trimble spoke. The light went out in Lacy's study.

Cleeve was retreating to his own dormitory, intending to reach it and get into bed before the chums returned. He had to pass Trimble and Cobb, but did not observe them in the gloom. He nearly shrieked with terror as a hand gripped him, and another was clapped over his mouth, and he was dragged into an empty room. Trimble had recognised him, and he meant to know what it was all about.

"Shut up, you silly ass," whispered Trimble, fiercely; "It's only me!"

Cleeve gasped with relief.

The sudden grip had filled him with unreasoning terror, but Trimble's voice assured him that he was not in the hands of a burglar.

The chums passed on, quite ignorant of what happened, and, as we have related, reached their dormitory and found Cleeve still absent.

Meanwhile Trimble was questioning his captive.

"What are you doing out of bed this time of night? And who was that in Lacy's study that you were watching? Who is it that's just gone by?"

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"Nugent and Blagden," gasped Cleeve. "They've been playing a trick on Lacy. At least, Nugent has, and Blagden kept watch in the corridor."

"What did Nugent do in the study?"
 "He was upsetting things, you know. I couldn't see all he did. Let me go, please, Trimble."
 "You can go, but mind you don't say a word to Nugent about having met us. Not a word, or I'll flay you alive!"

"I won't say anything, Trimble."
 And Cleeve, glad to escape, hurried back to his dormitory. Trimble chuckled in the darkness of the empty room.
 "This is a bit of all right for us, Cobb. We'll let the cigarettes go for to-night; we don't want to get mixed up in anything that takes place in Lacy's study this time."
 "You won't give Nugent away to Lacy?"

"I sha'n't say anything—but he can find out if he likes; and if he does, Nugent can smart for what he has done, and for what he hasn't done, too."
 "What are you driving at?"

"Don't ask questions, but cut along to our study and get the jumping cracker out of my desk," said Trimble.
 Trimble's word was law, and Cobb scuttled off, and soon returned with the jumping cracker.

"Come along," said Trimble, as he took it, and he led the way to Lacy's study. "Lacy is a beastly bully—What are you cackling about?"

Cobb had broken into an involuntary chuckle; it seemed funny to him to hear Trimble, the bully of the Upper Fourth, denouncing Lacy on that score.

"Nothing. Go on!"

"Well, he's a bully and a brute. He licked me to-day, simply because Talbot punched him and he couldn't go for Talbot. I've had it in my mind to make him sit up for it; but he's such a spiteful beast if he found it out. But now, if he gets on the warpath, he'll put it all down to Nugent. See?"

"I say, that's jolly mean!"
 "Do you want me to punch your head, Cobb?"

"Nunno."
 "Then shut up, and don't give your opinion till it's asked for!" growled Trimble. "Remember, you're in this as much as I am, if anything comes out!"

They entered Lacy's study. Trimble lighted a candle, and by its illumination he carefully stopped the gas-burner with sealing-wax, so that the gas, when it was turned on, could not be lighted. Then he tied the cracker on, in such a position that a match put up to the burner would light the fuse.

(This grand story will be continued in next week's PLUCK. Order your copies in advance.)

Your Editor's Corner.

All letters should be addressed, "The Editor, PLUCK, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London."

"JACK'S ENEMY."

My friends and readers will be pleased to hear that the first extra long, complete tale in our next Saturday's issue of PLUCK will be written by Jack North, who, in his tale of school life, tells of the doings and adventures of a quartette of fun-loving boys.

Order PLUCK in advance.

"THE EMPEROR'S RING."

Another pleasing announcement I have to make for our next issue is that, under the above title will be found a tale of John Smith, the invincible detective. John Smith is never at a loss, though sometimes cornered; never yet has he failed to carry out his mission and frustrate the plans of those plotting against him.

Mark Darran is the author of "The Emperor's Ring."

PLUCK

A LONG SCHOOL
TALE EVERY WEEK. 1d.



This picture depicts an incident from "Jack's Enemy," by Jack North, one of the two complete tales for next Saturday's PLUCK. 32 pages. Price 1d.

70, Newmarket Street, Ayr, January 25th, 1907.
 My Dear Editor,
 I have great pleasure in writing you to say that your stories are excellent in every way. I have read PLUCK ever since the first number of the penny series, and will continue to do so for a long time yet. I often see boys getting pocket-knives both in "The Marvel" and in PLUCK, so I wonder if you would send me one for this little puzzle? It looks like Latin, but it is in reality a sentence, with the words jumbled together. This is it: "Is acer," sed jacto his mas ter at te, "Jus passus sum jam," "Notabit" anser de, "Duce visor? 'Cos uva da totas uno Anu jus bene an etenim aw lupa tago."

This is the meaning: "I say, sir," said Jack to his master at tea, "Jus pass us some jam." "Not a bit," answered he. "D'you see why, sir? 'Cos you've had a lot, as you know."

And you've jus' been an' catcht him all up at a go."

I think this worth a pocket-knife, so please send me one. (I have — YOUR EDITOR) — Yours very faithfully,

JOHN WILSON.

I shall be pleased to receive contributions from other readers.

YOUR EDITOR.