

EXTRA LONG SCHOOL TALE BY JACK NORTH in this issue.

PLUCK

GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

Big Billy's Transformation,
AND

THE GOLDEN KEY,

Splendid Tale of the Messenger Boys.

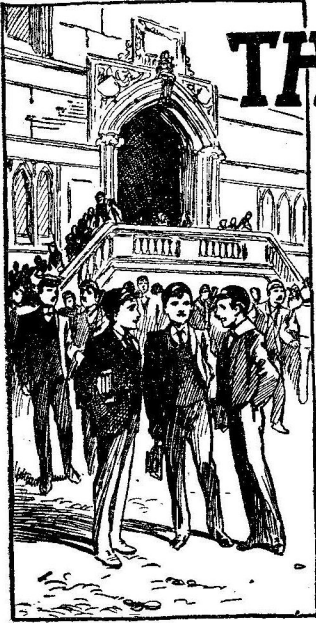
1d



"DO YOU WALTZ, BIDDICOMBE?" INQUIRED BIG BILLY. "NO, I DON'T. OH, GOODNESS! DON'T DO THAT, SIR; YOU'LL ONLY MAKE US BOTH LOOK FOOLISH," CRIED THE FAT PREFECT. "OH!"

(See page 36.)

NO. 136. VOL. 6. NEW SERIES.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory. One day a tramp named Black comes to the school and, at the instigation of the two Lacys, who for some reason fear and dislike Talbot, claims Talbot as his son. As Arthur has never seen his parents he does not know what to do; but Black is warned off the place by one of the masters. Talbot resigns his position as captain of the school. He quarrels with Lacy and the latter gets Talbot to promise to fight in a wood close to St. Kit's, a condition being that there shall be no witnesses. Lacy arranges this, as he has managed to get Dunn, his friend, to promise to creep up behind and attack Arthur Talbot. Pat, Blagden, and Greene, Talbot's three chums, follow him into the wood and hide behind some trees and watch the fight. They are surprised to see Dunn come up behind Talbot and strike him a cowardly blow on the head, stunning him, and then move quickly away. They then rush to Talbot's assistance, and in the end they make Lacy face him fairly, otherwise they determine to expose his villainy to the whole school. (Now you can go on with the story.)

Lacy is Forced to Face Talbot.

A gleam of hope, half incredulous, darted into the prefect's eyes. It had not occurred to him that Talbot would even think of keeping silence upon the matter.

"You will?" he muttered, in a low voice.

"Yes; so take your choice. Face me, and take the hiding you deserve, or face the shame that awaits you at St. Kit's!" The prefect breathed hard. He was not likely to be long in making his choice between two such alternatives. But he cast an expressive glance at the juniors.

Talbot understood it, and he turned to the three at once.

"Nugent, Greene, Blagden, you will keep silent about this affair, if I ask you?"

The juniors hesitated, looking at one another.

"The hound ought to be shown up!" said Pat.

"Just so," chimed in Blagden and Greene. "You're too good to the brute, Talbot; he ought to be shown up to all St. Kit's, and then kicked out of the school!"

Lacy ground his teeth. But he was too much at the mercy of the juniors to say a word just then.

"You are right, in a sense," said Talbot slowly. "But I do not want to have any disgrace brought upon the old school, my lads. This piece of business would disgrace the lowest hooligans in the lowest slum in London, and I don't want people to be able to say that St. Kit's fellows disgraced themselves like this."

"Well, I didn't think of that," said Pat. "Perhaps, for the sake of the school—"

"That's how I want you to look at it."

"We'll do whatever you wish, Talbot."

"Then you will say nothing about this occurrence at St. Kit's, any of you."

And after a moment's hesitation, the three chums replied together: "No."

"Thank you! You hear, Lacy? This disgraceful business is a secret unless you choose to talk about it yourself!"

The prefect bit his lip. He had never been so shamed and humiliated in his life, and the fact that the juniors witnessed his bitter humiliation made it all the more bitter.

"I am ready for you!" he said sullenly.

"Then come on!"

"Send these brats away, and—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Pat indignantly. "I think if we're going to keep the secret, Talbot, we're entitled to see the cad licked. You can't get out of that!"

Talbot smiled.

"Remain if you like," he said. "I have no reason to consider the feelings of Eldred Lacy, and I don't intend to do so."

And the three juniors stood in a row, watching, a good deal as if they were about to witness a dog-fight.

"Are you ready, Lacy?"

"Yes, confound you!"

And the fight recommenced. Lacy, knowing that there was no escape, and furious with disappointment and chagrin and

his deep humiliation, found in his rage some substitute for the courage he lacked, and he attacked Talbot savagely.

Talbot met him with a grim determination to severely punish the traitor, and Lacy's rage only added to the severity of his punishment.

Again and again the prefect reeled back from fierce blows, which left their mark wherever they fell, and again and again he came on with savage fury.

And at last a terrible right-hander, straight from the shoulder, caught him full between the eyes, and he crashed down with a thud upon his back.

He lay gasping and blinking, not attempting to rise. There was no shamming about it. He was licked—utterly and thoroughly licked.

Talbot gave him one glance, and saw that he did not intend to renew the fight, that he could not have done so had he wished. Then the captain of St. Kit's turned upon his heel.

"You will remember your promise, youngsters?" he said quietly.

And the three juniors replied together:

"Honour bright!"

Talbot strode away through the wood. The chums followed more slowly, quite satisfied with what they had seen. Lacy rose slowly to his feet, and stood staring after them, with black hatred in his gaze.

"My time will come!" he hissed, between his clenched teeth—"my time will come! When I am captain of St. Kit's Arthur Talbot shall pay dearly for this!"

And, with many a mutter and groan of pain, the defeated prefect limped away through the wood in the direction of St. Kit's.

After the Fight.

It was dusk when Eldred Lacy came in. The prefect went straight to his study, without exchanging a word with anyone. Many a curious glance followed him. Even if a fight between a captain of the school and a prefect had not been an almost unprecedented happening, the peculiar circumstances of the encounter between Talbot and Lacy would have aroused general interest.

The secrecy of the meeting had been a great disappointment to all who had looked forward to witnessing a good "mill" between the two seniors, and speculation was rife as to how it had gone. The general opinion was in favour of Talbot, but it was recognised that Lacy had a chance. When it was discovered that the two seniors were absent from the school the reason was soon guessed, and quite a group of interested individuals waited at the gates of St. Kit's for the combatants to return.

Lacy was first in. As we have said, he passed through the waiting group, and went straight to his own quarters without a word.

Haywood shook his head as Lacy disappeared into the building.

"Licked!" he said tersely.

"Well, he looks a good deal as if he had been through a mangle or under a motor-car," Rake remarked. "But we haven't seen Talbot yet."

"Sure, if he had licked Talbot he'd say so fast enough!" exclaimed Flinn. "It's licked he is, and serve him right, I say, for doing us out of seeing the foight."

"That was Talbot's doing," Rake observed—"at least, I understood so from Dunn."

"Then you understood wrong, kid. It was Lacy's idea, and I know it for a fact. But—Hullo! Here's Talbot!"

The athletic form of the late captain of St. Kit's appeared in sight in the road. He came straight on towards the gates of the school. He did not appear to see the waiting group, but was walking directly in to go towards the School House, when Flinn planted himself in his path, with a half-threatening and half-persuasive look.

"Talbot darling, are ye in a hurry? Hold on a minute while I spake to ye."

Talbot halted, perforce, as Flinn was directly in his path. The others quickly surrounded him.

"Well, what is it?" asked the captain of St. Kit's quietly.

"How did it go?"

"How did what go?"

"What?" howled Flinn. "Why, the foight, of course!"

"My dear chap, you must ask Lacy, if you are curious."

"Sure, we've asked him, and the baste hasn't answered a worrud, and it's devoured with curiosity we are!" exclaimed Flinn. "Of course, we know you licked him—"

"Then I don't see what you want to question me for."

"Ye spalpeen, how quick ye catch a fellow up! We want you to tell us—"

"I've told you to ask Lacy."

"We've asked him, I tell ye. Now we're asking you. Of course, I know you ain't the fellow to blow your own trumpet; but, still, we can't lave the whole school unsatisfied."

Talbot laughed.

"I hardly think the whole school is worrying about such an extremely trifling matter," he observed. "If you are very curious to know all about it, Lacy and I met in the wood, and we parted when we were mutually satisfied. That's all."

"But, sure—"

Talbot put a hand on Flinn's shoulder, calmly twisted the astonished Sixth-Former on one side, and passed on, leaving him staring.

The group at the gate, somewhat discomfited, stared after Talbot, and then at each other.

"Faith," exclaimed Flinn, "I shall begin to think that Talbot is the one who has been licked! The baste, not to tell us a worrud!"

"Well, Lacy wouldn't," remarked North, "and he looked the worst handled of the two. I fancy he was the licked party. You see, one can't expect a chap to say out that he's had a hiding. On the other hand, the victor don't want to brag about it. So—"

"Sure, and ye talk like a gramophone, North, me boy. But here's the end study, and they look as if they know all about it."

Pat Nugent, Blagden, and Greene were coming up the road, arm-in-arm. They had not hurried home, and now they were strolling in, looking extremely pleased with themselves and things generally.

There was very little going on at St. Kit's that the end study did not know all about, and their knowing looks at the present moment, and the fact that they came in so soon after Talbot, caused Flinn to jump to a correct conclusion at once. At his words the anxious seniors blocked up the gateway, so as to force the three juniors to stop.

"Hullo!" said Pat, looking at them coolly. "Sure, and this is an honour. I suppose you've all come out to receive us in state."

He took off his cap politely. Nothing ever abashed the cool cheek of Pat Nugent. Some of the seniors laughed, and some of them frowned. But it was all one to Pat.

Flinn stretched out his hand to seize the elusive junior, to question him more at his ease, but Pat promptly dodged.

"Hands off, Flinn, old son! I can hear your sweet voice from here."

"Come here, you young omadhaun!"

"Rats!" was Pat's cheerful retort.

Flinn nearly exploded with wrath, but he controlled himself. He knew that it was of no use attempting to ride the high horse with Pat.

"Sure, Nugent," he said coaxingly, "ye've seen the foight, haven't ye?"

"What fight?"

"Ye little baste—I mean, me dear kid!—ye saw the foight between Talbot and Lacy?"

"Oh, yes!" said Pat airily. "We saw it, didn't we chaps?"

"We did!" said Blagden and Greene solemnly.

Flinn gave a chirrup of joy.

"Faith, and I knew it! How did it go?"

"How did it go?" said Pat reflectively. "Hasn't Talbot told you?"

"No. The baste won't spake!"

"Hasn't Lacy said anything?"

"No. He's as silent as a mummy."

"Then I think I'll be silent, too. Curiosity," said Pat, with a wave of the hand, "is a besetting sin of the young; you should learn to control it."

The Sixth-Formers breathed hard as they received this really excellent advice from the junior.

"Ye little spalpeen," shouted Flinn, "it's breakin' yer neck I'll be in a minute, if ye don't answer at once!"

"Never let your curiosity run away with you," said Pat seriously. "Learn in time, my brethren, to—Gerroob!"

He broke off suddenly as Rake, making a sudden dash, seized him before he could escape.

"Got the little brute!" shouted Rake, dragging Pat into the crowd in the gateway. "Now, we'll make him talk, or wring his beastly little neck."

"Here, no beastly bullying!" exclaimed North, pushing forward.

Rake glared at him.

"Mind your own business, North!"

"Come, don't be a beast, Rake, if you can help it."

"Go and eat coke! I'm going to make the little brute tell us what's happened."

"Oh, I've no objection, then, to that, only—"

"All the same if you had," snapped Rake defiantly. "You and Talbot and Brooke, and all your set, have had your day at St. Kit's, I can tell you, and we don't want to hear too much from you. 'Nuff said. Hold the little brute, chaps!"

"Rescue!" yelled Pat, as Rake and Haywood pinned him against the gate.

And Blagden and Greene, reckless of odds, rushed to his aid.

But a couple of seniors seized them and held them fast in a twinkling.

Rake laughed.

"Now, young Nugent, answer my questions, or you'll get hurt."

"Rats," said Pat, gasping, "and rats, and more rats!"

"None of your cheek. I tell you we're going to keep you kids in your places now. Arthur Talbot is a back number at St. Kit's, especially as he's been licked—"

"He's not been licked!" exclaimed Pat indignantly.

"Eldred Lacy couldn't lick one side of him."

"Then Lacy was licked!" exclaimed Flinn. "Sure, and didn't I say so?"

Rake shook Pat roughly.

"Is that the case, Nugent? Was Lacy licked?"

"Ask him."

"I'm asking you. I'll twist your ears if you don't answer."

"Go and eat cocoanuts!"

The next moment Pat gave a yelp. Rake had kept his word.

"Oh, oh! Yah! Don't!"

"I'll do it again if you don't answer me. You say you saw the fight. Which of them got the worst of it?"

"Find out!"

Pat was the last fellow in the world to be bullied. His back was up now, and he wouldn't have answered the bullying Sixth-Former's questions for worlds.

Rake grinned.

"I'm going to find out, my pippin. I'm going to twist your ears till I have found out. How do you like 'em done?"

And he gave Pat's ears another twist.

"You beast! Let me go!"

"Here, stop that, Rake!" exclaimed North. "I tell you I won't stand it. He's an aggravating little brute, I admit, but you're not going to bully him."

"I'm going to do as I like."

North strode forward.

"Let that kid go."

"Sha'n't!"

North laid hands upon the bully the next moment.

Rake, a good deal to his astonishment, was twisted away from his victim by the stalwart chum of Arthur Talbot, and Pat Nugent stood at liberty. For a moment the two seniors stood glazing at one another, Rake panting with rage.

"North, you cad, I'll—"

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE NEW HEAD."
A Tale (School) of Specs, the Twins & Co.,
by H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"RUNNING THE CAUNTLET."
A Thrilling Tale of Adventure,
by Owen Leach.

IN "PLUCK," 1st

"Oh, shut up, Rake, you make me tired."
 "The young brute shall answer me!" yelled Rake.
 "You sha'n't bully him!"
 "North, it's a decent chap ye are," said Pat. "I don't mind telling you if you want to know, but I wouldn't answer that beastly bully. Lacy was licked."

"Lacy licked?" exclaimed a general chorus.
 "Yes; Talbot knocked him into a cocked-hat. We three saw it all from start to finish. Lacy hadn't a chance. Talbot did him down properly, I can tell you; just as we're going to do him down at the election."

"Are you?" exclaimed Haywood. "Next week Lacy will be captain of St. Kit's, my kid, and then you had better look out."

"Captain of your grandmother!" said Pat disdainfully. "We won't have him at any price. Brooke's our man, and we're going to get him in."

"Cut, you young rascal!" exclaimed North, laughing. And the chums of the end study cut off to the school.

"I say, kids," exclaimed Pat, as they entered the end study, "it will be a bad look-out for us and all the fags if Lacy gets in as captain of the school. You see how the bullies are beginning to show themselves in their true colours already. Talbot has always been down heavy on bullying, but that's not Eldred Lacy's way. If Lacy gets in, we simply sha'n't be able to stand the Sixth at any price."

"You're right, Paddy," said Greene. "We've got to get Brooke in. That's next best to having Talbot. But I say, there wouldn't be much chance left for Eldred Lacy if we told the fellows what we saw in the wood to-day."

Pat nodded.
 "Yes; but we can't, as we've promised Talbot," he said. "I think Talbot carries generosity a little bit too far. He won't get any thanks from Lacy. But we had to do as he wished in the matter, and now we can't go back on our word."

"No; that's impossible," Blagden remarked. "It would settle Lacy thoroughly, though. It will be rotten if he gets in as captain. We've got to work tooth and nail for Brooke. After all, it was us got Talbot in last election. We'll do as much for Brooke. Brooke's going to be the new captain of St. Kit's!"

And Pat nodded a hopeful assent, yet there was a lingering doubt in his mind. He knew that Eldred Lacy and his friends would strain every nerve to capture the post, and Brooke had not the standing in the school that Talbot had possessed, when he had beaten Lacy by a very narrow margin at the poll.

And it was true, too, that the disgrace that had fallen upon Talbot was to some extent reflected upon his friends, in the eyes of many at St. Kit's; and the fact that Brooke was the late captain's closest chum would tell against him at the election with many of the voters.

Talbot's friends were certain to do their best for Brooke, and the end study would not be wanting when the time came; but it could not be denied that the chances of success at the election were in favour of Eldred Lacy.

Sweet Sympathy.

Eldred Lacy had entered his study without speaking to a soul, and as he went in, he slammed the door shut, and threw himself into a chair. The next moment he started up again. It was dusk in the study, and he had not noticed on entering that the room had already an occupant.

"Hallo! Who's there?"
 A white face glimmered in the gloom. Lacy was startled for a moment; but the next, he recognised Dunn.

"Dunn, how you startled me! What the dickens are you here for?"

Dunn had evidently been waiting for him to come in. His face was pale and anxious, his eyes feverish.

"Lacy, what are we going to do?"

The prefect threw himself into a chair again.
 "I don't know that I'm going to do anything in particular," he replied. "I feel pretty used up. I'm going to take a rest."

Dunn came closer to him.
 "You know what I mean," he said hoarsely. "I never counted on anybody being there. You forced me into this. I didn't want to do it."

"No; I know. You wanted to have the price without doing the work," said Lacy sneeringly. "But it couldn't be done, you see."

"Don't speak like that, Lacy. I've stood a lot from you already," said Dunn, clenching his fists. "You said that there would be no danger of its coming out. Now I know that it will be over the school before bed-time. St. Kit's will all know that I attacked Talbot from behind to help you.

What a fool—what an utter fool I was! I ought never to have listened to you!"

Lacy heard him with a sneer upon his face.
 Dunn was in a state of funk amounting to agony; but it did not suit the spiteful, cat-like nature of the prefect to put him out of his suspense in a hurry.

"You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire," went on Dunn savagely. "What are we going to do? What are we going to say? What lie are we to tell?"

"None, as far as I am concerned."

"You don't mean to say that you're going to admit to all St. Kit's that you met Talbot in a lonely place, so that you could get a fellow to help you, because you were afraid of him?" cried Dunn in a shrill voice.

The prefect bit his lip hard.
 "It will mean expulsion for both of us!" cried Dunn.

"Why, the school will ring with it! And I sha'n't keep silent either. I shall let all St. Kit's know that you drove me into doing it, because I owe you money—"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" snapped the prefect. "You're making a mountain out of a molehill. Talbot won't say a word about what happened in the wood."

Dunn stared at him in amazement.
 "He will keep silence!"

"Yes."

"Why should he?"
 "He has given his word."

"He has given his word!" Dunn drew a long, deep breath. "If he has given his word he will keep it. But why did he give it?"

"He gave it, and that's enough."

"But—but there are the juniors. They all saw—"

"You can make yourself easy about them. Talbot has asked them to keep quiet, and they are going to do it, for his sake, not for ours."

"I can't understand this. What is Talbot's motive?"

The prefect smiled sourly.
 "Oh, some rot about the honour of the school, and not wanting to bring disgrace upon St. Kit's," he said flippantly.

"There it is, if you particularly want to know. I suppose he thinks he has brought enough disgrace upon the school, as it is, with that beautiful father of his."

And Eldred Lacy gave a savage laugh.

Dunn had sat down, breathing heavily. He was no longer listening to Lacy. The danger he had narrowly escaped had set all his nerves throbbing.

He had waited for Lacy's return in a state of terror. Expulsion was a light sentence for what he had been guilty of—attacking a fellow from behind while he was engaged in conflict with another. Even if the masters did not take the matter up, he would be ruined if it got about among the boys. Not one would speak to him. He would be sent to a rigid Coventry, and would lead the life of a pariah, so long as he remained at St. Kit's.

He had escaped that; and he owed his escape to the generosity of Arthur Talbot, the fellow whom he had always spoken against, and whom he had injured.

And even in his heart there woke a spark of gratitude—a feeling of shame. He did not share Eldred Lacy's feeling of a cynical satisfaction at his escape, and a determination to be revenged upon Talbot at a future date.

Lacy watched him with a sneer upon his face.

"Well," he said. "Are you satisfied now? Why don't you go to Talbot and thank him for his kind clemency, and tell him you'll be a good little boy in the future? It would be like you, Dunn."

Dunn started to his feet.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I will go to him! I owe him some thanks. He's behaved awfully decently over this, and he's done what neither you nor I would have done, Lacy!"

"You are going to Talbot?"

"Yes," said Dunn, crossing to the door. "You needn't try to stop me. I'm going."

"I don't want to stop you," said Lacy, biting his lip. "I think you're a fool. Talbot will very probably order you out of his study."

Dunn paused, irresolute.

"I don't believe he would, if I said—"

"I don't suppose he'd listen to you. Besides, as you're going to vote against his chum Brooke, the less you say about this to him now the better. Don't forget the election."

"The election! Perhaps I sha'n't vote against Brooke," said Dunn, with a touch of defiance.

"Yes, I thought I saw that in your mind," said the prefect contemptuously. "Don't be a silly fool, Dunn! If Brooke gets in as captain, where's your chance of a place in the cricket eleven?"

"I—I had forgotten that."

"You seem to have forgotten a good many things it would be better for you to remember," said Lacy significantly.

Dunn stood still, evidently irresolute. The impulse of

gratitude, to go to Talbot and thank him for his kindness, was passing away in his breast. He who hesitates is lost, and Lacy saw that he had won.

"I'm going to keep to the bargain," he said. "It hasn't turned out as I anticipated, but I admit that that wasn't your fault. It was all due to the juniors, and I will make them smart for it. Do you want your I O U's?"

He opened his desk, and Dunn came eagerly from the door. "That's awfully decent of you, Lacy, as it's turned out."

Lacy threw him the papers. Dunn examined them eagerly, and then, with a sigh of relief, tore them into shreds.

"I'll keep my word," said the prefect. "If I get in as captain, there's your place in St. Kit's First. You'd better think it over."

"I don't need to," said Dunn, who was quite his old self again now. "I'm with you, Lacy, through thick and thin. After all, I don't see why I should think that I owe Talbot so very much. He's keeping silent from motives of his own."

"Of course he is. That is the way I look at it."

"Well, I shan't see him," said Dunn; "so that's settled. But, I say, this is a weight off my mind. If any of the fellows knew I could never look them in the face again."

"Make your mind easy; no one knows."

Dunn nodded, and quitted the study.

Lacy was left alone—alone with aching head, tingling nerves, and smarting skin. He had received such a punishment in the fight in the wood as he had never experienced before, and he was feeling completely worn out. He threw himself into a chair. Then he looked up savagely as the door opened and Haywood put his head in.

"Sorry, old chap," said Haywood cheerfully. "I hoped you would get the best of it."

Lacy scowled at his sympathetic friend.

"How do you know I didn't?" he snapped. "Has Talbot been bragging?"

"Oh, come, he wouldn't do that, and you know it. He hasn't said a word."

"Then I don't see where you get your information from."

"The kids of the end study saw it all, and Pat Nugent told us."

Lacy started violently.

"What did he tell you?"

"Only that you were licked."

"Anything else?"

"No," said Haywood wonderingly. "What else was there to tell?"

"Nothing," said Lacy hastily. "Now, I don't want to be inhospitable, but I'm feeling a bit used up, and I want to be alone."

"Right-ho!" said Haywood, as he closed the door and walked away.

Lacy began to bathe his bruised face.

"Hallo, Lacy!" He turned, with a snarl, as the door reopened and Rake's head appeared. "I say, Lacy, I'm sorry!"

"What are you talking about?"

"I've heard it from Pat Nugent. I hoped you would lick Talbot; but, really, I suppose you hadn't much chance."

"Oh, get out!"

"Well, I'm sorry. A fellow can't say more."

"I'll make you sorrier if you don't leave me in peace."

"Oh, don't get ratty! I know you did your best, and—"

Lacy made a threatening step towards the door, and Rake grinned and vanished, slamming the door behind him.

The prefect growled and returned to his occupation. But his sympathetic friends were not done yet.

A couple of minutes passed, and then Morton opened the door and looked in. Morton was one of the worst bullies in the Sixth, and therefore a backer of Lacy in the impending election. He nodded genially to the glowering prefect.

"I say, Lacy, I'm sorry! I've heard all about it."

"Get out!" roared Lacy.

"Eh?" said Morton, astonished. "I tell you—"

"Get out!"

"Well, if you're going to take it like that—"

Lacy picked up a hairbrush, and Morton, looking extremely offended, snapped the door shut and took his departure. A minute or two later open came the door again. Jones, of the Sixth, looked in, with a cheerful nod.

"I say, Lacy, I've just looked in to say how sorry I am that—Ow!"

The hairbrush cracked on Jones's head and then crashed to the floor.

"Ow!" roared Jones. "What—why—how—"

Lacy snatched up another brush, and his arm went up.

"Mad," gasped Jones—"mad as a hatter!"

He dragged the door shut with a slam, and the brush crashed against it inside the next moment, and Eldred Lacy was left in peace at last.

A Council of War and an Offer from the Enemy.

"How do you think it will go?"

Blagden asked the question, and he and Greene fixed their eyes inquiringly upon Pat Nugent, who sat at the table in the end study, with a pen and paper in his hands.

Pat was making calculations, his boyish brow wrinkled in thought. The paper was covered with all sorts and conditions of hieroglyphics, mysterious enough to anybody but the person who had dotted them down.

"I can't be exactly sure," said Pat slowly. "I've dotted down all I can think of, but there are so many uncertain voters. Fellows are not taking so much interest in this election as in the last one, when Lacy was opposed by Talbot. Lots of them won't vote at all, I believe."

"No," said Blagden, with a doleful shake of the head. "There's young Badger. I asked him if he were going to vote for Talbot, and he said he was going out on his bike that evening with Jones minor, and wasn't going to vote for anybody."

"You see," said Greene, "Brooke's a decent sort of a chap, and we all like him; but he doesn't care the school along with him as Talbot did, and many of the chaps who won't vote for Lacy won't vote for Brooke either, but will just keep out of the hall when the election comes off."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Pat, thoughtfully gnawing his pen. "We've got to get old Brooke in; but how are we going to do it?"

"You're leader of this study," said Blagden comfortably.

"Think of a way."

"There must be ways," said Greene. "Think it out, Paddy."

"Just like you two, leaving all the thinking to me!" said Pat. "Where would this study be if it wasn't for my brain, I wonder? I believe—"

"Never mind that now, Paddy. The election's on the carpet now."

"Well, we've got to get Brooke in. Last election Trimble played a mean trick, shutting a lot of our voters up in a study. You remember how we released them and got them into the hall to vote at the last moment."

"I'm not likely to forget that," said Blagden, with a chuckle. "How green old Lacy looked. He looked as if he could have bitten somebody."

Pat laughed.

"We want to make him feel like that again. I've calculated and calculated, but each time I can only work it out that Lacy will have, at the lowest estimate, a dozen votes over Brooke's lot."

"Oh, I say, that's rotten!"

"It comes to the same result each time," said Pat discontentedly. "However I look at it, it comes to the same thing. Lacy has got about a dozen votes to the good—that is, of the certain voters. There are a good forty or fifty uncertain ones, who may vote anyway, or not vote at all. It's no good bothering our heads about them."

"No good at all. But of the certain voters—"

"Lacy has a dozen over us. I'm sure of it. The question is, how are we going to get rid of them? It's no good any of us voting with both hands, because Lacy's lot would start doing the same; and, besides, it ain't playing the game."

"We can't kill 'em."

"No. There's a law against that. I know it's absurd; but we have to take the law as we find it. We can't kill 'em, or take 'em out and lose 'em. But, somehow or other," said Pat, bringing his fist down with a thump that made the table dance—"somehow or other, we're going to get rid of twelve of Lacy's backers before seven o'clock to-morrow evening."

Blagden and Greene looked extremely doubtful.

(Another long and interesting instalment of this popular tale next Saturday.)

IF YOU HAVE NOT

already done so,

DO NOT FAIL

to get the two NEW additions to "THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY":

No. 19.—"Nelson Lee's Pupil." A thrilling tale of the celebrated detective. By MAXWELL SCOTT.

No. 20.—"Three British Boys." A splendid short tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE NEW HEAD."

A Tale (School of Spies, the Twins & Co. by E. Clarke Hook)

AND

"RUNNING THE CAUNTLET."

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure, By Owen Leach.

IN "PLUCK," 1d