

PLUCK

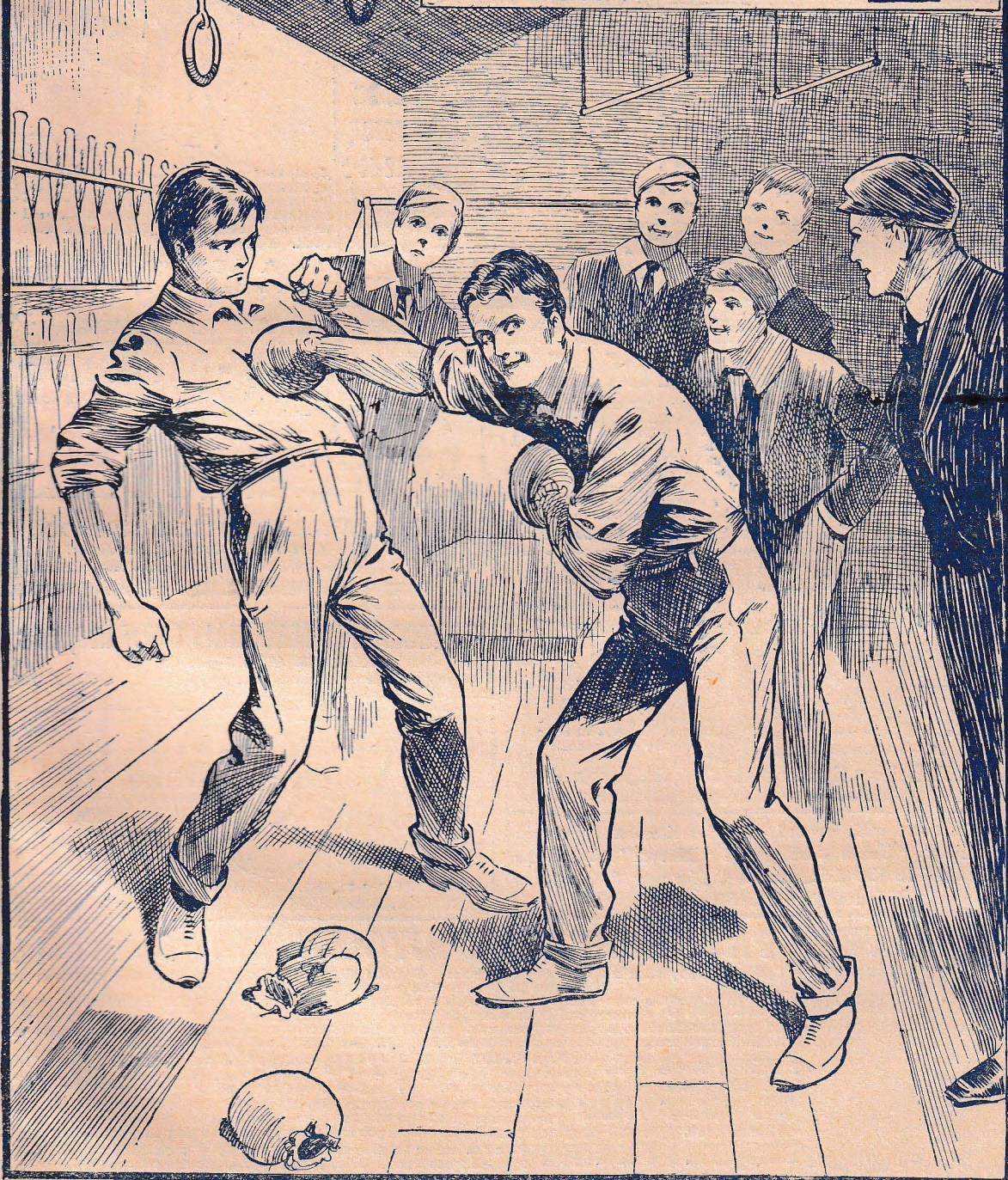
The Board School Boy.

By JACK NORTH.

The Second Million.

By MARK DARRAN.

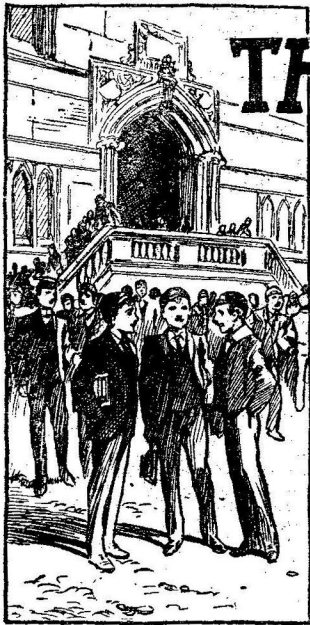
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AS THE BULLY TORE THE GLOVES OFF, BOB REPELLED THE FURIOUS ONSLAUGHT WITH A RAT-TAT-TAT ON BLENCOWES BODY, AND LOOKED BACK OVER HIS SHOULDER AND SAID QUIETLY, "NEVER MIND! I'M QUITE WILLING TO GO ON." (See p. 93.)
NO. 138. VOL. 6. NEW SERIES.

NEW SCHOOL TALE.

YOU CAN START NOW.



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, but afterwards resigns his position on account of a mean plot instigated by Eldred Lacy and his brother, who is Squire of Lynwood. Soon after, the election for the position of captain, which Talbot has vacated, draws near, and Talbot's chums have their doubts as to the result, but they decide to get rid of some of Lacy's supporters. "Somehow or other," cried Pat, "we are going to get rid of twelve of Lacy's backers before seven o'clock to-morrow evening!" Trimble, one of Lacy's cronies, enters Nugent's study, and tries to persuade him to vote for Lacy and not for Brooke, who is opposing the bully. Pat will hear nothing of it, and eventually drops Trimble out of the study window. At last the great day arrives, and the hour for electioneering draws near. (Now go on with the story).

Trimble Overhears Pat's Conversation.

Since the affair of Seth Black, Arthur Talbot was no longer a name to conjure with at St. Kit's.

It was bound to be so. Disgrace had fallen upon him by no fault of his own, and all the snobbish and mean elements in the school were set against him. He already had enemies—bitter enemies—and this blow had delivered him into their hands. Lacy was untiring in fanning into flame the growing feeling at St. Kit's against the "beggar's son," as Talbot was frequently called.

After school upon the important day, as the hour of election drew nigh, a little more excitement manifested itself at St. Kit's. Boys went about speaking eagerly, and in whispers, and groups of discontented fags discussed in bated tones their chances of voting against Lacy without being detected and held to account afterwards by the bullies of the Sixth.

Trimble kept a careful watch upon Pat Nugent. Lacy suspected, very naturally, that Pat would do his best against him, and the prefect never knew exactly what to expect from the Fourth-Formers in the end study.

That Pat would probably bring off some coup just before the election which would turn the prefect's expected majority into a minority was quite within the bounds of possibility, and Trimble and Cobb had been warned that they were expected to see that he did nothing of the kind. And so one or both of the Upper Fourth boys seemed to be haunting Pat Nugent that day.

Pat noted it, and grinned to himself, but took no outward notice of the circumstance. In the Irish lad's active brain ideas were working, and he fancied that Trimble's alert watchfulness might be of use to him.

Trimble certainly did not mean to lose sight of him. After school he posted himself to watch Pat like a Scotland Yard shadower. Pat went into the gym, and Trimble was there the next minute. He took a turn round the cricket-field, where many of the fellows were at practice, regardless of the coming election, and Trimble strolled round too. He went into the end study, and Trimble leaned against the wall opposite the door and remained there. Nothing escaped Trimble.

When Pat came out of the end study and hurried down the corridor with a preoccupied look on his face, Trimble's heart beat. Was something on at last?

He followed Pat down the corridor with a careless air, and looked down the stairs after him. Pat, in the lower corridor, was looking up and down, as if to ascertain whether he was being watched, and then glanced up the stairs.

Trimble popped back out of sight in a twinkling. Pat, apparently satisfied, walked away. Trimble was looking after him over the banisters the next moment, and he was just in time to see Pat disappear into an empty class-room.

Trimble's eyes glittered. He felt that he was on the right track. He hurried down the stairs, and reached the door of

the class-room, treading softly. It was ajar, and he could see into the room.

His lips tightened as he saw that Pat was not alone there. Blagden and Greene were with him in the deserted class-room, and they were talking in eager, low tones.

"Are you sure nobody tumbles to the wheeze?" Blagden asked.

Pat nodded emphatically.

"Quite sure. I've dodged Trimble and Cobb. They seem to have been very watchful to-day. I haven't seen Cobb for some time. He hasn't been watching you?"

"I think not."

"The game would be up if they knew that we had eight of their lot shut up under the old chapel!" chuckled Pat. "Not that we'd let them get the fellows out without a tussle. How many of our chaps have you left on guard?"

"Four!"

"Good! If Trimble smells a rat, and thinks of going to the chapel, we'll collar him and shove him in, too."

"Ha, ha! That would be a first-rate wheeze. Lacy would give him something warm afterwards if he didn't turn up for the election."

"Serve him right! Sure you fastened the chaps up safe?"

"Rather! They're in the crypt under the ruins, and you know it's impossible for anybody to get out of that without the door being opened from above."

"Good! And we'll take jolly good care it isn't opened!"

"But, I say, if Trimble tumbled to the wheeze, he might take a strong party of the Upper Fourth there and let them loose."

"He's not likely to do that. If he gets suspicious, he'll go there to look round, and then you chaps will shove him in with the rest."

"Yes, we'll do that; but if he brought a dozen of his chaps, he might shove us in instead, and then all the fat would be in the fire!" exclaimed Blagden.

"I tell you he won't," said Pat. "You two get back to the chapel now, and wait there till you hear my signal. The election is at seven, and I'll give the signal at five minutes to seven. Then you can cut into hall with the others just in time, and even if Trimble misses his voters, he won't have time to go for them."

"Right-ho! What's the time now?"

"Five-and-twenty to seven. Only twenty minutes before I signal."

"Then we'd better be off and keep watch. I'm anxious about Trimble."

"Oh, rats! He's too silly to tumble to this, anyway."

"All right, if you think so. Come on, Greene! Don't forget the signal, Nugent."

"Trust me!"

Blagden and Green came towards the door of the class-room. Trimble, who was trembling with excitement,

NEXT SATURDAY:

"SREGS' WHEEZE."
A School Tale (Extra Long),
By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE GREAT TIGER LILY."
A Splendid New Tale of the
Messenger Boys.

IN "PLUCK," ID.

whipped away and fled down the corridor. He burst into the study he shared with Cobb in a state of breathless hurry.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" said Cobb. "It's not time to go to hall yet!"

"It's time to go to the chapel!" gasped Trimble.

Cobb stared at him.

"Off your rocker?" he asked. "There's no chapel to-night!"

"I'm talking of the old chapel—the ruined west chapel!"

"What the dickens do you want to go there for?"

"Because the end study have shut up eight of our voters in the old crypt."

"Eh? Is that Pat Nugent's little game? How did you find that out, Trimble?"

"I've just discovered it through watching Pat Nugent. There's no time to be lost. Greene and Blagden and four other chaps are on the watch there, in case there is an attempt at a rescue. There will be an attempt—rather!" said Trimble emphatically. "We've got to get our fellows out, and while we're about it we'll shove Blagden and his lot in, and bolt the door on them."

Cobb grinned.

"That will be a good joke. But—"

"No time for buts. We've got to act quickly. Come on, and let's get some of the fellows together!"

Cobb followed Trimble from the study. The two were not long in gathering a force of Lacy's backers among the juniors for the purpose of effecting a rescue, and turning the tables upon the Brookeites in the chapel.

Trimble left nothing to chance. Besides himself and Cobb there were Hooper, Jones, and Cleeve, and nine other juniors in the party that set out for the old chapel.

Fourteen foes would be more than sufficient to overcome the half-dozen Trimble expected to find in the chapel, to release the prisoners, and to put Blagden and his comrades in the crypt in their place.

They hurried to the old chapel. The west chapel at St. Kit's had been a ruin for a couple of centuries, and only the lower portion of the walls remained standing, with the wide flagged floor. Underneath it was the crypt, reached by a narrow stair, upon which a low oak door, deep set in the stone, opened.

Old trees shadowed the ruin, which was very dusky now as evening set in. Shadows were thick among the ruined masses of masonry tumbled wildly about the remaining portions of walls and windows.

Trimble & Co. approached the ruined chapel cautiously. They heard a murmur of voices from the shadows within.

"It's getting pretty near seven, ain't it, Blagden?"

"I can't quite see, Blane. Nugent won't forget, anyway."

"I'm thinking of Trimble — if he should smell a rat—"

Hallo!"

There was a sudden rush of feet.

Trimble came in with a rush, his backers at his heels, and the half dozen juniors in the dusky chapel were down on the ground in a moment, each gripped in two or more pairs of hands.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Trimble. "Got you, you rotters!"

"What's the little game?" demanded Blagden, who was underneath Trimble. "What do you mean by rushing on a chap like a lot of giddy wild Indians?"

"Ha, ha! We know what you were up to here!"

"We weren't doing any harm."

"No; of course not. You haven't eight of our voters shut up in that crypt, have you?" said Trimble jeeringly.

"No; we haven't."

"That's a lie, Blaggy. Cleeve, open the door of the crypt and get our fellows out, and then we'll shove these rats in!"

"Right you are, Trimble!"

And Cleeve went to the little oaken door, fastened in its recess with strong bolts.

"Here, I say," exclaimed Blagden, "you're not going to shove us in there, Trimble?"

"You'll soon find out that we are, Blaggy!"

"But we shall have to cut the election if you do."

"That's just what I intend, old son."

"Do you call that playing the game, Trimble?"

"I call it winning an election, Blaggy," said Trimble, with a roar of laughter, in which the others joined.

The old chapel rang with it. Cleeve had opened the door of the crypt, not very easily, for it was stiff and set. He peered into the gloom.

"Call to them, can't you?" said Trimble impatiently.

"There doesn't seem to be anybody there, Trimble."

"Call to them, ass!"

"Oh, all right!" said Cleeve. And he called: "Hallo, there; hallo, hallo!"

The crypt rang with echoing sound, but there was no other answer.

"My hat," ejaculated Cobb, "it's a giddy hoax, that's what it is!"

"Hoax or not," said Trimble; "we've got these chaps here, they're going into the crypt! Drag 'em along!"

"Rescue!" yelled Blagden.

"No rescue for you!" Trimble grinned. "Come along, you beast!"

"Rescue!"

A voice came ringing back from the dusk.

"At 'em, kids!"

There was a shout and a wild scrambling of feet. Twenty forms came bursting into the ruins on all sides, and Pat Nugent was in the lead.

"Collar 'em!" he shouted.

And Trimble realised that he had been trapped.

As Pat's party rushed to the attack, the captain of the Upper Fourth thought only of escape; but that was not possible. For Blagden was clinging to him like a limpet to a rock, and was not to be shaken off. And each of Blagden's party was clinging to his captor, so that the said captor was in the position of the unfortunate gentleman who caught a Tartar, and could not get away from him.

And the attack was too sudden, and the surprise too complete, for Trimble's followers to have much chance either of resistance or escape. The enemy were two to one, and in a few seconds not only Trimble, but all his companions, were pinned down, simply overwhelmed by the odds against them.

Blagden and Greene held Trimble fast, while Pat Nugent had Cobb by the collar, and Blane collared Cleeve. All the rest were held fast by Pat's followers.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pat. "What do you think of this for a surprise, Trimble?"

"Let me go!"

"Yes; I'll let you go—into the crypt!"

"Don't you dare to—"

"Rats! What were you going to do with Blagden?"

"You—you beast!"

"You—you ass!" said Pat cheerfully. "Why, I knew you were listening at the class-room door all the time, and I was leading you by the nose when you thought you were so clever. You've fallen into the trap like a giddy babe, Trimble, old man!"

"Confound you, let me go!"

"Bosh! Shove him into the crypt, kids!"

"Rather!" said Blagden and Greene together. "Come along, Trimble!"

"I won't!" yelled Trimble, struggling desperately in their grip, as they tried to drag him towards the open door of the crypt.

"Trimble, old man, you'll get hurt; better go quietly."

"I won't!"

"All right; hold him, chaps, till I lend you a hand. You can go in first, Cobb."

"I won't go in!"

"Your mistake; you've got to!"

And Pat twisted Cobb to the open door, and sent him in with a kick. Cobb stumbled down the stair and disappeared into the darkness.

"Now, your turn, Trimble, old dear!"

"I won't go—I won't—"

Pat wasted no time in words. He grasped the captain of the Upper Fourth, and added his strength to Blagden's and Greene's, and between them, Trimble was dragged to the opening and hurled in. There was a fearful yell from the darkness; he had crashed against Cobb, and Cobb was hurt.

"Now chuck Cleeve in, Blane."

"All right," said Cleeve hastily; "I'll go quietly. You needn't do any chucking."

"Hurry up, then!" grinned Blane.

So Cleeve disappeared into the crypt. The rest of the prisoners, after some vain struggling and loud protesting, agreed to go in quietly, and one by one they descended into the gloomy recesses below the old chapel. Pat took hold of the door when the last had descended.

"You won't have to stay there long," he called out. "We'll let you loose as soon as it's safe. When the election's over, you know."

A yell of rage from Trimble was the only response. Pat laughed and slammed the door. The bolts were soon fastened, and the fourteen juniors were prisoners in the dark, powerless to escape till Pat chose to let them out.

Boom! The clock from the school tower began to strike.

"Hallo," exclaimed Pat, "seven o'clock! Those bouncers have wasted a lot of time. Come on, kids, and we'll be in the hall by the time the clock has struck."

"Right-ho!" said Blagden. "Get a move on you, chaps!"

The chaps got a "move" on them, and they dashed out of the ruined west chapel, and the ground flew under their feet as they sprinted towards the lecture-hall, where the election was to be held as usual.

Boom! It was the last stroke of seven booming out from

the clock tower as the breathless band reached the door of the great hall.

The hall was already pretty full, and, mindful of the disorder that had taken place at the last election, a couple of masters were present to conduct proceedings with due decorum. As Pat Nugent and the crowd of juniors forced their way in, North was just rising to propose his friend Brooke as captain of St. Kit's.

Pat grinned at his comrades.

"Just in time," he said cheerfully. "This is where we win hands down, children! Now then, North's finished talking—three cheers for Brooke!"

And the hall rang with the loud hurrah.

The New Captain.

"Hurrah!"

Loud rang the cheer through the old hall of St. Kit's. It was evident that Brooke had plenty of friends in the crowded assemblage.

Pat, Blagden, and Greene shouted themselves hoarse, and Pat, in his enthusiasm, kept on cheering after the rest of the hall had subsided into silence, and did not leave off till Blagden kindly recalled him to himself by clapping a hand over his mouth.

"Groo—geroo!" gasped Pat. "What are you up to?"

"Shut up!" said Blagden. "Can't you see Haywood's up?"

"Well, hiss him, anyway."

And the juniors commenced a vigorous storm of hissing as Haywood proposed his friend Eldred Lacy for the vacant post of Captain of St. Kit's.

"Silence!"

"Silence!"

"Boo! Hiss-s-s-s! Boo!"

Mr. Slaney rose to his feet.

"All who cannot keep silence will be turned out of the hall, and not allowed to vote in this election!" he exclaimed.

This dire threat had the effect of restoring silence.

Haywood was left to propose his friend Eldred Lacy in peace, and he did so, and was seconded by Dunn.

Lacy's partisans gave a cheer, and then the question was put to the vote.

"Hands up for Eldred Lacy."

Pat grinned gleefully at his chums. They were voting for Lacy first, and the counting would not occupy many minutes. Then if Trimble and his comrades escaped from the crypt, they would be too late to vote. They might come in if they liked while the voting was going on for Brooke—that would be too late for them to do any harm.

Up went the hands for Eldred Lacy.

The prefect had plenty of followers there, especially, as it was noted, among the Upper Form fellows.

And many fags voted for him too, in mortal fear of what they would get afterwards from their masters if they did not.

Intimidation had been used to the fullest possible extent by the Lacy party, and that more than justified Pat Nugent's action in shutting up fourteen Lacy voters in the crypt under the old chapel.

But many of the fags, who found themselves unobserved by their masters, took the opportunity of keeping their hands in their pockets.

They would not venture to vote for Brooke, but they helped him on by refraining from voting for Lacy, and whenever they could do this safely, they did so.

The result was that the show of hands for the prefect was not nearly so large as he had confidently counted upon.

The absence of Trimble made a tremendous difference.

Trimble, Cobb, and Hooper would have been among the juniors, seeing that they voted as they were told, and noting down for punishment all who refused to do so.

But now Trimble, Cobb, and Hooper were off the scene.

There was no one to watch what the juniors did, and the seniors, from the front of the hall, saw very imperfectly what was going on among the small fry at the back.

Pat saw it all very well, and he was inclined to throw up his cap and shout at the success of his stroke of business in getting Lacy's junior backers off the scene.

Besides the fact that many of the promised Lacy voters did not vote, there were fourteen certain votes lost to the prefect, fourteen being the number of the juniors shut up in the crypt.

Mr. Slaney counted the votes, and then a second master went through them.

The counting finished, the two masters compared notes, and as the two totals agreed, the result was taken as the correct number.

The announcement of the number was made at once, and it was eagerly listened to.

"Votes for Eldred Lacy, ninety-seven."

The prefect's face was a study.

The number was at least thirty below that which he had counted upon as absolutely assured to him.

He sprang to his feet.

"Excuse me, sir," he exclaimed, "but I see that many of the fellows are absent. Some who had promised to vote for me have not turned up."

Mr. Slaney glanced at him in surprise.

"That can make no difference now, Lacy. Proper notice of the election was given to all the school, and the hour is known to all. I myself have observed that not more than two-thirds of the boys are here. That is their own affair."

"Under the circumstances, sir, could there not be some little delay while I—"

"That is impossible, Lacy. If your friends have not come in, that is their own fault. The election was fixed for this hour, and they knew it."

Lacy snapped his teeth.

"I can't help thinking that some of them have been kept away by some trickery!" he exclaimed.

"Have you any reason to suppose so?"

"Well, I cannot understand their not turning up."

"That is a very slight reason for accusing your opponent of trickery," said Mr. Slaney, in a tone of icy coldness.

Brooke was on his feet in a moment. Brooke was a slow, good-natured fellow, but no one could safely accuse him of any sort of trickery. His eyes blazed at Lacy.

"If Lacy accuses me of keeping his voters away, he is not speaking the truth," he exclaimed. "While I'm on the subject, I may as well say that I am aware that Lacy's backers have been using intimidation to force the juniors to vote for him. Lacy naturally suspects me of his own tricks."

Lacy turned pale with rage.

The whole hall tittered at Brooke's outspokenness.

Mr. Slaney looked worried.

"These recriminations are entirely out of place," he said. "Unless you have a definite accusation to make, Lacy, you had better be silent."

Lacy sat down.

It was impossible for him to say anything further, yet he felt that all was not as it should have been. He could not see Trimble in the hall, and he did not believe that his fag would have dared to remain away if he could help it. Still, in the face of Mr. Slaney's decision, it was impossible to take the matter any further.

"The number of votes for Eldred Lacy stands at ninety-seven," said Mr. Slaney. "Voters for Brooke will now put up their hands."

Up went a forest of hands.

Pat and his chums had listened to the discussion with some anxiety. Any postponement of the election would have been fatal to their scheme.

They heard Mr. Slaney's decision with great relief. Up went their hands for Talbot's chum, and up went scores of others, and the counting proceeded through the hall.

When it was finished, and Mr. Slaney and the other master were seen comparing notes, the excitement was breathless. A silence in which a pin might have been heard to drop was broken by the voice of Mr. Slaney announcing the result.

"Votes for Brooke, ninety-nine."

Silence reigned—only for a moment!

Then a tremendous shout rang through the hall from end to end.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Good old Brooke!"

"Hurrah!"

Loud and long was the cheering.

Pat and his chums shouted, and stamped, and raved, till they were red in the face, and as hoarse as crows.

Mr. Slaney rapped for silence in vain, till full five minutes of deafening noise had elapsed. Then the boys of St. Kit's ceased from sheer exhaustion.

"Brooke is captain of St. Kit's," said Mr. Slaney. "I congratulate you, Brooke."

He shook hands with the successful candidate, and went out of the hall.

Then, as Brooke rose to his feet, looking very red and uncomfortable, the cheering burst forth anew.

It was not only Brooke's voters who cheered, but many also who had voted for Lacy from compulsion, and were delighted to find that their candidate had been defeated.

The hall rang with the loud hurrahs.

When silence fell again, Brooke tried to speak.

There had been a howl of "Speech! Speech!" which was not to be denied.

"Thank you all, kids!" said Brooke. "I seem to have won the election—"

There was a shout of laughter.

"I didn't exactly expect to, but I'm jolly glad."

Another shout.

"I'm much obliged to you all. I shall make you as good

a captain as I can, but, of course, you all know that I'm not a patch on Arthur Talbot."

The audience cheered and laughed.

"Talbot was the chap you wanted," went on Brooke, growing enthusiastic. "He's the best cricketer, and the best sportsman generally at St. Kit's, and he's a captain any school might be proud to have. He's resigned, and I'm sorry for it."

"Bravo, old Brooke."

"You're all right."

"That's all I've got to say," said Brooke. "I'll do my best. If I don't come quite up to Talbot's mark, I can't help it. Perhaps he'll be captain of St. Kit's again some day. I hope so. That's all. Thanks."

And Brooke, with a sigh of relief, stepped down.

"Good old Brooke!"

"Hurrah!"

And the assembly dispersed in high good humour.

A few went away furious. They were Eldred Lacy and his immediate chums. Talbot gave his chum a grip of the hand.

"Good old Brooke! I'm so glad you've got in, for your sake, and the sake of St. Kit's."

"Right," said Brooke. "But I'm only keeping the place warm for you, you know, Talbot. As soon as you choose, I resign, and you're captain of St. Kit's again."

Talbot shook his head with a smile.

A Visitor at Lynwood.

"A pusson to see you, sir."

Squire Lacy, of Lynwood, looked up with an irritable start. He was seated in one of the deep windows of the old library at Lynwood, looking out absently over the wide stretch of park, thick with elms, and beeches, and oaks, with a silvery stream winding among the trees.

The view was a beautiful one, and all the land that the squire's eyes roamed over belonged to the master of Lynwood.

But Rupert Lacy's face was dark and discontented.

He did not see what he was idly looking on, and as he gazed unseeing he had fallen into a deep and troubled reverie. The voice of the butler of Lynwood startled him from it. He looked angrily at the fat and pompous Manners.

"I can't see anybody now, Manners."

"So I told him, sir," said the butler, who was evidently in a state of suppressed amazement and indignation. "But he refuses to go, sir, and says that you'll see him as soon as you know who he is, sir."

"Tell him I can't, whoever he is."

"Can't you, old sport?" said a hoarse voice at the door. "Can't you see an old friend—eh?"

The squire sprang to his feet. The portly butler of Lynwood was unceremoniously elbowed out of the way by the rough and ragged-looking individual who had evidently followed him from the hall, and who now pushed his way into the library.

"Seth Black!"

The squire muttered the words between his teeth. It had come at last. Ever since the ruffian had taken up his quarters in the neighbourhood the Squire of Lynwood had lived in fear of this visit. Now the blow had fallen.

Manners simply wriggled with horror and indignation at the touch of the ruffian. Black was evidently under the influence of drink. His coarse face was flushed, and his gait far from steady.

"Shall I call the footmen, sir, and have this pusson thrown out?" gasped Manners.

Gladly Rupert Lacy would have answered in the affirmative; but he dared not. The hard, cold, iron-nerved Squire of Lynwood quailed under the unsteady, swimming eyes of the ruffian.

"No!" he rapped out.

The butler gasped with surprise. Seth Black chuckled.

"Get out!" he exclaimed, giving the butler a push. "Get out! Do you 'ear?"

Manners staggered against the door.

"You may go, Manners," said Rupert Lacy, white to the lips.

The butler staggered away, and the door closed. Manners went down to confide the amazing story to the servants' hall, and Squire Lacy of Lynwood was left alone with his enemy. The squire's hands were tightly clenched, his eyes gleaming with rage. He took a step towards the ruffian.

"Seth Black! How dare you come here?"

The ruffian grinned.

"Why shouldn't I? You come to see me in my quarters, don't you? Ain't it only friendly to return an old pal's visit?"

Rupert Lacy breathed hard.

"I could—I could kill you!" he muttered. "Don't you understand, you fool—you brute? This will be the talk of the servants, and of the whole neighbourhood soon. You dog! How dare you?—how dare you?"

He looked as if he would spring upon the ruffian. Seth Black held up a warning finger.

"No tricks, skipper—no tricks, mind! I'm ready for yer."

His grimy hand went into his coat, and reappeared with a revolver in it.

"There you are, skipper, you see."

"Put that thing out of sight, you fool!"

Seth Black put the pistol away, and sank into a chair. As a matter of fact, he had found courage for bearding the squire in his own house by drinking deeply at the Dragon before he started, and now he was very unsteady upon his legs.

"And now," said the squire, in a low, hard voice, "what do you want?"

"Mcney."

"I have told you that you can have nothing beyond the fixed allowance I make you."

"And I've told you that I will! I'm stony—broke to the wide. That's why I've come 'ere. Shell out, or I'll come again—yes, and again. I want a hundred pounds!"

"Fool!"

"A hundred pounds!" said Seth Black emphatically. "And I'll have it before I stir from this house, and so I tell you straight!"

"I haven't half the sum in the house now, if I wanted it."

"Then I'll stay with you, skipper."

"Don't call me that, fool! Suppose someone should hear you!"

"Well, you was my skipper, wasn't you?" grinned the ruffian. "You was my skipper when we was in Africa—eh? My word, some of the county-folk would stare if they knew that the Squire of Lynwood had been a nigger-stealer in Africa, and—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"All right. If you don't like me to talk of old times I won't; but now you're rolling in wealth I'm going to have some of it. Mind, I could shift you out of this house to-morrow if I liked."

The squire gnawed his lip till the blood came. He was helplessly in this ruffian's power. It was not only that Black knew his past, that the ruffian had been his associate in the old wild days, when Rupert Lacy had been an adventurer, and as great a scoundrel as any of the reckless adventurers who sought their fortune in the heart of the Dark Continent. It was not only that. But Seth Black knew a secret more important. His unlucky meeting with Arthur Talbot of St. Kit's had placed the Squire of Lynwood more than ever in his power. Black watched him with a mocking expression.

"Yes," he went on, "you know I could do it if I chose. So long as the boy was lost—so long as no trace of him could be found—you were safe. But I've found him, and I know who he is; and I know he's got the papers to prove it, though he doesn't know it himself. I've only got to open my mouth—"

"You have only to go to the boy you have injured and disgraced!" said the squire. "Do you think he would listen to you, after what you have done?"

"Yes, he would, when I could tell him that I wasn't his father, and that I know who his father was!" said the ruffian coolly.

The squire clenched his hands harder.

"I could tell him all that," went on the ruffian, "and the papers in the silver box would prove it."

"What do you know about the silver box?"

"More than you do, squire. I've seen what's in it. I've seen the silver box in the hands of the man who is dead now. Norroys was his name. I know more about it than I've ever told you, squire," said Black, with an evil grin.

The squire paced the room restlessly.

"I knew nothing," he cried—"nothing till I saw the boy at St. Kit's. I suspected nothing till my father died in the hunting-field, and ere he expired muttered a few words to me with his dying breath—a few words about a murder—a boy—a silver box. I did not wholly understand till I saw Arthur Talbot."

"But you understand now. You know that Arthur Talbot, as he is called, is the rightful—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Black chuckled.

"Right-ho! But you know that Talbot would pay well for what I could tell him."

"You—you blackmailing thief!"

"I may be a thief; and what are you?"

"Hold your tongue! You tempt me to do you a mischief!"

"I'll hold my tongue if it's made worth my while," said

Seth Black. "You've ridden the high horse a little too long. You know you dare not quarrel with me."

Rupert Lacy panted. "Am I to have the hundred pounds?" demanded Black, raising his voice. "I don't stir from this house till I have it!"

"Fool! I have told you I have not the money here. I could not possibly get it until to-morrow."

Seth Black grinned triumphantly. There was surrender in the words.

"I desay I could wait till to-morrow," he said. "If you give me a promise to bring it to the Dragon to me, mebbe I'll go now."

"I cannot come to the Dragon. I have been there too often already. It has been remarked upon," said the Squire of Lynwood savagely.

"Do you want me to come here, then?"

"Fool! No. I will meet you somewhere with the money."

"All right. I don't care, so long as I have it."

The squire reflected.

"I will send to the bank. They do not keep such sums down here. It will be impossible to get it before to-morrow afternoon. I will meet you in the evening. I cannot risk being seen meeting you, especially after your reckless visit here to-day."

"That's a long time to wait," said the ruffian discontentedly.

"There's no choice in the matter," said the squire, with something of his old sharpness of tone. "You can have it to-morrow night, or not at all!"

"All right. I suppose it will do. Where am I to meet you?"

"Anywhere where it is quiet. Suppose we say the bridge over the river. That is about an equal distance from here and from the village."

"Right you are, squire! You might as well have given in at first, and then I shouldn't have had to come 'ere at all," said Seth Black. "Tain't much catch for me, coming to a place like this 'ere," he went on, with a disparaging glance round at the lofty walls, lined with bookcases. "Gimme a cosy room, with a pipe and a glass."

"Then, at ten to-morrow evening, on the bridge," said the squire indifferently. "And now go!"

Seth Black rose to his feet. He nodded, and lurched out of the room. The squire heard him staggering away, and ground his teeth with rage and shame.

A deadly light was gleaming in the eyes of the Squire of Lynwood. He had fixed a sum as the price of Seth Black's silence, and he had warned the ruffian to beware if he passed the line laid down for him.

Seth Black had passed it recklessly. It was clear that he was not to be kept within bounds; that he was determined to squeeze as much as he could get from his victim. The present demand once yielded to—and the squire had no choice but to yield—would be followed by others, and yet others, without limit. A stop must come somewhere; and as well first as last.

It was quite clear to the hard, practical brain of Squire Lacy of Lynwood; and Seth Black would have been somewhat less satisfied with his success if he had known what terrible thoughts he left working in the brain of Rupert Lacy.

Like a Thief in the Night.

"You—you young cad!"

Eldred Lacy snarled out the words as he sprang towards Trimble. The latter had just entered the prefect's study, and he was looking very nervous and dubious. He evidently did not know what his reception would be like; but Lacy soon set that doubt at rest. He seized Trimble by the collar, and began to box his ears furiously.

"You young cad! You deserted me at the last moment, after all!"

"I didn't!" roared Trimble. "Lemme alone!"

"You were not at the election."

"I—I—I— Oh, don't! Lemme alone!"

"I looked all over the hall, and you were not there."

"I couldn't help it."

"Take that, then, and that, and that, for not helping it!" said Lacy, boxing his ears till he was tired, and then throwing him from him. "You little brute! Why weren't you there?"

Trimble gazed and blinked. He was rather dazed by the rough handling he had undergone, and he leaned against the wall, staring stupidly at Lacy.

"Why weren't you there?" roared the enraged prefect, taking a step towards him.

"I couldn't help it!" gasped Trimble. "I was kept away!"

"Who kept you away?"

"Pat Nugent."

Lacy started, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Pat Nugent! Then there was some trickery about it, just as I suspected."

"Yes; Pat Nugent shut me up in the crypt under the old chapel, and there were thirteen of our chaps shut up there with me," said Trimble, rubbing his ears ruefully.

"And what were fourteen of you doing, to let yourselves be bundled into a crypt and kept there?" demanded Lacy savagely.

"What could we do, when there were twenty or thirty of them against us?"

"How did you get into the old chapel at all just before the election, you young fool? What on earth business had you there?"

"We were tricked by Pat Nugent; we had thought we might be able to shut up some of the other party's voters in the crypt," said Trimble, "but Pat Nugent was too deep for us."

"Just like you to let yourself be taken in."

"Well, I didn't think—"

"Oh, dry up! Was Pat Nugent alone in this—I mean, do you think Talbot or Brooke had any hand in it?"

Trimble shook his head decidedly.

"No, they wouldn't, of course."

"Why of course, fool? I think it's very likely, myself."

"Well, they might," said Trimble, who knew very well that the prefect did not think anything of the kind.

"So I lost fourteen votes like that," said Lacy, gritting his teeth. "And Brooke beat me only by two. You can see how the election would have gone if you had had sense enough to keep clear of Pat Nugent."

"Is it too late now?" asked Trimble. "I know Brooke wouldn't have said anything if it had been he, but there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"What do you mean?"

"You could complain, and demand a fresh election."

Eldred Lacy looked thoughtful.

"Well, that might be done," he said; "and next time we would be a little more careful, and see that we got a majority into the hall. How did you get out of the crypt?"

"Oh, Pat Nugent came and let us out after the election!"

Lacy's brow wrinkled in thought. He was not beaten yet; there was still a chance to upset the election, and to become captain of St. Kit's, after all. It was certain that, but for Pat Nugent's device, he would have been captain of the school at this very moment by a considerable majority of votes.

"Well, we'll see!" he exclaimed. "I'll see Brooke and put it to him. Do you know where he is just now, Trimble?"

"I saw him go out with Talbot. They went down towards the gymnasium."

A sparkle came into the prefect's eye.

"All right. You can go."

Trimble went out of the study. Lacy stood for some minutes in deep thought.

"I've got to do it!" he exclaimed, aloud, at last. "It's risky; especially after that Irish kid seeing me there the other day. But it's got to be done. If Arthur Talbot leaves St. Kit's, he must not take the silver box with him. Rupert was very emphatic about that. Now's my chance to try again."

The prefect stepped from his study. Night had fallen upon St. Kit's, and the corridors of the old school were gloomy and shadowy. From below came the sounds of voices and singing. The boys of St. Kit's were "keeping it up" after the election.

The studies were almost wholly deserted. From only one or two doors came a gleam of light. The prefect could not have a better opportunity of making a second attempt to surprise the secret of Arthur Talbot. He went quietly along the passage and opened Talbot's door. It was not fastened, and the gas in the study was turned low. Lacy entered and closed the door.

If Talbot had just gone down to the gym. with Brooke he was not likely to return in a hurry, and no one else was at all likely to come into the study. Yet the prefect's heart was beating hard and fast. He went about his task in the dim light, not daring to turn the gas higher for fear of betraying himself by the light from the window.

For a quarter of an hour the spy was busy. The result was—nothing. He paused, and stood with a savage and baffled look on his face. He did not like the task, but he was completely under his brother's influence. For everything, including his fees at St. Kit's, he was dependent upon Rupert Lacy. He dared not disobey the orders of the Squire of Lynwood.

His eyes rested upon Talbot's desk. Once already he had been through that; but now, as he looked at it, it occurred to him that the desk, which was a large, old-fashioned one, might contain a secret drawer.

He stepped towards it and made a second examination. He patiently examined every part of it, pressing with his fingers wherever he thought there was a chance of a secret spring existing. Suddenly there was a faint click! The prefect's heart gave a bound. In the dim light he stooped and looked closely at the spot. A little panel had shot back, and a small cavity was revealed. Within the cavity something white glimmered.

He drew it out with trembling fingers. It was a metal box; dull in hue, but evidently of silver.

"The silver box!"

The prefect muttered the words aloud as his fingers closed upon it.

"The silver box!"

He had found it at last! He drew it out of the cavity and closed the little panel. There was another click as it closed. Then he stepped towards the light, the silver box in his hand. He examined it carefully. So far as he could see, there was absolutely no kind of opening to the box; the metal surface was chased with quaint designs, but no crack or crevice was visible.

The prefect's heart beat hard. It was not prudent to stop there and examine his prize, and he thrust it into his inside breast-pocket and stepped to the door of the study. Then his heart gave a painful throb. Footsteps were coming along the passage without. Was it Talbot?

The prefect's brain worked quickly. To be caught in Talbot's study with the door closed would lead to awkward questions. He could not escape from it without being seen. He silently opened the door wide, and stepped into the doorway. The footsteps came nearer. It was Talbot! The corridor was dimly lighted, but he saw Lacy in the doorway of his study as he came up, and looked at him in surprise.

"What do you want here, Lacy?"

"I was just looking in to speak to you," said the prefect coolly.

The door being wide open somewhat disarmed Talbot's suspicions, but he did not quite trust Eldred Lacy.

"Indeed! Well, here I am."

Lacy cudgelled his brains for something to say—something plausible, that would look a little genuine.

"Well?" said Talbot. "I'm waiting."

"It's about the election," he said quickly.

"The election tonight? What about it?"

"Are you aware that your side used foul play?"

"I am aware that your side did so, so far as intimidating the juniors is concerned," said Talbot sternly.

(Another long instalment next Saturday.)

Your Editor's Corner.

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

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