

Stratemeyer Edward

**The Putnam Hall Cadets: or,
Good Times in School and
Out**



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«Public Domain»

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	15
CHAPTER V	18
CHAPTER VI	21
CHAPTER VII	24
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

Arthur M. Winfield

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: In bringing out this story, “The Putnam Hall Cadets,” the initial volume in the “Putnam Hall Series,” I feel it necessary to make an explanation why it is that this tale is brought out when I have already written so much concerning the doings of the students at Putnam Hall.

Ever since I presented to the boys the first volume in the “Rover Boys Series,” I have been urged by the boys – and girls, too, for the matter of that – to write something concerning the doings of the students at the Hall previous to the coming of the Rover boys on the scene. When the Rovers arrived they found a wide-awake, jolly crowd of cadets already there, some of whom had been at the academy several years. My young friends wished to know more about these, and it is for their benefit that I have instituted this new series, which will tell of many things that happened at the famous seat of learning from the time it was first opened to the present day.

Putnam Hall is an ideal boarding school for boys, located on the shore of a beautiful lake in upper New York State. The students there are bright, manly fellows, full of vigor and fun, and bound to get the best there is out of school life. There are some keen rivalries, and in the story are related the particulars of a mystery which had an unlooked-for ending.

In offering this first book of the new series I wish to thank the thousands everywhere who have written to me regarding the “Rover Boys Series.” It does my heart good to know that the tales have been so well liked. I trust sincerely that the present story meets with equal approbation.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

Arthur M. Winfield.

July 25, 1905.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING SOME CADETS

“Hurrah, Jack, I’ve got news! To-morrow we are going to ballot for officers!”

“I’m glad to hear that,” answered Jack Ruddy, as he threw down the algebra he had been studying. “I was almost afraid we weren’t going to have officers this term.”

“I suppose Captain Putnam wanted to find out if there was any military material here before he let us fellows take charge,” went on Pepper Ditmore, as he swung himself up on a corner of the dormitory table. “Tell you what, Jack, it’s a great thing to organize a school like this, and get everything in working order, all in six weeks.”

“Do you think you are organized, Pep?” queried Jack Ruddy, with a twinkle in his eyes.

“I’m organized about as much as I’ll ever be,” returned Pepper Ditmore. “You can’t expect a fellow like me to settle down and be as quiet as a lamb, can you?”

“No, you’re more like a jumping-jack. The fellows don’t call you the Imp for nothing.”

“It’s a base slander,” returned Pepper Ditmore, with an injured air. “I’m as meek, sometimes – ”

“When you are asleep.”

“As a – a – ”

“Circus clown. By the way, have they found out yet who mixed the salt and sugar last Saturday?”

“Can’t say as they have.”

“And who put that little bulldog in Josiah Crabtree’s bedroom in the dark?”

“They haven’t asked me about it,” and now Pepper Ditmore began to grin.

“Then let me congratulate you on your escape,” and Jack Ruddy smiled broadly.

“Let’s change the subject, Jack. Don’t you want to be an officer of the Putnam Hall Cadet Corps? I should think that would just suit you. Your father was an army officer.”

“It would suit me first-rate. But the fellows don’t know much about me. Most of them are strangers to me.”

“Well, they are mostly strangers to each other. If you want to become an officer, say the word and I’ll do the electioneering for you.”

“Don’t you want to be an officer yourself?”

At this question Pepper Ditmore gave a merry laugh.

“I’d make a fine-looking officer, wouldn’t I?” he returned. “No, I’ll remain a high private in the rear rank – and take my sport in some other way.”

“And you expect me to be an officer over you, Pep? How in the world will I manage you?”

“By not trying, Jack. But come, are you going to be an officer or not? As a battalion, we are to have a major, two captains, two first lieutenants, two second lieutenants, and a lot of sergeants and corporals. I want to see you a captain at least.”

“That’s kind.”

“I’d rather see you an officer than that Dan Baxter. Do you know, Jack, I don’t like that chap at all.”

“No more do I. He is very overbearing. I heard him bossing some of the little fellows around in regular slave-driver style.”

“Well, he shan’t boss me around.”

“Oh, it’s not likely he’ll bother the big boys,” came from Jack Ruddy, as he arose from his chair and stretched himself. “Those chaps usually make the little fellows toady to them. What time is it?”

“Just five o’clock.”

“Then come on down to the lake and have a row before supper.”

At that moment something soft, thrown up through the open dormitory window, struck Jack Ruddy on the shirt bosom. It was a lump of mud, and it left quite a mark behind.

“Hi, there, who threw that?” he cried, angrily, as he rushed for the window. He was just in time to see a lank youth diving out of sight behind some bushes.

“I know that lad,” came from Pepper Ditmore. “His name is John Fenwick, but they call him Mumps.”

“I’ll Mumps him!” retorted Jack Ruddy. “Come on!” And he rushed out of the dormitory, and down the broad stairway three steps at a time. He was just near the bottom when he passed a tall and rather sour-looking teacher, who was coming up.

“Master Ruddy, not so fast – ” began the teacher, when of a sudden Pepper Ditmore struck the man on the shoulder, hurling him flat on his back at the foot of the stairs.

“Oh, excuse me, Mr. Crabtree!” burst out the cadet. “I – er – I didn’t mean to run into you!”

“Yo – you imp!” spluttered Josiah Crabtree. “What do you mean by tearing downstairs like a – a cyclone?”

“We’re after a fellow who threw some mud up into our room,” explained Jack Ruddy.

“I didn’t see you coming,” added Pepper. “Very sorry – it shan’t occur again.”

“This jumping downstairs has got to be stopped!” fumed Josiah Crabtree. “I shall make an example of you, Ditmore. Go back to your classroom and write this sentence one hundred times: ‘It is best to walk with care.’”

“Have I got to go back now?” cried Pepper.

“At once.”

“It isn’t fair, Mr. Crabtree. I didn’t mean to run into you; really, I didn’t.”

“Stop! I want no back talk. To the classroom instantly.”

“Mr. Crabtree,” put in Jack Ruddy, “please – ”

“Silence, Master Ruddy, or I shall send you, too.”

“Catch that boy if you can, Jack,” said Pepper, and walked slowly towards his classroom. Josiah Crabtree saw him enter, and saw Jack Ruddy leave the building, and then continued on his way upstairs.

Jack Ruddy and Pepper Ditmore were chums. Both hailed from the western part of New York State, and they had arrived at Putnam Hall about a month before this tale opens. Jack was a few months older than Pepper, but the youths were of the same size and weight. Jack was of a serious turn and studious, while Pepper was rightly called the Imp, on account of his fun-loving disposition.

At the time of which I write, Putnam Hall was a new institution of learning. It was located on Cayuga Lake, in New York State, not many miles from the village of Cedarville. It was a handsome structure of brick and stone, standing in the middle of a parade ground of about ten acres. In front was a well-kept wagon road, and beyond this the grounds sloped down to the lake, where were located the academy boathouse and bathing houses. To the rear of the school were the barns and a storehouse, and on one side a well-fitted-up gymnasium, all backed up by a stretch of thick woods.

On the ground floor of the Hall, which was built in the shape of the letter E, were located the classrooms and also a drillroom and a messroom, all reached by three entrances, each of imposing appearance. Above the ground floor were the sleeping apartments, those for the students divided into dormitories holding four, six, or eight cadets.

The master of the school was Captain Victor Putnam, a bachelor, and a West Point graduate. The captain had seen strenuous service in the West, where he had fought under the gallant General Custer during several Indian uprisings. But a fall from a horse had placed him on a sick bed, and when he regained his health he decided to give up army life, and go back to his former profession of teaching. Money had been left to him, and with this he purchased the grounds and built the academy.

As was to be expected from a military man, the school was organized upon military lines, and each cadet was given instructions in military duties daily. All were clothed in neat but serviceable uniforms, and there was a general parade each day, just before supper.

To get the school into proper shape, Captain Putnam had hired three retired officers of the army to drill the boys daily. Under their tuition all of the scholars had learned rapidly, and now the master of the Hall was about to let the cadets choose their own officers and do their own drilling, under his sole management.

Captain Putnam was a well-educated man, and taught several classes in the school, besides looking after the general management. His head assistant was Josiah Crabtree, just introduced, and his second assistant was George Strong, whom we shall meet later.

Josiah Crabtree was a morose individual, with a very exalted opinion of himself. He had come to the Hall with high recommendations, but it cannot be said that Captain Putnam liked the man, and as for the cadets, they nearly all hated him.

Leaving the building, Jack Ruddy hurried to the spot where his chum had seen the boy called Mumps. He found the boy talking earnestly to a big, burly youth, who carried a baseball bat in his hand.

"It was lots of fun," Mumps was saying, as Jack strode up. "I struck Andy Snow, and Hen Lee, and some fellows in dormitory No. 4, and –"

"And you struck me, you sneak!" cried Jack, catching the boy by the arm. "I suppose you thought it fine fun to cover me with mud."

"Hi! let me go!" cried Mumps, in sudden alarm. "Let me go. I – I – didn't do anything."

"You threw a lump of mud up into our room and struck me."

"I – I – didn't –"

"You can't get out of it. I've a good mind to box your ears, Mumps."

"Say, you let that kid alone," came from the big boy with the baseball bat. "Leave him alone, I say!"

"See here, Dan Baxter, this is none of your quarrel," retorted Jack.

"Let him alone."

"I'll let him alone when I feel like it."

"You'll let him alone now."

"Will I?" Jack caught Mumps by the collar and shook him thoroughly. "Now, after this, you behave yourself, or I'll thrash you good," he went on.

"Oh! oh!" screamed the boy. "Le – let up! Don't – don't shake my head off!"

"Stop it!" roared Dan Baxter. "Stop it!" And rushing in he took hold of Jack and tried to draw him back.

"Baxter, let go of me," said Jack, quietly, but with determination. "If you don't –"

"What?" came from the big youth with a sneer.

"That!" retorted Jack, and turning from Mumps, he gave a quick push that sent Dan Baxter flat on the turf.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERIOUS SLOOP

The attack had come so unexpectedly that for the moment Dan Baxter did not know what to do. In a dazed fashion he sat up, and finally scrambled to his feet. Mumps, the toady and sneak, gazed at Jack Ruddy in wonder.

“You’ll catch it for that!” he cried. “Dan Baxter’ll most kill you!”

“He has got to spell able first,” murmured Jack.

“See here, what did you do that for?” spluttered Dan Baxter, when he could collect himself sufficiently to speak.

“I told you this was none of your affair!” answered Jack. “After this you attend to your own business, and I’ll attend to mine.”

“I told you to let up on Mumps.”

“Well, you are not my master, Baxter.”

“Mumps is under my protection.”

“What you mean is, that he is one of your toadies.”

“I ain’t anybody’s toady,” came from John Fenwick, but his face grew as red as a beet.

“Yes, you are, and you’re a sneak in the bargain,” said Jack.

“I’ve a good mind to give you a crack with this,” burst out Dan Baxter, as he swung his baseball bat aloft.

“Here, don’t you hit Jack Ruddy with that!” came a voice from the rear, and on the instant another cadet caught hold of the bat.

“Thanks, Andy,” came from Jack. “But I don’t think he’d dare.”

“So you’re going to take part in this too, eh?” said Dan Baxter, turning to the newcomer.

“Oh, I only want to see fair play,” answered Andy Snow, a tall, slender boy, who was a good deal of an acrobat, and at the head of the gymnasium class.

“Andy, were you up in your dormitory a while ago?” questioned Jack.

“Yes.”

“Did you get hit with a lump of mud?”

“Yes. I’d like to spot the rascal that threw it.”

“I was hit myself. That’s why I came down after Mumps.”

“So you’re the guilty party, eh?” cried Andy Snow, stepping up to John Fenwick.

“Don’t!” screamed the lank boy, and turning, he ran off at top speed. “Come on, Dan!” he called out, when at a safe distance. “Don’t have anything more to do with ’em!”

By this time a crowd of a dozen was beginning to collect. Dan Baxter gazed around uneasily.

“We’ll settle this some other time,” he muttered, and edged away.

“Better settle it now,” retorted Jack.

“I – I’ve got something else to do,” faltered Dan Baxter, and then he turned and followed his toady.

“Baxter is afraid of you, Jack,” came from Andy Snow. “He’s a bully if ever there was one.”

“He certainly is a bully.”

“A thrashing would do him good.”

“Well, he’ll get it unless he minds what he is doing.”

“It was a mean trick of Mumps to throw mud in at the windows,” went on Andy Snow, as they walked away. “I had just put on a clean shirt when it hit me in the shoulder.”

“Mumps is as much of a mean sneak as Baxter is a bully, Andy. They make a fine team.”

“Where are you bound?”

“Pepper Ditmore and I were going for a row on the lake, but Pep got into trouble with Mr. Crabtree and had to go to the classroom.”

“I’ll go for a row if you wish.”

“All right. We haven’t much time, but we can take a short row anyway. It’s a pity Pep isn’t along.”

“You and he are great chums, aren’t you?”

“Yes. You see, it is this way: His father and mine were old college chums, and we take after them. Besides that, his father and mine are associated in several business affairs.”

The boathouse was soon gained, and the two cadets brought forth a rowboat of fair size, and two pairs of oars.

“Hullo, you fellers!” came from back of the boathouse. “Is it yerselves that’s afther wantin’ company, I don’t know? If yez do, it’s meself will be afther comin’ along.”

“Hullo, Emerald!” returned Jack. “Yes, come on if you wish – there is room enough.”

“It’s meself that would loike to learn how to row,” said Joseph Hogan, as he stepped into the craft. He was a pleasant-faced Irish lad, who had come to Putnam Hall on the day the institution opened.

“All right, Emerald, we’ll give you lessons,” came from Andy Snow. “Wait till we get out on the lake.”

The craft was shoved off, and Jack and Andy seated themselves at the oars. Soon they were gliding over the surface of Cayuga Lake in fine style.

“Sure, an’ it looks aisy enough,” said Hogan.

“It is easy – after you know how,” answered Andy. “By the way,” he went on to Jack, “are you going in for that boat race next week?”

“Yes, and so is Pepper.”

“Good enough. I hope you both win.”

As soon as they were well out on the lake both boys stopped rowing, and allowed Joseph Hogan to take a pair of the oars.

“Now, take hold this way,” said Andy Snow, “and pull like this.”

The Irish lad tried. At first his blades slipped quite frequently, and once he splashed some water into the craft.

“Look out!” cried Jack. “Emerald, we’ve had all the bath we want.”

“Sure, an’ I didn’t mane to wet yez,” was the answer. “The oars schlipped before I knew it!”

In a few minutes the Irish boy was doing better, and they turned down the lake. As they did this they noticed a small sailing boat approaching.

“There’s that craft again!” cried Jack.

“What craft is that, Jack?”

“Oh, I forgot, Andy. It’s a sloop Pepper and I saw day before yesterday. We thought the fellows on board acted queerly.”

“In what way?”

“They sailed up and down the shore at least ten times, as if they were on the lookout for something or somebody.”

“Who was on board?”

“Two men. I tried to catch a good look at their faces, but they wouldn’t give me a chance.”

“It’s certainly queer they should sail up and down here,” was Andy’s comment. “Did they come from Cedarville?”

“I don’t know.”

By this time the strange sloop was close at hand. The same two men were in command, but both kept their faces turned away as the rowboat glided by.

“Did you notice how they kept their faces hidden?” queried Jack.

“Sure, I did that,” answered Hogan. “B’ys, they are up to some thrick.”

“It certainly is strange,” said Andy, thoughtfully. “See, they are turning back once more.”

“Perhaps they know some of the cadets, and would like to meet them.”

“More than likely they want to steal some of our boats.”

The sloop turned again on her course, and it was not long before both craft were only a short distance apart.

“I’m going to hail them, and learn what they have to say for themselves,” whispered Jack.

“Do it,” answered Andy.

“Sloop ahoy!”

At first there was no reply to this shout. Jack repeated the call, and Andy brought the rowboat still closer.

“What do you want?” growled one of the men on the sloop, finally.

“Fine day,” said Jack, brightly.

To this there was no answer.

“Looking for anybody around here?” came from Andy.

“No.”

“Saw you cruising around here day before yesterday, didn’t I?” continued Jack.

“Maybe you did. We’ve been out on the lake quite some the past week,” answered the second man.

“Thought, if you were looking for somebody, I might help you.”

“No, you can’t help us,” growled the one who had first spoken.

“Do you belong at Putnam Hall?” questioned the other occupant of the sloop.

“Sure, we do that,” answered Hogan.

“Got many pupils there now?”

“Forty or fifty so far,” said Jack.

“Humph! How many teachers?”

“Two regular teachers, besides Captain Putnam. Then we have others for French, and German, and music.”

“Who are the regular teachers?”

“Mr. Crabtree and Mr. Strong.”

“Do they stay there all the time?”

“Yes.”

“It must grow rather monotonous for them.”

“Oh, we try to make it lively enough.”

“Don’t they ever go to town, or go boating?”

“Of course. Mr. Strong is quite an oarsman,” came from Andy, who had been out with the second assistant on more than one occasion.

At this announcement both of the men exchanged glances.

“You can come ashore and look at the school if you wish,” said Jack.

“No, thank you, we don’t care to do so,” was the hasty answer; and a moment later the sloop veered off, and was soon out of speaking distance.

“Well, they are a queer pair and no mistake,” murmured Jack. “Did you notice how one kept his hand over his forehead?”

“And how the other had his cap pulled far down over his eyes,” added Andy.

“Sure, an nayther of ’em looked roight sharp to me,” put in Hogan. “I’d not like to be spendin’ much toime in their company.”

“I believe they are up to something,” said Jack. “I’d like to know what it is.”

“Perhaps we’ll find out later,” answered Andy. And they did find out, in a manner that was as thrilling as it was astonishing.

CHAPTER III

A CASE OF BRIBERY

When the boys got back to the boathouse they found Pepper Ditmore awaiting them.

“Dashed off that bit of writing as soon as I could,” said he. “My, but wasn’t it mean of old Crabtree to make me do it! But wait, I’ll get square on him!”

“Pep, we met that strange sloop again,” said Jack, and told of what had been said.

“There’s a mystery there, that’s certain,” answered Pepper. “Perhaps we had better report to Captain Putnam.”

“It won’t do any harm.”

“Then come on now. We’ve got ten minutes before parade.”

Captain Putnam’s office was a finely furnished apartment, just off the main classroom. They found the master of the school engaged in writing a letter.

“Well, young gentlemen, what can I do for you?” he said cheerily as they entered.

“We’ve got something to tell you, sir,” they answered, and then Jack quietly related their story.

The master of Putnam Hall listened with close attention, and questioned each one of the party.

“This is certainly odd,” said he, meditatively. “Still, there may be nothing of importance in it. If you see the sloop hovering around again, let me know.”

“We will, sir,” answered Jack, and then he and his companions hurried off.

The drum was already rolling, and all of the cadets lost no time in getting out on the parade ground. It was a beautiful day in early October, with just enough of coolness to make it bracing.

“The battalion will fall into line!” was the command, from one of the old army officers present, and then the cadets of Company A and Company B took the places assigned to them.

“Company, attention!” was the command from the officer in charge of Company A, to which Jack, Pepper, and Andy belonged. And then followed a similar command to Company B.

While the battalion was at attention, Captain Putnam came forth and mounted a small stand that was handy.

“Young gentlemen,” said he, gazing, at the assembled cadets, “I have an announcement of importance to make to you. In the past you have been under the command of Captain Wilson and Lieutenants Plummer and Montgomery, who have drilled you thoroughly in the arts and duties of the soldier. These instructors will leave the Hall early next week, and then I intend to place the battalion in charge of such officers as you may select for yourselves.”

“Hurrah!” came the shout. “Three cheers for Captain Putnam!”

“Three cheers for Captain Wilson and his assistants!” was the added cry, and the cheers were given with a will.

“As you well know, ever since this school was organized I have been keeping a close watch on every cadet, to find out who was fit to take command. I have prepared a list of sixteen names, which you will find hung up in the general library and in the gymnasium. Of these names the first eight are eligible for the rank of major of the battalion, and all are eligible for the rank of captain, or first or second lieutenant. The position of sergeant or corporal may be filled by any cadet in the school. Voting for the various officers will take place to-morrow, directly after the regular school session.”

“Hurrah!” came another shout, as the captain stepped down.

“Battalion, attention!” came the command, a moment later. “Carry arms! Present arms! Support arms! Shoulder arms! Forward, march!”

“Tap! tap! tap-tap-tap!” went the drums, and off moved the young soldiers. They marched around the parade ground twice, and then into the mess-hall, where each cadet took his place at one

or another of the long dining tables. It was a spirited scene, and one calculated to make the heart of each boy bound with enthusiasm.

“Your name is on that list, Jack,” whispered a cadet sitting near. “I saw Peleg Snuggers tacking it up in the gym as I came away.” Peleg Snuggers was the general utility man around Putnam Hall.

“I hope you are on it, too, Joe,” answered Jack.

“I am,” returned Joe Nelson, who was a quiet and studious cadet, hailing from Philadelphia. “And Andy Snow and Henry Lee are on it, too,” he went on. “I think – ”

“Silence at the table!” broke in the rough voice of Josiah Crabtree. “If I hear any more of that, I’ll send you away without your supper!”

“Oh,” murmured Joe Nelson. It was rarely that he had any trouble with any of the teachers.

“Say, but old Crabtree is crusty enough to make pie of,” was Pepper’s whispered comment.

“Silence, I say!” thundered the first assistant. “I will have silence!” And he looked around the board so fiercely that hardly anybody dared to say another word.

At the next table sat Dan Baxter and Mumps, the sneak. The former scowled darkly at Jack and Andy, while the sneak put his tongue into his cheek at them.

“I’m going to fix Mumps,” whispered Pepper, who had been told of the occurrence in the school yard, and watching his chance, he leaned back in his chair and dropped a bit of sharp fish-bone down inside the sneak’s collar.

At first the sneak did not notice what had been done, but then he made a side turn and of a sudden uttered a yell of pain.

“Hi! who’s sticking me with a pin?” he roared. “Drop it!”

He glanced around, but the boys on both sides of him were busy with their eating.

“What is it, Master Fenwick?” questioned George Strong, the second assistant.

“Somebody stuck me with a – Oh, I’m stuck again! Oh! oh! Something is down my back!” And the sneak began to wiggle from side to side. “Oh, dear me!”

“You had better leave the room and find out what is the matter,” said the teacher, and still twisting and squirming, Mumps left the mess-hall in a hurry.

“Baxter, do you know anything of this?”

“No, sir.”

“It is strange; what could be the matter?”

There were a few minutes of silence, and then the sneak came back and dropped into his chair.

“It was a fish-bone – awfully sharp, too,” he said. “Somebody must have dropped it down my back, sir.”

There was a titter, in which our friends joined. Pepper winked at Jack, Andy, and Joe Nelson, and they understood.

As soon as the meal was over, the cadets rushed off to the library of Putnam Hall and to the gymnasium, to scan the list of names the master had mentioned.

“Bart Conners is at the head,” said Andy. “Harry Blossom comes next, Jack is third, Henry Lee fourth, myself fifth, Dave Kearney sixth, Stuffer Singleton next, and Dan Baxter next.”

“And those are the ones who may be made major,” came from a cadet named Dale Blackmore, one of the leading athletes of the academy.

“You are up next, Dale,” returned Jack. “That means you may become a captain.”

“I’d rather be captain of the football team,” answered Dale, with a smile.

As soon as the list was scanned, an animated discussion took place regarding the merits of the different candidates. As among men, and especially politicians, there was a good bit of “log-rolling” and electioneering.

“I think Henry Lee ought to be major,” said Jack. “He is one of our best soldiers.”

“He is no better soldier than you are, Jack,” returned Andy.

“Just what I say,” came from Pepper. “Jack ought to be major, and Henry one of the captains.”

“Dan Baxter is working hard to become major,” came from a cadet who had just strolled in. “Somebody told me he was actually trying to buy votes!”

“Buy them? Do you mean with money?” queried Jack.

“So somebody told me.”

“Oh, that can’t be true, Jerry. Why, who in this school would be mean enough to sell his vote?”

“Well, Baxter has got a wad of rocks all right enough. I saw the money myself.”

“I’m going to watch him,” came from Pepper, and he motioned for Andy Snow to go along.

“What will you do, if you learn he is really offering money for votes?” questioned Andy, as they hurried away.

“I don’t know yet, Andy. But it would be a mean piece of business. Why, in politics that is bribery, and they can arrest a man for it.”

“I know that – but it’s seldom a briber is caught.”

It was not difficult to trace Dan Baxter. From a small cadet they learned he was down by the lake, back of the row of bathing-houses.

By going down to the boathouse first, and then stealing along a fringe of bushes skirting the lake shore, they reached the bath-houses without being seen. As it was past the bathing season, the houses were supposed to be “out of commission,” and locked up, but one of them – the largest – stood wide open.

“Well, that is the chance of your life, if you only know it,” reached their ears, in the voice of Dan Baxter. “Besides, you know well enough that I would make as good a major as anybody in the school.”

“That’s a fine way to blow one’s own horn,” murmured Pepper.

“And what will you give me, Baxter, if I work for you?” came from a big boy named Gus Coulter. He, too, was a bully, and, coming from humble parentage, had very little spending money.

“I’ll give you five dollars, Gus.”

“Will you give it to me now?”

“Yes, if you’ll promise to do all you can to elect me major.”

“All right, then, hand over the money,” answered Gus Coulter. “I’d just as soon work for you as anybody.”

“Why can’t I have a fiver, too?” put in Mumps, who was present. “I’ll work as hard as Gus.”

“I’ll give you two dollars, Mumps,” said the bully. “I can’t afford any more.”

“Where do I come in on this?” came from a lad named Paxton.

“I’ll give you two dollars, too, Nick, if you’ll vote for me and try to get others to do so, too.”

“Humph! Aren’t my services worth as much as Gus Coulter’s?” demanded Nick Paxton.

“Well, if I’m elected I’ll give you two dollars more.”

“Very well, hand over the dough, Dan. As Gus says, I’d just as soon work for you as for anybody.”

“What a barefaced thing to do!” whispered Andy Snow. “Baxter can’t have a bit of honor about him!”

“The others are just as bad – to take his money,” whispered Pepper in return. “If they – who’s this?”

“Hullo, what are you doing here?” demanded a rough voice behind them, and a cadet named Sabine appeared on the scene.

“Who is there?” cried Dan Baxter, and rushed from the bath-house. “Humph! Pepper Ditmore and Andy Snow! So you’ve been spying on us, eh? That’s a nice business to be into, I must say!”

CHAPTER IV

ELECTING A MAJOR

“Have they been spying on us?” queried Mumps, and turned slightly pale.

“Yes, they have been spying – I caught them at it,” came from Billy Sabine. “What have you fellows been up to here?” he added, anxiously.

“Never mind just now,” answered Dan Baxter. He looked much disconcerted. “Just step in here a minute, will you?” he requested, of Pepper and Andy.

“What do you want of us?” asked Pepper, cautiously, while Andy also held back.

“Have you been listening to our talk?”

“Yes.”

“It was a mean piece of business, Pepper Ditmore!”

“Not half as mean as what you were up to, Dan Baxter!”

“What was I up to?”

“You were bribing these fellows to vote for you.”

“No, I wasn’t. I – er – that is – we were talking about something else. It’s a – er – a secret society,” stammered the bully. He did not know what to say.

“Bosh!” came from Andy. “You were bribing them to vote for you for major, – paying them from two to five dollars apiece.”

“You shut up!” roared Baxter, rushing up to Andy and catching him by the arm. “I know what I’m doing. I don’t want any talk from you!”

He ran Andy against the side of the bath-house, but as said before, Andy was a good deal of an acrobat, and in a twinkling he had slipped from Baxter’s grasp.

“Let us get out of here, Andy,” said Pepper. “We have seen and heard enough.”

“Are you going to blab on us?” demanded Gus Coulter.

“That depends upon what you do,” retorted Pepper, bravely. “We are not going to stand for such underhanded work as has been going on here.”

“If you dare to say a word I’ll – I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life!” hissed Dan Baxter, rushing forward and catching Pepper by the throat. “Don’t you dare to do it! Don’t you dare!”

“Le – let up, Baxter!” gasped Pepper. He pushed the bully back with his hand. “You won’t, eh? Then take that!”

So speaking, he landed a blow that took Dan Baxter full in the face and sent him staggering back several paces.

“What’s going on here?” came the cry from the parade ground, and half a dozen cadets appeared, including Joe Nelson and Jack.

“Perhaps Baxter will tell you,” said Andy.

“I – er – I haven’t anything to say!” stammered the bully.

“But I have something to say!” cried Pepper, boldly. “Boys, take care that he doesn’t try to bribe you to vote for him. He has just bribed Coulter, Paxton, and Mumps. I saw him pay over his money, and so did Andy Snow.”

“It’s a – a – falsehood!” stormed Dan Baxter. He was beside himself with rage.

“It’s the truth,” came from Andy. “It was the most disgraceful thing I ever witnessed in my life. We don’t want such a chap for a major, or even for a captain.”

“Maybe we don’t want him even for a high private,” came from somebody in the crowd.

Gus Coulter whispered to Baxter, and then to Paxton and to Mumps.

“That’s the way to talk!” whispered Mumps. “Our word is as good as theirs!”

“What these fellows say is not true,” came from Gus Coulter. “I was never bribed in my life.”

“I wouldn’t accept a bribe,” put in Paxton, loftily. “I’m not that sort, and my friends know it.”

“We all belong to a secret society, and we were counting up the money in the treasury,” said Mumps. “In the midst of it Ditmore and Snow rushed up and intimated that Dan was bribing us. They ought to have their heads punched for it!”

“Well, you’ll never punch them, Mumps,” said Pepper. “And Baxter won’t punch them, either.”

“Don’t be so sure about that,” growled Dan Baxter. “You may get more than you expect!”

“I am not afraid of you,” answered Pepper.

Further talk was cut short by the ringing of the school bell, calling the cadets into the Hall. Baxter and his cronies went off in one bunch, while Pepper, Andy, and Jack went off in another.

Among so many cadets opinions were necessarily divided. Some thought Baxter guilty, while others believed in his protestations of innocence. Yet with it all, the bully had only a limited circle of friends and hangers-on, as later events proved.

During the evening the air was filled with subdued excitement. All of the candidates for the officers’ positions were discussed, and it was generally admitted that Jack, Bart Conners, Henry Lee, and Dan Baxter stood equal chances of winning the majorship, or at least one of the captaincies.

“I hope you win the majorship, Jack,” said Andy. “You are just suited for that position.”

“I’d like it, Andy, I must confess. But I’m afraid I’m not well enough known. Big Bart Conners has a host of friends – and he is a staving good chap in the bargain.”

During the following morning it was easily to be seen that Dan Baxter had been working hard to win the cadets over to him. The bully and his cronies had done a good deal of talking, and in a few cases it looked as if he had been doing additional bribing.

During the recess electioneering became warm once more, and the students gathered in little knots to discuss the situation. Jack, Pepper, and several others were talking together when Dan Baxter strolled up, with a dark look on his face.

“Say, I want this talk about bribery stopped,” he said, savagely. “I won’t stand it – do you understand? I won’t stand it!” And he shook his fist at the crowd.

“If you won’t stand it, sit down on it, Baxter,” retorted Pepper.

“It ain’t fair,” roared the bully, for the benefit of the crowd.

“I believe Pepper tells the truth,” came from Jack, eyeing Baxter boldly. “He caught you in the act.”

“Of course you’d say so, Jack Ruddy, you’re so anxious to be elected!”

“Well, I don’t want to be elected,” came from Pepper.

“And neither do I,” put in Andy. “I saw it as well as Pepper.”

“It’s false! Absurd!” roared Baxter, and then, as there seemed nothing more to say, he walked off with his head held high in the air.

“He makes me tired,” came from Dale Blackmore. “I’d never vote for him, even if he hadn’t started to bribe the fellows.”

The voting began directly after dinner. There was a large ballot box, and the cadets were given slips of paper and pencils, so that they might put down the names of their candidates.

“There are seventy-seven students present,” said Captain Putnam. “Consequently it will take thirty-nine votes for a choice. We will now take the vote for the majorship.”

There was a moment of silence, during which the students put down the names of their candidates, and then the line filed past the ballot-box, and each youth deposited his ballot. Without delay the captain and George Strong tabulated the vote.

“I will now read the result of the first ballot,” announced Captain Putnam, and at once the cadets became silent.

“Number of votes cast, 77;
Necessary to a choice, 39;
Bart Conners has 21,

John Ruddy has 21,
Henry Lee has 14,
Harry Blossom has 9,
Daniel Baxter has 7,
David Kearney has 3,
Andrew Snow has 1,
Paul Singleton has 1.”

“Hullo, Bart and Jack are a tie!” exclaimed Pepper.

“And I’ve got one vote,” put in Andy.

“Guess you must have voted for yourself,” put in Gus Coulter, sarcastically.

“If I did, I didn’t have to bribe myself to do it,” retorted Andy. He raised his voice: “Whoever voted for me, will kindly vote for Jack Ruddy on the next ballot.”

“I also wish to withdraw in favor of Jack Ruddy,” came from Dave Kearney. “I don’t believe I can fill the position of major just yet,” he added, by way of explanation.

“Please cross me off the list,” sang out Paul Singleton, a fat youth, who went by the nickname of Stuffer because he was always hungry.

After this came a little more electioneering, and Henry Lee said he would withdraw and give Jack his support if Jack’s friends would vote for him for captain.

“Yes, we’ll do that, Henry,” cried Andy.

The second ballot was soon cast, and resulted as follows:

Number of votes cast, 77;
Necessary to a choice, 39;
For John Ruddy, 48;
For Bart Conners, 20;
For Harry Blossom, 5;
For Daniel Baxter, 4.

“Hurrah! Jack is elected!” cried Pepper, and rushing forward he caught his chum by the hand.

“I congratulate you, Major Ruddy,” said Captain Putnam, with a smile.

“I move we make the election of Jack Ruddy unanimous!” called out Bart Conners. “I voted for him, and I want all of you to do the same.”

“Hurrah! That’s the way to talk!” sang out a student. “Bart, you’re a good fellow.”

“Three cheers for Major Ruddy, Captain Putnam, and Bart Conners!” came the cry, and the cheers were given with a will. But Dan Baxter and his cronies did not join in.

“They sold me out!” muttered the bully to Mumps. “Some of the fellows who said they’d vote for me didn’t vote for me at all.”

“I’d square up with them for it,” returned the sneak.

“I shall – and I’ll square up with Jack Ruddy too,” added Dan Baxter, bitterly.

CHAPTER V

OFF ON A PICNIC

As soon as the excitement attending Jack's election had subsided, Captain Putnam announced that they would proceed next to the election of two captains, one for Company A, and one for Company B. For this purpose each student was allowed to put down two names, making the total number of votes cast one hundred and fifty-four.

True to their promise, many who had supported Jack voted in favor of Henry Lee, and as a consequence he was made captain of the first company. Bart Conners became captain of Company B. Later still, Harry Blossom became first lieutenant, and Dave Kearney a second lieutenant. For all of these positions Dan Baxter received not more than six votes, much to his disgust.

"It's a put-up job," he growled. "But just wait – I'll fix them!" And then he and his cronies said no more.

After the voting was over, Captain Putnam called the newly elected officers together and gave them their instructions.

"I shall leave the battalion in your hands from now on," he said to them. "On parade and during drill you must see to it that every cadet does his duty. Of course, during school hours and off hours, you will have no more authority than any of your fellow pupils."

"I understand," said Jack, "and I don't want any authority excepting on parade and during drill."

That evening the battalion celebrated on the campus of the Hall, with a big bonfire and singing. There was also a fancy drill and a short parade, and all enjoyed it excepting Baxter and his cronies. As soon as possible the latter sneaked off in a little crowd by themselves.

"I'm satisfied that Ruddy and his crowd cooked this whole thing up against you, Dan," said Coulter. "Look at Lee. He sold out the majorship just to get a captaincy."

"And Dave Kearney sold out so he could be sure of becoming a lieutenant," put in Paxton. "It makes me sick."

"Well, some of the others sold me out," growled the bully. "I know twelve fellows who said they'd vote for me, and the most votes I got were seven!"

"Jack Ruddy must have bought them up," put in Mumps. "He's a slippery one, he is!"

The majority of the cadets, however, were well satisfied over Jack's election, and they told the newly elected major so. All shook him by the hand, and wished him the best of success in his position. He was called on to speak and made a neat speech.

"I thank you all for electing me," said he. "I trust we shall all be friends, and that our relations with one another will be pleasant from beginning to end. I am going to try to do my duty, and I know you will try to do yours. And because you have made me major, don't forget that – during school hours and off hours – I am one of you anyway."

"That's the way to talk!" called out a cadet. "Jack's the right kind of a major."

"Three cheers for Major Ruddy," was the cry, and they were given loudly, and a tiger followed.

A number of the boys, including Pepper and Andy, had worked hard to elect Jack and he felt that he ought to do something for them in return. He thought the matter over carefully and then decided to ask a dozen of the cadets to go off on a picnic with him on the following Saturday afternoon, which would be a half-holiday.

"Just the thing, Jack," said Pepper, when the thing was mentioned. "We can have a jolly time, in the woods and along the lake shore."

"Do we take any grub along?" came from Stuffer Singleton, anxiously. "It's no picnic without grub."

"Trust Stuffer to remember about food!" laughed Andy.

“To be sure we shall take something to eat along,” answered Jack. “I’ll arrange it with the captain and Mrs. Green, and I’ll buy some extras at Cedarville.”

As soon as the picnic, as it was called, was announced those to take part became enthusiastic. Not to make the other cadets feel bad, it was kept a secret among those concerned. Captain Putnam allowed the housekeeper to have two baskets of provisions packed for Jack, and the young major took Andy and Pepper with him to town, where they purchased some extra dainties.

“This is going to be the dandiest of all picnics,” declared Pepper. “A red-letter day for Putnam Hall.”

“Don’t you want to invite Dan Baxter?” said Andy, with a sly grin.

“Not on your life, Andy!” cried Jack.

“Oh, I was only joking.”

“He wouldn’t come,” put in Henry Lee. “He is as mad as hops because he wasn’t elected an officer.”

“I don’t want any such bully as he is to be an officer over me,” came from Stuffer Singleton.

There were signs of rain in the air on Friday and the students to participate in the picnic grew anxious, fearing they would have bad weather. But by the next morning the sun was shining as brightly as ever, and soon all were ready for the start, which was to be made at one o’clock.

“Say, what do you think?” cried Mumps, coming up to where Baxter and Paxton were standing. “Jack Ruddy is going to take some of the fellows out to the woods for a spread.”

“Who told you?” queried the bully of Putnam Hall.

“I overheard them talking about it in the gym. They’re going to take two or three baskets of good things with them.”

“That’s a shame!” cried Paxton.

“We ought to spoil their game,” suggested Gus Coulter. “Can’t we do it, Dan?”

“I don’t know.” Baxter became thoughtful. “Where are they going, Mumps?”

“Up to Gerry’s Point, on the lake. It’s about two miles from here.”

“We might row up in one of the boats and see what we can do,” answered the bully. So it was arranged, and Baxter, Paxton, and Mumps set off without delay. Coulter wished to go along but could not because he had an extra lesson to do, he having missed several times during the week.

Jack and his friends started in high glee. They had three baskets filled with good things to eat and to drink, and each basket was carried by two boys, the handle having a stick passed through it for that purpose.

“I’m going to have a swim,” declared Andy. “I know it’s a little late in the season, but the water is pretty warm.”

“I’m with you,” said Pepper. “I shan’t mind the cold water. Why, I take a cold bath two or three times a week, in the bathtub.”

“Cold baths are very healthy,” came from another of the crowd. “My father used to be quite weak, but now he takes a cold bath every morning and it is wonderful how strong he is getting.”

The path led back of the Hall grounds and then through a dense woods fronting the lake, where the shore made a sweeping turn. As the boys were all good walkers, they covered the two miles with ease, reaching Gerry’s Point inside of an hour after starting.

“Now then for a rest and a swim,” cried Pepper.

“And then we’ll sample some of the good things Jack has provided,” added Stuffer, smacking his lips.

“Say, Stuffer, you could eat about all the time, couldn’t you?” queried Andy.

“No, not all the time – he must sleep,” put in Jack, and this brought forth a laugh.

“I caught myself eating once in my sleep,” said Stuffer. “I began to cough and woke up with a piece of pie in my hand. I had had the nightmare, gone down to the kitchen pantry, and helped myself. After that ma locked the pantry up and hid the key.” And at this tale there was another laugh.

After a short rest the boys went in bathing, placing their baskets in a secluded spot behind some bushes. Not far away was a small stream of water, and they did not know that in this one of the Hall rowboats was hidden, containing Baxter, Paxton, and Mumps, who had watched their arrival.

“Now is our chance!” cried Baxter, when all but two of the boys had gone in bathing. “Let us take their baskets and make off with them. We can go up the lake shore and have a dandy time on the good things!”

“Right you are,” put in Paxton. “And won’t Jack Ruddy and the others be mad!”

“Be careful, or they’ll spot you!” whispered Mumps, in a trembling tone.

“Oh, don’t get scared, Mumps,” said Baxter. “They can’t see us – the bushes are too thick.”

Leaving the rowboat, the party of three stole to the spot where the baskets were resting.

“Say but they are heavy,” remarked Paxton in a low voice.

“Hush!” came warningly from the bully, and then nothing further was said. Each took a basket, and started back for the rowboat as fast as he could carry the load.

Baxter and Paxton had just placed their baskets in the boat when there came a crash. Mumps, who was bringing up the rear, had slipped and let his basket fall, breaking a drinking glass and a bottle of ginger ale.

“Hi, there, what’s that?” came from Jack, who was standing in the water up to his waist. “Who’s breaking glass?”

“I’m not,” answered one of the cadets on shore. “It was – ”

“Hullo, there is Dan Baxter!” yelled Pepper. “He’s got one of our baskets!”

“They are running off with our things!” broke in Andy. “Hi, stop, Baxter! Stop, Paxton!”

“Go to grass!” roared the bully of Putnam Hall. He flung himself into the rowboat. “Quick, Paxton; quick, Mumps!”

Paxton leaped in, basket in hand. But Mumps, becoming frightened, let his load remain where it had fallen and scrambled in headlong. Then the oars were taken up and the craft shoved out into the stream.

“Stop them! Stop them!” came from Jack. “Don’t let them get away, boys!”

“Swim for the boat,” said another cadet. “Come on!”

“Baxter, stop your rowing!” called a cadet on shore. “Stop, or I’ll throw this!” And he held up a large and sharp stone.

“Ain’t going to stop!” muttered the bully. “Clear the track, you fellows!” And he shook his head at those in the water. “If you don’t get out of the way, I’ll run over you!” And then he began to pull with might and main, while Paxton did the same.

CHAPTER VI

AN ODD BIT OF PUNISHMENT

For the moment the declaration by the bully that he would run the boat into those in the water kept the swimmers back.

“Look out, fellows!” cried Stuffer, in alarm. “That boat has got a pretty sharp bow. If it hits you it will cut you deep!”

“I’m going to stop the boat anyway,” cried Jack, and continued to swim toward the craft.

As Jack did this, Andy measured his distance and suddenly dove out of sight. Andy was as good at swimming as he was at acrobatic feats, and he did not come up until he was close to the side of the rowboat. Then, before Baxter knew what was up, he had hold of one of the oars and jerked it out of the bully’s hand.

“Hi, give me back that oar!” cried Baxter, in alarm.

“Not much,” said Andy. And then, as Baxter tried to hit him with the other oar, he dove under the boat and gave it a sudden push that nearly upset the craft.

“Oh!” yelled Mumps, in alarm. “Don’t! We are going over! Help!”

By this time all of the crowd in the water were surrounding the rowboat, and Jack lost no time in pulling an oar from Paxton. Then he shoved the end of the blade against Dan Baxter, and in a twinkling the bully fell over against the gunwale. Here Pepper caught him by the arm, and over went Baxter into the water with a loud splash.

“Don’t throw me over!” screamed Mumps. “Don’t! I – I can’t hardly swim a stroke.”

“Do you surrender?” demanded Jack.

“Yes! Yes! Please don’t throw me over! I – I wasn’t going to do anything!”

“Paxton, do you surrender?” asked Jack.

“No, I don’t! I’m going – Hi! give me that oar!” For somebody had suddenly captured the other blade.

“If you don’t surrender we’ll cast you adrift without oars,” came from Pepper, with a wink at his companions.

“Yo – you won’t dare,” faltered Paxton.

“Won’t we? You’ll soon see.”

“Yes, cast him adrift,” was the cry.

“Send him away out into the lake!”

“No! No! I – I surrender!” said Paxton.

By this time Dan Baxter was walking ashore. His clothes – a new suit, elegantly pressed, – were, of course, soaked completely, and there was a streak of mud over one shoulder.

“I’ll make somebody pay for this!” he growled. “It will cost two dollars to have this suit fixed up again.”

“You brought it on yourself, Baxter,” said Jack.

“No, I didn’t!”

“Yes, you did. What right had you to try to run away with our baskets of things?”

“I – er – I wasn’t going to run off with ’em. I was just fooling.”

“I don’t believe you,” broke in Pepper.

Several surrounded the bully, so that he might not run away, and the rowboat with Paxton and Mumps was turned back to the point from where it had started.

“Let us make them prisoners,” suggested Andy. “They ought to be taught a lesson.”

“That’s the talk!” came the cry.

“I – I won’t stand it,” faltered Paxton.

“Then sit on it!” cried Pepper, and tripped the fellow up. While he and Stuffer made Paxton a prisoner, the others attended to Dan Baxter and Mumps. The prisoners had their hands tied behind them, and each had a foot tied to the root of a big tree, the boys using sections of boat rope for that purpose.

“Now let us finish our swim,” said Jack, and drew his crowd to one side.

“What shall we do with them?” whispered Pepper.

“We ought to duck Paxton and Mumps,” came the suggestion. “Baxter don’t need any more.”

“Let us keep them bound up,” said another. “They can look on while we are feasting.”

“That’s the talk!” cried Jack. “It will make their mouths water to look at us getting outside of the good things.”

“And let us pretend that we’re going to leave them tied up when we go away,” added Andy.

So it was arranged, and, this settled, the boys continued their swim and then dressed at their leisure.

“See here, ain’t you going to let us go?” asked Dan Baxter, after a long spell of silence.

“Of course not,” answered Jack. “We’ve decided to let you stay here until Sunday night.”

“Sunday night!” cried Mumps, in alarm. “I don’t want to stay here all night and all day tomorrow!”

“Don’t get afraid, Mumpsy dear,” came from Pepper. “There are not very many bears around these parts now.”

“Oh! one bear is enough!” And the sneak shivered.

“I’m not going to stay here until Sunday night,” came from Paxton.

“Come, let us off, and maybe I’ll call it square,” said Baxter, in a more reasonable tone.

“But we don’t intend to call it square, Baxter,” answered Pepper.

“Then you won’t let us go?”

“No!” shouted the rest of the crowd.

After that the baskets were brought up and all the good things spread out where Baxter, Paxton, and Mumps could see them. Soon the cadets were eating and drinking to their hearts’ content.

“Baxter, wouldn’t you like a drink of soda?” asked Pepper, coming up with a glass full of the beverage. “I don’t like to be too hard on a fellow student.”

“Yes, I’d like a drink,” grumbled the bully.

“All right then, you shall have one – as soon as you go down to Cedarville and put up the necessary nickel at the store.”

“Oh, go to thunder!” growled the bully.

“Can’t I have a drink?” asked Mumps. “I’m as dry as a – a fish.”

“Sure you can have a drink – but not of soda,” said Andy. “I’ll get some water for all hands.”

He disappeared behind the bushes in the direction of a spring. Soon he came back with three glasses filled with water.

“Here’s a drink for each,” he said. “I’m not going to be too mean about this. I know what it is to go dry.”

He passed a glass to Pepper and one to Stuffer, and each of the cadets held his glass up to the mouth of a prisoner. As Baxter, Paxton, and Mumps were all dry, each drank eagerly.

“Hullo, what’s this?” spluttered Paxton.

“Bah!” came from Baxter, spitting out the water. “It’s full of salt!”

“This will make us drier than ever!” groaned Mumps.

“And I took several swallows,” growled Paxton.

“So did I,” added Baxter.

“To be sure it’s full of salt,” said Andy. “I thought you all needed it, you’re so fresh, you know.”

“Be gorry, that’s the bist joke yit,” came from Emerald Hogan, with a roar. “That’s roight, Andy, me b’y, salt ’em down.”

“I’ll salt you down, Irish!” cried Baxter, in a rage. “Just wait till I get back to the Hall.”

After this the bully and his cronies asked for nothing more to eat or drink, but they wistfully eyed the good things as the others disposed of them. The salt made them fearfully dry, and each would have given a good round sum for a glass of pure, cold water.

“Wonder if we can all get into that boat,” said Jack, after the feast had come to an end. “A row on the lake and back to the Hall would just suit me.”

“It will give us a little practice for those races,” put in Pepper. “I reckon we can manage it.”

“Are you going to steal our boat?” demanded Baxter.

“It is not your boat – it belongs to the academy,” retorted Jack. “We have as much right to it as you have.”

“Yes, but we had it first.”

“You won’t need any boat just yet,” said Stuffer. “You’re to stay here, you know.”

“No! No! don’t leave us here,” cried Paxton. “Let us go and – er – I, for one, will call the whole matter off.”

“Will you really!” said Pepper. “Awfully kind, I’m sure.”

“If you don’t let us go I’ll tell on you,” said Mumps. “The captain won’t stand for anything like this.”

“What have you got to say, Baxter?” demanded Jack.

“You had better let us go,” grumbled the bully. He did not fancy spending a night in the dark woods.

“If we let you go, will you keep your mouth shut?”

“I haven’t said that I would.”

“All right, we’ll leave you tied up.”

“No! No!” came from Mumps, pleadingly. “Please don’t do it! Dan, tell them that you won’t say anything.”

“They won’t dare to leave us,” said the bully.

“Won’t we?” said Jack. “Wait and see. Come on, fellows, put the baskets in the boat and come on board.”

“They are going to leave us,” groaned Mumps, as the baskets were stowed away and several entered the craft. “We’ll have to stay here all night, and I know it is going to rain! And there may be bears around! Peleg Snuggers told me about a bear he saw once, on the road to Malville.”

“Oh, don’t be a calf, Mumps,” interrupted the bully. “They’ll all laugh at you.”

“I don’t care, I don’t want to stay, so there!” whimpered the sneak. “Tell them you won’t say anything.”

“Well, good-bye!” shouted Jack, turning toward the rowboat.

He walked several steps, but then Baxter hailed him.

“Stop!” cried the bully. “Let us go. For Mumps’ sake I won’t say anything.”

“Very well. Remember, Baxter, that’s a bargain. Are you agreed, Paxton?”

“Yes.”

“And you, Mumps?”

“I shan’t say a word – I promise, Ruddy.”

Without another word Jack released the three prisoners. Then he ran for the rowboat, leaped in and shoved off, and soon the craft was on its way out into the lake.

CHAPTER VII

HOW THE BOAT RACES WERE WON

“Do you think they’ll keep silent?” asked Stuffer, after the rowboat was some distance from the shore.

“That’s a problem,” answered Jack. “Maybe they will – for their own benefit.”

“If they talk about it, the laugh will be on them,” came from Andy.

“That was a fine dive of yours, Andy,” came from Pepper. “You took them by surprise.”

“We would have been in a mess if they had gotten away with the baskets and our clothes,” said Stuffer.

“Sure, an do yez think they’d stale our duds?” questioned Hogan.

“They’d take everything – if they got the chance,” answered Jack. “It was lucky for us that Mumps fell and gave the alarm.”

“What a calf he is!”

“Sneaks are generally of that sort,” said Andy. “How I’d hate to have the reputation he is gaining.”

They looked back and saw Baxter, Paxton, and Mumps standing on the shore. The bully shook his fist at them.

“He feels real friendly,” said Andy. “I think he’d like to embrace us all.”

Soon the rowboat passed out of sight of that portion of the shore. Then the craft was turned up the lake, and those who were to go into the boat races during the following week took turns at the oars.

“Pepper pulls a fine stroke,” said Stuffer. “He ought to win something.”

“I believe Jackson and Perry will win the main races,” said another cadet. “They are bang-up oarsmen. They live on the Ohio River and have had lots of practice.”

“Well, I am going to do my best,” answered Pepper.

“And so am I,” added Jack.

The sun was just going down when the boys returned to Putnam Hall, tired out but thoroughly happy. They cleaned out the boat and put it away, and then went to their dormitories to wash up for parade.

“Hullo, look here!” cried Jack, as he got out his uniform. “Somebody has been putting on my rank of office.” And this was true, and the uniforms of the other elected officers had been treated likewise. When the young officers went below each received a shining sword, with a scabbard and belt to match.

“We’ll have to have our pictures taken,” said Henry Lee, with pride, and later on, this was done, and each officer sent one or more of the photographs home, much to the parents’ delight.

It must be confessed that Jack felt quite proud when he stepped out in front of the battalion, sword in hand, and in his newly decorated uniform. He saw his friends in the ranks and also saw his enemies. Baxter looked as dark as a thundercloud, but did not dare to express his feelings.

“That was very well accomplished, Major Ruddy,” said Captain Putnam after the drill was at an end. “I trust you keep the battalion up to such a standard for the balance of the term.”

“I shall do my best, sir,” answered the youthful major.

“Ruddy seems to take hold with vigor,” was George Strong’s comment. “I like to see a boy do that.”

“His father was once in the army, and he has military blood in his veins,” answered the master of the Hall.

The boat races which have been mentioned were to come off on the following Wednesday afternoon, starting at two o’clock. There were to be four races, three among the students of Putnam

Hall and the fourth race with the students of Pornell Academy, situated a few miles from Putnam Hall. Pornell Academy was an old institution of learning presided over by a Dr. Pornell, who did not much fancy the coming of Captain Putnam to that neighborhood.

“I hope we wax those Pornell fellows good,” said Pepper. “They are a proud lot, and they think we are nothing but the dust of the earth.”

“The races between ourselves will show what we can do,” answered Singleton.

“Are you going to row, Stuffer?”

“To be sure I am.”

“Well, I hope you win something.”

The day was a cool, bracing one, an ideal day for boat racing, and immediately after the midday meal the oarsmen turned out in force and the lake front was alive with craft of various sorts. The races had been talked of for two weeks and several sloops and a steam launch came up from Cedarville bringing parties to view the contests. Some boats also came from across the lake, and flags flapped gayly in the moderate breeze.

The first race was a four-oared affair between the smaller boys, and much to the surprise of everybody it was won by Mumps and a lad named Cathby.

“Hullo, I didn’t know Mumps could row so well,” cried Pepper.

“He comes from a town on the Hudson River, and was brought up around boats,” answered a cadet standing near. “His folks own several sailboats, so I’ve been told.”

“Well, he deserves credit for winning, even if he is a sneak,” declared Jack.

The next race was an eight-oared affair, between crews made of Stuffer, Hogan, Blackmore, and a number of others already mentioned in these pages. This was lost by the crew led by Stuffer.

“Stuffer had been eating too much,” said Pepper. And the always-hungry lad afterwards admitted that this was true.

The third race was a four-oared affair between Jack, Pepper, Andy, and Joe Nelson on one side, and Paxton and several chums on the other. Baxter had been expected to row in this, but fell out at the last moment, stating he was not well. Privately, he was afraid of losing, for he knew Jack and his friends were good oarsmen.

The race was for a mile, and at the discharge of a pistol both crews started in fine shape.

“Go it, Paxton!” was the cry. “You can win if you try!”

“Pull, Pepper, pull!”

“Make every stroke tell, Jack!”

On and on swept the two boats, and for the first half of the course kept side by side.

“It’s going to be a tie race!”

“Pull, Paxton! Pull, Leeds!”

“See, Paxton’s boat is going ahead!”

It was true – slowly but surely the craft went forward, until it was a full length in advance. Jack, Pepper, and the others were doing their best but the other boat continued to keep in the lead.

“I see a rope trailing behind!” cried Pepper suddenly.

“There it goes,” added Andy. “It was caught on the bottom.”

“All together, and give her tar!” shouted Jack, shutting his teeth hard. “Pull, boys, pull!” And they did pull as never before.

But quarter of a mile of the race remained, and now Jack’s boat was crawling up to the rival craft.

“See, Paxton’s boat is but half a length ahead!”

“They are tie again!”

“Pull, everybody, and may the best crew win!” came from a gentleman in one of the sailboats.

“Oh, pa, I hope that last boat wins,” cried a girl in the sailing craft, a fine small yacht.

“So do I, Laura,” came from a second girl.

“Why, Flossie?” questioned her father, with a smile.

“Oh, I don’t know. They look nicer than the boys in the first boat.”

“Really? You have sharp eyes, I must say.” And then Mr. Ford, for such was the gentleman’s name, turned to the race once more.

Jack, Pepper, Andy, and Joe Nelson were working like steam engines, and the same may be said of their opponents. On and on swept the two rowboats toward the finish line. There was a wild yelling along the lake front and from the various boats gathered around.

“Come, we must win!” shouted Joe Nelson, and seemed to suddenly wake up. Jack and the others also renewed their exertions, and now their spurt carried them a foot in the lead.

“Here they come!”

“Jack Ruddy’s boat is ahead!”

“Paxton is crawling up again!”

It was true, the rivals were also spurting, and for a moment the two craft were side by side once more. But Paxton’s crew could not keep up the terrific pace, and suddenly they fell back, and Jack and his friends shot over the line winners by a full length.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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