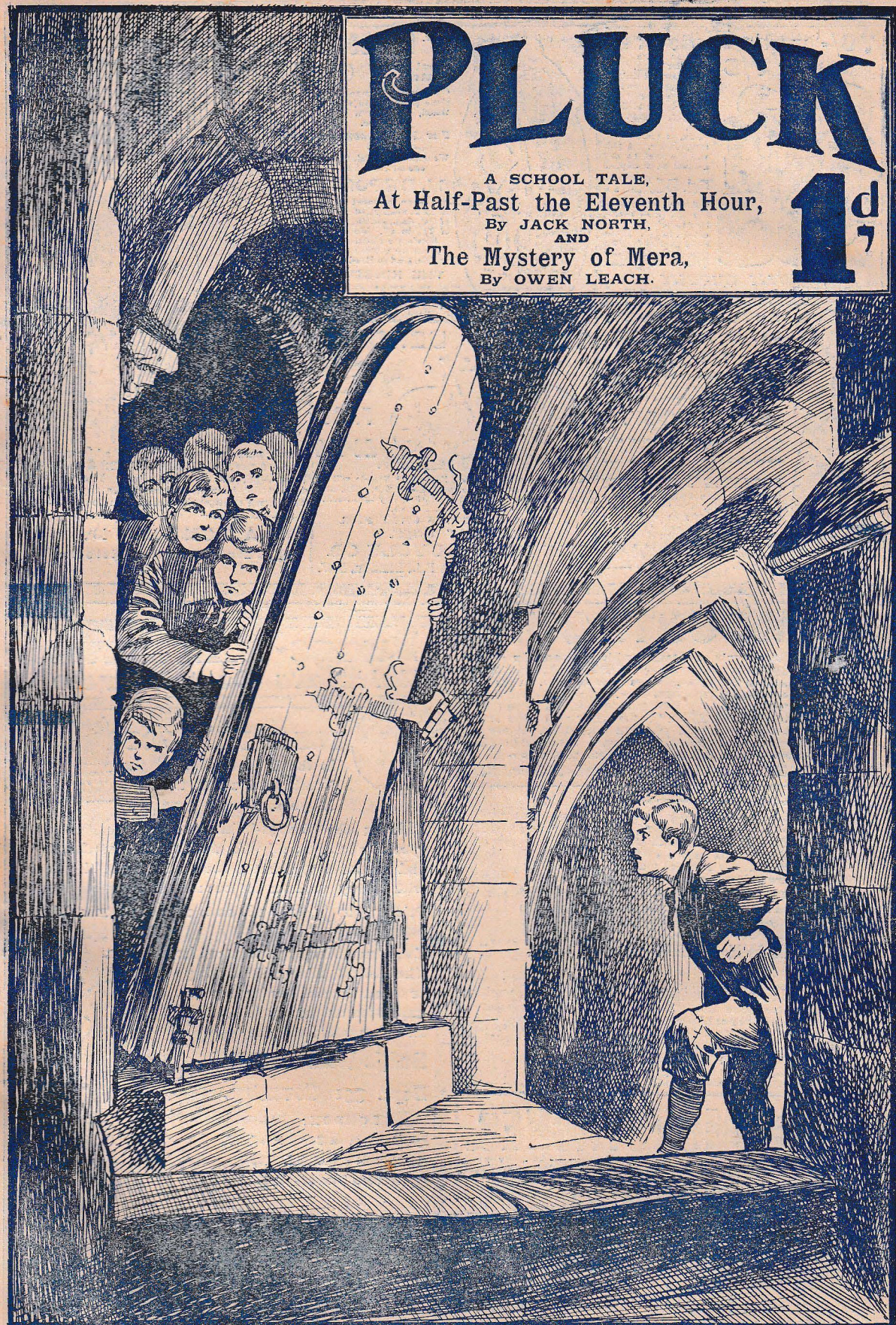


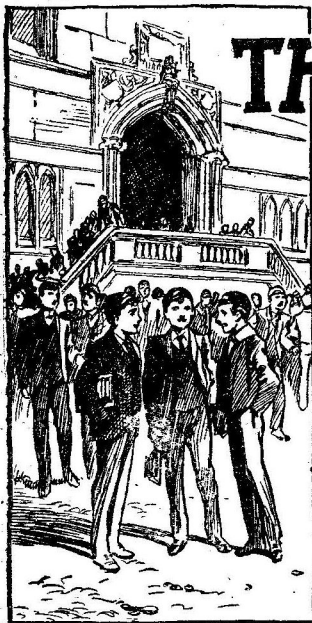
PLUCK

A SCHOOL TALE,
At Half-Past the Eleventh Hour,
By JACK NORTH,
AND
The Mystery of Mera,
By OWEN LEACH.

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"DON'T WAIT! IT'S DEFF IF YER DO—CERTAIN DEFF!" CRIED TOMMY. (See page 16.)
NO. 134. VOL. 6. NEW SERIES.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory. Pat is thrown into a cupboard by some juniors, and falls asleep. On waking up he hears voices—the voices of Eldred Lacy and his brother, Rupert Lacy, the squire of Lynwood: "You must ruin and disgrace Arthur Talbot, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But ruined and disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity, I shall no longer fear him!"

Pat becomes great chums with Blagden and Greene, and remembering what he had heard when locked in the cupboard, Pat decides to shadow Lacy, and overhears the bully and Black, a tramp, hatching a terrible plot against Arthur Talbot. The next day Black comes to the school while a cricket match is on, and claims Talbot as his son before them all. However, Black is warned off the place by one of the masters, and Talbot goes to his study. Later in the day Arthur pins up a notice on the notice-board saying that he has resigned the captaincy of the school.

Lacy at once puts his name up as candidate, and Brooke, Arthur's chum, opposes him. Talbot and Lacy quarrel, and Arthur challenges Lacy to fight. Haywood seconds Lacy, and is told by the latter to make arrangements so as the two can fight it out absolutely by themselves. (Now go on with the story.)

A Mean Plot.

"What's the matter with Haywood, Lacy?" asked Dunn.

"Where are you sending him?"

"He's gone to fix things with Talbot. He doesn't like the idea of the fight coming off in strict private, without any spectators or seconds."

Dunn looked at him in astonishment.

"You're not thinking of that, are you, Lacy?"

"Yes, I am."

"It will be a disappointment for the whole Sixth. Why, a fight like this doesn't come off once in a dog's age!" exclaimed Dunn. "We are all looking forward to seeing Talbot—I mean—that is—" He paused in confusion.

Lacy smiled grimly.

"To seeing Talbot lick me?" he asked. "You may as well say it out."

"Oh, no," said Dunn. "Certainly not. I didn't mean that. It will be a jolly good fight, that is what I meant, although, as a matter of fact—"

"As a matter of fact, I tackled Talbot once before, and found that I had bitten off more than I could chew," said the prefect. "I am perfectly aware of the fact that I am no match for him in a fair fight, and, you see, I make no bones about admitting it."

"Yet you are going to meet him," said Dunn wonderingly.

"I am going to meet him because I cannot get out of it without confessing that I funk it to all St. Kit's."

Dunn grinned.

"Well, this is being candid with a vengeance!" he exclaimed.

"I am not being so candid without an object," the prefect replied grimly. "I am compelled to meet Talbot, and I do not intend to get licked if I can help it. If I could lick him, the eclat of victory would very likely carry the day for me when the new election comes off. I am going to lick him if I can."

"You said just now you were no match for him."

"I said I was no match for him in a fair fight."

Dunn stared at him and shifted uneasily.

"I don't understand you, Lacy. What are you driving at? What did you want to see me about?"

"Several matters, this among the rest. We have been pretty good friends, Dunn."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Dunn, looking as if the reflection was not particularly gratifying to him at that moment.

"I've lent you money from time to time, and never worried you to return it."

"I know you are always a generous fellow."

"Do you know what the exact sum amounts to just now, Dunn?"

"A good many pounds, I dare say."

"Fifteen pounds and some odd shillings," said Lacy calmly.

"What a memory you've got!" said Dunn, forcing a laugh.

"Oh, not at all! I have all your I O U's here, and I have just totted them up."

"If that means that you want me to settle, Lacy, I'm afraid it can't be done just now. I haven't a feather to fly with at the present moment."

"That's your usual state, old fellow. Some ill-natured chaps have spoken of you as a sponge, but I have always thought that if you couldn't pay a debt one way, you would another."

Dunn turned very red.

"Now, I want you to do me a favour," said Lacy. "I've done you a good many, and I think I have a right to ask for one at your hands, Dunn."

"Oh, of course! Anything I can do I shall be most happy to do," said Dunn, looking anything but happy, however.

"Then you will help me in this affair?"

"What affair?"

"This quarrel with Talbot."

"I don't understand you, Eldred. What can I possibly do? You don't want me to take the quarrel off your hands, do you, and fight the fellow myself?"

"No; that would be impossible. I want you to help me."

"It seems to me that that's impossible, too. You're talking in riddles."

"I'll try to make my meaning plain. I'm arranging to meet Talbot quietly, without seconds or spectators or any fuss at all." Lacy lowered his voice instinctively. "I shall meet him in the wood, some distance from the school, and we shall fight under the trees. There will be plenty of cover close at hand for a third party."

"Yes, no doubt; but what good can a third party do you? I don't mind being there, if that's all," said Dunn, growing visibly more uneasy.

"That is not all. I shall stand up to Talbot and do my best. As soon as I show signs of getting the worst of it—or, rather, as soon as I make a certain signal—you will rush out, and—"

"Hang it all, Lacy, I—"

"Let me finish," said the prefect, with a scowl. "You will rush out at my signal, as I said, and take Talbot from behind. If you are quick enough about it, he will never know what hit him. He will not see you."

Dunn had turned quite pale.

"I—I can't do it. It's too rotten—too awfully beastly for anything. I can't."

"I thought you said you were my friend, Dunn."

"Yes; but this isn't a thing you've a right to ask of a friend, you know that."

"I know that you owe me fifteen pounds odd," said Lacy unpleasantly. "Are you prepared to take up your I O U's?"

"You know that I am not."

"When this affair is over satisfactorily, I will make you a present of them, and you can burn them if you like."

Dunn brightened up somewhat. "That's generous of you, Eldred, I admit." Then his face became gloomy again. "But—but can't you ask anything else? I—I—"

"I don't want anything else," said the prefect coldly. "I want this, and I want nothing else. I know you'll do it, Dunn. After all, you don't like Talbot any more than I do. He has shoved you out of the first eleven."

Dunn's eyes snapped. "Yes, I know he has, the cad! But—but I say, Lacy, if you get in as captain, now that Talbot has resigned, you'll have the ordering of that. You'll be able to put me in if you like, old fellow."

"And I will do it, like a shot," replied the prefect, "if we are still friends."

"If we're still—you mean if I do this for you?"

"Exactly."

The prefect waited, his eyes fixed upon Dunn's face. He knew that the Sixth-Former would give in, and it was only a question of time before he'd do so.

"The I O U's burnt, and a place in the cricket eleven," said Dunn, in a low voice.

"Yes, honour bright."

"I'll do it," said the other suddenly, as if with a wrench. "I've no cause to love Talbot. He's never done anything for me. I'll do it."

"That's right. I rely upon you, then. All you've got to do is to be on the ground first, and chip in when I give the sign—when I say 'Oh!' three times quickly. It's agreed?"

"Yes, it's agreed," said Dunn. "Hallo, here's Haywood."

Haywood came into the study.

"Well, what does Talbot say?" asked Lacy.

"He's agreeable to all that you suggest," replied Haywood discontentedly. "He'll wait for your note appointing time and place of meeting, and will come without a second, and without telling anybody about it. He had arranged to have Brooke for his second, but he's going to explain to him."

"Good enough."

And Lacy exchanged a glance of satisfaction with Dunn.

"Bad enough, I think," said Haywood. "It's a rotten business, and I don't like it. Fellows will say that you don't want anybody to see you licked."

"Fellows can say what they like," replied Lacy, with a shrug of the shoulders. "They can go and eat coke. It's settled now."

The Fight in the Wood—Black Treachery—The Chums to the Rescue.

Eldred Lacy had planned cunningly, but he had reckoned without the end study. He had for the time forgotten the very existence of Pat Nugent, Blagden, and Greene; and if he had remembered, he would not have taken the heroes of the Lower Fourth into consideration.

But the three juniors had not the slightest intention of being left out of the matter. The end study, as we know, had taken Arthur Talbot under its wing, and at such an important conjuncture as the present, the trio were not likely to be found napping.

The talk of the row between Talbot and Lacy, and the planned meeting ran like wildfire through St. Kit's, and the chums of the end study were speedily on the track.

"We've got to see this," Pat announced. "We've got to see this thing through, chaps. It will be a treat to see Eldred Lacy thoroughly licked. He's been asking for it for such a long time."

"Rather!" said Blagden. "Only I'm pretty certain that when the fight comes off, juniors will be barred. The Sixth are sheer hogs; they'll want to keep a thing like that all to themselves."

"They may want to," grinned Pat; "but if they succeed in doing it, I shall be greatly surprised. We are on the scene in this act. If they try to keep the place of meeting secret, as I suppose they will, then we start in the Sherlock Holmes-Stanley Dare business again, and find out all about it for ourselves."

"Good!"

"You see, Lacy is such a rank rotter, that he may be up to some tricks," said Pat sagely, little thinking as he spoke, how near to the truth he was. "We've got to be there to see fair play."

"I don't see what tricks he could play with the whole Sixth looking on," remarked Greene.

"Who knows? Anyway, we've got to be there. Why, I wouldn't miss this fight for a ton of toffee," said Pat.

"Mind, keep your peepers open, that's the word."

And the chums agreed to keep their peepers open.

But the Sixth certainly seemed to be very close about the

matter. Even Pat, with all his conspicuous abilities could learn nothing from them.

During the next day he was keenly on the alert; but he learned nothing from any member of the Sixth. But he made a discovery, which was that the Sixth themselves knew nothing about the matter.

That the fight would come off that day was pretty certain, for such an affair was not likely to be long postponed. But when and where was a mystery to the Sixth as much as to the end study.

The chums could have no doubt upon this point, for there was a great deal of indignation in the top Form about it, and the comments of the seniors were free and forcible.

After school, Pat made his duties as a fag an excuse for installing himself in Talbot's study. He prepared the late captain's tea with extraordinary care, and toasted muffins and cheese in a way that would have done credit to a chef. Then, when all was ready, he did not go, but found some silver to polish, and remained in the study doing it.

Talbot came in to tea with Brooke, and he seemed very preoccupied. Pat made himself as small as possible, and went on industriously with his polishing, with his back to the seniors, hoping against hope to escape being kicked out.

Talbot glanced at him carelessly, and perhaps thought that such unwonted industry ought to be encouraged. At all events, he said nothing, but sat down to tea.

The two seniors discussed tea while Pat, with a beating heart, continued his self-imposed task, till the silver shone again.

"I say, these are ripping muffins," said Brooke. "I'd give you fourpence-halfpenny for your fag, Talbot, I would really. And the tea! Good!"

The late captain of St. Kit's smiled.

"Yes, Nugent is a gem!" he said. "He has excelled himself this time, too! You needn't stay any longer, Nugent, unless you like."

"I'd like to get this finished," said Pat.

"Just as you like."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Brooke. "You've got visitors coming, I see!"

"Not that I knew of," said Talbot.

The door had opened, and five or six of the Sixth had come in a crowd. Rake and Flinn were at their head.

"We haven't come to say," said Flinn, who hailed from the sister isle. "Sure, you needn't look alarmed, Brooke."

"I wasn't looking alarmed," said Brooke, laughing.

"We only want to spake to Talbot here."

"Speak away," said Talbot.

"What do you mean by it?" demanded Flinn.

"Eh?" said Talbot, looking astonished. "I don't quite catch on."

"What do you mean by it? The best foight going for a long time, and you want to kape us off the grass, ye omadhaun."

"Oh, I see! I hope you fellows don't mind!"

"But we do mind!" howled Flinn. "We're not going to be done loike this, so I tell ye. When is the foight to come off?"

"You see—"

"That's what I mane to do. And when?"

"You see, it's going to be quite private, not even seconds present," explained Talbot. "It was Lacy's idea, but it suits me down to the ground. It's an affair neither of us feels very proud of, as a matter of fact, and we want to keep it dark. It's an unfortunate fact that all St. Kit's knows it's coming off—"

"Very unfortunate, if we're not to be allowed to see it."

"But the fight itself will be quite private. It's the best thing that can be done; and, anyway, I've promised Lacy now."

"Lacy's a baste, and you're another!"

"We won't put up with it!" said Rake.

"It's too rotten!"

"We've been looking forward to it!"

"Oh, I say, do be good fellows, and let us have it out in peace," urged Talbot. "Brooke here was to have been my second, but he's let it pass like an angel."

"Brooke can go and eat his hat! I want to see the foight!"

"I'm sorry that it can't be done; but there you are."

"Sure, and it's an obstinate baste ye are."

"He says it was Lacy's idea," said Rake. "Let's go and interview Lacy. If Lacy changes his mind, Talbot, I suppose you have no objection?"

"Not at all," said Talbot, with a smile. "But he won't. He feels just the same about it as I do, I assure you."

"Well, we'll try, at all events."

And the Sixth-Formers left the study, and went off to Eldred Lacy's quarters on the forlorn hope.

Brooke laughed as he put down his teacup.

"It's a disappointment to the Sixth, Talbot. I'm sorry,

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE LINCROFT CUP."

A School Tale of Specs & G's.

By H. Clarke Hook

AND

"THE CLUE OF THE SCARLET ORCHID."

A Story of Captain Frank Perrett,

Detective.

IN "PLUCK," ID.

too! It would be worth seeing, though I fancy Lacy won't put up much of a fight."

"Oh, I don't know; he seems very resolute just at present!"

"I can't quite understand his not trying to squirm out of it, Talbot. And this delicacy about the matter isn't exactly what one would expect of a chap of his cut, either. Perhaps he doesn't want the Form to see him licked, though."

"Perhaps he won't be licked. I may come back in that enviable state."

"Oh, rot! I haven't the slightest fear of that."

Talbot looked at his watch.

"You had better run off now, Nugent," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Pat cheerfully, doing his best to hide his excitement. He knew what that meant—that Talbot was about to get ready to leave St. Kit's to meet Eldred Lacy at the appointed spot, wherever that was.

The late captain of the school had received Lacy's note making the appointment, and it only remained for him to keep it.

Pat went out of the study, and hurried down the passage. He passed Lacy's study, of which the door was wide open. The Sixth-Formers who had interviewed Talbot were in the doorway, and Pat stopped with an amused smile to look on. Flinn was talking, with the beautiful accent which reminded Pat of his native heath.

"Sure, and ye're as obstinate a baste as Talbot himself, Lacy."

"Can't help that, old fellow."

"We've all been looking forward to the fight."

"Nice of you, I must say. You can go on looking."

"We want to see it."

"Then you can go on wanting."

"It's a rotten spalpeen ye are!"

"And it's a beautiful accent ye've got," replied Lacy.

"Look here, you let my accent alone!" said Flinn wrathfully.

"Certainly. I don't want it. I get too much of it as it is."

"Have ye made up your mind not to let us see the fight?"

"Yes; I've told you that already," said Lacy, yawning.

"Then it's a baste ye are, and I tell ye so plainly."

"Go and tell Talbot the same."

"I've told him already. Is it ye or the other party who is afraid of letting us see him get licked?" demanded Flinn.

"Go and ask Talbot."

"Oh, I've no patience with ye in-firely. Come along, chaps; let's get out to the cricket practice, and leave the bastes!"

(To be continued in next Saturday's issue of PLUCK.)

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"THE LYNCROFT CUP."

Teddy Wickfield, better known as Specs, will appear in our next issue, together with his chums, Tim and Dick Ross, the twins, and the "Co."

This latest from the pen of H. Clarke Hook is a highly interesting school story, and I am sure you will follow every line of it with pleasure.

"THE CLUE OF THE SCARLET ORCHID."

the second long, complete tale will deal with the adventures of Captain Frank Ferrett, detective and mystery investigator.

Now, let me remind you of the school tales appearing in

"The Gem" Library, and when you have finished your PLUCK, I should certainly recommend you to get the issue of "The Gem" now on sale, and read the long, complete story dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry. Merry is by name and Merry by nature, and as "The Gem's" a gem, it's well worth that

ODD HALPENNY.

In fact, I cannot help saying that "The Gem" Library is absolutely the best value in complete halfpenny story-books now on the market.

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"The Gem" is interesting, neat in appearance, contains sixteen pages crammed with good, healthy stories, has a blue cover, is liked by all who read it, and "The Gem" will please you.

My friends will be pleased to hear that "THREE BRITISH BOYS."

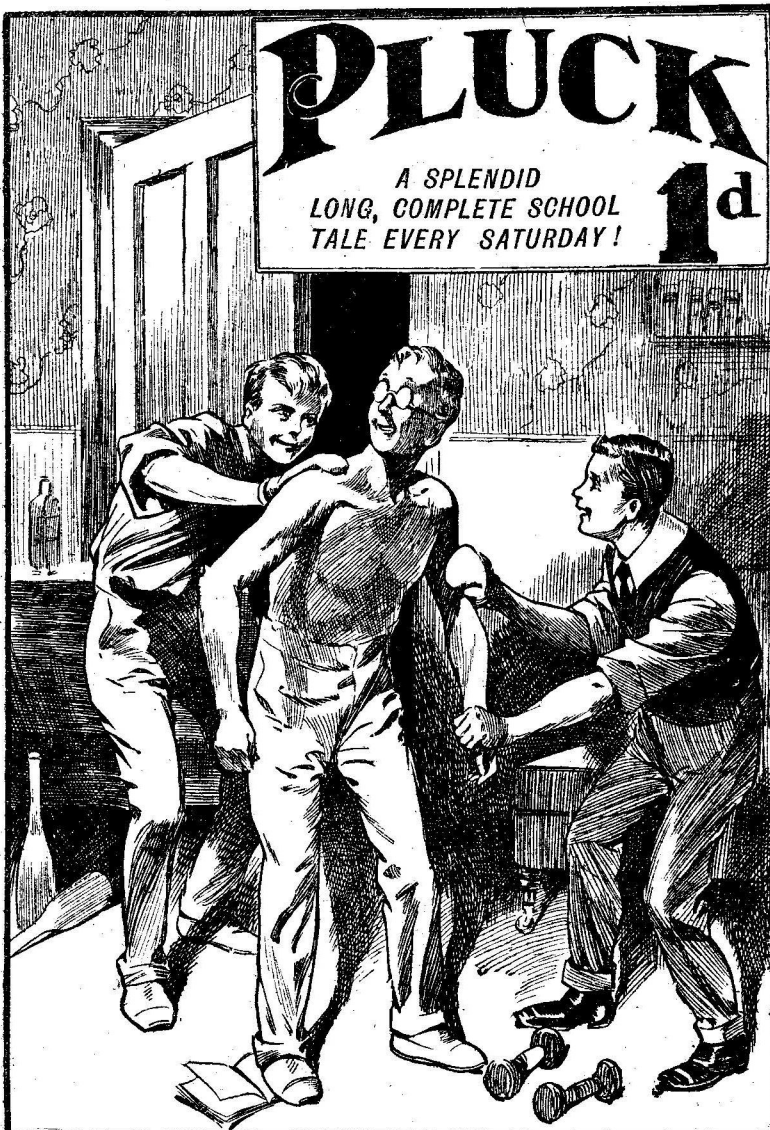
a splendid school tale by Maurice Merriman, is to be published in "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library on Friday, June the 7th.

At the same time will also appear another volume, entitled

"NELSON LEE'S PUPIL."

a thrilling tale of the adventures of this famous detective.

YOUR EDITOR.



This picture depicts an incident from next Saturday's Splendid Long, Complete School Tale. Order your PLUCK in advance. 32 pages. Price 1d.