

School & Detective Stories in this Issue.

PLUCK

FOR THE OLD SCHOOL.

A Tale of Specs, the Twins & Co. By H. Clarke Hook.

DETECTIVE M'KEE.

A Grand Complete Detective Story.

1^d



"AHEM!" COUGHED DICK LOUDLY. "AHEM, AHEM!" THE DISGUISED SPECS WENT ON PAINTING, AND THE THREE OPENED THEIR MOUTHS A LITTLE MORE.
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descriptions. They talked. At this point my friend Cochefort, of the Secret Police of France, laid hands upon the missing waiter No. 71. He was having a gay old time in Paris. Cochefort interviewed him, and soon elicited the fact that he had been paid to feign illness, send a substitute to the Hotel Richo, and then disappear. He himself is an undersized creature, but the man who had paid him to let him send someone else in his place was an old white-bearded man."

"Holy smoke! The fellow that met me in the park?" cried Flax.

"Exactly; and wasn't Clew on hand to see you right?"

"He was, sir."

"Good! I don't like my arrangements to fail. But that old man puzzled me; and the incident of the poisoned sweets, coming that day, made things look very much against Petroceni, especially as he saw you leave the house, cigar in mouth, as if you were giving in to the threat sent you by the Black Hand the day before. It is to be presumed another man with a cigar would not stop and ask you for a light unless he saw you were smoking as well. When all your servants departed that night, Elise went too. She must have felt mighty confident that she was not watched, else she would never have permitted Ferneco to have visited her at Italy Street. However, she did; and Clew set eyes on him, took him for Prince Petroceni at first, and then found he had made a mistake, and that he was the prince's Neapolitan valet, a young man with a criminal history of the worst kind."

"No doubt he told you that when the precious pair were out at a night club in the early hours of this morning he gained entrance to Elise's room, and discovered from her papers that she was no other than the notorious Mina Zamberti, of the American branch of the Black Hand Society. If her papers shed a light upon the subject, the various disguises he unearthed in her room explained everything. The messenger-boy's uniform, the nurse's costume, proved that she had indeed played those parts. A long white beard, a shawl similar to the one the flower-girl had worn, and a livery similar to those of the Hotel Richo, but with one gilt button missing, were sufficient proof against Ferneco."

"But they must have had other accomplices," pursued Flax.

"Of course, in slight degree; but none it is worth while to follow up unless they make themselves objectionable, Mr. Flax."

"Well, it's something to be devoutly thankful for that those two can do no harm to anyone," said Flax. "And you've done finely, McKee; do yourself justice when you send me my account, now. Then there's Walker; let's have him up. He saved your life, Daretta, and we mustn't forget it."

"Oh, Walker!" McKee laughed. "Is this like him?"—pulling a chef's cap from his pocket and putting it on.

"By gosh!"

"Oh my—oh my!" laughed Daretta.

"Jove!"

"But if you're Walker," said Sir Derry presently—"and you are—what gets me is how you kept in touch with your agent outside the house."

"I telephoned him," replied McKee, with a twinkle in his eye.

"From where?"

"From this room."

"But I am working here every day," put in Flax.

"But not every night. While you people slept, Clew and I exchanged messages. No one ever caught me; you all slept soundly."

"If this doesn't lick creation!" exclaimed Flax.

At this moment Francis ushered in Patrick, who, hat in hand, carried an important-looking letter up to Sir Derry.

"What can this be?" cried the young man. "Pray excuse me, Miss Flax!" And he tore it open.

"Great heavens!" He read it and handed it to Mr. Flax.

The millionaire glanced over it with keen grey eyes. Then: "Congratulations, Sir Derry!" he said, and shook the other's hand warmly.

"Oh, do tell!" cried Daretta.

"Why, phwat has happened, sorr?" seconded Patrick.

"Miss Flax"—the baronet turned to her—"my luck has turned. I sha'n't be poor much longer; I may not have to go to Nigeria. Here's the Hibernian Transport Company asking to be allowed to rent or buy some stony acres of mine on the West Coast of Ireland for a big shipbuilding yard. It will make my fortune, Miss Flax, that barren stretch of land, and so—"

How bright her eyes, how sweet her smile.

"The saints be praised!" said Patrick solemnly.

"Say, this is a happy ending to the chapter, Mr. Flax," remarked Winton McKee; and Flax, looking at the radiant couple, nodded.

THE END.

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CONTAINING A GRAND COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE. PRICE ONE HALFPENNY

A GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

THE RIVALS OF ST. KIT'S.

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 chum Brooke, who opposes Lacy, gains the majority of votes, and so is elected captain of St. Kit's. One morning the Head discovers he has been robbed of £80. He calls a meeting in the Hall and Lacy, Arthur's enemy—speaks out. "Many of us," he says, "think the thief is here amongst us. The person I mean is Arthur Talbot, sir." "Very well," returned the Head sharply. "You have once before spoken against Talbot. If you cannot substantiate this fresh charge, you stand exposed to the whole school as a slanderer."

(Now go on with the story.)

Lacy's Accusation.

"Good old doc!" murmured Pat Nugent. "Sure, and he hits straight from the shoulder every time, more power to his elbow!"

"That is a very hard word, sir," said Lacy meekly. "I am only trying to get at the truth, and save St. Kit's from disgrace."

"We will take your motives for granted, Lacy."

"I think also that it is only fair to Talbot to have the matter threshed out."

"You may speak plainly. I am sure Talbot has no objection."

Talbot's eyes gleamed with scorn as he looked at the prefect.

"None!" he exclaimed, in his clear voice. "Lacy is at liberty to say what he chooses. I think my character is pretty well known at St. Kit's, and that most of the fellows know I am not a thief!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the irrepressible Pat.

"You juniors must be silent," said the doctor. "Go on, Lacy!"

"Very well, sir. Then I will say right out that Talbot has already been the cause of disgrace being brought on St. Kit's through his father!"

"You refer to the statement made by a ruffian called Seth Black that he was the father of Arthur Talbot?"

"Yes, sir."

"The claim was so evidently false that I am astonished that any boy at St. Kit's could be so simple as to place any faith in it."

"But—"

"The man has made no attempt to prove it. The claim was wholly false and wicked. But even had it been true, Lacy, are you one to visit the sins of the parents on the children? Would you dare to say that Talbot deserved anything but sympathy and kind compassion for such a misfortune?"

The prefect turned red.

"It isn't that, sir. Like father, like son. That's an old saying."

"And a foolish one."

"Seth Black is an awful scoundrel, sir. If Talbot is his son, he may be the same. But it isn't only that. He gave the man money."

"How can you know?"

"Some of the fellows saw him."

"They had better come forward and say so—"

"It isn't necessary, sir," said Talbot, who was very pale and quiet. "I admit having given money to the man who claimed to be my father. Lacy can make what use of that he can."

"Well, sir," said Lacy, "it's a pretty general idea that Seth Black was blackmailing Talbot, under the threat of coming to the school again and giving him another show-up."

and, of course, we don't know how much money he may have demanded. Where did Talbot get it all from?"

A grim silence followed the prefect's words. Most of the boys thought that he was rather hitting below the belt to drag this matter up, but there was no doubt that he had scored a strong point.

Even the doctor was silent and troubled. Did it flash across his mind, then, that it was possible that there was something in the accusation made by Lacy; that it was possible that Talbot, driven to desperation by the menaces of Seth Black, had indeed obtained money to satisfy the blackmailer by taking it from the Head's desk? The thought may have come into the doctor's mind.

But, if so, he dismissed it. His faith in the honour of Arthur Talbot was like a rock. "Is that all you have to say, Lacy?" "That is all, sir."

"You are aware, I suppose, that it all amounts merely to bare suspicion?" "A pretty strong suspicion, I think, sir."

"Talbot, I need not ask you if there is anything in this." Talbot stood out in the full sight of the school. Every eye was bent upon the brave lad who had been captain of St. Kit's, and who was the finest cricketer in the college, and the finest fellow, too.

Certainly a fellow more unlike a thief it would have been hard to imagine.

His face was very pale. But that was natural enough. His eyes were steady and clear and scornful, and he stood very erect.

"There is nothing in it, sir. I went to your study, and left again as you were not there. It is true that I have paid all my pocket-money to the man who calls himself my father. I do not believe he is my father, but I have paid him what he has demanded. It has never crossed my mind to give him money that was not my own. I should certainly never have done so under any circumstances. I am innocent. I can say no more."

"That's quite enough!" shouted Brooke. "We all know you're innocent, old fellow."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Talbot's friends in the Sixth, and the shout was taken up through the hall.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Pat. "We all know you're innocent, and Lacy is a dirty spalpeen, and I'm ready to fight anybody who says he isn't!"

"Bravo, Talbot!" "Thief!"

The "bravos" predominated, but the terrible word which was hissed out by someone was quite audible, and Talbot shuddered as he heard it.

Trimble took it upon himself to echo the word, and Pat turned towards the lanky captain of the Upper Fourth with blazing eyes.

"Was that you, Trimble?"

"Was what me?" sneered Trimble. "Mind your own business!"

"Did you call Talbot a thief?"

"Yes, I did."

"You hound! Take that!"

Pat's fist came straight from the shoulder.

Trimble took it—with his nose!

He went down with a yell, and Pat sat on his chest, and commenced to knock his head against the floor, in his frantic excitement scarcely conscious of what he was doing.

Trimble roared and wriggled.

The whole hall was in an uproar with shouting and stamping, and the masters tried in vain to restore silence.

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Order!"

Their cries were lost in the din.

Mr. Slaney seized Pat by the back of his collar and jerked him off Trimble. It was about time, for Trimble was getting decidedly hurt.

"Order! Order!"

Pat gasped.

"Let me give him one more, sir."

"Behave yourself, Nugent," said the Form-master, trying not to smile. "I can understand your indignation, but you know you must not fight here."

"Order! Order!"

Something like order was restored.

The doctor was trying to make his voice heard, and at last he succeeded.

"Boys! Silence! This uproar will not improve matters. I firmly believe every word that Talbot says. He is certainly not guilty. I hope that the thief will be discovered, but in any case no just suspicion attaches to Arthur Talbot."

There were cheers and hisses after the doctor's declaration.

"I am innocent," said Arthur again. "That is all I can say."

"Then let it be put to the proof," cried Eldred Lacy. "We know that no one has left the school, sir, since the theft. The stolen money must be still in St. Kit's. A search would be bound to find it."

The doctor was silent.

"I know it's not a nice idea, sir," said Lacy, "but anything's better than having a thief in the school. We are all willing."

"If it is the wish of the school," said the doctor, "I will not oppose it. Boys, are you willing for a general search to be made of your persons and belongings by the porter under my supervision, or shall I call in a detective? I leave it to you. The matter must be settled now, after what Lacy has said."

"Does Talbot object?" asked Lacy tauntingly.

"Certainly not," said Talbot quickly. "Why should I object?"

"Well, if you don't object, I don't think anyone else need do so."

"That is not a proper remark, Lacy," said Dr. Kent severely. "Put up your hands those who are in favour of a search."

A forest of hands went up.

Everyone was eager for the unpleasant matter to be settled as quickly as possible, and without the interference of the police, and Lacy's suggestion seemed a good way of solving the difficulty.

"Very well," said the doctor quietly. "It is decided."

And the Head of St. Kit's consulted in low tones with the other masters. There was a buzz of talk in the hall. Only one was silent; it was Arthur Talbot. Brooke tapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't be downhearted, old fellow. You know you've plenty of chums who will stand by you."

"I know I have, Brooke, and you are the best and the truest of them," said Talbot gratefully. "But this is terrible."

"The search will clear matters up."

"I suppose so."

"But it's sure to, Talbot. There can't be any doubt about that."

Talbot nodded.

But he knew that, unless the thief were actually discovered, the suspicion would cling to him. His innocence could only be satisfactorily proved by the discovery of the real thief. And was he likely to be discovered? The stolen property was small in bulk, and might be easily concealed in some nook or cranny of the old school. If it did not come to light, the search would prove nothing, and suspicion would still rest upon the name of Arthur Talbot.

Guilty!

Dr. Kent stood in his study, pale and harassed in expression. The Head was usually equal to any emergency that arose, but on the present occasion he felt himself at a loss.

The happening was so unexpected, and so terrible, that the good old doctor was disturbed and unhappy, and could hardly summon up his courage to go through the task before him.

There was a thief at St. Kit's!

Whether Talbot proved to be innocent or guilty, the fact was indisputable that there was a thief in the school, and that was alone sufficient to darkly cloud the face of the doctor, who had the honour of St. Kit's very much at heart.

But was Talbot innocent?

It was terrible to doubt him—to doubt this lad who had always been, or seemed, the ideal of what a brave British lad should be. He had been as a son to the doctor, and it would have seemed impossible, at any other time, to doubt his honour for a moment. But now?

The doctor groaned aloud as he thought how black everything looked against the lad who had been the pride of his heart.

"But I will never believe it!" he exclaimed—"never! Talbot is innocent. Whoever is guilty, Talbot is innocent!"

Mr. Slaney tapped at the door.

"Come in!"

The Head strove to pull himself together as the master of the Fourth entered his study. Mr. Slaney's face was very grave and concerned.

"All is ready, sir," he said. "Josling is ready to begin the search."

Dr. Kent nodded; but he did not move from where he stood. It seemed as if it were impossible for him to nerve himself to the task which was to prove, perhaps, the guilt of his favourite.

"Mr. Slaney," he said, at last, in a low voice, "what is your opinion? Speak frankly. Do you think it possible that Talbot is guilty?"

The master of the Fourth availed his eyes.

"Do you think it possible, sir?" he said.

"No—never!"
The Head uttered the denial vehemently.
"It does not seem so," said the master of the Fourth. "Talbot is the last fellow in the world whom I should suspect. When I first heard Lady's declaration, I set it down as a piece of malice at once."

"Yes, yes," said the Head eagerly.
"But since then he has certainly advanced some reasons."
"Yet there is nothing really in them—nothing that might not be chance—coincidence," said the doctor.

"True. But it is very unfortunate for Talbot. It is certain that he has been blackmailed by that ruffian Seth Black."

"He has admitted it frankly."
"But is it likely that Black would be satisfied with the amount of money Talbot could spare from his allowance, sir?"
The doctor sighed.

"He probably made fresh demands that Talbot could not meet."

"Yes, I believe that is the case, but—"
"Then came temptation and opportunity. I hope and believe that Talbot is innocent; but it is useless to blind oneself to probability, sir."

The Head was silent. He spoke at length in a low, halting voice.

"A doubt, a horrible doubt, crossed my mind," he said. "I drove it away as an unclean thing, but it returned; it will not leave me. Yet I feel that I am guilty of a crime in allowing it to linger in my mind for a moment. Talbot is the soul of honour. I am certain—quite certain of that."

"I know how you feel on the subject, sir. But it would be wisest to prepare for anything that may transpire."

"I understand you, Mr. Slaney. You wish to prepare me for the discovery of Talbot's guilt. But I cannot, cannot believe that such a discovery is possible. Let us go." And the Head stepped firmly towards the door.

Mr. Slaney nodded.
"I hope that the search will resolve all doubts, sir. If any discovery should be made in Talbot's quarters, it will settle the question of his guilt. If, on the other hand, the stolen money is not found, the presumption will be that he is innocent although it will not be exactly proved."

"That is the worst of the matter. It is easier for a suspicion of this kind to be than for it to be set at rest again."
"True."
"But come; there is nothing to be gained by delay," the doctor said, with a sigh. And he led the way from the study.

(Another long instalment next Saturday.)

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"COCK HOUSE AT WYCLIFFE."

This is the title of next Saturday's first splendid, long, complete school tale. It will deal with the adventures of Wicks, Harria, Merry, Jackson, Donald, Sinhi, Paddy, and Taffy. "Cock House at Wycliffe," by Jack North, is a story you must not fail to read.

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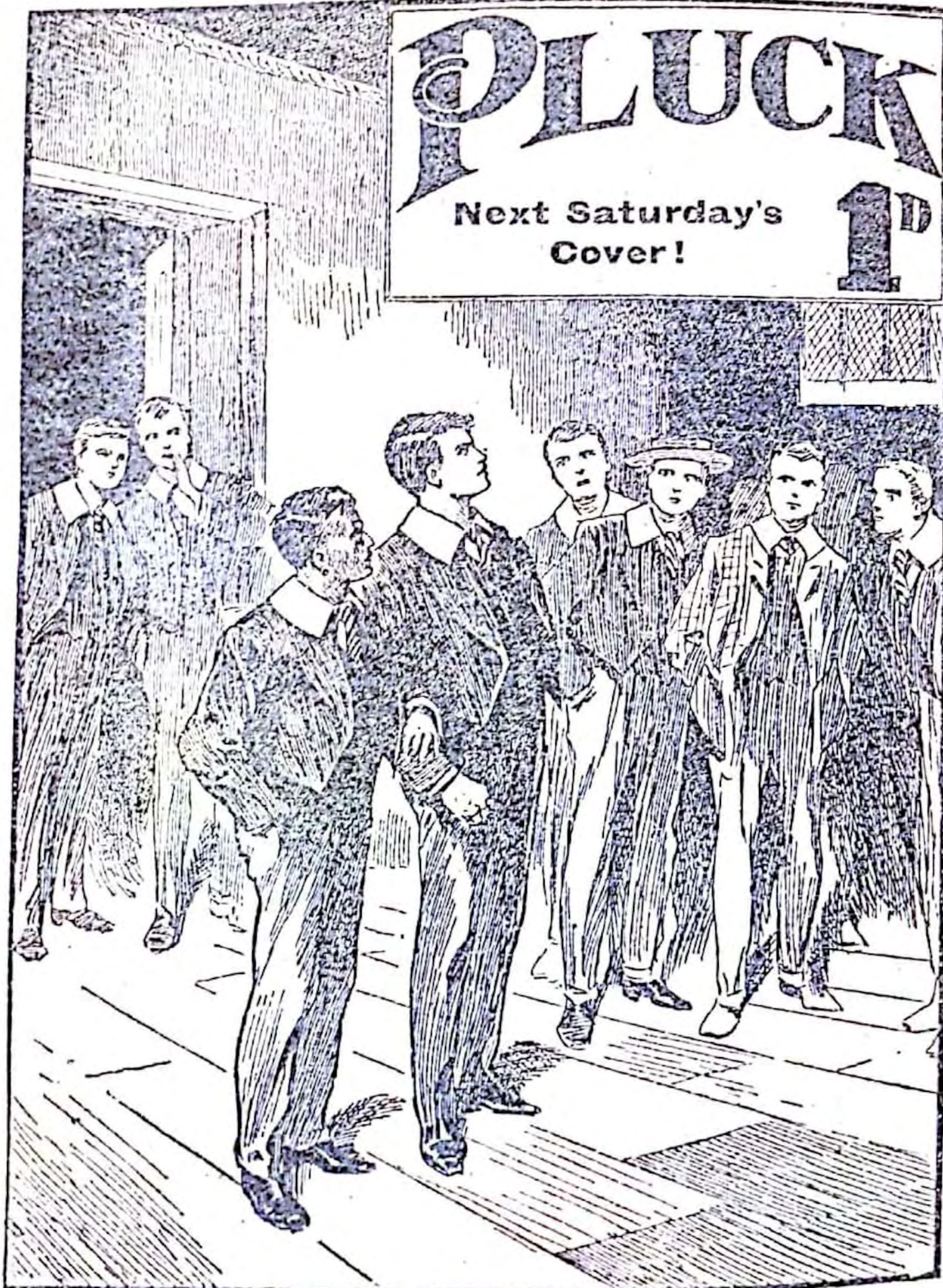
a marvellous tale of Nelson Lee, detective, by Maxwell Scott.

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YOUR EDITOR



This picture depicts an incident from "Cock House at Wycliffe," by Jack North, one of the two complete tales in next Saturday's PLUCK. Price 1d.