

Extra Long, Complete School Tale in this issue

PLUCK

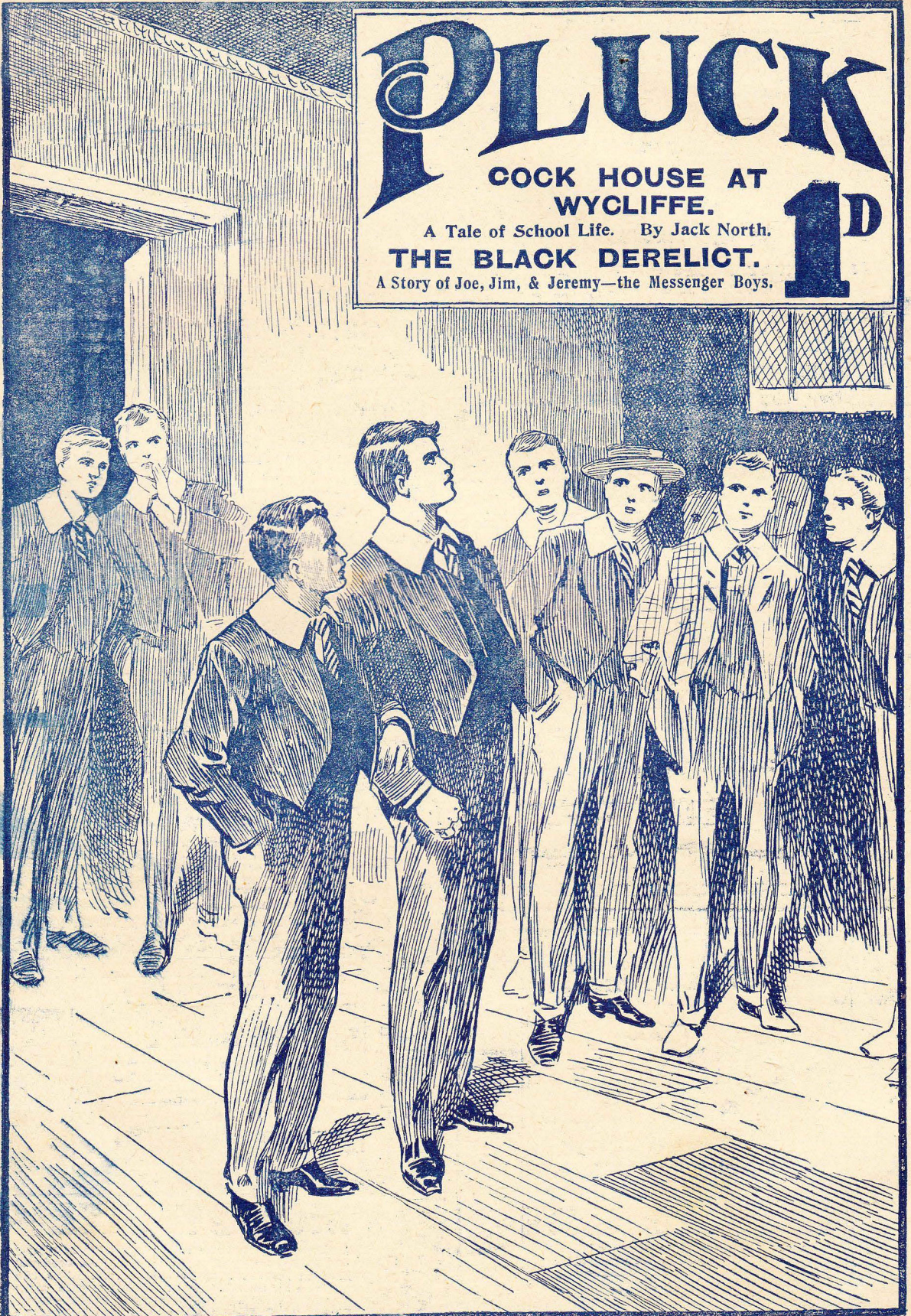
COCK HOUSE AT
WYCLIFFE.

A Tale of School Life. By Jack North.

THE BLACK DERELICT.

A Story of Joe, Jim, & Jeremy—the Messenger Boys.

1D



A FRIEND IN NEED! (See the Extra Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)

NO. 146. VOL. 6. NEW SERIES.

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Then Joe's voice, not far away, sounded over the water:

"Jim! Hairpin! Which way?"

Suddenly the sea parted in a great trough, with curled waves like mountains on either side.

Sniggers looked along, and saw first Joe's head, and then a moment afterwards, a little further along, he saw Jim.

The latter saw his two partners also, and struck out with his powerful arms, until he came up with Joe, and then the two came up with Sniggers.

"Strike out for the boat!" said Jim. "Keep together!"

Now they were on billows, from which they could see miles of the ocean around them; the next moment they were cast into a deep trough of the sea.

But, thanks to their lifebelts, they were able to eke out their strength considerably.

At last they reached the boat. Jim got a firm hold, and the other two clung to him, while they paused for breath.

Jacko half-sprang and half-scrambled on to his master's shoulder, where he crouched, trembling with cold and fear.

"I wonder where the others are?" gasped Sniggers.

"Mate, ahoy!" roared Jim, as soon as he had recovered breath. "Mate, ahoy!"

But no answer came to his call.

Again and again he hailed them.

"They've gone under, mates!" he said solemnly.

"We them to 'ave all the luck!" murmured Sniggers.

Indeed, the fact that their shipmates had lost their lives did lighten their own cares. Their case was bad, but as Sniggers told himself a hundred times during the next few hours, while they were battered about by the merciless waves:

"While there's life there's hope!"

For a while they managed to keep up an effort at conversation, but when several hours had passed, and their limbs were cold, their tongues parched with brine, they began to feel their hopes fading.

"I thshould like to 'ave them Allgit Pump again!" murmured Sniggers, waking from a drowsy state.

"An' I should like to have let Martha know what became of me!" muttered Joe, whose thoughts were with the girl he loved.

"Mates," suddenly ejaculated Jim, "I 'eard something!"

They all listened intently, grasping at the faintest hope.

"Bo-oot, ahoy-oy-oy!"

"Thumbod's callin' us!" gasped Sniggers.

"Altogether, mates!" said Jim. "Sing out 'Ship ahoy!' with all your might! S'elp me shivers, we're going to be picked up, after all!"

"Ship, ahoy! Ship, ahoy! Ship, ahoy!"

Would their voices be heard?

Feverishly they waited, their eyes straining, every nerve on the stretch. Jim climbed further on to the boat.

A liner was approaching, yet they received no answering shout, and the ship would not heave-to unless her captain saw someone alive clinging to the upturned boat he must have sighted.

"Let it go again, mates!" cried Jim.

Once more they raised their voices:

"Ship, ahoy! Ship, ahoy! Ship, ahoy!"

From over the sea came the heart-cheering call:

"Bo-oot, ahoy-oy!"

"They see us!" cried Joe.

"Crumbs!" murmured Sniggers. "My eye!"

His feelings were too strange to allow him to say more.

Gradually the great liner, bound for the Thames, as she proved to be, bore down upon them, until she heave-to, and the castaways saw a boat being lowered to their assistance.

In a few minutes willing hands were stretched out to them; in a few minutes more, for time flew apace with the joy of living once more, they were aboard, safe at last.

When—after they were in dry clothes, and the novelty of their arrival on board had passed away—they stood leaning over the rail, scanning the horizon for the first glimpse of the shores of old England.

"Now we thsha'n't be long before we thee Allgit Pump again!" murmured Sniggers. And he added to the monkey:

"Thotop yer ticklin', Jock!" The only time you ever gave me any peace in me life wath when you wath in the water and skered o' bein' drowned!"

"He's glad to be safe again, as we all are!" said Joe.

"Ay; it's bin a close shavo, mates!" said Jim. "An', s'elp me shivers, I don't like goin' 'ome without me ship!"

"But the black derelict's gone down," said Joe; "and that's what we went out to accomplish!"

"Ay, matey, it was that same!"

And then silence fell upon the three.

THE END.

(Two Grand Long, Complete Tales again Next Saturday. Order your Copy of "PLUCK" in Advance. Price 1d.)

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE MAJOR'S CUP,"

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Specs & Co., AND

By H. Clarke Hook;

"THE PARROT'S TALE,"

A Thrilling Detective Case.

By Phil Granby.

IN "PLUCK" 1d.

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 Arthur Talbot is openly accused of the theft. The Head believes in him, but a decision is arrived at that every one should have their boxes searched.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Search—Guilty!

The search, which had been assented to by the whole school, was to commence in Talbot's quarters. Talbot was the only one against whom any suspicion had been raised, and so, although the search was to be a general one, it was fitting that it should commence with him.

If the notes were discovered, as Eldred Lacy declared he expected, it would be needless for the search to extend further.

Arthur Talbot was in his study, and Brooke was with him, as well as Eldred Lacy, and Dunn, and the porter Josing. They were waiting for the arrival of the doctor for the search to commence.

The Head entered the study, followed by Mr. Slaney. The Head glanced round.

There were a dozen fellows in the corridor, among them three chums of the Fourth Form, Pat Nugent, Blagden, and Greene.

The three chums of the end study felt that they had to be upon the spot, not from mere motives of curiosity, of course, but to back up old Talbot.

At such a time as this, as Pat declared, a fellow wanted backing up, and his chums agreed; though what precise form the "backing-up" was to take Pat did not specify.

However, the end study were on the spot in case they were wanted, and looking daggers at Eldred Lacy, who did not appear to be aware of their presence.

"Talbot," said the Head, in a calm voice. "Before this search commences, I must say once more that I do not believe anything against you, and that you are quite free to accept or decline the search, just as you choose."

Lacy bit his lip.

Talbot cast a grateful glance towards the Head.

"Thank you, sir!" he replied. "I have agreed to the search, and it is a matter of complete indifference to me."

"Then we will proceed."

The Head turned to Josing, the porter, who was looking very red and uncomfortable. He, like everyone else at St. Kit's, liked Talbot, and the task that had been set him was very repugnant.

"Josing, you will now do as Mr. Slaney has directed you."

"Yes, sir."

"You will make a thorough and complete search in the study, and if you find any sovereigns or banknotes, you will produce them."

"Yes, sir."

"Then commence."

Josing commenced the search. Everyone was silent now, and all eyes were bent upon the porter as he proceeded. What was the result to be?

Talbot's face was calm and quiet. Brooke's showed unwavering loyalty and faith in his chum. Eldred Lacy and Dunn wore sneering expressions.

The Head and Mr. Slaney were grave and quiet. No sound was heard in Arthur Talbot's study but that of steady breathing and the occasional rustle of articles moved by the hands of the school porter.

He first examined Talbot's desk. Nothing was discovered

there that did not belong to the late captain of St. Kit's. He was about to close it again when Talbot stepped forward.

"There is a secret drawer there," he said. "You had better open that too."

He clicked the secret drawer open. It was empty. The Head gave Talbot an approving glance.

"I suppose there are no more secret drawers there?" Dunn remarked.

"None," said Talbot quietly.

The search proceeded. Josing went slowly and methodically through the bookcase, and each separate volume was taken out and shaken.

The gold was not likely to be there, but the banknotes might be hidden between the leaves of a book, and so not one was missed. Still no result. Then the bed and the other articles of furniture in the room were examined. It was in vain. The result was nil.

Dunn was looking disappointed. Relief and satisfaction were growing in the faces of the Head and Mr. Slaney; and in Brooke's face was the triumph of one who felt that his faith was justified.

But the end had not yet come. Josing turned towards the doctor.

"I have finished, sir."

"There are some books on the table," said Dunn.

"Examine them, Josing."

Josing took up the books, used in Talbot's school work, and shook them one by one. Still nothing!

"What price the carpet?" asked Dunn.

The Head glanced at him.

"That is a vulgar expression, Dunn!"

"Sorry, sir! But it would be jolly easy to tuck away banknotes under the corner of the carpet, wouldn't it? If we're having a search, it ought to be a thorough one."

"You are right," said the doctor coldly. "You will examine the carpet also, Josing."

The porter went down on his hands and knees to make the examination. He gave a slight exclamation. In a moment every face was keen with interest.

Talbot's floor was covered with a square of carpet, which extended to within a foot of the wall on every side. At one edge the porter had made the discovery that some of the tacks had been drawn, and the border of the carpet was loosened. He lifted up the edge of the carpet and put his fingers underneath. There was a faint rustling sound.

The doctor became deadly pale. Mr. Slaney glanced involuntarily at him, and then dropped his eyes. Well they knew the crisp rustle of banknotes!

Josing, who was a little pale himself now, drew the rustling paper from beneath the edge of the carpet where it had been concealed.

There were several banknotes, and they had been laid flat under the carpet. A more cunning place of concealment could hardly have been devised.

But the thoroughness of the search had unearthed the loot. Josing rose to his feet, the banknotes in his hand. He did not say a word, but held them out towards the Head.

Dr. Kent took them in his trembling hand. He ran his eyes over them, but he could not see them very well, for his vision was becoming blurred.

Talbot stood as if turned to stone. The banknotes had been found—hidden in his room! It seemed to him that the room was turning round him—the doctor, the Sixth-Formers, and Josing seemed to be spinning before his eyes. What did it mean?

"Talbot!"

It was the Head who spoke. His voice was almost a groan.

"Talbot!"

The boy pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Doctor, are those your banknotes?"

"Are they yours?"

"Mine? No."

"Then they are mine. I can ascertain the numbers."

"It is not necessary. They are not mine, and so I suppose they are the notes that were stolen."

Talbot spoke with a forced, unnatural calmness. The doctor groaned aloud.

"Talbot! Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Talbot's face was strained and grey.

"Doctor, I never took them—I do not know how they came here."

The doctor did not speak. Talbot looked round him wildly, seeking belief in every face, and finding none. Even Brooke's glance had dropped. The unhappy lad caught at the table to support himself. It seemed to him like some frightful dream. Even in the doctor's kind old face there was unbelief!

"Doctor"—his voice was husky and unnatural—"doctor, is it possible that you think me—that you think me a thief?"

The doctor kept silent. Talbot turned from him, and looked towards Brooke. He turned to him like a drowning man clutching at a plank, but his chum did not meet his eyes.

"Brooke!"

The other did not speak.

"Brooke—you, too—you believe me guilty—you believe that I did this horrible thing!"

Brooke was still silent. His face was very pale, his eyes on the carpet. Talbot seemed to stagger.

"You, too!" he said bitterly. "I thought you were my friend! You believe me guilty of this horrible thing! I know how much your friendship is worth now."

Brooke looked up.

"How did the banknotes come there, then?"

"Heaven knows."

"Have you no explanation to offer?"

"None. Unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"It is a plot—the notes were placed there to ruin me."

Brooke shook his head. It was the first pretext that would naturally come to the lips of one who found himself exposed, whose guilt was discovered. Who should place the notes there? Talbot had foes at St. Kit's—but a foe with the incredible baseness to be guilty of such a piece of black treachery!

"You do not believe me, Brooke?"

"I do not know what to believe."

Talbot turned from him.

"And you, too, doctor—you doubt me?"

Dr. Kent was silent.

"Then why do you not send for the police," said the boy bitterly. "There is proof enough here to send me to prison, innocent as I am."

"Talbot, do not speak like that. It will never come to that."

"Why not? You believe that I am the thief."

"Heaven help us all."

"The truth is out," said Eldred Lacy quietly. "There is no need to speak of the police, or of prison. If Talbot leaves St. Kit's, the matter need not become public."

Talbot looked him straight in the face.

"Leave St. Kit's!" he said. "Is that what you want?"

"It is what all the school will want now, I fancy."

"You know something of this, Eldred Lacy!"

The prefect coloured.

"What do you mean?"

"You have had a hand in this business," said Talbot. "It is a plot to ruin me, and you are at the bottom of it. I am convinced of it."

The prefect shrugged his shoulders.

"That is a little too thin," he said. "A convicted thief is never at a loss for a yarn to tell, and it usually takes the form of a plot against him. I am afraid that it will not hold water, Talbot. Come, Dunn, we're finished here."

The two Sixth-Formers quitted the room.

"My hat!" said Dunn. "I was hot against Talbot, of course, but I never really expected to see him so utterly sewn up, Lacy."

Lacy laughed.

"Oh, I knew he was guilty all along!"

"There's no doubt about it now. By Jove, the fellow ought to be kicked out of the school, and no mistake."

"He will be now."

"The Head won't want him to go, you mark my words."

"The Head will have no choice in the matter," said Lacy grimly, "you can be pretty sure of that. If he wants a thief to remain at St. Kit's, we'll start all the fellows writing to their parents and complaining. My brother is one of the governors of the school, and I'll soon bring him down upon the Head."

"Good enough. We shall soon be rid of Talbot."

"Yes, and for good."

"It won't take long to get rid of Brooke from the captaincy," said Dunn, with much satisfaction. "And then, Lacy—"

"Then I shall be captain of St. Kit's, and our turn will have come," said Lacy. "Every dog has his day, and Talbot has had his."

"Hallo, here's Brooke looking down in the dumps. Hallo, Brooke."

The Sixth-Former looked up as he passed. Talbot's chum was indeed looking unhappy. He could not believe in the innocence of his friend, and yet to believe him guilty was a terrible blow.

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"I say, Brooke, what do you think of this affair?"

"Nothing."

"What do you reckon Talbot has done with the gold?"

Brooke did not reply. He passed on without another word, and went into his study and closed the door. Dunn whistled. "Well, that's civility, and no mistake."

"He doesn't like the subject," chuckled Lacy. "He has always stood up for Talbot, and this is a bit of an eye-opener for him."

They looked curiously at the Head and Mr. Slaney as they came out of Talbot's study. The two masters were very silent.

Talbot was left alone. His study door closed, and the fellows in the corridor began to disperse, eagerly discussing the discovery.

"Well, the truth is out," said Lacy. "Talbot is the thief!"

"Liar!"

The prefect stared round angrily. It was Pat Nugent who had uttered the word. The junior was looking at him with blazing eyes.

"Liar!" he repeated. "Talbot is no thief, and it's a plot against him! I know that, and we'll get at the truth yet, you blackguard!"

And with that Parthian shot, Pat Nugent fled before the incensed prefect could lay hands upon him.

Pat Speaks Out.

Arthur Talbot was alone. Alone with his shame and misery. He was adjudged guilty! In all St. Kit's he felt that he had not a friend—even Brooke, who had always stood by him, had turned against him at last. The discovery, or supposed discovery, that he was the son of the respectable tramp, Seth Black, had turned a large portion of the school against him. This was the finishing blow. He was disgraced and ruined. The whole school believed that he was a thief! His days at St. Kit's were numbered. He could not stay now. He had hoped to live down the disgrace of Seth Black's claiming him. He could not think of living this down. He was branded a thief before the whole school, and the unhappy lad felt nothing so strongly as a desire to go away and hide himself from all eyes.

To prove his innocence was impossible. The stolen bank-notes had been discovered in his room. He had suspected that Lacy might have hidden them there—that it was all a plot on the part of the prefect to ruin him. How was he to prove it?

Lacy had not been seen near the Head's study; there was nothing to connect him with the theft save Talbot's bare suspicion. And he had other enemies besides Lacy.

No, he could prove nothing; he was helpless in the net which had been thrown round him with such fiendish ingenuity. He was ruined! That was the final result to which his agitated reflections led him.

Tap! It was a knock at the door of his study. Talbot looked up heavily. For a moment there was a gleam in his eyes—a gleam of hope. Was it Brooke—was it the doctor—come to speak a few words of renewed faith in him?

"Come in."

His voice was strange and husky. The door opened, and three youthful figures presented themselves to his view. Talbot felt a thrill of disappointment. It was not Brooke—it was not the doctor.

The chums of the end study were the ones who had come to him in this black hour of misery and disgrace.

"What do you want?"

Talbot's voice was very gentle. The interruption to his painful reverie displeased him, but he could not be angry. He read in the faces of the juniors that their visit was a friendly one.

Pat came in, and Blagden and Greene followed. Then the three chums of the Fourth Form stood hesitating.

"What is it, Nugent?"

Pat was always the spokesman of the end study, and Talbot naturally turned to him for an explanation. Pat coughed and cleared his throat.

"The fact is, Talbot—"

Then he paused again, turning very red.

"The fact is—," began Greene.

"Yes," said Blagden. "You see, the fact is—"

Then all three stopped and looked at Talbot.

The Sixth-Former smiled faintly.

"Well, the fact is what?" he asked.

"We know we oughtn't to bother you at such a time, Talbot," said Pat, "but we felt that we must come. The fact is, we've come to tell you that we know you're true blue."

"That's it," said Blagden.

"Exactly," chimed in Greene.

Pat, encouraged by having got so far, proceeded more boldly.

"We believe in you, Talbot. We stick to you."

"Through thick and thin," said Blagden.

"Like leeches," said Greene.

"Sure, and we know you didn't take the banknotes, but that some spalpeen took them and shoved them into your study," said Pat. "We know it, I say."

"You are very good to come and tell me this, lads," said Talbot. "Believe me, I deeply appreciate your trust in me. Now—"

"But that isn't all."

"What else is there?"

"It isn't only that we believe you to be innocent. We know that there is a plot against you, Talbot," said Pat eagerly.

The late captain of St. Kit's gave a start.

"Do you mean that any actual fact has come to your knowledge, Nugent?"

"Not lately; but some time ago."

"What was it?"

"We know that Eldred Lacy plotted with his brother, the squire of Lynwood, to bring some disgrace upon you, and force you to leave St. Kit's."

Talbot stared at the Fourth-Former.

"What are you saying, Nugent?"

"I never told you before, Talbot, because it seemed like tale-bearing, and I was afraid that you might think I was romancing."

"But what have you to tell me?"

"Sure, and I'll tell you all now. It happened the first day I came to St. Kit's. You remember there was an election on you and Lacy were putting up for captain?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Blagden and Greene were canvassing for votes for you, and as I wouldn't promise them mine—sure, I didn't know you then, you know—they fastened me up in the cupboard in Lacy's room, so as to keep me out of the election."

Talbot smiled slightly.

"Indeed! That was a drastic measure."

"While I was there, I accidentally heard Lacy talking to his brother, the squire of Lynwood, in the study. The squire said that he feared you, though he would not explain why, and insisted upon his brother joining him in a plot to bring disgrace upon you, and drive you from the school."

Talbot changed colour.

"That was about all," said Pat. "The squire said that when you were disgraced and driven from St. Kit's, he would no longer fear you."

"Good heavens!"

"Now—you see what has happened."

"Are you sure of all this, Nugent?"

"Every word."

"Did you tell anyone at the time?"

"Not at the time, but some time ago I told Blagden and Greene, and they'll bear witness to that much, Talbot."

"That's so," said Blagden.

"Rather," said Greene.

Talbot passed his hand over his brow. Back to his mind came a recollection of more than one strange look and word of the squire of Lynwood. Of the meeting too, between the squire and Seth Black—the ruffian who had been instrumental in bringing disgrace upon him.

"But why?" he said. "Why should the squire of Lynwood hate me—why should he seek to drive me from St. Kit's?"

"Because he fears you."

"But why should he fear me?"

"That is a mystery: but I have his own word for it," said Pat. "I swear that every word I have spoken is the truth, Talbot; and I thought you ought to know it now."

"Thank you, Nugent."

"You see, the squire was talking with Eldred Lacy about a plot to ruin you and drive you from St. Kit's, and now—"

"Now I am ruined," said Talbot quietly. "And they are going to drive me from St. Kit's."

"Yes. A cow with half an eye could see the connection."

"Rather," said Blagden. "I don't know how they fixed it, but it's pretty certain that you owe this to the squire of Lynwood and his precious brother, Talbot."

"My idea exactly," said Greene.

"Thank you for coming and telling me this," said Talbot, quietly. "Thank you too, for the faith in me that you have shown. I feel it very deeply, my dear boys, at a time like this. If I leave St. Kit's I shall always remember you."

Pat looked anxious.

"But you won't leave St. Kit's, Talbot, now, will you?" he asked. "Now you know it's a plot, what's the good of turning your back upon the scoundrels?"

Talbot did not reply.

"The Head would believe you if you told him all this," said Pat, urgently.

"He might attribute it to your imagination, Nugent," said Talbot, smiling faintly. "It is a very strange story. I believe it, every word; have no doubt upon that point. But others, I am afraid, would not give it credence."

Pat looked disappointed.

"Then you are going?"

"I shall probably have no choice in the matter."

"Oh, Talbot! What shall we do without you—what will become of the cricket! It won't be like St. Kit's when you are gone."

Talbot did not speak.

The junior's evident sorrow touched him deeply.

"But I'll tell you what," exclaimed Pat, after a moment's thought. "If you go, Talbot, we shall remain at all events, and we'll look into the matter. We'll form ourselves into a committee of investigation, and discover the truth. Won't we, chaps?"

"Rather," said Blagden and Greene together.

Talbot smiled.

He had not much faith in the success of that committee of investigation, but it showed him the juniors were devoted to him, and he held out his hand.

"I may not see you again," he said. "Give me your hand, my lad. Good-bye—when we meet again, if we ever do, things will be cleared up."

He shook hands with the three juniors in turn.

Then, without further words—for their hearts were too full for them—they left the study of the unhappy lad. Their faces were grim and sad as they walked away. They had said good-bye to Arthur Talbot, the hero of St. Kit's. Were they to meet him again? Was he passing out of their lives on that grim, miserable day? What would St. Kit's be like when he was gone?

Arthur Talbot's thoughts were sad enough when he was once more alone. The faith of the juniors—faith stronger than that

of the Doctor, stronger than that of his own chum—touched him to the very heart. But it could not help him. They had shed a new and strange light upon the subject by the information they had given him. But that, even, could not help him. His situation was past help. What could he do? Leave St. Kit's—that seemed to be the only clear course. To leave St. Kit's—to break all his old ties—had he the strength?

"Yet I must do it!"

He muttered the words aloud.

He rose suddenly to his feet. His face was white and drawn.

"I must think! I must think!"

He put on his straw hat and went to the door of his study. A desire to be out in the air had come to him; he felt as if the room, as if the old grey building, stifled him. To be out in the air and the sunny day, under the green trees to think: to think out his situation, and decide finally what to do: that was his impulse.

He left the study. Quietly, slowly, he passed down the stairs, and out into the close.

Several fellows saw him pass, and drew away from him as if they thought he was going to speak to them. A faint flush came into Talbot's pallid cheeks.

(Another long instalment next Saturday.)

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"THE MAJOR'S CUP."

Specs & Co. will appear in our next Saturday's issue, and, as with former stories, I feel certain you will thoroughly enjoy reading the adventures of the famous trio of school-boys as narrated by H. Clarke Hook.

"THE PARROT'S CAGE."

Our second long, complete—a detective tale—will be written by Phil Granby, author of "The Scarlet Scarf," and "The Third Shadow." This story is full of mystery and adventure.

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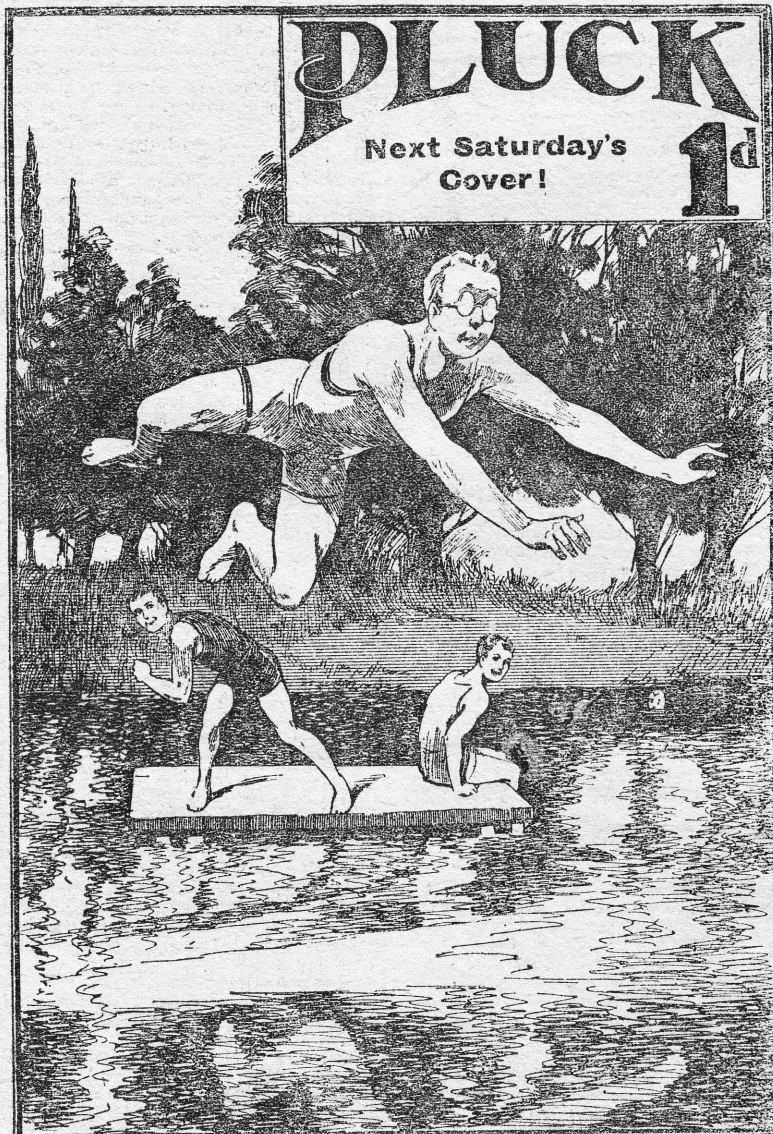
NEXT SATURDAY'S COVER.

Now it remains for me to remind my readers that I am always pleased to receive criticisms of our complete stories.

Although I am pleased to say, "Pluck" is well to the front, I still rely on my readers' help in the selection of our long, complete stories.

A postcard will do.

YOUR EDITOR.



This picture depicts an amusing incident from "The Major's Cup," by H. Clarke Hook, one of the two complete tales in next Saturday's PLUCK. Price 1d.