

THE EDITOR'S WEEKLY WORD.

For the last two months the editorial head has been worried and busied with our Christmas Number, which, I am happy to say, will be ready by next Saturday. The staff have spent many sleepless nights, and the office coffers have been freely ransacked to supply the necessary pounds that were required to prepare our special number. If we had to give a Christmas Number every week, we should want a reserve fund of about £10,000 a year to run the paper; but we don't grumble at the extra expense once a year. At first it was contemplated charging a penny for our Christmas Number, but then, in our largeness of heart, we said: "No; our readers shall have some return for the great help which they give us in making PLUCK known, and we will only charge a halfpenny, as usual."

I believe our idea for a Christmas Number is quite unique; indeed, we got it quite by chance, as you shall hear. A week or two ago I spent an evening with Mr. Maxwell Scott, the author who has made it his special work to chronicle the doings of the famous Nelson Lee. As it was only natural, our conversation centred mainly round the exploits of that celebrated detective, and as Christmas happened to be mentioned, I asked Mr. Scott if he knew where Nelson Lee proposed to spend the coming holidays.

The question seemed to amuse Mr. Scott. "You might as well ask me from which direction the wind proposes to blow on Christmas Day!" he said, with a laugh. "I don't suppose that Nelson ever knows a day beforehand where he will be, or what he will be doing. It is the same with all the best-known detectives. They never can tell from what strange quarter a case may be sprung upon them, or to what part of the country they may have to travel at a moment's notice. Did I never tell you of Nelson Lee's Christmas party?"

"No; what was that?" I asked.

"Well, he had invited Sexton Blake and Gideon Barr to spend Christmas Eve in his rooms in Gray's Inn Road."

"Really?" I exclaimed. "I should have thought that the three were deadly rivals."

"Rivals they certainly are," said Mr. Scott, "but there is no tinge of jealousy or envy in their rivalry. On the contrary,

they entertain the greatest admiration for each other's abilities.

"If you ask Nelson Lee who is the cleverest detective in the profession he will tell you that it lies between Sexton Blake and Gideon Barr. If you ask Sexton Blake, he will tell you that Nelson Lee and Gideon Barr are equally clever, and that you wouldn't be far wrong in saying that either of them was the head of the profession. And if you were to put the same question to Gideon Barr he would say that the palm must be unhesitatingly awarded to Nelson Lee or Sexton Blake, but he couldn't make up his mind which! In fact, each of the three thinks the other two are cleverer than he is."

I was not altogether surprised to hear this, for I knew that modesty and greatness invariably go together; but I was anxious to hear what took place at this convivial gathering of the three most renowned investigators of the century, and so I said:

"Well, and did the two detectives accept Mr. Lee's invitation?"

"Of course," said Mr. Scott. "It was not the first time by any means that they had fraternised together."

"And they passed a very pleasant evening, I suppose?"

"That's just where you make a mistake!" said Mr. Scott with a laugh. "They had scarcely lighted their pipes ere an urgent message arrived for Sexton Blake, and he had to go. A few moments later a summons came for Gideon Barr—and he, too, had to leave. And before Nelson Lee had time to bewail the breaking up of his party, he also was dragged from his cheerful fireside in order to work out a difficult case."

"How very annoying!" I exclaimed. "Now I understand what you meant when you said that the best-known detectives never knew where they might have to go at a moment's notice. Did the three men have their meeting, after all?"

"Yes, but not until the next night. They all met together the following evening, and related their adventures to each other."

I sprang from my chair, and executed a war-dance on the hearthrug.

"The very thing!" I cried. "The very thing!"

I'm afraid Mr. Scott thought I had

suddenly taken leave of my senses, for I saw his hand steal towards the poker, and he never took his eyes off me.

"No, I'm not going mad!" I said, answering his looks rather than his words. "For weeks and weeks I have been racking my brains for an absolutely new and original idea for a Christmas Number for my readers, and you have unwittingly supplied me with the very thing I want. You must set to work at once and write me all the details of that interrupted meeting, and you shall have whatever price you like to ask for the manuscript."

"I have no objection to write an account of the gathering, and of Nelson Lee's adventure," said Mr. Scott; "but I think you ought to ask Blake and Barr to write their own. You see, I have Nelson's notebook to guide me in the one case, but I should have to trust to my memory for the others."

"You are right," I said. "In stories of this kind absolute accuracy is essential. I don't believe in palming off fictitious narratives on my readers. I'll see Blake and Barr to-night."

I was mistaken, however, for Blake was shadowing a man in Scotland, and Barr was on the trail in Spain; but, thanks to the telegraph, I have succeeded in obtaining their co-operation, and the result of their united labours will appear in the Christmas Number of PLUCK, which will be published next Saturday under the title of "Christmas Clues; or, How Three Great Detectives Spent their Christmas Day"; and I venture to assert that it will be the most unique and enthralling production of its kind that ever was issued from the British press.

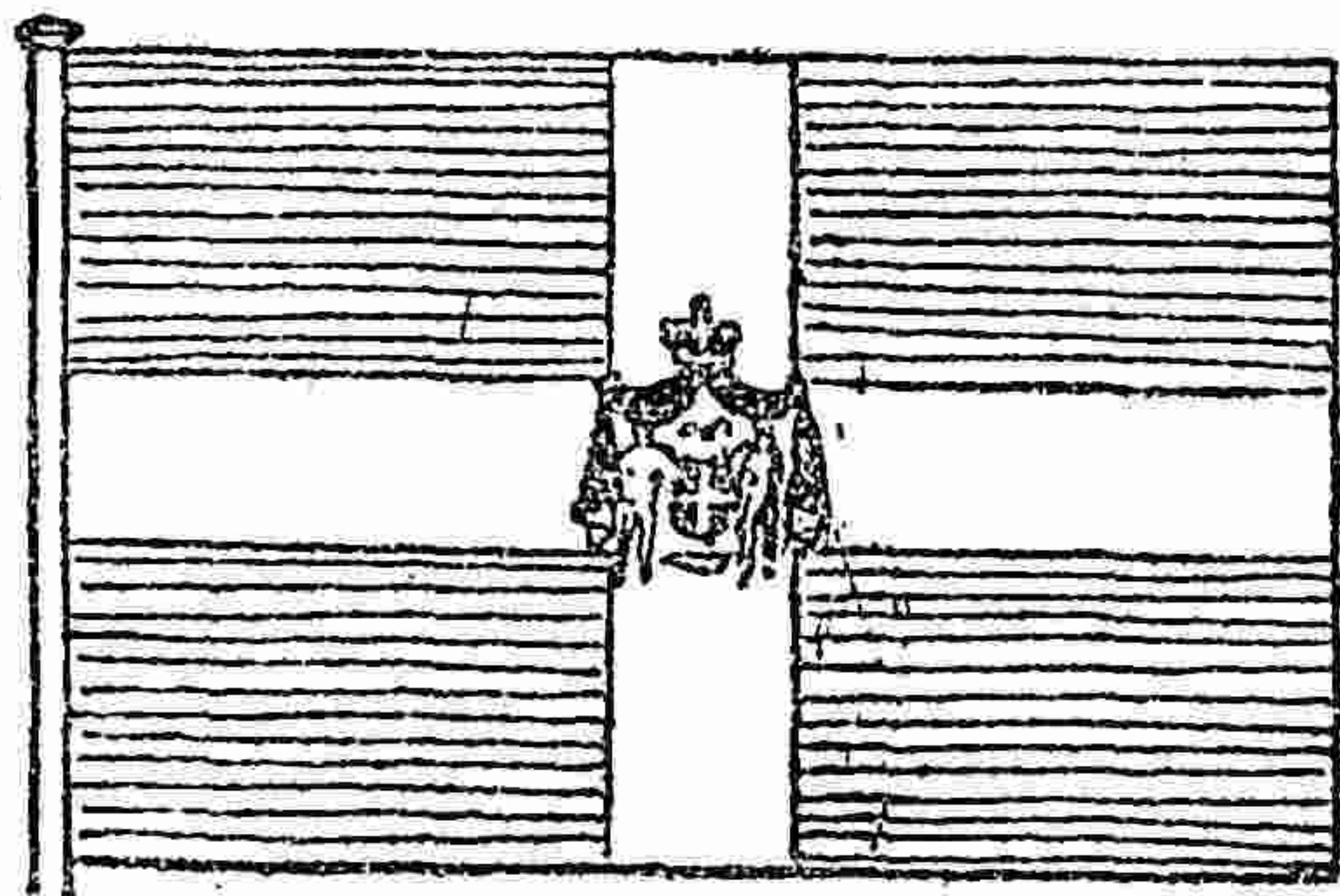
But we have other surprises in store for our readers who take PLUCK regularly and keep their eyes open.

The three flags we give below are the Royal Standard of Greece, and the naval and merchant flags of that country. In all three the shaded lines should be painted a pale blue, while the centre of the crown in the naval, and the banners round the two figures in the centre of the Royal Standard, must be red; the crowns yellow.

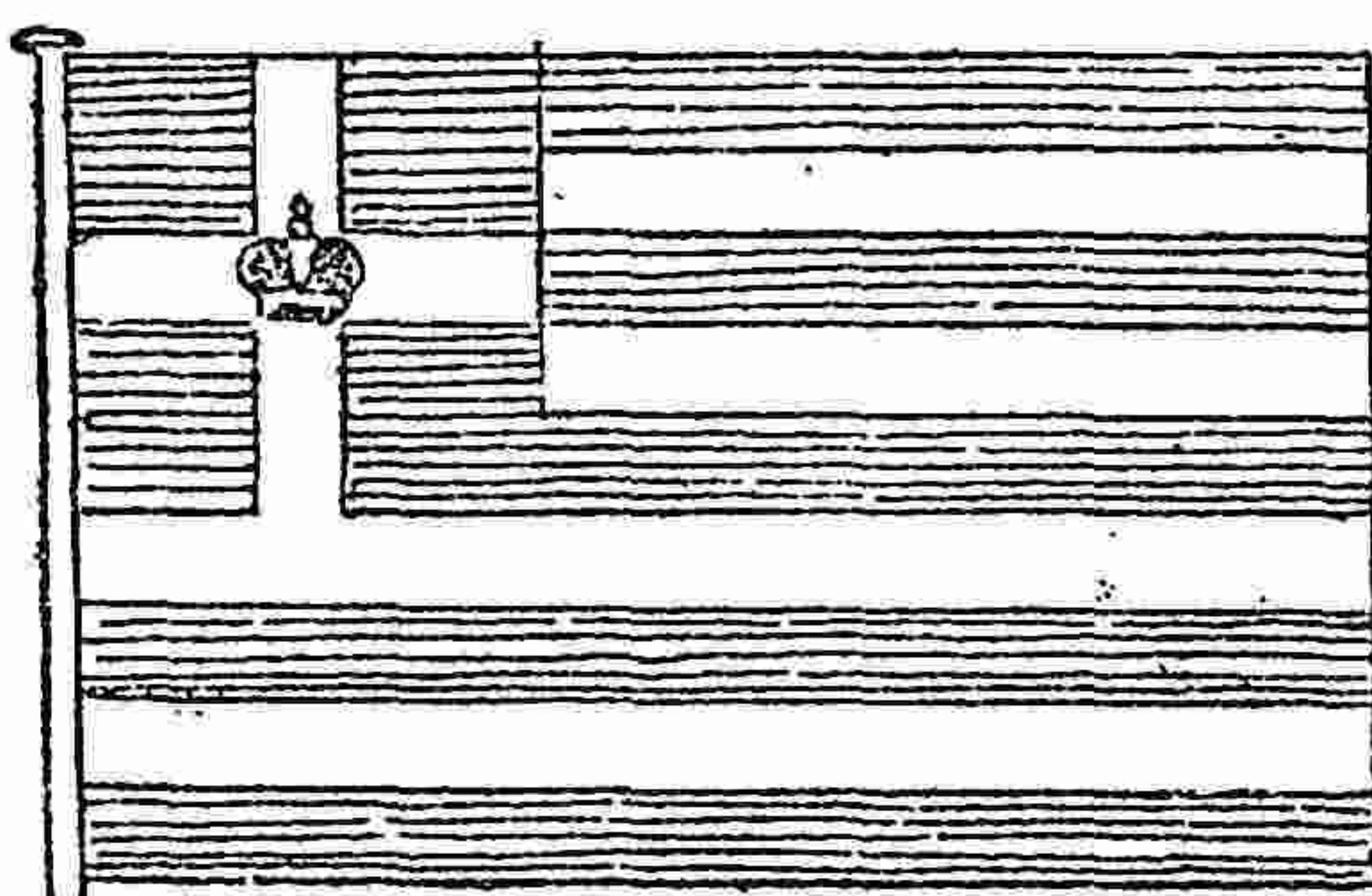
I advise all Pluckites to take care of these flags, and to be on the look-out for something concerning them next week.

"Will you kindly inform me how I can secure a berth as a stoker on board a ship?" writes "Carman." The best thing to do is: get a pamphlet from the Post Office on "How to Join the Navy," which will give you full particulars. You will not find it difficult to get a place, I believe.

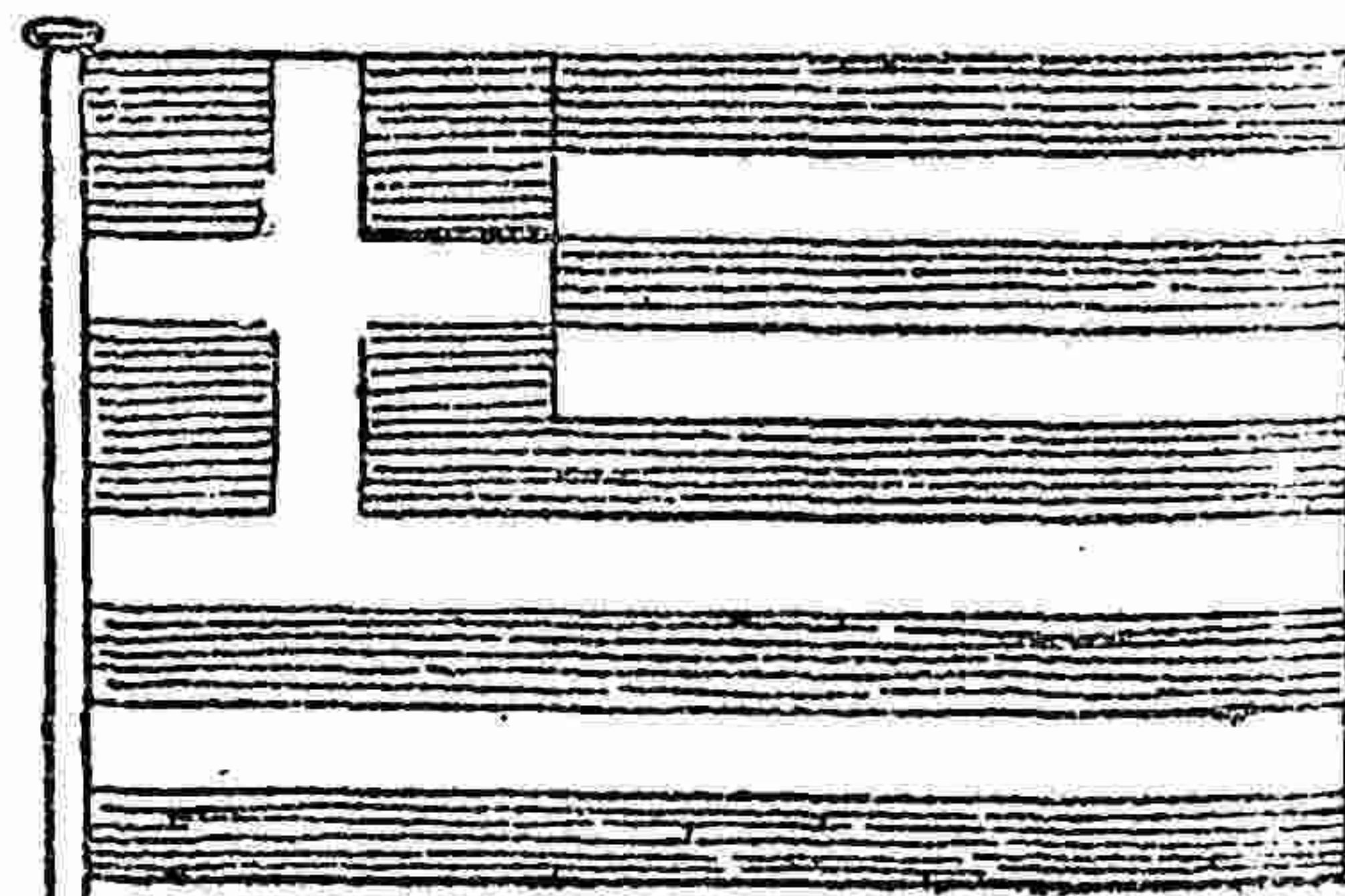
THE FLAGS OF GREECE.



ROYAL STANDARD.



NAVAL.



MERCHANT.

"PLUCK" CHRISTMAS NUMBER ready next Saturday. Price 1d.

