

Grand School & Detective Tales ⁱⁿ this Number.

PLUCK

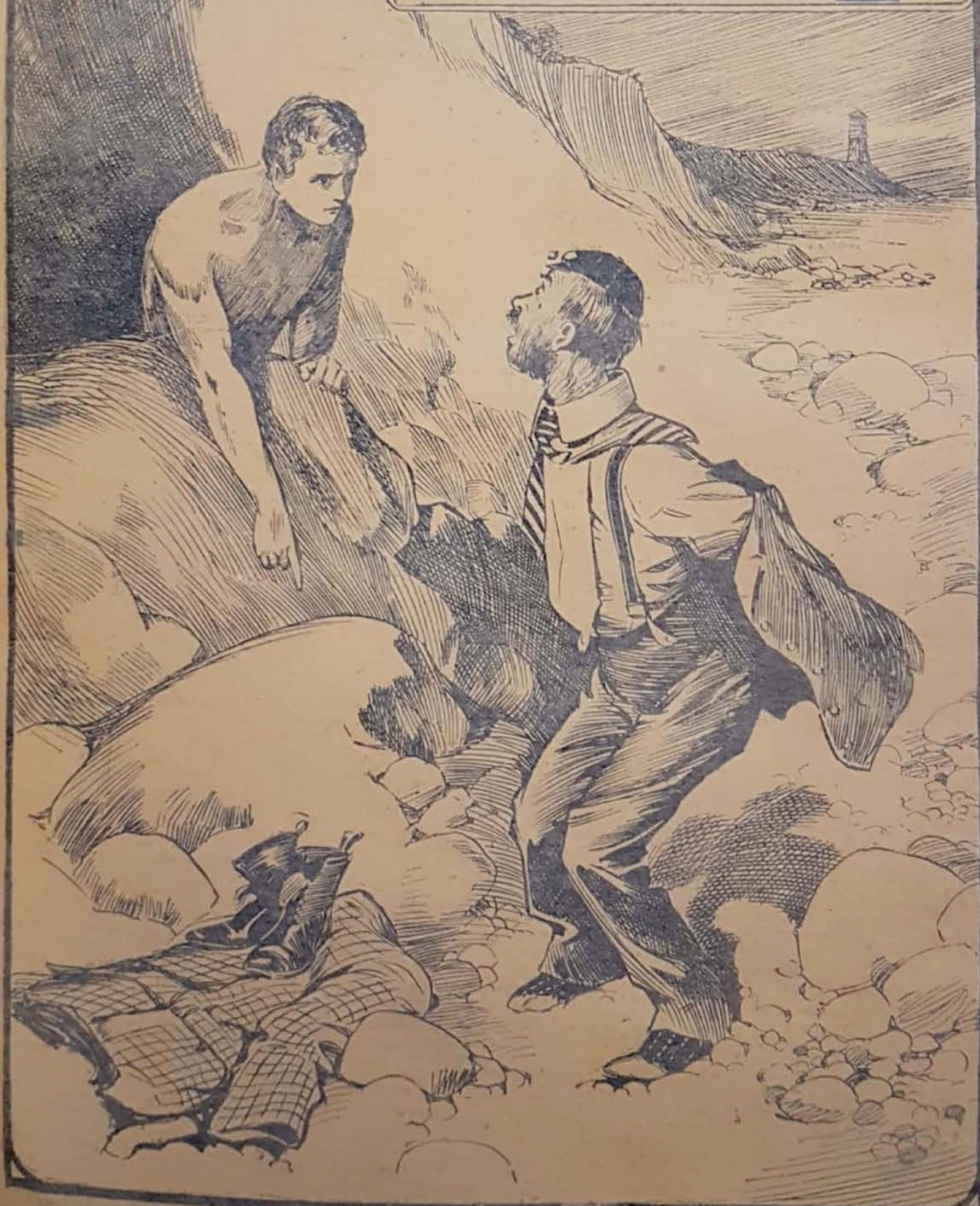
BRIAN'S EXCURSION.

A Splendid School Tale. By Lewis Hockley.

THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN LANCE.

A Grand Story of Stanley Dare, Detective.

1d



"YE SPALPEEN!" CRIED BRIAN DONOGHUE 'ANGRILY. "TAKE MY CLOTHES OFF, OR I WILL FOR YE, AND GIVE YE THE HIDING YE DESERVE AFTERWARDS. TAKE 'EM OFF!"

NO. 176 VOL. 8. NEW SERIES.

GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

YOU CAN START NOW.

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, is elected captain of St. Kit's. One morning the Head discovers he has been robbed of £30. He calls a meeting in the hall, and Arthur Talbot is openly accused of the theft. His study is searched, and the notes are found hidden beneath the carpet; but Arthur declares he is innocent. He is sent to Coventry by the whole school except Nugent, Blagden, and Greene, three chums, who believe in his innocence, and who are determined to stand by him. However, Arthur Talbot decides to run away from St. Kit's. He leaves the school by night, and as he is passing over the bridge which spans the river he hears a splash, followed by a weak cry for help. The cry is from the lips of Seth Black, a tramp who has been bribed by Squire Lacy to claim Talbot as his son. When Lacy hears that Arthur is going to leave the school he knows that Black will be a hindrance to his plans, so on the night that Arthur leaves St. Kit's the Squire attacks Black on the river-bank, and then throws him into the water. Arthur Talbot, however, eventually save Black from drowning and takes him to the school. The next morning the Squire of Lynwood rides up to St. Kit's and is met by a police inspector. The two start talking, and Lacy tries hard to hear whether anyone is suspected of attempting to murder Seth Black. "You can speak confidentially to me, of course, Leggs," said Lacy.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Mean Suggestion.

"Well, sir, Black has been unaccountably flush with money, which is remarkable, as he certainly never did any work. It looks to me as if there was a row at the Dragon. You may be aware that the garden there goes down to the water, and the current would soon carry the body down to the bridge, if it were thrown in."

The squire nodded.

"That's very likely, Leggs."

"Talbot thinks Black was thrown in at the bridge, and he says he heard a cry there. He may have heard a cry, but I don't see how Black could have gone into the water at the bridge. He is mistaken on that point. I'm pretty certain that my theory as to a row at the Dragon is correct, especially as Black had no money on him, and yet was known to have been lately very flush of money."

"I think you are right, inspector. I believe you have hit the nail on the head," the squire said, with a nod. "I wish you every success. The case is in capable hands, at least."

The inspector purred. Words of praise from so great a man as Rupert Lacy of Lynwood were very gratifying to the portly inspector. If the squire thought his theory was correct, why, it was correct, and there was no further doubt about the matter.

"Thank you, sir," he said; "we shall do our best."

The squire passed on, leaving Inspector Leggs extremely satisfied with himself. He was shown into the doctor's study.

Dr. Kent was looking worried, but he tried to banish the trouble from his face as he received his visitor.

Rupert Lacy took a keen, searching look at his face.

The Head of St. Kit's evidently knew nothing yet.

If Talbot suspected anything, he had not told Dr. Kent. The Head's manner was as cordial as ever, and the trouble on his mind had nothing to do with the squire.

"I hear that you have some excitement in the school," the squire remarked, with a smile; "I have just met Inspector Leggs in the quadrangle."

"Yes; it is a very strange affair," said the Head.

"Talbot appears to have distinguished himself."

"He acted very bravely."

And the Head of St. Kit's proceeded to detail Talbot's action, the squire listening with keen attention.

"A lad you should be proud of, doctor," he remarked.

"Yes, certainly."

"But—excuse me for being curious—how came Talbot on the bridge at such an hour?" asked the squire carelessly.

The troubled look settled again on the doctor's brow.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lacy, he was leaving St. Kit's."

"Leaving St. Kit's?"

"Yes. There has been a most unhappy occurrence here—some money was abstracted from the desk in my study, and suspicion fell strongly upon Talbot. Part of the missing money was found concealed in his study. I—"

"Then there is no doubt as to his guilt?"

"I feared not."

"Has he admitted it?"

"No; he maintains his innocence, and really he has shaken my belief," said the Head slowly. "I do not know what to believe."

"Had he any strong motive for wishing to take the money?" suggested the squire.

"Unfortunately, yes. That ruffian—I mean the man who lies upstairs unconscious now, was blackmailing him," said the Head, with a look of keen distress.

"You surprise me."

"As you are aware, Mr. Lacy, Talbot's parentage is unknown. That man claimed to be his father, and made out a plausible tale. He was certainly acquainted with a certain birthmark on Talbot's person, which he can hardly have seen unless his tale is true. True or false, he made the claim, and since then—as I have discovered—he has extorted money from the lad, under the threat of disgracing him here at St. Kit's."

"The scoundrel!"

"Scoundrel indeed; and the wonder is that Talbot risked his life to save him," said the Head. "That shows his noble heart—not the heart of a thief."

"Then," said the squire thoughtfully, "it was through this Black that Talbot was ruined here; and—and I suppose it is not possible—"

He broke off.

The Head looked at him curiously.

"What do you allude to, Mr. Lacy?"

"No, no, I will not say it. It was a thought that crossed my mind, but it is too terrible!" the squire exclaimed, with an air of great sincerity.

"I don't understand you. What is too terrible?"

The squire hesitated.

"I really wish you would speak out, Mr. Lacy."

"Well, if Talbot met Black in that lonely place, with such an injury rankling in his breast," the squire said slowly; "if—if the man then used threats, perhaps—"

The Head started back in horror.

"Mr. Lacy!"

"Of course, I do not suggest it—I do not suggest it for a moment. But I really wonder that it has not suggested itself to the police."

"Impossible!"

"I hope it is impossible."

"Talbot risked his life to save Black's—"

"Ah, yes; but that might have been remorse—terror at what he had done. Of course, I am not suggesting that he did it. But in a moment of rage, perhaps exasperated by fresh demands and threats, it is only too possible that a hasty blow might be struck—without any deadly intention, of course."

"Good heavens!"

NEXT SATURDAY: "RYVAL CAPTAINS," A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale, by Jack North.

AND

"NAT THE TRACKER," A Thrilling Tale of Adventure in the Australian Bush.

IN "PLUCK." 1d

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"RIVAL CAPTAINS."

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"NAT, THE TRACKER."

It is now twelve years eleven months and three weeks since appeared the first number of this book, and

THREE YEARS

since the first penny number took its place among the best of penny books then on the market.

"Perhaps I should not have uttered this thought," said the squire. "Yet, if there were anything in it, it is better for you to know what to expect."

The doctor sank into his chair and covered his face with his hands. It was impossible—incredible; and yet—and yet—

As the squire had said, a harty blow might have been struck, in a moment of rage and exasperation, without a thought of the consequences.

"It is impossible—impossible!"

The doctor almost moaned out the words; but the very vehemence of his utterance showed that the terrible thought had taken root in his mind.

The squire's eyes gleamed.

Little did he reckon of the anguish he inflicted, so long as his own purposes were served so long as he carried out successfully the secret plan he had already formed for saving himself.

"But you will soon know the truth from Black," he remarked. "I suppose he will be in a condition to speak soon."

The doctor shook his head wearily.

"I fear not. The physician says that he will certainly remain in his present state for some days—and possibly for weeks. He may even die without recovering himself sufficiently to speak."

"That would be very unfortunate."

"Mr. Lucy! It is impossible that what you have suggested can be the truth," said Dr. Kent. "You do not know Talbot as I do. He—"

"Yet you know he is a thief."

Dr. Kent groaned. "You would never have suspected him of that, doctor, had it not been brought home to you with undeniable proofs."

"It—it is true."

"I am afraid that you have been greatly deceived in that lad," the squire resumed. "However, let us say nothing about the matter now. It is not our business to furnish clues to the police. If they think of it themselves it is a different matter."

"Yes, yes!"

"Mean while, he must remain."

"He has declared his intention of leaving St. Kit's at once. He is suspected of that theft by the whole school, and his position here is too painful."

The squire shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry for him, then, but he must remain. You understand, doctor, that I do not wish to be hard upon him, but it would not be consistent with my duty as a magistrate to allow him to go, with so grave a suspicion against him."

(To be Continued.)



This picture depicts an amusing incident in "Rival Captains," by Jack North, one of the two complete tales in next Saturday's PLUCK. Price rd.

Three years ago I looked forward to a bright future for PLUCK. The success of this book has met with process day that I was not too sanguine.

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