

THE TWO VENTRILOQUISTS.

PLUCK

A GRAND TALE

1^d

BY H. CLARKE HOOK.



"LOOK AT MY BOOTS, SPECS!" GASPED TIM. "THEY'VE BOTH GONE!"

red blotches that were there on that night, months before, when he and Tarrant had met outside the door of Melton Bannister's room in the "Daily Mercury" office.

Arriving in India with the determination to put drink aside, to do his level best for the "Morning Echo," he had given way to his besetting curse when Tarrant had, time after time, outvalled him in his work. And all that day, while the other correspondents had been out for their papers in the firing line, he had remained in his tent, drinking the poison that was ruining him body and soul, and vaguely wondering how he should report the battle that his sapped energies had kept him from taking part in.

Coming from his tent, with brain somewhat cleared from the fumes of liquor, he had seen the arrival of Lester and Tarrant, and he had seen Lester, after writing a cable, get up and walk away. Then Tarrant had fallen asleep. Here was his chance! He would take Tarrant's finished cablegram and use it himself. Before his young rival waked, he would have time to copy it and then replace it on the box. No one need be any the wiser.

Nearer and nearer the sleeping figure he stepped, and at last, stretching out a shaking hand, he clutched the little pile of paper on which Tarrant had written his cable. Tarrant never stirred, but Whytill suddenly screamed. Someone had gripped his arm.

"Put that down, Whytill!" said Warden Lester. "That's a dirty game to play, you know!"

The papers rustled down in a little heap on the box, and Whytill turned a white, abject face to the man who had once again saved him from committing a contemptible action.

"I—I only wanted to look at it," he whimpered, not a trace of his old, bullying character showing in his manner. "I've been ill all day, Lester, and I couldn't go out with you fellows. I must send a wire to my paper."

He stood there, his knees shaking together, a limp, pitiable specimen of a man, and the kind heart of Warden Lester went out to him; for Lester had seen careers wrecked by drink before, and he was ever a lenient judge of men's weaknesses.

"I'll give you some details," he said. "Come with me to my tent. And give up whisky drinking, Whytill. It's deadly stuff to take too much of in this climate."

"Thanks, Lester," faltered Whytill. "But," he added, with a cunning look, "it isn't whisky that's upset me. I fancy that I must have caught a slight sunstroke."

"Don't be a confounded liar!" exclaimed Lester.

And Whytill, formerly bully and braggart, kept silent, and cringed before the young American, for the drink demon had enslaved him, and he was fast becoming that most pitiable of all human beings—a characterless man.

"Well, it's farewell to India at last!" said Hume Tarrant, a week later, as he and Warden Lester walked down the promenade facing the harbour of Bombay. "We've had some glorious times together while we've been here, old man!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Lester emphatically. "And we'll have better ones yet, too! Now that I'm coming home your way, I've decided to stop in London a month before going on to New York."

"Bravo!" cried Tarrant delightedly. "That's the best piece of news I've heard for a long time! I can promise you a royal holiday in the Old Country, Lester! I'm deadly eager to get back there myself. We'll strike London just at the right time to enjoy ourselves!"

"Yes," said Lester drolly, "I guess we'll have a rare flutter in London town! By the way," he added, "I heard one of the fellows say at the shipping office this morning that you'd booked a passage home for Bernard Whytill."

Tarrant looked a trifle embarrassed.

"Didn't want the other fellows to hear of that," he said. "I simply did Whytill a good turn because I couldn't see him left stranded here. You remember how we all wondered at his sudden departure from the front a week before the rest of us. Well, I met him in Calcutta one day when we got down there, and he was in a wretched plight. The 'Morning Echo' had sacked him, and refused to send him any more money, and he'd only two or three pounds left. So I brought him on to Bombay and bought a ticket for him. Saw him off on the steamer, too, so I know he'll get home all right."

"Well," exclaimed Lester, "after the shabby tricks he played on you, it would have served him right to let him stop here!"

"You'd have done the same thing yourself, old fellow," said Hume Tarrant. "And, after all's said and done, a man's no stronger than he's made."

THE END.

(Two splendid long, complete stories again next Saturday. Please order your copy of PLUCK in advance. Price one penny.)

NEXT SATURDAY:

"SPECS ON THE FLIP-FLAP,"

A Splendid Tale of Specs, Ventriloquist, &c., by B. Clarke Hook.

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IN "PLUCK," 10.

NEW SCHOOL TALE.



A Splendid New School Story,

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD,

Author of the tales of Tom Merry, appearing every week in the "GEM" Library.

READ THIS FIRST.

Clive Lawrence, a new boy at St. Winifred's, is put into the Fourth Form, which is at daggers drawn with the Fifth. The leaders of the Fourth are Fisher and Locke, Clive's study-mates, and those of the Fifth are Kendal and Keene. Courtney, a bully, takes Clive for "fag," and sends him on an errand to the Jolly Seaman, a public-house in the village. Clive arrives at his destination, and is shown into a back room to wait for a Mr. Napper. He overhears a plot between Napper and a German, whom he afterwards recognises as Herr Stossel, the German master at St. Winifred's. Clive returns to the School, and the next day quarrels with Fisher. The two agree to meet in a glove fight, and Clive knocks Fisher out. Ultimately there is a Form election, and Clive is elected Captain of the Fourth. The Form celebrate the occasion and capture Kendal and Keene. In playful revenge Clive decides to let his followers toss their captives in the blanket.

(Now go on with the Story.)

A "Giddy" Celebration.

"Up with him!"

"Up he goes!"

The blanket swung up, and Kendal was projected into the air. Up he went, and came down into the blanket again, his weight nearly dragging it from the hands of the Fourth-Formers. They were not used to the weight of a fellow like the bulky captain of the Fifth.

"Look out!" exclaimed Clive warningly. "We don't want to fracture any of his bones if we can possibly help it."

"Or to break his neck," said Fisher. "Funerals come expensive, you know."

"Lemme go!"

"Up with him again!"

"Hurrah! How do you like it, Kendal?"

"You young hooligans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a furious hammering at the door. It was the Fifth again.

"What are you young rascals doing in there? Open the door! Where's Kendal?" bawled a voice through the key-hole.

"He's here!" called back Clive Lawrence.

"What are you doing with him?"

"Tossing him in a blanket."

"We'll lick you to little pieces!"

"Rats!"

"Open this door!"

"More rats!"

The Fifth-Formers hammered again. Then again there was a sudden cessation of noise. They had been scattered again by someone in authority appearing in view. The Fourth-Formers howled with laughter.

"My hat," said Prye, "this is a giddy celebration, and no mistake! The Fifth seem to find it more exciting than we do. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up with him again!"

"Up he goes!"

And up he went. Down into the blanket, more firmly held this time, then up again! Then up higher, and down with a plump, gasping for breath.

"We've got to touch the ceiling with him," said Locke.

Clive whistled doubtfully.

"They did with you, Lawrence," said Locke warmly.

"Yes; but the ceiling upstairs is a good three feet lower than this one," said Clive. "We don't want to risk hurting him. Let's make him go within three feet of the ceiling, and call it square."

"Right you are."
"Are you satisfied, Kendy, or would you rather go up to the ceiling?"

"I'll wring your neck!"
"That is quite irrelevant, Kendal."
"I'll flatten your nose for you!"
"That's irrelevant, too!"
"I'll squash your face for this!"

"Well, as he can't keep to the point, it's no good consulting him," said Clive. "Up with him, and a jolly good one this time!"

The blanket swung up, and Kendal was jerked ceiling-wards. He went well within three feet of it, and came down with a bump into the blanket.

"Enough?" said Clive. "Have you had enough, Kendy?"

"I'll wring your neck!"
"Off his rocker, I suppose. He keeps on saying irrelevant things. Chuck him out, and let Keene have his turn. We don't want Keene to feel neglected."

Keene grinned rather uneasily.
"I don't mind," he said. "You can keep on with Kendy instead, if you like, and he doesn't mind."

Clive Lawrence shook his head.
"No, we must be just. You are a rotter, too, you know, and the honour of the Fourth Form demands that you be tossed in a blanket."

"Come along," said Fisher. "If you don't struggle, you won't get so rumpled as your respected friend Kendal."

Kendal was held by a couple of juniors. He was too breathless to do anything but sit on the floor and gasp. Keene took his place in the blanket without a struggle. It was the wiser plan under the circumstances.

He went through his tossings with heroic fortitude. He was about to go up for the last time, when there was a sudden shout of alarm.

"Look out!"
"What's the matter?"
"The window! The window!"

Clive Lawrence swung round quickly. Half a dozen heads were in the light at the window, and the heads belonged to the Fifth Form. The friends of Kendal and Keene were making a desperate attempt to get in to the rescue of their leaders. Clive dropped the blanket and dashed towards the window.

"They've got a ladder!" exclaimed Fisher. "Hold those two rotters, you know! Don't let them get loose!"

Kendal and Keene began to struggle, but half a dozen juniors piled upon them. The rest rushed after Clive Lawrence to the window.

Benyon and Stott already had the window open. Benyon's leg was already through, and the rest of Benyon would have followed. But Clive Lawrence was upon the spot now. He took a grip upon Benyon's ankle.

"Hold on, kid!"
Benyon tried to draw his leg away, but Clive Lawrence held fast. He grinned up at the Fifth-Former.

"Better not slide in, kid."
"Let go my ankle!"
"You'll land on your head, as sure as a gun, and that will damage the floor, you know."

"Leggo!"
"Sling them out!" shouted Fisher. "Chuck that pointer over here, Carker! I'll jab it into Stott's ribs!"

Stott disappeared from the window in a twinkling.

"Twist his ankle round, Law-

rence," said Pye. "If you keep that up long enough, the foot will come off, and—"

Benyon gave a howl of apprehension.

"Leggo!"
He wrenched his foot away at last, and disappeared from the window. There was a bump outside, and a yell, which seemed to indicate that he had fallen upon somebody.

"Quick!" exclaimed Clive. "Get a form here, and we'll fasten up the window. They won't venture to break the glass."

Clive was quickly mounted upon a form, and he secured the window. The faces of the Fifth were flattened on the glass from without, and they shook their fists at the juniors. But they were shut out, and any interference on their part was impossible. Kendal and Keene were still prisoners in the hands of the Fourth.

A Rough Time.

"The gauntlet next," said Clive Lawrence cheerfully.

"Are you ready, Kendal?"
"Go and hang yourself!"
"Are you ready, Keene?"
"Go and eat coke!"

Clive Lawrence laughed.
"Well, we're ready, and that's really more important," he said. "Form up, you fellows. We've got an audience this time."

A score of faces belonging to the Fifth Form were flattening against the windows. Kendal and Keene groaned in spirit. It was bad enough to have to run the gauntlet at the hands of the juniors, but to do it under the eyes of their Form fellows was the worst of all. But there was no help for it.

The Fourth formed up in a double row. They had caps and rolls of paper for offensive weapons, and their looks showed that they would not be sparing of their blows. It was the scene in the dormitory over again, but this time Kendal and Keene were the victims instead of the aggressors.

"Ready, kids?"
"What-ho!"
"You first, Kendal! Run!"
"Rats!"
"Run, I tell you!"
"Sha'n't!"
"Collar him!"

Kendal squared up, but Fisher, Lawrence, and Locke piled on him. He was dragged towards the double row of juniors.

"Fair play!" he gasped. "One at a time, you rotters!"

"Rats! Did you come for me one at a time in the dormitory?" demanded Clive Lawrence. "This isn't a fight, it's a punishment. We are vindicating the honour of the august Fourth Form at St. Winifred's."

"You cheeky young villain!"
"Yank him over!"

And yanked over Kendal was, and hurled into the double row, and then there was nothing for it but to run, or to be overwhelmed by blows from all sides. So Kendal ran.

"Sock it to him!"
Kendal ran his hardest, and escaped at last, and reeled away from the yelling juniors, and sank in a heap on the floor.

"Keene now!"
"Shove him along!"
"You needn't trouble," said Keene hastily. "I don't want shoving. I'm coming. Keep your paws off!"

"Buck up, then!"
Keene looked at the eagerly-watchful juniors, drew a deep breath, and made a sudden rush.

So sudden was the rush that he was past the first half-dozen without receiving a blow, and he ran on at full speed, the blows then aimed at him being so hasty that he escaped half of them.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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