

Ventriloquism and Sports at Lyncroft!

PLUCK

A GRAND SCHOOL TALE

1^d

BY H. CLARKE HOOK.



"Ten and two-fifths!" exclaimed Dora, as Specs finished his hundred yards.

New School Tale.

A SPLENDID SCHOOL TALE

By MARTIN CLIFFORD, Author of
THE TALES OF TOM MERRY
appearing in "The Gem" Library.

The Secret of St Winifred's



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 play, Clive decides to let his followers toss their captives in the blanket. Kendal loses his temper and challenges Clive. A ring is formed and "Time" called. (Now go on with the Story.)

The First Two Rounds of a Great Fight.

Clive, who contented himself with defence to begin with, showed that he was a master of that art—at all events. His guard was almost perfect.

Kendal's blows were almost all brushed aside, and once or twice Clive put in a counter that made the Fifth-Former pant.

Right round the ring, however, Clive went, with the Fifth-Former pressing him hard, and there were grins on the faces of the Fifth-Form fellows round.

"Is this a walking-match?" Benyon asked Fisher innocently. "I say, Fishy, your man has made a mistake. He came here to fight, you know!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Fisher crossly.

"I suppose that chap has practised walking backwards, and wants to show what he can do," grinned Stott.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Go it, Kendy!"

"Buck up, Lawrence!"

"Don't go to sleep, old chap!"

"I say! This isn't a walking-match!"

"Try to stand still for a minute!"

"Back-pedal, old man!"

Clive Lawrence took no notice whatever of either encouragement or mockery. He knew what he wanted to do—and he did it. So long as Kendal was willing to exhaust himself for nothing, Clive Lawrence was quite content to let him do it.

Pye was looking at his watch. Kendal paused. He had driven the younger lad twice round the ring, but had hardly touched him with his fists. He wanted to do something a little more definite before the round closed, to show how easily he could handle a Fourth-Form kid. He made up his mind to rush matters, and he paused for a moment in order to do so. But in that moment Clive Lawrence, who seemed to read his thoughts, rushed in, hitting out furiously, and Kendal staggered back, lost his guard, and went heavily to the ground under a right and left-hander, planted together full in his face.

"Oh!"

Kendal gasped out that monosyllable as he went down upon the grass with a bump. And some of the Fifth-Formers said "Oh!" too.

Fisher gave a yell.

"Hurrah! What did I tell you, Locke?"

As a matter of fact, he had told Locke nothing, but his chum nodded and grinned. Both were delighted by the sudden and unexpected fall of the champion of the Fifth.

Pye was looking at his watch.

"Time!"

Keene picked up his dazed and bewildered chief. The call of time came fortunately for Kendal, for he could not have resumed the struggle then to save his life. The knock-down blows had completely floored him for the moment.

"By jove!" he gasped.

Keene made a knee for him, and Kendal sank upon it gasping. Benyon mopped his glowing face with the wet sponge.

"I—I wasn't looking for that," said Kendal.

"I could see you weren't," agreed Keene.

"He—he rather took me by surprise, you see."

"I fancy he did."

"Of course, it won't happen again."

"I hope it won't."

"I warned you to look out, Kendal," said Stott. "You can't say that I didn't warn you to look out."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Then you let him bump you over like that—"

"I'll bump you over if you don't cheese it," growled Kendal. "It was a fluke, of course, and it only came off because I wasn't looking for anything of the kind."

"Well, you'll get something more you're not looking for if you're not jolly careful, that's all I've got to say," remarked Stott.

"And enough, too," said Keene. "Shut up!"

The Fifth-Formers were looking serious. At the beginning of the round it had looked like a walk-over for Kendal, but Clive's sudden awakening had changed the aspect of affairs. A change had come over the spirit of their dream, to use the poet's expression. They were growing doubtful. The Fourth-Formers, on the other hand, were growing confident. Fisher sat Clive Lawrence on his knee, and Locke sponged his face, and several fellows slapped him on the back.

"Sure, and it's a broth av a boy ye are," said Murphy. "And I can see now you were only playing 'possum at first."

"Yes, rather," said Fisher. "I never saw anything neater than that. Kendal wasn't looking for it. It was a regular double-knock, and it bowled him over like a stump."

"Ripping!" said Locke. "A few more like that, and Kendal will have to be carried home and put to bed."

"Time!"

"Feel all right, Clive?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

Clive Lawrence stepped up to the line again. His handsome face was somewhat flushed, but he looked fit and fresh enough. Kendal was recovering, too, but there was a growing black circle round one of his eyes, and his nose was swelling visibly.

"That was one to you," he said, with a grin, as he sparred at Clive. "The next to me, perhaps."

"Perhaps," agreed Clive.

The second round was not much like the first. Kendal did not waste time and breath in following Clive up, and the younger combatant began to do some of the attacking. Kendal's forte, however, was hard hitting, and his defence was not nearly so good as Clive's. Several times the fists of the Fourth-Former came home with sharp raps on face

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and chest, and Kendal's counters were slow and easily avoided.

Fisher grinned at Locke as he watched them.

"Looks like a sure thing for our man, Locke, my boy."

"Not sure yet," said Locke.

"Lawrence is getting it all his own way."

"If Kendal gets close to him— Ah!"

Kendal had succeeded in getting to close quarters as Locke was speaking. He received a postman's knock full on the mouth, but bore it without flinching, and his right came home with a crash on Clive's nose.

Clive Lawrence staggered, with a spurt of the "claret" running from his nose, and before he could recover his guard Kendal's left came under his chin, and he was hurled back.

He fell on one knee, and Kendal rushed in, but Clive was up again in a second, and sparring for time. He could do nothing but hold out to the end of the round, and that he succeeded in doing, and the call of time found him quite ready to sink for rest upon Fisher's knee.

Fisher and Locke were looking serious. The former supported Clive upon his knee, while the latter sponged his heated face, and they did not speak.

Clive gasped for breath.

"By Jove, that was rough!" said Bruce sympathetically.

"You shouldn't have let him do that, Lawrence!"

"Do you think I let him do it?" gasped Clive. "He did it without my letting him!"

"Sure, and ye'll be more careful next toime!" Murphy remarked. "So long as ye keep him off, ye're all right; but he's stronger than ye are at close quarters, intirely!"

"I know that."

"Faith and sure, I—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Fisher. "What's the good of advising a chap who's better than yourself at the game? Lawrence will do better in the next round!"

"Yes, rather!" said Clive grimly. "I'm going in to win, and I believe I can do it; but one can't expect to score all along the line!"

"Of course not."

"Time!"

Pye rapped out the word. Kendal stepped up briskly, and looked curiously across at Clive Lawrence. Clive toed the line again, prompt to the word. He had had a hard time in the second round, but he was quite ready for the third.

Hammer and Tongs.

"Go it!"

"Finish him this time, Kendy!"

"Keep him off, Lawrence!"

"Play up!"

The two combatants, taking no notice of the varied encouragement from their Form-fellows, commenced the third round of that memorable fight. The circle of lookers-on had grown larger, and by this time nearly the whole of the Fourth and Fifth Forms at St. Winifred's had arrived on the ground. Even some youngsters belonging to the Remove and the Third had got wind of the fight, and had come to see the fun, and the interest was growing very keen.

It was evident that this fight would be a record one, and would form a new tradition to be handed down at St. Winifred's. A Fourth-Former against one of the Fifth usually had no chance, and now the old order was changed with a vengeance. Clive Lawrence looked like having at least an equal chance, and his backers believed that he would win, with common luck. For Kendal's advantage in the second round did not last into the third. Clive was too careful for him now.

The Fifth-Former attacked, and Clive retreated a little, till he felt himself equal to more exertion, and then he piled into the fight with a sudden burst of energy that somewhat surprised Kendal.

The younger lad got in two body blows that made Kendal gasp, and easily guarded the Fifth-Former's counters.

Kendal ceased to attack, and waited for Clive to come on; which he did, pushing the attack with a keenness that rather bewildered the Fifth-Former, still shaky from two heavy blows in the ribs.

Kendal went back and back, and was driven half round the ring by the time the round came to an end.

Both combatants were breathing hard, but Kendal had certainly received the rougher usage and looked more breathless, when Pye called time, and each sought the repose of his second's knee.

"Better," said Locke.

And Fisher nodded.

"You didn't give him enough that time, Kendal!" Stott remarked to the captain of the Fifth. "You should have gone for him, you know!"

Kendal grunted.

"That's so," assented Benyon. "You should have rushed things a little, and got through his guard, Kendy!"

"And let him have it right and left," added Stott.

"Oh, shut up!" said Kendal.

"Well, we're only telling you what you ought to have done!"

"Well, shut up!"

"Mind, the honour of the Fifth is in your hands!" said Stott. "If you were to get licked, Kendal—"

"Will you cheese it?"

"Oh, certainly! But I don't see why you can't listen to a civil remark without losing your rotten temper and getting so beastly ratty!"

"Oh, you make me tired!"

"Lawrence seems to be making you tired, too!" retorted Stott.

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Stott? If you're not, you may as well shut up before you get one."

"Time!"

"Buck up, old chap!" whispered Keene. "Buck up! Go in and win!"

"I'm going too!" growled Kendal.

The fourth round commenced. Both combatants were careful now, husbanding their wind, and for a time the round was eventless—sparring on both sides leading to little or no result. The onlookers, who wanted excitement all the time, began to exchange sarcastic remarks. Murphy opined that the two champions had come there for a rest-cure, and Benyon thought they probably wanted an alarm-clock to show them that it was high time to wake up.

Kendal gave an angry grunt, and was imprudent enough to allow the remarks of the circle to urge him on to reckless attack. He found Clive's fists like a brick wall to pass, and he reeled back from them shorter of temper, and shorter of breath.

And Clive Lawrence followed him up fast, and the Fifth-Former's blows grew weaker, his defence broke down, and the junior's fists rained on his face.

There was a shout from the Fourth Form:

"Go it, Lawrence!"

"The Fourth wins! Hurrah!"

"Buck up Kendy!" cried Keene anxiously.

Kendal made an effort. He had had a terrible blow in the eye that half-blinded him for the moment, and another on the nose that made it spurt "claret," and brought the water with a rush to his eyes. His defence was feeble, but he warded off the attack somehow till Pye called "Time!"

Then he almost reeled into his second's arms.

Keene sat him upon his knee and wiped his face. Kendal was gasping for breath, while Clive Lawrence, on the other side, was sound as a drum.

Stott looked at the captain of his Form with disapproval in his eye.

"Do buck up next time, Kendal!" he urged.

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Yes; do shut up!" said Keene. "Kendal's doing his best; and if he's getting cut up—"

"Who's getting cut up?" said Kendal.

"Well, you are a bit knocked about—"

"Who says so?"

"Well, I don't say so," said Keene, not knowing exactly how to put it. "If you feel all right, it's all right you know."

"If you silly asses leave off jawing, it's all right, you mean!" said Kendal.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Stott.

"How's a chap to box with a lot of silly rotters chipping at him all the time?" demanded Kendal.

"Well, you lost your temper, and rushed in—"

"All your fault!"

"Well, Lawrence didn't lose his temper—"

"Hang Lawrence!"

"Don't get ratty, Kendal—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Time!"

"Fifth round!" said Fisher, with a grin. "I must say that you're getting the best of it, Lawrence, and if Kendal goes on getting into a wax, you'll have a regular walk-over at the finish. A chap can't fight in a temper."

Clive nodded, and stepped up for the fifth round. Fights at St. Winifred's—especially in the lower Forms—seldom reached a fifth round, and the excitement was growing intense. Even the Fifth-Formers could not blink the fact that while Kendal was growing irritable and puffy, Clive Lawrence looked fresh as a daisy, and seemed little the worse for his exertions. He was, in fact, recovering more and more every minute from his rough usage in the second round, and seemed to be improving in form while his opponent's form went steadily down.

"Go it, Lawrence!"

"The Fourth wins!"

"Buck up, Kendal, old man!"

Hammer and tongs the two combatants went at it for the fifth round. Science played a far slighter part in the contest now, as both were shorter of breath and more excited.

Blows began to fall thicker upon both sides. At the end of the fifth round both had received considerable punishment, but it was hard to tell which had fared the worse of the two.

"Feel like going on?" asked Fisher, with a grin, as he sponged his principal's blazing face.

"Yes, rather!" said Clive Lawrence quietly. "It's lagging, but I think I'm good for a few rounds more."

"So do I, by Jove!"

"Kendal's got bellows to mend," said Locke. "He's putting up a good fight, but I had a feeling all along that our man would win."

"Yes, by Jove, and I don't grudge Lawrence the captaincy of the Form, either. The chap who can lick a Fifth-Former ought to be captain of the Fourth."

"That's so, Fishy."

"And he looks like licking him now, if I'm any judge."

"Time!"

The sixth round commenced. The crowd was in a buzz of comment. Six rounds were almost a record at St. Winifred's, and both the combatants seemed quite able to go on. But as the round progressed, Kendal was seen to weaken. His wind was not so sound as Clive's, and he had, as Locke remarked, bellows to mend.

Clive began to drive him round the ring, and Kendal went, till all of a sudden, close upon the end of the round, he woke to sudden activity, and rushed at Clive with a suddenness that took the Fourth-Former almost off his guard.

Crash, crash! came his right and left on Clive's chest, and as the younger lad reeled, he followed up the attack with both fists full in his face.

Clive went to the earth with a crash.

"Time!"

The call came fortunately for the Fourth Form champion. Fisher picked him up, and Kendal went back to his second grinning.

"What do you croakers think of that?" he demanded.

"Ripping!" said Keene.

"Good!" said Stott. "I knew you could lick him, if only you took my advice and went for him in earnest, you know."

"Oh, rats!"

Fisher and Locke tended their champion in silence. They did not believe that Clive Lawrence could go on after that terrible knockdown. But they did not yet fully know the new captain of the Fourth.

"How do you feel, Lawrence?"

"Rotten!" said Clive frankly.

"Of course, I suppose you couldn't expect to stand up against a Fifth-Former, especially the cock of the Form, and that's what Kendal is," Locke remarked mournfully. "It wasn't really much good going in for it."

"We oughtn't to have let him," agreed Fisher. "He has put up a splendid fight, considering, but, of course, it wasn't any good."

"Give us over Lawrence's jacket, Carker."

Clive looked up with a quiet smile.

"I don't want my jacket yet," he said.

"You're not going on?"

"I am."

"Look here, my dear fellow," said Fisher kindly, "that fearful knockdown would have put a Sixth-Former out of the tussle."

"You can't go on," said Locke, shaking his head; "you're not fit. We couldn't allow it, you know."

"I am going on!"

"But look here—"

"I am going to fight as long as I can stand. I thought I told you that," said Clive Lawrence quietly. "I can still stand."

"Time!"

"Well, if you mean it—"

"You will see that I mean it."

And Clive stepped firmly into the ring. Fisher looked after him admiringly, and then grinned at Locke.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I believe he will do it, after all. He's got nerve enough, at all events, if his wind and muscle hold out."

"You're right."

Kendal looked at his adversary with a grin. He felt that he had the victory in his hands, and he could afford to be generous. He did not come on.

"Hold on, kid!" he exclaimed. "Don't you think this has gone far enough yet?"

Clive Lawrence dropped his hands.

"Certainly, if you do," he said.

"Good! I don't want to hurt you. If you like to own yourself licked, I'm perfectly willing to let the matter drop."

Clive's hands went up again in a flash.

"Come on!" he said.

"Eh? What do you say?"

"Come on!"

"You'd rather keep it up to a finish?"

"Yes; unless you like to own yourself licked!"

Kendal laughed.

"That's likely, isn't it? Well, if you insist upon it, I suppose I had better knock you right out while I'm about it. Here goes!"

"Sail in, Kendal!" said Keene.

"Rather! Watch me!"

Kendal sailed in. But his sailing in had not exactly the effect he anticipated. Clive gave ground at first, but he recovered more and more every moment, and before the end of the round, which was mostly defensive, he seemed almost his old self. Through the seventh round Kendal drove him hard, but Clive's defence was splendid, and he received little punishment. And at the end of it Kendal seemed more out of breath than the younger lad.

"You stuck it out well," said Fisher, slapping Clive Lawrence on the shoulder. "I suppose I needn't ask you if you're still going on?"

"No," said Clive, laughing; "I'm going on."

There was a buzz as the eighth round commenced. Eight rounds was unprecedented at St. Winifred's, and this record fight was not yet finished.

The Victor!

"Buck up, Kendal!"

"Go it, Lawrence!"

Clive Lawrence was pushing his opponent hard now. He seemed to be quite his old self once more, but the grogginess Kendal had shown was increasing, and his blows were feebler and less carefully aimed, and his defence altogether weaker.

"Go it, Lawrence!"

It was good advice this time, and Lawrence took it. Taking little note of the blows that fell feebly upon his face and chest, he pressed Kendal hard, raining blows on him, blow on blow, till the Fifth-Former was reduced to blind parrying, and ceased to counter, and soon ceased to guard.

Crash!

Kendal went down with a bump on the grass, and Pye looked at him and began to count. Clive stood ready to level him if he rose, but he did not rise.

"One, two, three, four, five—"

Kendal made a movement, and half staggered up. Clive would have been well within the laws of the ring if he had struck him down again. His adversary was at his mercy till the call of time, and unless he gained his feet in the permitted ten seconds he was licked.

But the boy's generous nature came into play then. He stepped back, and Kendal rose unmolested, and stood giddily.

There was a groan from the Fourth-Formers. They thought it was no time for generosity, when victory unprecedented in the annals of the Fourth Form at St. Winifred's was trembling in the balance.

"The young ass!" muttered Fisher. "The ass! Oh, the ass!"

"You're right," said Locke. "But it's decent."

"Well, yes; but I ask you, is this a time to be decent?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Time!" rapped out Pye.

Keene took his principal away. Clive Lawrence came back, and again accepted Fisher's knee. The late captain of the Fourth Form gave an expressive grunt.

"You young ass, what did you do that for?"

"Well, it's not a prize-ring," said Clive apologetically. "We're not fighting for a purse, you know. I had to let him get up."

"You won't lick him now."

"I shall try."

"You could have knocked him into the middle of next week."

"Perhaps I can yet."

"You're a good ass, Lawrence," said Locke. "I think I like you all the better for it; but if you don't lick him now the Fourth will be ready to mob you."

"Let them!"

"Time!"

"Ninth round!" said Sugden. My hat! This will be a talked-of tussle for some time at St. Winifred's, I fancy! Think Lawrence will pull through, Fishy?"

"I fancy so."

"Kendal looks awfully groggy, doesn't he?"

"So does our man," said Locke. "But I fancy Kendal is the groggier of the two. The Fifth look as if they think so."

That was true enough. The Fifth Formers were looking on at the ninth round of that great fight with decidedly glum faces. It was pretty plain that their feeling of certainty was gone, and had been replaced by painful doubt, if not by certainty in the opposite direction.

"Go for him Lawrence!"

"The Fourth wins!"

The Fifth-Formers were grimly silent. They knew that their man would have been knocked out but for Clive's generosity in the eighth round, and it looked as if he would be knocked out, anyway.

Kendal was certainly groggy, and growing groggier. He put up hardly any defence against Lawrence's attack, and had Clive been fresher, he would have been knocked out in a few seconds. But Clive was fagged, too, now, and though he was steadily winning, it was not rapid work. But it could not fail to be seen that he was getting home two or three blows to Kendal's one, and harder blows, too.

The round ended with a sharp attack, which drove Kendal across the ring, and laid him on the grass at his second's feet, panting and exhausted.

Keene picked him up and sponged his face in grim silence.

The rest of the Fifth were silent, too.

Pye was looking at his watch. Clive Lawrence rested on his second's knee, tired, but evidently ready for a tenth round. But matters were different with the champion of the Fifth.

The minute's rest was up, and he did not move from his second's knee. Pye glanced up from his watch.

"Time!"

Kendal staggered to his feet. Keene caught him on one side, and Benyon on the other.

"Hold on, Kendal."

"Let me go!"

"Time!" repeated Pye, with emphasis.

Clive Lawrence stepped forward quietly. His face, white where it was not darkened with bruises, showed the strain of the fight. But he was ready to go on. So was Kendal, as far as pluck went. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

"Let me go, Keene. He's waiting for me!"

"You can't go on!"

"Bosh! I'm going on!"

"But I tell you—"

"Confound you! Let me go!"

"Oh, chuck it, Kendy!" said Stott, with a grunt of disappointment.

"You're licked. You oughtn't to have done it! The honour of the Fifth was in your hands—"

"Shut up, Stott!" said Keene.

"Oh, certainly! But what I say is—"

"Let me go, Keene! I tell you I'm going on!"

"You can't!"

"I can, and will, confound you!"

And Kendal wrenched himself away, and staggered blindly forward. His eyes were almost closed, and he could only dimly see Clive Lawrence. Lawrence did not raise his hands.

"Come on, you young rotter!" grunted Kendal.

"You can't go on," said Clive quietly.

"Mind your own business, confound you! I'm coming on!"

And Kendal made a blind rush forward. He staggered before he reached Clive, and rolled helplessly on the grass. Keene ran forward and picked him up.

"Now, don't be an ass!" he whispered. "You can't even stand, let alone fight out another round. Don't be an ass!"

Kendal sat up in the grass, looking very sick. He blinked round in an uncertain way.

"I suppose I shall have to chuck it," he said. "I'm not what you'd call licked, only my head is a little dizzy, and I can't see very well, and—"

Fisher chuckled.

"Not exactly liked, only beaten," he agreed. "Not what you would call knocked out, but simply unable to come up to time."

And the Fourth Form cackled.

"Well, I'm done!" said Kendal—"hang you, I'm done!"

"And a nice sort of a giddy captain you are for a Fifth Form!" said Stott. "The honour of the Fifth was in your hands, and you let us down like this!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"You oughtn't to have done it!"

"Will you cheese it?" howled the unfortunate Kendal.

"Shut up, I say!"

"Yes, that's all very well; but what I say is—Ow!"

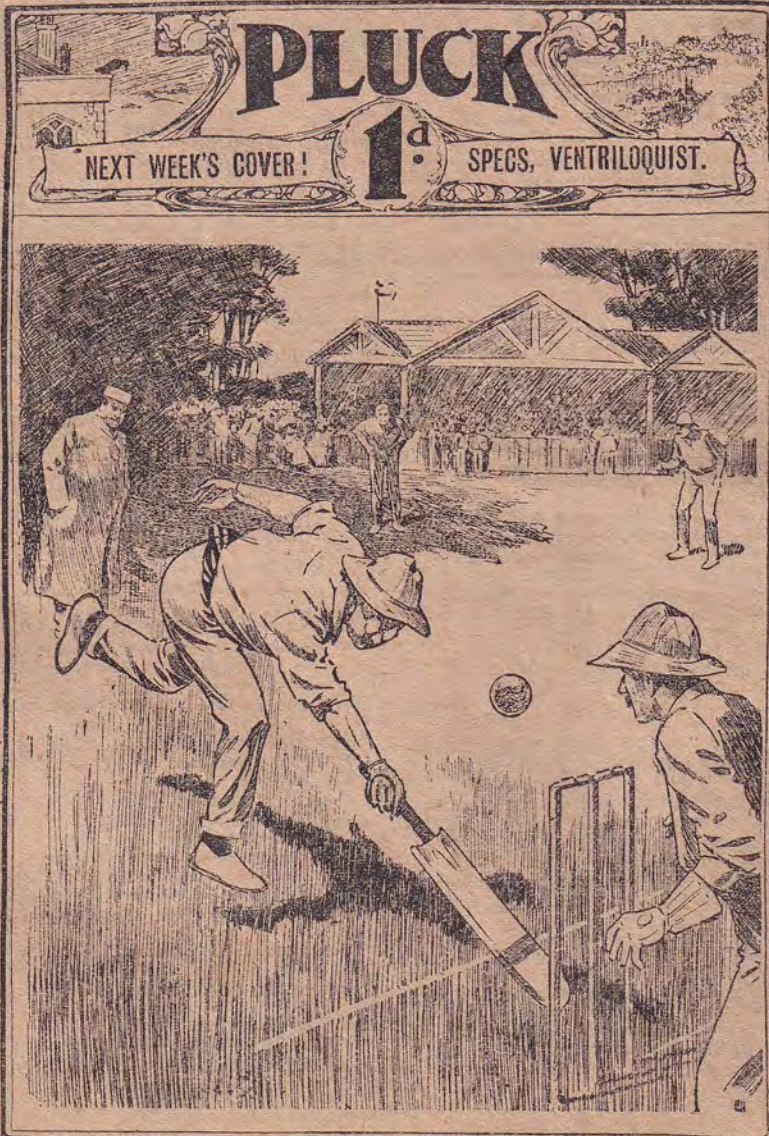
Kendal, his patience quite exhausted, reached out and gave the critic a drive in the ribs that laid him kicking in the grass.

"There, perhaps you'll shut up now!" Kendal remarked.

Stott did shut up. He looked around him in a rather bewildered way, but he had no more remarks to make on the subject of what his Form captain ought or ought not to have done.

Kendal had half risen; he finished rising with Keene's assistance. Then he looked at Clive Lawrence in a rather uncertain way. Clive caught his eye, and impulsively held out his hand.

(Another long instalment of this splendid School Tale next Saturday. Please order your copy of **PLUCK** in advance.)



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