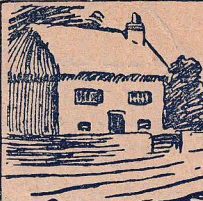


**Grand Ventriloquist Story.**



# PLUCK

SPECS & CO.

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BY H. CLARKE HOOK.

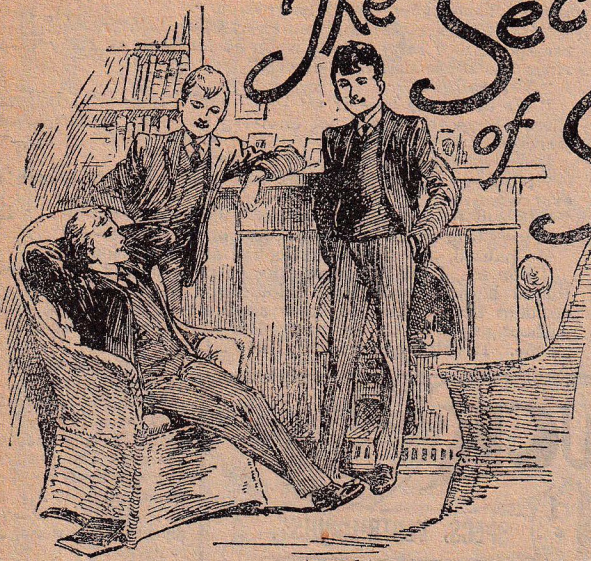


"GET OUT OF SIGHT, KIDS!" WHISPERED SPECS. "HERE'S SEARLE."

**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



*Climbing the Cliff.*

**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. Mapper. He overhears a plot between Mapper 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. After 'crowning' him across the Close, the fellows disperse, except Fisher and Locke. Clive remains standing thoughtfully at the gates. (Now go on with the story.)

"Aren't you coming in, Lawrence?" said Fisher. "I was thinking of having a run down to the shore for an hour," said Clive. "We could do that and get in before locking-up. Will you fellows come?" "Right you are!" And the three chums strolled away in the direction of the fishing village of Penwyn. They passed the Jolly Seaman on their way to the beach, and Fisher uttered a sharp exclamation.

The form of Franz Stossel, the German master of St. Winifred's, was just disappearing into the side door of the disreputable inn! "My word!" said Fisher. Clive Lawrence made no remark. In a few minutes more the juniors were on the wide pebble-ridge, with the waves of the Atlantic creaming at their feet. Clive Lawrence looked up at the towering cliffs of Black Point as he stood on the pebble ridge of Penwyn. A thousand feet above the sea rose the time-worn masses of rock, here and there patched with lichen and moss, but mostly swept bare by the winds of the Atlantic. Round the tops of the cliffs the seagulls could be seen circling. The path up the cliffs ran zigzag, and was lost among the huge rocks. Clive moved towards the cliffs as he looked upward. The three chums of St. Winifred's were near the spot where Clive and Locke had encountered the German master the morning after the adventure at the Jolly Seaman. "Thinking of going up?" asked Fisher. The new boy at St. Winifred's nodded.

"Yes. Why not?" Fisher laughed. "Only it's a long climb, and already tea-time." "Oh, bosh!" said Clive. "When I was here with Locke before, it was close on breakfast-time. I shall never get up the cliffs at this rate. I want to look at the caves that the smugglers used to use." "Oh, so long as you don't want to clamber to the top of the cliffs, it's all right!" said Fisher. "We can get to the caves with a bit of a climb."

"Come on, then!" Fisher led the way up the rugged path. He had explored the caves before in previous terms, and so had Locke; but it was the first time Clive Lawrence had set foot on the rocks of Penwyn cliffs. The path wound among great grey masses of rock, here and there so narrow and steep that the adventurous lads had to cling to the rough rock as they pressed on up the face of the cliff.

Fisher went ahead as the path grew narrower, and Clive Lawrence came next, Locke bringing up the rear. Once or twice Fisher glanced back to see whether the new boy hesitated, but Clive's face was quite calm and cool. He nodded cheerily to Fisher as he caught his eye.

"Much more of this?" he asked. "Not much," said Fisher, laughing. "I must say you've got a nerve on you, Lawrence. The first time I came up this path, I felt inclined to get on my hands and knees and crawl. It's narrower further on. Keep your right hand on the cliff, and get what hold you can. If you were to slip off the ledge, nothing could save you."

"Right-ho!" Fisher's words were correct. The juniors came out upon a section of the path where only a ledge of uneven rock, less than a foot wide, supported them. On the right rose the great grey cliff, bulging out above their heads. On the left was a sheer drop of a hundred feet to rocks and creamy waves.

Clive Lawrence drew a deep breath, but his nerve was never near to failing him. He pressed on after Fisher quietly and calmly. Fisher looked round again, holding on to a point of rock with his right hand.

"Feel all right?" he asked. "Yes; rather. But, I say, did the old Penwyn smugglers bring their contraband stuff up this path?" said Clive. "If they did, I'm blessed if I understand how they managed it!"

"There's been a landslide since their time," Fisher remarked. "A great lump went off this cliff into the sea about twenty years ago, I believe. They say there's some more going, too."

"Rather a joke if it happens while we're up here!" grinned Clive.

"Oh, there are signs by which the fishermen know when it's coming off, I believe!" said Locke.

"That's so," agreed Fisher. "I hear that this path was much wider in the old days. I wasn't here, so I can't answer for it. We're just on to the caves now. This ledge is known as Danger Ledge hereabouts; and it may interest you to know that you're the first chap I ever saw pass it standing up."

"Well, I've got you to guide me," Clive remarked. "I've guided other fellows," grinned Fisher, "but they always crawl along here first time, and they generally don't come up a second time. Safe now, though. Here are the caves."

"Isn't there another way to them—an easier way?" "Yes; but not to this part. And these caves are the most interesting. They are the ones used by the old smugglers; and, besides, the treasure of the wrecked Spanish galleon is hidden here."

"Seen it?" asked Clive, rather sarcastically. "No; I haven't seen it, Mr. Clever Lawrence. But that's what all the fisher folk say, and I give it to you for what it's worth."

"It's the treasure I want to look for," said Clive. "It would be a great thing for us if we could get hold of a cargo of pieces of eight."

"Folk round here have been thinking the same thing ever since the Spanish Armada came, and that's about three,

hundred years," said Fisher drily. "They haven't found it yet."

"I suppose it will be found some day?"

"Yes; if it exists," said Fisher, as he stared into the caves.

The juniors had passed the narrow ledge, and came out upon a plateau of almost level rock, from which the caves opened like yawning jaws, dark and gloomy.

"Don't you believe it exists, Fisher?" asked Clive.

"Well, I suppose it does," said Fisher, with a yawn. "I don't suppose it will ever be found, though."

"And if it is, it really belongs to Trelawney, as the descendant of the sea captain who drove the galleon ashore here," said Locke.

"I wouldn't mind handing it over to a chap like Trelawney," Clive remarked. "It's the finding it that I should enjoy. I don't want the gold."

"Well, the Government would take a big whack, and Trelawney would stand us a good feed out of the rest!" grinned Fisher. "But it won't be found in a hurry. Shall we go into the caves?"

"Yes; rather!"

"Can't go far," said Locke. "We ought to have brought lanterns if we were going to explore the caves. Can't go far without a light."

Clive Lawrence looked disappointed. He dearly wanted

to explore the ancient caves, so rich in romance to his boyish mind. But Locke was certainly right. There was no exploring the deep recesses of the hollow cliffs without a light. The sun was deep down in the west, turning the broad Atlantic to a sea of gold, and the oblique rays flared full into the mouths of the caves. But the red light of the sunset did not penetrate far. Beyond was twilight, and beyond that dense darkness.

The juniors stood looking doubtfully into the caves. A sudden click of a falling stone broke the silence.

Fisher started.

"That's somebody coming up the path."

"Let's see who it is," said Locke.

"If it's some merchant coming to look into the caves, he may have a lantern with him."

The three juniors turned back towards the path. They looked round the great rocks, and then exchanged glances of chagrin and surprise.

A man of muscular form was advancing up the rocky path on the face of the cliff.

It was Franz Stossel, the German master. He did not see them, and the juniors drew back among the rocks in a second. Instinctively they knew that it would mean trouble if Franz Stossel saw them there.

### The Explorer!

Franz Stossel came slowly up the rugged path, quite unconscious of the fact that the three juniors from St. Winifred's were watching him from above.

The Fourth-Formers were silent, and they wore somewhat worried looks. In a few minutes the German master would be on the rocky plateau, and he could not fail to find them there. Then there would be trouble.

"Can't let him see us," muttered Clive Lawrence. "You remember how ratty he was when he found us on the pebble ridge the other morning, Looke."

"Yes, rather!"

"We can come here if we like," said Fisher. "I believe there's some rule about not climbing the cliffs in dangerous places—"

Locke grinned.

"I believe there is," he replied, "and I believe nobody's ever taken any notice of it, either."

"It will be enough for Stossel," said Clive quietly. "It will give him an excuse if he wants one. Besides—"

He paused, and the others looked at him curiously.

"You see, I think I know why he is here, and he guesses that I know," said Clive, colouring a little. "It was by accident that I came to know anything of his secrets, and without any wish on my part. But that is why he is down on me. It will mean trouble if he finds us."

"Suppose we get into the caves?"

"That's what I was thinking of," said Clive, glancing towards the yawning openings in the great cliff. "It's a bit risky in there without a lantern, I suppose?"

"Not if you're careful."

"I think we ought to risk it. Stossel would order us straight back to the school, and we should have to go, and we might have a hundred lines each in addition."

"Come on, then. Let's get out of sight."

There was evidently nothing better to be done. The three juniors hurried across the rough rocks and entered the largest of the caves.

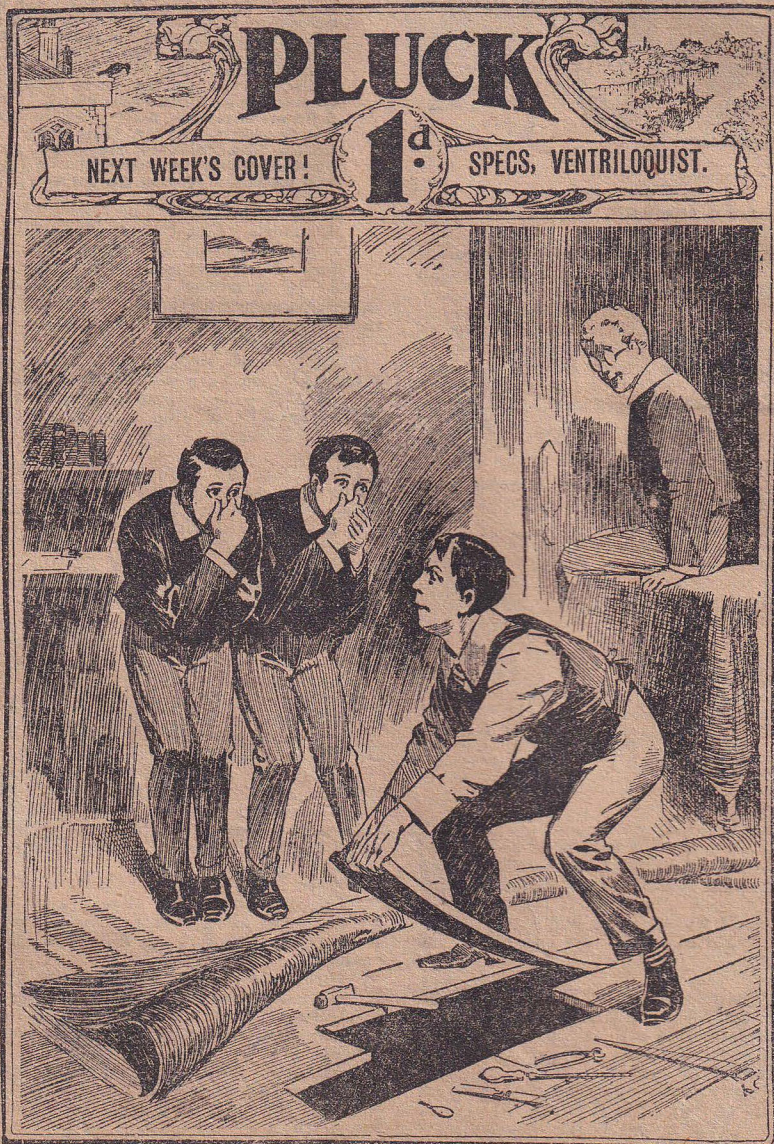
Within, for some distance, the level rays of the sun, setting far out across the Atlantic, shed a ruddy light.

Beyond that the juniors plunged into a dim twilight, and there they stopped.

It was a warm summer's day, but within the shadowy cave the atmosphere was very cool, and the rocks cold and damp to the touch.

"There is plenty of cover here," Clive Lawrence remarked, glancing round the caves, the rugged roof of which was supported by masses of shapeless rock. "A hundred men could hide in this place."

(To be continued in next Saturday's PLUCK.)



Next Saturday's two long, complete stories: "Spees' Mistake," a splendid tale of Spees, The Twins, & Co.; and "The Baldwin Square Mystery," the story of a boy detective. Please order your copy of "Pluck" in advance. Price One Penny.