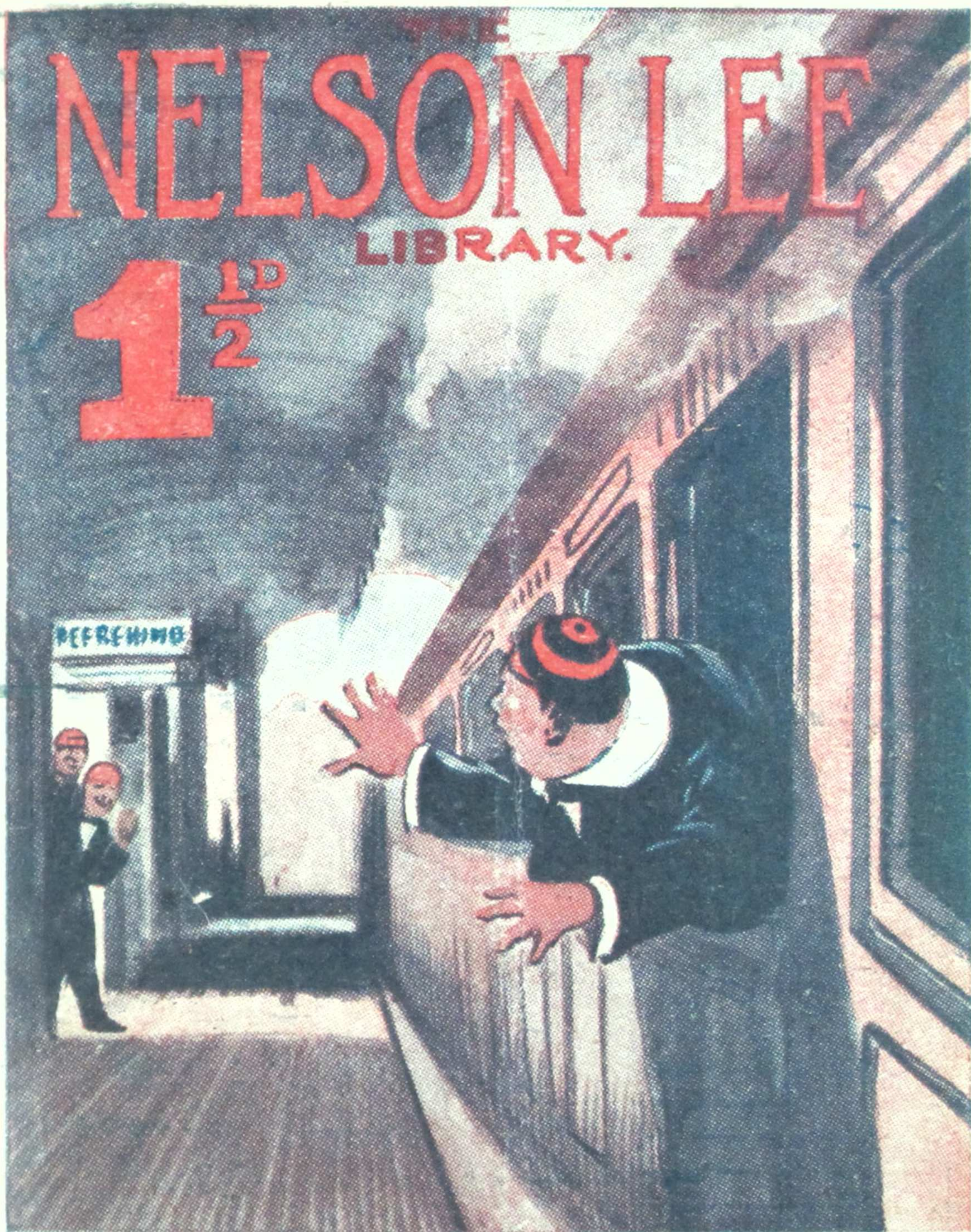


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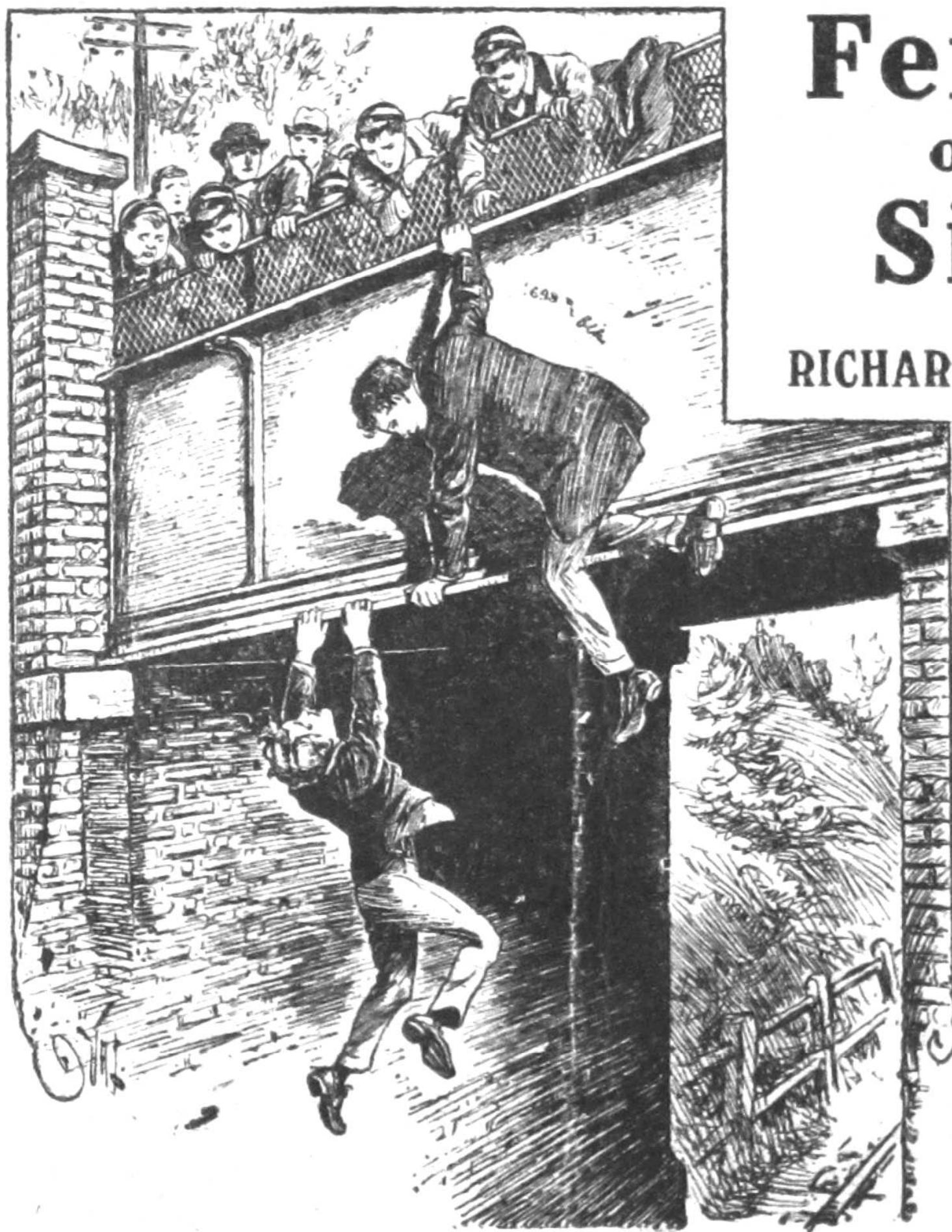


"Try one of these buns!" cried Church, as Fatty vainly struggled to free himself.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SINGLETON'S LATEST.

"**A** SPANKER!" said Handforth approvingly.
 "Rather!" agreed Church.
 "The best I've seen for months!"

"It beats everything!" remarked McClure. "Just look at all that nickel work, and notice the ripping seats! Best car I've ever seen!"

Handforth and Co., of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, stood on the steps of the Ancient House. Their gaze was centred upon a brand-new motor-car, of the sporting two-seater type.

The car was standing alone, unattended. The three juniors, emerging from the Ancient House after morning lessons, were the first to see the automobile, and they were quite interested.

"It's a lovely thing," said Church.
 "Seems a pity to use it."

The car was certainly a spanker, as Handforth had described it. The sporting body was elegantly designed, and was of a soft red colour. The wheels were provided with discs, and everything about the car was the last word in neatness and comfort.

"Wonder who it belongs to?" said Handforth, as he went closer. "It's a new thing, anyhow. One of Mr. Lee's friends, I suppose."

"Perhaps the car belongs to Mr. Lee himself," suggested Church.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "It's never been here before——"

"Hallo, hallo!" I exclaimed, emerging from the Ancient House. "What have we here, my bonny boys? Something like a car—eh? My hat! I'd like to be behind the wheel of that beauty!"

"Your judgment ain't far wrong, dear old boy; it ain't really!" observed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, and inspecting the car with great interest. "Begad! What a really toppin' article!"

"Does it belong to Mr. Lee?" asked Church.

I shook my head.

"The guv'nor?" I said. "I don't know. He hasn't said anything to me about getting a new car. I expect it belongs to somebody who has merely called in. For a two-seater, the car is IT. Must have cost close upon a thousand."

Other juniors came out, and very soon a little crowd surrounded the car. The Hon. Douglas Singleton, screwing his monocle into his eye, gazed at the two-seater with his usual air of languid boredom.

"Not so dusty!" he remarked critically. "The seating accommodation might be a little more comfortable, but, apart from that, the car's satisfactory."

I grinned.

"You can't expect a two-seater to be as luxurious as a limousine," I remarked.
 "The seating accommodation of this

little fellow is magnificent—best I've ever seen!"

"Really!" said the Hon. Douglas, yawning. "That's rather interesting. You've made me feel more satisfied, egad!"

Singleton was the owner of a huge limousine car, which he kept in a garage in the village, to say nothing of a chauffeur at the George Inn. The new fellow in the Remove had plenty of money—more than he knew what to do with—and his tastes were somewhat expensive.

Since his arrival at St. Frank's he had revealed himself as an amazingly reckless spendthrift. He did not seem to realise the value of money at all, but disposed of it right and left, in the most lavish manner.

"I don't know whose car it is," I remarked, "but I should just love to have a spin in her! I simply adore these racy two-seaters, and this one is about the best I've struck. I wonder who owns it?"

"Yes, it would be awfully interesting to know that," said Singleton, smiling.

He proceeded to open the door and to climb in.

"Better go easy!" advised Handforth. "The owner might come out, and you wouldn't like to be pitched out of the car on your neck, would you?"

"Such a thing would be decidedly unpleasant," said Singleton. "But I'll risk it. I don't think the owner will pitch me out. Somehow or other, I've got an idea that I shall be quite safe."

He entered the car, sprawling approvingly on the soft cushions, and then fingered the various levers. He touched a switch, and all the electric lamps of the car sprang alight.

"That's rather neat, you know," he remarked.

"Leave the car alone, you cheeky ass!" said De Valerie. "The owner will half skin you if he catches you there!"

"I don't think so," said the Hon. Douglas mildly. "In fact, I'm sure the owner would do nothing of the sort. He's quite a good-tempered fellow."

"What do you know about him?" asked Church.

"Oh, a lot!"

"Do you know who he is?" demanded Handforth.

"Certainly!"

"Well, who is he, you ass?"

"You're gazing at him at the present moment," smiled the Hon. Douglas.

"Eh? What the dickens——"

"Do you mean to say this car is yours, Singleton?" I asked, staring.

He nodded.

"That's right," he agreed languidly.

"Yours!" roared Handforth.

"Exactly!"

The fellows crowded round with much greater freedom.

"I hadn't the faintest idea it was your car, Singleton," I said. "What about your limousine? I suppose you've sold it?"

"Egad, no!" replied the Hon. Douglas. "I took a fancy to this little car, though, and sent a cheque at once. A mechanic fellow brought it down from London this morning. It only cost eight-fifty."

"Eight hundred and fifty quid!" gasped Church.

"Yes."

"You seem to have a large amount of ready cash," said De Valerie. "I suppose you know you won't be able to keep the car here, at St. Frank's?"

"Why not?" asked Singleton. "Some of the seniors keep motor-bikes. Why shouldn't I have a car? If the Head's unreasonable, though, I shall shove her in the garage with my other car. I think you mentioned you'd like a spin, Nipper?"

"Yes," I replied; "but I didn't know——"

"That's all right!" said Singleton. "Jump in, and we'll just see how she runs. There's nothing like having an expert on the job, and I understand that you know all there is to be known about light cars."

"Well, I know a bit," I admitted. "Thanks, Singleton! I'll come with the greatest of pleasure! Shall I drive, or will you?"

"Oh, you'd better take the bally wheel!" said the Hon. Douglas.

I was just about to open the door when Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell appeared. The three Nuts of the Ancient House regarded Singleton and the car with much curiosity. They had been very pally with Singleton since his arrival, and Singleton had made no effort to avoid them; he had been only too willing to walk in the footsteps of the rascally trio of the Remove.

For this reason I had not been

particularly friendly with the new fellow. I could not bring myself to be intimate with a boy who was more than intimate with Fullwood and Co. But, somehow, Singleton did not strike me as being a rascal by nature. He had the makings of a decent fellow in him.

"Hallo! That your new car, Duggy?" asked Fullwood genially.

"Yes, old man."

"Good!" said Fullwood. "I'll come for a spin with you——"

"Sorry!" interrupted Singleton. "Nipper's on the job."

Fullwood turned.

"Oh, if you prefer to take Nipper, instead of me, you're welcome to it!" he said sourly. "But I thought I was your pal?"

"Did you?" drawled Singleton. "That's rather entertaining! I wasn't aware that I had any pals at St. Frank's. I've made plenty of acquaintances, but there's nobody I can exactly call a pal—not even you."

"That's one good thing!" said Handforth bluntly. "I'm glad to hear you say that, Singleton! If you accepted that awful cad as a friend, I'd cut you dead!"

"Then it seems that I've had an amazingly narrow escape," said Singleton smoothly. "Well, go ahead, Nipper. You know more about the bally thing than I do. Start her up, and let's be going! There's plenty of time for a run round before dinner."

I manipulated the electric starter, and the engine purred almost silently. Then, accelerating, I slipped the clutch in, and we glided across the Triangle towards the big gateway, followed by the envious gaze of all the other juniors.

"Lucky, beggar!" said Pitt. "He seems to be in a position to have exactly what he wants, and he spends as much money in a week as any ordinary chap spends in a year. And he wastes the majority of it!"

"That's just what he is—a waster!" said Jack Grey. "And, at his present rate of progress, he'll soon get through every penny of the money his father left him. Personally, I think it's rather a sad sight."

"Well, it's certainly not very elevating," agreed Pitt. "If only the chap would drop Fullwood and those other cads, there would be some chance for

him. But as long as he leads the gay life, he'll get worse and worse."

Meanwhile, Singleton and I slid smoothly out of the gateway on to the hard road. There had been a good deal of cold weather lately, and for the last three or four days the country had been in the grip of King Frost. The roads were frozen hard, and the River Stowe was in a splendid condition for skating purposes. On the previous afternoon hundreds of fellows had enjoyed themselves on the ice.

"Which way shall we go?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter to me—go which way you like," murmured Singleton. "We only just want to see how the car goes, you know. I didn't see it until this morning, and I want to see if I've been swindled."

I grinned.

"I thought you didn't care about little details like that," I remarked. "But you needn't worry; you haven't been swindled. The car is priced rather high at eight-fifty, but all cars are dear nowadays."

We went through the village, and then took the Bannington road, my intention being to return by the narrow lanes which led through Edgemore, and then by the rear of Belton Wood to the school.

Singleton chuckled once or twice as we glided along.

"Something seems to be amusing you," I remarked.

"That's quite right, old man," said the Hon. Douglas. "I've just been wondering what the man will think—the man who brought the car down, I mean. He was indoors, waiting for me, I believe. Still, the car's paid for, so it doesn't matter much. Egad! She can buzz!"

We were shooting along the straight road towards Bannington at a fine pace. Opening up the throttle, I tested her thoroughly, and soon we were roaring along at a speed which was almost dangerous. I only kept it up for a minute.

"Don't slow down," said Singleton. "I'm rather fond of speed."

"You'd get more speed than you liked if we kept on at that rate round this corner," I said grimly. "We turn off in a minute, and go back to St. Frank's by the other route."

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas. "I'll take the wheel."

I looked at him doubtfully.

"Can you drive?" I asked.

"My dear chap, I don't profess to be an expert like yourself, but I can certainly drive!" said Singleton. "If I happen to pitch you into a ditch, you must be kind-hearted and forgive me; but I don't think we shall meet with any event of that sort."

It only took us a moment to change places, and then I saw that the Hon. Douglas was at least acquainted with the handling of a motor-car. He made rather a mess of changing speed, but this was probably due to his inexperience of the car. Very soon we were gliding along sedately.

"How do you like her?" I asked.

"Oh, ripping!" said Singleton. "She runs like a dream, egad!"

He opened-up the throttle as he spoke, and we picked up speed rapidly, until, in fact, we were roaring along in a manner which made me feel somewhat uncertain as to our ultimate fate.

"She's running more like a nightmare now," I remarked.

The Hon. Douglas chuckled.

"You trust to me, old man," he said. "You're perfectly safe with me at the wheel. I'm not at all anxious to be smashed up, so I'm taking no bally chances. I believe in caution."

"So I notice," I said, clinging to my seat.

Singleton's ideas of caution were not mine. He sent the racing-car shooting along at a speed which did not tend to increase my comfort. And we had just topped a hill, and were dropping down the long grade towards Edgemore.

"Better go easy!" I said. "There's a nasty turn at the bottom. Close the throttle, you ass! We're doing about fifty now!"

Singleton grinned.

"She's a spanking car!" he declared.

He shut off, and we continued our career down the hill, carried by the car's own momentum. Singleton did not attempt to apply the brakes. And the foolishness of his method of driving was evident a moment later.

"We shall take the bend easily," he said, turning his head. "It's not very sharp, and we can—"

"Look out, you ass?" I roared.

"Eh? What the— Goodness gracious!" gasped the Hon. Douglas.

Just coming round the corner, now only a hundred yards ahead, was a child on a bicycle! A little girl it was, and

apparently she was unaware of our approach. The car was quiet, and Singleton had sounded no warning.

Zzzzrrrr! Zzzzrrrr!

He jerked the electric-hooter, and the thing emitted two terrifying bursts of sound. It was an unwise action on Singleton's part. The little girl looked up, startled, swayed over the road, and skidded.

The next second she lay right in the centre of the narrow lane, with her bicycle near by.

"Oh!" I gasped, horrified.

I could say no more. It was utterly impossible for Singleton to pull up; there was not sufficient time. It was equally impossible to steer round the fallen child. The hedges were close upon the road.

A mishap was inevitable, and I felt rather sick. I was convinced that we should run the child down, and probably kill her on the spot. Either that, or Singleton would overturn the car.

I thought of these things within a second, for there was no further time. Then the accident happened.

My first impulse had been to seize the steering-wheel, and elbow Singleton out of the way. But one glance at the dandy of the Remove made me alter my decision. His face was grimly set, his eyes were calm and determined, and there was not a trace of panic in his expression.

He had already applied the brakes, and we had reached the corner before they took full effect. Then, as I expected to see us run over the child, the Hon. Douglas showed what he was made of.

Calmly and deliberately, he swung the car round, and charged full tilt into the low hedge. We simply tore our way through, landed on the grass beyond, and continued our headlong rush.

Singleton had saved the child, and he probably believed that everything was now all right. But a new danger revealed itself. There was no meadow on this side of the hedge, as he had imagined.

Just a short strip of grass—and the River Stowe!

The whole thing happened within the space of five or ten seconds, remember, and it was all over before we could draw a couple of breaths. The car shot across the strip of grass, swung round near the river-bank, and then skidded, with locked wheels, right on to the ice.

To my astonishment, the ice held firm, and we slid right out into the middle of the river, like a gigantic toboggan. So far the car was absolutely unharmed. And there, in mid-stream, we came to a halt. The ice was cracking and groaning ominously beneath us.

The Hon. Douglas grinned.

"Rather neat—what?" he drawled calmly.

"You—you bounder!" I ejaculated.

"I thought we were going——"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The ice changed its tone abruptly. The cracks became as loud as pistol shots, and long splits appeared in the ice, stretching in every direction. Just one second passed, and then the worst happened.

Crash!

The ice considered the burden too great for it to bear, and the two-seater, with Singleton and myself sitting in it, plunged down into the cold water. We simply sank through the jagged opening like a stone.

There was a terrific splash, a crackling roar and a hiss of steam, and we were under water fighting for our lives.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER FOR THE HON. DOUGLAS.

SINGLETON managed to get free from the steering-wheel immediately, and he rose to the surface. Up—up he went, until his head emerged into the frosty air. He gasped and spluttered noisily.

That portion of the river was deep; in the summer time it was regarded as one of the chief danger spots. The current was treacherous even in July. Now, with the river unusually high, the current was swift and dangerous. It flowed along under the ice with grim speed.

"Egad!" gasped Singleton.

He grasped the rough edge of the broken ice, and shook his head vigorously. And when he opened his eyes he gazed about him with sudden dismay and concern. I was nowhere to be seen.

"Nipper!" shouted Singleton.

"Where are you, old man?"

But I was far from the surface.

The truth was, my overcoat had become jammed in the door of the car, and after the plunge into the river, I was held down. My struggling only made matters worse at the start, for I was swung round, and my head caught the corner of the wind-screen with a terrific crack.

For a moment I was half stunned, many feet below the surface of the water. I turned upside-down, forced by the current, and I clutched desperately at the coachwork of the car.

Once released, I should probably drift under the ice, and then there would be no escape for me. I should be imprisoned beneath the ice, as many unfortunate people have been imprisoned when skating accidents have occurred. The finest swimmer in the world is helpless under such conditions.

And the Hon. Douglas, clinging to the ice on the surface, looked round in vain for me.

"Good heavens!" he muttered frantically. "The poor chap is still down there—caught in the bally car, I expect! And it was all my fault, too! If he's killed, I shall——"

But Singleton refused to consider the possibility.

He made up his mind in less than a second. Taking a deep breath, he turned and dived deep down into the chill water.

He could see nothing, but he groped about, and his hand—more by chance than anything else—touched my shoulder. Singleton clutched at my coat with desperate strength, and held firm.

His action was beyond my praise. It was a noble, heroic effort, for he must have known that the undercurrent was treacherous. Failure would mean my death and his. Yet he had dived for me.

He gave one mighty pull, and my coat became freed. We both rose to the surface, my head still dizzy with pain. The situation was not improved when I struck the ice with a tremendous bang. Singleton, by good fortune, emerged into the open. He heaved me round, and I rose into the glorious air. I took several mighty gulps, and clung to the ice desperately.

"Thanks, Singleton!" I panted faintly. "You're a brick!"

"Rot!" said the Hon. Douglas.

"We've got to get out of this yet, you

know. I'm hanged if I can see how we can manage it! This rotten ice keeps breaking! We shall have to buck up, too; my fingers are numbed!"

He finished up with a gasp, for he had succeeded in dragging himself on to the ice. I followed suit, expecting to be cast into the water again. But the ice was thick, and it held firm.

At last, chilled to the bone, we reached the bank, and stood there. I was feeling altogether better, and I regarded Singleton with gratitude. He had undoubtedly saved my life.

The fellow was revealed to me in a new light. A spendthrift, a waster, a gay searcher after pleasure, he was nevertheless made of the real stuff. He was grit right through.

"Singleton," I said huskily, "I don't know how to thank you——"

"Egad! Don't waste time on that rubbish!" interrupted the Hon. Douglas. "We've got to get a move on. Unless we scoot to the school at double speed, we shall both spend a month in the 'sanny,' ending up by spending eternity in a nasty-shaped wooden box, six feet under the ground! Buck up!"

He was right.

There was no sense in standing there, getting chilled. Action was what was required. If we could only keep our circulation going, and our blood warm, we should come to no harm. A 'ducking,' even in a frozen river, is quite harmless if a fellow can manage to keep on the move.

We could discuss things afterwards. The most necessary task was to get to the school and change into dry things.

We ran every inch of the way, and by the time we had rounded Bellton Wood we were glowing with warmth and were feeling none the worse for our adventure. Exercise is a wonderful thing.

Of the child we had seen no sign. She had probably picked herself up after the car had gone through the hedge, and had remounted her cycle, riding off home in a considerable state of alarm. At all events, she was unhurt.

"Better get in by the back way, Singleton," I panted, as we drew near the school. "We don't want to be stopped by a crowd of fellows."

"You're right!" said Singleton, nodding.

We climbed over the wall, found our-

selves in the rear courtyard, and entered the Ancient House by means of the servants' back door. Then we slipped up the rear stairs, and got safely into the Remove dormitory.

"Good!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "Now, my son, off with those things, and quick about it! Grab some of these blankets and wrap 'em round you. We can scout round for clean linen and underclothes afterwards. The main thing is to get rid of these soaking duds."

We undressed in double-quick time, and when we had rolled ourselves in blankets we were feeling splendid, warm and invigorated, and quite serene. We sat on one of the beds.

"No need to tell the masters anything," I said. "At least, not about that ducking. We don't want to be carted off into the sanatorium, with Dr. Brett buzzing round us. With clean things on, we shall be O.K."

"Rather!" said Singleton, nodding.

"But, of course, we shall have to tell Mr. Lee about the car," I went on. "What a rotten piece of luck, although I must say it was your own fault, Singleton. The way you raced down that hill was absolutely dotty."

"I suppose it was," agreed the Hon. Douglas. "Still, we didn't hurt that kid, and we haven't come to any harm ourselves. So there's nothing to worry about."

"I haven't thanked you yet——"

"You needn't," interrupted the other.

"I did nothing——"

"You saved my life," I said quietly.

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you——"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Singleton. "I chucked you into the river, nearly drowned you, and just because I happened to yank you out, you say I saved your life. My dear chap, please be sensible!"

"You acted with wonderful courage," I said. "You proved your pluck, Singleton, and I think you're true blue! If you prefer me to say nothing further, I'll keep quiet, of course."

"Good!" said Singleton promptly.

"Now, not another word!"

"I can jaw about the car!" I exclaimed. "What about it?"

"Eh? What about what?"

"Your new sporting two-seater."

"It's on the bed of the bally river," said Singleton, smiling.

"I know that, you ass!" I said.
 "What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing."

"But you can't leave the car there!"

"It'll be no good, even if it's brought up," said Singleton. "I heard the engine crack to bits as we went down. And the river's frightfully deep just there. I don't quite see how the car can be raised."

"It'll be a bit of a job, I dare say," I said thoughtfully. "But you can't possibly let the car stay there. It's a brand new one, and it cost nearly a thousand pounds! My dear chap, it was awfully rough luck——"

"Oh, ease up!" protested Singleton. "I'm not worrying about the car, or what it cost. As it happens, the firm have several models on hand, and I can easily post off a cheque to-night."

"A cheque!" I repeated. "What for?"

"A new car, of course," said Singleton calmly.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "You speak of a thousand pounds as though it were a thousand farthings! Do you realise it's cost you nearly a thousand to have one short ride in a car?"

"That's nothing," said Singleton. "I've got plenty of cash. It doesn't worry me in the slightest degree. As for the car, it can stay where it is, for all I care. It's not worth the bore of bothering about it."

I looked at him squarely.

"The fact is, Singleton, you don't seem to realise the value of money," I said. "My dear chap, you may have a big supply of cash—that fact is self-evident—but it won't last for ever at the rate you're spending it. Take my advice, and learn to go easy——"

"A lecture—what?" drawled the Hon. Douglas. "Pray go ahead!"

I flushed.

"I'm sorry!" I said quietly. "I didn't mean to lecture you, Singleton."

I said no more, but commenced to dress. The Hon. Douglas followed my example, and shortly afterwards we were looking our usual selves, and were feeling perfectly fit.

Just as we were about to leave the dormitory, Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West appeared. They entered the room, and regarded us with open astonishment.

"What the dickens are you chaps doing here?" asked Watson. "We thought you were out on that new car!"

"We were," said Singleton, "but we came back."

"I didn't see you!" exclaimed Tommy. "How did you manage it? I've been in the Triangle all the time——"

"We came in the back way, discreetly," said Singleton. "You see, it was necessary, because we were rather damp. The car, I regret to say, has passed from this world for ever, and will be seen no more."

Watson turned to me.

"What the merry thunder is the chap talking about?" he demanded.

"He's quite right, in a way," I said. "The two-seater is at present on the bed of the River Stowe, and it's doubtful if it will ever be recovered. If it hadn't been for Singleton's pluck, I should be on the bed of the River Stowe, too!"

"Egad!" said the Hon. Douglas. "What utter rot!"

"Dear fellows, you are puzzlin' me in the most shockin' manner, you are, really!" put in Sir Montie. "You are not serious, surely, when you say that that spankin' car is at the bottom of the river?"

"We had a bit of an accident," explained Singleton. "The bally car got restive, and refused to obey the helm. Quite a trifling incident, really. The loss of the car doesn't matter a jot!"

I explained the position, and my chums were amazed.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Watson. "That lovely car lost! And it was only delivered, brand-new, this morning! It's—it's enough to make a fellow sit down and blub! And Singleton doesn't seem to mind a bit!"

"There is no sense in crying over spilt milk," said the Hon. Douglas. "Crying won't bring the car to the surface, will it? Let the thing rest, for goodness' sake! I'm not worrying, so why should you?"

He strolled out of the dormitory, leaving us staring after him.

"He's hopeless, dear old boys!" declared Montie. "He's a spendthrift by nature, begad! He can't help himself. As long as he's got money, he'll get rid of it. And, unfortunately, he seems to possess an unlimited supply."

The whole affair was just an indication of Singleton's reckless nature. It was fortunate that a tragedy had not resulted.

The Hon. Douglas lounged downstairs, and went along the Remove passage to Study N. He was the sole possessor of

this study, having bought the original owners out of it. Singleton was somewhat exclusive.

Study N was a little palace. The furniture, the carpet, the rugs, the curtains—everything in the room, in fact, was of the very best. And the study was a place of ease and comfort.

When Singleton entered, he found Teddy Long, of the Remove, in possession. Long was standing by the table, busy with something, and he did not notice the other junior's almost silent entry.

Long was the worst little sneak in the Remove; he was a sponger and a cad, and most of the Removites barred him. He was not in Study N as an honoured visitor, but as a paid servant.

The Hon. Douglas had "engaged" Long as his fag, and Master Teddy was content with the arrangement. He was paid well, he received numerous tips in addition, and he had very little to do. He also had frequent opportunities of helping himself to good things from Singleton's cupboard.

At the moment of Singleton's entry, Long seemed to be giving all his attention to a letter. He had inserted a penholder under the flap, and was attempting to force the flap open without tearing the paper.

"Afraid it's stuck up too well for that dodge," remarked the Hon. Douglas calmly.

Teddy Long dropped the letter and the penholder, and swung round. His face was red, and he looked completely confused.

"I—I—I—" he stuttered. "Oh, it's you, Singleton! I—I was just putting your table straight, you know!"

Singleton nodded.

"So I observed," he exclaimed, "but I shall be interested to know what you were doing with that letter? It's yours, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course—that is to say, no," panted Long. "I—I was just looking at it, Singleton. I wasn't trying to open it, you know. That penholder wants a new nib——"

"Yes, I know all about it," interrupted Singleton. "You needn't try to make excuses, you miserable little spy. I pay you to keep this study in order—not to pry into my affairs. You can cut off now."

Teddy Long was only too willing to

clear out, and he scuttled from the study with all speed. The Hon. Douglas picked up the letter, glanced at it, and then sank down into one of the luxurious chairs.

Before opening the letter he selected a cigarette from his gold case, lit it, and puffed away with seeming enjoyment.

"Now we'll have a look at this," he murmured.

He knew that the letter was not from London, for it bore the Bannington postmark. And there was only one man in Bannington who would be likely to write to the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

That man was Mr. Philip Smith Gore, temporarily residing at the Grapes Hotel. And Singleton's surmise was correct. The letter ran:

"My dear Singleton,—Perhaps you will have an opportunity of running over here on Wednesday afternoon? I believe you have a half-holiday on that day, and I should be quite pleased to meet you again.

"If you can come, try to arrive before 2.30. I shall be with Mr. Carslake, in Room No. 123.—With kind regards, yours most sincerely,

"PHILIP SMITH GORE."

"Wednesday afternoon," mused Singleton, tossing the letter aside; "that's to-morrow. I dare say it can be managed. I expect the excellent Mr. Gore is rather keen on another little flutter at poker. Well, I'm game—Hullo! What's this?"

He had suddenly noticed that the letter contained a postscript, and he glanced at it with interest:

"There is no reason why you should not bring your three young friends, if you wish.—P. S. G."

"That means Fullwood and Co.," murmured the Hon. Douglas. "I shall have to—Egad! Talk of the devil and he appears!"

"Eh?" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

He had just entered Study N, and behind him were Gulliver and Bell. The three Nuts of the Ancient House were looking rather concerned.

"I was just talking to myself about you, old man," said Singleton languidly. "I've got a letter here from Mr. Gore. He wants us to run over to-morrow afternoon—to the Grapes, you know."

"We'll talk about that later," said Fullwood, shutting the door. "What's this I hear about your car being wrecked?"

Singleton yawned.

"My dear chap, I'm not supposed to know all you hear!" he remarked. "If somebody told you that the car is wrecked, that somebody is a liar!"

"I thought so!" said Fullwood. "The silly ass said——"

"But the car's resting on the bottom of the River Stowe—so I suppose it comes to the same thing," went on Singleton.

"A bally nuisance, of course, but I'm not worrying."

Fullwood and Co. stared.

"Tryin' to pull my leg?" asked Fullwood. "You can't make me believe that your car is in the river. You know as well as I do that the river is covered with ice."

"Must I explain it all again?" inquired Singleton plaintively. "The car ran down the hill, ran into the river, smashed through the ice, soaked Nipper and I—and there you are. The car's finished with. And you'll oblige me by finishing with the subject. I'm fed-up with it!"

"But—but, you silly ass!" roared Bell. "That was a brand new car!"

"It cost nearly a thousand quid!" added Gulliver.

"This is what comes of letting Nipper drive it!" sneered Fullwood. "If I were you I'd make a fuss about it, an' force Nelson Lee to pay——"

"I wish you'd talk sense!" interrupted Singleton, rising to his feet. "You will allow me to observe that this study is mine, and unless you chaps can do as I want, you'll have to clear out. I was driving the car when it went through the ice—so you needn't try to be funny. Is it settled that we're going to Bannington to-morrow? That's the question."

"But, about this car——"

"Hang the car!" said Singleton warmly.

"It's no good talkin' to the ass!" interrupted Bell. "I don't believe he'd care if he lost ten thousand quid! As for going over to Bannington to-morrow, there's no reason why we shouldn't."

"None at all," said Fullwood. "I'm always game for a bit of sport."

And, the matter being thus settled, the Nuts proceeded to discuss the possibilities. They were quite certain that

the half-holiday was to be spent in gambling, and Fullwood was equally certain that the Hon. Douglas would lose a large sum of money.

Meanwhile I had been making arrangements for the half-holiday on my own account. The St. Frank's Junior Eleven was due to run over to Helmford—about twenty miles distant—in order to play the Helmford College Junior Eleven.

It was likely to be a hotly contested game, for the Helmford crowd was a pretty strong one.

However, the Remove was confident, and, personally, I had an idea that we should beat the Helmford champions on their own ground. If we could pull it off, the victory would be a big one.

At any rate, as Sir Montie remarked, we were hopin' for the best.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING LIKE A BARGAIN.

"HERE we are!" The Hon. Douglas Singleton made that remark as he descended from his magnificent limousine outside the main entrance of the Grapes Hotel, Bannington. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were with him, and all four were dressed in their most dandified attire.

It was just 2.30, so the Nuts of the Ancient House were in time for the appointment with Mr. Philip Smith Gore. The boys had no hesitation in driving straight up to the Grapes Hotel.

It was forbidden for juniors—and for seniors, for that matter—to enter any public-house. But the Grapes was one of the best hotels in Bannington, and there could be no possible objection to the boys entering. It was by no means an ordinary public-house.

"You'd better take the car round to the back, Jenkins, and wait until you get further orders," said Singleton, turning to the chauffeur. "I don't suppose I shall want you until the evening, but there's no telling."

"Right, sir," said the chauffeur. "I'll be on hand."

The juniors entered the hotel, and did not trouble to make any inquiries of the clerk. They marched straight up the big staircase, and made their way to

Room No. 123, which, as they knew, was occupied by Mr. Carslake.

This gentleman was not exactly an ideal type of humanity. He generally made a living by preying upon others. In short, he was a professional card-sharper, and his confederate in the little business was named Mr. Crosse.

Fullwood and Co. had become acquainted with the pair a week or two earlier, but they had only known Mr. Gore a few days. The latter individual had really introduced himself to the boys on the Bannington road—making the excuse that his car had run out of petrol.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Gore appeared to be a far bigger scoundrel than either Carslake or Crosse. At all events, he had succeeded in rooking the Hon. Douglas for seventy-five pounds at their first meeting.

Furthermore, Mr. Gore had had several quiet business talks with Carslake and Crosse; and the trio were not the kind of gentlemen to have any truck with schoolboys unless their own pockets were likely to benefit to a considerable extent.

The Hon. Douglas tapped on the door of Room 123.

It was opened almost at once, and the juniors saw a tall, slim man with very dark hair and a black, waxed moustache. A cigar was between his teeth, and he removed it as he smilingly drew aside.

"Come in, boys—come in!" he said genially. "I had an idea that you would turn up. I am quite delighted to see you."

"Another little flutter, eh, Mr. Gore?" said Singleton. "If so, I am quite prepared—I have come with a good supply of cash."

"That's a bad sign," smiled Gore. "You are evidently expecting to lose."

"I'm not expecting to, but it's just as well to be prepared," said the Hon. Douglas. "How do you do, Mr. Carslake?"

The boys shook hands with Carslake and Crosse, who were both there. If the juniors had not been quite so conceited, they would have realised that these men of the world were not courting the boys' society for the mere pleasure of it.

"You'll find cigarettes on the table—help yourselves," said Carslake. "As a matter of fact, we weren't exactly thinking about poker this afternoon."

"What's it to be, then—nap?" asked Fullwood.

"Well, hardly."

"Pontoon?" grinned Bell. "Or solo whist—"

"To tell you the truth, boys, I thought we'd have an afternoon out," interrupted Mr. Gore. "Why not leave cards alone for once, and take advantage of the fine weather to run over to Helmford?"

"Helmford?" repeated Fullwood. "What for?"

"The races, I expect," said Bell eagerly. "That's a fine idea—"

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Fullwood. "You know as well as I do there ain't any races on this week. There's nothin' doin' in Helmford until next week."

"That is certainly correct," said Gore. "And it indicates that you are well acquainted with the racing news. Do you take much interest in the subject?"

"Oh, a pretty good bit," said Fullwood.

"I'm frightfully keen on it," remarked the Hon. Douglas, laying back in his chair. "As a matter of fact, I've been thinking if you gentlemen could put me on to anything good in that line. I don't want to potter about with a fourth-rate bookie, you know. I should like to have some real sport—on the grand scale. A fellow can't hope to win anything unless he launches out."

"Splendid!" said Mr. Gore. "That is my argument precisely. One might as well leave racing alone if one can't do any better than to deal with a street-corner bookmaker. But I was not thinking of taking you to the Helmford racecourse—although our destination will be quite near by."

"There doesn't seem much fun in going to Helmford, just to look at a deserted racecourse," remarked Singleton.

Mr. Gore smiled.

"I shall not ask you to view the racecourse at all," he said. "It is just this way, my lad. I happen to be the owner of a racehorse—as perhaps you know. I am very proud of the animal, and as I intend to see him this afternoon myself, I thought you might like to come with me."

"Yes, rather!" said Fullwood. "I didn't know you were keen on that sort of thing, sir."

"My horse is one of the finest fellows that ever passed a grand-stand," said Gore, his eyes sparkling. "When you

reach my stables, you will understand my enthusiasm. Blue Lightning is wonderful—positively wonderful.”

“I don't seem to have heard of him, sir,” said Fullwood.

“There is nothing very surprising in that, since I have taken every precaution to keep his name out of the Press,” said Mr. Gore. “Blue Lightning is a dark horse—in two senses of the term. If you do not care to come to Helmford, just say so, and we can——”

“But we are coming, sir,” interrupted Fullwood.

“Yes, rather!” declared the Hon. Douglas. “There is nothing that I should like better. I have often wanted to enter a real racing stable, and I want to thank you for your invitation, Mr. Gore.”

“My dear lad, pray do not mention it,” said Gore. “Now, we must look alive. The train leaves within fifteen minutes——”

“Why not let it leave, sir?” asked Singleton. “My car is round at the back, waiting for orders. I loathe railway trains. Wouldn't it be just as well to do the trip by road?”

“It would be far better,” said Mr. Gore. “A splendid suggestion of yours, Singleton. We will certainly take advantage of your offer.”

Ten minutes later the party set out—seven of them altogether. The distance to Bannington was a mere nothing to a splendid motor-car like Singleton's. The smoothly running limousine reached Helmford in just a few minutes over the half-hour, and continued straight through the town to the heath beyond.

The racecourse was situated here. It was not a particularly important racecourse, but undoubtedly the largest for a good many miles around. Helmford, in consequence, was a prospering town.

Everything was quiet and rather dull on this particular afternoon, for there were no races that week.

Singleton's car kept on until a low set of buildings, standing quite to themselves, were reached. They consisted of several stables, and living accommodation for the stable boys and others whose duty it was to remain on the premises.

The car drove straight into the big gateway, and pulled up on the little square of tiled ground near the stable doors. A man in corduroy breeches and a check coat came bustling up.

“Good-afternoon, Lambert!” said Mr. Gore, descending from the car. “I don't think you expected me this afternoon?”

“No, sir, I didn't; but I'm pleased you've come, all the same, sir,” said the man. “He's in splendid condition, sir——”

Lambert hesitated, and glanced at the other members of the party.

“You are quite free to speak, Lambert,” said Mr. Gore. “These gentlemen are my personal friends, and I have no secrets from them. How is Blue Lightning getting on? Has he improved his pace?”

“It's wonderful, sir—just wonderful,” declared the trainer. “That horse seems to know what depends on him. And this morning, just when it was getting light, he beat all records. He's fit to win the Derby, sir.”

“And I hope he will win the Derby, later on,” said Mr. Gore smoothly. “For the present, Lambert, we must be content with smaller honours. Well, we might as well enter the stable. I presume you are keeping a constant watch, Lambert—night and day?”

“Every minute, sir,” said the man. “That horse hasn't been left alone not for one single second. Some of the people about here wouldn't hesitate to come prying round if they could. There's more than a few curious about Blue Lightning—but I reckon he's regarded as a hopeless outsider.”

Mr. Gore chuckled.

“That's rather rich, Lambert—quite amusing,” he remarked.

He strolled leisurely over to the stable, accompanied by the other two men. Singleton and Fullwood and Co. followed, greatly interested.

“This Blue Lightning seems to be a bit of a terror,” murmured Fullwood. “I mean to have a quid or two on him—if we can get the straight tip. If he wins at a good price next week, there's no reason why we shouldn't have a finger in the pie. What do you say?”

“Rather!” said Gulliver. “As a matter of fact, I've been thinking what a ripping chance this is for us. Bein' introduced to a stable like this is as good as gettin' money for nothin'. We can get tips often—an' back winners all the time.”

“There's something in that,” admitted Singleton. “But let's have a look at this marvellous horse.”

They were just on the point of entering the stable, and they passed in after the men. Blue Lightning stood in a stall, and there was no denying the fact that he was a finely proportioned animal—a thoroughbred from head to heel.

"Egad! He's fine—he's simply topping!" murmured Singleton. "I know a good bit about horses, but I've never seen one to equal this. He's a picture. I reckon you must be proud, Mr. Gore."

Gore smiled.

"Proud is hardly the word," he said. "I am naturally inclined to favour my own horse—but in this case I am quite impartial. I am judging Blue Lightning on his merits. And I can tell you honestly that there is no finer piece of horseflesh in the whole United Kingdom. Why, Blue Lightning is capable of winning anything—he's capable of beating any animal you can name."

"That's a bit stretched!" murmured Fullwood in Bell's ear.

Mr. Gore turned abruptly.

"Stretched, eh?" he repeated.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" said Fullwood, turning red. "I didn't mean you to hear—"

"No, I don't suppose you did," exclaimed Gore drily. "However, we will let it pass. I am not offended, because your remark was somewhat justified. My statement was a very wide one, and it possibly struck you that I am unduly enthusiastic."

"I hope you're right, sir," said Fullwood.

"I know I am right," declared Gore.

"There is no horse within the British Isles that can show a clean pair of heels to Blue Lightning. These remarks of mine will be fully substantiated during the next few weeks. You will understand that I have been talking in most strict confidence—and perhaps I have been very foolish to mention the matter at all. You must not allow a word of this to get about—under any circumstances."

"You want it to be kept a secret, sir?" said Bell.

"Good Heavens, boy, you don't seem to realise that a fortune is at stake," said Mr. Gore. "Blue Lightning is regarded as a rank outsider. He will be entered in the race for the Helmford Cup next week as a hopeless runner, and he will certainly start the race at a very long

price. The odds are likely to be twenty to one. On the other hand, if the truth got about, the price would go down with a rush, and Blue Lightning would start to a very different tune. I am backing him for ten thousand pounds—and I am confident of raking in a fortune. At least, I should like to wager that sum, but it is doubtful if I shall be able to obtain it. But I certainly intend to risk every farthing I possess. But even that is incorrect—I shall risk nothing. It is positively a dead cert!"

"It's awfully interesting, sir," remarked Singleton. "I'm a bit keen on horses, you know. I suppose it wouldn't be possible for us to see Blue Lightning out for a run?"

Mr. Gore laughed.

"I would rather present you with five thousand pounds," he said, shaking his head. "There are spies about constantly—men from other stables, and book-makers' touts, and so forth. Blue Lightning trains at night, and under conditions of the greatest secrecy."

"But that's enough to make other people suspicious, isn't it, sir?" asked Bell.

"It probably would be if I had not instituted a little measure to throw dust into the eyes of our inquisitive friends," said Mr. Gore. "Blue Lightning is taken out in the daytime occasionally—but my trainer always sees that Blue Lightning gives a very poor show. The secret has been well kept, and it will be maintained until next week. Blue Lightning is a horse in a million; he is one of the discoveries of the century."

"I suppose he's worth a lot, sir?" asked Fullwood.

"Well, at present, I don't suppose I should be offered more than two thousand for him—simply because he has no name," said Mr. Gore. "But before long I shall be able to sell him for a fortune. Even to-day I would not accept a farthing under twelve thousand. Not a farthing."

"It's tempting—confoundedly tempting," murmured the Hon. Douglas. "I've half a mind to suggest—"

"What's that?" asked Gulliver.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," said Singleton.

Mr. Gore had passed to the other side of the stable, and was chatting with

Lambert, the trainer. And Carslake touched the Hon. Douglas on the shoulder.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked softly. "Gore is very enthusiastic about his horse, eh? But I'll warrant he would not resist an offer of £10,000 for Blue Lightning, spot cash."

"But Mr. Gore said that the horse will be worth a fortune soon," said Singleton.

"I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Gore was correct in that statement," said Carslake. "But he is particularly anxious to wager every penny he can get hold of on the horse—and even if he sold it, he will still be in a position to back the animal for any sum he chooses."

Singleton nodded.

"Well, hang it all, I'm game for some sport," he said. "It's always been a fancy of mine to launch out big, and there's no reason why I shouldn't make a splash this time."

"Why, what's the idea?" asked Gulliver curiously.

"You'll see, old man—just be patient," said the Hon. Douglas.

Gulliver looked at Fullwood and Bell in a rather startled way. He couldn't quite understand what the Hon. Douglas was contemplating, but he had a slight suspicion—and it was inclined to make him gasp.

"Mr. Gore!" called Singleton.

Gore looked round, said a few more words to the trainer, and then strolled back to where the others were standing.

"I was wondering if we couldn't do a stroke of business," drawled Singleton.

"It's not usual for a schoolboy to own a racehorse, I know—and it's not permissible, either—but a thing like that can be arranged."

"I don't quite see what you are driving at," said Gore.

"It's quite simple," exclaimed the Hon. Douglas. "I'm merely suggesting that I should buy Blue Lightning. I am quite willing to pay you £10,000 for the horse. What do you say?"

"You—you'll pay £10,000!" gasped Fullwood incredulously. "You must be dotty, Singleton! How the deuce can you find all that money?"

"Never mind!" said Singleton. "I know what I'm doing."

"You must be off your rocker!" said Bell breathlessly.

Mr. Gore shook his head.

"I must thank you for your offer, my boy, but I am afraid I cannot accept it," he said smilingly. "It is a most generous offer, I will admit, but I could not consent to sell my horse to you. I must have ready money for one thing, and I am quite certain that you could not produce such a sum as you mention. Moreover, I am not at all anxious to sell."

The Hon. Douglas frowned.

"You seem to have got a wrong idea," he said. "It won't be at all difficult for me to find the money, Mr. Gore. I have the sole control of my fortune, and no man on earth can prevent me spending it as I wish. Ten thousand is a mere trifle to me, I can assure you."

"I cannot take you quite seriously—"

"But you must!" persisted Singleton. "Look here. If you don't believe me, I will take other steps. I won't ask you to close the deal now, at once. But what will you say if I bring the ten thou. to the Grapes Hotel on Friday evening—in solid cash? Will you be open to a deal?"

"Well, that would make a big difference, I will admit," said Mr. Gore. "But I am very much afraid that you cannot find the money so easily, Singleton. However, I will give you a testing. Come to the Grapes with the money on Friday, and I have no doubt we shall be able to do business. I only make one stipulation—and that is, to the outside world Blue Lightning shall remain my property. He will be yours in actual fact, but mine to the world."

"Egad! That's just what I was wanting," said Singleton. "Nothing would suit me better, Mr. Gore. I can't openly own a racehorse—I should be sacked from St. Frank's if the Head got to know about it."

"Why, yes, of course," said Gore. "Your position is somewhat difficult—but we can discuss these points on Friday—if they arise. For the moment we will dismiss the subject and deal with other matters."

The Hon. Douglas was quite calm and collected, but Fullwood and Co. seemed rather dazed. They certainly took it for granted that Singleton had been swanking in the most outrageous manner. It was too much for them to believe that he was actually in a position to buy Blue Lightning.

But it was the truth. Singleton's resources were considerable.

CHAPTER IV.

ST. FRANK'S JUNIORS VERSUS HELMFORD JUNIORS.

"PLEASED to meet you again, my sons," said Barlowe, genially. "You've come over here to be whacked, let me tell you."

Barlowe was the junior skipper of Helmford College, and an old enemy of St. Frank's. An enemy, that is to say, regarding football. He and his men were always out to beat us—but they didn't generally succeed.

"I'm jolly interested," I said, smiling. "So we've come over to be whacked, have we?"

"You have!" said Barlowe.

"Well, I shouldn't be quite so sure of that," I remarked. "Football's an uncertain game, old son, and it's quite likely that you'll be whacked on your own ground. We're a hot team just at present, and I can tell you——"

"Better not make any prophecies, Nipper," advised De Valerie. "Let's wait until the match is over—and then we shall know more about it. We're out for gore this afternoon, but that doesn't mean to say we shall get it."

Everybody was cheerful. The Helmford Eleven were a decent set of fellows, and thorough sportsmen. They had beaten us on our own ground once, but on their last visit the game had been a draw. On this occasion we wanted to convince Barlowe and Co. that we were hot stuff.

I had every confidence in my eleven. I had spent hours choosing the team—picking out the best fellows for the different positions. There had been a certain amount of jealousy, and not everybody was satisfied with my choice. But I was skipper, and my word was law—regarding football.

The St. Frank's eleven was composed as follows: Handforth; Watson, Burton; Armstrong, Grey, Yorke; Tregellis-West, Pitt, myself, Christine, De Valerie. There were other juniors who laid claims to being first-class men—and perhaps they were—but I had chosen the eleven without favouritism, being anxious to win.

Handforth was acknowledged to be a duffer at most things; but his worst enemy could not deny that he was the right man between the "sticks." As a goalie, Handforth was unbeatable.

The Helmford team was equally strong, and the game was certain to be a hotly contested one.

A good few other fellows had come over from St. Frank's in order to witness the match—those, in short, who were enthusiastic enough, and who could afford the return fare.

Church and McClure were there, of course, and Handforth had paid their fares. They had come over for the purpose of seeing their redoubtable leader keep the ball out of the St. Frank's net.

Fatty Little was also a member of the party. He was keenly interested in football, and he had a vague sort of idea that he would be given a chance one day to display his powers.

He was active, undoubtedly, and he was willing enough to fill any position on the field. But his size was so enormous that he was hardly fitted for such a strenuous game as footer.

The only position he was likely to occupy was that of goalkeeper. As Pitt remarked, it was only necessary for Fatty to stand between the posts, and the goal-mouth would be blocked. But Jimmy Little was not quite so big as this. One day I was determined to give him a chance in goal—and risk the wrath of Handforth.

There were several other fellows among the party, too, so we had quite a few supporters to cheer us when we took the field—although, of course, they were a mere handful compared to the big crowds of Helmford juniors.

"We're going to win," remarked Church comfortably, as he stood by the ropes. "The Helmford chaps are pretty strong, but with a team like we've got we could wipe up a giddy senior eleven."

"If we don't win, we sha'n't let Helmford win, anyhow," declared McClure. "Handforth assured me that he's not going to let anything through to-day. He means to keep the ball out at all costs."

"And if the Helmford chaps score a goal, we've got Handy's permission to punch Handy's nose," added Church. "That's what he told us, anyhow. Handy's all right, and I expect he'll turn up trumps to-day. If he fails, Nipper will probably put Fatty in goal next time."

"Ah?" said Little. "Talking about me?"

"I was saying that if Handforth fails, you'll get your chance," replied Church.

"But you needn't look so jolly pleased with yourself. There's not much chance of Handy failing."

"Shut up, you chaps—they're just starting," said McClure.

The whistle, in fact, was on the point of being blown. One of the Helmford seniors had agreed to act as referee, and was quite a good man—and as likely to give a decision against his own juniors as against us.

Our rivals had won the toss—although there was practically nothing in it, since the sky was cloudy, and there was precious little wind.

The whistle blew.

For the first minute or two the play was quite ding-dong, the ball remaining mainly in the centre of the field. Then one of the Helmford half-backs sent a beautiful pass over to his outside-left.

The juniors were on the ball in a second, and they made a fine rush up the field towards the St. Frank's goal. Tommy Watson and Burton were there, however, and Watson succeeded in getting the ball away in the nick of time.

Tommy kicked rather wildly, however, and the leather descended almost on the foot of Barlowe, who was in the centre. Barlowe was a good way from the goal, but he sent in a long shot with beautiful accuracy.

The ball curved high, and dropped with anerring aim into the mouth of the goal. Handforth leapt up, but his fingers just missed the leather, and it whizzed over his head—and under the bar.

The next second it reposed in the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good man!"

"Good shot, Barlowe!"

"Hurrah!"

The Helmford crowd sent up a tremendous roar. Handforth kicked the ball out to the centre of the field rather disgustedly, and the teams lined up again. The Helmford men were looking very cheerful.

"That's just a sample of what's coming," grinned Barlowe pleasantly.

"All right, my son—we haven't showed you our samples yet," I replied.

Church and McClure, who were standing near the St. Frank's goal, looked

rather upset. "For Helmford to draw first blood was not very satisfactory. St. Frank's would have to score at least two goals in order to win.

"What about it, Handy?" shouted Church.

Handforth looked round.

"Oh, dry up!" he roared.

"Didn't you promise us——"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "How the dickens was I to see a shot like that? I didn't know it was coming into the goal until it dropped. By George! This looks a bit dangerous!"

The outside left had again secured the ball, and had already beaten Tommy Watson, who was racing after him in an endeavour to cut him off before he could shoot.

"Go it, Bates!" roared the crowd.

"Let's get another!"

"Shoot, man—shoot!"

"Now's your chance, Batey!"

Bates did shoot, and his shot was an excellent one. But Handforth was safe this time. He punched out with ease, but unfortunately the ball was spinning, and it curled over and descended beyond the goal-line.

"Corner!" yelled the crowd.

"This is beginning to look bad, Montie," I murmured, as I hurried up towards the goal. "If Handy doesn't buck up, we shall be hopelessly out-classed in the first half. Corners are always pretty dangerous."

The man at outside-left took the kick, and he dropped the ball right in front of the net. Handforth punched out desperately, and the leather went spinning away over the heads of the juniors who were round the goal.

It was a good save, and there was not much chance of another shot being sent in. For Sir Montie had seized the ball, and was streaking up the field with no single enemy opposing him.

He had already outstripped the one back who had barred his progress, and now he had a clear run up to the Helmford goal, with nobody to beat but the goalie himself. It was a golden chance.

"Off-side!" yelled somebody.

"Rats! He can't be off-side!" bawled Church. "Shoot, Montie!"

Tregellis-West was not likely to hear that advice, and such advice was certainly not necessary, as Church seemed to imagine. Montie was already within ten yards of the Helmford goal

He steadied himself in order to shoot, and the goalie rushed out desperately—a rather bad mistake on his part. For Sir Montie, with a delightful exhibition of quick dodging, walked clean round the goalkeeper, and sent in a shot which simply could not fail to score.

"Goal!"

The shouts from the Helmford crowd were not very loud this time. I rushed up to Montie and grabbed his fist; other juniors attempted to do so at the same time. Sir Montie smiled in his usual urbane manner.

"Splendid, old son!" I said. "That was ripping!"

"Terrific!" said Pitt.

"Pray do not be so absurd, dear fellows!" panted Montie. "I really did nothin'; I couldn't help scorin' when I had a chance like that. It was simply askin' to be taken advantage of."

Montie was always modest, and he would take no credit for himself. But he had equalised for St. Frank's, and that was a big thing. The Helmford eleven were looking rather more determined when the teams lined up once more.

And when the play restarted, Barlowe and his men did their very utmost to force the pace. Again and again their forwards got through, in spite of the efforts of Watson and Burton.

But Handforth was there, and Handforth was on his mettle. Within the space of five minutes, he saved three times—he kept out the ball when it was shot with unerring aim and accuracy.

But matters could not last in that way for long, and once the ball got down into the enemy's half of the field, it stayed there for a time. Twice I attempted to run up to goal, but on both occasions I was stopped just when success seemed certain. The Helmford defence was well-nigh perfect.

And although the game was very fast and furious, the score still remained at 1—1 when the whistle blew for half-time.

"Well, we share the honours, so far," I remarked. "We haven't been hopelessly whacked, at all events. If we buck up in the second half, we shall still be able to beat the bounders."

"Not if Handforth fails us!" said Watson bluntly.

"You—you rotter!" panted Handforth coming up. "I've been working hard."

"What about that first goal?" demanded Tommy. "It was as easy as winking! You were asleep!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Steady!" I interrupted. "Handy has done jolly well. No goalie is perfect, and we can't blame Handy for letting the ball pass him once. He's been busy right from the start, and he's done wonders!"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, I don't know about that," he said. "I'm not exactly satisfied with myself, if you want to know the truth. I was an ass to let Helmford score like that; I don't mind admitting it!"

"You don't object to running yourself down, but you jib at others doing it?" I grinned. "All right, Handy! We're still in a good position. In the second half we'll teach these bounders how to score goals!"

"We don't want to teach them too thoroughly," chuckled Pitt, "or they'll take the lesson to heart, and score goals on their own account!"

Barlowe and his men were quite confident of success.

"You put up a decent show, Nipper," remarked Barlowe. "We shall have you down this half, of course, but you've been holding your own pretty well. At any rate, we're going to wipe you up."

When the game re-started, however, the Helmford fellows noticed a difference.

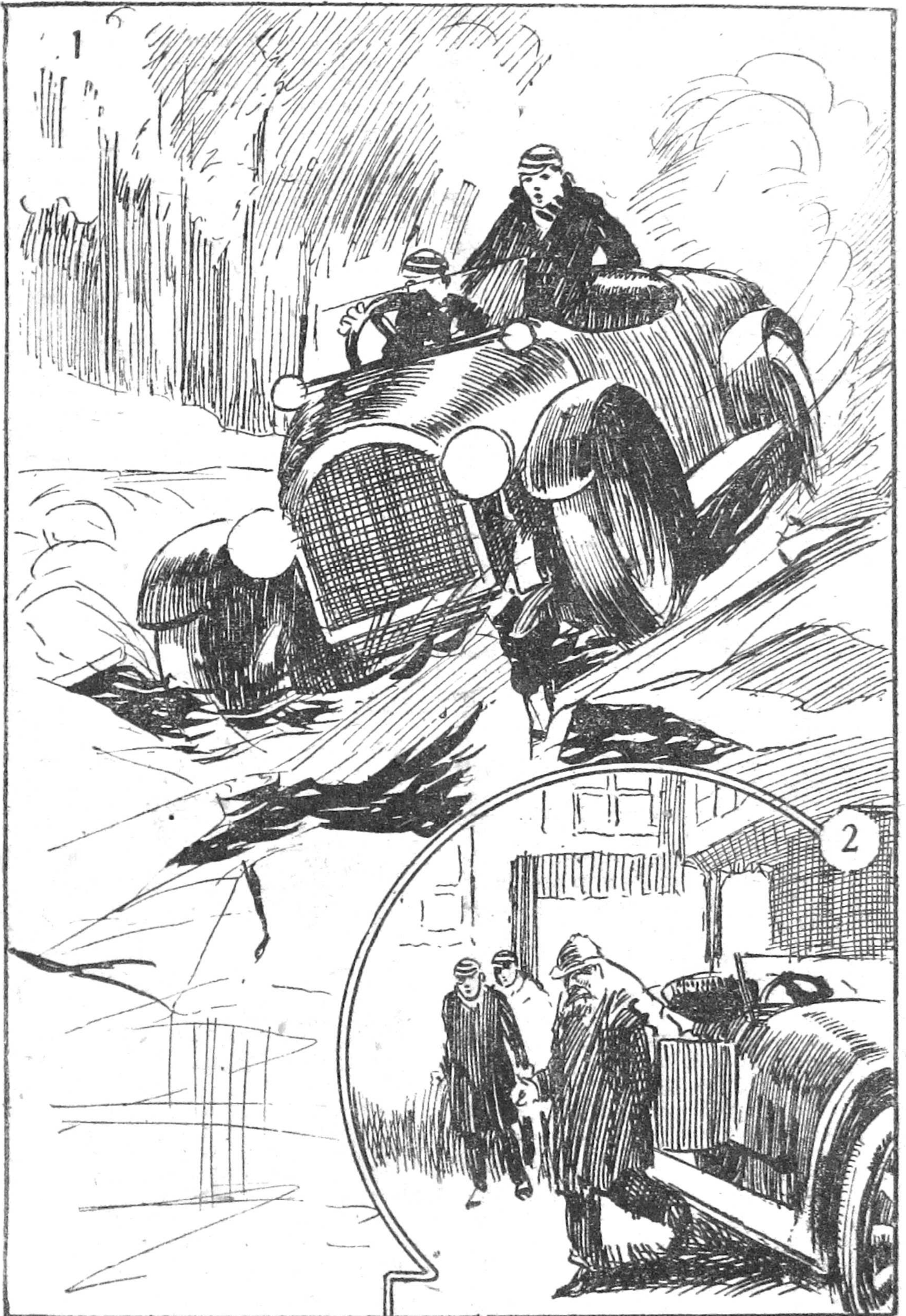
The Saints played with greater caution. They worked together with more determination, and their organised attacks were extremely hard to deal with. Time after time the St. Frank's forwards swept up towards the Helmford goal.

Tregellis-West, at outside-left, and De Valerie, at outside-right, seized every opportunity to centre the ball. Reginald Pitt and myself were kept very busy, and we, in turn, kept the Helmford goalie busy.

But he was on the alert, and although we rained in a good many shots, not one of them materialised. But the play was practically all in Helmford's half of the field, and their own forwards never had a chance of getting clear.

It was left to De Valerie to give St. Frank's the lead.

The ball had just been thrown in from touch, and one of the Helmford men managed to get clear with it for a moment. He streaked down the field.



1. Crack! Crack! Crack! The ice gave way under its heavy burden.
2. "Infernal sauce!" growled Fullwood. "What was he doing?"

towards Handforth, and the rest of his team kept him company, in readiness to support him when the time came for the attack.

But Tom Burton was in the way. He got the ball very cleverly, dodged two other Helmford men, and cleared. The pass was a splendid one, the leather falling practically on De Valerie's foot, just against the half-way line. De Valerie was still in his own half, and there was only one man between him and the Helmford goalie.

De Valerie rushed away down the field, dribbling the ball. Christine kept him company, and when De Valerie was attacked, he passed the leather neatly to Christine, and continued his run.

Christine passed back at exactly the right moment, and De Valerie took a fairly long shot for goal.

Slam!

He took the kick steadily, and sent in a low, hot shot, which completely beat the Helmford goalkeeper. The leather thudded into the net only a few inches from the ground, and near the post. It was one of the best shots I have seen during the season. Almost any goalie would have been beaten.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!" roared Church and McClure.

"That's the way to do it!" said Fatty Little pleasantly.

The Helmford crowd was looking very alarmed. We were now leading, and in order to win, the home team would find it necessary to score two more goals; and, somehow, they did not quite see how they could do it.

They certainly made a valiant effort.

As soon as the play restarted, the Helmford men put far more ginger into their work. They were determined to equalise, at all events. They were so determined, in fact, that they were careless.

Barlowe himself managed to get the ball, and he made a grim rush towards Handforth, and it looked for the moment as though he would score. He sent in a shot which Handforth would have been excused for missing. But the redoubtable leader of Study D saved in the most admirable style, and Handforth kicked the leather out into midfield. I was on it in a moment, and the Helmford backs were on me.

But I passed right across to Montie,

and ran up in readiness for him to pass back. He performed his duty well, for he sent in a beautiful centre. I was attacked on all sides, and I only had a bare second in which to steady myself. I shot for goal, and the leather was easily fisted out by the Helmford custodian.

But Reginald Pitt's head was there, ready. The ball bounced back almost before the goalie could know it, and just slipped over his fingers into the net.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Barlowe. "That's put the lid on it!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the Saints. "Good old Pitt!"

St. Frank's were now leading by two clear goals, the score being 3-1. It was practically impossible for the home team to win now, and it was very doubtful if they would even succeed in equalising.

As a matter of fact, they did not.

The score remained unaltered. With fifteen minutes more to play only, the Helmford fellows probably gave up hope. At all events, their play had completely lost its "pep," as the Americans would say.

This was not the case with my own team. We were elated and full of enthusiasm, and we nearly succeeded in scoring a fourth goal. But the whistle finally blew, announcing St. Frank's the winner by two clear goals.

We had beaten Helmford on their own ground, and it was generally voted that the match had been one of the best of the season.

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CHAPTER V.

FATTY LITTLE IN TROUBLE.

"GOOD!" I said genially. "I expected to whack the beggars, but I hardly hoped for such a success as this! I didn't shine particularly on my own account, but some of you fellows——"

"Rats!" interrupted Pitt. "You played a great game, Nipper! Without your leadership and support, we should have been nowhere. Just because any one chap fails to score a goal, it doesn't mean to say he's no good."

"Well, we've beaten them—woke them up, in fact!" I said. "That's the

main thing, after all. And now we can go home, happy and light-hearted. There will be a bit of a celebration when we get back to St. Frank's."

Fatty Little's eyes shone.

"A feed?" he asked eagerly.

"You bet!"

"Why not a feed now?" asked the fat boy. "I'm blessed if I can see the sense in waiting until we get back to St. Frank's! I'm a great believer in doing things at the moment—there's no time like the present, you know. The train doesn't go for nearly an hour, and I vote we have a good feed in the town."

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt. "I second the resolution."

"Good!"

It was decided, therefore, that we should pause on the way to the station and partake of liquid and solid refreshment at one of the confectioners' shops. We were all feeling rather hungry after our brisk exercise.

But a disappointment awaited us.

We discovered that every shop in the town was closed—Wednesday being the early closing day in Helmford. Fatty Little was quite disgusted, and he glared up and down the whole High Street in a somewhat ferocious manner.

"Disgraceful, I call it—absolutely disgraceful!" he declared. "Shutting up the shops as early as this! How the dickens are people supposed to keep alive without grub?"

"I expect they take in good stocks earlier," grinned Pitt. "It seems to me, Fatty, that we shall have to rely on the refreshment-room at the station."

"Great doughnuts!" gasped Fatty. "I'd forgotten that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat boy came to his senses, and he rushed off along the High Street without waiting to see if anybody else was bent upon the same mission. He arrived at the refreshment-room quite alone, the rest of us being left far behind. Fatty was hungry, and he needed food.

He bustled into the refreshment-room, and looked about him with much satisfaction. This feeling did not last for long, however, and an expression of anxiety came into his eyes.

There was practically nothing to be seen on the counter in the food line. True, a small heap of sandwiches reposed under a glass cover, and a large piece of cake stood upon a shelf. There was also some pastries. But certainly there was

not sufficient for a large number of healthy appetites.

"Yes, young man?"

Fatty looked up as the woman behind the counter addressed him.

"Oh, I—I want some grub, please!" said Fatty.

"A twopenny bun?"

"Yes, rather—a dozen twopenny buns, if you've got 'em!" replied Little. "You might hand over those sandwiches, too, and that chunk of cake, and those pastries, and anything else in the grub line you've got."

The attendant looked somewhat astonished.

"You're expecting a party, I suppose?" she asked.

Fatty grinned.

"Rats!" he said. "I'm as hungry as a hunter, and it won't take me long to get rid of a small amount of grub like this. As a matter of fact, I am expecting a party, but they're not so hungry as I am, and if you don't buck up and serve me, they'll be here, and there ain't enough tuck to share out!"

Fatty was not at all selfish in ordinary matters, but when it came to food he cast all scruples aside, and steeled his heart. So far as he could see, there was only a limited supply of grub available, and the thought of having merely a twentieth share was too awful for contemplation.

Within three minutes the refreshment-room had changed its aspect. The stock in hand was set out in an imposing array on one of the marble-topped tables, and Fatty Little sat behind, eyeing the pile with great satisfaction.

"That'll be two pounds, three shillings," said the woman firmly.

"Oh, you want paying now I suppose?" asked Fatty. "Right-oh! It's all the same. I might just as well pay now as afterwards."

He pulled out three currency notes and handed them over.

"You see, sir, the stock's very low this afternoon," explained the attendant. "We had a party of people through by the three o'clock train—London folk they seemed—and they took nearly everything I'd got. We don't do much business here, even at the best of times."

"That's all right!" said Fatty. "I shall just be able to manage on this lot."

The woman staggered.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you

can eat all this food yourself?" she asked wonderingly. "Why, it ain't possible!"

"You wait and see!" grinned Fatty. "This lot is just a biting-on. When I get back to St. Frank's, I shall have a square meal!"

The woman was quite certain that the fat junior was trying to pull her leg—as Fatty himself would have expressed it. It did not seem possible to her that any one boy could eat such a huge amount of food in one meal.

But she did not know Jimmy Little!

The fat boy commenced operations without delay. He received his change, and then went into the task of demolishing the good things with a will. Perhaps he was rather anxious about the other juniors.

He had a vague idea that there would be trouble when they arrived to find that all the available grub had been commandeered. Fatty had no scruples whatever. When it came to a matter of food, his heart was hard.

In all other respects, Little was one of the best chaps breathing. But food was a kind of religion to him, and the very thought of losing the grub was enough to fill him with consternation. And Fatty wanted to be filled with something far more substantial than that!

Meanwhile, the other footballers were strolling to the station more leisurely. I was with them, of course, and I glanced at my watch as we came within sight of the station buildings.

"Heaps of time yet," I said. "There's a clear half-hour before our train comes in, and we shall be able to have quite a decent snack in the refreshment room. I expect Fatty's well on the job already."

"Bound to be," said Pitt.

"Well, I can do with a few sandwiches—providing they're not ten years old," remarked Handforth. "Refreshment room sandwiches are generally a bit ancient, but when you're peckish they ain't so bad."

We were all feeling high spirited, and in the best of humours. Our decisive victory over Helmford had put us all into a splendid frame of mind, and we bustled through the station booking office rather noisily.

The platform was quite deserted. The station was a comparatively small one, although a number of expresses stopped

there at long intervals during the day. In between the times of the trains the station was very quiet.

There was nobody on the platform excepting ourselves. A small branch line had its terminus at Helmford—about one train every three hours commenced its ten mile journey to an isolated town. And on the other side of the platform several old-fashioned carriages were standing, empty and forlorn looking.

"There's the refreshment room," remarked Pitt. "Come on, my children."

"Good!"

We all bustled along to the refreshment-room, and piled in, invading the place. Fatty Little was sitting on the far side, near the fire, with a considerable pile of eatables before him.

"It hasn't taken you long to get busy," remarked De Valerie. "You seem to have laid in a good stock, too!"

Fatty nodded; his mouth was too full for speech.

He eyed us rather nervously, I thought. Somehow, he seemed to be anticipating trouble—and I soon discovered why.

"Thank goodness refreshment rooms don't have an early closing day," said Handforth, striding to the counter. "We've got time for a decent feed before the train comes along. I suppose you want something, you chaps?"

"Rather!" said Church and McClure, who had been addressed.

"Right you are," said Handforth. "I'll stand treat."

He rapped on the counter.

"Some sandwiches, cakes, pastries, three cups of coffee, and anything else decent you've got on the bill, miss," he said briskly. "And please buck up, because these other chaps will want to be served."

The attendant behind the counter smiled.

"I can let you have the coffee," she said. "But I'm afraid——"

"You can't do it quickly?" said Handforth. "Well, bustle about, and do the best you can——"

"I'm sorry, sir, but there is only coffee left."

"Eh?"

"There's been a big run on the food to-day," said the woman. "There's not a crumb left in the place—exceptin'

what that stout young gentleman has got. He bought the last I had, sir. There's not even a biscuit left."

"What!"

"Great pip!"

"You—you must be joking!" gasped Handforth. "No grub!"

"I'm afraid not, sir——"

"But—but what's the idea of a refreshment-room without any grub?" roared Handforth.

"It's a swindle!"

"We want some sandwiches!"

"And biscuits!"

"And cakes and tarts!"

The uproar was rather alarming.

"Please young gentleman!" protested the woman. "Please don't make such a noise! All the food has gone, and I can't let you have anything except coffee. The stout young gentleman took everything—spent over two pounds, he did. I thought he was buyin' the stuff for a party."

"So he was," I grinned, "one party!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but we're not going to stand this!" bellowed Handforth. "Of all the awful nerve! Coming here and buying the whole stock of grub! By George! We'll soon make an alteration!"

"Rather!" said Christine. "What about that pile of grub on the table?"

"It belongs to the young gent, sir," said the woman. "He bought the lot."

The juniors swarmed round Fatty Little. "Now you greedy porpoise, share out!" roared Handforth.

"Divide up the spoils!" said Pitt.

Fatty Little swallowed hard.

"Oh, draw it mild!" he gasped. "This—this grub is mine, you know. I—I bought it——"

"But you can't eat all that lot," howled Church.

"You'll burst before you get it all down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—you see, I'm a bit peckish," explained Fatty. "This is just a snack to keep my strength up until we get to St. Frank's. It's mine—I paid for it."

"You greedy glutton!" said Christine warmly. "Do you mean to say that you can sit there and eat all that stuff, while we've got nothing?"

"Easily!" said Fatty promptly.

"You—you elephant!"

"You walking food hog!"

"Oh really, you chaps!" protested Little. "It's only a snack——"

"But it's amazing!" said Handforth. "How any chap can be so selfish is beyond me! How you can sit there and eat when we starve is a mystery! You ought to be boiled in oil, you greedy, selfish bounder!"

"Oh, I say, go easy!" said Jimmy Little feebly.

"You don't understand him, Handy," I grinned. "Fatty's the best chap in the world; he'd give quids away; he'd strip his study furniture and divide it up amongst the other chaps; he'd take the giddy shirt off his back and give it to a tramp; he'd go without blankets at night—but never, under any circumstances, would he part with a morsel of grub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grub, in Fatty's eyes, is sacred," I went on. "It's an obsession with him. Once he's got some grub in his power, he'll fight for it, and keep it safe until it's all down his throat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he'll have to fight for this lot, anyhow," declared Handforth. "It'll surprise me if that pile goes down his throat—because I happen to know that a few of those sandwiches are going down mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And some of those cakes will suit me, too," remarked Pitt. "Of all the confounded nerve! Rushing up here before anybody else, buying the entire stock, and sitting down with all in front of him like—like an ogre!"

"Oh, really!" said Fatty weakly. "I—I didn't think, you know. You chaps can have a couple of sandwiches if you like, and three of those cakes—but I can't possibly spare any more."

"You're going to spare the lot, my son!"

"Every giddy crumb!"

Fatty jumped up, alarmed.

"Look here, you're not going to touch my property!" he roared. "I don't want you to think I'm greedy, or selfish, but you seem to forget that my appetite is a hundred times bigger than yours! I must have grub to keep my strength up! Lemme alone, you bounders."

"There's a nice little carriage on the other side of the platform," said Do

Valerie. "What about bunging Fatty into a compartment, and locking the door on him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good idea!"

"He can roar all he likes—and we'll let him out when the grub's finished," grinned De Valerie. "Who'll help to shift him?"

"Everybody!" replied Handforth promptly. "Unless we can find a crane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on," I shouted. "How are you going to lock him in?"

"It's all right—I've got a railway key," said De Valerie. "All hands to the pumps, you chaps!"

The footballers advanced upon Fatty with grim determination. I stood by, a spectator; my services were not required.

"You—you burglars!" roared Fatty, in alarm. "If you touch a crumb of this stuff I'll—Yaroooh!"

"Yes—that's about all you will do," agreed Handforth.

Fatty Little, in spite of his size, was seized. With over a dozen fellows on him, his resistance was of no avail. And he was off his feet, bundled towards the door, and hurled forth on to the platform.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open the carriage door, somebody!"

"It's open already," grinned Watson. Church had obligingly opened the door of a third class compartment. And Fatty was rushed across the platform, pushed forcibly into the compartment, and the door was slammed.

De Valerie inserted his square key, and locked the door.

"You—you rotters!" howled Fatty. "If you dare to touch my grub——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about the other door?" asked Pitt.

"My hat!" said De Valerie. "I'd better see to it!"

He dived into the next compartment, passed through, and got on to the foot-board. A moment later the other door was locked and Fatty Little was a prisoner within the carriage. There was no danger of him being carried off, for those old coaches were not likely to be shifted for days.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now you can stay there, and watch us feed," grinned De Valerie. "It ought to be a lesson to you, Fatty. Greediness is a frightful sin. You ought to learn to be self-sacrificing where grub is concerned!"

Fatty Little groaned.

"I'm starving!" he said plaintively. "It's rotten of you chaps to lock me here like this! Gimme half the fodder, anyhow!"

"Not a crumb!" said Handforth. "Not a giddy smell!"

"Better buck up, you chaps," called Pitt. "The grub's going."

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a rush for the refreshment-room, but an elderly porter stood in the way, and he was nearly bowled over.

"Now, then, young gents, what's all this 'ere noise about?" he asked. "We can't allow no rowdyism! And you'll have to let that friend o' yours out o' that carriage pretty quick——"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "He'll stay there until we choose to let him out!"

"I can't allow it, young gent——"

"That's awkward," interrupted Handforth. "If you can't allow it we shall have to bung you in the compartment, too! Lend a hand, you chaps!"

"'Ere!" gasped the porter. "Steady, you gents—oh, my heye!"

The man fled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That settled his little hash!" grinned Handforth. "Now for a feed!"

He and the others marched into the refreshment-room, and seized what little food remained. Every fellow had a small proportion, so they didn't do so badly. And the bulk of the juniors stood round the door of the refreshment-room, munching cakes and sandwiches—in full sight of Fatty Little.

"You're missing a treat, Fatty!" said Handforth, with his mouth full. "These cakes are ripping!"

"And the sandwiches are like home-made!" grinned Yorke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ain't you feeling hungry, Fatty?"

"Awfully decent of you to stand a treat like this!"

"We appreciate it fully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you burgling bounders!" howled Fatty. "I'll never forgive you for this—never! You stand there, eating

my grub, while I starve! A bunch of robbers—highway robbers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try one of these buns, Fatty!" grinned Church.

He held it out invitingly, and other fellows followed Church's example. The unfortunate Little, imprisoned in the carriage, was well nigh driven to distraction. He was goaded on to making a supreme effort.

"I'll—I'll pulverise you!" he roared. "You think I'm a prisoner—but I ain't! I'll show you whether I'm a prisoner."

"Oh, my hat! He's climbing through the window!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty, in sheer desperation, was indeed attempting a feat which was practically impossible. He forced his head and shoulders through the window of the compartment, and exerted all his strength. It was an extremely tight fit for the space was limited, and Fatty was not limited. His bulk was enormous, and the result was inevitable.

Fatty managed to squeeze his way through as far as his waist. And there, puffing and blowing, and red in the face, he came to a halt. He found it impossible to squeeze himself out another inch.

"Jolly good!" grinned Pitt. "Is that the way you show us whether you're a prisoner?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Fatty. "Lend a hand, somebody."

But nobody was inclined to lend a hand. The sight of Fatty jammed in the window was extremely humorous, and the juniors stood on the platform and yelled. No helping hand was held forth.

And Fatty, in desperation, decided to retreat. He didn't retreat—he only decided to. For, when he came to the actual task, Little discovered that he could go neither forward nor backward!

In short, he was wedged firmly in the window, completely filling the space.

And the juniors stood round, highly amused. Fatty's face was red, and his fat legs kicked about aimlessly, while he made movements with his arms as though he were attempting to swim.

"It's as good as a giddy pantomime," grinned Handforth. "We shall have to look out, you chaps!" added Handforth suddenly. "The train's coming!"

"Oh, my aunt!"

The fellows had forgotten the time, and it was only just realised that the train had been signalled for some minutes, and was now actually steaming into the station. A few other would-be passengers were standing about, highly amused by Fatty's predicament.

"Come on! We've got to get him free!" I said briskly. "If we lose this train, we shall have to wait for three hours."

There was a rush to Fatty's aid. A good many juniors grabbed hold of his arms and pulled. But the only effect of this was to make Fatty yell, and to go more purple in the face.

"Stop it, you asses!" he gasped. "You're pulling my arms out!"

"Who's got an axe?" gasped Handforth. "We shall have to chop the door down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got an idea!" shouted De Valerie. "I'll go round through the next compartment with two other chaps, and we'll push Fatty from the inside. While we push, you chaps must pull!"

"Buck up!" gasped Watson. "The train's waiting!"

The train, however, was not likely to wait for the juniors, and speed was necessary. De Valerie and Pitt and Watson dashed through the next compartment, climbed over the footboard, and entered Fatty's prison by the other door.

"Now, then—push!" said De Valerie briskly.

They pushed with a will; and while they were doing so, the juniors on the platform pulled. The door creaked and groaned, but, inch by inch, Fatty moved. He groaned on his own account, too.

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped. "I'm—I'm nearly killed!"

"One more shove!" roared De Valerie.

They set their shoulders to it, and heaved with all their strength. They heaved to such good purpose, in fact, that Fatty became freed rather too suddenly, and he shot out of the window like a stone from a catapult. The juniors on the platform were in the way, and Fatty fell upon them with much force.

Handforth was underneath.

"Gerroff!" he mumbled. "I'm squashed! I'm flattened!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty rose to his feet dazedly, and Handforth moaned.

"I'm done for!" he gasped. "Every rib's broken, and I'm fatally injured!"

At that second the guard blew his whistle, and Handforth acted in a manner which did not give one the impression that he was in a dying condition. He jumped to his feet, and made a dive across the platform, yelling in tones the opposite to feeble for the other juniors to buck up.

Somehow or other, they all managed to scramble aboard. Nobody was any the worse, except for a bruise or so.

But Fatty Little, to judge from his remarks during the whole of the homeward journey, was dying—from starvation!

CHAPTER VI.

THE WASTER'S PROGRESS.

THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON glanced at his watch.

"We shall have to be going soon," he remarked languidly. "It's just about six, and I told Jenkins to be ready by a quarter-past."

"We shall do it nicely," said Fullwood.

They were in Study N, in the Remove passage. Two days had passed, and it was now Friday evening. Gulliver and Bell were there, too—the trio from Study A having been invited to tea with Singleton.

"There's goin' to be no sport to-night, then?" asked Gulliver.

"No playin' poker, if that's what you mean," replied Fullwood. "You know, as well as I do, that Singleton is seein' Gore about that horse. He's goin' over to pay the cash."

"Oh!" said Gulliver. "I thought there was a lot of bluff about that! Singleton hasn't really got the cash, has he?"

"Singleton has," said the Hon. Douglas, yawning. "Look at this!"

He produced a thick wad of banknotes, and the other juniors eyed them almost with awe.

"Ten thousand quid!" said Singleton calmly. "It's mostly in hundred-quid

notes, with a few tenners to make up the amount. I've got another thousand in my pocket-book—cash to be going on with for the week."

The Nuts gasped.

"For—for a week!" said Bell faintly.

"Well, I expect it will last longer than a week, but I'm not particular," said Singleton. "You see, there's no need for me to be careful about money. I've got pots of it, and I shall make something like a fortune with Blue Lightning next week, so I can be a bit lavish."

"There's that about it, of course," said Fullwood. "As it happens, I'm a bit short at present—we're all short, Duggy. We were wondering whether you could oblige us with a little loan?"

"Certainly!" said Singleton. "As much as you like, old chaps. I suppose this'll do for the present?"

He took out his pocket-book, selected three notes, and tossed them on to the table. The Nuts picked them up rather dazedly.

"Twenty-quid notes!" said Gulliver. "Are—are you lending me twenty quid, Singleton?"

"Certainly!" said the Hon. Douglas. "Twenty each. I'm feeling a bit generous to-night! You can pay me back when you like. It won't worry me if you don't pay it back at all."

"Oh, we shall pay you back! I wouldn't accept it under any other terms!" said Fullwood. "Thanks awfully, Duggy!"

The Nuts, needless to say, had no intention of returning the money. Even if they had had such an intention, they would have been unable to fulfil it, for once the money was spent, there was not much likelihood of obtaining sufficient funds to meet debts amounting to twenty pounds and more.

Fullwood and Co. could hardly believe the evidence of their own eyes. Singleton had always been lavish; he had been ever ready to oblige them with a loan of a few pounds, if they asked. But the Nuts were finding out that they could impose upon the spendthrift almost exactly as they pleased. This evening he was in a particularly good humour. To whack out sixty pounds for Study A was astonishing.

"Yes, we shall have to be going," said Singleton, rising to his feet. "Beastly bore, of course! It would have been much better if Gore could have

come along here. But I'm afraid the Head wouldn't like it. I suppose you're coming with me, Fullwood?"

"Yes, certainly, if you like!" said Fullwood. "There's no need for the whole crowd of us to go, though. Thanks tremendously for this loan, Duggy!"

"Rot!" said Singleton. "As I told you before, I shall make a fortune very likely next week, so a hundred pounds or so is simply a mere trifle. It just shows you the advantage of a fellow having control of his own money. He can seize upon a chance, and double it."

"Yes, if he's lucky," said Fullwood guardedly.

"But, my dear chap, this is a cert.!" drawled the Hon. Douglas.

"Of course!" said Fullwood hastily. "A dead cert.!"

"How the deuce do you manage to handle your own tin?" asked Bell, in a curious voice. "Some of the chaps here have got pots, but they can't touch it. Tregellis-West, for example. He's a millionaire, I believe, but he couldn't get more than fifty quid from his guardian, and even then the case would have to be special."

The Hon. Douglas smiled.

"You see, things are different with me," he explained. "I can't go into the exact details, but my guardian is out in Central Africa, I believe, exploring—lost among the savage tribes, or something like that. Anyhow, the lawyer chaps can't get at him, although they're making every effort to communicate with him. The silly old fossils don't like me drawing on my fortune."

"Lawyers are always old-fashioned," said Fullwood.

"My pater's dead, as you know," went on Singleton. "Well, he left everything to me, and most of the fortune is in securities and all that kind of thing, that can be turned into solid cash with ease. There was some clause in the legal documents which gave me full control."

"Jolly lucky for you!" said Fullwood.

"Rather!" agreed Singleton. "As far as I can make out, my pater's will stated that if my guardian neglected affairs for more than a year, I was to become the controller of my own money. Something like that, anyhow—details don't bother me! Well, my guardian went to Africa on a three months' trip.

He ventured into the interior, and he hasn't been seen since. Perhaps he'll never turn up again, and it won't worry me particularly if he doesn't!"

"Well, it's your affair, an' I don't want to butt in," said Fullwood. "Of course, it's jolly handy havin' lots of tin like this. You can do just as you like, and it'll be glorious if that horse wins next week!"

"Don't be so absurd!" said Singleton. "There's no 'if' about it. It's bound to win. Didn't you hear what Gore told us about it?"

"Perhaps he was only bluffin'," said Bell.

"What rot!" laughed the Hon. Douglas. "He said all that before I even suggested buying the horse, which proves that the whole thing is straight-forward. Gore's one of the best chaps breathing."

Fullwood and Co were not quite so sure of that point; but they said nothing. If Blue Lightning failed to win, Fullwood had every intention of interviewing Mr. Gore and his companions on the quiet. And if they refused to part with a fair share of the booty, Fullwood would lose no time in making threats. The rascal of the Remove was not at all averse to a little blackmail. Singleton's position did not worry him at all. If the young idiot lost every penny of his money, Fullwood's conscience would not be affected.

Five minutes later Singleton and Fullwood passed out of the Ancient House, and made their way across the dark Triangle to the gateway. So a little distance down the road, Singleton's car was waiting.

The two juniors climbed into it, and the journey to the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington, was soon accomplished.

In room No. 123, Mr. Philip Gore was found with Carslake and Crosse. The three men welcomed their young visitors warmly.

"I knew you would turn up, of course," said Gore, tossing his cigar-end into the fire. "Possibly you have come to call off the little matter of business—eh? Personally, I'm quite indifferent. In fact, I shall be rather glad if you do call off, for I badly want to keep Blue Lightning in my possession. Frankly, I have no wish to sell him."

Singleton looked rather alarmed.

"Egad! That's hardly fair, Mr.

Gore!" he protested. "We settled the thing, and I've got the money here in cash, as you stipulated. It's only right that you should keep to your part of the bargain."

Gore smiled.

"If you are still of the same mind, I must, of course, meet you," he said. "I'm a man of my word, Singleton, and, provided you have the ten thousand pounds with you, we will settle the deal."

"Well, it's here," said the Hon. Douglas.

Mr. Smith Gore well knew what he was doing. His very attitude was sufficient to convince Singleton that the deal was absolutely honest and above board. How could it possibly be anything else, when Gore had stated that he had no wish to part with the horse?

Gore took the money and counted it over.

"Correct!" he said, after a few moments.

"Ten thousand?" asked Carslake incredulously.

"Yes," said Gore. "I don't like to accept the money, but I must. A bargain is a bargain. Blue Lightning is now yours, Singleton, and, now that I have had time to think the matter over, I can assure you that you have secured an amazing bargain. The horse is worth double what you have paid."

"Lucky young fellow!" said Carslake. "If you want to know the truth, Mr. Gore was hoping that you would fail to bring the money, so that he would have an excuse for calling off. Why, you will get your money back next week with three or four hundred per cent. interest!"

"That's what I'm planning," said Singleton easily. "Now about the details. The horse is mine, but, of course, I can't be his owner outwardly. I want you to keep things going as they are, Mr. Gore, if you don't mind."

"Certainly!" said Gore. "Here is a receipt for your money."

He signed a paper, and handed it across the table. Singleton did not even trouble to read it, and he was certainly unaware of the fact that the document was no receipt at all, and not worth a cent.

"You may be quite comfortable about Blue Lightning," said Gore smoothly. "I will look after him well, and I advise you to back him heavily for the Helm-

ford Cup next week. At present, the betting is ten to one, and it will possibly drop even lower before the race. Blue Lightning is regarded as a hopeless outsider."

"That's just the joke about it," said Crosse. "We're in the know, and it's an absolute fact that Blue Lightning will romp home, showing every other gee-gee a clean pair of heels."

"He simply can't lose," said Gore. "It's a chance to make a fortune, Singleton, and I can assure you that every penny of this money, and more besides, will be wagered by me. I want to make a fortune on my own account, and it's within your power to do the same."

"But a bookmaker wouldn't take such stakes, would he?" asked Fullwood doubtfully.

"My dear lad, you don't understand these things!" smiled Gore. "The bookmakers look upon Blue Lightning as hopeless. Ten thousand pounds wagered on him, therefore, would be regarded as a present. But, quite apart from that, I have matters of my own. I shall back the money with quite a number of bookmakers—comparatively small sums here and there—and by this time next week I shall be a man of wealth."

Singleton nodded.

"Well, look here!" he said. "The horse is mine, and I mean to back him heavily, too."

"Good!" said Gore. "I shouldn't think of putting on less than three thousand, if I were you."

"Do you require the cash to-night?" asked Singleton.

"Cash isn't really needed," replied Gore. "A cheque will do quite well. But why are you asking me if I want money? I'm not a bookmaker—"

"I know," said Singleton. "But I thought you would oblige me, Mr. Gore. I can't very well have dealings with bookmakers, unless I want to get sacked from St. Frank's. So I thought you would handle the money for me, and deal with it while you're dealing with yours. I don't mind paying commission."

"Nonsense!" smiled Gore. "I'm only too willing to help you in the matter, my lad. I will certainly take your money, if you wish; it will be no trouble to me. None at all!"

"Thanks awfully!" drawled Singleton. He drew out his cheque-book and

pulled the cap from his gold-mounted fountain-pen.

"Not less than three thousand, and more if you can reasonably manage it," said Gore. "Take my advice, young 'un, and you won't regret it."

Singleton tossed the cheque across the table. It was open, and Gore would be able to cash it by merely presenting it at the bank. His eyes opened somewhat as he looked at the cheque.

"Ten thousand—eh?" he exclaimed.

"Great Scott!" murmured Fullwood.

"That's the figure," said Singleton calmly. "I might as well do the thing properly while I'm about it."

"But are you sure you can manage such a sum?" asked Gore concernedly. "My boy, you must not be reckless. You must remember that it is always wise to go cautiously in these matters —"

"That's exactly what I am doing," interrupted Singleton. "If that cheque was made out for ten times the amount it would be honoured all right. You needn't worry at all, Mr. Gore. I know precisely what I am doing."

"That's good enough for me," said Gore, placing the cheque in his pocket. "I'll put this money on Blue Lightning for you with pleasure, and next week I hope you will be able to run over to Helmford to see your horse win."

Carslake and Crosse regarded Gore rather curiously.

"Do you think it will be advisable for Singleton to be there?" asked Crosse.

"Why not?" said the other. "I shall be delighted with his company!"

"Good!" said Singleton. "You can rely on me being there, Mr. Gore. It's a cert.!"

A few minutes later the boys took their departure, Gore advising them to go, saying that it would be just as well for them not to be seen too much together. And after they had gone, Carslake and Crosse regarded their companion in a somewhat dazed fashion.

"Twenty thousand pounds!" exclaimed Carslake. "It's amazing, Gore! You said you would be able to do it, and you're right. The boy is a fool of the most pronounced type."

"I don't agree with you," said Gore. "The boy has plenty of sense if he chooses to use it. He is simply fascinated by the whole game, and he does not

realise what he is doing. Moreover, he thinks that we are genuine."

Crosse chuckled.

"You've certainly given him every reason to think so," he explained. "Why, you've handled the whole thing in a masterly way, Gore. You didn't want to sell the horse, and for a moment I was afraid Singleton would back out —"

"Not he!" chuckled Gore. "I knew exactly what I was doing. My reluctance only made Singleton all the more determined. I knew well enough that I had landed my fish. You remember that I advised the boy to back the horse for three thousand; but I knew well enough that he would fill in a cheque for ten. It is only necessary to have a knowledge of human nature."

"So we've got twenty thousand quid to divide," said Carslake. "Five thousand each for you and I, and ten thousand for Gore. He certainly deserves his share."

"I think I do," smiled Gore. "For the present I will retain the money, and we will square it up later. Needless to say, I shall not put a penny on the horse; but Singleton will never know that."

And the three men again chuckled over the easy manner—the astounding easy manner—in which they had hoodwinked their victim.

Meanwhile, Singleton and Fullwood went round to the rear of the hotel for the car. They arrived just in time to surprise a man who was getting out of the limousine.

"What the dickens——" began Singleton.

The man seemed to be an old tramp, and, somehow, the boys thought they had seen him before, hanging about near by. The old fellow hobbled off at once, and vanished round some outbuildings.

"Infernal sauce!" growled Fullwood. "What was he doing?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," drawled Singleton. "Just tryin' to see what he could find, I suppose. Where's Jenkins?"

The Hon Douglas dismissed the incident from his mind. But Fullwood thought about it a good deal.

Who was the man? Why was he lurking about in that strange manner? Was he spying on the boys?

It was certainly somewhat mysterious.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LUCK OF THE FOOLISH.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE beamed upon the scene amiably.

It was quite a sunny afternoon, and the Helmford Racecourse was looking quite gay with colour and bright sunshine.

It was the afternoon of the races, and the event was very well attended. Singleton was there, to say nothing of Fullwood and Co. By good fortune, the day happened to be a half-holiday—a Wednesday—and the boys had been able to get away.

"Everything will go smoothly, boys," smiled Gore. "Blue Lightning is at the top of his form. By gad! He will give a few people a surprise within the next hour, mark my words!"

"Well, we've got some money on him, anyhow, sir," said Fullwood. "If he wins at ten to one, we shall be in clover."

Personally, Fullwood was rather doubtful. But, considering the fact that he had backed Blue Lightning with money especially borrowed from Singleton, he was not worrying. Even if the horse lost, Fullwood would not be out of pocket. He had received the money from Singleton, promising to pay it back as soon as he obtained his winnings. Gulliver and Bell had done the same.

There were several minor races before that. The St. Frank's party watched these with interest, but they were only waiting for the important event of the afternoon—the 3.30. The race for the Helmford Cup was a most important affair, and a good deal of money had been wagered.

"At last!" said Singleton.

The time was nearly 3.30, and preparations were being made for the big race. For the first time since Fullwood and Co. had known him, Singleton had dropped his languid air. The dandy of the Remove was alert, rather anxious, and nervy. He had his binoculars to his eyes constantly.

"Egad! There's Blue Lightning!" he exclaimed, at length.

The boys, with their mean companions, were in the grand stand. They were wearing ordinary soft hats, deeming it inadvisable to display their school colours in such a public and forbidden spot.

Blue Lightning had been let out with

the other horses, and was now taking his place at the starting-post.

"I can't quite understand you, Gore," murmured Carslake. "You know as well as I do that the horse will lose——"

"Of course I do!" admitted Gore.

"Then we ought to be going—we ought to be miles away," said Carslake. "What will the boy do when he finds out how he has been duped?"

"Don't be so absurd!" said Gore. "And don't talk so loudly! The boy will never find out the truth. Upon my soul! You have no idea of what you are saying. We have not half done with Singleton yet, and if we made ourselves scarce, he would guess the truth in a moment. We will face the whole thing out. Leave it to me, and everything will be all right."

"That's the best way," murmured Crosse. "Hallo, they're starting."

A minute or two later the race began. There were twelve horses running, and Blue Lightning was somewhat difficult to distinguish, since his colouring was similar to that of two or three other horses, and his jockey was wearing a rather dull costume, which did not stand out from the others.

"By gad!" said Fullwood excitedly. "Blue Lightning leads!"

"Hurrah!"

"No, you're wrong!" gasped Bell. "It's Swanee River!"

"Rats!" said Gulliver. "The leading horse is Buckeroo!"

Nobody was exactly sure, and the race-horses were now a good distance round the track. Most of them kept in one bunch, but one or two straggled far behind. One horse, indeed, had practically dropped out.

"Here they come!"

"Lend me your glasses, Singleton!" gasped Bell.

"Rats!" said Singleton.

His eyes were glued to the glasses, and as the horses swept past the winning-post he lowered the glasses and breathed rather hard.

"Egad!" he murmured. "That's deucedly strange!"

"Eh?"

"What's strange?" asked Fullwood eagerly. "I didn't see——"

"Blue Lightning wasn't among the crowd at all," said Singleton, trying to

keep his voice steady. "He's out there, nearly half a mile away."

"Great Scott!"

"Then—then he's lost?" asked Bell faintly.

"Yes, it seems like it."

"My dear lad, this is terribly serious!" said Gore, his voice full of anxiety and concern. "Blue Lightning has undoubtedly lost, and I'm amazed! Wait here. I will make instant inquiries."

He hurried away, and Carslake and Crosse went with him.

"Ten thousand quid!" muttered Bell huskily. "Oh, my goodness! You've lost it, Singleton! You've lost ten thou—"

Singleton turned.

"Don't make a song about it, hang you!" he snapped savagely.

It was the first show of temper he had made for some time, and the Nuts remained quiet. They could well understand the feelings of the Hon. Douglas. He had backed the horse heavily, and he had lost.

Gore did not return until fifteen minutes had elapsed.

"Well?" asked Singleton eagerly.

Gore sat down.

"I have some rather serious news for you, Singleton," he said gravely. "Never, in the whole course of my career, have I struck such a piece of infernally bad luck! My lad, I am deeply sorry!"

"That's all right!" said Singleton. "I don't mind losing the money; I've got plenty more! What's wrong with the horse?"

"By what I can understand, Blue Lightning sprained a vital tendon at the very moment of starting off," said Gore concernedly. "Nobody seems to know exactly how it happened, but Miles, the jockey, declared that the horse was too eager to get off."

"Is it serious?"

"Not particularly, except in this one instance," replied Gore glibly. "You see, Blue Lightning will have to have complete rest for a month, and then he will be perfectly fit again. It is a mishap which is likely to occur to any highly trained racehorse, and you must be prepared for such disappointments. But this is particularly galling!"

"The horse is quite all right, then?" asked Singleton.

"Oh, quite!" replied Gore. "I'm only worrying about your bad luck, my boy. Of course, you will get all your money back ultimately—there is no question about that."

"Well, that's a good thing!" said Fullwood, with relief.

"In point of fact, there is no reason why you should not get your money back almost at once," went on Gore. "I have a suggestion which you will gladly agree with, I believe. But I will tell you about that later. In any case, I can promise to put you into a position to recover the twenty thousand almost within a week."

"Egad! That's rather topping of you!" said Singleton eagerly.

His faith in Mr. Philip Smith Gore was as staunch as ever. He had not the faintest suspicion that he had been duped and robbed—that the horse was not worth a mere fifty pounds.

And when the Nuts and Singleton left Helmford, an hour later, the Hon. Douglas was feeling quite serene and content.

Gore had managed to put him into an easy frame of mind, and everything was going smoothly.

The fly was now firmly enmeshed in the web, and Gore and Co. were determined to continue their game until they had fleeced the Hon. Douglas of all he possessed.

In a saloon of a quiet hotel in Helmford, the three men collected together after the races.

"It's amazing how you managed it!" said Crosse.

"Nonsense!" laughed Gore. "There is nothing easier than to pluck an un-plucked pigeon. Singleton is absolutely a fool in all worldly matters, and I can assure you that I have only just commenced my programme."

"You think we can make more money?" asked Carslake.

Gore laughed.

"Think!" he echoed. "I know!"

"But how—"

"Never mind how just now," said Gore. "Before I have finished with the Hon. Douglas, he will not possess a farthing. Man alive! Do you realise

that we have only tapped the very commencement of his fortune? There are immense possibilities, and in a very short time I shall have all my plans complete." Meanwhile the Hon. Douglas had returned to St. Frank's, quite content and happy. It seemed that he was booked for a somewhat lively time!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

It seems fairly certain that Gore means to get hold of Singleton's fortune without much loss of time. Indeed, Gore is cute enough to know that he must strike the iron while it is hot and not let this opportunity to enrich himself slip under his feet. Even Carslake was staggered by the calm audacity with which his new associate hoodwinked and swindled this unsuspecting schoolboy of thousands of pounds. Though the loss of £20,000 over Blue Lightning was irritating to Singleton, it was only the beginning of a series of carefully planned schemes to bring about his complete ruin. Like all reckless gamblers, Singleton plays higher and higher stakes in the hopes of retrieving his failures.

NEXT WEEK we shall follow the further adventures of the Hon. Douglas Singleton in London. The story will be called "THE SCHOOLBOY GAMBLER!" and will be provided with plenty of colour and incident.

And now a few words about our new serial, "Three Boys in Canada!" beginning in this number. In introducing the author, Mr. S. S. Gordon, I need hardly say that he is no stranger to Canadian life. Having knocked about in this part of the world, his story will give you a true impression of life away up in the wilds of North-West Canada. None of you, my chums, should fail to read it.

Many inquiries have been made as to the publication of "In Trackless Space" in book form. This wonderful story, which has created such a sensation, will appear in "The Boys' Friend 4d. Library" about next April or May. So make a note of it, my chums.

I feel sure that all my readers will welcome another grand new serial from the pen of that most successful and popular contributor, Mr. David Goodwin. It is a long time now since this gifted author's name appeared in the various papers under my control, and in his latest effort he had completely surpassed the high level of all his previous stories.

Mr. Goodwin's new serial is entitled

"KING OF THE CANALS,"

a story graphically relating the stirring adventures of a bargeboy; it starts in this week's number of "The Robin Hood Library." Get a copy now and read the first long instalment. "The Robin Hood Library" appears every Friday—price 1½d.

THE EDITOR.

A MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIAL STARTS BELOW!

THREE BOYS IN CANADA

**A stirring Story of the Adventures of
Three British Lads in North-West Canada**

By S. S. GORDON

The Royce Brothers Have An Adventure.

IT was an unpleasant night. Rain was battering against the window of the room in which sat two youths talking together. A skimpy, little fire burned wearily in a grate that looked as though it had at late missed the attentions of a housemaid and a blacklead-brush. Now and then the paltry fire sent a puff of smoke into the room that set the youths coughing.

"I don't mind smoke," said the elder of the two, "if it comes from somebody's pipe; but I don't like it when it ought to go up the chimney. What awful coal your landlady provides, Teddy!"

"She grouses at having to provide any at all after the first of April," said the younger lad—Teddy Royce, who was barely sixteen years of age, and, despite his cheerless surroundings, a happy-faced youngster.

"H'm! I s'pose so," said his brother, Jack, aged twenty, tall, and as straight as a young fir-tree. He possessed a handsome face that was deeply tanned by the climate of another country than England. "Hang it, lad! I wish I could get you out of this! I don't like going back to Canada, and leaving you here on your own."

Teddy's eyes grew a trifle wistful.

"I wish I could go with you," he said, with half a sigh. "But I simply can't save up the cash. It's hard to save out of a quid a week wages these days."

"Aren't there any people you could

borrow twenty pounds from?" asked Jack. "The old guv'nor used to be pretty well thought of."

A little of the spirit that was in the younger Royce showed itself in his face.

"I'd rather go on grubbing all my life," he said, "than have to borrow from the pater's old friends. He died bankrupt, as you know, and most of the people who used to think such a lot about him aren't at all keen on our name now. They thought they'd get twenty shillings in the pound out of his estate, and only got five."

"H'm, yes!" murmured Jack thoughtfully. "If ever I strike it rich out there, I'll find out all the people who were hit in the smash, and pay them back every cent. But— Well, the first few dollars I get scraped together I'm going to send over to you, so you can come out. I took up a Government homestead in Alberta last fall, and by the time you get out it ought to be looking something like a farm. You and I, as partners, ought to be able to make things go."

"Then you're not sorry you went?" said his brother.

"Sorry? By gad, no! Say, young 'un, in spite of the hard graft, I wouldn't stay in this country another year. It always seems so free and good in Canada, even on a wet night. If you get wet through—well, you just wait till you're dry again, and that's the end of it. And everybody's so decent to you. If a man's making a bit less than his neighbour, they don't—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

He came to his feet suddenly, as did Teddy. Both listened intently, for they could hear an unmistakable disturbance out in the dingy street. There was the sound of running feet, also breathless cries. Then, as the boys strode to the window, there came a furious knocking at the street door.

"Let me in!" cried a panting voice. "Quick! They're after me!"

"Landlady's out," said Teddy, running into the dirty little passage. "What's up here?"

He shot back the bolt of the front door, and opened it. No sooner was it done than a figure stumbled in, cannoning violently into Teddy, who staggered back.

The passage became a scene of fierce struggling, for three other men forced their way inside.

"Keep 'em off!" cried an excited voice. "Here, let go!"

Jack Royce instinctively knew what to do. One of the men reached out, and seized the first-comer's coat. The next moment he shot through the doorway, sent there by a mighty blow from Jack's fist. The westerner's blow was akin to the kick of a colt, and the fellow who received it made no attempt to re-enter the house. Indeed, before he had recovered his feet, a heavy body fell on him, for Jack had picked up another man, and, with a prodigious heave, had thrown him out also.

Jack slammed the door shut, and locked it. He turned into the passage again, and looked at his brother, at another youth, who was leaning limply against the hatstand, and at a third person, who was crouching low, his fists clenched, glaring at Jack.

"Hallo!" said the elder Royce. "Here's another of 'em! What d'ye want, my man?"

For answer, the man whipped a hand behind him, and something glittered in the dim gaslight of the passage. Jack, as quick as light in all things, did not stop to think, but gave a grunt, stepped forward, and shot out his fist. The blow caught the man with the knife like a steam-hammer, and the fellow crumpled like a sack to the floor.

Jack stooped and hauled the fellow to his feet. He was stunned.

"We'd better look after the person," he said. "Get him into the parlour, Teddy. And you, sir"—to the ap-

parent cause of all the trouble—"had better come in, too, and explain a few things."

The Royces sat the senseless man in an armchair, and Jack examined him carefully. A moment convinced him, however, that the fellow was in no great need of assistance.

"Just a knock-out blow," he said. "He'll be all right in a minute. What about the other?"

He turned to the person who had knocked at the door and called to be let in. This was a youth of apparently about eighteen years of age, rather lavishly dressed, wearing a well-cut raincoat that was trickling water down to the floor, and a soft, felt hat. The face of this youth was still white, and, as he leaned against the table, panting, he held a hand to his head.

"Did they hurt you?" asked Jack. "Sit down, old man. You look a bit finished."

"Thanks!" said the other. "I feel rocky. Fact is, they got me before I could dodge them. I managed to break away, and bolted. Your house was the first I came to that had a light in the window, so I came in. I'm much obliged for your help. It seems they'd have got me, even after I'd found my way inside."

"Well, don't talk about it, unless you feel well enough," said Jack kindly. "Sorry there's nobody in, or we could get you something to drink to pull you round."

"I'll be right in a minute," said the other. "See, that chap's coming round."

Sure enough, the man in the chair was stirring. He groaned once, then opened his eyes stupidly. Jack was beside him, with a powerful hand on his shoulder, before he could think where he was.

"Who're you?" he asked stupidly.

Then his eyes fell on the form of the youth in the raincoat, and he half rose to his feet. Jack, without any particular gentleness, forced him back to his seat.

"You're in the hands of a crowd who're going to hand you over to the

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

police as soon as this gentleman's fit to tell a tale," he said.

The fellow struggled, but Jack rammed a hard, brown fist under his nose, and the look in his eyes, as well as previous experience of the weight of that fist, taught the man the wisdom of obeying him.

"I wouldn't move too much," said Jack grimly. "We call your sort a nasty name in the West, and we treat you rather roughly. I don't always remember I'm in England, you know."

"Curse you!" growled the man.

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm used to worse than that," he said. "Now, you sit quiet until we know just what to do. You, sir"—turning to the young stranger—"might try and tell us what it all means."

"I—I don't quite know; it was all so quick. I was walking along a pretty low street near here, when three fellows set on me. They made no noise, and one of them got me a nasty knock with something heavy. I tripped one of them, then bolted. Why they should do it I don't know."

"And d'you know who they were?" asked Jack. "Who is this chap?"

"I don't know; never saw him before in my life."

Jack turned to the ruffian, who was a heavily built man, with a short, black beard and heavy-browed, dark eyes.

"What did you attack this gentleman for?" he asked.

"Find out!" was the snarled-out reply.

"Oh, all right, then! Teddy, fetch a policeman, if there is such a thing to be found round here. I have a charge of my own to make, too. The gentleman tried to use a knife on me, I remember."

Teddy nodded, and went outside. Jack, with his hand still on the black-bearded man's shoulder, turned to the other stranger.

"Any objections to giving your name?" he asked.

"No, of course not. I'm sorry I forgot before. I'm Telford, Gerald Telford."

"Thanks! Well, I suppose you're prepared to make a charge against this man? Looks to me a bit like footpad-work, as they call it where I come from. It ought to be stopped."

Gerald Telford hesitated, looked at the black-bearded one, and then at the stalwart, young colonial.

"Do you want to make a charge?" he said. "There's a lot of fag connected with it, you know. We'll both have to appear as witnesses against him, and it wastes a lot of time. Besides—well, I don't want to be a coward—but these chaps generally have friends, and——"

"Yes; I see what you mean. Those friends might try to do you in again," said Jack. "And, as for me—well, I'm due to sail for Canada the day after to-morrow. And if I delay my journey, I might not get a berth in another boat for months. Second-class and steerage are booked up for months ahead. Can't afford saloon."

"Then let the chap go. Frighten the life out of him first," said Telford. "I don't want any more bother over him, and I think he's had a lesson not to try and rob me again."

Jack released his grip on the man's shoulder. Just then there came a knock at the door.

"Get!" he said curtly, pointing to a window that led on to the backyard. "And if ever I clap eyes on your ugly face again, I'll make you so sick you can't think. See?"

The man came to his feet quickly. Jack dealt him a heavy kick, and the fellow, as the door was knocked upon again, dashed to the window, which he threw open. He was outside in a moment, and when Jack opened the door, to let his brother and a policeman in, there was no trace of the ruffian.

"Why—what——" began Teddy.

"He got away," said Jack. "Sorry, Mr. Policeman, to have troubled you."

"But, surely——" Teddy began again.

Then Telford checked him, with a wave of the hand, dipped into his pocket, and produced a couple of half-crowns, which he handed to the policeman, who was beginning to feel annoyed at the waste journey he had made.

"That's for your trouble, officer," he said. "The fellow had a black beard, but that's about all I can say to describe

(Continued overleaf.)

him. If you happen to see him, run him in, and communicate with me. Here's my card. I'm staying with my guardian at present, Mr. Septimus Cardone, solicitor, of Bank Street, Bradleyfield."

The policeman touched his helmet and the frown that had gathered on his face vanished when he felt the silver in his palm. He turned on his heel, and left the house, and the three young fellows grinned at each other.

"That's easier than prosecuting," said Telford. "They always did say I was an easy-going sort. I do know, if

there's an easy way and a hard way I always seem to pick the easy one first time."

But had he been able to peep in the future just then, the speaker might have found reason to think that letting the black-browed rascal escape the law was not the easiest way out, for none of the three had seen the last of Obadiah Snaith, a man who knew what the inside of Sing Sing Prison was like, and who would have given a great deal.

(To be continued.)

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