No. 243.—A Splendid New Series at St. Frank's Just Started!

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Singleton, dazed by the blow, had a dim idea that he was being robbed.
Mr. Gore was shadowed by the strange, bearded man, as he entered the post office.

SINGLETON IN LONDON

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Spendthrift of St. Frank's," "On the Downward Grade," "The Waster's Progress," etc.

January 31, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FOR McCLURE.

STUDY D, in the Remove passage of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, was very quiet and peaceful.

This was rather unusual, more particularly as Edward Oswald Handforth himself was in occupation. As a general rule Study D was the centre of a considerable amount of noise in the early evening.

But it so happened that Church and McClure were out at the moment, purchasing, as a matter of fact, the necessary articles of food for tea. Hence the unusual quiet'.de.

Handforth, being alone, could not create a din; he would find it difficult to enter into an argument with the four walls. Moreover, he was busy two ways. He was sitting before the fire, reading, and also attending to a row of chestnuts which adorned the top bar of the grate.

At all events, he was supposed to be attending to them. The fact that they were rapidly becoming charred into an uneatable condition did not seem to worry Handforth in the slightest degree.

He was very interested in his book—which, of course, was a detective romance. Handforth seldom read anything else but detective stories; he confidentially informed his chums that it would be good experience for the future. Edward Oswald, for some inexplicable reason best known to himself, imagined that he was capable of shining as an investigator of crime.

Tap!

Handforth took no notice of the soft knock upon the door. And again it sounded, this time much louder.

Tap!

"Eh? What the—— Come in, you silly ass!" called Handforth, laying his book aside. "My—my only hat! All the chestnuts are burning! Oh, it's you, is it?"

Handforth broke off, and glared at Tubbs, the pageboy, who had just entered the study. Tubbs, who knew Handforth of old, had sufficient presence of mind to keep near the door.

"Yessir," he grinned. "I've just brought this letter——"

"Blow the letter!" snapped Handforth. "Why the dickens didn't you come before? Look at these chestnuts! Just look at 'em!"

Tubbs looked.

"Yes, Master Handforth," he said, "they do seem to be a bit scorched!"

"Scorched!" roared Handforth. "You—you silly ass! They're burnt to cinders! If you'd only come five minutes ago, they'd have been cooked to a turn. Some fellows haven't got any wits at all!"

Tubbs was inclined to agree; but he made no comment.

"The best nuts out of the bag, too," went on Handforth. "I picked 'em out specially. I can't be expected to watch chestnuts and concentrate upon crime elucidation at the same time."

"Crime which, sir?" asked Tubbs politely.

"You wouldn't understand, Tubby," said Handforth, waving his hand. "You might as well tell me what you came for."

"I've brought this letter, Master Handforth," said Tubbs.

"A letter? For me?"

"No, sir. it's for Master McClure."

"Oh, for Master McClure!" snapped Handforth. "Why the dickens didn't you go to Master McClure, then?"

"I thought he was here——"

"Well, why didn't you put it in the rack?" demanded Handforth, who couldn't live without arguing. "The rack is the proper place for letters—— But I've just remembered. The post came hours ago——"

"This is an express letter, sir," explained Tubbs. "It was brought from the post-office by a telegraph boy. I've always thought that express letters were important, so I brought it straight along."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "McClure wouldn't have anything important by post. Chuck the letter over, and buzz off, Tubby. Your face may be handsome, in its own way, but it worries me."

"Yessir," grinned Tubbs.

He retired while he was safe, and Handforth picked up the letter and glanced at it. It was addressed to Master Arnold McClure, and was marked "urgent." It had been posted in London that same morning.

"Rather rummy," murmured Handforth. "I'll ask the ass what's it about when he comes in."

Handforth stuffed the letter into his pocket absent-mindedly, and turned once more to his book. He was reading tensely, having reached a very thrilling episode, when his chums came in.

"Here we are again," said Church cheerfully.

They were loaded up with bags. Being rather in funds that day, they had splashed somewhat, and had provided themselves with an extra-special tea. The two juniors regarded Handforth with a certain amount of indignation.

"You lazy bounder!" said McClure warmly. "You haven't done a thing—not a giddy thing! We expected to see the cloth laid——"

"How do you expect me to attend to silly domestic affairs when I'm up to my eyes in this mystery?" demanded Handforth. "Don't be so dotty! I've just got to the point where the detective has discovered the trail of blood!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Church. "Don't spoil our tea! We don't want to hear all that lurid stuff—— My goodness! Look at those chestnuts! Why, they're burnt to nothing!"

"Yes, they are a bit scorched," admitted Handforth.

"Why, you careless rotter!" roared McClure. "What the dickens do you mean by ruining my chestnuts, Handy? You promised to have 'em all cooked by the time we came back."

"Well, he's kept his promise," grinned Church. "They're certainly cooked!"

"Don't make a song," said Handforth. "The fact is, my brain was so occupied in elucidating the mystery of this amazing case that I had no time to think about such silly things as chestnuts. As far as I can make out, the murderer must have entered by the skylight. Then he got through a trap-door into the coiners' den, and stuck the knife into his former confederate——"

"Oh, ring off!" groaned Church. "Why on earth you read such piffle amazes me!"

"Piffle!" snapped Handforth. "This is one of the best detective stories going. I've only got half-through it, and there's already been three murders and two suicides—to say nothing of bank robberies!"

"Well, we won't argue," said Church. "Personally, I'd like something more elevating. A chap with a brain like yours ought to read stories that teach you things, instead of——"

"These teach me just what I want to know—the science of detecting crime," said Handforth firmly. "As you chaps know, I'm hot stuff on detective work ——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared.

"You cackling asses," he roared. "I'll punch your noses——"

"I—I was laughing at Church," stammered McClure hastily. "He—he was

nearly dropping the tea on the floor, you know!"

"I'm rather good at detective work," he repeated. "And when I leave St. Frank's I mean to go through a special course of training—instead of Oxford, you know. What's the good of stuffing up with things I don't want to know at Oxford?"

"We don't know what you want to know at Oxford," said Church. "Anyhow, change the subject. Clear that book of yours off the table, and help to spread the cloth. We've got some fine little beef-pies, and all sorts of nice cakes. I'm jolly hungry, if you want to know the truth."

Handforth shifted at last, and tea was soon being prepared. The table certainly looked inviting, and Handforth forgot all about his wonderful detective ability when he had fairly started on the feed.

"The sardines are topping," he declared, helping himself to more. "Mrs. Hake seems to be getting more up-to-date; she's stocking her shop with decent stuff this term—— Hallo! Who put that ugly thing there?"

The door had opened, and a face had appeared. It was the face of Teddy Long, of the Remove. A visit from Master Long during tea-time generally indicated that the sneak of the Remove was on the look out for a free feed.

"I say, you chaps——"

"Cut!" interrupted Handforth. "Scat! Buzz off! Clear!"

"But, look here——"

"We'll give you one second!" roared Handforth. "You needn't come cadging here, you little worm! I expect you've had two teas already——"

"I—I haven't come here for tea," shouted Long.

"What?" yelled Handforth and Co.

Teddy Long ventured further into Study D.

"I just looked in to have a word with McClure," he explained.

"And you don't want any grub?" gasped Handforth.

"No, of course not!"

"My only hat!"

"I've had tea," said Long. "I'm not a sponger!"

"Not—not a sponger!" panted Church. "And you don't want any grub! Who said that the age of miracles was past? Long comes to a study at tea-time, and doesn't want to cadge anything."

"Amazing!" said Handforth. "I don't believe it——"

"I—I only came to ask McClure about that letter of his," said Teddy Long.

McClure stared.

"Letter?" he repeated. "Which letter?"

"Why, the one Tubbs brought not half-an-hour ago—an express letter," said Long.

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth.

"Tubbs brought me no letter," said McClure. "Don't be an ass, Long. You must have been dreaming——"

"But—but I saw the telegraph boy bring it," said Long. "I saw him give it to Tubby, and Tubby showed it to a crowd of other chaps. We all wondered what it could be, and I thought McClure was in trouble, perhaps."

"You'll be in trouble in about four seconds' time!" said Handforth grimly. "Clear out, you prying little bounder! I should like to know what business it is of yours if McClure gets an express letter. It's about time you stopped poking your nose into other people's business!"

".Yes, but I—— Ow! Yaroooh!"

Long fled, Handforth having hurled a rock cake at him with some violence. The cake struck Teddy in the mouth, and burst into atoms. Long was more disappointed by this catastrophe than by his failure to learn the secret of McClure's mysterious communication. To have food hit his mouth without entering that cavity was decidedly galling.

"Yah, rotters!" he yelled, slamming the door.

Handforth jumped up.

"Oh, let him go!" said Church. "Don't make a fuss in the passage, Handy. What's that rot he was saying about a letter for McClure? There's been no letter for any of us since this morning."

"Yes, there has," said Handforth. "While you chaps were in the tuck shop Tubby brought this in."

"What's 'this'?" asked McClure.

Handforth pulled out the letter and tossed it across the table.

"My only hat!" said McClure, at once. "This is from home! It's my

mater's handwriting! And it's marked 'urgent,' too, and was sent by express! It must be jolly important."

"Well, open it and see," said Church. "Very likely there's a postal order in it, or a couple of Bradburys—or Fishers. There's no telling."

"Fishers!" said Handforth. "What the dickens are they?"

"Currency notes are signed by a chap named Fisher now—not Bradbury," said Church. "And you're supposed to be a detective—a chap who observes things. Take my advice, Handy, and ——"

"Oh, my goodness!" said McClure huskily.

His chums looked across the table with concern. McClure had turned rather paler than usual, and there was an expression of anxiety in his eyes. The letter had been opened, and McClure was holding it between his fingers.

"Anything wrong?" asked Handforth quickly.

"Nothing bad, I hope," said Church.

"I—I don't exactly know," said McClure. "This letter's from the mater. Listen:

"'My dear boy,—Your father is very ill indeed, and although the doctors say there is no danger, I want you to come to London at once—the very instant you receive this letter. I did not send a telegram, for fear of alarming you too much. Show your Headmaster this letter, and I know he will give you permission to come.'

"That's all there is practically," added McClure.

"So you've got to go home?" asked Church. "I say, I hope your pater's all right, Clurey. I can't make out why they didn't send a telegram. It's all rot to say it would scare you——"

"The mater's a bit nervous like that," said McClure. "Besides, I expect she thinks this letter will carry more weight with the Head. I shall have to buck up if I'm going up by the evening train."

"To-night?" exclaimed Church.

"Of course. What's the good of waiting?" asked the other. "If I can get permission I might as well go straight off."

"You'll never do it," said Church, looking at his watch. "There's only just over half-an-hour before the train goes—and it's the last train through to London to-night."

"It's all Handy's fault, the silly ass," snapped McClure.

"My fault?" roared Handy. "I'm not responsible for the giddy train service, you dotty idiot!"

"You're responsible for keeping this letter in your pocket for an hour," said McClure warmly. "If you'd only given it to me when I came in, I should have had heaps of time. And I must go to-night. The pater might get worse——"

"Well, rush to the Head to begin with, and obtain permission," said Church. "You haven't got a second to waste."

McClure hastened off, and returned less than seven minutes later, flushed and excited.

"It's O.K.!" he panted. "I've got permission."

"Good," said Handforth. "For how long?"

"Three days—and more, if necessary," replied McClure. "I suppose you fellows are going to see me off?"

"Rather," said Church.

"Well, come upstairs and help me to chuck a few things into a bag," said McClure. "I shall just have time to catch the train, if I look sharp. But it'll be a jolly near shave!"

The chums of Study D rushed upstairs to the dormitory, and McClure lost no time in bundling a few collars and other oddments into a small, leather travelling case. And by the time he had washed and changed, there was very little interval before the train was due.

"We shall have to run like the dickens!" said Church quickly. "Come on!"

They rushed downstairs, charged through the lobby and nearly bowled over three fellows who were just entering. One of them was Sir Montie Tregellis-West, another was Tommy Watson, and the third was myself.

"Steady on!" I exclaimed. "What's all the bustling and dashing about? Somebody going to catch a train?"

"Yes, I am," gasped McClure. "Pater ill—back next week!"

He dashed out with his chums, before we had time to question him further. And I glanced at my watch and shook my head doubtfully.

"They'll never do it," I said. "Train goes in four minutes, and it takes at least ten to get to the station, even running all the way."

"It can't be done in ten," said Watson.

"Dear boys, the train might be late; it frequently is, begad!" said Sir Montie. "This local service is frightfully unpunctual—it is, really!"

"Well, let's hope the train's late to-night," I said. "I'm sorry to hear about McClure's pater. I hope he'll find everything all serene when he gets to London. But it always seems pretty bad to me when a chap is called home from school."

Meanwhile, the chums of Study D were racing to the village at full speed, and long before they had passed through Bellton they knew the worst. The station was on the other side of the village, and while Handforth and Co. were still three hundred yards away, they heard an engine give a preliminary whistle.

The next moment there sounded a loud puffing.

"Too late!" gasped McClure huskily. "It's impossible to catch it now. Oh, what rotten luck!"

It was, indeed, unfortunate.

But the one fact was quite clear. McClure, of the Remove, would not go up to London by train that night.

CHAPTER II.

THE HON. DOUGLAS TO THE RESCUE.

"ROUGH luck, old man!" said Church sympathetically. "I thought we should do it, but the beastly train seems to be punctual to-night."

McClure clenched his fists.

"Isn't there another train?" he asked desperately.

"Yes, in the morning."

"I mean to-night, you ass!"

"You'll be able to get a train to Bannington, and it might go through as far as Helmford," said Handforth. "But there's no connection to London after this train. It's ghastly luck——"

"Luck!" snapped McClure angrily. "It's not a question of luck at all! If you hadn't acted the goat with my letter, I could have caught the train easily. You ought to be jolly well kicked. Handy!"

For once Handforth did not resent such a remark.

"Well, it was my fault, I'll admit," he said. "I'm sorry, old man—quite cut up, in fact! But I wasn't to know the letter was important, was I? We shall have to go back to school, and you can pop up to London by the first train in the morning."

"Thanks for telling me!" snapped McClure.

He was rather short-tempered, and he was hardly to be blamed for that. He scarcely spoke a word during the walk back to St. Frank's; he was very worried, and this was only natural.

"You needn't be so gloomy," said Handforth. "I don't suppose there is much wrong with your pater. The doctors don't seem to be anxious about him, anyhow. It'll be all right if you go in the morning."

"It's got to be all right!" growled McClure. "There's no other way of getting to London!"

They tramped back to the school, and when they arrived in the Ancient House they found that practically all the juniors knew that McClure had been called suddenly home.

"Hallo, he's back again!" remarked Pitt. "I suppose you missed the train, old son?"

"Of course, I did!" said McClure snappily. "How could I do anything else, when Handy kept my letter in his pocket until the train was almost on the point of going? I knew it was hopeless from the start."

"Is your pater very bad?"

"He seems to be, by what the letter says," replied McClure. "And now I'm stuck down here, helpless, until to-morrow! Of all the beastly, rotten luck, this is the worst I've come across!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton, of Study N, strolled up in his usual languid manner.

"But, surely, there's another train to-night?" he asked.

"Not through to London," said McClure. "What's the good of me getting to Helmford or Bannington? I

might just as well stick here. It wouldn't be so bad if I had a motor-bike to take me up, but——"

"Egad!" said the Hon. Douglas. "That's rather a good idea."

"Blessed if I can see how it's good!" said Church. "Who's going to lend him a motor-bike, I'd like to know?"

"I wasn't thinking exactly of a bicycle," said Singleton languidly. "But I've got my car in Bellton, and it's only a short run from here to London, when you've got a good car. Jenkins could do it in just over two hours, I expect—three, taking it easy."

McClure's eyes sparkled.

"It's awfully good of you, Singleton, to suggest it, but I don't see how it can be done," he said. "For one thing, the Head wouldn't allow you to take me to London. I shall have to wait until the morning——"

"Not necessarily!" I broke in. "If the case is very urgent, there's no reason why you shouldn't use Singleton's car, since he's been generous enough to offer it. The Head can't possibly object to that. But he might put the ban on Singleton going himself."

"Well, we'll see," yawned the Hon. Douglas. "I'll just go and interview Dr. Stafford. I think I can work the oracle."

He strolled off, and we looked after him rather curiously. Singleton was a remarkable fellow in many ways. He had not been at St. Frank's very long, but he had already made an astonishing reputation for himself.

He had been spending money in the most astounding manner; he had thrown cash about as though it were dust. Fivers were like pennies to him, and he was also very friendly with Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, the sporting Nuts of Study A. This fact had stamped Singleton in most fellows' eyes as a bit of a rotter himself.

Personally, I was of a different opinion.

The Hon. Douglas was easy-going. He was not so much weak-willed as carried away by the fact that he had a fortune at his disposal. He could find no channels for spending money by behaving as a normal schoolboy. So he went with Fullfull and Co., and led what was considered to be a fast life—gambling and risking money on horses, and so forth.

But, apart from this, Singleton was a generous fellow. He was very good-hearted, and was always ready to oblige anybody. It was really impossible to be on bad terms with him, even though one did not agree with his mode of life. He consorted with Fullwood and Co., but he was of a very different stamp.

I had every reason to feel warmed towards the new fellow, for only the previous week he had displayed great courage in hauling me out of the River Stowe, after we had both plunged through the ice in a motor-car accident.

I guessed that he would be only too delighted to take McClure to London—not because of McClure particularly, but because the Hon. Douglas would welcome a chance to have a few hours in town.

He went to the Head's study full of confidence.

"Come in!" came the Head's deep voice, in answer to Singleton's knock.

The junior entered, and found Dr. Stafford taking things easy in a big chair before the fire.

"Well, my boy?" asked the Head. "I presume you know it is not usual for juniors to visit my study in this informal fashion. I gather that your mission is one of importance?"

Singleton nodded.

"It is rather important, sir," he said. "As a matter of fact, I've come here to speak to you about McClure, of the Remove."

"McClure has gone to London, Singleton," said the Head.

"He missed his train, sir."

"Oh, indeed! I'm sorry to hear that," said the Headmaster. "H'm! There is no other train until the morning, I'm afraid."

"That's why I came to you, sir," said Singleton. "McClure's pater is very ill, I understand, and McClure is wanted in London at once. All sorts of things might happen during the night. I was wondering if it wouldn't be possible to get him up to London, after all."

The Head removed his glasses and polished them.

"I am glad to see you concerning yourself so much about another boy's welfare, Singleton," he said. "But I am really afraid it is impossible to help the lad in any way——"

"Pardon me interrupting, sir, but I've got an idea of my own," said the Hon. Douglas. "Couldn't McClure go

up to London by car? As you know, I've got a limousine of my own."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head. "I'd overlooked that fact for the moment, I must confess. So you have a car of your own, Singleton? Remarkable—most remarkable, for a junior boy to own a large motor-car! You are suggesting, therefore, that McClure should go to London by road?"

"Yes, sir."

"But surely it is too late for that method?"

"I don't see it," said Singleton. "My car is a good one—it cost over two thousand a week before I came to St. Frank's—and Jenkins is one of the best drivers you could wish for. He'll be able to land McClure in his own home by ten o'clock easily."

"Nonsense, Singleton!" said the Head. "It is almost seven already."

"The journey takes under three hours, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "I'll guarantee the car can be back here soon after midnight. It's a case of illness, sir, and I should very much like to give McClure a hand in such an emergency. I should feel that my car has been of some use. May I take him to London, sir?"

The Head considered for a minute.

"Well, Singleton, I hardly know what to say!" he exclaimed, at length. "But as the situation is exceptional, I think I can permit McClure to travel to London by road in your car."

"Thank you, sir!" said Singleton promptly.

He left the study on the instant, although he was quite certain that the Head had been about to make some further remarks. The Hon. Douglas was not anxious to hear them. All he wanted was permission to go to London, and he had got it.

Whether the Head's permission included Singleton himself was not quite clear. Quite possibly Dr. Stafford meant that McClure was to go up alone; but Singleton did not have any intention of finding out for certain. He meant to be off at once, and, later on, it would be quite easy for him to say that he had misunderstood.

He arrived in the lobby, unusually brisk.

"Well?" asked McClure eagerly.

"All serene!" said Singleton.

"I can go?" shouted McClure.

"Yes. That is to say, we can go."

"Do you mean to tell me that the Head has given you permission to take McClure to London?" I asked.

"Exactly," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "I shall probably arrive back just after midnight, when all you little fellows are snugly in bed. A long motor-ride is rather interesting, you know."

"Lucky boggar!" said Pitt. "If you want to know the truth, I'm jealous."

A good many other fellows were jealous, too. Handforth, indeed, was inclined to be considerably indignant.

"Didn't you get permission for Church and me to go?" he demanded.

"No I didn't think of asking——"

"So we, McClure's own chums, ain't allowed to go with him?" roared Handforth. "I call it jolly rotten——"

"But, my dear chap, the Head wouldn't allow a crowd to go, you can be sure of that," said Singleton. "Be reasonable! The car's mine, and it's only natural that I should be the chap to go."

"Duggy is quite right," I said. "Dash it all, Handy, it's jolly decent of the Head to let McClure go! You couldn't expect him to allow a whole crowd to be out after midnight!"

Handforth growled a bit, but it made no difference. And, less than five minutes later, Singleton and McClure left the school. It was their intention to walk to the village, rouse out Jenkins, and go off by car at once.

There was a good deal of envy in the other juniors' looks as the pair left. Fullwood and Co. were feeling rather swindled. They considered that Singleton was their own pal, and the very thought of going off to London without them was enough to make them boil with disappointment.

But the position could not be altered, and Singleton and McClure went alone. In the village they had no difficulty in finding Jenkins, the chauffeur, and within fifteen minutes the big limousine was ready, its huge, electric headlamps blazing brilliantly, its engine throbbing with impatience to get off.

"This is jolly decent of you, Singleton!" said McClure gratefully, as they were bowling along. "I'd given up hope of going to-night, you know. You're a brick!"

"Don't mention it, old chap!" yawned

the Hon Douglas. "Don't say another word about it. I might just as well be frank and tell you that my motive was one of pure selfishness."

"Oh, rot!" said McClure.

"You see, I thought it was rather a decent excuse for getting a look at London," explained Singleton candidly. "You get home, as you want, and I have a nice ride to London and back. What could be better?"

"Well, the fact remains that without your car I should have been stuck at St. Frank's until to-morrow," said McClure. "That's good enough for me, Singleton, and I think you're a thundering good chap! But I don't agree with smoking."

McClure added that remark as Singleton produced his cigarette-case. The interior of the car had a little electric light fitted in the roof, and it was quite brilliant in there.

"Sorry," said the Hon. Douglas. "It would give me a pain if I offended you, but smoking is just a habit of mine. Please don't lecture me, because I sha'n't take any notice."

"If you choose to smoke, it's your business," said McClure. "Personally, I think it's a rotten habit, but I wouldn't dream of lecturing you. If you choose to act the giddy ox, it's your look-out."

"Good!" drawled Singleton. "You're the kind of fellow I like."

To McClure it seemed as though the trip was accomplished in an amazingly short time. At all events, it was only a little after nine-thirty when the car was already within the outlying districts of London.

Before ten it pulled up in front of McClure's own house in Kensington. The junior jumped out, eager and excited.

"It's wonderful, Singleton!" he said. "I didn't think we should get here until midnight. The car's a spanker! I suppose Jenkins exceeded the speed limit more than once?"

The Hon. Douglas laughed.

"I think he was exceeding the speed limit all the time," he replied. "Not that a detail of that sort worries me. Police-traps ain't usually active at night, and even if we were stopped it wouldn't matter. A police-court fine only amounts to a trifle—ten quid at the most."

"I suppose you're going straight back?" asked McClure.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Singleton.

"Wouldn't you like to come in and have some supper first?"

"Jolly decent of you, but I'd rather go off at once—thanks all the same," replied the Hon. Duggy. "Besides, I don't want to be a bother to your people when there's an illness in the house. You've got home—and that's the main thing. Good-night, McClure. See you in a day or two, I suppose."

"Well, I don't mind if I stay in London for a week—or a fortnight," said McClure, with a grin. "Anyhow, now I'm here, I shall stick here as long as possible—even if my pater's as well as I am. It's an extra holiday, you know."

The two juniors shook hands, and McClure entered the gateway. Singleton gave an order to Jenkins, and the car glided off.

It did not take the road back to St. Frank's, however.

After proceeding for five or ten minutes, Jenkins pulled up before a big garage in a back street not far distant from Piccadilly. Singleton jumped out, and glanced at his watch.

"I shall be back in about a couple of hours, Jenkins," he said languidly. "I'm feeling rather peckish, and I don't suppose a little supper would do you any harm. You'd better take this quick, and have a feed."

"Thank you, sir," said the chauffeur. "But I sha'n't need all that——"

"Rot! Take it!"

Jenkins took it, and a minute or so later, the Hon. Douglas strolled away in the direction of Piccadilly. Now that he was in London, he saw no reason why he should not enjoy himself for an hour or two.

It was just ten o'clock, and the West End was fully awake, and alive with gaiety. The theatre crowds were not out, but this was really an advantage. Piccadilly Circus was fairly quiet—although, later on, it would be packed.

Singleton was undecided for a few minutes as to where he should dine, but at length he entered a very high-class restaurant—a place of the most expensive type. He was soon sitting at a little table to himself, studying the menu.

"Egad; This is great," he murmured. "Having a gay time in London—and at tea-time I thought I shouldn't see the good old bright lights for months. I'm going to do myself well."

Judging by the order he gave to the waiter, he certainly had that intention. The waiter was politely astonished when the youthful diner proceeded to give about the most expensive order it was possible to give—ending up with instructions to bring a bottle of the finest champagne the establishment could produce.

"Get busy with the order—and if you look after me decently, I'll tip you a quid when I go."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter. "Thank you, sir."

His attitude changed considerably—particularly when Singleton took out his pocket-book and carelessly looked over a bundle of Bank of England notes— the majority of which were for £20.

The Hon Douglas was carrying no less than seven hundred pounds on him. He liked doing so. He generally walked about with large sums of money on him. He also had a weakness for displaying it.

This time perhaps he was incautious.

Two well-dressed men were sitting at a table only a little distance from him. And they had not failed to notice that extremely well-filled pocket-book. All sorts and conditions of men dine in "swell" restaurants; and gentleman-crooks are fairly frequent visitors—generally on the look-out for victims.

The Hon. Douglas dined well; he enjoyed himself immensely. And he decided to have a stroll about the brilliant streets before returning to the garage for his car. It would be quite simple to explain, when he arrived at St. Frank's in the early hours, that the car had a slight mishap.

But, as it turned out, the Hon. Douglas was not destined to have much of a stroll. The restaurant was not in one of the main streets, but just a little way off Piccadilly.

And Singleton lounged along, carelessly smoking a cigarette, and was practically alone for the moment. There were a good many people within sight, of course, to say nothing of motor 'buses and taxi-cabs.

But the junior happened to be quite alone in that particular spot. The lighting was not extra good, either.

And just as Singleton was passing a small alley he received something of a shock. Two dark figures came out and barred his path. At the same second a third man, who had been walking a few paces behind Singleton, hastened up.

"I say, what the deuce——?"

Singleton was not able to finish his remark. The man in his rear swung his walking cane up and brought the knob of it down with considerable force upon the boy's head. Singleton was wearing a thick cap, and it afforded him a certain amount of protection.

The blow, however, had been severe and he collapsed to the pavement, not exactly stunned, but dazed. He was knocked out, and he only had a dim idea as to what took place It was impossible for him to make any outcry.

The three men only remained for a couple of seconds. Then they vanished down a little alley, leaving their victim lying sprawled on the pavement, still too dazed to know what had happened.

Several people came walking down the road, and it was not long before Singleton was discovered. An elderly gentleman and a young man bent over him, and tried to get him to his feet.

"The boy seems to have fainted, Ralph," said the old gentleman. "Come my lad, pull yourself together——"

"Don't you believe it, dad," said the young man. "He's been having a gay time by the look of it—too much drink. I don't see why we should bother ourselves about him."

But the old gentleman did bother himself, and within a few minutes quite a little crowd had collected. And when a little crowd collects, it generally attracts a large one.

In the finish a constable appeared on the scene, and by this time Singleton was just beginning to come round.

"What's wrong, my lad?" asked the policeman, kindly.

"Well, I'm hanged if I know exactly," muttered Singleton, rubbing the back of his head. "I seem to remember a couple of men getting in front of me. Then something hit me on the back of the head."

"I thought as much," said the constable. "Have you lost anything of value?"

"I don't think so," said the Hon. Douglas faintly. "My watch is all right Great Scott! My head feels as if it's going to split!"

The policeman and two or three others helped Singleton to his feet.

"What about your money, my boy?" asked the old gentleman. "Are you quite sure you haven't been robbed? How much did you have on you?"

"Not much," said Singleton. "Something like a thousand pounds in my pocket-book, and one or two loose notes—fifty quid notes, I think."

The policeman looked suspicious.

"Is that what you call not much, young man?" he asked.

"Well, twelve hundred pounds doesn't worry me much, even if I have lost it," said the Hon. Douglas. "My confounded head feels rotten. As for my pocket-book, it's still here—Egad! that's queer! The pocket-book's gone—the loose notes as well! That's rather surprising!"

"Not to me, my lad," said the policeman grimly. "The best thing you can do is to give me your address, and I'll put you in a taxi——"

"That's all right," interrupted Singleton. "I live in the country. If there's a decent hotel about here I'll go in for a bit—until I'm feeling better."

He attempted to walk, but was so dizzy that he staggered and fell over. A few minutes later he was being carried into a quiet, respectable hotel near by. And it was practically a certainty that the Hon. Douglas would not return to St. Frank's that night.

CHAPTER III.

RATHER STARTLING.

REGINALD PITT sniffed.

"It doesn't surprise me particularly," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, I didn't expect Singleton to be back by this morning. It's a ten to one chance he went on the razzle last night."

"Seems like it," agreed Jack Grey. "Anyhow, he's not here this morning—although I expect he'll turn up before lessons. If he doesn't, there'll be a bit of a row with the Head."

"Well, that'll be Singleton's funeral," said De Valerie. "Personally, I think he's a double distilled ass."

The juniors were chatting in the lobby of the Ancient House. It was nearly breakfast-time, and there had already been some speculation as to what had delayed the Hon. Douglas Singleton. The dandy of the Remove had not turned up, and the other fellows were naturally curious.

"It's hardly fair to judge the fellow just yet," I remarked. "It's quite possible that he had a mishap with the car. All sorts of things can happen when you're on the road, especially at night. And Singleton's a reckless bounder."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear fellows, I can't see why you're concerning yourselves," he observed. "Singleton isn't the chap to worry. It seems to me he has been goin' the pace up in London, an' he'll probably have a good excuse when he gets back. It was shockingly unwise of the Head to allow him to go."

"Well, I agree with you there, I said. "But the Head doesn't know Singleton as we know him."

After breakfast there was still no sign of the Hon. Douglas. I had ceased to wonder about him, deeming it better to wait until he turned up. Conjectures, in any case, are always liable to be wrong.

Watson and I had decided to spend half-an-hour at football practice before lessons, and we were on our way from Study C when we became aware of a little excitement in the lobby.

Pitt was there, with a newspaper, and a crowd of other juniors had gathered round him, and everybody was talking at once.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "It can't be Singleton!"

"Of course not!"

"There hasn't been any time for the item to be printed, anyhow," said Grey.

"I'm not so sure about that," declared Pitt. "Most of these morning papers don't go to press till about two o'clock. It's my belief that this paragraph here refers to Singleton."

"The description fits him, anyway," said De Valerie.

I pushed my way through the crowd.

"What's all the excitement about?" I asked briskly.

"Haven't you seen?" asked Pitt. "I was just glancing over the paper when I happened to notice this small paragraph. I shouldn't be surprised if Singleton is the chap referred to. It would account for his not turning up, anyway—and he always carries pots of money on him."

"Let's have a look at the paragraph," I said.

Pitt handed me the newspaper, indicating a small item of news nearly at the bottom of the front page. It ran as follows:

"SCHOOLBOY ROBBED.

Late last night, within a stone's throw of Piccadilly Circus, an unknown schoolboy was knocked down and robbed. The exact amount of his loss is not known, but it is believed that the sum amounts to nearly one thousand two hundred pounds, in notes. Unfortunately, the victim has no knowledge of the numbers of the stolen notes, and it is feared that they will not be traced. The boy refused to give his name and is now staying at a neighbouring hotel. His injuries are only superficial."

I handed the newspaper back to Pitt.

"Well, it might mean Singleton," I said. "In fact, it looks very significant. Singleton wouldn't have given his name for fear of the Head seeing it, and it would be just like him to have a thousand quid on him."

Handforth snorted.

"I don't believe the paragraph refers to Singleton at all," he said. "Rats to it! I don't believe in newspapers!"

A few minutes later, as it happened, I ran into Nelson Lee in the Triangle. The schoolmaster-detective was looking rather thoughtful as I pulled up in front of him. He halted at once.

"Well, Nipper?" he asked. "What's the question? I observe an enquiring look in your eye."

"I was wondering if you knew anything about that paragraph in the morning paper, sir," I said. "That item about a boy being robbed——"

"Yes, Nipper, I have seen it."

"Some of the fellows are saying that Singleton is the boy mentioned, guv'nor," I went on. "He hasn't turned up yet, you know, and it's only natural that the chaps should put two and two together."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Quite so," he agreed. "And what is your opinion?"

"I think the paragraph does refer to Singleton," I replied.

"You are quite right, Nipper," said Lee grimly. "The lad has got himself into trouble, it seems. He is not particularly hurt, but I do not think we shall see him down here until after the week end."

I looked rather surprised.

"But how do you know all this?" I asked.

"I have no difficulty in answering that question, young 'un," smiled the guv'nor. "Singleton, it seems, has lost no time in communicating with Dr. Stafford. He sent a messenger down by the first available train this morning."

"What has the ass been doing?" I enquired.

"The letter which the messenger brought was not from Singleton personally, but from a doctor," replied Lee. "This doctor explains the details of the affair, and he considers that the boy is not much hurt, but must remain in bed for at least three days. We shall probably see him down again on Tuesday?"

"And did he really lose over a thousand pounds, sir?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lee. "The boy is absurdly reckless with his money, and I shall consider it my duty to speak to him seriously when he returns. There is certainly no need for the boys to make a mystery of the affair. Singleton was knocked down and robbed, and was only slightly hurt. That is all it amounts to."

It wasn't long before the news became general, and most of the fellows agreed that the fault was probably Singleton's own.

"I suppose he was counting the notes in the open street, or something," said Hart. "A chap like Singleton oughtn't to be allowed out without a nurse."

Nobody was particularly upset over Singleton's mishap. Fullwood and Co were rather concerned, certainly—but they were mainly thinking of their own pockets, and were not worrying about Singleton's welfare.

"The silly fool ought to have been more careful," said Fullwood sourly. "Over a thousand quid—chucked away! It's enough to make anybody weep!

And now the idiot won't be here again until Tuesday!"

"Our week-end messed up!" growled Bell. "I was reckoning on gettin' a fiver out of Duggy this Saturday."

"You won't get it!" said Gulliver. "An' it's hardly fair to blame the chap, Fully. Better people than him have been robbed in the open street before now. Let's hope he isn't hurt much."

"Rather," agreed Fullwood. "It'll be a bally catastrophe for us if Singleton doesn't come back. We've been making piles of money out of him since he's been here. It'll be rotten luck if he never returns."

Morning lessons were already over, and Fullwood and Co. entered Study A in a somewhat gloomy frame of mind. It would indeed be a bad day for them when Singleton left, for he had been a veritable gold mine to them since his advent. They not only fleeced him of money at cards, but borrowed wholesale. And Singleton was always so flush that he never remembered how much he had lent, and never bothered about asking for its return. Consequently Fullwood and Co. sponged upon him to the fullest extent.

"What I can't make out is why the ass was near Piccadilly Circus," said Gulliver, as he closed the door. "He went up to London to take McClure home, and I understood that he was coming straight back—in the car."

"That point doesn't puzzle me," said Fullwood. "You can bet your boots that Singleton went to a restaurant to supper, and—hullo! What's this?"

Fullwood picked up a letter which had been lying on the table. It had evidently been placed there quite recently, for it bore the Bellton postmark, and had been posted in the early morning.

"It must have come by the midday mail," said Fullwood. "But I can't make out who'd write to me from Bellton—only a mile away."

"Better open it and see," suggested Gulliver.

Fullwood took the advice, and his chums watched him curiously. As he read the letter his face became slightly flushed, and a keen glitter came into his eyes. Gulliver and Bell watched him more intently than ever.

"Well?" said Bell at last, who's it from?"

"It's from Singleton," he replied.

"Eh?"

"From—from Singleton?"

"Yes," said Fullwood.

"Oh, don't be an ass," snapped Bell. "You can't pull our legs like that, Fully. We know jolly well it's not from Singleton. He's in London, and this letter was posted in Bellton."

"The letter is from Singleton," repeated Fullwood. "The artful dodger! The cute bounder! I didn't give him credit for such sense."

"Can't you explain?" roared Gulliver.

"Read the letter yourself—it explains everything," said Fullwood. "Or, better still, I'll read it aloud. Listen: 'Gadsby's Hotel, Glasshouse Street, Piccadilly, W. Dear Fully,—I thought I'd drop you a line to let you know the position. There's no need to go into details, but some cheerful gentleman took a fancy to my cash a couple of hours ago, and obtained it, after knocking me down. I wasn't hurt much, but I've got a doctor on the job, and I've squared him nicely. He's sending a letter to the Head, saying that I've been hit pretty badly, and must stay in bed over the week-end. Of course, I'm not hurt at all—only a bruise——'"

"Then it was all spoof?" said Bell excitedly.

"Of course it was," grinned Fullwood. "But don't interrupt, you ass. Let me finish. The letter goes on like this: 'only a bruise. It hurts a bit, but I'm not worrying about it. I've arranged everything so that I can have a good time for three days, and the Head won't be any the wiser. I am sending a messenger down with the Head's letter by the first train in the morning, and he'll post this in Bellton—so you ought to receive it by dinner-time. My suggestion is that you should come up to town to-morrow night. We could have some sport together——'"

"Oh, that's rot!" interrupted Gulliver. "How the thunder could we go to town to-night? Does the idiot think the Head'll give us permission to go out on the spree in London? I thought Singleton had more sense."

"He has," said Fullwood pleasantly. "If you'd listen, instead of interrupting, you'd hear all about it. Duggy has got a fine stunt. Now, where was I?"

"Just where he said we could have some sport together," said Bell.

"Yes, that's right," went on Fullwood. "'We could have some sport together, and make a night of it. You'll think this is impossible, but I'll explain how it can be done. I'll send Jenkins down to Bellton with the car, and he'll arrive in the lane, just against the stile, at a quarter to eleven. You be there to meet him, and you'll arrive in London by one-thirty, at the latest. We can have three hours off, and you can be back before daylight—and nobody will be the wiser. Of course, you'll be able to sleep on the two journeys up and down—so you'll be all right the next morning. It you don't intend to come let Jenkins know. But do your best to work the dodge. You'll find me at the above address.

D. S.'"

The Nuts regarded one another excitedly.

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "It could be worked all right you know—nothing easier. And what a chance! Three clear hours in London, and the Head won't know a thing about it. We'll go!"

Bell looked doubtful.

"I'm not so sure about it," he remarked. "We've got to consider the thing squarely, you know. Is it worth the risk?"

"But there won't be any risk, you idiot," said Fullwood.

"Won't there?" asked Bell. "What if we're seen getting out?"

"We've got out times enough before."

"Well, we'll let that pass," said Bell. "I expect we shall be able to manage it all right. The most important point is this. We shall be away from the school, approximately, from half-past ten until after six in the morning. That's a pretty long time, don't forget. What if one of the masters goes into the Remove dormitory in the night—even before twelve? Our beds will be empty, and there'll be the dickens to pay in the morning. The whole thing will come out, an' we shall get nothing less than a flogging, with the sack on top."

Fullwood grinned.

"And two days ago I heard you call yourself an optimist!" he said. "Why, you ass, you're simply soaked in pessimism."

It's better to be cautious——"

"That true enough," admitted Fullwood. "But the chances are that not a soul will know of our absence—an' we can afford to take a few risks. Personally, I vote for going."

"Same here," said Gulliver. "Dash is all, the chap's sending his car down especially for our benefit. It'll be only sporting to take advantage of it. It would seem a dirty trick to tell Jenkins to go back alone. Besides, we shall have the chance of makin' piles of money in London."

"An' we can sleep all the way down again," said Gulliver. "So we shan't miss much, after all."

"But what if a tyre bursts, or a valve goes wrong, or something of that kind?" asked Bell. "We shouldn't be able to get back in time——"

"Oh, don't croak!" snapped Fullwood. "Cars like Singleton's don't have squiffy tyres—and there are sure to be some spare ones, too. As for a valve bursting, we can chance that, because mishaps of that kind hardly ever occur."

The chums of Study A continued discussing the various possibilities, and in the end they came to the conclusion that it would be safe enough for them to go. And they decided to take their chance.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE TAKES A HAND

"THERE is no reason at all why we should not go, Carslake—in fact, it fits in with our own plans admirably."

Mr. Philip Smith Gore made that remark as he stood with his back to the fire in Room 13 of the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington. It was afternoon, and the dusk was already beginning to fall.

"You don't think it's a trap of any sort?" asked Carslake.

"A trap? Good lord, no!" said Gore. "Singleton is the last fellow on earth to try any tricks of that sort. His letter explains everything. He's pretending to be ill, and he means to have a good time for two or three days. I've been preparing my plans, and, although the time isn't exactly ripe, I think we had better take advantage of this opportunity.

Carslake nodded.

"I leave it to you, of course," he said. "You've managed everything splendidly so far, Gore, and I'm willing to trust myself with you anywhere. I suppose you'll wire Singleton that we're coming along?"

"Yes, of course."

The two men, to judge by their appearance, were highly respectable members of society. But this could hardly be said after a brief examination of their methods—which were, to say the least, extremely shady.

Gore was the prime mover in all the swindles; he had already fleeced the Hon. Douglas of a sum exceeding twenty thousand pounds. And he had done it in such a way that Singleton regarded Gore as a staunch friend.

It had been an exceedingly easy task to hoodwink the Hon. Douglas. The boy was quite a fool in all matters concerning business, although he imagined exactly the opposite to be the case.

Mr. Gore had had no difficulty in selling Singleton a racehorse for the sum of £10,000. And, having received the money in notes, Gore had advised the spendthrift to wager a similar amount on Blue Lightning—the horse.

Of course, Blue Lightning had been hopelessly beaten in the race for the Helmford Cup, and Singleton lost his money. But the smooth-tongued Mr. Gore was ready with his explanations.

The horse was quite all right, he assured Singleton; the animal had simply sprained a tendon, and a few weeks' rest would put him right. Then Singleton would be able to get all his money back.

The Hon. Douglas, it need scarcely be said, had been spoofed and swindled. It had been child's play to an experienced hand like Mr. Philip Smith Gore. Singleton had complete faith in the plausible rascal.

"Yes, that the idea," remarked Gore, as he lit a cigar. "I'll dodge across to the post-office within a minute or two, and send Singleton a wire. The young beggar is cute, Carslake. That idea of his to stay in London over the week-end is decidedly smart."

"Do you think we shall be able to make any capital out of the affair?" asked Carslake. "We have already got hold of a large proportion of Singleton's money——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Gore. "A large portion? My dear fellow, let me tell you that we are only just tapping the supply. Singleton is worth two hundred thousand, if he's worth a penny. Up till now we have succeeded in obtaining about a tenth of that amount."

Carslake shook his head.

"It won't be possible to continue the game for long," he said. "The boy doesn't suspect anything now, but after one or two bad deals with us—well, he'll smell a rat."

"Which only proves that you do not grasp the possibilities," said Mr. Gore pleasantly. "The next deal, as you call it, will be of a very different nature, Carslake. You and I will not appear in it—as the promoters, at all events. In fact, we shall lose considerable sums of money, too. Singleton will not suspect——"

"We shall lose money?" asked Carslake, staring.

"Ostensibly—yes," smiled Gore. "But you will understand all about it later on, my dear fellow. In a moment I will slip out and send off that telegram. By the way, isn't Crosse coming back to-day?"

"I don't think so," replied Carslake. "He's gone off to Bristol—on some private business of his own. But we shall be able to manage quite all right without him, I fancy."

"No doubt," agreed Mr. Gore, "no doubt."

He slipped into his overcoat, and donned his hat, and ventured forth. It was rather dull outside. The dusk was rapidly deepening, and the sky was heavy. He wandered away down the High Street towards the post-office.

He did not seem to be aware of the fact that his movements were being closely observed by a man who had been standing in the shadows. This man seemed to be elderly. His back was bent, and he wore a grizzled, iron-grey beard. Had he been straight and upright, his figure would have shown to advantage. But the stranger was bent, and apparently aged.

For some reason he seemed to be very interested in Mr. Gore.

At all events, when the latter gentle-

man turned into the post-office, the other man was waiting there, outside, in a doorway on the other side of the road. He waited until Mr. Gore reappeared—but made no attempt to continue his shadowing tactics.

Instead, he waited until Gore had disappeared. Then he crossed the road, entered the post-office, and did not come out again until several minutes had elapsed. He wandered away down the road in an apparently aimless fashion.

Who was the stranger?"

And why did he take such an interest in Mr. Gore?

This happened in the late afternoon. Comparatively early in the evening—just after tea at St. Frank's—Tubbs presented himself in the doorway of Study C. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and myself had just finished tea.

"Well, Tubby, what's the trouble?" I asked briskly.

"No trouble, sir, that I knows of," grinned the pageboy. "Mr. Lee told me to tell you that he wants you in his study at once, please. I hope it ain't nothing serious, Master Nipper."

I nodded.

"Thanks, Tubby," I said. "I don't think there's any need to worry. I haven't committed any particularly awful sins this week."

Tubbs grinned again, and took his departure.

"Begad! I'm inclined to echo Tubby's words—I hope it's nothin' serious, dear fellow," observed Sir Montie. "It ain't often that Mr. Lee wants to see you at this time of the day."

"We shall have to rake over your misdeeds," said Watson. "I wonder if Mr. Lee has heard about that affair with Christine and Co.?"

"Rats!" I grinned. "The guv'nor wouldn't make a song about that, even if he had heard. We only had a bit of a scrap with the bounders, and happened to come off best. Mr. Lee doesn't punish fellows for that sort of thing."

"Well, old boy, I should advise you to hurry along to Mr. Lee's study," said Tregellis-West. "If you keep him waitin' he may become impatient—and then things will be worse."

"Keep your hair on, Montie," I said calmly. "I go to the execution with a brave heart and with a steady eye. Fear not, my trusty comrades."

I passed out of the study, chuckling, and went down the Remove passage quite easy in mind. When I arrived at Nelson Lee's study, I tapped upon the door and walked in.

"Here I am, guv'nor," I said cheerfully. "What's the row about? Am I to be called over the coals for something, or is it merely a friendly chat?"

Nelson Lee turned in his chair.

"Your remark is somewhat enlightening, Nipper," he observed. "You have shown me that you are probably deserving of being called over the coals. However, as it happens, I have no intention of discussing any of your misdeeds at present. I merely sent for you in order to let you know that I am leaving St. Frank's this evening."

I stared.

"You're leaving, guv'nor?" I repeated.

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I shall probably remain away until Monday," replied Nelson Lee.

"Oh!" I said, with relief. "I thought you were going to tell me that you had decided to clear out altogether! You gave me quite a shock, sir. Where are you going to, anyhow?"

"London."

"On business, guv'nor?"

"Well, yes," said Lee slowly. "There is no need for me to go into any details. I shall be away on business, certainly. During my stay in London I shall be at our place in Gray's Inn Road."

"And you've brought me in to tell me this?"

"Exactly!"

"You brought me here to make me jealous," I said, in an injured tone. "It's not playing the game, guv'nor. I'd just love to go to London for a day or two, just for the sake of a change, and all you can do is to make me envious by telling me that you're going!"

The guv'nor chuckled.

"I'm very sorry, Nipper." He smiled. "As a matter of fact, I had no intention whatever of making you jealous, for, to tell you the truth, I was thinking about letting you come to London, too."

"What?" I shouted.

"My dear Nipper, you heard my remark quite distinctly."

"I know I did, sir; but I thought it was too good to be true," I exclaimed. "Oh, this is great! Thanks awfully, sir. When do we start?"

"We shall run up to town by the last train this evening," said Lee. "So I've warned you in time, so that you can pack a few personal articles."

"Oh, ripping!" I said heartily. "I'll be ready, sir."

I left the guv'nor's study in a highly delighted frame of mind. We hadn't been up to London for some little time, and the prospect of a week in town was decidedly alluring. And we should be back in our old quarters at Gray's Inn Road. It would be quite like old times.

I burst into Study C, and found my chums just finishing the clearing up. They regarded me rather curiously.

"Dear old boy, you don't look as if you've just received a frightful whoppin' —you don't, really," said Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez. "On the contrary, you seem terrifically bucked over something."

I nodded.

"That's just what I am," I replied cheerfully. "My sons, the guv'nor and I are going out on the randan this week-end. We start for London by the evening train, and we sha'n't get back until Monday morning."

"Gammon!" said Watson. "You're spoofing, you ass!"

"It certainly seems rather tall, dear fellow," observed Montie.

"It's the truth, anyhow," I went on. "The guv'nor's a brick! He's going up to London on business, and he's decided to let me go with him. It'll be a ripping change, after being at St. Frank's——"

"Then it's absolutely true?" asked Tommy.

"Absolutely!"

"And what about us?" went on Watson grimly. "What about Montie and me? Where do we come in?"

"I'm afraid you don't come in at all," I said slowly. "I'm sorry——"

"Rats!" interrupted Watson. "What is the good of saying you're sorry when you look as pleased as Punch? So you're quite content to leave Montie and I in the lurch!"

"I'm not exactly content——"

"You don't seem to care much, anyhow!" growled Watson. "If you want to know my opinion, I think it's jolly off-side. It's a dirty trick! Leaving Montie and I to ourselves all the week-end, while you go out on the spree!"

"I must admit, dear fellow, that I'm shockingly disappointed," said Montie, shaking his head. "Surely you asked Mr. Lee for permission for Tommy an' I? Surely you thought of us?"

I felt rather uncomfortable.

"I suppose I'm selfish," I said. "No, Montie; I didn't say anything to the guv'nor about you. The fact is, I was so pleased that you chaps never entered my head. You see, the guv'nor and I have lived in Gray's Inn Road for years, and when he suggested that we should take a trip up together, I looked upon it as old times, and didn't think about asking if you fellows could go."

"Old boy, you ain't a pal—you ain't, really!" said Montie sadly.

"You're a rotter!" exclaimed Watson hotly. "I'm surprised at you, Nipper, leaving your pals in the lurch! While you go out to London, to have a ripping time, you leave us here, forlorn and miserable, deprived of your sunny presence. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Well, you see——"

"Didn't you ask Mr. Lee if we could go?"

"I didn't think——"

"Well, my hat!" said Watson. "You didn't even suggest that we might go, too! You were so selfish that you just thought of your own enjoyment! What do you think of him, Montie? Is he worth calling a pal?"

"I am frightfully afraid that Nipper hasn't been at all sportin'," said Tregellis-West. "I don't like to make the statement, but it's a fact. Nipper ain't been sportin', an' we're doomed to stay at St. Frank's while he goes to London, seein' pantomimes an' havin' a good time generally."

"Pantomimes!" echoed Watson. "That's just what I'm keen on! Two or three of 'em are still running——"

"Keep your hair on!" I interrupted. "I'll buzz along to the guv'nor, and ask him if you fellows can come with us. I can't guarantee anything, remember, but I'll do my best. Personally, I'm afraid there'll be nothing doing."

I passed out of the study, leaving my chums in a rather more hopeful frame of mind, and I went straight along to Nelson Lee, and found him alone, as before. He looked up in mild surprise.

1. Singleton, dazed by the blow, had a dim idea that he was being robbed.
2. Mr. Gore was shadowed by the strange, bearded man as he entered the post office.

"Not ready yet, surely?" he asked. "The train isn't due to leave——"

"I've come about something else, sir," I put in. "Would it be possible for Watson and Tregellis-West to go to town with us?"

"No, Nipper; it would not be possible."

"They can't come, then?"

"I'm afraid the suggestion is out of the question," said Nelson Lee. "I can quite understand your natural inclination to take your chums with you, and I dare say they will be rather disappointed. But it will hardly be right to take three of you away at such short notice."

"They don't care anything about that, sir," I put in. "They're simply dying to go. They've been my chums ever since I came to St. Frank's, and they think it's rather rotten that I should go without them. Couldn't you concede a point, sir? Couldn't you let them come with us?"

"No, Nipper; I must be firm——"

"They've often made themselves useful, sir," I went on quickly. "If there's anything to be done they'll be only too willing to lend a hand. And there's never any telling. Besides, I should be awfully uncomfortable if I went alone. I should be thinking of them all the time, and worrying."

"In that case, Nipper, there seems to be only one solution to the problem," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"You'll let them come?"

"Decidedly not! You will have to remain."

"I—I—I shall have to remain?" I gasped. "But—but——"

"You surely cannot come with me and be uncomfortable all the time?" asked Lee. "What pleasure will you have if you are worrying continuously about your faithful chums?"

"Look here, guv'nor: I believe you're pulling my leg!" I said. "I want to know once and for all: will it be possible for Montie and Tommy to do the trip with us? We can easily make up lessons next week, and it'll be a ripping change! We thought about going to a pantomime to-morrow night——"

"Dear me! Unless I surrender, I suppose you will pester me continuously!" sighed the guv'nor. "Perhaps I'd better give in to you in my usual meek manner. Somehow or other, Nipper, you always seem to get your own way! Get along with you! Make yourself scarce! I want to think."

"And can they come?" I asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes; have your own way!" said Nelson Lee resignedly. "Only, you will all have to behave yourselves—— Upon my soul!"

I had not waited to hear the finish of the guv'nor's sentence, but I dashed out of the room and rushed away to Study C.

"Well?" asked Watson tensely, as I burst in.

"It's all serene!" I panted.

"We can go?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!" yelled Watson.

"Begad! I'm frightfully surprised—I am, really," remarked Sir Montie. "I didn't entertain any hopes that we should be able to go up to London. Nipper, old boy, you're a wonder! How in the world did you manage it?"

"I simply jawed at the guv'nor until he agreed," I grinned. "Now, we'd better buck up and pack our things! The train goes in just over an hour——"

"Oh, begad!" said Montie, in dismay. "I'm afraid I can't go with you, dear fellows. It's shockingly unfortunate!"

"Why can't you come, you duffer?"

"I shall not have sufficient time to get dressed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Tony boy, there is nothin' to laugh at!"

"You prize ass!" grinned Watson. "If you're not ready by the time we are dressed or only half-dressed, you're coming along! We'll yank you down to the station by force, and you can finish your giddy toilet in the train."

"Really, that would be impossible!" said Montie firmly. "However, I will do my best to hurry myself, and if I succeed in getting ready in time, so much the better. The train service through Bellton is frightfully inadequate. It is, really!"

Montie rushed off, and we followed him more leisurely. Our destination was the dormitory, where we proceeded to change in record time. So far, we had said nothing to the other fellows.

Somehow, I had an idea that they would be jealous when they heard the news.

CHAPTER V.

GOING ON THE RAZZLE!

"HALLO! Hallo!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt. "Why this thusness? Why the spectacle of dazzling splendour?"

Pitt stood at the bottom of the stairs in the lobby. Montie and Tommy and I were just coming down, "dressed in our best," and I suppose we did look rather unusually smart.

"What's the idea of being dressed up to the knocker?" asked Pitt. "My hat! Just look at Tregellis-West! Gaze upon him! Gaze upon the spectacle of glory! My eyes are dazzled!"

"Pray don't be so frightfully absurd, Pitt!" said Montie severely. "We are merely dressed in readiness to start the journey."

"Eh?" said De Valerie. "What journey?"

"We're just off to London," I explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't believe it, eh?" I asked. "Well, as it happens, it's the truth. We're going to London by the evening train, and we sha'n't be back until early on Monday morning. Wish us luck, you chaps!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "If you think you can pull our legs like that, you've made a bloomer. London, indeed! You'll be jolly lucky if you get as far as Bannington! You can't spoof me, you silly chumps!"

"We wouldn't think of attempting such an impossible feat!" I retorted. "But the fact remains, Handy, that we're going to London. If you don't like to believe it, you can disbelieve it. And we haven't time to argue either, because Mr. Lee's waiting for us."

"Rats!"

"Tell that yarn somewhere else!"

The juniors were certainly sceptical; but they were not sceptical for long, for, as it happened, Nelson Lee himself appeared in the lobby, carrying a leather travelling-case. He was attired in his thick overcoat, and was all ready for the journey.

"You boys ready?" he asked briskly.

"All ready, sir, except our overcoats," I replied.

"Then you had better hurry," said Lee. "The train won't wait for us."

The juniors regarded one another wonderingly.

"Where—where are you going to, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Surely Nipper has already informed you!" said Nelson Lee. "We are taking a short trip to London, Handforth. We shall probably be back on Sunday evening—or on Monday morning at latest."

"By George!" muttered Handforth. "It's true, then!"

"Seems like it," said Church. "We shall all be going to London soon! McClure's there already, and now these three chaps are going!"

"Like their beastly cheek!" snapped Handforth. "What about us? Where do we come in? I don't see why we should stand it!"

"Can't do anything else, old son!" said Pitt. "Personally, I wish these three chaps all the luck in the world, and hope they have a decent time. I'd like to go up as well; but we can't have everything we like on this earth."

"Same here!" said De Valerie. "I can't help feeling rather envious, all the same. Lucky bounders! A week-end in London is just what I should like!"

We managed to get off in time to catch the train, leaving the majority of the juniors in an exceedingly jealous condition. Handforth was feeling rather sore. He saw no reason at all why he should not go. He regarded it as a personal affront that he—Handforth—had not been invited.

"It's simply rotten!" he declared. "Me—one of the leaders of the Remove, if not the leader—left out in the cold! I call it jolly off-side! I think those chaps are selfish beasts!"

"Cheer up, Handy! Your turn'll come some day!" chuckled Pitt. "Everything comes to those who wait."

* * * * * *

In Study A, Fullwood and Co. were looking rather serious.

"I wasn't expectin' anythin' of this sort," said Fullwood. "Of course, it won't make any difference to our plans. We shall go up to-night just the same. Singleton's car will be waiting for us in the lane at a quarter to eleven."

"It seems to me that our plan has received the kybosh," put in Bell. "How the dickens can we go to London now?

Mr. Lee's there, and it's quite likely that he'll spot us, and that would mean the sack. It ain't worth the risk, Fully!"

Fullwood snorted.

"Don't talk rot!" he snapped. "There's no risk in it! Do you think London's only as big as Bellton? There's not one chance in a million of Lee seein' us. Anyhow, I'm not goin' to give up the scheme just because Lee's gone to London! We simply need to be a bit cautious—that's all!"

"Hadn't we better be disguised?" suggested Gulliver. "It would hardly be wise to wear our school-caps!"

"You lunatic!" said Fullwood witheringly. "That's the last thing in the world we shall do! We'll wear soft hats and high collars. We can easily nip to Bannington this evening to buy them. We shall look years older, and nobody will guess that we're St. Frank's chaps."

"It's a good idea, certainly," said Bell, with approval.

A little later on in the evening, the Nuts returned from Bannington, and they managed to smuggle their parcels into Study A without any difficulty. They merely crossed the dark Triangle and slipped into the study by the window.

"Now we're all serene," said Fullwood pleasantly. "We sha'n't know ourselves when we're dressed in these togs. An' if anybody happens to spot us in London—well, they'll have to be pretty keen to recognise us."

The Nuts were quite satisfied that everything would be all right. And when the time came for the Remove to go to the dormitory, they made an elaborate pretence of being very sleepy and tired.

"By gad! I shall sleep like a top tonight," said Fullwood, as he undressed. "It's this bally weather, I suppose. I'm feelin' awfully heavy."

"The weather's all right," said Handforth, bluntly. "I expect you've been doing too much smoking!"

"Oh, rats!"

Fullwood yawned many times before he finally got into bed, and Gulliver and Bell followed his example. And Handforth, for once in a way, was rather alert, and he was somewhat suspicious, too.

Those yarns did not look quite genuine to him, and he wondered what was in the wind.

Knowing something of the nature of Fullwood and Co., Handforth was inclined to suspect that something special was on.

"The gay bounders!" he muttered. "I'll keep awake to-night, and see what they get up to. I wouldn't mind betting anything that they're going out on the razzle—down to the White Hart."

"What's that you're mumbling about?" asked Church.

Handforth started.

"Eh? Oh, nothing," he said. "I wasn't speaking at all!"

The Remove settled down to sleep in a very short time, and before ten o'clock every junior was slumbering soundly—every junior, that is, with the exception of Fullwood and Co.

Handforth had decided to be on the alert. But, somehow or other, he had dropped off with the others, although it must be admitted, he wasn't sleeping with his usual soundness.

At last the school clock chimed out the half-hour, and Fullwood sat up in bed with great caution.

"Hist!" he whispered. "Anybody awake?"

"Yes!" came Bell's voice. "I am."

"Same here," murmured Gulliver.

"Anybody else?" asked Fullwood.

Silence.

"Good!" muttered Ralph Leslie. "Everybody's dead off. Slip into your things quickly, you chaps, because we haven't got much time. And don't make any noise. We can't afford to be spotted goin' out."

Unfortunately for the Nuts' plans, Handforth awakened.

The hero of Study D lay for some minutes in a drowsy, half-sleeping condition. Then he became dimly aware of curious sounds—slight rustlings, and now and again a whispered word.

Handforth became fully awake in a moment, and he raised himself on his elbow. One or two dim forms were moving about near by—and even as Handforth watched, they vanished out of the dormitory.

Handforth was out of bed in a second.

"By George!" he muttered, "I'll put a stop to their rotten game."

He only paused to don his dressing-gown. For a second he thought about waking Church, but decided not to. Several minutes would be lost in the

process, and then it would probably be too late to do anything. Moreover, Handforth was quite confident that he could deal with the Nuts single-handed.

He hurried across the dormitory, passed out, and found himself in the corridor. Everything was dark and quiet. He judged that the Nuts had gone downstairs to Study A—with the intention of slipping into the Triangle via the window.

Handforth hastened silently down.

He arrived at Study A, and stood listening. Yes, sure enough, he heard soft whisperings within. He applied his eye to the keyhole, and saw a dim light. Fullwood and Co. were evidently making their final preparations by the light of a candle.

"The rotters," muttered Handforth. "By George! I'll teach 'em!"

He grasped the handle, and swung the door open.

"Great goodness!" gasped Bell, "we're spotted!"

"Handforth!" grated Fullwood.

The leader of Study D strode in, and closed the door.

"Now, my sons, I'll give you two minutes to get back to bed!" he said aggressively. "Two minutes—and not a second longer!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Mind your own confounded business!" he snarled. "What the deuce has it got to do with you, you interferin' cad?"

"I'm not going to see three rotters acting the goat after lights-out!" said Handforth grimly. "I'm about fed-up with your rotten ways, Fullwood, and it's about time you were taught a lesson. You've made a bloomer if you think you are going out to-night."

"Oh, have I?" snapped Fullwood. "You're not going to stop us, you confounded rotter. Clear up to bed, an' take a word of advice. Keep your nose where it's wanted, and don't stick it into other people's affairs!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm not going to argue!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe in arguing ——"

"Oh, by gad!" sneered Fullwood. "That's a piece of news!"

"I don't believe in arguing!" roared Handforth. "In any case, jawing to rotters like you would be worse than jawing to a gate-post. I'm going to act!"

"You—you silly fool!" hissed Bell. "You'll wake everybody in the house with that beastly roar of yours! Can't you talk quietly?"

"I don't choose to talk quietly!" said Handforth. "Now, then, put your fists up! I'll give you just two seconds."

Handforth actually didn't allow them that grace, for he lunged out as he spoke. Fullwood received a terrific punch on the nose, and went over backwards, clutching at the tablecloth.

"Yarooh!"

Fullwood sat on the floor, and he drew the tablecloth over him, to say nothing of a pile of books, an ink-stand, and several plates.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Bell. "Somebody's bound to have heard that. We'd better bunk back to the dormitory."

"Hang you!" snarled Fullwood, getting to his feet. "I'll make you sorry for this, Handforth, you cad!"

Slap!

Handforth's fist came into contact with Gulliver's cheek with considerable violence, and Gulliver went over with a bang. But Fullwood was on his feet by this time, and he simply hurled himself at Handforth, reckless of the consequences. Fullwood was almost mad with rage.

It seemed to him that Handforth's interference was to mean that the Nuts' night out would be ruined. Fullwood wasn't afraid of Handforth sneaking. He knew he was safe enough in this respect, and if he could get away safely he would risk the consequences.

But Fullwood feared that all the noise would attract the attention of a master, and then the fat would be in the fire. It was highly necessary to subdue Handforth without delay.

Handy was a great fighter, but the odds just now were rather too much for him. Fullwood attacked him from behind, and took care to use a round ruler, which he had picked up from the floor.

Thud!

The ruler hit Handforth with great force. His head was hard, but it wasn't quite capable of standing such a blow. He staggered back a trifle, swung round, and glared at Fullwood.

"You—you murderous cad!" he

roared. "You might have brained me!"

He threw himself at Fullwood, but Gulliver and Bell plucked up courage to attack from the rear.

And Handforth was pulled up short, pitched on the floor, and his feet were sat upon.

"Get some rope—quick!" gasped Fullwood. "String will do—or even a couple of handkerchiefs. Anythin' to keep the beast quiet."

Bell whipped out his handkerchief, and Handy's wrists were bound. A cushion was flung over his head, and Gulliver sat upon it. Handforth's furious roars were subdued to a degree.

His feet were rapidly fastened with string, and he was helpless. The Nuts were practically ready to go, and they lost no time in blowing out the candle, and slipping through the window.

They left Handforth writhing on the floor.

And Fullwood, at least, was filled with anger. He was determined to get out upon the "stunt" whatever happened—but Handforth's interference had jeopardised the whole undertaking.

Moreover, the Nuts were bruised and sore.

"I'll get my own back on the cad somehow!" panted Fullwood, as he and his chums raced down the lane. "By gad! I'll make him smart."

"It seems to me he's made us smart!" growled Bell. "I hope the rotter doesn't give us away, that's all!"

"He won't do that," said Fullwood. "Handforth may be an interferin' Nosey Parker, but he ain't a sneak. He'll go back to bed an' fall asleep. We shall find him there when we get back."

"How can he get back to the dormitory when he's all bound up?" asked Gulliver.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood. "We only tied him up for a minute. He's free by this time, I'll bet. Rats to Handforth. There's the car, waitin'. We shall have to tell Jenkins to buzz like the deuce."

They reached the bend in the lane, near the old stile. Singleton's car was there, with Jenkins, the chauffeur, behind the wheel.

"I was expecting you, young gents," he said with a grin. "Beggin' your pardon, but I must say you're sports—goin' out at night like this, snappin' your fingers at the Headmaster, as it were."

"We believe in seeing life a bit, Jenkins," said Fullwood. "We want to buzz as hard as you can go—get to London in record time. You're takin' us straight to Gadsby's Hotel, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good," said Fullwood. "Let's get goin'!"

They climbed into the car, and were soon whirled away from the neighbourhood of St. Frank's. Through Bellton and Bannington, and then on the main road to Helmford, after which there was practically a straight run to London.

The Nuts did not get any sleep, as the Hon. Douglas suggested. They were too excited to think of having a nap en route. And the novelty of the whole affair was considerable.

Jenkins was certainly an excellent driver, and the car was a magnificent one.

In a very short time—so it seemed to Fullwood and Co.—they were passing through the outskirts of London.

And after that it was one swift rush to the West End, and the car pulled up in front of Gadsby's Hotel, near Piccadilly Circus, with the journey accomplished in almost record time.

There had been one pause only. Passing a suburban station, Fullwood had ordered Jenkins to pull up. And the cad of the Remove had entered the telegraph office, and had dispatched a wire—apparently with much satisfaction.

Somehow or other, the sending of that telegram seemed to give Fullwood a great deal of pleasure.

He was looking quite pleased when he came out of the station, but he would give his chums no hint as to the meaning of his action. They did not know why the telegram had been sent, or who was the recipient.

And now, having arrived at Gadsby's Hotel, the Nuts strode in and asked for Singleton. They were at once directed to a private room; and here they found the Hon. Douglas with two visitors.

The latter were Mr. Philip Smith Gore and Mr. Carslake.

"Good!" exclaimed Singleton, as the Nuts entered. "We were just waiting for you, Fully. This is great. You managed everything all serene, then?"

"Of course," said Fullwood. "Good-evenin', Mr. Gore—good-evening, Mr. Carslake. Rather a curious time to meet—what?"

"I think you ought to have said good-morning, my lad," said Gore. "You appear to be as big a sportsman as Singleton. We have already planned our programme, and there is no reason why we should not have a little flutter."

"Cards, sir?" asked Bell.

"Well, hardly," said Mr. Gore. "I've got something better than cards in my mind—and I think you'll agree with me. It is fortunate that Singleton told me of his plans, for I shall be able to help you all. I intend to take you to a place where you will obtain much sport and excitement."

"What place is it?" asked Fullwood.

Mr. Gore shook his head.

"Ah!" he smiled. "I shall not tell you just yet, but you will see for yourselves within fifteen minutes, and then you'll judge."

And immediately afterwards the party ventured out, climbed into Singleton's car, and drove away.

Curiously enough, a figure came out of the shadows near by, mounted a light-weight motor-cycle, and took the same direction as the limousine. Had the stranger been watching, and had he deliberately gone in pursuit of the car?

The situation was rather interesting.

CHAPTER VI.

"HERE we are, boys!" said Mr. Gore pleasantly.

The car had come to a halt, and the little party got out of the car, and stood on the pavement. The street was a narrow one, and was quite deserted, except for Singleton and the others.

The road was tucked away behind one of the main arteries of London, and there were many big blocks of buildings on either side—flats, by the look of them. Mr. Gore led the way into a big doorway, after instructing Jenkins to be back with the car within two hours.

"Egad! Where are we?" inquired the Hon. Douglas languidly.

"The precise locality would not interest you, my lad," replied Mr. Gore. "We are about to enter the private residence of Mr. Reginald Varney. To all intents and purposes, he is a highly respectable member of society."

"But I thought you were bringin' us to some place where we can have some sport—not to a private house," said Fullwood. "What's the idea of comin' here, Mr. Gore?"

"You'll find out very shortly," replied Gore. "I may as well tell you now that Mr. Varney is not quite so innocent as he appears to be—and his private flat is really the reverse of private. But it is hopeless for an outsider to gain admittance. I happen to have been here before, and I know the ropes. That shows the advantage of knowing an old hand like myself."

"Rather," agreed Singleton. "Without you, Mr. Gore, we should have been pretty helpless. Who shall we meet in here?"

"Quite a number of people, I dare say."

"Any ladies?"

"Oh, no—no ladies," said Mr. Gore. "The flat, to be frank, is a kind of gentlemen's club, and a club of a most exclusive character. I do not know Mr. Varney personally; in fact, I have only been here once before. But I think I can manage to obtain admittance for the whole of our little party."

"I hope so, sir," said Fullwood.

They mounted two flights of marble stairs, and then came to a halt before a door on the second landing. Mr. Gore pressed the bell-push, and within a few moments the door was opened by a staid-looking man in evening-dress, apparently a butler. He regarded the party with an expressionless face.

"Mr. Varney in?" inquired Gore.

"If you will give me your name, sir, I will see," said the butler solemnly. "Will you kindly wait within the lobby?"

They were ushered in, and they were kept waiting for a couple of minutes. Then the butler returned with the information that Mr. Varney was in, and that he would see Mr. Gore.

"I don't suppose I shall be long, boys," said Mr. Gore. "You had better stay in here, too, Carslake."

Gore passed out of the lobby with the butler.

"Well, this is a rummy business!" murmured Gulliver. "There's nothin' very excitin' about this affair! We're in a giddy private flat——"

"Wait!" interrupted the Hon. Douglas languidly. "I've got an idea that we shall all be surprised soon. Mr. Gore isn't the kind of man to bring us here on a fool's errand. There's something good in this, I'll bet!"

A minute or two later Mr. Gore reappeared.

"Everything is all right," he said, smiling. "I have vouched for the discretion of my party, and you are all at liberty to enter. Mr. Varney is engaged at the moment, but that makes little difference. We shall be quite occupied in other directions, and there is no need for us to bother the host with needless introductions. Come, boys!"

They passed out of the lobby into an electrically lit corridor. Mr. Gore was smiling to himself. Perhaps he was congratulating himself upon the manner in which he had spoofed Singleton and the other boys. The juniors certainly did not suspect the actual truth.

They had no inkling that the whole affair was a plant—that Mr. Varney was no stranger to Gore, and that Gore had brought them here for the especial purpose of extracting money from Singleton.

The Hon. Douglas was under the impression that Gore and Carslake were almost strangers to the flat, and that they had come for sport, too. Quite the contrary was the case. Gore had merely enticed the fly into the web.

"This way, boys!" said Gore genially.

He threw open a door which had been concealed behind a curtain, and a confusion of voices came out to the boys. They saw a big room, hazy with cigar smoke, and brilliant with electric light.

"By gad!" murmured Fullwood.

They passed inside, and they knew at once the exact nature of this harmless-looking "private residence." It was, to be exact, nothing more nor less than a high-class gambling den—a resort for those members of society who had more money that they knew what to do with, and who fancied that gambling was a sport.

The flat was not exactly a second Monte Carlo. But roulette was being played, and other "games" of a similar nature. Twenty or thirty men were present, the majority of them in evening-dress.

"Take my advice, Singleton, and don't plunge too deeply to begin with," said Mr. Gore softly. "Roulette is wonderfully interesting—provided you win! I rather fancy myself, and if you do as I do, you won't go wrong."

"Good!" said Singleton. "Any old thing!"

"How much are you prepared to lose?" whispered Gulliver.

"I don't mind losing anything—if I get it back again," drawled the Hon. Douglas. "But let's have a shot!"

Very soon Mr. Gore and Singleton were trying their luck at one of the tables. Other punters had been winning considerable sums of money, and it looked so extremely easy to Singleton.

There seemed to be nothing in it; it was money for nothing! The Hon. Douglas did not worry much over his unfortunate racehorse deal, but he had privately decided to win back his lost twenty thousand, if it could be managed. And he could only hope to do so by plunging to a pretty high figure.

He had come with ample funds on him, for he was determined to win. And, as he explained to Fullwood, he could not win anything at all unless he had the money to wager.

For some little time he was rather puzzled by the various terms spoken by the croupier. He did not know what "pair" and "impair" meant; he was quite ignorant of the meaning of "manque" and "passe"; a "cheval" and a "transversal" were like double Dutch to him.

But he very soon discovered that he could back black or red, and that he could put all his money on to one number, and, if he won, could obtain thirty-seven times the amount of his stake.

The more he played, the more he liked it. It did not matter much to him that he lost consistently for the first half-hour. Mr. Gore was losing, too, but not to the extent of Singleton.

Then the Hon. Douglas' luck turned, and he gained one or two successes right off the reel. In fact, he raked in over five thousand pounds, and ten minutes after that he had regained his losses, and

was several thousand pounds in pocket.

"Egad! This is a fine game!" he said excitedly.

Singleton did his utmost to remain calm; but the gambling spirit was upon him, and his face was flushed. He was just in the mood to bet heavily, and he did so. Time after time he placed money on the table—large sheaves of banknotes, for there appeared to be no limit in this remarkable establishment.

"Go easy, my lad—go easy!" said Gore warningly. "You mustn't take such deep plunges."

"That's all right," said Singleton. "I shall win in the long run."

"I hope so," said Mr. Gore. "I've had bad luck—I'm five thousand pounds out of pocket already, and I can't afford to lose sums like that. If things don't change rapidly, I shall chuck the game for to-night. I've always found that luck runs in grooves—one has bad nights and good nights. And I've generally found that when a man loses several time in succession, he will keep on losing. Unless you meet with success soon, I should advise you to ease up."

"Don't worry," said the Hon. Douglas. "I shall be all serene."

The astute Mr. Gore knew well enough that his advice would be rejected, otherwise he would not have tendered it. But the giving of that advice, coupled with the fact that Gore himself had lost heavily, naturally gave Singleton the impression that Gore was in no possible way connected with the flat. The Hon. Douglas would have been willing to swear that Gore was practically a stranger in the place.

Fullwood and Co., having lost a fiver each, decided that roulette was an excellent game to watch, and they kept the remainder of their money in their pockets, and were not tempted.

But with the spendthrift things were different.

The more money he lost, the more money he risked. Now and again he won, and these few and far between successes gave him encouragement to continue.

Mr. Gore watched the game with pretended anxiety, but, inwardly, he was tremendously pleased with the way things were going. The foolish schoolboy was rapidly losing money—so rapidly that Singleton himself could not keep count of it. He was completely intoxicated with the excitement of the gamble.

But, at length, his recklessness was brought to an end in the natural order of things. In short, his money gave out.

Singleton seemed very astonished. He had been using his banknotes freely, and did not realise until the last moment that his supply had gone. He looked round him in a somewhat dazed fashion, but was not at all scared. He smiled at Mr. Gore rather sheepishly.

"It doesn't seem to have worked out right, does it?" he asked. "I suppose you couldn't lend me a thousand or two, Mr. Gore?"

Gore shook his head.

"I told you at first that your luck was out, Singleton, and when a fellow's luck is out, he might as well keep the money in his pocket," he said. "However, you are rather headstrong, and this lesson will do you no harm."

"But won't you lend me anything?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, I should be only too pleased to," replied Gore, in a fatherly way. "But I really do not see why I should lend you money so that you may lose it, for you certainly will."

"Well, that'll be my misfortune," said the Hon. Douglas. "Be a sport, and let me have some cash. I want to make a final plunge."

"Oh, very well!" said Gore. "But don't blame me if you lose."

"How much are you down already?" whispered Fullwood.

"I don't know, old man, and I'm not worrying about it," said the Hon. Douglas. "Thanks, Mr. Gore. Now you'll see me get everything back. I've got a sort of idea that I shall strike lucky."

Singleton's idea was wide of the mark, for after he had been playing with Mr. Gore's money—two thousand pounds—for some twenty minutes, he turned away from the table absolutely penniless.

"Well?" smiled Mr. Gore grimly.

"Say it—say 'I told you so,'" smiled Singleton. "I sha'n't be offended if you do, because I deserve it. Roulette is a ripping game, but it's deucedly expensive. Egad!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Gore. "You mustn't be discouraged."

"I'm not discouraged!" protested the Hon. Douglas.

"You can make a fortune out of roulette," declared Gore. "I know men who have started with five thousand, and

who have retired with a hundred thousand, after a week's play. And it generally happens on the first night they lose, and lose badly, too. It's just the luck of things."

"I'll have another shot, of course," said Singleton.

"You ought to have taken my advice, my boy—you ought to have eased up when I told you to," went on Mr. Gore. "There is no doubt whatever that if you keep to the game persistently, you will win."

"I shall keep to it all right," said Singleton. "I'm jolly keen to come to-morrow night and try my luck again. I've got an idea that I shall win back everything I've lost, with another pile on the top of it."

Mr. Gore nodded.

"I share that opinion," he said. "And I should certainly advise you to come—do not be disheartened."

"I say," put in Bell. "How much are you down, Duggy?"

"I don't know," said Singleton. "About twenty-five, I think."

"Rot!" said Bell. "You've lost hundreds."

"He means twenty-five hundreds, I expect," remarked Gunner.

"Thousands," said Singleton calmly. "I'm at least twenty thousand pounds down to-night."

"Great Scott!"

"By gad!"

"My goodness!"

"Twenty—twenty thousand!" gasped Bell. "Why you—you silly fool! You'll never get all that back! I don't believe it, anyhow! It can't be true—you can't have lost all that! It's a fortune!"

Singleton laughed.

"It doesn't seem much to me," he said lightly. "You see, I brought that sum because I wanted to win back the money I lost on the gee-gee. But the game doesn't seem to have panned out in the right way."

"Well, you've got nobody to blame but yourself!" declared Fullwood. "We could all see you were losin', an' you kept on just the same. You were simply handin' out the brass all the time, an' the croupier was rakin' it in. You ought to have taken Mr. Gore's advice."

"My dear chap, don't rub it in so much!" said Singleton plaintively. "I know well enough that I was an ass, but what's the good of nagging me? Next time I'll take Mr. Gore's advice—and his advice is that I should come again to-morrow night."

"Quite right, my boy," said Gore, nodding. "I have not the slightest doubt that you will win. I have seen a good deal of roulette, and I have generally found that when a fellow loses on one night, he wins on the next."

Singleton swallowed the bluff easily. He was not astute enough to realise that Mr. Gore was merely leading him on. The man's plans had already worked superbly. He had brought Singleton here, and he had seen that Singleton had lost every penny of the money he had had on him.

On the morrow, the story would probably be the same.

But the main thing was to get Singleton to come, so it was necessary to use a little bluff. Once the Hon. Douglas had the fever on him again, he would probably follow the example of many other punters—he would plunge more heavily than ever, in order to recover the losses of the previous night.

"Well, boys, we had better be going now," said Mr. Gore, glancing at his watch. "You three must get back to St. Frank's, and you'll only just be able to do it, I fancy. The car will be waiting outside."

The party left the flat almost at once, except for Carslake, who remained behind. He was, of course, "in" with the promoters of the establishment, and he had probably stopped behind to obtain his share of the booty.

Meanwhile, Singleton's car made its way back to Gadsby's Hotel. The Hon. Douglas and Mr. Gore were dropped there, and Fullwood and Co. remained within, and the car set off for St. Frank's at top speed.

Everything had gone splendidly, according to Mr. Gore's idea. Certainly the night had been very profitable, although Singleton did not suspect this. He had no idea that the money he had lost would ultimately find its way into Mr. Gore's pocket. Gore's losses were not losses at all. He knew well enough that he would get the money back, for it was all in the game.

But, to Singleton, everything appeared to be above board. Mr. Gore was a friend—a friend who had no connection with the flat. And Singleton went to

bed that night with the hope that he would win on the morrow.

He did not worry much. He was really too young to understand what these losses meant. He had money in plenty—as much as he liked to draw. So what did he care if he lost a small fortune?

And after the limousine had left Gadsby's Hotel—after Gore and Singleton had passed within, a figure moved out of the shadows again and mounted a motor-cycle. It was the same figure that had been there before.

This mysterious individual had been watching the party right from the moment of Fullwood and Co.'s arrival.

Who was he, and how was he connected with the case?

Certainly, the unknown man instilled an element of mystery into the whole adventure.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH AND CO., TOO!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH sat up in bed, yawned, and stretched himself. The sound of the rising-bell was ringing in his ears, and it was not at all a welcome sound. The morning was cold, and the bed was extremely comfortable.

"Oh, rats!" growled Handforth. "We've got to turn out, I suppose!"

He glared across the dormitory at the beds of Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell. The beds were occupied, but the three juniors were sleeping like logs; they had not awakened, although the bell was clanging noisily.

"Huh! That tells a tale!" grunted Handforth. "I expect the cads were out on the razzle nearly all the night! Who's got a sponge?"

Handforth's shot was quite true. The Nuts had certainly been out on the "razzle." They had returned before daybreak, and had succeeded in getting into the school without attracting attention.

But they had had very little sleep, and now, in consequence, they were very heavy.

Handforth, of course, had no intention of sneaking. He was quite disgusted with Fullwood and Co., but he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had marked them on the previous night and he had also the satisfaction of knowing that he would very shortly mark them again.

He did not forget how they had trussed him up; he did not forget that he had struggled with his bonds for twenty minutes before freeing himself. And Handforth was fully determined to make the Nuts see the error of their ways. In his own terms, they would get it in the neck very severely.

And Edward Oswald had great pleasure in commencing his revenge on the spot—although he had decided to reserve the greater pleasure until later on—that is to say, he would punch them to a jelly after breakfast.

He crossed over to one of the washstands, selected a jug of icy water, and plunged a sponge into it. Then he advanced across the dormitory with the deadly weapon.

Several juniors retreated beneath the bedclothes at once.

"Steady on with that sponge, you silly ass," gasped Church, leaping out of bed in one wild bound.

"Keep your hair on." said Handforth. "It's not for you!"

"Thank goodness!" muttered Church.

He shivered for a moment, eyed his bed lovingly, and took a step towards it. Handforth came to a halt, and glared.

"Get in again—go on!" he said grimly. "I didn't fill this sponge for you, Church, but if you get back into that bed, I'll swamp you. There's one thing I can't stand, and that's sluggishness in the morning."

"Oh, all right," snapped Church.

He commenced dressing, as the only alternative, and Handforth proceeded along the dormitory to the beds of Fullwood and Co. He was watched by many of the other fellows, who were all grinning with anticipation.

"That's the idea, Handy," chuckled Pitt. "The bounders look as if they've been going it strong. Cold water is what they need."

Cold water was certainly what they got!

Handforth held the sponge immediately over Fullwood's face and squeezed it. A stream of icy water plunged down upon Fullwood's face. It soaked his hair, filled his ear, and trickled down

over his face. Fullwood gave a wild howl, a gasp, and rolled out of bed.

"Gug-gug-grooh!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's just to warn you that acting the giddy goat isn't good for a chap," said Handforth. "Now we'll see how Gulliver likes it."

Gulliver didn't like it at all—neither did Bell. They jumped out of bed, gasping and spluttering.

"You funny idiot!" snapped Fullwood. "I suppose you think it's clever to act the fool like this?"

"I think it's necessary to teach rotters of your sort a lesson," retorted Handforth. "I may as well tell you that I'm going to slaughter you after breakfast. Perhaps that'll make you feel comfortable."

Handforth proceeded with his dressing, and he and Church went downstairs together. They arrived in the lobby, and were about to pass outside into the Triangle, when Handforth paused.

"Let's have a look in the rack," he said. "There might be a letter from Clurey."

"My hat, yes," said Church.

But there was no letter in the rack from McClure.

"Careless bounder," grunted Handforth. "He might have dropped us a line, any way. I'll give him a jawing when he comes back."

"Perhaps his pater's badly ill, or even dying," said Church. "A chap can't always write, you know, Handy."

Handforth grunted again, and the pair passed out into the Triangle. Almost immediately they were approached by a telegraph boy, who had been on his way to the Ancient House side door.

"You're Master Handforth, ain't you, sir?" he asked.

"I am," said Handforth. "What do you want?"

"This 'ere wire is addressed to you," said the telegraph boy.

"A wire for me?" asked Handforth wonderingly. "I expect that's a bloomer. And how could it have been sent off as early as this—I mean, to be delivered before brekker?"

"I expect it was sent off last night," said Church.

Handforth took the telegram, and told the boy that he could buzz off. The wire was certainly addressed in an unmistakable way: "Handforth, Study D, Ancient House, St. Frank's College, Sussex."

"That's for you right enough," said Church. "No doubt about it, Handy. I wonder who the dickens can have sent a telegram?"

Handforth did not intend to remain in doubt. He tore open the envelope, and extracted the form. And as he read the words which were written there, his face became flushed, and his eyes grew round with excitement and anxiety.

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped. "Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Church excitedly.

"Good heavens!" said Handforth "Poor old Clurey."

"What's wrong with him?" yelled Church.

"Poor old chap!" muttered Handforth.

Church snatched the telegram away, and read it feverishly. And he, too, changed colour, for the words on that form were rather terrible:

"Am dying. Caught the pater's complaint. Come at once with Church. Tell nobody elee. Make all haste, or I may be gone. McClure."

McClure, the faithful chum of Handforth and Church, was dying!

"This—this is awful," said Handforth frantically.

"I can't believe it," gasped Church. "It's—it's too wild! McClure was as right as rain when he left—he was never healthier in his life! And how could he send this wire if he's dying?"

"You burbling idiot!" said Handforth, panting. "Couldn't somebody else send it for him? Poor old chap! Dying! It's too horrible for words! It was a rotten shame to send for him!"

"Oh, go easy——"

"His pater's got some catching disease or other—measles, or scarlet fever, or rheumatism, I expect," said Handforth, vaguely.

"Rheumatism ain't catching, you ass!"

"I don't care whether it's catching or not—McClure's people were at fault to send for him at all," declared Handforth. "He simply went home to die—and we sha'n't see him down here any more!"

"I—I can't believe it," muttered Church.

The two juniors were thunderstruck—staggered. They stood there looking blankly before them. And they were in this condition when Pitt and Jack Grey happened to come along.

The two juniors saw at once that something was wrong.

"Hallo! You're looking rather bowled over, Handy," said Pitt. "That's a wire you've got, isn't it? Bad news?"

Handforth looked at Pitt dully.

"The worst news I've had—I—I—mean clear off!" he said hastily. "It's none of your business! There's—there's nothing to worry about!"

"Sorry," said Pitt. "I didn't mean to butt in."

He walked away with Grey, and Church eyed Handforth curiously.

"Dash it all, there was no need to bark at the chap, Handy," he said.

"I—I hardly knew what I was saying," said Handforth in a broken voice. "Poor old McClure! Dying! I couldn't explain because he's asked us to tell nobody. My goodness! What shall we do?"

"I think we'd better show that wire to the Head," suggested Church.

"To the Head! What for?"

"He'll give us permission to go up——"

"Supposing he doesn't?" asked Handforth. "We shall be done then—we sha'n't be able to see our pal before he dies! I vote we go right off now—we can catch the morning train to London, and I've got enough cash for the fares."

"Go now?" gasped Church. "Before brekker?"

"Brekker!" shouted Handforth. "Do you mean to tell me you could eat brekker with news like this on your chest?"

"But—but I don't believe in being in too much of a hurry," he protested. "We ought to reason it out, Handy. I think there must be a mistake—it might even be a practical joke of somebody's——"

"You idiot!" snapped Handforth. "As if anybody would joke on a subject like this! If you won't come I'll go by myself. We can't be punished for slipping off, because it's the last wish of a dying chap!"

Handforth walked towards the gates—and Church walked with him. They hurried down to the village. and all the way down Church's suspicions increased. Somehow, he couldn't believe that the telegram actually stated the truth.

Vaguely, he had an idea that there was something wrong—that the wire was a cruel joke.

Church's suspicions would certainly have been greatly strengthened if he had noticed three faces at the window of Study A as he and Handforth had stood in the Triangle reading the telegram.

Those faces belonged to Fullwood and Co., and it was not long before Gulliver and Bell fully understood the meaning of the telegram which Fullwood had despatched the night before. And the Nuts grinned with great delight as they saw the consternation written upon the faces of the two juniors.

"Well, they're sent off on a nice fool's errand," grinned Fullwood. "Perhaps it'll teach Handy not to be so jolly clever with his fists—an' we sha'n't have any trouble with him this mornin' either."

Meanwhile, Handforth and Church boarded the morning train for London. With every mile that sped by, Church became certain that his suspicions were justified. But Handforth was just as certain that poor old McClure was dying.

However, the point was rapidly settled when the two juniors presented themselves at the door of McClure senior's house in Kensington. For almost the first person they saw in the hall was McClure himself—dressed ready to go out with a handbag by his side.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "What are you chaps doing up here?"

"Ain't—ain't you dying?" demanded Handforth faintly.

"Dying!" roared McClure. "Do I look like it?"

"I knew it was a fake, all the time," said Church.

McClure soon had the telegram in his hand, and he read it, stared, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"You silly jossers!" he exclaimed. "You've been spoofed! I didn't send this wire!"

"And we've been bemoaning your fate all the way up from St. Frank's," said Handforth warmly. "It's a beastly swindle."

"So you wanted me to be dying, then?" grinned McClure.

"Of course I didn't, you chump," said Handy. "I'm jolly glad to see you safe and sound. How's your pater?"

"Miles better," said McClure. "I was just starting off for Victoria—to catch the train back. You'd better come with me—but you'll have a dickens of a job to explain things to the Head. You'll get it in the neck."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Church gloomily.

McClure's eyes suddenly sparkled.

"By Jove! I've thought of something!" he exclaimed. "Nipper and his pals are up in London—Mr. Lee, too—at Gray's Inn Road! Why not go along there, see Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it? It's quite likely that he'll 'phone to the Head, and let us stop up in town until the morning."

"Then we can see a pantomime together to-night!" said Church eagerly. "It's a brain wave, Clurey. I say, if it turns out all serene, we'll bless the chap who sent the giddy wire."

As it happened, it did turn out all serene.

Handforth and Co. presented themselves at Gray's Inn Road shortly before midday—to my astonishment. Watson and Tregellis-West and I had been about to go out, and we were very astounded to see the heroes of Study D.

Nelson Lee was stern at first—for the guv'nor was in at the time. But when he had heard the explanation, and when he had seen the wire, he could not help realising the humour of the situation.

"Well, boys, I suppose I ought to be angry, but I'm not," he smiled. "And now that you are in London you would like to remain?"

"Yes, please, sir," said Handforth. "It's a half-holiday to-day, anyhow, and it'll be ripping if we can stay—and go home with these other chaps to-morrow."

The guv'nor chuckled.

"Very well, you young rascals," he said. "I've been wondering if this is a plant, but I hardly believe that seriously. We will let it pass, and you may remain. Go to a pantomime this evening—do anything you like—but don't bother me. I have important work on hand."

What that work was I don't know myself; and certainly the other fellows didn't care. Handforth and Co. were delighted, and they fairly hugged themselves with glee.

But, as events turned out, there was to be quite an amount of excitement, one way and another, before we left London town and arrived back at St. Frank's!

THE END.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST COMMENCED!

THREE BOYS IN CANADA

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

By S. S. GORDON

A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

JACK ROYCE, *home from Canada, is on a visit to his brother,*

TEDDIE ROYCE, *a clerk in London. Jack tries to induce his brother to join him in Canada, but Teddie has not money enough. While they are talking an unexpected visitor arouses them, followed by roughs. There is a set-to, in which the Royces rescue the stranger, a lad of about their own age, whose name is* GERALD TELFORD. *(Now read on.)*

Gerald Telford's Change of Plans.

"IT'S early yet," said Gerald Telford. "Won't you two chaps come along home with me? I've got a den of my own at my guardian's place, and haven't too many friends in Bradleyfield. I'd like to cultivate your acquaintance. Besides, I want Mr. Cardone to thank you for what you've done to-night. I've an idea those bullies meant to hurt me pretty badly, somehow."

"Don't want any thanks," said Jack quickly. "But we'll come along with you. You must be feeling a bit shaky yet, anyhow, after that clip on the head."

"Don't feel so bad," said Gerald. "Not so bad as I believe I'd have done if you hadn't been near. Well, then, come along, and we'll have a little supper brought up into the den."

Fifteen minutes later the three were sitting before another fire, far more cheerful than that in Teddy's sitting-room. The room itself was more comfortable—an ideal boy's den. The chief ornaments on the walls seemed to be pairs of boxing-gloves, pictures of football teams, while a couple of revolvers hung over the mantelshelf. Sundry swords and foreign knives were hanging here and there, and the hearthrug was a fine tiger's skin. The armchairs were soft and alluring, and Jack sank into one with a grunt of content.

"Most comfortable chair I've sat on for years," he said. "Say, Telford, you're almost to be envied. Most chairs I've had these last few years have been home-made ones, made of deer-hide. You see, in the West, a chap doesn't spend much time sitting down. He's either on his feet, in the saddle, or in bed."

"What are you going to do when you go back?" asked Gerald, and Teddy noticed there was a little shine in his eyes.

"Oh," was Jack's easy reply, "I'll find plenty to do! A man who knows his way about Canada needn't look far for a job. Money's the think I'm after, though, because I want to get my homestead into shape as soon as possible."

"I'm told I've got quite a lot of money," said Gerald thoughtfully. "My pater's dead, and Mr. Cardone looks after my affairs. I know there's quite a pile coming to me when I'm twenty-one. Still, I'd hate to spend my time loafing about and spending money! I've often thought of going out West and doing something useful."

"And quite right, too!" said Jack. "You'd find plenty of chances to make good. Having some capital won't do anybody any harm."

"I'm going to ask my guardian to let me go. I say, Royce, how'd you like me to pal in with you?"

Jack flushed.

"I'm a poor man," he said—"you'll

rich. We shouldn't be able to carry on together for long."

"But——" began Gerald.

Just then the door opened, and a gentleman entered the room. The Royce brothers were at once struck by the appearance of the newcomer.

He was a tall, angular man of about forty-five, clean-shaven, with a pair of deeply sunk, glittering eyes. His nose was long, and his chin so prominent that they nearly met when his mouth was closed. His lips were thin, his hair was iron-grey. Also one thing that Jack noticed was that he had a habit of passing his hand over his mouth, as though his lips were irritating him.

"That you, sir?" said Gerald, standing up. "These are two friends of mine—Jack and Ted Royce. They've just done me a good turn. A crowd of roughs set on me not long ago, and I quite thought they meant to finish me. But Jack here changed their minds. By Jove, sir, you should have seen the way he hit! I brought them here so you could thank them personally." He turned to the Royces. "This is my guardian—Mr. Cardone," he added.

Septimus Cardone turned his piercing eyes upon Jack Royce and searched the youth's face keenly for several seconds before he spoke. Jack returned the stare unflinchingly. Then the lawyer held out his hand, and Jack crushed it in his great fist. He noted, however, that Mr. Cardone made little attempt to return the grip.

"You have evidently been distinguishing yourself," Mr. Cardone said, in a dry voice that betrayed neither pleasure nor displeasure. "Allow me to thank you for your services. Any reward that you may think suitable——"

"There's none, thanks!" said Jack shortly. He had taken a great liking to Gerald Telford, but he could not say that of his guardian.

"Then I will thank you again," said the lawyer, in the same voice. "But I came in to speak to my ward. Perhaps, Gerald, you can spare me a few moments. I heard you come in, but I was speaking to somebody else at the moment. I will not detain you long."

Gerald was away fifteen minutes, during which time the two brothers chatted together, discussing their new acquaintance and his guardian for the most part.

"Well," said Jack, as his host returned, "if you have business to talk over, we'd better be off, I think. Thanks for your hospitality! Hallo, what's wrong?"

Gerald's face had changed considerably within the last fifteen minutes. Whilst speaking with the Royces, he had forfotten the bump he had received on his head, and his face had been alight with enthusiasm. Now it was looking a little grey, and was drawn at the corners of his mouth. As he sank heavily into his chair, he pressed his hands to his forehead.

After a while he looked up. He was trying to laugh, but made only a very poor success of the effort.

"By Jove!" he said, and his voice shook sadly. "It doesn't take long to change a man's state, does it?"

The brothers glanced at each other. Jack stood up and held out his hand to his young host.

"You seem to be in trouble," he said. "It's none of our busness what it is, so I guess we'd better be going. Good-night!"

Gerald waved him back to his seat.

"Don't go yet!" he said huskily. "I've just had frightfully bad news, but—but I believe it would do me good if I told it you, too. You see, I believe you can help me; only give me time to think the thing out clearly. You've been a good friend once to-night. Be one again, and listen."

"Why, certainly," was Jack's hearty response, "if it will do you good! Hope it isn't so very bad!"

"As bad as it can be," said Gerald. "I've just heard I'm a beggar, when I thought I was well off."

"Phew!" whistled Jack and Teddy together.

"It's a fact! My guardian's just told me. Let me tell you the whole story. My dad left a lot of money, you know, and named Mr. Cardone as my guardian, with full control of the funds. The money was all to be invested in certain shares—never mind what they were. Well, my guardian carried out my father's wishes, and I thought everything was going swimmingly—until to-night. Now I am told that the whole company's gone bankrupt. The head man embezzled all the money he could lay his hands on, and there's only a matter

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

D

of fifty pounds between myself and starvation."

"I say, I'm real sorry!" said Jack. "You'll have to turn to and work for a living now, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I sha'n't have to pick and choose my job, either," said Gerald. "Wonderful what a difference money makes. A few minutes ago I was talking about Canada as if I were a man of capital, and now I'm next door to a pauper. Fifty pounds! Rather a drop from fifty thousand—eh?"

"Plenty of good men have made a pile when they'd less than fifty pounds to start with," said Jack. "I wish I could say I had so much. I suppose you'll want time to think out your next move? But you don't suppose your guardian made any mistake?"

"He's the cleverest business man in the North of England, besides being the smartest lawyer," answered Gerald. "No; if my guardian says a thing, you can take it from me he's a reason to say it."

"Then I'm sorry!" said Jack, and held out his hand. "If I could help you, I would."

"Do you mean that?" asked Gerald eagerly.

"Why, of course! But what could I do?"

"Well, I haven't had much time to think about it, but I've got the idea about going West. That money would easily pay my fare, and would leave me with a tidy little sum over. I have plenty of clothes, and I shouldn't mind making a quick move. I could get away by the day after to-morrow. What would you say to my going out with you?"

"I wouldn't do anything too impulsively," said Jack. "I'd be jolly glad to travel out with you, but—well, it's a big step, to leave everything behind—home, friends, position."

Gerald laughed a little shortly.

"I've no home, except my guardian's house, and that won't be my home now there's no money for me to live on. I've no friends worth counting on—except Mr. Cardone, of course; while as for position—well, that won't be much if I stay behind as a clerk! And I don't suppose I'd make even a decent clerk. I've had no training. I've got to make a big change at once. Why not go then? Would you mind if I went out with you? But perhaps you'd think me a drag on you?"

"Pshaw!" said Jack. "You'd be no drag. I don't mind saying, though, that if you went with me you'd be better off than if you went alone. I could put you up to the ropes. There are many things an experienced man could put a greenhorn wise to, while, if he went alone, he'd have to worry through a pretty hard year or so until he got on to the hang of things. Yes, if you're quite sure you'd like to go, I'd be pleased to have you with me. But it's a rough life."

"Then I'll go!" cried Gerald. "I'll miss the most unpleasant part of a greenhorn's existence—the initial friendlessness. I say, Royce, you don't know how much obliged I am to you! It was a big thing I asked of you."

Teddy Royce had listened to all this silently. What he had been thinking only he himself knew; but it is certain that he was quite as sorry for Gerald Telford as his brother was.

"I wish you luck!" he said. "You'll hit it off with Jack all right. There isn't a better chap in the whole world! I wish I was going along with you both."

"Why not?" asked Gerald. "We'd be a jolly trio then. I say, young 'un, come along and join the party!"

Teddy flushed. He had uttered his wish quite thoughtlessly.

"I—I can't manage it," he said. "But I'll join you as soon as I can. I'm sav—— I mean——"

He halted in confusion as he saw his brother grimacing fearfully at him. But he had said enough to tell Gerald the truth, and that youth showed the kind of lad he was on the instant.

"Look here!" he said. "I think your brother and I are going to be good chums, and so are you and I. Hang it all, even in the midst of my troubles, I ought to be able to think of those who are so decent to me! Your brother and you saved me from a nasty mauling. Who knows, those chaps might have killed me? You saw what sort that black-bearded one was when he pulled a knife out. So I'm going to say you saved my life to-night."

"Rot!" said Jack and Teddy together.

"'Rot' as much as you like, I'm going to think it. Also, I'm going to be cheekier than ever I've been in my life.

(Continued overleaf.)

I've got fifty pounds. I'm going to share it with you."

"No, you're not!" said Teddy hastily. "I wouldn't let you!"

"Don't be an ass, man! We're all three chums now. I understand your brother's return passage is booked to Winnipeg. My own there won't cost more than twenty pounds, if so much. Another twenty for your ticket, and there's ten left."

"It can't be thought of," said Jack hurriedly. "You know the truth—the lad can't afford to pay his own way out, but he'll manage to save up enough in time, and I'll be able to help him."

"Then," said Gerald, pretending to sulk, "I think it pretty selfish of you not to let me do something for the firm. We are a firm now. You're doing everything, and you won't let me even do what I can do, which isn't much, goodness knows!"

"It would be imposing on you," said Teddy.

But his eyes began to shine with a new hope. Perhaps only he himself knew how much he dreaded the thought of saying goodbye to his brother, of being left behind to drudge away his existence in a dingy office in a grimy little North Country town. It would be a hard struggle for him to settle down to his commonplace labours again, especially after Jack had fired his blood during the past few weeks with his stirring accounts of doings in the new land.

"Then," said Gerald decisively, "if you won't let me do that bit—hang it, I'll not go with Jack myself! There!"

They argued the point for half an hour. At the end of the debate, Gerald was triumphant.

"But I'll never be able to thank you enough!" said Teddy brokenly. "You don't know how much I want to go. I'll pay you the cash back as soon as I have earned it, anyhow."

"Bah!" cried Gerald. "By George! I'm glad, you fellows!"

He laughed quite light-heartedly, and was still laughing when the door opened to admit Mr. Cardone. The lawyer sat himself down in a spare armchair, and pressed the tips of his fingers together.

(To be continued.)

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