No. 244.—Exciting Adventures of the Hon. Douglas Singleton in London!

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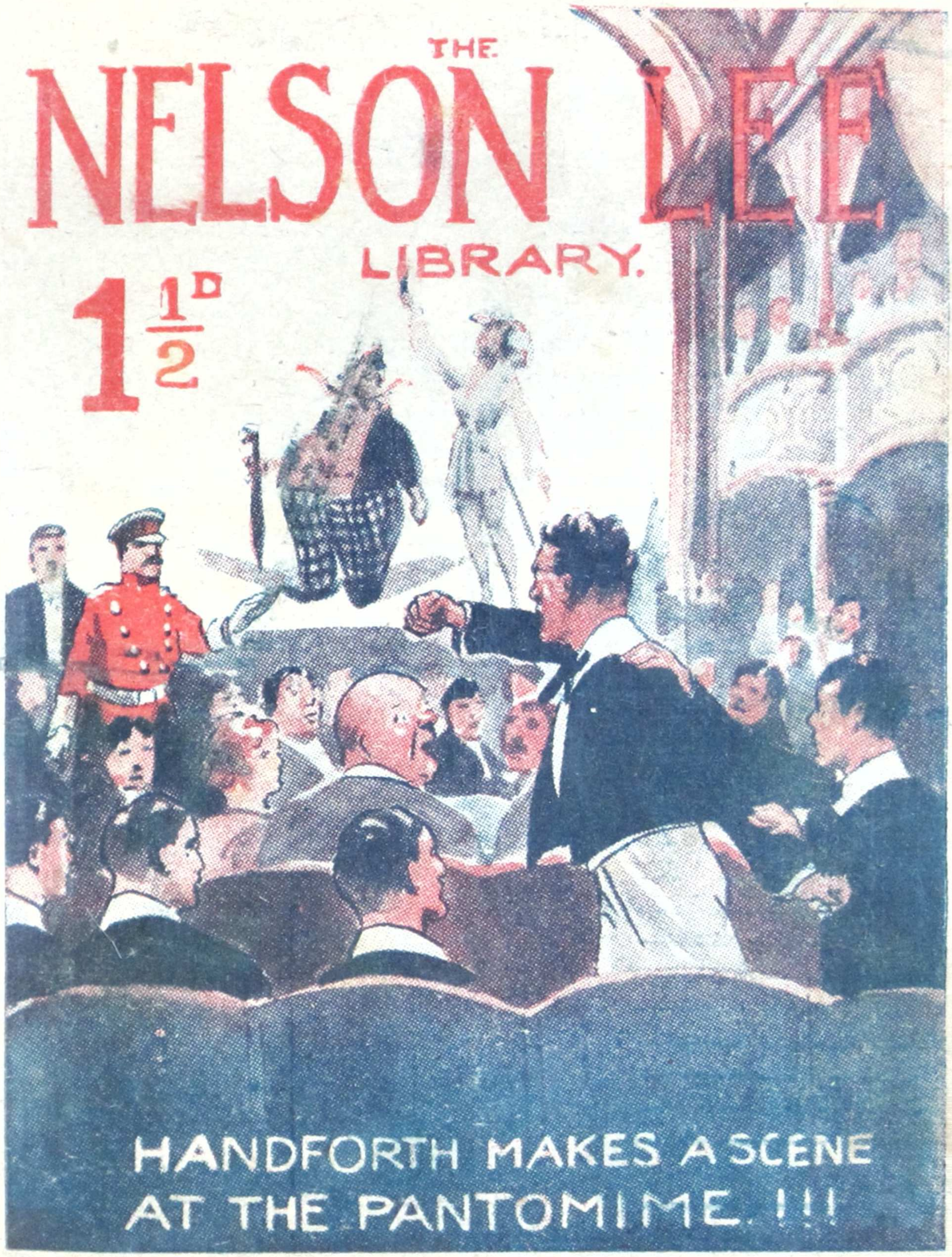

DEEPER IN THE MIRE

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 "On the Downward Grade," "The Waster's Progress," "Singleton in London," etc.

February 7, 1920.

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THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PANTOMIME PARTY.

"READY?"

I asked that question briskly as I strode into Nelson Lee's consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road. But I did not put the question to the guv'nor himself—but to five juniors who were adorning the apartment.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West—my two chums of Study C at St. Frank's—were there, and the other three fellows were Handforth, Church and McClure. They were all looking in the best of spirits—and with good reason.

"Ready?" repeated Handforth. "Of course we're ready, you ass. We've been waiting for ages!"

"This is better than mooning about at St. Frank's as we generally do on a Saturday night—eh?" grinned Watson. "We're off to a giddy pantomime, my sons, and the other chaps will be green with envy when they hear all about it."

"Begad! They'll certainly be frightfully jealous," agreed Sir Montie. "I call it really sportin' of Mr. Lee to let us come up like this. He's a brick—he is, really."

"Hear, hear!"

"He's one of the best!"

I grinned as the juniors made other various remarks. The fact was, Nelson Lee had business in London, and as it was the week-end he had kindly consented to take me with him.

Upon hearing the news, Montie and Tommy had wanted to come, too—which was quite natural. After a little pleading, I had got the guv'nor to consent. Consequently, we had all left St. Frank's together, and were in London. We should either return on the morrow—Sunday—or early on Monday morning.

But what about Handforth and Co.?

How they came in was rather amusing. McClure had been in London for some days, having been called up from St. Frank's because his father was ill. And somebody had played a practical joke upon Handforth. Privately, I suspected that Fullwood, of the Remove, had a hand in the affair. Early on the Saturday morning a telegram had arrived for Handforth, purporting to come from McClure. It stated with shocking abruptness that McClure was dying.

Handforth promptly made a bee-line for London, ignoring the advice of Church, who had shrewd suspicions regarding the genuineness of the telegram. Of course, they had found McClure in the best of health—and on the point of returning to St. Frank's. The trio had come along to Gray's Inn Road, had explained, and Nelson Lee was agreeable to Handforth and Co. remaining, so that we could all return to St. Frank's together.

The chums of Study D were naturally very pleased, and Handforth was inclined to bless the cruel-minded individual whose practical joke had gone wrong. For Handforth and Co. were having quite a holiday—and there would

be no question of punishment when they returned to St. Frank's, because they had Nelson Lee's consent.

"We shall have to be starting out soon," said Watson, glancing at his watch. "In fact, we ought to go now, to do it comfortably. What pantomime are we going to, by the way?"

"Cinderella," I replied. "I expect it'll be pretty decent."

"Rather kiddish, of course," remarked Handforth. "Personally, I should prefer something more enlightening, but Mr. Lee has booked the seats for us, and I wouldn't dream of grumbling——"

"You silly ass!" I grinned. "You'll enjoy the panto as much as anybody. You seem to forget that modern pantomimes are produced more for the benefit of the grown-ups than for children. There's practically no fairy story left by the time the thing is produced—it's simply a series of spectacles, with plenty of comedy and singing."

"Somethin' like a bally revue, begad!" said Montie.

"That's it," I agreed. "And this show ought to be particularly good, considering that it's at the Nell Gwynne Theatre. I'll buzz along and see if the guv'nor is ready."

"Why, is Mr. Lee coming, to?" asked Church.

"He hasn't said he's not coming," I replied. "I shall be disappointed if he doesn't come, anyhow. He's dressing, so it looks pretty hopeful."

"Tell him to buck up," grinned Watson.

I passed out of the consulting-room, and made my way to Nelson Lee's bedroom. The guv'nor was just putting the finishing touches to his tie as I entered. He was in evening dress, and looked particularly immaculate.

"Ready, sir?" I asked briskly.

"Eh? Ready for what, my boy?" said Nelson Lee.

"For the pantomime, of course," I said. "You're coming with us!"

The guv'nor smiled.

"My dear Nipper, what on earth put that idea into your head?" he inquired. "I never said that I was coming, and, as a matter of fact, I have other business to attend to—business of a more important character."

I pulled a long face.

"Well, that's rotten, sir," I exclaimed. "We all thought you were coming. Couldn't you manage it, as an extra special favour?"

"I'm sorry, Nipper, but it is really impossible," answered Nelson Lee. "You see, young 'un, I have an appointment——"

"Who with?"

"The matter would not interest you——"

"But it would, sir—it would interest me a lot," I broke in. "I know jolly well that you haven't come to London this week-end for the mere pleasure of it. There's a bit of business on—and your movements are rather mystifying. I wish you'd let me into the know, sir."

But Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Just at present, Nipper, I can't explain matters," he said. "Before long I shall probably take you into my confidence—and then you'll understand. But for the present you must curb your impatience."

I couldn't get anything further out of the guv'nor, and it was quite certain that he was not going to the pantomime. So I went and announced the fact to the others, and we lost no time in getting off.

Once outside, in Gray's Inn Road, Handforth grinned.

"Well, I'm not exactly sorry," he remarked.

"About what?"

"I'm not sorry that Mr. Lee's staying behind."

"Begad! You frightful rotter——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I always believe in speaking my mind—and if Nipper's offended, he's an ass. With all due respect to Mr. Lee, I reckon we shall enjoy ourselves more as we are—just the little party of us. Mr. Lee's a master, and his presence would put a bit of a damper on things."

There was something in Handforth's argument, and I fancy most of the other fellows were rather pleased that Nelson Lee had decided not to see Cinderella with us. For my part, I was quite content. I only worried a bit because Nelson Lee was inclined to be secretive.

What was the nature of the business which had brought him to London?

I didn't know, and I certainly wasn't

going to worry over it. I meant to enjoy myself that evening, and I strode down Gray's Inn Road with the other fellows in a light-hearted frame of mind.

"What about a taxi, dear old boys?" asked Sir Montie. "I reckon we shall have to find somethin', begad! We can't do the walk."

"I vote we take a 'bus," said Handforth. "It's not far, and I'm blessed if I see the fun of spending a lot of money——"

"Dear fellow, I'll pay the exes," put in Tregellis-West.

Nothing could alter his decision—he required a taxi. And when we got into Holborn it was not long before we succeeded in finding an empty cab. The six of us piled into it.

Montie gave the cabby his directions, and a moment or two later we were speeding away towards the Nell Gwynne Theatre. So far there had been no trouble, but this pleasant state of affairs was not to last for long.

As soon as I knew Handforth was to accompany us, it was pretty certain there would be ructions. It would be something like a miracle if we got back home without a bust-up of some kind.

All went well until we were nearing our destination.

Then, as we were rolling swiftly down Kingsway, and had come nearly opposite the Stoll Picture Theatre, Handforth uttered a surprised exclamation. He was near the window, and had been looking out.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated. "Did you see that chap?"

"Which chap, you ass?"

"A fellow walking along near that great place with the electric signs——"

"The Stoll Picture Theatre?" I asked.

"Rats!" said Watson. "It's the London Opera House."

"It was called that at first——"

"Can't you dry up, you arguing idiots?" roared Handforth. "What does it matter what the silly place is called? Did you see the young chap who was looking at one of the posters?"

"No, we didn't," said McClure.

"Well, I did—and he was Singleton!"

"Eh?"

"Singleton, of the Remove!" declared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling lunatics!" yelled Handforth. "What's the idea of cackling like that? I tell you the chap I saw was the Hon. Douglas. Do you think I don't know him? I recognised his chivvy on the second!"

"Rubbish!" I said. "You mistook somebody else for Singleton, Handy."

"I tell you I didn't——"

"Dear fellow, you must have done," put in Sir Montie mildly. "It ain't a habit of mine to argue—I hate arguin', begad! But you know as well as I do that Singleton is in bed—injured."

Handforth nodded.

"I thought so, too, until a minute ago," he replied. "But when I see a chap walking about, I jolly well know he's not in bed! And I saw Singleton. If you don't like to believe, you can go and eat coke!"

"Mistakes have been made by greater people than you, Handy," I observed. "Don't forget that we were flashing past in a taxi—and you couldn't have gained a very good look at the fellow."

"I don't care about that," argued Handforth. "The chap was Singleton."

"I'm sorry to doubt your word old son, but I'm afraid I can't agree with your view," I said. "Singleton came to London a day or two ago—he brought McClure up as a matter of fact, because McClure lost the last train——"

"That was Handy's fault," put in McClure.

"That's not the point," I went on. "Singleton came up, and was knocked down and robbed near Piccadilly Circus. A doctor sent a letter to the Head saying that Singleton had received a pretty big gash, and had to remain in bed over the week-end. Of course, it's just possible that he may be out, but it's hardly likely. Was the fellow wearing a bandage, Handy?"

"No."

"I suppose you recognised the school colours?"

"The chap was wearing a soft felt hat——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear old chap, that's the final proof that you made a bloomer," I said. "Singleton always wears toppers—he wouldn't be seen in a soft felt hat."

"Oh, all right—have your own way," snapped Handforth. "But I know what I know! And I've got my suspicions,

too," he added darkly. "Yes, by George! I've formed a theory of my own!"

"And what may that be, Mr. Sexton Blake?" inquired Watson blandly.

Handforth glared.

"I don't want any sarcasm!" he said crossly.

"Well, you shouldn't start jawing about theories, as if you were a born detective," exclaimed Watson. "You seem to think——"

"As a matter of fact," interrupted Handforth deliberately—"as a matter of fact, I am a born detective——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A born detective!" roared Handforth. "You can jeer all you like! But the art of detection is in me—it oozes out at every opportunity!"

"Swank oozes out, you mean!"

"I'll punch your silly nose for you, Thomas Watson!" bawled Handforth, who always addressed fellows by their full name when he was inclined to be angry. "I tell you I've formed a theory—and, what's more, I mean to keep it to myself."

"Good!" I said thankfully.

"And don't forget, dear old boy, that we're goin' to a pantomime," remarked Sir Montie mildly. "This ain't an argument—it ain't, really. What we've got to do is to be calm an' cheerful——"

"How the dickens can a chap be calm when he's boxed up in a taxi with a set of idiots?" demanded Handforth with more force than politeness. "This theory of mine is absolutely sound. I'm not going to tell you what it is, because you'll only laugh at me. But I know jolly well that Singleton's been bluffing! He's not ill at all—it was spoof! And he's staying in London on purpose to go on the razzle!"

"And is that your theory?" I asked.

"Yes, it is!"

"And is this the way you keep it secret?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you——" Handforth paused, took a deep breath. "I don't want to say any more!" he went on. "But I'm going back to that picture place—and I'm going to collar hold of Singleton——"

"Don't be an ass," I interrupted. "We're just arriving at the theatre, and you don't suppose that the fellow you saw is still standing in the same place, do you? Oh, my hat! What a lot of trouble you cause, Handy!"

Handforth seized the door handle.

"I don't care how much trouble I cause—I'm not going to be laughed at and scorned!" he declared. "I'm going back—lemme go, Church, you idiot! Leggo my arm, Arnold McClure!"

"Ease up, Handy," said Church. "You can't get out of the taxi now——"

"Oh, can't I?" roared Handforth. "We'll soon see!"

He wrenched at the door, and it flew open with far greater promptitude than he had expected. Handforth made a valiant attempt to save himself, failed and plunged out into the road.

He hit the wooden paving with a bump, and sat down.

"Great pip!" he gasped.

A taxi-cab was within a yard of him, a motor-'bus towered on the other side, and another 'bus charged at him in the most dangerous-looking manner. Handforth scrambled up, rather scared.

Our taxi had only been travelling at a crawl, fortunately, and it was now a few yards further on. The driver had pulled up at once, knowing that one of his passengers had fallen out.

"You—you reckless ass!" panted Church, jumping out. "We thought you got killed."

Handforth snorted.

"It takes more than that to kill me!" he snapped. "It was like your idiocy to let me dive out like that! Why the dickens didn't you pull me back?"

Church and McClure looked at one another helplessly.

"What can we do with him?" asked McClure, appealing to me. "What the dickens can we do with a chap like this?"

"Bury him!" I said promptly. "Suffocate him!"

"He needs something pretty drastic," said Church crossly. "We do our best to keep him in the taxi, and when he forces his way out, and takes a seat in the middle of the road, he demands to know why we let him go!"

Handforth looked down at his clothing.

"I'm smothered!" he exclaimed. "Look at the dust—look at the mess I'm in!"

"It serves you right——"

"Eh?"

"I mean it'll easily brush off!" said Church hastily. "It's a jolly good thing the roads aren't muddy. We'll dust you down in a minute or two, Handy—we can't stop here all the evening, blocking the giddy traffic!"

Somehow we managed to get Handforth back into the taxi, and finished up the journey, a matter of a hundred yards. Outside the theatre we dusted him down as well as possible, and I was thankful that we had arrived in safety.

But I trembled to think what would happen in the orchestra stalls if Edward Oswald started any of his bunkum!

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CHAPTER II.

PREPARING THE WEB.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE smiled, and jerked the ash from the end of his cigarette.

"My dear fellow, I don't see why you should be at all worried," he said easily. "The plan is all settled and complete, and there is every indication that we shall be entirely successful with to-night's programme."

"Well, I hope so," said Mr. Gore's companion. "It's amazing to me how on earth you manage everything so smoothly, Gore. So far as I can see, no hitch is likely to occur. Your plans are all cut and dried."

"Then why on earth worry?"

"Well, it seems too easy to me," said the other. "I can't help thinking that we're having everything our own way. The money we have obtained from Singleton already staggers me, and yet you are not satisfied."

Mr. Gore chuckled.

"Satisfied?" he repeated. "Satisfied with forty thousand? My good man, I've told you before that Singleton is worth two hundred thousand, and I shall certainly not rest content until I have tapped the supply to the utmost limit. I consider that our little campaign has only just commenced. The boy's a fool, and, if possible, I want to denude him of every penny he possesses."

"I don't think it can be done."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see, Carslake," said Mr. Gore easily. "The boy is a fool, as I said before, and he trusts us implicitly; he believes that we are his friends."

"Well, he deserves to lose what he's got," said Carslake. "It won't worry me if he becomes a beggar. He is a spendthrift by nature, Gore, and if we didn't get his money, somebody else would."

"My argument, exactly," said Gore. "If we didn't obtain his fortune, Carslake, Singleton would get rid of it by some other means. And I see no reason why we should not benefit."

The two men were talking at a quiet little table in a West End restaurant, hardly a stone's throw from Coventry Street. They were both attired in evening-dress, and both had the appearance of refined gentlemen.

Their records, however, would hardly bear searching into.

For the last week or so, at all events, Mr. Gore had been engaged in the congenial task of "rooking" the Hon. Douglas Singleton of his money; and Mr. Gore had been highly successful.

Singleton, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, was rather an extraordinary specimen of humanity, considering that his age was barely fifteen. He had the sole control of a fortune, and it was his to do as he liked with.

The exact circumstances were rather obscure, but Singleton's father was dead, and his guardian was not available—being, in fact, somewhere in the wilds of Central Africa. And the Hon. Douglas had full control of his money, owing to some legal technicality which the boy himself did not understand.

What he did understand, and what he only cared about, was that he could spend his fortune as he liked. And, certainly, he had been using money with the freedom of water since his arrival at St. Frank's.

He had made friends with Mr. Gore and Mr. Carslake.

That very fact seemed to be something like a tragedy. The plausible Mr. Gore, smooth-tongued and polite, had sold Singleton a racehorse, and had advised him to back the horse heavily in a race.

And, as a direct consequence, the Hon. Douglas had lost £20,000.

On the top of that he had lost a similar sum in a West End gambling flat, into which he had been introduced by Mr. Gore. Singleton had plunged heavily at roulette, and he had lost consistently.

That was on one visit.

And now Mr. Gore was determined to obtain further supplies of Singleton's cash, for the gambling flat had been inaugurated by Mr. Gore himself. His was the brain which controlled everything.

To all intents and purposes, Gore had been a stranger to the place, and Singleton thought this was the case. The boy did not suspect for a moment that the whole affair was a plant—that the very punters were paid men, and that the flat had been opened for his especial benefit.

The cost of the place had been considerable, but the prize was worth it. The money which had been "won" from Singleton paid all the expenses and left several hundred per cent. profit—even more than that.

"To-night," said Gore smoothly, "we shall obtain a further amount, Carslake. And I shall not be satisfied with a mere twenty thousand. If possible, I want to double that sum, and I think it can be done."

Carslake shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're too optimistic," he said.

"What makes you say that?"

"Singleton will smell a rat—or, at least, he will become cautious when he continues to lose," said Carslake. "It is my belief that after he has expended another ten thousand, he will ease up, and perhaps stop the game abruptly."

Gore shook his head.

"I don't think you quite realise the boy's nature," he said. "When he is at the roulette table, he becomes absolutely fascinated; he forgets all else except the game. He hardly cares whether he is winning or losing. This experience will be a lesson to him—a bitter lesson, perhaps—but he will benefit by it. After we have finished with him, Singleton will be a saner lad."

"And a poorer lad, too," said Carslake grimly.

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Gore. "I may as well tell you, Carslake, that I started out with the intention of sucking Singleton dry, and I shall do so. I mean to obtain every penny he possesses."

"It sounds easy——"

"It is easy," said Gore. "You have already seen how astonishingly simple the task is. Man alive! Have you ever known of a chance like it? Here is a boy—an inexperienced schoolboy—with great wealth at his finger-ends. He is easily led, and he is too young to understand what he is rightly doing. Why, it is simply child's play for us to twist him about our fingers, and to obtain from him everything we desire. The chance is too good to miss."

"I quite agree with that," said Carslake. "You're rather a wonderful man, Gore, and I am speaking seriously, without any idea of flattering you."

Gore smiled.

"I am quite gratified," he said smoothly.

"It is simply the truth," went on Carslake. "The manner in which you have conducted this business fairly staggers me. The audacity you have displayed is positively startling, and every shot has gone home. Not one of your schemes has misfired."

"And yet you are sceptical regarding to-night?"

"After I have been talking to you, Gore, my doubts vanish," admitted Carslake. "It is only when I sit thinking that I begin to wonder if the thing can be pulled off."

"Take my advice, old man, and leave the thinking to me," said Mr. Gore, lighting a fresh cigarette. "Well, perhaps we had better be moving. It is past nine, and I've arranged to meet Singleton at ten."

"Oh!" said Carslake. "We are starting early to-night?"

"Yes."

"But there is plenty of time yet——"

"I want to run round to the flat first," said Gore. "I'm rather anxious to see that everything is staged to perfection. A great deal depends upon to-night. It is the last chance we shall have to obtain money by this method, for we cannot expect Singleton to come a third time, reckless though he is."

The two men left the table, paid their bills, and sauntered out into the brilliantly lighted streets.

It was rather a mild evening, and the West End was brilliant. A taxi was soon secured, and the pair climbed into it. The journey was not a long one,

and before many minutes had elapsed the cab pulled up.

Mr. Gore and Mr. Carslake alighted, and found themselves outside a large block of buildings in a quiet backwater. The buildings were flats, and many windows were brilliantly illuminated.

The two men entered the block, and walked up to a flat on the second floor. They passed through a lobby into a softly lighted passage.

A man in evening-dress appeared from behind a curtained door.

"Everything ready, Varney?" asked Mr. Gore pleasantly.

"Yes! everything," replied the other. "I suppose you haven't got the boy here now?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Gore. "I shall act very differently when I bring Master Singleton. You have plenty of money in the bank?"

"Singleton will have a good deal of difficulty in breaking it," said Varney, with a laugh. "But there's not much chance of that, seeing that I shall make him lose every time."

"Not every time," advised Gore. "Give the lad a little encouragement now and again, or he will lose heart before he loses his money. You did very well last night, Varney, and you should do better to-night."

The other man laughed.

"Well, I'll guarantee that the kid never finds out the truth about this roulette-wheel," he said. "He hasn't the faintest suspicion that I can control it exactly as I like. It's a great idea of somebody's, Gore, but I don't think it could be safely worked with a crowd of hard-headed men—men who have had previous experience of roulette."

"As the table will never have to be used for that purpose, we need not discuss the subject," said Gore. "Singleton is absolutely a greenhorn—a baby in these affairs. He suspects nothing, and it is easy enough to hoodwink him."

The men entered a large, well-furnished apartment. They were the only occupants so far, although, before long, other men would come—men who were supposed to be strangers, but who were really in the game.

Varney himself was the croupier, and the flat was ostensibly his. He was merely one of Mr. Gore's confederates, and was carrying out instructions. Gore preferred to remain an outsider.

"Well, I might as well leave you here, Carslake," he said, after a while. "There is no reason why you should come to Gadsby's Hotel with me—merely a waste of time. I can fetch Singleton."

"Just as you please," said Carslake. "Perhaps it will be better if you do go alone, Gore. Singleton may be in a despondent mood after last night, and you will be able to deal with him more effectively if you are alone."

Gore nodded.

"I've not the slightest doubt that my calculations will turn out to be accurate," he said smoothly. "Well, for the present, I'll go."

Everything at the flat was arranged to Gore's satisfaction, and the time was already twenty minutes to ten. He had arranged to meet the scholboy at ten o'clock, and wanted to be in good time for the appointment.

Mr. Gore arrived at Gadsby's Hotel, in Glasshouse Street, by five minutes to the hour, and he lost no time in going straight up to the private room occupied by the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

The spider was about to entice the fly into his web!

CHAPTER III.

MORE TROUBLE!

"GOOD!"

"Ripping seats!"

"Begad! Rather!"

We were sitting in a row—the six of us—in the orchestra stalls of the Nell Gwynne Theatre. The curtain was almost due to rise, and the huge orchestra was already playing a selection of popular songs.

The theatre was packed, as we had expected it would be. It was rather late in the season, but this particular pantomime would probably run right into March before it was withdrawn.

"Jolly decent of the guv'nor to get seats like this!" I said. "I don't quite know how he managed it, and I'm not worrying about it. We've got the seats, and that's the main thing."

"There's only one thing I'm rather doubtful about," said Watson. "I don't quite like the way we're arranged in our seats."

"I suppose you're referring to Handforth?" I asked, grinning.

"Yes."

"You silly ass——" began Handforth.

"I don't think you ought to be sitting between Church and McClure—that's what I'm doubtful about, Handy," said Watson. "There's bound to be ructions if you sit there. You ought to be this side, between Nipper and Montie."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'll sit where I please."

"Well, it's not a bad idea at all," said McClure. "Tommy can come and sit where you are, Handy——"

"Don't you want me here?" roared Handforth.

"Shut up, you ass! It ain't that ——"

"If you want me to clear out, say so!" shouted Handforth. "I'm jolly certain I don't want to sit where I'm not wanted! But it's a pity if my own chums turn against me—that's all I can say!"

"Thank goodness!" I breathed.

"What's that?"

"Thank goodness you can't say any more!" I explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiots!" roared Handforth, glaring.

"Hallo!" I said. "He's breaking out again Go easy, Handy; you're making everybody stare at us. Remember we're under the public gaze. If you're not careful the audience will think that the pantomime's already started—down here!"

"It has!" muttered Church.

"What's that?" said Handforth sharply. "If there's one thing I hate, it's to have a chap mumbling near me! I'm not going to say any more now, because I'm fed up with you!"

Handforth set himself squarely in his seat, and glared ferociously at the programme. He held it upside down, but seemed to be unaware of this fact until McClure politely pointed it out.

For that act of courtesy, McClure nearly received a punch on the nose.

The members of the audience in our immediate vicinity were somewhat amused by the little altercation. It was an entertainment of its own. A big man who was sitting immediately in front of Handforth, however, did not seem to appreciate Handforth's vocal efforts.

Twice he turned round and bestowed a severe glare upon the aggressive leader of Study D. But he might just as well have glared at the ceiling, for all the effect it had.

Handforth was impervious to "straight looks."

"Sh-sh-sh!"

It was a general sound. The lights had gone down in the auditorium, and the curtain was on the point of rising. There was a hush of expectancy, and a moment later the curtain rose to reveal a woodland scene, beautifully designed and brilliantly lighted.

And then the pantomime commenced.

There was a good deal of chorus singing to begin with, as usual, and we enjoyed ourselves considerably. Handforth was really quiet, but I thought that it was too good to last.

Two of the comedians were on the stage, and they were keeping everybody highly amused with their witty sayings, although, to tell the truth, many of their jokes were somewhat ancient. It always surprises me to notice how well a staid old chestnut will "go down" in a pantomime.

"Who's that chap?" muttered Handforth suddenly; "that one dressed like a woman?"

"I don't know," said Church. "Dry up!"

"Who's got the programme?" asked Handforth, bending over Church.

His whisper was really quite a loud vocal effort, and it was audible to a considerable number of people, and severe glances were cast in Handforth's direction.

"Blow the programme!" whispered McClure. "It slipped down."

"You careless ass!" hissed Handforth. "Pass Nipper's along!"

"Be quiet, for goodness' sake!" snapped McClure. "I'm not going to bother the other chaps. Our programme's on the floor, near your feet; but what the dickens do you want it for?"

Handforth did not reply, but bent down, and incidentally dug his elbow into Church's ribs. Church gave a howl, quite involuntarily, and pushed at Handforth in order to relieve the pressure.

Handforth slipped down, and clutched at the chair in front of him.

"You—you silly ass!" he roared. "My goodness!"

In the darkness of the auditorium he could not very well see what he was doing, and his hand, instead of gripping the back of the chair, landed upon the large man's head, and Handforth's gasp was occasioned by the fact that the portly gentleman's hair came away in his hand, revealing a superb vision of baldness.

"Oh, corks!" gasped Church. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The big man gave a bellow of surprise and anger as he twisted round in his chair.

"Upon my soul!" he shouted thickly. "The impudence! Boy, how dare you interfere with my hair? Good gracious! I've a mind to thrash you——"

"Sorry, sir!" said Handforth, bobbing up. "Quite an accident, sir! I was looking for my programme——"

"'Hush!"

"Order—order!"

"Really, is it impossible to expect you boys to be quiet?" demanded an elderly lady, with much severity. "This is positively disgraceful!"

She was sitting just behind me, and she tapped my shoulder as she spoke.

"Really, madam, I am not responsible," I said softly. "I am willing to agree that it is disgraceful. Unless Handforth improves, we shall be compelled to take him up and quietly slaughter him."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the old lady. "What an extraordinary boy!"

I grinned, and nudged Tommy. Meanwhile, Handforth had handed the wig back to its rightful owner, but had not given up his search for the programme. He grovelled on the floor, and thrust his hand out.

He thought he could see the programme, for there was a square of whiteness under the seat in front; but his hand touched a box of chocolates, and a small boy immediately set up an outcry.

"Oh, mummie, look!" he exclaimed shrilly. "That big boy's stealing our sweets!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "I—I——"

"You silly chump!" hissed Church. "If you ain't careful, you'll have us all chucked out! I'll bet Nipper'll never bring you to a theatre again."

"I'm surprised at you, Handy," muttered McClure, "trying to pinch the kid's sweets——"

Handforth jumped up, hot and dusty.

"I thought that white box was the programme, you idiot!" he roared.

"Hush!"

"Order!"

"Sit down, there!"

"Sit down—sit down!"

Handforth was certainly causing an enormous amount of commotion, and he had missed a great deal of the show. And the thing that I had been expecting to happen took place.

A big attendant came hurrying down. He stopped at the end of the row where I was sitting.

"We can't allow this noise, please!" he said severely. "If you can't be quiet, young man, you'll have to go out."

Handforth glared.

"Oh, shall I?" he roared. "You can go and eat coke! This seat was paid for, and I'm going to occupy it until the show's over!"

"I shall have to appeal to you, sir," said the attendant, looking at me. "This young gentleman is with you, I believe?"

"Yes—unfortunately," I replied.

"I shall have to ask you to keep him quiet——"

"You'd better keep quiet yourself first!" exclaimed Handforth tartly. "You can buzz off, anyhow—I've found the beastly programme. And if these chaps would only keep quiet, we shall have peace."

The attendant decided to retire, for he was certainly doing no good, and Handforth, for a spell, was quiet. I was quite sure it couldn't last for long, and I trembled to think what would happen when he burst out again.

Fortunately, the interval was reached without mishap.

There had been one or two diversions, but nothing of any great importance, and as the curtain went down, McClure turned to his leader with a fierce expression on his face.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Handy!" he exclaimed warmly. "You've been kicking up a fearful dust ever since the show started. It's a wonder to me you haven't been chucked out."

"He would have been if we'd been squatting in the pit," remarked Church. "He was only saved because we're stallites."

Handforth sniffed.

"I don't take any blame on myself," he said. "It was this silly old josser in front who started it all——"

"Shush!"

But the stout old gentleman had heard; he would probably have heard if he had been as deaf as a post.

"How dare you, boy?" he demanded angrily. "How dare you refer to me as—as an old josser?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wasn't talking to you, sir!" said Handforth gruffly.

"Nevertheless, you were talking about me," snapped the man, "and, what is more, I shall make a serious complaint to the manager of this theatre. Such conduct is positively disgraceful! I shall refuse to sit here unless you are removed."

"Nobody's keeping you in your seat, sir," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I should be glad if you went—I should be able to see much better."

"Impudence—infernal impudence!" spluttered the stout gentleman. "Hi! Attendant, remove this boy at once!"

An attendant, with a worried expression on his face, approached.

"I have been grossly insulted!" shouted the indignant gentleman. "This boy has——"

"I'm sorry, sir," said the attendant. "I'll do my best. Now, young gentleman, surely you can manage to be quiet——"

"Don't glare at me like that!" interrupted Church. "I haven't done anything."

"It is this boy here!" rasped the man in front; "this big, clumsy boy!"

"You needn't talk about being big and clumsy!" retorted Handforth warmly. "I've been expecting that seat of yours to collapse every minute——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will not tolerate this!" shouted the man. "I demand——"

"It's all right, sir!" I put in hastily. "We'll keep him quiet. If we find it impossible, we'll carry him out ourselves, and sit him down in the gutter outside. Let it rest at that."

Handforth was not inclined to let it rest at all, and it was rather fortunate that the lights went down at that moment. The second part of the pantomime was about to commence, and the effect of the rising curtain naturally subdued Handforth for the time being.

And for fully twenty minutes he sat in his seat, enjoying the show, and when a song had been sung, he signified his approval by clapping in the most wholehearted manner. He clapped loudly, with his hands about half an inch off the back of the stout man's head.

"Topping!" shouted Handforth. "Encore!"

The stout gentleman turned.

"Confound you, boy! You are doing this on purpose to annoy me!" he exclaimed. "Keep your hands to yourself——"

"You'd better not say that I started this row!" shouted Handforth warmly. "I suppose I can clap now, without you interfering?"

"That is not the point——"

"Order—order!"

"Grab the ass, and hold him down!" I said fiercely. "If he starts any more of his bunkum, he'll end up by being chucked out."

"And a good job, too," muttered Church. "He's ruining everything."

"What's that?" bawled Handforth aggressively.

"I said you're spoiling everything—and so you are," declared Church, with unusual bluntness. "Why the dickens can't you keep quiet, you—you——Yow!"

Biff!

Handforth's fist planted itself upon Church's nose, and Church collapsed at the feet of McClure and Tommy Watson. Even in a theatre, Handforth could not refrain from using violent measures.

"Yaroooh!" roared Church. "Ow! You—you ass!"

"Silence!"

"Order—order!"

"Sit down!"

"Be quiet there!"

"Turn him out!"

I looked round helplessly. It was certain Handforth would be chucked out now. A comedian was on the stage at the moment—a man who was pretending to be a marvellous magician—quite a comic affair; but the comedian could not get on with his business until the disturbance was over, for it was mainly a talking affair.

The same attendant came hurrying down, and this time he was accompanied by a man in evening-dress, and both of them were looking grim.

"Which one is it?" inquired the man in evening-dress sharply.

"The big boy, sir," said the attendant.

"Huh!" snapped the stout man. "About time, too!"

"I shall have to ask you to leave the theatre, my boy," said the man in evening-dress. "You have created a great deal of disturbance during the evening, and the management cannot possibly allow it to continue."

Handforth stared.

"You—you want me to leave?" he asked blankly.

"You must leave at once."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Go and eat coke! This seat was paid for, and I'm not going to shift until the show's over. You can't work that bunkum on me, I can tell you!"

"I'm afraid we shall have to use force, sir," muttered the attendant.

"So it seems—so it seems!" said the other man. "Pardon me, please."

He pushed past Sir Montie and me, and Handforth gave a wild look in our direction. He realised at last that drastic action was about to be taken.

"Back me up, you chaps!" he gasped. "Don't let these idiots chuck me out! Rescue, St. Frank's."

"Sorry, Handy, but it can't be done," I said. "Dash it all, we can't start a fight in the stalls of a theatre! The best thing you can do is to go out quietly—or give your word of honour that you'll dry up."

"I won't do either!" roared Handforth. "I'll—— Oh, my goodness! Lemme get past there! Great Scott!"

The attendant and the man in evening-dress were practically upon him, and Handforth scarcely knew what to do. He certainly had no intention of being thrown out, and he was equally determined not to give in quietly, so, with a wild gulp he forced his way along the row—incidentally treading on feet and bumping into various knees—until he reached the other aisle.

And now, to his horror, he found two other attendants were cutting off his retreat. One was coming down from the rear, and the other was already hastening along the orchestra rail, right in front.

The audience by this time had ceased to take an interest in the stage, and everybody was watching Handforth's performance with tremendous interest even the comedian on the stage was interested.

"Chuck him out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stick to it, kid—dodge!"

All sorts of shouts floated down from the gallery, and I couldn't help grinning. Handforth was providing an extra turn. The audience had ceased to be angry with him, and were now decidedly amused.

Handforth surprised everybody by his next move. He fairly staggered Church and McClure and the rest of us.

For, instead of waiting to be captured, he escaped from the auditorium in a most extraordinary manner.

The magician on the stage evidently invited people across the footlights during his turn, for a short flight of steps led up to a carpet-covered board which bridged the orchestra.

As Handforth saw this arrangement his eyes gleamed. By swift action he would just be able to reach it before he was collared, and he rushed down towards the orchestra like a hare.

"Well I'm jiggered!" I muttered. "He's going on to the stage!"

"What?"

"The—the babbling lunatic!" gasped Church.

Handforth bounded up the steps, tore across the bridge, and arrived upon the stage, amid a roar of laughter from the audience. Some of the people were beginning to suspect that it was all a part of the show.

Handforth turned defiantly.

"Yah!" he roared. "I've beaten you now!"

He looked rather untidy and grimy as he stood there, in the full glare of the footlights, and Church and McClure, after staring, horrified, for a moment or two, burst into a roar with the rest of the audience—they really couldn't help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My boy, I must ask you to come down at once—at once!" panted the assistant manager—for that's what the man in evening-dress was. "You have created quite enough disturbance already——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Watkin," interrupted the comedian from the stage. "Why not let the boy remain here? I was about to ask for a member of the audience to step up, and this lad will do splendidly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is really impossible——"

But the assistant-manager was interrupted by a burst of applause from practically everybody in the theatre. The audience approved of the comedian's idea, and the assistant-manager saw, after a moment, that it would be unwise to proceed with his throwing-out intentions.

Handforth scarcely knew what to do. He could not very well return to the auditorium, and he did not know how to get off the stage—at any rate, without running into enemies.

He decided that he was safer where he was.

"Just the boy I want!" said the comic-magician genially. "Now, my dear lad, please sit down here and observe all that I do. I want you to be a witness that my various tricks are absolutely genuine in every particular. Watch!"

The magician proceeded with his turn, and it was certainly rather funny, for he made out that he was doing marvellous tricks, and he was actually making a mess of everything. That was just where the humour came in.

"Well, Handy's providing an extra turn, anyhow," grinned Watson. "But what's he going to do when this bit's over? They won't allow him to come back, will they?"

"Begad! I hope not, dear old boy," murmured Sir Montie.

We waited, rather curiously, and at last the faked magician's turn was over. Most of the year he was a music-hall artiste, as most people in pantomimes are. The comedian turned to Handforth after the applause had ceased.

"Now, my lad, I want you to assure the audience that all my tricks are genuine. You have witnessed them at close quarters," he said. "You have had every opportunity of following my methods——"

"Exactly!" said Handforth grimly. "And, what's more, I'm going to expose you!"

"Eh?" said the comedian blankly.

"I dare say all those tricks diddled the audience, but they didn't diddle me!" shouted Handforth. "It takes a better man than you to spoof me, I can tell you! Why, you're a fraud! I could see through every one of your tricks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the biggest roar of laughter that had echoed in the auditorium during the evening. The comedian laughed as much as anybody. For it just dawned upon him that Handforth had taken the tricks seriously. Poor old Handy thought that he was exposing the man.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted the magician. "Allow me to perform my last marvellous act of sorcery. I will now proceed to make this young gentleman vanish. He will disappear from your sight—swiftly and dramatically."

"Here, I say——" began Handforth, backing away.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Observe!" shouted the magician. "One—two—three!"

The man darted to the side of the stage, and reappeared with a huge pair of pincers—a pair as big as himself, but, of course, extremely light. The jaws opened, fastened themselves round Handforth, and the junior was yanked off the stage as the magician was saying "three."

Handy had certainly vanished!

There was tremendous applause, but Handforth did not reappear, and Church and McClure wanted to go round in search of him. But I advised them to stick in their places until the

end of the show, which would be very shortly.

So we all remained in our seats until the curtain went down. There had been no further sign of Handforth, but when we went out we found Edward Oswald stalking up and down the big entrance hall.

He glared at us ferociously as we appeared.

"Oh, here you are!" he snapped. "I suppose you thought it was very funny?"

"Rather!" I grinned. "You'd make a fortune on the stage, Handy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I suppose you thought it was funny to leave me out here, alone?" went on the leader of Study D. "I think you're a set of rotters, and you can go and eat coke! I don't want anything to do with you!"

I saw that diplomacy was needed.

"Come on, Handy, be a sport!" I said, taking his arm. "The performance you gave was ripping; we enjoyed it tremendously. I didn't think you had it in you. Everybody was applauding you to the echo."

"I don't believe you!" growled Handforth. "You can't spoof me!"

"My dear chap, I'm not trying to!" I said. "It's just the truth. When you get older, you'll be able to go on the stage and earn a hundred quid a week. You're a born comedian!"

I spoke enthusiastically, and Handforth had no suspicion that I was pulling his leg.

"There's no need to get huffy," I went on. "We're all tremendously sorry we offended you, old son! It's all over, and now we're going back to Gray's Inn Road. Come on!"

"All right; I'll overlook it," said Handforth gruffly. "But, mind you, if you start playing the ox again, I'll get busy with my fists."

We decided to walk home, as the distance was not very far. Moreover, it was a pleasant night, and it was rather good, strolling through the West End at the busiest time. We had enjoyed ourselves tremendously, and we were all feeling in the best of moods.

But before we reached Gray's Inn Road something rather curious took place.

CHAPTER IV.

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY.

THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON yawned, and threw his cigarette-end into the glowing embers of the fire.

"Time Gore was turning up," he murmured languidly.

He glanced at his gold watch, rose from the soft lounge, and stretched himself. It was nearly ten o'clock, and Gadsby's Hotel was rather quiet. It was tucked away in a kind of backwater, and was generally peaceful.

A very high-class hotel, there was every luxury for a person with ample means. The Hon. Douglas Singleton did not care how much he spent, and he had engaged the best suite of rooms in the establishment.

"Gore promised to be here at ten, so he ought to be appearing," muttered Singleton, as he lounged across the room. "I've got to buck up to-night, or I sha'n't get that bally money back!"

The Hon. Douglas had hopes. He was practically certain that he would recover his losings before the night was out. The lad had not yet realised that the game of roulette, when played for high stakes, is a losing fight for the reckless punter.

For a junior schoolboy, Singleton had certainly been "going strong." He was making the most of his short trip to London, and, apparently, Mr. Gore was determined to make the most of Singleton.

The door opened and Mr. Gore appeared.

"Glad you've come, Mr. Gore," said the Hon. Douglas. "I was just getting deucedly tired of my own company. We're going straight off to Mr. Varney's flat, aren't we? I want to start early to-night."

"That's the idea!" agreed Gore, stroking his black, waxed moustache. "You'll be able to have a long spell at the table, my lad—and you need it. We both need it, in fact. I have a good sum to recover from last night, too. But you needn't worry. I have every confidence."

"I'm not worrying," said Singleton lightly. "Dash it all, why should I? I lost twenty thousand last night, I

know, but I'm not the kind of fellow to go into hysterics over a trifle. If I lose it altogether, I sha'n't sit down and mope."

Gore smiled.

"That's the spirit, my boy—that's the spirit!" he said heartily. "A fellow who goes into a condition of wild raving because he loses is no good. You simply have to remain calm, and there's practically no risk. Study the table carefully, watch every move, and, above all, play cautiously until you know that you are winning."

"That's all right!" said Singleton lightly. "Leave it to me. Let's be getting along now! I'm anxious to start the business."

"How much cash have you got on you?"

"Same as last night."

"Twenty thousand?"

"Yes," said the Hon. Douglas. "I thought I might as well be prepared, you know. I'm not expecting to lose, but you never know your luck. Besides, I can't very well win if I've no money to stake."

"That's true," said Gore. "Well, let's be making a move."

"Isn't Carslake coming?"

"Carslake will probably be at Varney's place when we arrive; he's going there independently," said Mr. Gore. "Come along, Singleton! One moment, though! Suppose we have just one drink to wish ourselves luck?"

"I've no objection," said Singleton.

Gore poured out two liberal doses of whisky. The Hon. Douglas, nut as he was, was not accustomed to whisky, He took his glass, and was about to drink when Mr. Gore interrupted him.

"Put it down, lad," he said. "We need clear heads to-night, and whisky won't do us any good. We'd better give it a miss."

"Perhaps you're right," said Singleton.

They passed out into the corridor, and a few minutes later they were seated comfortably in a taxi-cab, and the journey to Varney's flat was not a long one. The pair got out of the vehicle, walked into the block of flats, and made their way to the second floor.

They were admitted at once, and now there was a great difference in the place. The gambling room was well filled with people—mostly young men, and nearly all wearing evening-dress.

There were two roulette tables, and both of them were well patronised. In other parts of the flat card games were in progress, and the air everywhere was blue with tobacco-smoke.

"But I think we'd better watch just to start with," said Gore cautiously. "There's no sense in rushing headlong into a gamble——"

"Oh, I'm not going to wait!" said Singleton. "I want to get that money back, and the best way is to start at once. If my luck's out, I'll stop in good time. I expect I shall soon know how things are going."

Within a few minutes Singleton was seated at one of the roulette tables, with a large pile of Treasury and Bank of England notes in front of him. He certainly looked as though he meant business.

Gore sat a little distance away, and he made a pretence of playing fairly frequently, but he was really watching the Hon. Douglas.

Singleton did not lose much time in starting. He placed his money on single numbers to commence with, hoping, of course, to win, and get his money back rapidly. But after a good few fifty-pound notes had vanished in this way, he eased up somewhat.

Singleton thought nothing of putting down a fifty-pound note as a single stake, and quite frequently he put two at once. They seemed to be of no value to him! He threw them about quite recklessly.

Consequently, he lost.

Now and again, at rare intervals, he had a stroke of luck, or what seemed to be luck. He did not guess that the croupier was faking everything for his particular benefit.

And one of the facts which urged Singleton to back rashly and heavily was that a man near him had been winning with astonishing consistency the whole time. The Hon. Douglas could not understand why his own luck was different.

Long before an hour had elapsed he had lost several thousands of pounds, yet it could not be said that he had been losing all the time. In quite a number of cases he had won, but his winnings were a mere trifle in comparison with his losses.

'And the more money Singleton got rid of, the more excited he became, the more determined to continue until his luck altered.

But somehow it did not alter.

And, at length, the foolish boy succeeded in losing every farthing of the money he had brought with him. This was because he wagered the money in the most absurd manner. He would place a thousand pounds upon the table at one time, and would perhaps lose every farthing of it.

There was no limit at this remarkable roulette table, and this was not very astonishing, when it is remembered that the whole place had been prepared for Singleton's own benefit.

It was, of course, a swindle from start to finish—a barefaced fraud. But Singleton was so ignorant of this sort of thing that he never suspected. And in his madness to win, he merely succeeded in losing.

"How are you getting on, my boy?" asked Mr. Gore, when he thought the right moment had arrived. "I'm afraid you're not looking very cheerful."

Singleton's face was flushed, and his eyes were rather wild.

"I've lost," he said shortly.

"Sorry to hear that. How much?"

"All of it."

"The whole twenty thousand?"

"Yes."

"Dear me! That's rather bad!" said Gore concernedly. "Personally, I've been winning, and I was hoping that you would report similar luck. But you mustn't give up heart, my lad. So far as I can see, there's only one method by which you can regain the losses of to-night and last night."

"And what method is that?"

"I will explain," said Mr. Gore softly. "You have had abominable luck, and I am deeply concerned. Well, there is no need to be long-faced about it. There is yet hope. In order to pull yourself up, you must employ the game of playing to the croupier."

"I'm just as wise as before," remarked the Hon. Douglas.

"Playing to the croupier is a recognised term," explained Mr. Gore. "I have seen it done at Monte Carlo many times. I have seen a man lose a hundred thousand pounds within two hours, and, by using the 'playing the croupier' game, he has completely recovered his losses within a single hour."

"Egad!" said Singleton eagerly. "Is that so? But how is it worked?"

Mr. Gore smiled. He looked very knowing, and the Hon. Douglas waited rather impatiently for him to continue Of course, Gore's words were meaningless; he was simply leading the boy on. There was no such "game" as he had suggested. But if he could get Singleton to plunge deeply, his object would be achieved.

"You see, my boy, it is this way," said Mr. Gore. "You must use larger sums of money than ever; you must cause consternation to enter the croupier's heart. Back the numbers continuously, and place thousands of pounds on at a time. There is no limit to the amount you may stake. The croupier will become nervous; he will spin the wheel erratically. And, in the long run, you are bound to win. Do you understand? By the law of average, you are bound to win. The method simply cannot fail; but you must have large capital. That is the only difficulty with most people."

"It is the difficulty with me," said Singleton.

"We will talk about that in a moment," went on Mr. Gore. "I want you to fully grasp my meaning now. At first you may lose a lot of money—even more than you have lost already. But, after a while, the effect will be felt, and you will begin to win steadily. Once on the right side—and that time is certain to come—you will haul in the winnings at an amazing speed. It is a plan which has never been known to fail. Play with big money, don't worry if you lose, and keep on playing. Success is positive."

Singleton nodded.

"Yes, I see," he said. "It's all clear, Mr. Gore, quite clear."

Mr. Gore agreed, although, privately, he couldn't quite understand his own argument. It was simply a mass of bluff. He had not the slightest intention of allowing Singleton to win.

"You have lost a great deal, I believe?" he asked.

"Twenty last night, and twenty to-night," replied Singleon. "That is to

say, forty thousand pounds on the two nights."

Gore nodded.

"What you require is a further forty thousand pounds," he said, "or even more would be advisable. Even if you lose the bulk of it to start with, you are bound to win in the finish."

"But what can I do?" asked Singleton, worried. "I haven't got a quid left, and I can't put cheques on the table ——"

"You can give me a cheque."

"By Jove! Will you let me have the cash?"

"Yes, certainly."

"How much?"

"To any extent you like," said Gore. "I happen to have a big supply on me, and I know your cheques are good. I can let you have fifty thousand, if you wish—or even sixty thousand. Write out your cheque."

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas heartily. "You've made me breathe again, Mr. Gore! I feel that I shall make good, after all!"

He strode over to a small side table, sat down, and took out his cheque book. Mr. Gore lent him a fountain pen, and he rapidly drafted an open cheque for sixty thousand pounds.

"Thanks," said Mr. Gore. "I can either get this money from the bank—or return the cheque for cash, out of your winnings. Just see if these are right, my boy. Count them."

He produced a thick bundle of bank-notes. They were mostly one hundred pound notes, but there were a good many of them of higher value.

Singleton had a tremendous sheaf in his hands. His face was hot and flushed, and there was a feverish light in his eyes. He was excited and nervous.

"I don't want to count it," he said huskily. "I'm going back to the table. I'm going to win, Gore. I'm going to get all that money back."

"Good!" smiled Gore. "That's the spirit, my boy!"

The Hon. Douglas walked rather unsteadily to the table, and Gore watched him with a curious expression in his eyes. It was an expression almost impossible to define.

"The boy is positively maddened," he muttered. "I never believed that the trick could be worked so easily. Within an hour he will have lost the lot and I can cash this cheque on Monday. Good gad! I have heard the expression 'a fool and his money' often enough, but surely it applies here better than in any case!"

Carslake strolled up.

"Everything going well?" he murmured.

"Splendidly," said Gore. "Singleton has accepted the bait."

"You think he'll lose it all?"

"He cannot help doing so," replied Mr. Gore.

"It seems impossible to me," said Carslake. "The whole thing strikes me as being a farce. Singleton is in our hands completely—he can be worked as easily as a piece of new putty!"

"He is only a boy, remember. He is new to this sort of thing," remarked Gore. "He is learning his lesson early in life. But if we did not get his money—well, somebody else would. It is just our luck."

Carslake nodded, and walked over to the roulette table to watch.

Singleton had already followed Gore's extraordinary advice. The boy did not seem to realise that he was plunging to certain disaster. He was not a fool by any means; but the fever had got hold of him, and he hardly knew what he was doing. The fascination of the game overwhelmed his commonsense.

And he placed his money on the table in amazingly large sums. Again and again he lost, and occasionally he won. And it was noticed that when he won his stake was usually a comparatively small one.

But he received encouragement, and he continued the insane gamble.

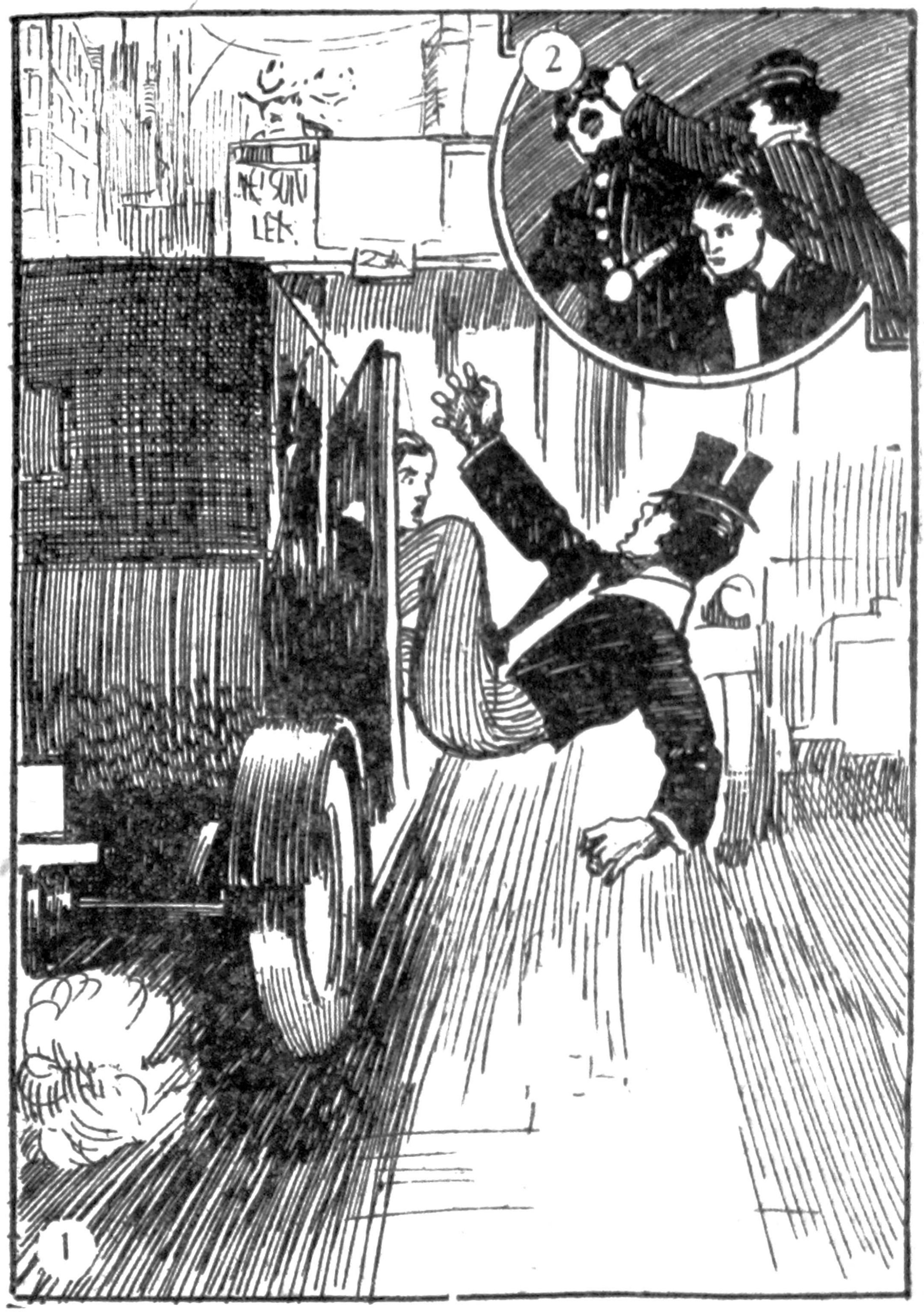
He remembered Gore's advice—"keep on." And he kept on, regardless of his losses, regardless of everything.

And, with terrible speed, his sheaf of notes disappeared.

The plan did not seem to be working right; but Singleton was altogether too excited to call a halt. The gambling spirit had caught him in its arms, and he was carried along helplessly.

Mr. Gore's calculations were right in every detail.

Long before an hour had elapsed—practically before midnight—his money had diminished to a few thousand pounds. And, with a harsh, hopeless little laugh, Singleton staked his last supply of cash on a single number.



1. The door flew open with far greater promptitude than Handforth expected.
2. The constable's helmet went one way, and his truncheon another.

He lost.

For a moment or two the Hon. Douglas did not seem to realise the dreadful truth. He had lost it all! He had lost a hundred thousand pounds in two nights! On the face of it, the very idea seemed ridiculous and impossible.

But the croupier held Singleton's money, and Mr. Gore held Singleton's cheque. It was a perfectly good cheque, and it would be honoured on Monday when it was presented at the bank.

Gore, his eyes gleaming with triumph, stepped to Singleton's side.

"You played well, my boy," he said softly. "You played with wonderful judgment and skill. And if you had only been able to continue for another ten minutes, all would have been well. Look here, I will risk a few thousands myself. No, I don't want any cheque for this little lot. Take this money, and use it exactly as I tell you. You will win. You will pay me back, and keep the rest for yourself. Then you will be able to——"

Ting-ting-ting!

A bell, somewhere near the ceiling, commenced to ring sharply.

"Good heavens!" gasped the croupier. "The alarm!"

"The—the what!" shouted Mr. Gore hoarsely.

"That bell is the alarm gong!" panted one of the other men. "It—it means danger! I expect the police are here!"

The Hon. Douglas laughed with sheer nervous shock.

"The police!" he said unsteadily. "Egad! That's good! A fine finish to the evening, what? I suppose we shall finish in chokey! Ha, ha, ha! This is a topping adventure——"

"Pull yourself together, Singleton," said Gore sharply. "You are a bit hysterical, I can see. It won't do, boy! We must escape! Do you understand? We can't afford to be caught by the police!"

"It makes no difference to me—I'm broke," said Singleton. "Of all the rotten luck! Just when I was about to get my money back——"

"You'll have to move, there!" gasped Carslake, running up. "The police are in the flat already! Run—run for safety!"

"Where can we run to?" panted the Hon. Douglas.

Gore seized the boy's arm.

"Come with me," he murmured. "I know a way. Trust to me, Singleton, and we shall get out of this all right. If the police arrested us it would be a dire calamity; but we shall hoodwink them!"

CHAPTER V.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"POLICE!"

Several men who had been playing at the roulette tables echoed the cry, and there was general consternation. Some of the punters had made a dash for the door which led to the landing. But they were turned back by the police, who seemed to be in considerable force.

Mr. Gore led Singleton to the back of the flat.

All was dark here, and the man softly opened a small window. He looked out for a moment, and then withdrew his head.

"Quite clear this side, I think," he murmured.

"But we can't jump!" protested the Hon. Douglas.

"I'm not suggesting that we should," said Mr. Gore. "There is a fire escape just to the left—one of those iron affairs, you know. They generally fix them to the rear of these blocks. But we shall need to be cautious, my lad. Follow me, and take no risks."

Gore climbed out on to the window-sill. Then he allowed himself to hang down. His feet touched a wide ledge, and by walking along this for a few feet, it was possible to reach the fire escape.

"Come along, Singleton!" murmured Gore.

The Hon Douglas lowered himself, and his companion assisted him to the escape. Then they both descended to the ground. Mr. Gore had just put his foot on solid earth when a dark form loomed up.

"Better take it quiet, gents," said the form. "I've got orders to detain——"

"A policeman!" muttered Singleton huskily.

"He won't take us!" said Gore in a fierce voice.

At the same second he flung himself forward, and the constable was taken by surprise.

He had apparently assumed that this pair would not show fight. Mr. Gore's fist landed on the side of his head.

The constable's helmet went one way, and his truncheon another. He staggered slightly, tripped, and fell. Before he could get to his feet, Mr. Gore and Singleton were speeding away.

They dashed across a lawn—a big affair, the common property of all the tenants of the flats—and found themselves at the bottom of the grounds. Gore climbed to the top of a wall, and helped Singleton over.

A minute later the pair were in a quiet little road, and all signs and sounds of the police raid were left behind. Mr. Gore came to a halt, and chuckled. He patted Singleton on the back.

"That was rather neat, eh?" he said softly.

"Yes, rather!" panted the Hon. Douglas. "I thought we were collared for the moment. Egad! It was a narrow squeak!"

"No mistake about that," agreed Mr. Gore. "It is extremely fortunate that you were not captured, my lad. It would have been a bad thing for you. Expulsion from St. Frank's would have been inevitable——"

"I shouldn't have worried much about that," said Singleton. "I'm angry with the police for raiding that place to-night—deucedly angry! I sha'n't have an opportunity of getting my money back now."

"My dear lad, you will have many opportunities," declared Gore. "This little incident is annoying, I will admit, but you must not worry yourself. Before long you will be richer than ever."

"Oh, I'm rich enough still," said Singleton. "My money's not worrying me. It's the idea of being stumped like that. Just when I thought I was going to win, too. It's frightfully rough luck, you know!"

"It is indeed," said Gore. "I have seldom known such a run of bad luck—and then the police raid as a climax! It was the height of misfortune——"

"Egad! I can see a policeman!" interrupted Singleton abruptly. "I think we'd better part, Mr. Gore. Safer, you know. You walk one way, and I'll walk the other. We'll meet later at Gadsby's."

Before Mr. Gore could stop him the Hon. Douglas had dived down a side turning. It was obvious that the boy was exceedingly nervous; the very sight of a policeman caused him to tremble.

Mr. Gore smiled to himself.

"Perhaps it is better for the lad to be by himself for a time," he murmured, as he selected a cigar from his case. "He has a great deal to think over—not that thinking will restore his little cheque for sixty thousand!"

Mr. Gore tapped his breast pocket comfortably.

Meanwhile, the Hon. Douglas Singleton wandered away in a very absent-minded mood. He hardly knew where he was going, and he certainly didn't care. He found himself in the neighbourhood of the Strand finally.

He had been thinking—wondering how on earth he had lost such a lot of money. He could hardly remember the events which had taken place in the roulette room. It was all misty.

Singleton realised that he must have been half dazed with excitement; he had spent money in the most astounding fashion; he had got rid of a fortune. And, for the first time in his life he was feeling somewhat scared.

But he wouldn't admit this—even to himself.

He walked on, not caring where he was going. He vaguely knew that it was rather late, although the streets were by no means deserted. He was in Kingsway, and came to the conclusion that he had better take a taxi to Gadsby's Hotel.

But there was no taxi to be seen.

He commenced walking back towards the Strand, having a kind of hazy idea that if he went to Charing Cross he could reach Piccadilly Circus fairly easily. Singleton's knowledge of London was not extensive.

Just as he reached a side turning, however, six schoolboys swung into Aldwych, and the Hon. Douglas was momentarily surrounded by them. He had not known of their presence until that moment—and they had not known of his.

Needless to add, I was one of the six. The others were Montie, Tommy, and Handforth and Co.

We had walked from the Nell Gwynne Theatre, going first to the Embankment to have a look at the Thames. We had wasted a good deal of time, not caring what time we had got home. It would

be Sunday on the morrow, and we should not be compelled to rise early.

"Hallo! Nearly a collision that time," I said cheerfully. "Sorry, sir —— Why, what the—— Well, I'm blessed!"

I recognised the young fellow at once; so did the others.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "It's Singleton!"

"Singleton!"

"My hat!"

The Hon. Douglas stared at us in amazement.

"What—what—— Egad!" he ejaculated. "This is remarkable! How in the name of wonder did you fellows get here?"

Handforth let out a roar.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded triumphantly. "I knew I saw Singleton earlier this evening! I say, Singleton, were you looking at the posters of the Stoll Picture Theatre at about seven o'clock?"

"I took a walk in that direction, certainly," replied the Hon. Douglas.

"There you are!" said Handforth.

"Well, you mustn't crow about it," I went on. "You didn't perform anything very wonderful, Handy, in spotting Singleton. But I thought he was in bed, suffering from a nasty whack ——"

"That's what I thought!" said Handforth grimly.

Singleton nodded.

"The doctor allowed me to go out this evening," he explained. "I'm feeling much better, you know. I only got a crack on the head—nothing to make a song about. I was fearfully wild when I found that I couldn't get back to St. Frank's at once. The old doctor chap is an ass!"

We looked at the Hon. Douglas suspiciously.

"You don't seem very ill," said Handforth bluntly.

"I'm not ill——"

"And you don't show any signs of having had a knock on the head," added Handforth. "I've got my own ideas, Singleton, and I don't mind telling you that I suspect you of playing a trick on the Head!"

"Really?" yawned the Hon. Douglas. "You stayed in London to go on the razzle, you bounder!"

"Perhaps there's a bit of truth in what you say," admitted Singleton calmly. "I'm not denying the horrid charge. A fellow's not much good if he doesn't freeze on to an opportunity when it crops up."

"You reckless ass!" I said severely. "I'll bet you've been spending money at a terrific rate!"

Singleton started, his troubles brought to mind again.

"Well, yes—that is to say, mind your own business!" he replied. "What does it matter to you whether I've been spending money or not? Please don't be so inquisitive."

Somehow his manner changed; he became different. His face, although he endeavoured to wear an expression of bored indifference, showed signs of worry and anxiety. There were lines beneath Singleton's eyes, and he became nervous and unsteady.

I had never seen the Hon. Douglas like this before, and the change had come about because I had mentioned money. What was the meaning of it? Had Singleton been losing a great deal? As I afterwards found out (and as I have already described), he had.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" asked Handforth.

"Eh? I shall be able to get it back, of course," said Singleton absently. "I—oh—what—what did you say, Handforth? I—I was thinking, egad! Good night, you fellows!"

Before we could stop him, he walked on hurriedly.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Watson.

"What's the matter with the idiot?" demanded Handforth. "He seems to be dazed over something. Did you notice the way he hesitated and blundered? It strikes me there's something wrong with the chap!"

I was watching Singleton with interest.

He passed down Aldwych, in the direction of the Strand, and his walk, although brisk, seemed to be unsteady. I had nearly lost sight of him, when my attention became attracted by something else.

A man, quite a stranger, had been standing on the other side of the road, examining a book by the light of an electric standard; but now he closed the book, and went in the same direction as Singleton.

I remembered that the man had stopped under the lamp at the same time

as we had run into the Hon. Douglas. Somehow I was suspicious—and the more so when the stranger turned into the Strand, immediately behind Singleton.

He was shadowing the junior.

I was convinced of this, and I decided to take action.

"You fellows walk on slowly," I said, turning. "I'm going down this way—after Singleton. I sha'n't be long, and I'll soon catch you up, if you don't walk too fast."

"Hold on a minute," said Handforth. "What's the idea—— Hi, Nipper, you ass! I'm talking to you——"

I took no notice, but hastened away. Handforth, I believe, attempted to follow me, but Sir Montie and Tommy held him back. I knew that there was no time to be lost, for there were still many people in the Strand, and it is quite easy to lose sight of people in that thoroughfare.

My curiosity was aroused, and I wanted to satisfy it.

Fortunately, I picked up the shadowing stranger just opposite Southampton Street. He was only a few yards behind the Hon. Douglas. The stranger was a tallish man, dressed rather shabbily, with a soft hat low over his face.

My suspicion became a certainty by the time we had reached Trafalgar Square. The man was undoubtedly following the Hon. Douglas. We continued our way until we entered the Haymarket—and so on to Piccadilly Circus.

And then I received a bit of a shock.

As I turned out of the Haymarket, somebody stepped out from the shadows and confronted me, completely barring my progress.

It was the stranger!

"Your attentions, my boy, are not appreciated," he said, in a soft, smooth voice. "I regret that I must take action."

Before I could recover from my surprise I was seized, twisted round, and bumped down upon the pavement. The stranger gave a soft laugh, turned away, and ran lightly across the Circus. By the time I got to my feet he had vanished up Shaftesbury Avenue.

"Great guns!" I gasped. "Who the dickens is he?"

I hurried after him, but when I got into Shaftesbury Avenue there was no sign of the stranger—he had disappeared. The fact that he had spotted my game came as a bit of a shock to me, for I prided myself on my shadowing capabilities.

And who was the fellow, anyhow?

I was rather wild with myself, for it was hateful to know that I had been bested. The fellow had evidently known of my little game for some time, although he had given no sign.

I had not seen him turn once, so it was pretty clear that he was an expert in his own way. But who was he? That was the point which puzzled me. Why was the fellow shadowing the Hon. Douglas?

"Oh, well, there's no sense in hanging about here," I told myself. "I'd better get off home."

The others were probably at Gray's Inn Road by this time, and I reckoned that I should have to walk. It was too late for 'buses, and there were no taxi-cabs to be seen.

Before I had walked a hundred yards, however, I spotted a taxi. It was speeding along in the same direction that I was taking, and I noticed that the little flag was up.

"Hi!" I yelled. "Stop a minute!"

The taxi slowed down—of necessity, for I had run into the road.

"Get out of the way there!" shouted the cabby. "D'you want to git run down, you young ijit?"

"I want you to drive me to——"

"I ain't drivin' nobody nowhere," said the taxi-man, with wonderful grammar. "I'm off home—an' late enough, too!"

"Look here—be reasonable," I exclaimed quickly. "You're plying for hire, and you're compelled by law to take me. I only want to get to Gray's Inn Road——"

"Oh, that's different," interrupted the man. "Jump in, sir. I'm goin' down Holborn, anyhow. It won't be much out of my way."

I entered the taxi, and we were soon speeding along. I was rather indignant, too. Some of the London taxi-drivers seem to do pretty well as they like—regardless of the law. I fully expected that the man would demand double fare when we reached our destination, and I was quite determined not to pay it.

Within a few minutes the cab drew up in front of Nelson Lee's house in Gray's Inn Road. I jumped out, and inquired the fare. The man mentioned

the correct amount, rather to my surprise, so I tipped him sixpence.

"Pretty generous to-night, ain't you?" said the cabby sarcastically.

I didn't reply, and the cab drove off. I certainly had no desire to enter into an argument with the fellow there. I was just about to insert my key into the lock when I heard familiar voices.

"I told you it was Nipper!" said Tommy Watson. "Well, of all the giddy nerve! Telling us to walk slow, and then coming by taxi!"

"Begad!" exclaimed Montie. "It is certainly a bit steep!"

I grinned, and waited for the juniors to join me.

"What's the meaning of this——" began Handforth.

"Keep your hair on!" I interrupted. "I walked back to Piccadilly Circus, and I thought you'd be home, so I came in a taxi."

"You followed Singleton, I suppose?" asked Watson.

"Well, not exactly," I replied. "I'll tell you all about it when we get in. I hope the guv'nor's home."

But when we got up to the comfortable sitting-room, there was no sign of Nelson Lee. Mrs. Jones had left a fire burning, and supper was on the table. We attacked it with great gusto.

And Nelson Lee did not turn up until an hour had elapsed. I heard him come up the stairs and go straight to his bedroom. I jumped up at once, excused myself, and went out.

But when I tried the door of the guv'nor's bedroom, it was locked.

"You in there, sir?" I called out.

"Yes, Nipper; I shall only be a few minutes," said Lee.

"But what's the idea of locking the door?" I demanded. "You might let me in, guv'nor. I want to have a word with you."

"Just one moment, Nipper—that's all."

I waited, and the moment turned out to be three or four minutes. At last Lee opened the door, and I found him collarless, and with a towel to his face. I was somewhat indignant.

"Why couldn't you open it before?" I asked warmly.

"I had a reason, young 'un."

"What reason?"

"It is not good for little boys to be inquisitive," said Lee banteringly. "As a matter of fact, Nipper, I don't want to explain just at the moment. You needn't make a mystery out of nothing ——"

"Hallo! What's this?" I asked suddenly, picking up a towel which had been lying over a chair. "There's a sign of grease-paint here, sir—— My hat! I'll bet you came in disguised, and didn't want me to know it!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Your brains, my dear Nipper, are singularly acute to-night," he observed. "Perhaps I was disguised—and then, again, perhaps I was not."

I glared, and felt rather speechless. It was quite obvious that the guv'nor had no intention of taking me into his confidence, and, somehow or other, I could not help remembering the tall, shabby figure of the man who had been following the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

Was it possible that——

But I knew nothing for certain, and I thought it wiser not to jump to conclusions.

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CHAPTER VI.

A VERY PROFITABLE UNDERTAKING.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE meanwhile had been active.

After the Hon. Douglas had left him, he acted in a somewhat curious manner—a manner which Singleton himself would have regarded as extraordinary.

For Mr. Gore calmly retraced his steps to the gambling flat. Arriving there, he walked boldly into the block, and admitted himself into the flat by means of a latch-key.

And yet the police had raided the place only a short while before. It was a certainty that they would still be in possession.

But Mr. Gore did not seem to be at all uneasy.

He strolled in with every confidence, and when he was confronted by a burly constable just in the corridor, he did not even flinch. On the contrary, he nodded and smiled.

"Splendid, my man," he exclaimed. "Everything went off perfectly."

"Yes, sir," said the policeman. "I think so, sir."

He grinned, and Mr. Gore passed on.

This was rather remarkable. Evidently everything was not exactly as it seemed on the surface. And this fact was even more obvious a few minutes later, for in one of the sitting-rooms Mr. Gore found his friend, Carslake. Another man was also there.

They were both looking very satisfied with themselves, and they were smoking big cigars. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate.

"Well?" asked Carslake. "All right?"

"Perfectly," replied Mr. Gore easily. "The fool of a boy had no suspicion whatever, and he has gone off by himself—thoroughly scared. How do you do, Crosse?" added Gore, shaking the other man's hand. "I didn't know that you would be turning up this evening."

"I thought I might as well drop in," said Crosse.

The three men sat down, and Gore selected a cigarette from his gold case. These three men were the trio who had originally set out to swindle the Hon. Douglas of all his money.

Carslake and Crosse were rather slow at the game, but Mr. Gore had taught them a few things since he had commenced operations. He was the brain of the party, and every plan that was made originated from him.

"Yes, I think it worked very nicely," he observed, as he lay back in his chair. "Singleton never guessed that our raid was only a fake, and that our policemen were 'property' officers."

"It was worked splendidly," declared Carslake. "Some of the fellows almost believed that real police were on the job, and got quite alarmed. It's rather humorous, when you come to think of it—all this trouble being taken for the sake of one boy! All this deception! Singleton never guessed that we were all confederates—that every punter was in the know, and that the whole business was 'worked' from start to finish."

Gore nodded.

"Perhaps it is humorous," he admitted; "but don't forget, Carslake, that the prize is well worth the trouble we have taken. Just consider—all this has cost us, at the most, is a thousand pounds, and we receive a prize of something like sixty thousand pounds for our trouble!"

"I can't believe it!" exclaimed Gore. "It's not possible that Singleton lost such an enormous sum."

"My dear fellow, it is not only possible, but an absolute fact," said Mr. Gore. "And my first figure was wrong. I have here a cheque for sixty thousand pounds, which I shall cash on Monday, as soon as the banks open. Previous to that Singleton lost twenty thousand pounds in cash, and, as you are aware, we made an additional twenty thousand out of the racehorse stunt."

"So, on the whole, we have secured a hundred thousand?" asked Crosse incredulously.

"Exactly," replied Mr. Gore.

"Phew! It seems too good to be true," said Carslake. "A hundred thousand! It's a fortune, Gore! Don't you think we'd better ease up now? Don't you think it would be advisable to drop the game?"

"No, I do not."

"There's no sense in being greedy," argued Carslake. "Personally, I shall be satisfied if we divide up now. I can't see the wisdom of continuing, and losing everything in the finish."

Mr. Gore smiled.

"My dear man, you don't seem to realise that our task is child's play," he said. "There is no danger whatever, and I have further schemes in mind for securing the other half of Singleton's fortune. The lad possesses exactly as much again as we have secured. We shall have no difficulty in obtaining possession of it. All it needs is caution and careful action."

"And when do we share out?" asked Carslake carelessly.

"I was expecting that question," chuckled Mr. Gore. "We share out, my dear fellow, when we have finished. I fixed the proportions at the start, and you will agree with me that they are liberal. I am to receive half, and you two will share the other half between you."

"Yes, quite liberal," said Carslake. "You are doing most of the work, Gore, and it is only right that you should have the lion's share of the proceeds. Personally, I should be content to drop out of the game at once—that is, to take my twenty-five thousand——"

"The same with me," put in Crosse.

But Mr. Gore shook his head.

"No, no; that doesn't suit me at all," he said. "You must keep to the bargain, my friends. I shall need your assistance very shortly; and, besides, you

will be putting money into your own pocket. Surely you are not content with half when you can easily obtain the whole?"

"Well, at all events, I think we ought to share as we go along," declared Carslake.

"In other words, you do not trust me?" said Mr. Gore smoothly. "I'm very sorry for that, but things will have to go on in the same way, I am afraid. I will pay you your working expenses, and take the same myself. The big bulk of the capital will remain intact, until the time for sharing comes."

Gore's companions were not quite satisfied, but they had no option. Gore was the principal man, and his word was final. The other two considered themselves very lucky to be in the plot at all, for they stood a chance of winning a fortune each.

The truth of the affair was somewhat remarkable.

The flat had been engaged for the especial purpose of swindling the Hon. Douglas. All the supposed gamblers were merely paid confederates. Gore himself had lost an enormous sum of money at the roulette table, and Singleton had been impressed. The Hon. Douglas did not know that Gore's losses were all returned to him later.

The police raid had been a cleverly engineered fake. Having obtained their booty, the rascals decided to finish abruptly, so that Singleton would have no chance of guessing that he had been swindled. He had lost the money, and would be unable to regain it.

The raid had been a great success, and there was no fear of Singleton appearing at the flat again. He had been completely scared off, and he was due to return to St. Frank's almost at once, in any case.

"I'm worrying about one thing," said Carslake. "Don't you think it's probable that the boy will stop payment of this cheque?"

"It is possible, of course, but highly improbable," replied Mr. Gore. "Singleton, you must remember, regards me as a friend, and he would not act so dishonourably. The cheque is paid to me, and the boy regards it as lost. He would not dream of stopping payment, Carslake."

"Well, I hope not," said the other. "Probably he is too much afraid of you to act in that way. But I would have preferred the money in cash; I'm always rather wary of cheques, you know. And when do you intend to commence the next operation, Gore?"

Mr. Gore was thoughtful for a few moments.

"Well, not just yet," he replied. "We must give the lad time to settle down again. After he has been at St. Frank's for a week or ten days, I will run down to see him, and I will make certain proposals to him which he cannot fail to adopt. I shall give him an opportunity of regaining his lost money—at all events, that is what he will think. In reality, I shall set machinery in motion which will result in the final triumph of my plans."

"What are they, Gore?" asked Crosse.

"I cannot tell you just now; but before I go to St. Frank's, I shall require the assistance of you two fellows," replied Gore. "You don't seem to realise that we are on a dead certainty. There is no possible chance of failing. Why be content with one hundred thousand, when we can easily obtain two?"

"Well, we'll leave it in your hands," said Carslake. "So far you have planned everything wonderfully, Gore. And you can rely upon Crosse and myself to assist you in every way possible. You don't think it would be wise to continue the game now—while the iron is hot, so to speak?"

"No, it would be far better to wait," said Gore. "Singleton is unsuspicious, but if we play the game too rapidly, he may smell a rat, and it is most essential that he should retain his confidence in me. It is far better to let him settle down for a while, and then we will get busy again."

Gore rose to his feet and threw his cigarette-end into the fire.

"Now I think I'll be getting along to Gadsby's Hotel," he remarked. "Singleton will be there by now, and I want to have a word with him before he turns in. The lad probably needs consoling, although, for that matter, he accepts his bad luck with a really wonderful grace."

Within five minutes Mr. Gore was speeding along in a taxi towards Glasshouse Street, and very shortly afterwards he pulled up in front of the hotel

and entered. As it happened, the Hon. Douglas was in the lounge hall.

"Why, Mr. Gore, I hardly expected to see you again to-night," he said.

"Didn't we arrange to?" asked Mr. Gore, smiling.

"Did we?" said the Hon. Douglas dully. "I forget."

"I'm afraid you are rather distressed, my boy," said Mr. Gore. "How long have you been in?"

"Only a minute. I walked about a bit, and got a bit fogged in my bearings," said Singleton. "But we'd better go upstairs."

They passed up to Singleton's private room, and Gore could see that the boy was considerably affected. Hitherto, he had taken his losses as though they were merely matters of pence; but this time it was different.

The Hon. Douglas had received an eye-opener.

"Well, my lad, I'm afraid our luck is out," said Mr Gore gravely, as he sank into a chair. "But we must congratulate ourselves upon our narrow escape. It would have been bad if we had fallen into the hands of the police."

"Egad! It would have been terrible!" said Singleton. "And just think of the infernal luck—losing all that money, and having no chance to get it back! That's what worries me."

"But you are wrong—quite wrong," said Gore. "No chance to get it back? Nonsense, my lad!"

"But the flat has been closed, hasn't it?"

"You mean Varney's place? Well, of course!" said the man. "But there are other means of recuperating, Singleton—plenty of ways. But for the moment we have met with very bad luck."

"How much did you lose?"

"Twelve thousand."

"Why, that's nothing!" said Singleton.

"Nothing!" echoed Gore grimly. "It's a very great deal to me, my lad. I can't afford to lose twelve thousand pounds! It represents practically all I possess. So, of the two, you are the better off, for you still have a fortune behind you—a fortune which you can use in order to recover your losses. I have nothing—at the moment, at any rate."

"Egad! I can't understand this, you know," he said slowly.

"You can't understand what?"

"You say you have nothing——"

"That is quite correct."

"But I gave you a cheque for sixty thousand, which is just the same as cash," said Singleton. "You gave me cash for it, and you will obtain the money from the bank as soon as you present the cheque. I was mad when I played like that, but I'm not the kind of fellow to grumble over something that can't be altered."

"That's the spirit," said Mr. Gore heartily. "With regard to that sixty thousand, I can see that I shall have to enlighten you. I cashed the cheque for you as a favour—you pressed me to do so."

"I pressed you?"

"You begged of me to let you have the cash," said Gore glibly.

"I can't remember it," said the Hon. Douglas, frowning. "It's queer how these things vanish out of your mind—deucedly queer. So I begged you to cash the cheque, did I?"

"I tried to dissuade you at first, but when I saw that you were determined, I gave in," said Mr. Gore. "And that money, let me tell you, was not mine."

"Not yours?"

"No. It rightfully belongs to a business firm I sometimes contract for," said Mr. Gore smoothly. "I knew your cheque was good, so I had no hesitation in letting the money go out of my possession. I take it that this cheque will be promptly met?" he added, tapping his breast-pocket.

"Of course; immediately you present it!" said Singleton. "In future I'll go easy, Mr. Gore; no more plunges for me."

"You are wise—very wise," said the other. "Of course, there may come a time when it will be a matter of policy to plunge. For I can assure you, there will be many opportunities of regaining all your losses, if you are prepared to risk some of your other money. However, we will not go into that now, Singleton! I might as well hint that I shall soon be in a position to help you materially, but just now we will drop the subject. When do you return to St. Frank's?"

"I shall go back to-morrow."

"Sunday?"

"I might as well," said the Hon. Douglas. "It's Sunday already, as a

matter of fact. I'm going to bed now, and I want a long sleep."

Mr. Gore could see that the boy was tired and weary, and inclined to be pessimistic. So, after a few more comforting words, the visitor took his departure, and the Hon. Douglas Singleton was left to dream of the money he had thrown away on gambling.

The boy did not wake up until Sunday was well advanced. He retired at about 2 a.m., and did not rise until four o'clock in the afternoon.

Singleton was feeling much better. He consoled himself with the thought that he had heaps of money left, and there would be plenty of opportunities of speculating successfully in the near future.

In fact, by the time the Hon. Douglas boarded the evening train for St. Frank's, he was feeling almost cheerful.

CHAPTER VII.

A DECIDED CHANGE!

"HERE we are again!"

Tommy Watson made that remark as we entered the big old gateway at St. Frank's on Monday morning. It was not quite breakfast time, for we had travelled down by the early morning train, in order to be in time for the day's work.

As we had retired very early on Sunday evening, we had had our full supply of sleep, and now we were feeling quite brisk and cheerful.

Handforth and Co. had been keen on staying until later, but Nelson Lee would not hear of it. He had travelled down with us, and had promised to speak to the Head with regard to Handforth and Co.'s trip to town. So there was nothing to worry the heroes of Study D.

"Here they are, the lucky bounders!" exclaimed Pitt, coming across the Triangle from the Ancient House. "I'll bet they've had a ripping time in London! How goes it, my sons?"

"All serene!" I replied. "Anything happened while we've been away?"

"Nothing of importance," replied Pit. "Fatty Little over-ate himself yesterday, and had frightful pains in his tummy."

"Great doughnuts! Don't believe him!" exclaimed Little, the fat boy of St. Frank's. "I didn't over-eat myself at all! And I haven't had any pains in my tummy for weeks!"

"What about that feed last night?" demanded Grey.

"In the dormitory, you mean?" asked Fatty. "Why, I only had a dozen sandwiches, and a few other things——"

"Such as a bag full of pork-pies, and two dozen jam-tarts, and a few hundred biscuits," said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well what's that when a chap's hungry?" demanded Little. "I'll bet these fellows have been going it pretty strong in London."

"We've had a fine old time!" said Handforth.

"Yes, you bounder!" snorted Owen major. "Who gave you permission to go up to London?"

Handforth grinned.

"I suppose you missed me on Friday morning?" he asked.

"Yes, we missed you, and Church, too. You both bundled off without saying a word," said Owen major. "Mr. Crowell was in a fine stew, and you can take it from me that you're going to get it in the neck before long."

"Really?" said Handforth. "Don't you be so jolly sure, my sons! Mr. Lee allowed us to stay, and Mr. Lee is going to explain everything to the Head. You won't have the pleasure of seeing us whopped."

"But why the dickens did you run off like that?"

"Why?" said Handforth. "Because some beastly rotter sent me a faked telegram, and I took it as a good 'un. It was meant to be a joke, I suppose; but I've had the best of it, after all."

"Lucky bounders!" said Hubbard. "Singleton came back last night, and he seems pretty subdued, too. He's hardly said a word to anybody—just locked himself in his room, and won't budge."

"Well, it's the effect of that whacking, I suppose," said Grey. "The poor chap was in bed for days, don't forget."

"Oh, was he?" said Handforth grimly. "Don't you be so sure of that.

Singleton ain't such a saint as he appears to be——"

"Dry up, Handy!" I interrupted. "There's no need to make a whole discussion about it. Hallo! Here's T.T., looking more like a cheerful lunatic than ever!"

I changed the subject deliberately, for there was no reason why the whole Remove should be told about Singleton's little deception. Handforth possessed about as much tact as a gatepost.

Timothy Tucker, the boy who had recently come to St. Frank's, smiled on us through his green glasses, and held his head on one side as he looked us over.

"H'm! I must admit that I am somewhat impressed," he remarked, in his high voice. "And so you little lads have just returned from London? H'm! It is not good for youngsters to be so long away."

"Talking to me?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"Yes, my dear sir, I was certainly addressing you, jointly with the others."

"And you dare to call me a little lad?"

"There's no need to get excited, my dear sir," said Tucker mildly. "Little boys should learn to keep quiet. It is a remarkable thing, but whenever I look at you, I feel depressed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somehow or other," went on T.T.—"somehow or other, your face frightens me, Handforth."

"My fist'll frighten you in a minute!" roared Handy.

"Not at all—not at all!" said Tucker. "Your fist is merely ordinary, except, perhaps, that it is of unusual size. But your face, my dear sir—— Well, when I look at it, words fail me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Words fail me!" repeated T.T. "It's a fact—admitted! Somehow or other, you give me an impression that I once received when I stood outside a big building in London. Admitted!"

"He's dotty!" grinned McClure.

"What rot is he talking about—a building in London?" asked Church.

"I will explain, my dear sir," said Tucker. "Once, as I was strolling down a London street, I observed a magnificent building, and there was some extraordinary faces engraved in the stonework. Handforth's face, I must admit, reminds me of those extraordinary gargoyles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you funny idiot!" roared Handforth. "What about your face? Why, your dial would take first prize in a freak competition! It reminds me of the work of one of those dotty futurist artists."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"H'm! Is that so?" said Tucker. "Dear me! Most interesting. Admitted, my dear sir—admitted!"

"Your face is like a squashed tomato!" roared Handforth.

"Good!" said Tucker. "Your brains are extraordinary acute to-day, my dear Handforth. That is so!"

"Well, chuck this!" I grinned. "We've had enough compliments——"

"Chuck it!" bellowed Handforth. "That's likely, ain't it, after this—this scarecrow has called my face a gargoyle! I'm going to wipe him up!"

"Is that so?" said Tinker. "Good!"

"Do you want to be slaughtered?" yelled Church.

"I have no material objection—no material objection whatever," said T.T. "That is, of course, if Handforth can accomplish the feat he has outlined. Personally, I think he will fail. Somehow or other, I've got the impression that he will fail. The little lad is inclined to be boastful."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean—what do you mean?" exclaimed Tucker. "Shut up, my lads—shut up! Do you realise who I am?"

"Who are you?" chuckled Pitt.

"I'm he with the big head!" said Tucker mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you must remember that I do not allow little lads to laugh at me," went on T.T.. "H'm! Very bad—very bad! I shall certainly have to take drastic action if this ridicule continues. There will be only one way of dealing with you, my lads—only one way!"

"And what's that?" I chuckled.

"I shall find it necessary to adopt disciplinary treatment," said Tucker. "I shall apply force, my dear sir. H'm! Quite so! Admitted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leave him alone, Handy," I grinned. "He can't help it, you know. He simply happens to be built that way. "I

expect the poor chap escaped from Colney Hatch before he came here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Timothy Tucker assumed a serious expression.

"What is that—what is that?" he asked. "Do I hear aright? Are you daring to suggest that I escaped from a lunatic asylum?"

"Well, you're a lunatic, aren't you?" I asked.

"Admitted," said T.T.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is to say, no!" added Tucker hastily. "Dear, dear! This is very sad! That youths of your age should waste your time in this paltry manner. I am shocked. I must remark that I am shocked. Admitted."

And Tucker, shaking his head sadly, strolled away, holding his head on one side, and walking with a peculiar jumping motion.

"Let him go!" I laughed. "He may be an ass, but he's a decent sort, really. What should we do at St. Frank's without our pet comedian?"

"He'd better be funny with me again—that's all," said Handforth darkly. "I'll comedian him."

"And he'll give you back better than you supply," said Pitt. "Timothy Tucker isn't quite such an ass as he makes himself out to be, and he can obtain a hold on a fellow that makes him helpless. It's ju-jitsu, I believe. Anyhow, T.T. is pretty smart, in his own way."

We all entered the Ancient House, and we had scarcely had time to wash before the breakfast bell rang.

We attacked our food with great gusto, for we were hungry, and I noticed that the Hon. Douglas Singleton was sitting in his place as usual. He was looking quite himself again.

Occasionally I found myself wondering how Nelson Lee came into the scheme of things. Was it a coincidence that the guv'nor decided to go to London at the same time as Singleton?

Or was there something deeper in it?

Again, I could not help connecting Nelson Lee with the man I had followed to Piccadilly Circus. Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps I was completely off the scent, but I was determined to keep well awake.

The guv'nor would tell me nothing, although I had attempted to tap him on the subject upon more than one occasion. For some reason, Nelson Lee did not want me to know the exact facts.

I suspected that Singleton had been getting mixed up in some shady business or other.

Although I have recorded the facts already, it must be remembered that I did not know them for certain until the whole affair was over. I only suspected.

And, although the Hon. Douglas seemed to be the same as ever, there was nevertheless a slight change in him.

Fullwood and Co. were the first to notice it. The Nuts of the Ancient house held a consultation in Study A almost immediately after breakfast.

"Look here, you fellows, we've got to make a big effort to-day," said Fullwood. "I suppose you know I'm nearly stony?"

"Well, I haven't got many thousands myself," said Bell sarcastically.

"When I say I'm stony, I mean I'm down to my last fiver," said Fullwood. "Since Singleton came, we've had tons of money to chuck about, and there's no reason why we shouldn't have tons more. He's as rich as Rockefeller, and there's no reason why we shouldn't touch him."

"Of course not," said Gulliver. "That's just my idea. We didn't go to London with him this last time, so he ought to pay for it—by lending us at least a tenner each."

"A tenner!" echoed Fullwood contemptuously. "A tenner—when he's got thousands in his pocket-book? I sha'n't be satisfied with anythin' less than fifty, I can tell you. An' you fellows had better ask for twenty each."

"That's likely, ain't it?" said Bell, "I don't see why you should have more ——"

"Oh, don't shout!" said Fullwood. "We can pool the money afterwards, and divide it equally. We were rather unlucky with the last lot he doled out. Somehow, we lost all our bets on those horses, an' now we're almost down to our last quids. Singleton's a fool, an' there's no reason why we shouldn't benefit by it."

"He's had rather bad luck, don't forget," said Bell. "He was telling me last night that he'd lost quite a good bit—although he didn't say how much."

"A few thousand, I suppose," remarked Fullwood. "The ass is rash enough for anythin'. But a thousand

te him is like a penny to anybody else. My suggestion is this: I'll go along to Singleton's study now, and touch him for my fifty. Bell can follow in a few minutes, an' then Gulliver can go——"

"That's awfully nice of you!" sneered Gulliver. "Why should I be last? I shn't stand half so much chance as you chaps—Duggy will be about fed-up by the time I get there. I'll go second."

"Oh, all right," said Fullwood. "It makes no difference to me."

"Yes, but it makes a difference to me, you ass," roared Bell. "I'm second ——"

"Why not all go together, and settle it like that?" asked Gulliver.

"Because it wouldn't be advisable," said Fullwood. "We'll drop in casually, as though we didn't know anything about one another's plans. That's the best idea. An' I'll go along now."

Gulliver snorted.

"It's not fair," he declared. "There's only one way to settle it, and that's to toss."

Fullwood hesitated.

"Oh, all right," he said, after a moment. "Odd man goes first."

Three coins were produced and tossed. Gulliver and Bell were even, so Fullwood had the privilege of going to Singleton first. It was rather lucky for him, for the original plan was not altered.

Gulliver and Bell tossed again, and Gulliver won. By this time Fullwood had left, and he presented himself at Study N, and lounged in quite languidly. The Hon. Douglas was sitting at his roll-top desk, fiddling with a pencil, but doing no writing. He looked round, and nodded.

"Hallo, Fully," he said. "Squat down. Help yourself to one of those cigarettes. They're pretty decent."

Fullwood availed himself of the invitation.

"Things goin' all right with you?" he asked casually.

"Yes, pretty decent."

"In funds?"

"Well, I'm not exactly stony," said Singleton smiling. "I suppose this is a preliminary, eh? You want to borrow something?"

"Well, yes," said Fullwood. "You see, my elder brother is in a bit of a hole, an' he wrote to me to help him out——"

"Egad! I've heard something like that before, surely?" said the Hon. Douglas. "I think Teddy Long told me about an elder brother of his. He was in a hole, too. Rather a queer coincidence!"

Fullwood coloured slightly.

"That was all a yarn," he said hastily. "I'm not spoofing you, Duggy. I thought perhaps you'd lend me what I want."

"How much is that?

"Well, I really want a hundred quid, but I can do with fifty at a pinch," said Fullwood. "It's not for myself——"

"Well, that's good," said Singleton. "I'm glad of that, Fully, because I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you. I can't lend you anything like that amount—for your beloved brother. If you're a bit short on your own account, I might be able to help."

"That's decent of you," said Fullwood, "but—— Eh? What's this?"

The Hon. Douglas had produced his notebook, and had placed a fiver on the table.

Fullwood picked it up, and stared at it.

"A—a fiver!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Your eyesight is remarkably good!" nodded Singleton.

"Is—is this all you can lend me?"

"Yes."

"But your case is stuffed with fivers ——"

"Perhaps so—but I'm not going to splash my money about quite so freely as I have been doing," said the Hon. Douglas. "A fiver is all you need for the moment, Fullwood—and it's all I can spare."

Fullwood was rather staggered.

"Thanks—thanks awfully," he exclaimed. "I thought—well, my brother will have to go short, that's all. I suppose you couldn't spare another fiver?"

"Exactly," said Singleton. "You suppose right."

"You won't, really?"

"No."

Singleton turned to his desk again, and Fullwood bestowed a fierce glare upon the back of his head. He had received a bit of a shock. A week earlier he could have obtained fifty with the greatest ease, and now he had a difficulty in getting hold of five!

Gulliver presented himself at Study N shortly afterwards, and the Hon. Douglas guessed his mission in a moment.

"You want some tin?" he asked bluntly.

"I—I—I—— That is to say——"

"This is all I can spare, Gully," said the Hon. Douglas.

He handed over a pound note, and Gulliver stared at it in dismay.

"You're—you're jokin'!" he ejaculated.

But the Hon. Douglas was not joking, and, try as Gulliver would, he could not get the loan increased.

And when Bell came along, ten minutes later, he found Singleton asleep. And, curiously enough, the Hon. Douglas positively refused to be awakened. Bell tried his hardest, but it was useless.

So the Nuts had six pounds to divide—instead of ninety!

A vast change had taken place, and Fullwood and Co. could not understand it. The spendthrift of St. Frank's was just beginning to realise, it seemed, that money had value, after all.

The change was coming about, but it would take a good deal yet before the Hon. Douglas fully learned his lesson. That it was to be a bitter lesson was perfectly obvious.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Many of my chums must be wondering what important work brought Nelson Lee up to London in the story they have just read, and whether it had anything to do with Singleton's remarkable escapades in London. It seems highly probable that our famous detective was well aware of Singleton's behaviour, and that his mission to London was not unconnected with it. Mysterious and purposeless as it may appear now, in due course the veil will be lifted aside, and all will be made clear to you.

In next week's story, "**UP AGAINST THE HEAD,**" it will be told how Singleton's extravagant misdemeanours reach the ears of Dr. Stafford, and the prompt disciplinary action taken by the Head to put a stop to it, resulting in Singleton leaving St. Frank's and buying up a grammar school in Bannington, which he intends to run on his own lines. A number of juniors of the Fullwood type are induced by Singleton to leave St. Frank's and join the grammar school. The decent fellows, however, will have nothing to do with the scheme. The Head is faced with a problem such as he has never met before in all his many years of experience. But you must read all about it in next week's number, and I am confident you will find in it a yarn of exceptional interest.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST COMMENCED!

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.

Shortly following this incident Gerald is informed by his guardian, MR. CARDONE, that all the money the boy was to inherit had been lost with the exception of £50. With this sum Gerald joins partnership with the Royces, and the three lads agree to try their luck in Canada. **(Now read on.)**

Farewell to Old England.

MR. CARDONE'S unemotional face betrayed nothing of the thoughts that were working in his brain. He spoke just as drily when he turned to his ward.

"I am exceedingly glad," he said, "to see you are not taking your loss too much to heart, my boy. Believe me, I was afraid to break the news to you. But I felt to-night, though, that it wasn't fair to you to keep you in ignorance; but I hardly expected to find you so cheerful. I expected a calm resignation, but——"

"By George, sir!" cried Gerald. "I was almost forgetting everything else but the fact that my friends and I are going to Canada the day after to-morrow. It's quick work, but it's the best thing for me. That is, of course, subject to your consent."

The lawyer pondered deeply. A minute later his face crinkled into the slightest possible smile. He nodded slowly.

"A very wise decision," he said. "I congratulate you on it. You have my entire consent, my boy, and I wish you every success. It will make it easier for me to know you will be with friends, too, especially as they are friends who are quite capable of looking after themselves."

He looked at Jack Royce, who returned the gaze. For ten seconds the eyes of the two held each other, and, though he did not flinch, Jack felt a tremor run through him, though he could not have accounted for it. It seemed as though the lawyer was trying to read his very soul. Then Mr. Cardone dropped his eyes.

"A very wise decision," he said. "It is short notice, but your wardrobe is pretty complete. There is the matter of tickets? I understand that there is some difficulty in booking berths on the Canadian boats at this time of the year?"

"We'll go to Liverpool first thing to-morrow, and see what can be done in that respect," said Gerald.

"Very good. Then I will leave you together." Mr. Cardone rose to his feet. "You will have a great deal to talk over, I know."

He went out, carefully shutting the door behind him. His next move was to the telephone, and over the wires he sent a peremptory order. Then he retired into his library, while the boys upstairs spent another hour in planning the future.

It was half-past eleven before the Royces rose to leave the house.

Gerald led the way down the stairs, and just as they came to the hall—which was in darkness—Mr. Cardone's library door came open.

As it happened, Jack's eyes were turned that way, and he saw for a very brief moment two figures silhouetted in the doorway against the electric light inside. Then one of the figures quickly thrust the other inside, came out into the hall and shut the door.

"Ah, boys! Going, I see!" said Mr. Cardone. "Well, good-night."

The Royces were shown into the street.

"See you to-morrow," said Gerald. "I'll call for you two, and we'll spend the day in Liverpool."

"Right you are," said Teddy, who was walking on air. Then the brothers turned their heads towards Teddy's apartments.

Teddy spoke excitedly for the length of several streets before he noticed that his brother barely answered him.

"What's up, Jack?" the boy said at length. "You're mighty solemn. Anything worrying you?"

"Yes—no, I mean," replied Jack. "I was just wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"I was wondering what Mr. Cardone was doing in his library with that black bearded chap who tried to knife me this evening."

"What?" cried Teddy. "I didn't see him."

"No, the lawyer pushed him into the room again very quickly; but I saw him, just the same, and it's making me think a bit," said Jack.

The next thirty-six hours were spent in frantic bustle by the three friends. There was a great deal to be done, but there was a man directing the preparations for their departure who had long since learned the art of packing up and moving on very short notice.

They took little baggage with them. Again Jack Royce's advice was taken. He selected every article his friends should take, and they accepted his decision without question.

"When I went out first time," said Jack, "I took with me two big trunks and a huge portmanteau full of clothes. I regretted it ever afterwards. In the West, when you're going to do what we shall do, you don't want a lot of dunnage. The time might come when, after you've worked a few weeks in a certain spot, you'll quit suddenly, and will have to get to your next job the best way you can. It's no joke to try and carry a half-ton of clothes when you're walking on the railway track for fifty miles—as I have done. No, boys, we're going out there to work, so you can leave your Sunday clothes behind."

So they had the scantiest wardrobes with them, and the belongings of each traveller was easily packed into a suit-case apiece.

Fortunately when they applied at the Empress Line's offices in Liverpool, they secured berths, though the clerk who interviewed them told them that they were lucky.

But for the fact that two men had sent back word at the last moment, Teddy and Gerald would not have found an inch of room.

Jack, of course, had booked his berth some weeks before—the day he had landed in England, to be exact.

"That ought to be a good sign for us," said Gerald merrily, as they left the office of the shipping company. "We've been lucky to begin with. Let's hope our luck will hold as good for ever."

"If hard work brings good luck," said Jack quietly, "we'll be lucky enough, I'll warrant. You two'll have to dig your toe-nails in when you're with me."

It was said without conceit, but Jack knew the reputation he had earned for himself in many places as a prodigious worker, and he also knew that he did not mean to suffer his reputation to be shadowed over by the fact that he had with him two friends who took things easily.

Once they got into harness in the West, Gerald and Ted would know what hard work really meant.

They caught the boat, after having said good-bye to Gerald's guardian and a few of Ted's friends at the office.

Mr. Cardone did not accompany his ward to Liverpool. Other passengers had friends who sailed a part of the way with them, and then returned to the landing-stage on the tug that drew the Empress of America out towards the open sea.

The tug took with it several telegrams from emigrants to their friends ashore. Neither of the three chums sent wires, but there was one man in the second-class who did send one.

This man was a dark-browed fellow, clean shaven, with a blue chin and lips. He looked as though he had not been

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

accustomed to shaving, and it might easily have been imagined that he had once worn a heavy, black beard.

The message he sent was addressed to Mr. Cardone, solicitor, of Bradleyfield.

"Just sailing," the telegram read. "Boys aboard. Sticking together like wax. Shall try to separate them as soon as possible."

The message was signed "Snaith," and when Mr. Septimus Cardone read it, his thin lips flickered into a smile.

"The young fool helped me wonderfully when he decided to go out West," the lawyer said. "It would have been too dangerous had he stayed at home. Now I need have no fear, with Snaith on his track."

The three chums, however. were entirely ignorant of the fact that Obed Snaith was travelling by the same boat as themselves.

The act of shaving off his beard had so altered the man's appearance, and he so carefully kept out of the boys' way, that Snaith chuckled as he watched them walking the promenade deck when the Empress was proceeding under her own steam, heading for the northern coast of Ireland, where she would call for passengers.

Gerald was, perhaps, the merriest of the three, and his laughter made many a passenger glance at him indulgently.

Now he was actually sailing, Ted found he had a few regrets. He had many young friends at home who would miss him, he knew.

There was the football team he played in, the harriers he ran in—many sporting interests he had had, and had proved no mean athlete. He knew the clubs would be sore at losing a popular youngster like himself.

Gerald began the voyage by being the merriest of the party. Ere they had been sailing half a dozen hours he was, perhaps, the most miserable passenger on the ship.

"Feeling it a bit?" asked Jack kindly, looking at his friend's paling face. "It's a bit choppy, eh? How're you, Ted?"

"I'm fine, thanks," said Teddy. "Hope I shall stay so. Sorry for Gerald, though."

"Need to be, too," groaned Gerald. "I—I say, isn't it rotten being seasick? How—ugh! How long does it last, Jack?"

"Oh, not long, if you set your teeth against it," answered Jack. "But I don't mind saying I've never been troubled by it. It's a matter of liver, I think. If you feel any worse, you'd better go and lie down. You'll soon be seeing sights that won't make you any better. Besides, you might disgrace yourself. Here, hold up!"

He took Gerald's arm and piloted him down below. Gerald was very ill indeed before his friend had stowed him away in his bunk. Then, knowing he could do nothing, he left him, and rejoined Teddy, who was as fit as a fiddle.

"We'd better keep our eye on him," said Jack. "It makes a fellow think all sorts of miserable things when he's seasick, so they say; and he might get thinking about his lost fortune."

Gradually the passengers began to feel the effects of the rolling and pitching, for there was a nasty sea running before the lights of Ireland were to be seen.

Before midnight there were very few passengers on their feet. Jack and Ted were two; another was the blue-chinned fellow who so carefully kept out of sight.

When the Royces awoke the following morning the Empress was anchored in the bay at Moville, and, by the time breakfast was over the ship was surrounded by sailing boats, the owners of which were clamouring and shouting to the passengers who leaned over, urging them to take a trip ashore.

Several passengers took advantage of the opportunity, for the ship would not sail again until four o'clock in the afternoon.

"I never was in Ireland," said Jack, "and if we never come back to Europe again, I never shall see the Green Isle. What d'you say, Ted? Shall we take a stroll ashore?"

"I'd like to. How much do they charge?" asked Ted, thinking of their restricted finances.

A shouted inquiry, and they were told they would be taken ashore and back again for a shilling each.

"I think we can afford that," said Jack. "Go and ask Gerald if he'd care to come, too. It might do him good."

Ted went below and interviewed his seasick friend. Gerald was feeling slightly better, since the ship was stopped. But his face was a sight to

(Continued overleaf.)

behold, and he only groaned when Ted addressed him.

"Leave me alone!" he gasped. "Don't stir me. I haven't been sick lately, but I shall be if I move. Leave me, or I shall die."

Teddy grinned sympathetically, and returned to his brother.

"All right, then, we'll leave him aboard for an hour or two," the elder Royce said. "We'll have that young chap down below; he looks a decent sort," and he hailed a young, merry-eyed boatman, who rowed alongside.

Before the boys could reach the ladder another man thrust his way to it, and, hailing another boatman, dropped into the dancing craft.

He kept his head lowered all the time, though that precaution was unnecessary, as neither of the brothers gave him a moment's attention.

"Right you are, Ted, jump down," said Jack; and a few moments later they were bowling shorewards before a fair wind.

(To be continued.)

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