No. 248.—Tells of Singleton in Straightened Circumstances!

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HANDFORTH—AUCTIONEER!

ON HIS UPPERS

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 "Deeper in the Mire," "Singleton's Rival School," "Taking the Plunge," etc.

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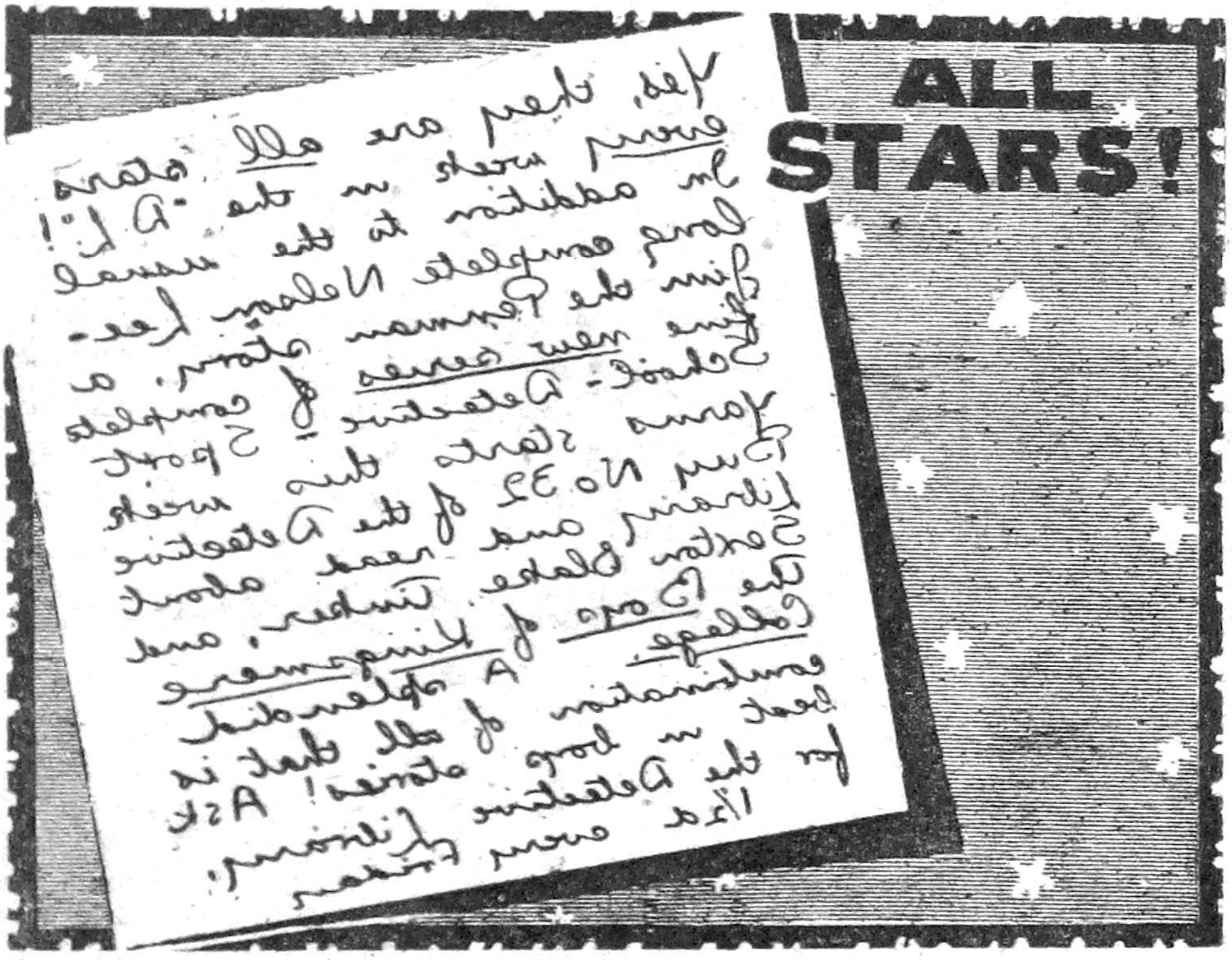

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS WEST

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

IN QUEER STREET.

"MYSTERIOUS!" said Handforth absently.

"Eh?"

"That's what it is, you know—mysterious!"

"What the dickens——"

"There's no getting away from the fact," said Handforth, stirring his tea with a penholder. "He's been like it for two days now, and goodness knows when he'll smile again! He hasn't smiled since last week."

Church and McClure regarded their leader curiously. Edward Oswald Handforth was certainly absent-minded on this particular occasion. He was thinking deeply, and partaking of tea at the same time. And he appeared to be talking to himself as a side line.

Study D, in the Remove passage of the Ancient House, was looking quite cheerful. The early March day was not yet over, and Handforth and Co. were having tea by the light of the sunset. A glowing fire burned in the grate, the muffins were toasted to perfection, and the tea was delightfully hot.

"Not since last week," said Handforth dreamily.

Church rapped the table.

"What the thunder are you jawing about?" he roared.

"Eh? What the—— You silly ass!" snapped Handforth, with a start. "What's the idea of yelling like that?"

"You seem to be all right now," said Church. "I thought you were dreaming, Handy. Anyhow, you were talking rot to yourself."

"Oh, was I?" growled Handforth, stirring his tea. "I was thinking about that chap—— Great pip! What the —— Who gave me this—this fatheaded penholder instead of a teaspoon?" he roared.

His chums grinned.

"You took it yourself," explained McClure blandly. "You reached over for it a couple of minutes ago. I thought perhaps you fancied the flavour of red ink in your tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!" grinned Church.

"Very funny, ain't it?" sneered Handforth, hurling the penholder down. "I was thinking about Singleton, if you want to know. There's something mysterious about that chap."

"Mysterious?"

"Yes," declared Handforth. "Look at the way's he's been mooning about this week. There's a terrific change in him. He hasn't even smiled, that I know of, and he's absolutely off his feed. I've noticed him at meal times. To-day he hardly touched a morsel for dinner."

"Perhaps he's in love," suggested Church.

Handforth glared.

"You utter ass!" he exclaimed. "Chaps in love don't look worried. They

go about with dreamy expressions on their faces. They buy chocolates, and write love-letters, and all that sort of rot."

"They go off their grub, too," said Church.

"Perhaps they do," said Handforth. "But Singleton isn't in love. He's terrifically worried over something. I know the signs. I've been like it myself occasionally, when I've had a bust-up with you chaps, for instance. But Singleton's worse. It's financial trouble, I should say."

"I'm not surprised at that," remarked McClure. "The way he's been spending money is—is wicked. That's the only word to describe it. Look at the supper he gave last week. It must have cost fifty quid."

Handforth nodded.

"That was the last splash, so to speak," he said. "Since then, he's been shut up in his shell. He hardly speaks to a soul, and he's getting thinner. His face looks pinched and wan. The chap's pining away."

"Oh, rot!" said Church.

"There's something the matter with him, anyhow," declared Handforth. "Somehow, I rather like him. He's an ass to pal with Fullwood and Co., but he's not so bad, on the whole. And I'm sorry for him. I was wondering if we couldn't do something."

"What could we do?" asked McClure.

"Well, I suggest we go to his study and ask if there's nothing he'd like," said Handforth. "I'll go first, and I'll try to pump him—not that I'm inquisitive. I just want to find out the cause of his moodiness. You chaps can come afterwards, one at once. Then, if the other fellows do the same——"

"Singleton will go dotty altogether," said Church.

"You ass! He'll get fed up, and tell us the trouble," said Handforth. "Once we know it, we can help. He's a Remove chap, remember, and it's up to us, as his Form-mates, to give him a leg-up."

"Well, that's true enough," said McClure. "I'm game."

But Handforth and Co. were not likely to help the Hon. Douglas Singleton very materially. The spendthrift of St. Frank's was in a bad way. He was penniless; he had lost every cent of his fortune.

Owing to his foolish trust in Mr. Philip Smith Gore and Mr. Carslake, he had been plucked clean—he had been literally skinned. The two men had obtained the boy's whole fortune—a very considerable sum.

And now, when it was too late, Singleton was realising the truth. He could do nothing; he had no evidence against Mr. Gore. That gentleman had been too clever; he had not left a single loophole which could convict him.

For weeks the Hon. Douglas had been regarded as a walking bank by the juniors of St. Frank's. He had splashed his money about everywhere. But now everything was altered.

Singleton had no money to splash about!

The fellows did not know this; they could only guess. Singleton had not told anybody of his misfortunes—mainly because he was ashamed to. For he now realised to the full extent that he had been a young fool.

Handforth was full of his new plan.

When tea was finished, he jumped up and made for the door.

"I'm going along to Study N," he said briskly. "I'll have an interview with Singleton, and ask him what the trouble is. If he won't tell me, you can go, Church. Then McClure can have a shot later. I don't like to see the chap mooning about the place; it gets on my nerves. We must try to cheer him up. Understand?"

"Yes, rather!" said Church. "Buck up—we'll be in the passage!"

Handforth nodded and passed out.

He walked down the corridor until he came to Study N. This apartment was occupied by the Hon. Douglas. It was a palatial junior study, replete with every luxury and comfort.

Handforth tapped on the door. At least, he thought he was tapping. In reality, he hammered with considerable violence. Handforth was always heavy-handed. He could not help it.

"Who's that?" came a voice from within. "Go away!"

"I want a word with you, Singleton!" shouted Handforth.

"Egad! I can't be bothered——"

"Bothered!" roared Handforth. "I've come to sympathise!"

"What!"

"Open the door, you ass!"

Handforth snorted, and rattled the handle. He had been under the impression that the door was locked. But it suddenly flew open, and Handforth was precipitated into the study. He sat down on the floor heavily, and caught his head a whack against the corner of the table.

"Yaroooh!" bellowed Handforth.

"Egad!"

All was darkness in the study, except for the glow of the fire. Handforth, rubbing his head, turned and saw that Singleton was lolling in front of the fire in an easy-chair.

"Ow!" groaned Handforth. "You—you—ow!—you ass!"

"You're a frightful disturbance, you know," said the Hon. Douglas. "Why can't you leave me in peace, Handforth? Clear off, there's a good chap. I'm frightfully busy!"

Handforth rose to his feet painfully.

"Busy," he repeated—"busy?"

"Yes."

"You—you idiot!" roared Handforth. "You're doing nothing!"

"I'm busy with my thoughts," explained Singleton. "Why you want to come here, blundering about, is a puzzle to me. Please get out, and stop out. I don't feel like talking now."

"That's not my fault," said Handforth. "I want to have a jaw with you. For days past you've been looking like a donkey with a sore foot."

"Egad! Have I, really?"

"Worse than that," said Handforth. "You've been mooning about frightfully. What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Are you feeling ill?"

"No."

"Have you had bad news from home?"

"No."

"Then what the thunder's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth. "You're not like yourself at all. Instead of lounging about, as usual, you stick in your study all the time. You keep to yourself; you won't speak to anybody; you've become a giddy hermit!"

"That's awfully interesting!" said the Hon. Douglas. "The fact is, Handy, I'm not feeling very bright. I'm well enough, but I'm a bit worried. That's all. You needn't bother yourself about me, thank you all the same!"

"And you won't tell me what's wrong?"

"It wouldn't interest you, if I did," said Singleton. "There's a draught coming from the back door. You don't mind closing it, do you—and you don't mind getting on the other side first, I suppose?"

Handforth glared.

"If you want me to get out, say so—don't talk in riddles!" he roared. "And if you won't tell me what's wrong with you, I'll tell you myself! You've lost a lot of money, and you're worried out of your life. You've been going the pace too fast, my son—that's the trouble!"

"Good!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Your remarks are wonderfully interesting," said Singleton languidly. "But I'm sorry I can't continue the conversation. Good-evening!"

Handforth was on the point of punching Singleton's nose, but he decided that this would scarcely be polite. So swallowing his feelings, he charged out of the study, slamming the door behind him.

Out in the passage he found Church and McClure.

"Well?" asked Church. "What's the news?"

"The ass won't speak—he's dotty, I think," said Handforth indignantly. "You go in and try him, and if you can get any information out of him, I shall be jolly surprised. I tried hard enough."

"I expect you tried the wrong way," said Church.

"What!"

But Church did not think it necessary to explain. He entered Study N, and closed the door.

"Egad! Is that you again, Handforth?" asked the Hon. Douglas irritably.

"No, it's me," said Church ungrammatically.

"Me?" repeated Singleton, without turning. "Who's 'me'?"

"I'm Church, you ass!" said the junior. "Handforth just came in to ask about your health, you know. I expect he went to work the wrong way—eh?"

"He did," replied the Hon. Douglas. "And if you got to work, you'll do the same thing. Kindly buzz off! I don't

feel like jawing now. And there's no reason why you should be inquisitive!"

Church turned red.

"I'm not inquisitive, you fathead!" he said warmly. "I'm only asking if there's anything I can do——"

"Thanks, but I'm quite satisfied!" interrupted Singleton. "You don't understand the position, and you wouldn't understand it even if I told you. You'll oblige me hugely by shifting."

"Oh, all right!" said Church huffily. "I won't stay where I'm not wanted. I think you're a bit of a rotter, Singleton! Just because a chap comes to sympathise and to ask if he can do anything——"

"Don't misunderstand me," put in the Hon. Douglas wearily. "I don't mean to be rotten, Church. But if you only knew how I am feeling, you wouldn't be so short-tempered. I'm worried, and I want to be alone. Be a good sort, and buzz off, please!"

Church nodded.

"Right!" he said briskly. "That's good enough, old son! Sorry you're feeling seedy and worried. I hope you'll be all serene to-morrow."

"Thanks!"

Church cleared out, and found Handforth and McClure just outside the door. There were seven or eight other fellows, too. Handforth had outlined the wheeze, and the juniors were keen upon carrying it out.

"Well?" asked Handy. "What's the result?"

"The poor chap wants to be alone," said Church. "Don't be a mean beast, Handy. Let him be in peace when he's worried. The best thing we can do is to sheer off altogether."

"Oh, is it?" roared Handforth. "So he's been talking you round, has he? It won't work, my son. Not likely! We've come here to find out what the trouble is, and we're not going until we've succeeded."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll go in next," grinned Reginald Pitt.

"Good egg!"

Pitt entered Study N, and a groan came from Singleton's chair. He turned round, and gazed at the intruder with an irritable expression. Pitt had left the door open, and the space was filled with faces.

"Who is it now?" demanded Singleton. "Oh, it's you, Pitt! What's the bally idea? Can't you all leave me alone? Don't torture me like this, you rotters! I'm worried, and I want to be left to myself."

"Sorry!" interrupted Pitt. "We want to cheer you up, old man. We've come here to give you a few words of comfort and genial advice. If you're in any trouble, open out your heart to me, and relate your woes."

"I don't want to talk to anybody, thanks!"

"But you're looking seedy——"

"Can't you see that I'm off colour?" snapped Singleton. "What's the idea of pestering like this? Leave me alone!"

"But, my dear chap, I'm full of sympathy!"

"I don't want any sympathy!"

"I'm very concerned——"

"You needn't concern yourself about me!" shouted the Hon. Douglas, getting to his feet and facing round. "You're jeering at me—making fun of me! I can see what your game is, you—you bally rotters! Well, I don't care if you do jeer me—I expect I deserve it, anyhow!"

"I didn't mean to jeer at all," said Pitt quietly. "The fact is, Singleton, you haven't been yourself for days, and everybody in the Remove notices it. We thought we might be able to help you——"

"You—you can't!" interrupted Singleton abruptly.

"We don't know until we've tried," said Pitt. "A little help is worth a lot of pity, you know. We don't pity you, but we're all ready to extend a hand, if you're in a bit of a hole. Don't misunderstand us, old man. There's no need to be offended."

The Hon. Douglas sighed wearily.

"I'm not offended, but I do wish you'd leave me in peace," he said quietly. "Please realise that I know best, and I tell you honestly that you can't help. I shall be all right in a day or two, if you leave me alone."

"But, look here, there's no reason why we should be kept in the dark like this!" exclaimed Handforth, entering the study. "Dash it all, if you're in a fix, Singleton, we might be able to help you!"

"For the twentieth time, I say you can't!" exclaimed Singleton huskily.

"That's rot! If it's a question of money, we might have a whip round," said Handforth. "I know you're rolling in tin, as a rule, but perhaps you're hard up for a time? Just say the word, and we'll see what we can do in the financial direction. Is it a go?"

Singleton gave a curious laugh.

"A whip round!" he said bitterly. "Egad! You don't know what you're talking about, Handforth! Nobody here realises what this all means. I'm broke—absolutely penniless!"

"What!"

"For the time being, you mean?"

"No!" shouted the Hon. Douglas desperately. "I'm stony!"

"Rot!"

"You're worth thousands, you ass!"

"You've got tons of money!"

"You can't spoof us, you ass!"

"I tell you I'm broke!" shouted Singleton hoarsely. "Hang it all, I'll tell you the truth, and then you won't bother me any more! You'll understand why I've been looking worried, and why I want to be left alone. I've lost all my money—every penny of my fortune! I'm not worth a brass farthing!"

"Phew!"

"It—it can't be true!"

"Of course not!"

"I wish to heaven it wasn't true!" said Singleton miserably. "But it's an absolute fact. When I came to St. Frank's, I was rich—I was worth nearly a couple of hundred thousand. But it's all gone now—it's all gone. I've run through the lot! I'm a spendthrift, and I've squandered it!"

Singleton had changed in his attitude. He faced the juniors with glittering eyes, and with his cheeks burning. He looked rather desperate as he stood there, his fists clenched, and his whole figure rigid.

"Two hundred thousand!"

"And you've blued it all?"

"Great pip!"

"I don't believe it!" said Handforth bluntly. "Why, you've only been here a few weeks—since the beginning of this term. No chap living could go through nearly a quarter of a million in that time."

"I didn't realise what I was doing—I was a fool!" shouted Singleton. "Yes, that's the truth of it! I was a blind, weak fool! You might as well know the truth, and I'd better tell you the absolute facts. I must have been mad, and I think I'm mad even now! I'm broke—stony—on my uppers! But, for goodness' sake, don't make a song about it! Leave me alone, and clear off. If you don't, I shall go stark staring mad!"

He sank down into his chair, breathing heavily, with his back to the juniors.

They looked at one another with startled expressions. Their grins had vanished, and they seemed to be half frightened. It was true, what Singleton had said—every word of it.

The Removites knew it—it was impossible to misunderstand that desperate little speech. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was broke!

And Handforth and Co. and the other juniors went quietly away from Study N, deeply impressed and rather staggered.

CHAPTER II.

VISITORS FROM BANNINGTON.

EVERYBODY knew Singleton's terrible secret before an hour had passed.

He, the junior who had been regarded as a millionaire, was poorer than a fag in the Third!

Most of the fellows were horrified, and the seniors could hardly believe the story. But there was truth in it, and it was impossible to think otherwise. Singleton's very attitude was enough to convince the most sceptical.

There were a certain number of juniors who adopted the "I told you so" attitude. They declared that they had said all along that Singleton was going the pace too swiftly, and that he was riding for a fall. Now that he had actually fallen, some of the fellows were inclined to jeer.

Others, of course, were sympathetic, and the Hon. Douglas was the recipient of many expressions of condolence which he did not appear to appreciate.

I was rather astounded, and I fully intended to have a few words with Nelson Lee at the first favourable opportunity. I wanted to hear what the guv'nor had to say about the matter.

Somehow, I had an idea that he knew more of Singleton's affairs than he

appeared to know. I was practically convinced that he had been interesting himself in Mr. Philip Smith Gore, the man who was primarily responsible for the Hon. Douglas' downfall.

It seemed curious to me that nothing could be done. It was astonishing that a man could hoodwink Singleton in such a way as to make the boy part with all his fortune, and it was even more curious that the fellow should go free with his booty!

For the rest of that day Singleton kept to himself—as much as he was allowed to do. But when he went up to the Remove dormitory, with the rest of the fellows, he was questioned by nearly everybody.

I could see that he was worried and troubled, and he did not welcome the many inquiries, the majority of which were needless and bothering. But Singleton managed to keep his temper. All the life seemed to have gone out of him. He was dull, listless, and lethargic.

"Look here, leave Singleton alone!" I said, at last. "We all know the truth, so what's the good of bothering him? He's lost his money, and that's an end of it. You don't need to ram it down his throat every minute!"

Most of the fellows took my advice, and those who did not were dealt with pretty effectively by Handforth and a few others.

Singleton was missing from his bed when the rising-bell went next morning. At first I had an idea that he had run away during the night; but this idea was almost immediately abandoned, for I espied the Hon. Douglas walking up and down the Triangle, his head sunk on his chest, his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets.

It was clear that he had risen early in order to escape the questions of the Removites.

It was noticed that he had ceased to care for his personal appearance. That morning he was wearing a dirty collar—not dirty in the ordinary sense, but he had worn it on the previous day. And hitherto the Hon. Douglas had never dressed in the morning without donning a clean collar.

He was getting untidy in other ways, too, and it was easy enough to guess the reason. He simply did not care. He was in that state of mind when a fellow hardly knows what he is doing.

During morning lessons the Hon. Douglas was dull and inattentive, and Mr. Crowell was not pressing. He had heard the news, of course, and he allowed Singleton a little freedom.

It was none of Mr. Crowell's business, and he took care not to interfere. But it was plain to see that the Form-master was thoroughly disgusted with the fallen spendthrift.

When lessons were over Singleton retired to his study, still moody and worried. He hardly knew which way to turn, and he kept thinking of a letter he had received a day or two before.

His guardian, who had been in Africa for many months, was now on his way home, and Singleton dreaded to think of the coming interview. He did not know how he would be able to face the ordeal.

He tried to discover how he had been swindled and robbed. This was easy enough, for Mr. Gore's methods were plain enough, now that it was too late. The Hon. Douglas was amazed that he had not seen through the trickery before.

It was true that the Hon. Douglas had been rather suspicious of the last transaction—an affair concerning a large number of shares in a Bolivian copper-mine. He had given Mr. Gore a cheque, but Singleton had withdrawn the money, in cash, before that cheque could be presented.

But, although he had beaten Mr. Gore that time, the money had been taken from Singleton's desk the same night. He had been robbed of it, frankly and openly, and the Hon. Douglas knew well enough that he would never be able to bring the scoundrel to book.

They had swindled him so astutely that they had left no loophole. They were free, and they had got his money. Moreover, Singleton was anxious to avoid publicity. At all costs, he wanted to prevent the story getting into the papers.

Things were bad enough as they were, without being made far worse. He did not want his guardian to find the newspapers filled with his woes, and the Hon. Douglas did not seriously consider the question of informing the police.

What could the police do, anyhow?

How could they get on the track of Mr. Gore? Even supposing they caught the man, what would the result be? They would never regain the money, and the

only tangible result would be further publicity.

The Hon. Douglas was thinking this way, puzzling how he could carry on, when he became aware of a curious commotion out in the Triangle. He did not trouble to look for some time, but at last, feeling irritable, he walked to the window and gazed out.

What he saw puzzled him somewhat at first.

Several men were talking rather excitedly, surrounded by a number of juniors. Then Singleton gave a violent start, and he went paler. For he recognised several of the men as Bannington merchants.

One, for example, was Mr. Normand, the owner of the big motor garage. Another was Mr. Salter, the jeweller. There were several more, too, and the Hon. Douglas recognised every man on the instant.

For he had had business dealings with them all!

And the truth came to him. He remembered, with a feeling of despair in his heart, that he had bought a quantity of goods some days earlier. He had bought them when he believed that his fortune was to be made—when he thought that everything was rosy.

He had, as a matter of fact, counted his chickens before they were hatched, and he had felt extremely reckless. Every article which had been purchased had been paid for by cheque.

And those cheques, Singleton now remembered, were useless!

He had given them in all good faith, intending to see that they were honoured. But the disaster had come, and all thoughts of those insignificant cheques had been driven from Singleton's mind.

For at the time he had regarded them as insignificant. A few hundred pounds, altogether—what was it? The Hon. Douglas was sure that this was actually the case. And he was right!

I happened to be in the Triangle at the time, with Watson and Tregellis-West, and we were interested in the little scene. A good many other juniors were there, too, and there was quite a deal of excitement.

Some of the Bannington gentlemen were quiet and calm, but one or two were inclined to be violent.

Mr. Normand, of the Bannington Garage, was one of these, and he was ably assisted by an excitable little man who was the proprietor of a smart restaurant—Mr. Trentini.

"The young fellow is an absolute scallywag! There's nothing else for it!" said Mr. Normand angrily. "I want to know where he is, and I'm not going to leave this school until I've squared things up!"

"But what's he been doing?" asked Handforth.

"He's been swindling me!" roared Mr. Normand. "Not only that, but he swindled all these other gentlemen, too! I'm going straight to the Headmaster, and I'm going to demand——"

"Hold on!" I put in grimly. "I shouldn't advise you to go to the Head, Mr. Normand. He won't help you at all. And I can't quite believe that Singleton deliberately swindled you——"

"It doesn't matter to me what you believe!" shouted the garage-owner. "Look at this! What is it—what is it?"

"Begad! A cheque, I should think," murmured Sir Montie.

"Yes, that's just what it is—a cheque for close upon a thousand pounds!" said Mr. Normand angrily. "Do you see what it's got marked on it? 'R.D.'! That's what it's got marked on it."

"Well, it's all right, isn't it?" asked Handforth.

"All right!" roared the man. "'R.D.' means 'refer to drawer'—that means refer to the man who drew the cheque! It's dishonoured—it hasn't been paid! Anybody who gives a cheque like that is a swindler!"

"I have one, too!" shouted Mr. Trentini excitedly. "See! I cannot afford to lose so much money! It will ruin me—ruin me! I was a fool to let the boy have the goods!"

"Yes, you're in a bit of hole," said Handforth. "Mr. Normand can get his car back, I dare say, but all the grub's been eaten, Mr. Trentini. You won't be able to have the goods returned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter!" said the garage-owner grimly. "These other gentlemen compared notes with me, and we all found that we had dishonoured cheques. It's as clear as daylight that young Singleton worked the trick on us deliberately. It was a plant!"

"I think you've made a mistake, Mr. Normand," I put in. "When Singleton

gave those cheques he thought he would be able to meet his obligations. But things went wrong, and I expect he forgot about these little matters——"

"Little matters!" shouted one of the other tradesmen. "Why, it runs into thousands, altogether! We can't afford to lose all that money, my lad. Personally, I mean to see the Headmaster ——"

"You won't see him this afternoon," I put in. "Dr. Stafford happens to be away. I saw him go out in his car half an hour ago. Mr. Lee's out, too. Take my advice, and see Singleton himself. If he can possibly manage it, he'll make things right. You misjudged the chap, gentlemen. I'll take you along to his study, if you like, and he'll probably put things in order."

"Well, perhaps we'd better see the boy," said Mr. Normand grimly. "I want that car back, and I shall have a bill on the top of that, too!"

The other tradesmen agreed to follow Mr. Normand's example, and I led the way across the triangle to the Ancient House. A whole crowd of juniors followed up behind—to see the fun, as Owen major had unfeelingly put it.

Meanwhile, the Hon. Douglas had been active.

He knew well enough what was coming, and he also knew that he had no money. The absolute truth was that the Hon. Douglas possessed about three pounds. He had no other money in the world.

So he thought of Fullwood and Co.

The Nuts of Study A had been his friends all along—at least, he had been very pally with them, and they had profited greatly. But the Hon. Douglas did not know the exact character of the precious trio who had sponged on him all along the line. He thought they were his real friends.

Knowing that the blow was coming, he hurried along to Study A, and burst in. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were taking things easy. They were comfortably sitting in front of the fire, smoking and chatting—planning, as a matter of fact, how to spend the afternoon.

"You silly ass!" said Fullwood tartly. "What's the idea of rushin' in like that? You made me chuck a whole cigarette-end into the fire!"

"Can't help that," said the Hon. Douglas. "I want you to do me a favour."

"What kind of favour?" asked Gulliver.

"I want some money."

"Eh?"

"Some money——"

"Oh, don't try to be funny!" grinned Bell. "You want money! You, the bloated millionaire——"

"You know well enough that I've lost everything, and I'm broke!" said Singleton fiercely. "Look out into the Triangle—look at that crowd there! They're tradesmen from Bannington!"

"Really!" said Fullwood lazily. "What's that got to do with us? We're not interested in the beastly tradesmen!"

"They've come for me—they've come with rotten cheques of mine!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas, staring at the Nuts. "I drew those cheques when I thought that everything was all serene—when I believed that everything was going to be rosy. I was an ass to be so premature!"

"You were," agreed Fullwood. "An' now you've got to face the music."

Singleton could not quite understand the Nuts' attitude.

"They want money—all those men want money," he said grimly. "I've only got a few quid—a mere trifle. I thought that you chaps might be able to help me out. I know I can rely upon you to lend me a hand——"

"Oh, come off it!" interrupted Fullwood sourly. "Don't talk out of your hat, Duggy! What can we do? We haven't got thousands——"

"I know you haven't, but you've got two or three hundred," interrupted Singleton. "That'll be enough to satisfy the men for the moment. I can return most of the goods, and a couple of hundred might see me through, at a pinch."

Fullwood laughed.

"My dear ass," he said unpleasantly. "What's the idea of coming to us for two hundred quid? You must be off your rocker! We've got nothin'—nothin' like that sum, anyhow."

"Rather not!" said Gulliver.

Singleton regarded the Nuts squarely.

"You're got nothing?" he repeated.

"That's so."

"But only a day or two ago—before the crash came—I gave you about two hundred and fifty!" exclaimed Singleton. "I was feeling particularly generous

that evening, because I was fool enough to believe that I'd made a fortune. So I gave you the bulk of my spare cash. Previous to that I'd advanced you big sums—forty and fifty pounds at a time."

"Well, what of it?" inquired Fullwood calmly.

"You haven't spent it—I know for a fact you haven't!" declared the Hon. Douglas. "I want you to let me have two hundred and fifty, between the three of you. I'm not trying to make out it's my money—that's not my way. I gave it to you. But you can do me a big favour now."

"Don't talk out of your hat!" snapped Fullwood. "You'll get nothing out of us, you silly rotter!"

"Nun-nothing out of you!"

"Not a penny!"

"Not likely!" put in Gulliver and Bell.

"But—but——"

"What if we lend you the tin," went on Fullwood. "How do you think you're goin' to pay us back? You're broke—you've got nothin'. We should have to whistle for our money."

"I shall be able to pay it back sooner or later; but I must have it now!" declared Singleton earnestly. "I can't understand you, Fullwood. Egad! After what I've done for you, I've got every right to expect a helping hand when I am in low water. Now is your chance to prove what you're worth."

Fullwood looked very unpleasant.

"You can clear out!" he snapped. "We're not lendin' you anythin'!"

"Not even a bob!" said Gulliver.

"But—but it's impossible!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas, in amazement. "You can't be serious! You wouldn't turn on me like this——"

"Turn on you be hanged!" interjected Fullwood. "It's not a question of turning on you. I think it's darned unreasonable of you to even expect us to advance you money! It's a fact, you won't get any, so the sooner you realise that the better. Understand?"

"It seems to me that I was a fool in every direction!" he said bitterly. "I was fooled by Gore, I was fooled by Carslake, and I was fooled by you! I thought you were my friends, but you're not. As long as I had plenty of money you were willing to stick to me; but now that I'm broke, you leave me in the lurch."

"It's the way of the world, my disillusioned youth," said Fullwood cynically. "Awful as it may seem, it's the truth—the shockin' truth! You can buzz off when you like! The sooner the better!"

The Hon. Douglas clenched his fists.

"You curs!" he shouted thickly. "I can see what you are now—I can see what you are really made of! Have you forgotten the money you borrowed off me? Ten pounds—twenty pounds—fifty pounds? Have you forgotten all those items? I'm not talking about that two-fifty now; that was a present. But you borrowed over two hundred before that—borrowed it, I say! And I've every right to demand the return of that money. I do demand it!"

"My dear chap, you can go on demandin' until you're black in the face," said Fullwood calmly. "You won't get anythin' out of us. We'll pay back those debts when we can comfortably afford it—say, in twenty years' time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There wasn't any stipulation as to when we should refund the cash," went on Fullwood smoothly. "An' if you go to the Head, you'll simply get yourself into trouble. An' we shall deny ever havin' a bally penny. So you can do what you like—an' rats to you!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Bell. "That's the stuff to give him!"

The Hon. Douglas breathed hard.

"You contemptible cad!" he exclaimed fiercely. "You beastly cur! I know what you're worth now—I know exactly what you are! Good heavens! To think that I could have been such a fool as to own you as my friends! I'm having my eyes opened in a way that I never dreamed of!"

Fullwood yawned.

"Quite entertainin', ain't it?" he said languidly.

"You—you——"

"You'd better not use any violent language, my son," said Fullwood. "If you ain't careful we'll take you up and pitch you out of this study! We're fed-up with you! Savvy?"

"You—you——"

The Hon. Douglas got no further. Somehow, the words choked in his throat, and he found it impossible to stand there, regarding Fullwood's leering face

Singleton wanted to do something—he wanted to hit out.

And he hit!

With two strides he crossed the room, seized Fullwood by the collar, and yanked him to his feet. Ralph Leslie was utterly startled, and was taken completely by surprise.

"Leggo, you—you fool!" he gasped. "I—I——"

Crash!

"Yarrooh!" howled Fullwood wildly. "Ow-yow-oooooohp!"

Fullwood felt the full weight of Singleton's fist as it thudded into his face. He went sprawling over the table, and landed on the floor in a heap. His nose was bleeding considerably, and it seemed to be rather out of shape.

"Get up, you cad—get up, and I'll give you some more!" panted Singleton.

"Hold him!" gasped Fullwood. "Yarooh! Pitch the cad out! Ow! Don't let him come near me!"

The Nuts were rather startled. Singleton had never struck them as being a fighting man. And for him to turn on them in this way was rather disconcerting. Gulliver and Bell looked scared.

Very possibly they would have shared Fullwood's fate—for they were quite incapable of defending themselves—but at that moment I entered the study, followed by several other fellows.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" I asked, looking round. "Who's been spilling the gore? Your nose looks rather lopsided, Fully!"

Fullwood staggered to his feet.

"Take—take this madman away with you!" he snarled. "He's dangerous—he's gone off his head! Take him away ——"

"You'd better not touch me, Nipper!" interrupted Singleton fiercely.

"My dear old son, I wouldn't dream of interfering!" I said. "If you're anxious to continue the slaughter, go ahead. Don't mind us. The gentlemen in your study can wait. It always gives me great pleasure to see these cads getting it in the neck! Go ahead, old son!"

"I'll give a hand, if you like!" put in Handforth generously. "I'm always willing to oblige."

"It's all right; I don't want to kick up a fuss," said Singleton, still breathing hard. "I've found out what these fellows are, and it came as a bit of a shock to me. They're not worth the friendship of—of a mongrel!"

"Begad! He is seein' the truth at last," murmured Sir Montie.

"About time, too!" growled Watson bluntly. "The cads have been sponging on him for weeks, and he didn't know it. It's about time he dropped them."

"It's a good sign," I said. "I don't want to be inquisitive, Singleton, but if we can do anything, we shall be only too willing to be of assistance. Just say the word, and we're with you."

Singleton gave me a warm look.

"Thanks!" he said quietly. "It was only a private matter between Fullwood and me. I'm too disgusted with the cad to stop here any longer. I'm going at once. Thank goodness I'm beginning to get some sense!"

"There's nothing like being frank," said Handforth. "At one time I thought you were devoid of sense, but misfortune seems to be beneficial. You were living in a kind of false world before, but now you're facing the hard facts."

"And you've got to face a few in your study," remarked Pitt. "A few facts in the shape of a worthy group of tradesmen from Bannington. You've been doing some naughty things, Duggy."

"Well, it's my own fault, so I mustn't grumble," said the Hon. Douglas bitterly. "When I gave those cheques, I thought I had the money—or, at least, I thought it was coming. But I was a bit too premature, and now I've got to pay the penalty."

"Dear fellow, I should like to be of some assistance," said Sir Montie. "Perhaps I shall be able to lend you somethin'—just a small amount to tide you over, begad! I shall be only too willin'——"

"Thanks all the same," said Singleton, "but I couldn't do it, Tregellis-West! I appreciate your generosity, and I think you're a brick, but I got myself into this trouble, and I've got to get out of it."

Singleton walked steadily out of the study, and he was watched curiously by the other juniors. Somehow, I could not help feeling rather pleased that this terrible blow had fallen, for the Hon. Douglas was being revealed in a new light; he was turning out to be decent.

"Hold on!" said De Valerie, as Singleton was pushing past. "I'd like to be with Montie in that suggestion. If you're in need of cash, Singleton, we

don't mind advancing you the sum you require."

"Same here!" said the Duke of Somerton languidly. "You can rely on us, old man. Don't be offended, and don't think you'll look small by accepting. We haven't been your pals exactly, but that doesn't make any difference. I dare say Nipper will extend a financial hand, too."

"Of course!" I said promptly. "I was just going to suggest the same thing. Don't be an ass, Singleton! We'd all like to help, you know. We're your Form-fellows, and it's up to us to see you through. When a chap's in a hole he needs some friends, so count on us."

The Hon. Douglas looked round, and his eyes seemed rather moist.

"It's decent of you chaps—so decent, that I hardly know what to say!" he exclaimed huskily. "You all regarded me as a bit of a rotter, I believe, and yet you're willing to help me now. Fullwood and those other cads refused to lend me a penny, and they've been my pals all along. I know the truth now, thank goodness! But, although I appreciate your decency to the fullest extent, I can't accept."

"Why not?" I asked. "Don't be an ass!"

"I may be foolish, but I'm firm on that point!" interrupted Singleton. "This is my trouble, and I've got to deal with it. I shouldn't feel comfortable in borrowing money from you fellows—I shouldn't rest at night. I'll see these men, and try to come to some arrangement. Then I can get busy afterwards."

The Hon. Douglas passed down the passage and entered Study N, where the visitors from Bannington were waiting. Exactly what happened in there we do not know, but somehow or other Singleton induced the tradesmen to go away.

Some of them took their goods with them. Mr. Normand, for example, took possession of his motor-car—a smart two-seater which Singleton had bought. Another gentlemen went away with a fur rug and a fur coat. Mr. Salter, the jeweller, was content with the return of the articles which the Hon. Douglas had purchased, and which were just as valuable to him now.

Some of the other tradesmen could not take their things back—Mr. Trentini, for example, who had supplied a big supper one evening. Considering that all the food had been eaten, it was gone for ever.

But Singleton succeeded in getting the men to go.

And then he told us what had happened—at least, he told us what had been arranged. Several of the tradesmen had only agreed to a few hours' respite. They were coming back in the evening for their money, and if the cash was not forthcoming there would be trouble.

"So, you see, I've got to get the money this afternoon," went on the Hon. Douglas. "I don't know how I shall do it, but it's got to be done. I'd sell some of the stuff out of my study, if I could. But who's going to buy it? My desk, and the carpet, and the lounge——"

"But you can't sell all those things!" protested Somerton.

"Why not?"

"You'll be left bare!"

"That doesn't matter," said Singleton. "I can do without luxuries. It's more important that I should have the money. But I can't see how I can sell the goods this afternoon, there's no time."

"By George!" exclaimed Handforth abruptly. "By George!"

"A brain wave?" I inquired politely.

"By George!" said Handforth.

"You silly ass——"

"I've got an idea!" shouted Handy, his eyes gleaming. "A first-class, top-hole wheeze! It's a glorious stunt—the best idea that's been thought of for years!"

"There's nothing like modesty," remarked Pitt.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You'll agree with me when you hear it. What's the matter with selling up Singleton's things by auction?"

"Eh?"

"Doing which?"

"Why not have a giddy sale?" suggested Handforth, looking round. "You know, a regular auction sale—to raise the wind. He's got some ripping stuff, and it ought to fetch in a pile of money. I'll be the auctioneer——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that funny?" bawled Handforth.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Pitt. "You'll be a scream, Handy!"

"I'm game," said Singleton, without hesitation. "It'll be a quick way to sell the goods, anyhow, and a quick way to get the cash. The only trouble is that

the fellows here won't be able to pay up at a moment's notice——"

"There's plenty of money about," I interrupted. "A good deal of cash in the Remove, too. And if you seriously mean to adopt this idea, Singleton, it would be just as well to ring up a few people in Bannington—dealers, for example. Tell them what's on, and they'll come over within the hour, loaded up with notes. They're sure to seize a chance of getting some bargains."

"Yes, rather," said Singleton. "It's a fine idea. We'll ring up at once, and make all arrangements."

"And Handforth is to be the auctioneer?" inquired Pitt politely.

"Yes," said Handforth. "It was my wheeze, and I reckon it's my right to be the auctioneer."

"Good!" grinned Pitt. "We shall have some fun this afternoon."

CHAPTER III.

THE AUCTION SALE.

"LADIES and gentlemen, I now beg to put before your notice Lot 12," said Handforth impressively. "This, you will see, is a magnificent roll-top desk. A superb article, unscratched, and as good as new. It is made of solid mahogany, and it ought to be knocked down for at least ninety quid—that is to say, ninety pounds. I want someone to start the bidding at that sum."

"Rotten!" said McClure.

"No good at all!" declared Church.

Handforth was practising, and his faithful chums were obliged to stand in Study D, listening to the elocutionary powers of their mighty leader. They did not appear to be very much impressed.

"You asses!" roared Handforth. "What do you mean by saying it's rotten? I was adopting the recognised style."

"Rats!" said Church. "You can't start the bidding at ninety quid, when the thing's only worth fifty! You'd only be laughed at. You've got to let the crowd start the bidding."

"Well, we won't argue about it," said Handforth. "It's nearly time to go down, and I'm satisfied with my rehearsal, even if you ain't. The thing's got to be done, and it's not going to be a joke, either. Some of the chaps seem to think it's a funny business, but they're wrong!"

Church and McClure possibly had ideas of a similar nature, but they thought it unnecessary to mention the fact to Handforth.

The arrangements were nearly complete.

All Singleton's goods had been carried out into the playing-fields. Hosts of juniors had been only too willing to lend a hand in the job. Study N was stripped bare. Everything was taken—furniture, carpets, curtains, ornaments—everything, in fact, that was saleable.

A catalogue had been made by Pitt and several other juniors, and the catalogue included nearly all Singleton's personal property. The Hon. Douglas was ruthless. He put everything into the sale. His gold watch, his fountain-pen, diamond tiepin, and at least a dozen suits of clothes—new suits which he had no use for, but which he had had a fancy to keep by him.

Handforth was to have the catalogue, and he was to read the items out before offering them for sale.

And every article was marked and numbered, and laid out for inspection. The news that there was to be an auction sale had spread like wildfire, and bargain-hunters from every Form came to inspect the goods.

Prefects and Sixth Formers and Fifth Formers were there in big numbers.

The fags turned up, too, but they were warned off, because they would only be a nuisance, and they had no money to spend, in any case.

And before the sale was due to commence, quite a number of people arrived from Bannington.

Some came by car, and some on bicycles, and others by pony and trap. It was quite certain that the attendance would be large.

And before everything was quite ready, a little confab took place in a corner of the Triangle. Three juniors took part in it, and they appeared to be somewhat mysterious. They were Tregellis-West, Somerton, and De Valerie.

"The question is, how much money have we got?" said De Valerie briskly.

"What's the amount of your cash, Tregellis-West?"

"Dear old boy; I've got fifty quid in banknotes, and a few odd currency notes," replied Sir Montie.

"I've got about forty," said the schoolboy duke. "Of course, I could get five hundred by to-morrow, but that's no good."

"That's the worst of having your banking account in London," remarked De Valerie. "It means such a long delay in getting cash. I've got an account in Bannington, and I've just got back with a hundred quid. So between the three of us we're worth nearly two hundred. That ought to help."

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie. "If Singleton won't take it as a loan, we shall have to use other methods. I must remark, De Valerie, that this is a rippin' idea of yours—it is, really!"

The three juniors were perhaps the richest boys in St. Frank's. The Duke of Somerton was almost a millionaire, De Valerie was worth pots of money, and Tregellis-West was certainly as wealthy as the duke.

But, unlike Singleton, they did not have control of their fortunes; two or three hundred was the most they could handle at a time, and even then only for special occasions. But even if they had been in Singleton's position, they would have been no different. They were not spendthrifts, and were never in the habit of squandering money.

"Well, I think it's a pretty good idea," said De Valerie modestly. "But we must be careful not to let Singleton see the wheeze. Our idea is to drive the price of things up."

"How will it be managed?" asked the duke.

"Easily enough," said De Valerie. "For example, we'll force up the prices of the small articles—a gold fountain-pen, for example; it's worth about ten quid, and the ordinary bidding will stop at about eight. Well, I'll bid nine, Montie will raise it to ten, then you'll add another quid, Somerton. We'll keep on like that until the price is forced up to about twenty, and then it'll be knocked down to one of us. The chaps will think we're dotty, but that doesn't matter. Singleton will get his tin."

It was a very generous plan, for the three juniors would be simply presenting the money to Singleton. They were quite willing to do so, for they knew that the Hon. Douglas was in a serious hole, and they rather liked his independent spirit. He was selling everything he owned in order to pay off his debts, and nobody could do more than that.

The three conspirators strolled away into the playing-fields, and arrived outside the pavilion just in time to witness the start. Handforth was mounted upon a big box, and he looked rather important. A small table was in front of him, and he held a carpenter's mallet in his hand, in lieu of a hammer. The crowd had gathered round, and was waiting expectantly.

"Gentlemen, the sale is now open!" shouted Handforth. "I must request you to keep order. There is to be no talking! Can't somebody kick those fags out? They oughtn't to be allowed here!"

Handforth brought his mallet down sharply. He did not quite realise its weight, and the table was split right across.

"My hat!" said Handforth blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"If anybody interrupts, tap them with that giddy mallet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sale's open!" roared Handforth. "I want you all to understand that everything must be sold. Under no circumstances can any article be left over. Now, lemme see, what's the first item on the programme—I mean, what's the first lot in the catalogue? Ah, here we are! Lot one, a magnificent drawing-room lounge settee, with a large easy-chair to match. These articles are absolutely wonderful. When a fellow sits in them he wants to go to sleep right off. They are perfectly made, in ripping condition, and as good as new. I don't want any silly bids, so you'd better start at a good round sum. Go ahead!"

"Five quid!" shouted a Fifth-Former.

"Five-pound-ten!"

"Five-pound-fifteen!"

"Six quid!"

"Look here, it's no good playing about like this!" bellowed Handforth. "Six quid! Why, you couldn't get kitchen chairs for that money! These things are worth pretty near fifty pounds, so bid something sensible."

"Twenty quid!" shouted De Valerie

"Ah, that's better—twenty quid!" said the auctioneer. "Now, gentlemen, make your bids, and don't be slow about it. We can't afford to waste time."

Very soon the dealers and other gentlemen from Bannington took a hand in the bidding, and the furniture was rapidly disposed of. Handforth was certainly a good auctioneer, if somewhat unconventional in his style, and he obtained tiptop prices for the various lots.

Singleton stood on the outskirts of the crowd, listening interestedly. There was a curious expression on his face, I noticed—a kind of grim, determined expression, which told of his firmness.

He was selling everything, and, somehow, he looked almost contented. Perhaps he was rather glad to be rid of the luxurious articles which had always surrounded him; perhaps he felt that he would, in future, be more like the rest of the fellows in the Remove.

Personally, I preferred Singleton the penniless to Singleton the rich. He was by far the better fellow.

Handforth fetched wonderful prices for the smaller articles.

"Lot twenty!" he shouted. "We have here a superb tiepin, set with a diamond of unusual brilliance. It is a real diamond, remember, and not a bit of glass. An article for anybody to be proud of!"

"Five pounds!" offered Mr. Salter, the Bannington jeweller.

This was an indication that the pin was worth at least treble the amount.

"Ten pounds!" shouted De Valerie.

"Twelve!" said Somerton.

"I'll make it fifteen, old boy!" yawned Sir Montie.

"Good!" said Handforth. "Fifteen pounds for this beautiful tiepin. Is there any advance on fifteen pounds? Speak up!"

"Twenty!" said Somerton.

"Phew!"

"Sommy must have taken a fancy to it."

"Twenty pounds offered," said Handforth. "I can't think of knocking an article like this down for twenty pounds! Will anybody say twenty-five?"

"Begad! Twenty-five!"

"Good old Montie!"

"Ass!" I whispered. "The pin's only worth about eighteen!"

"Dear old boy, it's quite all right," murmured Sir Montie.

"Twenty-five pounds," said Handforth. "Any advance——"

"Thirty!" said Somerton.

"Great pip!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "You don't mean to say—— Ahem! I have been offered thirty pounds for this beautiful tiepin. Is there any advance? Going, going——"

"Thirty-five!" shouted De Valerie.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "The blessed thing ain't worth ten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, who'll make me another offer?" gasped Handy. "Thirty-five pounds! Can't somebody make it forty? What about you, Mr. Salter?"

The jeweller smiled.

"No, thank you!" he said firmly. "Ten was my limit."

"Forty!" offered Somerton.

And at that figure the tiepin was knocked down to him. The other fellows thought that the duke was quite mad. But so were De Valerie and Montie, for that matter. They had all been bidding rather madly.

Singleton was astonished, as well as delighted. But he did not seemed to be comfortable, and he touched the duke on the arm.

"About that pin you've just bought," he said.

"A bargain—what?" smiled Somerton.

"I'm afraid it isn't," replied the Hon. Douglas. "I only paid twenty-two pounds for it, old man. I can't possibly let you pay forty. We'll halve the sum ——"

"We won't!" interrupted the schoolboy duke. "I offered forty, and I'm going to pay forty. Please don't be a silly ass!"

"But, look here——"

"Hush!" whispered Somerton. "The next article is being disposed of."

The Hon. Douglas was obliged to be silent. Handforth was getting busy again. This time he offered a gold cigarette-case, set with pearls. It was truly a splendid article.

It was knocked down, after a stiff fight, to De Valerie for thirty pounds. The juniors were rather surprised, for Cecil De Valerie did not smoke. They

wondered why he had bought it, especially at such a high figure.

As a matter of fact, De Valerie had got it very cheaply, for it was worth fifty pounds.

"What do I want it for?" he asked, in reply to numerous questions. "Well, I'm not taking up smoking, if that's what you think."

"But the thing's no good to you," said Tommy Watson.

"My dear ass, I'm going to send it away—to my respected uncle," explained De Valerie. "It'll make a ripping birthday present."

"Oh!" said Watson.

Handforth was busy with another article—a gold-mounted walking-cane, and this fell under the hammer to Sir Montie, at the staggering price of forty-five pounds. Everybody thought that Tregellis-West was insane.

"You burbling idiot!" said Hart. "It's a good cane, but it would be dear at ten quid!"

"Dear old idiot, I will forgive you for callin' me a burblin' idiot," said Sir Montie calmly. "I took a fancy to the cane, an' that's enough. Kindly refrain from interferin'."

"Oh, all right!" said Hart. "It's your giddy loss."

"What was the idea, Montie?" I whispered.

"We're helpin' Singleton, dear boy," said my noble chum. "Just a little conspiracy between Somerton an' De Valerie an' me."

"Good business!" I chuckled. "I was thinking there was a little plot on. I'll take a hand next time. I'll bid against you."

I did so, and acquired a gold watch I had no earthly use for, for the sum of sixty pounds. I had come well prepared, for I had obtained a hundred pounds from Nelson Lee. I had an idea that the guv'nor suspected my motive, and he shelled out instantly.

The sale continued, and although many of the lots went at absurdly low prices, other lots fetched absurdly high prices. So things were evened up somewhat, and at last the final lot was disposed of.

Then came the paying in, etc.

The Hon. Douglas found himself in possession of a great deal of money, but it seemed a trifle to him after the enormous sums he had been handling of late. And at about tea-time the Bannington tradesmen arrived.

It was fortunate that Sir Montie and the others had agreed to force the prices up, for Singleton was just able to pay off his debtors. He cleared them all, and was left with precisely eight shillings in his pocket.

This sum represented his worldly goods.

But he had surmounted his difficulty, and the worried expression left his face, and he seemed decidedly better. He was broke to the wide, his study was denuded of its splendour, and his former friends had deserted him.

But he looked rather happy as he went into hall for tea.

Several fellows had invited him into their studies, but Singleton refused the offers. He had no intention of sponging. He ignored the sneers of cads like Teddy Long; he could afford to.

Fullwood and Co. had no further use for the Hon. Douglas. He was penniless, and they had obtained every farthing they could from him. So they despised him, and jeered openly.

Singleton's eyes were opened. It was a shock to him, but he bore it bravely. The friends he had thought staunch were hollow and false; they had been friendly because of his money. Now that he was poor, almost a pauper, they turned on him and scorned him.

It was a bitter experience. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were jingling Singleton's money in their pockets—they possessed over two hundred pounds of cash between them—but they had deserted him in his hour of need. The Hon. Douglas knew them at their true worth.

His disillusionment was complete.

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE'S WARNING.

"A CIRCUS!" said Tommy Watson.

"Eh?"

"A circus in Bellton!" went on Tommy. "What price we patronise the show?"

"It's bound to be pretty rotten," I said. "These small travelling circuses are always duds, or nearly always. It's only a one-night affair, I believe, and we

shall probably be bored to fits before the evening's over."

"Dear old boy, you're probably right," remarked Sir Montie. "However, as these circuses ain't in the district very often, we might as well risk it, begad! I'm game—I am, really!"

"Oh, all right!" I said. "We'll settle on it, then. What time does it start, by the way?"

"Seven o'clock," replied Watson. "I've studied the giddy bill."

"We shall have to buck up, then."

"Ass! It's to-morrow evening!"

"Oh!" I grinned. "That's all the better. It'll give us heaps of time. I want to jaw about something else. What do you think of old Handy's performance this afternoon?"

"Begad! It was surprisin'ly good, you know," said Montie. "I didn't think the ass could do it—I didn't, really. The way he forced up the prices was really amazin'."

"And Singleton's just paid his debts," I went on. "My hat! What a comedown for the chap. After spending hundreds of quids like ha'pennys, he now finds himself broke to the wide."

"It was his own fatheaded fault," said Watson. "I've been expecting something like this for weeks. Singleton's been going the pace too strongly. It's a wonder he's allowed to stay on at St. Frank's."

"Somehow, I like the chap," I said thoughtfully, as I poured out some tea. "He's a good sort, I believe. And now that he's finished with Fullwood and his crowd, he'll be heaps better."

"Well, there's no denying that," agreed Tommy Watson. "But what's the chap going to do? He can't very well go about with empty pockets, and what about his study? It's practically bare, you know. He must have something in the way of furniture."

"It'll be rather interesting to see how he overcomes the difficulty," I said. "I feel sorry for the chap, although he doesn't deserve it. He's only got himself to thank for this position. We don't know the exact details of his downfall, but we know a good bit, and it's as clear as daylight that he was an absolute fool with his money."

"He's been taught a good lesson—a bitter lesson," said Watson, helping himself to bread-and-butter. "Perhaps it's the only thing that would have effect. Even if he'd gone straight at St. Frank's, he'd have squandered all his money later on. Now he knows the ways of the world better, and he'll be more cautious."

"That's one way of lookin' at it, old fellow," agreed Sir Montie. "As you say, perhaps it's just as well that the blow has fallen now, while he's still a youngster. He's had his lesson, but has he learnt it? That's the problem, you know. He certainly seems to be improved."

I nodded.

"The improvement is rather astonishing," I said. "I thought he'd be dreadfully cut-up this afternoon, but he looked relieved. I think I'll pop along to his study soon, and offer some aid. Now that he's fairly on his uppers he wants some encouragement."

Shortly afterwards, I went along to Study N with my two chums. I opened the door, and received something of a surprise. I had half expected to find the place deserted and the Hon. Douglas elsewhere.

But this was not the case.

Singleton was in possession of Study N. He was sitting on a hard chair at the table—a small deal table, with a piece of American cloth tacked over it. There was no carpet, and the only other article of furniture was a dilapidated bookcase. A small fire blazed in the grate.

The Hon. Douglas was working away at his prep, and he looked round with a frown.

"Yes?" he said. "Anything wanted?"

"We just came along to see how you were getting on," I said. "If there's anything we can do, Singleton, we're quite willing to oblige."

"Thanks all the same, but I'm fixed up quite comfortably," said the Hon. Douglas.

"Begad! Is this what you call comfortable?"

"It'll suit-all right."

"Where did you get the things from?" asked Watson.

"They were in the study originally," replied Singleton. "I raked them out of the lumber-room an hour ago. Not quite so decent as my old things, but I don't suppose I deserve anything better."

He spoke with a rather twisted smile

1. "You curs!" Singleton shouted thickly, "I can see what you are made of now!"

2. The door opened and the Hon. Douglas peered out.

on his face, and I could not help noticing that there was a queer light in his eyes. I hadn't seen it before, and I was puzzled.

It seemed to me that Singleton had come to a decision, and that he had fixed upon a plan of action and was determined. His whole attitude had changed; he was no longer languid, he was alive and alert.

"I'm afraid you'll be pretty uncomfortable here, old son," I remarked. "As it happens, I know of a few things in the second lumber-room—that place at the back of the house. There's an easy-chair—rather worn, but quite decent—and another bookcase, to say nothing of a strip of carpet. We'll help you to bring them down, if you like."

The Hon. Douglas shook his head.

"It's not worth it, thanks all the same," he said quietly.

"Not worth it?"

"No. I sha'n't be here. It's not worth the trouble," said Singleton. "I'm all right, thanks; don't worry about me."

"We're not worrying about you," I said frankly. "Personally, I think it'll do you some good. It's not my habit to lecture, but after the luxury you've been used to, a taste of hardship will work wonders."

"Really?" said the Hon. Douglas, with a touch of bitterness. "That's frightfully interesting! Please close the door after you. I'm busy."

We retired, and I did not altogether blame Singleton for his little display of irritation. But, in the same way, I had a feeling that everything was not exactly as it should be. That light in his eyes made me wonder.

Sir Montie and Tommy accompanied me out into the Triangle. We were off to the gymnasium, to put in half an hour at exercise. But I paused just outside the Ancient House, and looked at two bright lights which glared across the Triangle from the direction of the master's private door.

"A motor-car!" I remarked. "Who is the visitor?"

We moved closer, in order to give the car an inspection. Then we discovered that the automobile was a neat racing two-seater, and I recognised it at once. It was the property of Nelson Lee.

"Hallo, the guv'nor's going out, by the look of it!" I remarked. "I wonder——"

"Hush, old boy! Mr. Lee's here."

The schoolmaster-detective had just emerged from the private door. He was attired in a thick motoring-coat, a cap, and he was pulling a pair of fur gloves on. He nodded cheerfully as he saw me.

"Good-bye, Nipper!" he said calmly.

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked. "I didn't know you were going out."

"But you know now, young 'un."

"Where are you going to, sir?"

"Oh, I'm going—out!"

I looked at Nelson Lee grimly.

"I'm not going to be satisfied with that kind of bunkum, guv'nor," I said. "Why can't you tell me where you're going? I'm not inquisitive——"

"Good gracious, Nipper! Do you suppose for a moment that I could accuse you of inquisitiveness?" asked Nelson Lee, with a chuckle. "I'm just making a little trip, and I don't suppose I shall see you again until to-morrow."

I moved closer to the guv'nor.

"Anything private, sir?" I whispered.

"Yes."

"May I make a guess?"

"Certainly."

"Then I'll bet that you're after that rotter Gore!" I said keenly. "He's the chap who swindled Singleton, and I know jolly well you've been hot on his track for a week or two. Am I right?"

Nelson Lee smiled, and patted my shoulder.

"I told you that you may guess, but I didn't say that I should tell you whether you were right or wrong," he said. "As a matter of fact, my business is connected with Mr. Philip Smith Gore. More than that I cannot tell you. Oh, but there is something else I want to say!"

"You might be a little more confidential, sir," I protested.

"You'll know everything in good time, my boy—within a day or two now," said Nelson Lee. "I wished to speak to you about Singleton. Don't spy upon the lad, but keep your eye on him whenever you can."

"What for, sir?"

"Well, there's just a possibility that he may attempt to bolt," replied the guv'nor. "Boys have run away from school before to-day, and with less reason than Singleton has. A terrible ordeal is before him, and he knows it. He may consider it the easier way to quietly disappear."

"Phew! You really think he'll do a bunk?"

"I think he might," said Lee. "Therefore I want you to keep on the alert, particularly at night. If he does decide to bolt, he will certainly make the attempt after 'lights out.' I don't expect you to keep awake all night, but you will be able to judge within a few minutes whether he is contemplating any such desperate steps. So be on the watch, Nipper."

"I'll keep my eye on him, sir," I agreed. "But I can't exactly see why he should scoot."

"My dear lad, Singleton knows well enough that a climax will arrive very shortly—probably to-morrow," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Mornington, the solicitor, will be down, I dare say, and Singleton will be hauled before the Headmaster. He will be cross-examined, and there will be a regular ordeal. The lad knows it, and he dreads it. He has made a terrible mess of his affairs, and he may not be brave enough to face the music. I sincerely hope he will stay, for the lad has had his lesson, and he has the makings of a fine fellow in him. I hope he will not spoil himself on the last lap, so to speak."

"And you're going off after Mr. Gore?" I asked.

"I'm making a trip," said Nelson Lee evasively.

"Do you think you'll catch the rotter?"

Lee chuckled.

"Such a possibility is not remote," he said. "There is just a chance that I shall be successful in my efforts. As you intimated, Nipper, I have not been idle during the last three or four weeks. I have been far busier than you even suppose, and you will understand the precise details very shortly. Good-night, my lad!"

Nelson Lee climbed into his car and drove out of the Triangle, leaving me considerably puzzled. I could not quite understand his game, and I was on tenterhooks. What had Nelson Lee been driving at? What was the truth? And what should we learn within the next day or two?

They were questions I could not answer.

But I discussed the subject with my chums instead of visiting the gymnasium, and we wasted quite an hour. Then we went in to our preparations.

I was determined to keep awake that night—until midnight, at least. If Singleton meant to bolt, he would surely make his attempt before twelve. And, somehow, I had an idea that the guv'nor's suspicions were not ill-founded.

The queer light in the Hon. Douglas' eyes perhaps meant that he had resolved to flee from the school. That was why he did not care about having the extra furniture in his study. Since he was only to remain that evening, he did not worry about furniture.

Morrow came in to see lights-out at the usual hour, and I was forced to admit that Singleton had given no indication of bolting. He had undressed as leisurely as ever, and had snuggled down into bed with the seeming intention of remaining between the sheets until the rising-bell rang.

He was not chipped much. The juniors were beginning to respect him. He had faced his troubles bravely that day, and he had gone up several points in the estimation of the Remove.

Everybody dropped off to sleep before the hour of ten struck, and I was the only one who remained awake.

Singleton's bed was some little distance from my own, but before ten-thirty a moonbeam shifted its position and rested upon the Hon. Douglas' bed. I could see it distinctly, and I could see the form within the blankets.

Now and again Singleton moved, and I thought he was awake. But it was clear that he was only restless in his sleep. Once, too, I imagined that I heard a sound at the door, but I was probably mistaken.

In any case, Singleton was not the cause of it, for he still lay peacefully in bed.

But I was determined to wait until midnight. I had come to that decision, and there was no reason why I should alter it, although, by this time, I believed that Nelson Lee's suspicions were incorrect.

I was just feeling very dozy, soon after eleven-thirty had struck, and I noticed a movement on Singleton's part. Then I saw him half raise himself in bed, and a sneeze sounded.

I sat up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Great Scott!" I muttered, startled.

For there was something about that sneeze which came as a shock to me. I knew well enough that it had been made

by the figure in Singleton's bed, but it had not been made by the Hon. Douglas.

I slipped out of my own bed, angry and concerned, with the intention of investigating. I bent over the bed, pulled the sheets back, and grasped the junior firmly by the shoulders. I stared into his face.

"Hi! Leggo!" gasped a well-known voice. "What the dickens——"

The figure in Singleton's bed was Teddy Long!

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT CHASE.

TEDDY LONG!

I stared at the sneak of the Remove, utterly dumbfounded.

"You little bounder!" I exclaimed, shaking him. "What's the meaning of this? What are you doing in Singleton's bed?"

Long wriggled, and gave a gasp of alarm.

"If—if you touch me, I'll yell the place down!" he gasped. "I'll bring the masters here!"

"Dry up, you little sneak!" I said sharply. "What are you doing in this bed?"

"Sleeping."

"This is Singleton's bed, not yours!" I exclaimed. "If you don't tell me the truth within two seconds, I'll yank you out and swamp you with cold water! Buck up, you little rotter!"

Long breathed hard with alarm.

"I—I—— That is to say, it's nothing to do with you!" he panted. "I don't know where Singleton is—he didn't arrange anything with me—— I—I mean I must have got into this bed by mistake."

I shook the junior grimly, and I shook him until he gasped.

"If you try any more of those tricks with me, I'll have no mercy!" I said angrily. "Tell me the truth at once. Where is Singleton?"

"I—I don't know."

"What arrangement did you make with him?"

"I—I say, there's no reason for you to get excited!" said Long desperately. "He—he gave me eight bob—all he had—to change beds with him. I—I believe he's bunked, or something. Good riddance, too!"

"You little worm!" I exclaimed fiercely. "I want all the details. I've been awake ever since lights-out, and you were in your right bed then. How did you change places without my knowing it?"

Long grinned.

"So you ain't quite so smart as you thought," he grinned. "We dished you rather nicely. Yow! Leggo my ear! Yarooooh!"

"Tell me the truth!" I said threateningly.

"It—it was Singleton's idea," gasped Long. "Everybody was jawing immediately after lights-out, and it was as black as pitch in here—the moon wasn't shining. I slipped out of bed without anybody knowing, and rolled underneath. Singleton did the same. We both crawled along under the beds, and changed without a soul being the wiser. Rather neat, wasn't it? Singleton got into my bed, and I got into his."

I stared across the dormitory rather blankly.

The idea was certainly neat, and it proved that Singleton was ingenious. I had not been on the look-out for such a move; I had not even suspected it. But the Hon. Douglas had certainly "put one over" on me.

Something would have to be done at once.

"Singleton was pretty keen, I must admit," I said. "You ought to be kicked, Long, for agreeing to such a thing! You must have known Singleton wanted to bolt."

"It—it wasn't my affair——"

"Oh, go to sleep!" I snapped.

I was thoroughly enraged, for the Hon. Douglas had eluded me, after all. I had carried out the guv'nor's wish, but I had failed. I could not possibly sleep after that, and I was determined to do everything in my power to put things right. I crossed over to the beds occupied by Tregellis-West and Watson.

"By jingo!" I muttered. "I can't help admiring the fellow; he's got his wits about him, right enough!"

I shook Watson, and then shook Sir Montie. They both awoke, turned over in bed, and sat up.

"What's the idea?" muttered Tommy. "Who's that?"

"Nipper!" I breathed. "Don't make a noise!"

"Begad! This is frightfully curious, old boy," said Sir Montie, yawning. "It's dark, an' I'm sure the risin'-bell hasn't rung. What's the time?"

"Nearly midnight."

"You ass!" said Watson. "I was just dreaming about a motor-bike. Somebody had given it to me as a present, and it was a new patent, with an engine fixed on the handle-bar——"

"I don't want to hear about your nightmares!" I broke in. "Singleton has bolted, after all!"

"Begad!"

"Bolted!" repeated Watson blankly.

"Yes."

"But you've been on the watch!"

"I know I have, and I believe Singleton guessed something of the sort," I said. "Anyhow, he's tricked me, and there's no telling where he's got to by this time. He slipped out of the dormitory over an hour ago—I remember the door making a noise. We've got to get dressed."

"Dear boy, you can't be serious—you can't, really!" exclaimed Montie. "We can't do anythin', can we?"

"There's no telling," I replied grimly. "If we hustle, we may be able to overtake him before he's got far. Anyhow, we must do something. Singleton's bunked, and it's up to us to get on his track. The guv'nor distinctly told me to keep my eyes open, and this is the result of it!"

"The silly ass doesn't deserve any sympathy!" growled Watson. "Let him go! I don't see why we should worry ourselves——"

"That's not the point!" I interrupted. "Mr. Lee asked me to keep watch, and I've failed. I feel pretty rotten about it, I can tell you. The only thing we can do is to get busy at once. So slip into your things."

They were both thoroughly awake by this time, and they commenced dressing.

While we were getting into our things I explained how the Hon. Douglas had worked the thing, and Montie and Tommy were impressed.

"But he must be on foot," I said. "If he gave Long eight shillings, he was left without a penny, and he can't go far in that impecunious condition. We shall probably overtake him in the lane. He hasn't been gone long, you know."

Within five minutes we were ready, and we slipped quietly out of the dormitory. Teddy Long had snuggled down into bed, and it was not likely that he would tell the rest of the fellows what had happened. In any case, it did not matter. It was too late.

After we had descended to the lobby, we went along to the Remove passage, intending to make our exit by means of the window of Study C—our usual method when breaking bounds at night.

"Hold on!" I whispered. "We might as well have a look in Singleton's study. Probably there'll be some traces of him."

We went into Study N, and I switched on the electric light.

"You—you ass!" gasped Watson. "Put it out!"

"It's all right——"

"But somebody might see!" exclaimed Tommy, in alarm. "The blind's up——"

"That doesn't matter," I said. "I don't particularly care if we're spotted; we've got a good excuse this time. Perhaps we ought to go straight to the Head and tell him, but I don't think we will."

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "There's somethin' on the table."

I had looked, and saw that a sheet of notepaper was placed upright against an ink bottle, so that it should be seen by anyone on entering the room. Singleton had put it there with a purpose.

There were other signs.

His dressing-gown and slippers lay over a chair, and I noticed that two or three books were missing from the shelf. The Hon. Douglas had bolted; there was no doubt on the point. He had run away from St. Frank's, with the intention of going right off.

"This seems to be a note," I remarked. "Let's look at it."

I picked up the sheet of paper and glanced over it curiously.

"What does it say?" asked Watson.

"Not much; but it's quite enough," I replied. "Look at it!"

My chums looked. The note ran:

"To Everybody.—Perhaps I'm a bit of a fool, and perhaps I'm a coward, but I can't stick it any longer. So I'm clearing out, and I don't suppose many tears will be shed. I'm bolting because it's the easiest thing to do, and I don't intend to be found.—SINGLETON."

"Well, it's to the point," said Watson. "Silly ass! Chaps have bunked before, and they've always been sorry for it."

"Perhaps we shall be in time to get him back," I said briskly. "Anyhow, we'll do our best, and we might as well start under this window. We can follow the tracks."

"Can we really, old boy?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "But the ground's hard, an' I don't quite see——"

"There was a shower just after supper," I put in. "A pretty stiff shower, too. Everybody was in by that time, so Singleton's tracks ought to be fairly easy to find. There won't be any confusion."

"Begad! This is gettin' quite interestin'."

I switched off the light and crossed over to the window. A minute later we were outside in the Triangle. The night was quite calm, and the moon was shining fairly clearly.

"We can't see without a light," remarked Watson.

"Of course not," I replied. "This will suit us perfectly."

I turned on my electric torch, and the beam of light shot out and illuminated the ground under the window. As I had anticipated, the surface was quite soft, owing to the heavy shower.

And footprints were distinctly visible.

They led away in the direction of the school wall—in a straight line, proving that Singleton had gone off with a definite object.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "This is first rate. But I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to follow the trail as easily as this for long. Still, we can do our best, and we may be lucky."

We set off across the Triangle, and after we reached the wall we dropped over into the lane. It was rather difficult to pick up the trail again, for the road was bordered with grass.

"This is where we're done," said Watson.

"I'm afraid you're right, dear old boy!"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "What about this?"

I directed the light of my torch down upon the ground. Watson and Tregellis-West looked closely.

"There's nothing there," said Watson. "The ground's too hard——"

"My dear chap, the tracks are as clear as daylight!" I broke in. "They may not be obvious to your untrained eyes, but I can see them distinctly. Look! They lead straight down the lane, in the direction of the village."

"It's amazin'!" said Montie.

But after a few minutes my chums distinguished the marks made by Singleton. They picked them out of the other tracks on the road, and for some way we followed our quarry without much difficulty.

We were helped by the fact that one side of the road was bordered by Bellton's Wood, and the surface of the road, in consequence, was particularly muddy. Singleton's footprints were very clearly defined.

But after we had passed the wood the road become hard—hard and solid, with practically no surface mud, and it was absolutely impossible to follow the trail. We came to a halt at last.

"I'm afraid we're up against it," I said. "The only thing we can do is to walk on. Old Sparrow might be about, and perhaps he will tell us something. It's pretty evident, anyhow, that Singleton went through the village."

We continued our way, but saw no sign of P.-c. Sparrow, the village constable. As a matter of fact, we saw nobody, and although the roads were muddy further on—at the fork, we were not able to pick up Singleton's trail again.

He may have taken the Bannington direction, or he may have gone straight on to Caistowe. There was no telling, and it would have been a sheer waste of time for us to continue the search.

So we retraced our steps.

"It's a beastly nuisance!" I said gruffly. "I don't know what the guv'nor will say when he comes back to-morrow. Anyhow, we will wake somebody up as soon as we get in, and the Head will probably 'phone to the police."

"Perhaps we ought to have given the alarm at first," said Watson.

"Well, it's too late to talk about it now," I said. "We didn't give the alarm at first, and there's no reason why we should explain that we've been out on the track. Buck up, my sons!"

I was feeling decidedly irritable.

Singleton had fooled me so easily in the dormitory that I could not help being

angry with myself for having fallen into the trap. I had actually kept awake in order to prevent the Hon. Douglas from bolting, and he had got away in spite of all my alertness.

We were just nearing the school when Tommy Watson looked round, and he halted in the middle of the road, with an exclamation.

"Great pip!" he muttered. "Look here!"

Two piercing lights were charging up the lane towards us.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "A car! Perhaps Singleton is inside it. He's got a limousine of his own, you know, an' I expect he had it ready——"

"Of course not," I interrupted. "Singleton sold his car yesterday. Didn't you know? Besides, I recognise those lights. The storm is about to break, my sons. The guv'nor's here."

"Oh, my hat!"

The car undoubtedly belonged to Nelson Lee.

It came to a halt before it reached us, and I ran forward, out of the glare of the light

"Dear me! What does this mean, boys?" asked Nelson Lee's voice. "What are you doing out of your beds at midnight? I have caught you nicely!"

"Guv'nor!" I broke in. "Singleton's gone!"

"What!" exclaimed Lee. "Gone! Do you mean——"

"Yes, sir; he's bolted," I said. "We've just been searching for him, but we can't find the silly ass!"

"Upon my soul! What is the matter with you, Nipper?" demanded Nelson Lee wrathfully. "I warned you particularly, and this is what I find when I return. What have you got to say?"

"A lot, sir," I replied. "I'll admit I was hoodwinked, but I can't see that it was exactly my fault."

I explained the position, and when I had done, Nelson Lee nodded.

"It was a smart trick of Singleton's," he said. "It proves that the lad is determined, and he means to elude us if he can. You had better get back to bed, boys, and I will do everything in my power to find the lad."

"I suppose you'll scour all the local roads in your car, sir?"

"That is the idea, certainly," agreed Lee. "It is quite possible that Singleton will call upon me to halt, with the intention of asking for a lift. If so, he will walk straight into danger. I am sorry this has happened, but I do not blame you, Nipper."

"Can't we come with you, sir?" I asked.

"No; you had better get back to bed."

So we went, and Nelson Lee glided off in his car. He spent two hours roaming the country roads, going miles in each direction. But his search was fruitless, and in the end he was obliged to return to St. Frank's empty-handed.

The Hon. Douglas Singleton was nowhere to be found.

He had fled from school.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENTERTAINING EVENING.

MISSING!

Morning came, and Singleton was nowhere to be found.

He was still missing, and no reports came in to show where he had gone. Nelson Lee telephoned in vain. For some reason, Lee seemed particularly anxious to get the runaway back.

When I met the guv'nor soon after breakfast, he was wearing a very worried expression.

"You seem to be taking it to heart, sir," I said. "I don't see that it matters much. Singleton was a fool to run off like that, and perhaps it was all for the best——"

"It was not, Nipper," interrupted the guv'nor. "I particularly want Singleton here, and you will understand my reason before long. It is a terrible pity the lad has run off like this. But perhaps it is not too late—perhaps we shall be able to get him back."

"I hope so, sir."

There was a mild sensation in the Remove, of course. It was very seldom that a junior took it into his head to bunk, and a good many fellows felt rather sore about it.

"A disgrace—that's what it is!" declared Handforth. "I thought Singleton was made of better stuff! Just because he lost all his money he thinks St. Frank's ain't good enough for him!

When he comes back, I'll punch his silly nose!"

"Perhaps he won't come back," said Church. "If he does, he'll get into hot water. I know for a fact that Mr. Lee is pretty concerned—and if Mr. Lee can't find him, nobody can."

"I'll have a shot, anyhow," said Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" roared Handy. "What are you laughing at?"

"The idea of your finding Singleton—after Mr. Lee has failed," grinned Pitt. "My dear old chap, the best thing you can do is to take no interest in the affair. Instead of finding Singleton, you'll find something else."

"What shall I find?"

"Trouble," said Pitt—"and plenty of it!"

"Rats!" sniffed Handforth. "I'm going to start on the job straight away. As all you fellows know, I'm a pretty good hand at detective work——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" roared Handforth. "There's no fun in talking to chaps who don't appreciate you. I know what I can do—and I know that I'm going to do it. You'll look small later on."

However, Handforth himself did not look particularly important that evening, for he had made no discovery, in spite of all his efforts. For that matter, Nelson Lee himself was equally at fault.

Nothing had been heard of the Hon. Douglas.

Since his departure, late the previous night, he had completely disappeared. The police had been informed in every direction. Every step had been taken, but the Hon. Douglas eluded his pursuers.

Perhaps he was in London, perhaps he had made for the coast, and it was just possible that he was skulking in the recesses of Bellton Wood. But this latter suggestion was not probable.

Anyhow, he had gone. And by tea-time the Remove had begun to lose its interest. The majority of the juniors did not particularly care whether Singleton came back or not.

"Rats to the chap!" said Tommy Watson, as we were partaking of tea in Study C. "All this fuss! Anybody might think he was the most important fellow in the giddy school. I'm not going to worry about him any longer. After tea I'm going to that circus——"

"Begad! I'd forgotten all about it," said Sir Montie.

"But I hadn't," declared Tommy. "It's only a small affair, but they might be able to give a decent show."

"Yes, we'll go along," I said. "Mr. Lee was having a talk with the proprietor to-day—asking him about Singleton. Rather a decent old bird, I think. Of course, he knows nothing—it wasn't likely that he would know anything. Who else is coming down?"

"Oh, a crowd, I believe," said Watson. "Handforth and a good many others. Everybody's saying the circus will be no good—but everybody seems very anxious to go. They're all willing to risk their money."

So, later on, we went down to the village. I was not at all interested, and I would have preferred to remain at the school; but I went down with the others for the sake of company.

The show was an enormous affair—to judge by the bills which were plastered in various parts of the village. "Duke's Magnificent World-Famed Circus!" was the name of the affair, and it was pitched in a meadow off the Caistowe Road.

When we got there we found the tent to be a very small thing. However, electric arc lamps were glaring outside, and there was plenty of bustle, the villagers having turned up almost to a man.

"It's just as well these people only give one show," remarked Pitt. "I don't suppose they dare stop for two nights—because on the second night they'd get the bird. We're asses to go in, but it's all in a day's march."

We paid our money—patronising the best seats, of course. These were three shillings, and the accommodation merely consisted of a rough plank, with a piece of coloured canvas over it. The ring was small, with a couple of big arc lamps suspended overhead, on ropes.

The "band" was blaring away at a popular melody, and the result was terrible. It was almost impossible to recognise the tune. However, the musicians were doing their best.

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "If this goes on much longer, the audience will clear off—or get ill, or something!"

"The kids seem to like it, begad!" remarked Sir Montie.

The show commenced at last—about twenty minutes late.

The first turn consisted of the clown and a performing donkey. It was certainly amusing; but all the amusement was caused by the donkey. The clown was absolutely awful. He didn't even know the rudiments of his job.

But the children seemed to like him—just as they had liked the band. He was a clown, painted up and wearing grotesque clothing, and that was probably enough for their little minds.

The other turns were of a like nature.

There was very little talent in the show. The performing horses were very poor animals, and the conjuror was simply a scream. He was supposed to be serious, but his performance was highly amusing. We could detect nearly every one of his "mystifying" tricks.

The interval was made terrible by the band again.

After that ordeal there was some real fun. Everybody reared with merriment. The St. Frank's crowd howled. It was worth the admission money, just for that one item.

And it was due to the village boys—and not the circus performers.

There was a kind of giant spring mattress stretched in the ring, about four feet from the ground. The clown performed on this, and rolled about in the most ludicrous manner. He could negotiate the thing easily, and it seemed quite a simple proceeding to jump up and down, and land squarely every time.

But the village kids didn't find it so.

They were invited to join in the fun. There was, in fact, a competition. The ring-master—who was also the proprietor—offered a sum of one pound if any boy could emulate the antics of the clown. Every competitor was allowed three tries; and the job looked dead easy.

But when the amateurs got busy on the spring they found that the task was not so simple as it looked. The way the village kids fell about was screamingly funny, and everybody roared. It was the best "turn" of the evening.

"This is rather good!" I chuckled. "I'm glad I came, after all. Hallo! Here comes the Wild Man from Borneo to have a shot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A weird-looking person had entered the ring. He was a man dressed up for the part—probably one of the ordinary workmen. But he was so painted that nobody could recognise him as a white man.

He wore tatters of rags, leaves, and all sorts of oddments. His face was as black as ink, and his head was covered with a fuzzy wig. And when he essayed the spring he was as funny as a born comedian.

He fell about in the most ludicrous manner, and at last retired from the ring in a breathless condition. Meanwhile, the village boys were still trying to win the prize.

Handforth was inclined to be sarcastic.

"They must be dotty!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing in doing that business! I could go and win the quid easily—if I liked to make myself cheap. Any ass could do what that dotty clown does!"

"Even you could!" grinned Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you want your nose punched, Augustus Hart, you'd better say so!" roared Handforth, rising to his feet, "I'll give you—— Yarooooh!"

Handforth had been too hasty, and he fell between the boards with a crash, landing on the grass, mixed up with the supports.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "What—what happened?"

"Why not go and try your luck, Handy?" grinned Pitt. "A quid is always acceptable, you know. It'll be awfully rich if you walk off with the prize!"

"Rats!" said Watson. "He daren't!"

"What!" roared Handforth. "You say I daren't go?"

"Of course you daren't! You wouldn't have the nerve!" said Watson.

"You—you—— All right!" said Handy grimly. "You see! I'll show you!"

He stalked defiantly into the ring.

"Good egg!" chuckled Tommy. "I thought that would do the trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Watson, of course, had been anxious to see Handforth in the ring—and he had "dared" him purposely. Handforth, not suspecting that his leg was being pulled, had accepted the challenge at once.

"Look here, I'm going to win that quid," he said, striding up to the ringmaster. "Clear those kids out of the way!"

"Hi'm halways glad to see young gents in the ring," exclaimed the proprietor heartily. "You wants to 'ave a try? Certainly—certainly! Hi'll be honly too glad to pay hup if you wins. Go a'ead, sir!"

"The clown's got to do it first," said Handforth.

The clown obliged. He performed three movements which seemed quite simple, and stepped out on to the sawdust. The audience watched with added interest; the St. Frank's fellows grinning hugely.

"Go it, Handy!"

"Show us what you can do, old man!"

"On the ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't crow in a minute!" roared Handforth. "Watch me!"

He jumped into the spring, and promptly fell on his back. Then he rolled over, turned a somersault, and plunged off the spring into the grass! It was certainly a bad start.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Handforth. "What—what—— Where—— How the dickens did that happen?"

"Good old Handy!"

"That's the way to do it!"

"You—you cackling asses!" howled Handforth. "That—that was a mistake!"

He proceeded to show us how it ought to be done. And the result was even more amusing. Handy discovered that there was a certain art in manipulating the spring affair: and he was quite convinced that the proprietor was safe in making the offer of one pound.

By the time Handforth had finished his turn the audience was in a state of tears. And Handforth retired, with a good many other juniors. They felt that it would spoil things to see the rest of the ordinary show.

"It was worth double the admission money," I grinned. "Shall we follow the example of the other chaps, and clear—or shall we see it through?"

"Might as well stop now," said Watson.

"Just as you like, dear old boys."

We decided to stay, and we were rather sorry for ourselves.

The remaining turns were awful, except for one—which came next to the last. The clown gave an exhibition of boxing, and his partner was the Wild Man from Borneo.

It was, of course, a burlesque, and it was rather funny.

The clown did all the hitting, and the Wild Man did all the falling. As Watson remarked, it was give and take all the time—the clown was giving, and the Wild Man was taking.

He went over again and again, coming some terrific croppers. At first I watched with lazy amusement; then I became more interested. By the time the turn was over I was of the opinion that it was the most entertaining show of all the evening. There had been some really enlightening sparring.

At last the band played—or rather murdered—the National Anthem, and the audience streamed out of the tent. For my part, I was thoroughly satisfied, and my chums were, too.

"Jolly good!" said Watson, as we strolled towards the village, on our way home. "I reckon Handy was worth the three bob alone!"

"Begad! Rather, dear boy!" observed Montie. "It was quite surprisin' to see how Handy fell—— Dear me, I can't see Nipper!"

"Eh?" said Watson. "Why, what —— Nipper! Nipper, you ass!"

They paused in the road, and looked about them.

But Nipper had vanished. As a matter of fact, I was just on the other side of the hedge. I had dodged my chums purposely, for I had a little idea in my mind—an idea which I wanted to carry out on my own. I would face my chums' wrath afterwards.

I waited until they passed on.

Then I emerged, and retraced my steps towards the circus meadow. I found everything in a bustle. A number of men were busily pulling the tent down—for the circus was probably due to perform in the next village on the morrow. This, of course, would necessitate a night journey. The next stop, I believe, was Caistowe. But this didn't interest me.

I scouted about for some time, and at last approached the group of caravans which occupied a corner of the meadow. I examined one or two with care—and was nearly detected.

Then I came to a halt beneath the little window of a small caravan—a miserable, dilapidated affair. Finding that everything was favourable, I raised myself up, and gazed into the interior of the van.

Then I drew a quick breath.

The caravan had one occupant—somebody in rags and tatters and leaves. He was, in short, the Wild Man from Borneo. But his face was cleaned now; and it was the face of the Hon. Douglas Singleton!

CHAPTER VII.

SINGLETON DOES THE RIGHT THING.

I SMILED grimly to myself as I dropped silently into the grass. My suspicions had been aroused during the show; and now I knew the truth.

Singleton was here—in this fifth-rate little circus. A performer! A member of the company!

I walked round to the front of the caravan, and mounted the steps. But when I tried the door handle, I found that it would not budge. The door was locked. A movement sounded within.

"Who's that?" came Singleton's voice.

"Open this 'ere door, young shaver!" I said gruffly.

I heard a step, and then the key was turned in the lock. The door opened, and the Hon. Douglas peered out.

"Is that you, Mr. Duke?" he asked.

"No, my bonny boy—it's little me," I said calmly.

I pushed my way into the caravan, and closed the door quickly. Singleton stared at me dazedly for a second, his face going pale; and he backed away in a crouching attitude. Then he uttered a harsh sound in his throat.

"You—you rotten spy!" he panted hoarsely. "You confounded cad! Couldn't you leave me alone——"

"Steady—steady!" I said. "Keep your hair on, Duggy! I haven't come to spy on you."

"You liar!" shouted Singleton. "You've found out where I am, and you'll go back to the school and sneak! Just when I thought I was safe. You—you infernal rotter! I'll smash you up before you leave this caravan!"

He hurled himself at me fiercely.

"Don't be an ass, Singleton!" I said sharply. "Look here—— Oh, all right! If you will have it!"

I seized his wrists, and held him firm. He tried in vain to get free.

"Listen!" I said tensely. "I'm not going to sneak—that's not my way. I found you by accident, and I'll respect your secret if you want me to. Is that good enough? Be sensible, and stop this rotting!"

Singleton gave a kind of sob.

"All right; I won't try to hit you," he muttered. "I'm sorry, Nipper. I—I lost my temper. But—but I thought I was safe, and when I saw you, I—I—— Oh, what's the good. I'm miserable! I'm glad you've come, Nipper! I can talk to you—I can tell you everything!"

He sank down into a chair, breathing heavily.

The boy was distraught, and I knew well enough that he was hardly responsible for his actions. He was really glad to see me, although, at first, he had been inclined to resent my coming.

"All right," I said softly. "Don't give way, old son. You've been having a rotten time, and you'll have to buck up. I'm your friend—if you want me. I just popped in to have a chat."

"You'll tell the masters at the school that I'm here!" muttered Singleton.

"Not if you don't want me to," I replied.

He looked up.

"Do you mean that?" he asked huskily.

"Yes."

"You won't sneak?"

"Of course I won't sneak!" I said. "Look here, Singleton! You'd better pull yourself together. You're pretty nearly dotty with worry. Why on earth did you do a silly thing like this? Why did you come to this circus, and join the company as a wild man?"

"I thought I should be safe!" he said bitterly. "But I was a fool! I didn't reckon on you—a detective's assistant! How did you find me? How did you recognise me?"

"I didn't recognise you," I said.

"You must have done, unless somebody gave me away," declared Singleton, looking at me grimly. "I saw you in the audience, with the other fellows, but I wasn't nervous. I didn't speak, so you couldn't recognise my voice, and I was completely disguised."

I smiled

"When you were sparring with that clown chap," I explained, "you received rather a hefty punch. Do you remember? You went down heavily, and caught your head on a post."

"Yes, I do remember," said Singleton. "I've got a bump now. The silly ass didn't mean it, and he apologised afterwards. But I don't see——"

"I'll explain," I went on. "You didn't say anything aloud, but you murmured something to yourself. You said: 'Egad! You bally idiot!' That's what gave me the clue, and a pretty direct clue, too!"

The Hon. Douglas stared at me.

"But—but you didn't hear me?" he asked. "Egad! You couldn't have done!"

"I saw you," I replied. "I saw your lips form the words, my son. Mr. Lee has often given me lessons in lip-reading, and I haven't forgotten them. That's the way I detected you."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Singleton.

"But that's of no importance," I went on. "Look here, you can't stop in this circus. My advice to you is to come back to St. Frank's with me. You won't make things better by acting foolishly."

"I can't come back—I can't!" muttered the Hon. Douglas. "I—I'm afraid to!"

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you I am!" he said fiercely. "I've been a fool — a mad, reckless fool! I've lost everything, and I haven't got the nerve to face the music! I daren't see my guardian when he returns, and I daren't go before the Head! You—you don't understand, Nipper—you don't understand!"

"Yes, I do understand," I said, patting him on the shoulder. "And I know that you're made of the right stuff inside. You've been an ass, and you've had a pretty stiff lesosn. Don't ruin everything by staying away—by bolting like a thief. You're no coward, Singleton."

"I am!" he muttered. "I'm a rotten coward!"

"Rot!" I said sharply. "Do you remember that time you fished me out of the Riven Stowe—from beneath the ice? Was that cowardly? You performed a feat of astounding courage then, Singleton, and I sha'n't forget it in a hurry. And you're brave enough to stand this ordeal now."

The Hon. Douglas looked at me curiously.

"I—I didn't think you'd remember that," he said. "Do you think I'm an outsider, Nipper? Do you think I'm a cad and a rotter?"

"I think you're a good chap," I replied quietly.

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, of course."

"You can't think it—you can't!" he said. "I've been a skunk ever since I came to St. Frank's. I can see it now. I mixed with Fullwood and his rotten crowd. I mixed with gamblers and card-sharpers; I became friendly with swindlers and rogues! I went to race-meetings! Oh, what a fool I was! What a blind, insane fool! It's too late now. I'm ruined—ruined! And I might have been rich still!"

"You can't repair the damage by sitting down and moaning," I said. "It's no use crying over spilt milk, Singleton. What you've got to do is to pull yourself together, and make the best of things. I'm tremendously glad to find that you have changed so much. I like you, and I want to be your friend. Don't think that I want to lecture, or dictate——"

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I deserve a hundred lectures! I deserve a hundred horsewhippings! Why don't you scorn me, Nipper—like Fullwood does? Why don't you jeer at me? I deserve it! I deserve it, I tell you! Why don't you kick me away?"

He gulped, and broke into sobbing.

"Steady, old man!" I said soothingly. "You're rather off colour this evening. Don't give way like this. We're all friends in Study C. Mr. Lee's your friend, too, if you only knew it."

"Mr. Lee is my friend," asked the Hon. Douglas—"Mr. Lee?"

He looked up, with tear-stained eyes.

"Yes," I replied.

"You must be mad!"

"I'm not," I went on. "Mr. Lee has been on Gore's trail, if you want to know the truth, and you can take it from me that Mr. Gore is booked. When the guv'nor gets on a crook's trail there's not much hope for him."

Singleton's face flushed with hope for a moment.

"Oh, but it's no good!" he muttered miserably. "Even if he collars Gore, there's no proof! He won't be able to get the money back, Nipper. I don't know what to do. I came here in desperation. Old Duke offered to take

me in; he's just feeding me, and I've got to work hard for my keep. But I feel rotten about it—I feel that I'm a cad and a coward! I am a coward, too! I'm a rotter, sneaking——"

"Steady!" I interrupted. "Don't talk like that."

"It's the truth!" he declared tensely. "I've had my eyes opened. I know who my true friends are, and I know the traitors. Fullwood turned on me, after I'd done everything. But I can't speak about Fullwood, the thought of him makes me feel sick! And you're my friend, after all, you know. Nipper, I don't know what to say. You're a brick—you're a fine chap!"

"Nonsense!" I laughed. "I want to give you some advice——"

"Please do!" he said earnestly. "I'll take it! Whatever you say, I'll do! I'll be guided by you, Nipper. I've been guided by rogues and cads up till now, but I've chucked all that. I'll take your advice this time."

"Good business!" I said heartily. "My advice is simple. Come back with me to St. Frank's, and face the music. You'll feel better for it; you'll respect yourself again."

"But—but the other chaps——"

"Never mind the other chaps," I said. "You're strong enough to stand a few more jeers. Take no notice. Come back with me, and face the racket—face the consequences of your own folly. It's the only honourable course. Nobody will know of this circus affair. I won't tell a soul."

The Hon. Douglas looked at me with shining eyes.

"Yes, I'll come," he said huskily—"I'll come!"

"Good!"

"And I want to thank you——"

"Rats! You've got nothing to thank me for," I said lightly. "Pull these beastly things off, and tumble into your own. We can be off within a quarter of an hour, if you're sharp. Buck up!"

Singleton did buck up, and when we left the circus together he was looking brighter and happier. He had come to a firm decision, and he was glad. He was going back to stand the racket.

He went straight to bed when we got into the Ancient House. But the school soon knew of his return, and when I went along and told Nelson Lee, he was extremely pleased.

"Splendid, Nipper—splendid!" he exclaimed warmly. "You've done well, young 'un. I am very glad that this has happened. To-morrow—— Well, never mind."

"What about to-morrow?" I asked.

"You will know to-morrow," smiled the guv'nor. "I may as well inform you that the school will receive a big surprise. But I won't go into any details now. Just have patience for another twelve hours, Nipper."

Nelson Lee would not say any more, and I was left wondering.

What would the morrow bring?

If the Hon. Douglas Singleton had only known, his sleep would have been rather more peaceful.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Next week's story, "A LESSON WELL LEARNT!" brings to a dramatic conclusion a series which, I am confident, everyone of you, my readers, will endorse as a huge success. This final act in the spendthrift's extraordinary exploits at St. Frank's, of which you will be reading next week, I can truly say, is nothing short of a masterpiece of ingenuity. It is a succession of surprises, culminating in a most unexpected discovery. If you would enjoy this story as it deserves, let me beg of you, my readers, to refrain from the temptation of over-eagerness to know how it will end by glancing through the last chapter before you have read the preceding chapters.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST COMMENCED!

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

INTRODUCTION.

JACK ROYCE, *returned from Canada, has called to see his brother,*

TEDDY ROYCE, *a clerk in London. While the brothers are together, they are aroused by a loud summons at the door.*

GERALD TELFORD *has been set upon by roughs and seeks assistance of the Royces. The roughs are driven off. Later, Gerald is informed by his guardian, Mr. Cardone, that the money which the lad was to inherit is lost, with the exception of £50. The three lads agree to try their luck in Canada. They set sail for Montreal, and eventually reach Winnipeg. Throughout the journey they are shadowed by a man named Obed Snaith, one of the ruffians who had attacked Gerald in London, and who is believed to be in the pay of Mr. Cardone. While in Winnipeg, the chums rescue a man, nicknamed the Mad Prospector, from ruffians. The man, however, dies of his injuries, but gives the lads a secret chart of a rich gold discovery. The three lads proceed to Medicine Hat, south of Alberta, where they are offered work at St. Pierre,* 150 *miles further N.W. Jack is put in charge of the train taking them there and observes Obed Snaith with the party. There is trouble with them.*

(Now read on.)

Jack Royce Makes a New Enemy.

GERALD, of course, was delighted at the prospect of going out in the wilds to help to build a new railroad. As the three friends had not slept a night in the boarding-house, they merely paid for the meals they had, packed their bags, and, at seven-thirty, presented themselves at the railway-station, to which they were directed by a porter. They found the work-train standing, steam up, ready to go up to Camp Lake St. Pierre

Jack, being the only foreman about to travel on the train, was given a list of names—queer-sounding, foreign names, many of them were. These were the names of the men who were going to travel up on the work-train, to start as railway labourers. Jack added his own, Gerald's, and Teddy's to the list, then looked along the train, to count over the men.

A very motley crew were sitting perched on the flat cars, that were loaded with railroad-building material. Foreigners of nearly every nationality were there, all chattering together eagerly. Many of them were newly-come immigrants, and could speak little or no English. There were, however, a few English-speaking men among them. Jack picked out a few English names on his list.

The conductor of the train, who had given the roll of names to Jack, made a suggestion.

"Labour, sure, is scarce," said the conductor, "and Sanderson had to pay the employment bureau two dollars a head for those fellers. If you're in charge, you'd better call the roll. Guess you can't have been in the Army, or you'd want to do that without bein' told."

It was a good idea. Jack gave an order, with the result that all the men of the train alighted and stood in the track. Then Jack began to call the roll. He started with the English names first. There were seven, besides his own and his chums'.

Six men answered their names readily. Jack scrutinised each man as he did so. Then he came to the last English name.

"Johnson!" he called.

"Here!" came the reply, after the slightest pause.

It was getting somewhat dusk by this time. Jack had to look twice at the speaker before he could see his face properly—probably, however, because the man half turned his head away.

Then Jack started and frowned, and he felt a flush of anger burning on his face. Returning his gaze, with a very faint flicker of a smile on his blue-chinned face, answering to the name of Johnson, was Obed Snaith.

"So your name's Johnson, is it?" Jack asked, his lips curling.

"Yes—to you!" There was insolence that was quite intentional in Snaith's voice and bearing. "Anythin' else ye want? If not, why not get on with the job?"

Jack flushed a bit deeper still, bit his lips, then went on with the tongue-aching job of pronouncing the names of all those seventy foreigners. At length, however, he had the job done, and, finding the men present tallied with those on the nominal roll, he allowed them to climb back on to the flat cars. Then the conductor gave the signal, and the work-train jerked its way out of Medicine Hat, taking the main west-bound line for the first hour or so, after which it switched off in a north-westerly direction.

"So our blue-chinned friend has got a job in the same construction gang as ourselves, has he?" Jack said to his brother, when the three comrades were sitting side by side, swinging their legs over the edge of the flat car the English-speaking men of the party were riding in.

"Has he?" Teddy started; then he looked about him, at his fellow workers. The back of the man under discussion was turned to them; he was sitting on the opposite side of the flat-car. "Well, by Jove, old chap, I'm beginning to think you're right! His following us all over the country is no mere coincidence. Wonder what his little game is?"

Jack took Gerald's arm, and squeezed it.

"See that fellow there, with the pea-jacket on, collar turned up?" he said. "Just you take a look at him, old chap. Don't want to alarm you, but it's the fellow who tried to do you in that night you ran into Teddy's digs at Bradleyfield. Just you keep your eye on him!"

The train throbbed on through the now somewhat intense darkness. It was making good headway. Jack imagined they would be at their destination, Camp Lake St. Pierre, before midnight. Everything appeared to be going smoothly enough. Jack, in charge, decided he was going to have no trouble with his motley crowd of labourers. The foreigners were huddled together on flat-cars ahead of the one he was on. They were singing together in a droning key, painful to the ear. But they seemed happy enough. The rest of the English-speaking men were smoking and chatting. Obed Snaith—or Johnson, as he chose to call himself—seemed to be quite content to sit by himself and talk to no one. He smoked steadily, the flaps of his cap pulled down over his ears, though the night was not cold, his hands in the pockets of his heavy, rough coat.

Jack and his two comrades were dozing a little about three hours after the train had left Medicine Hat. The steady, even motion of the cars soothed them. Teddy was sitting with his head propped up against his elder brother's shoulder. Gerald had lain back on the floor of the car, and was sleeping with his face pointed up to the twinkling stars. Everybody else on their car was silent now, and the smokers' pipes had gone out.

Suddenly Jack stirred. The droning chant of the foreigners in front had ceased suddenly, and to the young foreman's keen ears came other sounds—the sounds of quarrelling.

Gently, Jack freed himself from his brother's weight, and stood up on the car. There was considerable excitement going on forward. He, in charge, deemed it his duty to interfere before the quarrel, whatever it happened to be about, got too far. He knew something of the ways of these foreign immigrants. They had to be treated firmly, otherwise they easily got out of hand.

He stepped away from his brother and Gerald Telford, and hopped across the space between his own car and the one immediately in front of it. The foreigners on this truck were chattering excitedly enough, but it was not here that any quarrel was going on. He hopped across the buffers to the next car.

Here the noise was loudest. As he stepped up to a chattering, excited bunch of men, he saw the dull gleam of steel for a moment. He rushed forward just in time, and caught a descending arm. He gave a wrench. A foreigner uttered a yell of anger and pain, but dropped the knife. Another man—evidently he who had narrowly escaped a stabbing—rushed for the man with a knife. Jack, never slow to act, dealt him a heavy punch in the jaw that sent him staggering backwards.

"Now, be quiet!" Jack roared, still hanging on to the would-be knifer's arm with both hands. "Quiet, I say!"

The man—he was a great, fair-haired Swede, it appeared, a man of much greater weight than Jack—growled something, but did not seem inclined to obey the young foreman's injunction. He had lost his knife, and was, therefore, less dangerous than he had been. But he was a hefty, beefy fellow, as strong as an ox, and about as slow in the intellect. He acted this time, however, with decision, and not too slowly.

He wrapped his free arm around Jack Royce's neck, and gave a bearlike hug. Jack gave a gasp with the first shock of it, and released his hold on the fellow's right hand. Both arms went about the young Britisher, and, by the neck, he was swung off his feet. His flying heels caught another foreigner, crowding too close on the scene, in the mouth. The fellow stepped back, with an agonised yell.

Jack struggled. Without releasing him, the Swede let his feet touch the bottom of the flat-car again. Then he released his hold on Jack with one hand. The other he clenched till it resembled a ham in shape and size, and he swung it, as though to smash the plucky young foreman full in the face.

Seeing the Swede had him by the neck, and that a paralysing blow was coming, Jack had no time to be too nice about things. He hacked out with his heavily booted foot. The Swede gave a yell of pain as the boot toe caught him sickeningly on the shin. His grip on Jack's neck loosened. Jack saw his chance. He struck out with his fists, left and right in succession. His left caught the man full in the throat; the right tapped his nose, with a force sufficient to make the big fellow grunt.

The Swede put his hands up to his face. Jack, indignant at the man's defiance of his authority—for everybody had been told prior to the train leaving Medicine Hat that he was in charge of the party—decided the Swede required a lesson. He gave him one—a very salutary one at that.

The man's position just at the moment was good for Jack's purpose, and Jack had passed a stiff course in Canada of using the strong right hand—or foot—rather than a witty tongue, to enforce his arguments. The Swede was standing facing the track, not far from the edge of the flat-car. The train was trundling on here at about fifteen miles an hour. The temptation was too strong for Jack to resist. He lifted his foot; he caught the big Swede squarely in the rear. With a wailing grunt, Henrik Olesen shot outwards, and dropped.

"Any more of you in sympathy with him?" Jack asked, glowing with joy at his conquest.

And he looked about him, at the other foreigners. It was not too dark for him to see their faces and the expression on them. There was not a man in the whole gang whose eyes would meet Jack's, not a man who did not shuffle uneasily on his feet and edge away from the heavy handed, heavier footed Britisher. Nobody aired a wish to try the same experiment as Olesen had tried. The man Olesen had tried to knife, on the other hand, stretched out a hand and patted Jack on the shoulder, jibbering some unearthly sounding language, and flashing big, white teeth at him, in a smile of would-be friendship. Jack shrugged his shoulder, dusted himself, and, while the train continued to trundle towards its destination, he hopped back along the cars until he had reached his own. There he saw Gerald still asleep, while Teddy was propped against the prone Telford, snoring peacefully.

"Suppose I ought to see about picking that big brute up," muttered Jack, looking back towards the rear of the train. "He cost the company a couple of dollars, and it's my job to see the whole bunch gets up to the camp to work."

Everybody on this flat-car seemed to be asleep, with the exception of Obed Snaith, who still sat on the edge, his

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

feet dangling, his pipe in his mouth. His back was still turned to Jack.

"Yes; I'll go and see what the conductor has to say about it," Jack said, and began to walk backwards along the train, towards the conductor's and brakesmen's caboose, the last vehicle of the string. He had to do some scrambling, for the cars further in the rear were loaded, piled high in many cases with construction material—ties, rails, bags of bolts, tools for the men; and, in the case of one car, foodstuffs and forage for horses.

The conductor was sleeping when Jack entered his caboose; so was one of the brakesmen. The other brakie was at his look-out post, smoking. Jack saw the conductor lying in his bunk. He touched the man gently. The conductor sat up.

"What's wrong?" he asked gruffly.

A freight conductor on a Canadian railway train has to snatch his sleep when he can. He did not relish the idea of being roused just now.

"Fellow off the train," Jack said shortly. "Can you stop until he catches up? Don't want to lose him. He's that great, hefty Swede, if you remember him."

"How did he get off?" demanded the conductor crossly, rubbing his eyes. "Thought you told 'em not to get off once the train had started?"

"So I did." Jack grinned. "But this fellow couldn't help it. You see, in the heat of the moment, I kicked him off."

The conductor's eyes popped wide open. He stared at Jack unbelievingly for a moment. Obviously, he remembered something of the Swede in question.

"You did? That six-foot-six of beef? Kicked him off!" he exclaimed. "Well, by heck! Gee! Say, Sim, did ye hear that?"

He addressed the brakesman on look-out duty. The latter grunted, without taking his eyes from the look-cut window.

"Must ha' taken some doin'," he remarked. "Air ye stoppin', Alec?"

"Sure, this time," said the conductor. "Gee!"

He felt Jack's muscles, while Sim climbed out on to the top of the caboose, his lamp in hand. With this he signalled the engine. In a little while the train came to a halt.

"Just near the bridge over Devil's Falls," said the brakesman, re-entering the caboose. "How long'll he be catchin' up?"

"I think I'll go back along the line and see," Jack said. "I hope I didn't hurt him badly. You never know, though; these big chaps seem to feel bumps worse than little ones."

He dropped down into the track. He stepped out briskly along the side of the rails, in the direction from whence the train had come. He walked, perhaps, a quarter of a mile before, huddled on the steeply sloping bank, he saw a shape. He slid down to it. It was Henrik Olesen. Jack grew a little anxious. He examined the man closely, but could find no injury about him, though the fellow's eyes were closed and he was lying very still.

Jack applied a few restorative measures of his own. The result was that, at length, the big Swede sat up. When he saw and recognised Jack, he put up his arms defensively. But Jack

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only laughed, and put an arm beneath the Swede's.

"It's all right, old chap!" he said. "No ill-feeling, you know. Just come along; the train's a little way ahead, waiting for you. Come on!"

The Swede staggered to his feet, holding both hands to his head. He groaned, though probably more from self-pity than pain. Jack knew he had only been stunned, or dazed, by his fall. He had fallen on quite soft ground; there had been no stones, or other dangerous things, for him to bump against.

When the fellow was walking straight, Jack allowed him to help himself along. A few breaths of the sharp night air did a great deal to restore Henrik Olesen. Just as the rear lights of the train came into sight, around a slight bend in the track, the big fellow stopped in front of Jack, bent his tall head until his face was level with, and quite close to, Jack's, and hissed:

"Just you mark mein vords, mister! Hank Elesen, the big Swede, vill never forget this. You youmped-up English pup, I vill von of these days make you darned sorry you ever kicked me! Savvy?"

"Don't worry about it," said Jack, with a shrug. "While you're on this train, my man, you'll do as I tell you; and you'll be a bit more careful with your knife. Savvy? Now, hustle!"

The man spat on the ground, then turned, and caught up with the train at the double. Jack followed him. He saw Olesen safely aboard, saw him start off on his walk-along the tops of the cars to the one he had so unwittingly left, then climbed back into the caboose.

"That's all, thanks!" he said to the conductor. "He was a bit shaken up, and very annoyed with me; but he's well aboard again. Much obliged to you!"

(To be continued.)

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