

THE BOY WHO BOUGHT A SCHOOL!

by
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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THE BOY WHO BOUGHT A SCHOOL!

by

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

When the Head of St. Frank's "gated" the Hon. DOUGLAS SINGLETON, he thought he had checked the extravagant habits of the junior who had wasted one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in a few short weeks! But there's no checking the Spendthrift of the Remove. He promptly goes out and buys his own school—to run just as he pleases!

The Narrative Related Throughout by NIPPER.

CHAPTER 1.

A Letter for McClure!

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

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

But it so happened that Church and McClure were out at the moment, purchasing food for tea. Hence the unusual quietude.

Handforth was sitting before the fire, reading, and also attending to a row

of chestnuts which adorned the top bar of the grate.

At all events, he was supposed to be attending to them. The fact that they were rapidly becoming charred into an uneatable condition had not been noticed by Handforth.

He was very interested in his book—which, of course, was a detective romance. Handforth seldom read anything else but detective stories; he confidentially informed his chums that it would be good experience for the future.

Edward Oswald, for some inexplicable reason best known to himself, imagined that he was capable of shining as an investigator of crime.

Tap!

Handforth took no notice of the soft

knock on the door. And again it sounded, this time much louder.

Tap!

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

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

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

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

Tubbs looked.

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

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

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

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

"Is it for me?"

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

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

"I thought he was here. This is an express letter, sir," explained Tubbs. "It was brought from the post office by a telegraph boy. I thought it was important, so I brought it straight along."

"Well, chuck the letter over and buzz off, Tubby."

"Yessir," grinned Tubbs.

He retired while he was safe, and Handforth picked up the letter and glanced at it. It was addressed to Master Arnold McClure, and was

marked "urgent." It had been posted in London that same morning.

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

"Here we are again," said Church cheerfully.

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

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

"How did you expect me to attend to silly domestic affairs when I'm interested in this mystery?" demanded Handforth. "I've just got to the point where the detective has discovered the trail of blood!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, ring off!" groaned Church.

"Why on earth you read such piffle amazes me!"

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

"Well, we won't argue," said Church. "Clear that book of yours off the table, and help to spread the cloth. We've got some fine little beef-pies, and all sorts of nice cakes. I'm jolly hungry if you want to know the truth."

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

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

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

"I say, you chaps——"

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

"But, look here——"

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

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

"What?" yelled Handforth and Co.

Teddy Long ventured farther into Study D.

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

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

"No, of course not!"

"My only hat!"

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

McClure stared.

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

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

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth.

"Tubbs brought me no letter," said McClure. "You must have been dreaming, Long——"

"But—but I saw the telegraph boy bring it," said Long. "I saw him give it to Tubby. I wondered what it could be, and I thought McClure was in trouble, perhaps."

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

"Yes, but I—— Ow! Yaroooh!"

Long flew, Handforth having hurled a rock cake at him with some violence. The cake struck Teddy in the mouth, and burst into atoms.

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

Handforth jumped up.

"Oh, let him go!" said Church.

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

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

"What's 'this'?" asked McClure, at once. "This is from home! It's my mater's handwriting! And it's marked 'urgent,' too."

McClure slit open the letter quickly, and anxiously read its contents.

"Oh, my goodness!" he said huskily.

His chums looked across the table with concern. McClure had turned

rather paler than usual, and there was an expression of anxiety in his eyes.

"Anything wrong?" asked Handforth.

"Nothing bad, I hope," said Church.

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

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

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

"So you've got to go home?" said Church. "I say, I hope your pater's all right, Clurey."

"I don't like the sound of things," said McClure. "I shall go up by the evening train."

"To-night?" said Church.

"Of course. If I can get permission I might as well go straight off."

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

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

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

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

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

McClure hastened off and returned

less than five minutes later, flushed and excited.

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

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

"Three days—and more if necessary," replied McClure. "You fellows going to see me off?"

"Rather," said Church.

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

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

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

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

"Steady on!" I exclaimed. "Why all the bustling and dashing about?"

"Train to catch," gasped McClure. "Pater ill—back next week!"

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

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

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

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

"Well, let's hope the train's late to-night," I said. "I'm sorry to hear

about McClure's pater. I hope he'll find everything all serene when he gets to London."

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

The next moment there sounded a loud puffing.

"Too late!" gasped McClure huskily. "Oh, what rotten luck!"

It was, indeed, unfortunate.

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

CHAPTER 2.

Singleton to the Rescue!

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

McClure clenched his fists.

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

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

"Luck!" snapped McClure angrily. "If you hadn't acted the goat with my letter, I could have caught the train easily. You ought to be jolly well kicked, Handy!"

For once Handforth did not resent such a remark.

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

"Thanks for telling me!" snapped McClure.

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

When they arrived at the Ancient House they found that practically all the juniors knew that McClure had been called suddenly home.

"Hallo, he's back again!" remarked Pitt. "Missed the train, old son?"

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

"Is your pater very bad?"

"He seems to be, by what the letter says," replied McClure. "And now I'm stuck down here, helpless, until to-morrow!"

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

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

"Not through to London," said McClure. "What's the good of me getting to Helmford or Bannington? I might just as well stick here. It wouldn't be so bad if I had a motor-bike to take me up, but—"

"Egad!" said the Hon. Douglas. "That gives me an idea. I've got my car in Beilton, and it's only a short run from here to London, when you've got a good car. Jenkins could do it easily in three hours, I expect."

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

"Not necessarily!" I broke in. "If the case is very urgent, there's no reason why you shouldn't use Singleton's car, since he's been generous

enough to offer it. The Head can't possibly object to that. But he might put the ban on Singleton going himself."

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

He strolled off, and we looked after him rather curiously. Singleton was a remarkable fellow in many ways. He had not been at St. Frank's very long, but he had already become known as the spendthrift of the Remove.

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

Personally, I was of a different opinion.

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

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

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

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

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

The junior entered, and found Dr.

Stafford taking things easy in a big chair before the fire.

"Well, my boy?" asked the Head.

"I've come here to speak to you about McClure of the Remove," said Singleton.

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

"He missed his train, sir."

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

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

The Head removed his glasses and polished them.

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

"Pardon me interrupting, sir, but I've got an idea of my own," said the Hon. Douglas. "Couldn't McClure go up to London by car? As you know, I've got a limousine of my own."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head. "I'd overlooked that fact for the moment. It is very kind of you; but it is rather late—"

"I don't see it," said Singleton. "My car is a good one, and Jenkins is one of the best drivers you could wish for. He'll be able to land McClure in his own home by ten o'clock easily."

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

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

The Head considered for a minute.

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

"Thank you, sir!" said Singleton promptly.

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

Whether the Head's permission included Singleton himself was not quite clear. Quite possibly Dr. Stafford meant that McClure was to go up alone; but Singleton did not have any intention of finding out for certain.

He arrived in the lobby, looking quite pleased.

"Well?" asked McClure eagerly.

"All serene!" said Singleton.

"I can go?" said McClure.

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

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

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

"Lucky beggar!" said Pitt.

"Well, come on, McClure," said Singleton. "We've got no time to lose. Let's get off."

And less than five minutes later, the Hon. Douglas and McClure left the school to hurry to the village, where Singleton's car was garaged.

In the village they had no difficulty in finding Jenkins, the chauffeur, and within fifteen minutes the big limousine was ready, its huge headlamps blazing brilliantly, its engine throbbing.

"This is jolly decent of you, Singleton!" said McClure gratefully, as they were bowling along. "I'd given up

hope of going to-night, you know. You're a brick!"

"Don't mention it, old chap!" yawned the Hon. Douglas. "I might just as well be frank and tell you that my motive was one of pure selfishness."

"Oh, rot!" said McClure.

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

"Well, the fact remains that without your car I should have been stuck at St. Frank's until to-morrow," said McClure. "That's good enough for me, Singleton, and I think you're a thundering good chap!"

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

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

"That was a quick trip, Singleton!" he said. "I suppose you're going straight back?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Singleton.

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

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

"Cheerio, Singleton!" said McClure. "Thanks ever so much for bringing me home."

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

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

After proceeding for five or ten

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

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

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

"Never mind. Take it!"

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

It was just ten o'clock, and the West End was fully awake, and alive with gaiety, and brilliant with neon lights.

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

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

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

To convince the waiter that he could pay for what he had ordered, Singleton took out his pocket-book and carelessly looked over a bundle of banknotes—the majority of which were for £20.

The Hon. Douglas was carrying no less than seven hundred pounds on him. He generally walked about with large

sums of money on him. He also had a weakness for displaying it.

This time perhaps he was incautious.

Two well-dressed men were sitting at a table only a little distance from him. And they had not failed to notice that extremely well-filled pocket-book.

The Hon. Douglas dined well; he enjoyed himself immensely. Having settled his bill and tipped the waiter handsomely, he decided to have a stroll round the brilliant streets before returning to the garage for his car.

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

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

"I say, what the deuce——"

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

The blow, however, had been severe, and he collapsed to the pavement, not exactly stunned, but dazed. He only had a dim idea as to what took place.

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

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

"The boy seems to have fainted. Ralph," said the old gentleman.

"Come, my lad, pull yourself together!"

Within a few minutes quite a little crowd had collected. And when a little crowd collects, it generally attracts a large one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My confounded head feels rotten," said Singleton. "As for money, it's still here—Egad, that's queer! My pocket-book's gone! That's rather surprising!"

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

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

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

CHAPTER 3.

Rather Startling!

REGINALD PITT sniffed.

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

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

"Well, that'll be Singleton's funeral," said De Valerie.

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

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

After breakfast there was still no sign of the Hon. Douglas. I had ceased to wonder about him, deeming it better to wait until he turned up.

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

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

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

"Of course not!"

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

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

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

I pushed my way through the crowd.

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

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

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

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

"SCHOOLBOY ROBBED.

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

I handed the newspaper back to Pitt.

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

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

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

"I was wondering if you knew anything about that paragraph in the

morning paper, sir," I said. "That item about a boy being robbed——"

"Yes, Nipper, I have seen it."

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

Nelson Lee nodded.

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

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

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

I looked rather surprised.

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

"Singleton, it seems, has lost no time in communicating with Dr. Stafford," replied Nelson Lee. "He sent a message down by the first available train this morning."

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

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

"And did he really lose seven hundred pounds, sir?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lee. "The boy is absurdly reckless with his money, and I shall consider it my duty to speak to him seriously when he returns."

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

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

Fullwood & Co. were rather concerned about the news; but they were mainly thinking of their own pockets, and were not worrying about Singleton's welfare.

"The silly fool ought to have been more careful," said Fullwood sourly, after morning lessons. "Over seven hundred quid—chucked away! It's enough to make anybody weep! And now the idiot won't be here again until Tuesday!"

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

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

"Rather," agreed Fullwood. "It'll be a bally catastrophe for us if Singleton doesn't come back. We've been making a good thing out of him since he's been here."

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

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

"That point doesn't puzzle me," said Fullwood. "You can bet your boots that Singleton intended to have a good time, and—hallo! What's this?"

Fullwood picked up a letter which had been lying on the table. It had evidently been placed there quite recently, for it bore the Bellton post-

mark, and had been posted there in the early morning.

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

"Better open it and see," suggested Gulliver.

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

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

"It's from Singleton," he replied.

"Eh?"

"From—from Singleton?"

"Yes," said Fullwood. "The artful dodger! The cute bounder! I didn't give him credit for such sense."

"Can't you explain?" asked Gulliver.

"Listen to this," said Fullwood:

"Gadsby's Hotel,

"Glasshouse Street,

"Piccadilly, W.

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

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

"Of course it was," grinned Fullwood. "But don't interrupt. Let me finish. The letter goes on like this:

"Only a bruise. It hurts a bit, but I'm not worrying. I've arranged everything so that I can have a good time for three days, and the Head won't be any the wiser. I am sending a messenger down with the Head's letter by the first train in the morning,

and he'll post this in Bellton—so you ought to receive it by dinner-time. My suggestion is that you should come up to town to-morrow night. We could have some sport together——"

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

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

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

"Yes, that's right," went on Fullwood:

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

"D. S."

The nuts regarded one another excitedly.

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "It could be worked all right, you know—nothing easier. And what a chance! Three clear hours in London! We'll go!"

Bell looked doubtful.

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

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

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

"We've got out times enough before."

"Well, we'll let that pass," said Bell. "I expect we shall be able to manage it all right. The most important point is this: We shall be away from the school, approximately, from half-past ten until after six in the morning. That's a pretty long time, don't forget. What if one of the masters goes into the Remove dormitory in the night—even before twelve? Our beds will be empty, and there'll be the dickens to pay in the morning. It's better to be cautious——"

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

"Same here," said Gulliver. "Dash it all, the chap's sending his car down especially for our benefit. An' we can sleep all the way back again. So we shan't miss much, after all."

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

CHAPTER 4.

Smith Gore Takes a Hand!

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

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

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

"A trap? Good lord, no!" said Gore. "Singleton is the last fellow on earth to try any tricks of that sort. His letter explains everything. He's pretending

to be ill, and he means to have a good time for two or three days. I've been preparing my plans, and, although the time isn't exactly ripe, I think we had better take advantage of this opportunity."

Carslake nodded.

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

"Yes, of course."

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

Gore was the prime mover in all the swindles; he had already fleeced the Hon. Douglas of a sum exceeding twenty thousand pounds. And he had done it in such a way that Singleton was none the wiser.

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Douglas, it need scarcely be said, had been spoofed and swindled. It had been child's play to

an experienced hand like Mr. Philip Smith Gore. Singleton had complete faith in the plausible rascal.

"Yes, that's the idea," remarked Gore, as he lit a cigar. "I'll dodge across to the post office in a minute or two and send Singleton a wire."

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

"Nonsense," interrupted Gore. "A large proportion? My dear fellow, Singleton is worth two hundred thousand, if he's worth a penny. Up till now we have succeeded in obtaining about a tenth of that amount."

Carslake shook his head.

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

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

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

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

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

"No doubt," agreed Mr. Gore.

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

He did not seem to be aware of the fact that his movements were being closely observed by a man who had

been standing in the shadows. This man seemed to be elderly. His back was bent, and he wore a grizzled, iron-grey beard.

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

At all events, when the latter gentleman turned into the post office, the other man took up a position in a doorway on the other side of the road. He waited until Mr. Gore reappeared—but made no attempt to continue his shadowing tactics.

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

Who was the stranger?

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

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

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

"No trouble, sir, that I knows of," grinned the page-boy. "Mr. Lee told me to tell you that he wants you in his study at once, please."

"Thanks, Tubby," I said, and Tubbs took his departure.

I followed him out of the study, and went down the Remove passage. When I arrived at Nelson Lee's study, I tapped upon the door and walked in.

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

Nelson Lee turned in his chair.

"Your remark is somewhat enlightening, Nipper," he observed. "You have shown me that you are probably deserving of being called over the coals. However, as it happens, I have

no intention of discussing any of your misdeeds at the present. I merely sent for you in order to let you know that I am leaving St. Frank's this evening."

I stared.

"You're leaving, guv'nor?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

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

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

"London."

"On business, guv'nor?"

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

"I'd just love to go to London for a day or two, by way of a change," I said. "Any chance of my going with you?"

The guv'nor chuckled.

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking about letting you come to London, too."

"What?" I shouted.

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

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

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

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

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

I burst into Study C, and found my

chums just finishing the clearing up. They regarded me rather curiously.

"Dear old boy," said Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, "you seem very bucked over something."

I nodded.

"I am," I replied cheerfully. "My sons, the guv'nor and I are going out on the spree this week-end. We start for London by the evening train, and we shan't be back until Monday morning."

"Gammon!" said Watson.

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

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

"Then it's true?" asked Tommy.

"Absolutely!"

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

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

"Surely you asked Mr. Lee for permission for Tommy an' I?" said Sir Montie. "Surely you thought of us?"

I felt rather uncomfortable.

"I suppose I'm selfish," I said. "No, Montie; I didn't say anything to the guv'nor about you. The fact is, I was so pleased that you chaps never entered my head."

"Well, my hat!" said Watson. "You didn't even suggest that we might go? What do you think of that, Montie? Is he worth calling a pal——"

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

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

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

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

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

"They don't care anything about that, sir," I put in. "They're simply dying to go. Couldn't you concede a point, sir? Couldn't you let them come with us?"

"No, Nipper; I must be firm——"

"They've often made themselves useful, sir," I went on quickly. "If there's anything to be done they'll be only too willing to lend a hand. And there's never any telling. Besides, I should feel more happy if they were with me."

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

"You'll let them come?"

"Decidedly not! You will have to remain."

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

"You surely cannot come with me and be unhappy about it?" asked Lee.

"Look here, guv'nor; I believe you're pulling my leg!" I said. "Will it be possible for Montie and Tommy to do the trip with us? We can easily make up lessons next week, and it'll be a ripping change!"

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

"And can they come?" I asked eagerly.

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

I did not wait to hear the finish of the gov'nor's sentence, but I dashed out of the room and rushed away to Study C.

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

"It's all serene!" I panted.

"We can go?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!" yelled Watson.

"Begad! I'm frightfully bucked—I am, really," remarked Sir Montie. "Nipper, old boy, you're a wonder! How in the world did you manage it?"

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

We hurried away to the dormitory, where we proceeded to change in record time.

CHAPTER 5.

Going on the Razzle!

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

Pitt stood at the bottom of the stairs in the lobby. Montie, Tommy and I were just coming down, "dressed in our best."

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

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

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

"We're just off to London," I explained. "We're going up by the evening train, and we shan't be back until early on Monday morning."

"Ret!" said Handforth. "If you

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

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

"Rats!"

"Tell that yarn somewhere else!"

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

"You boys ready?" he asked briskly.

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

"Then you had better hurry," said Lee. "We haven't long to catch the train."

The juniors regarded one another wonderingly.

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

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

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

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

"Like their cheek!" snapped Handforth. "What about us? Where do we come in?"

"Nowhere!" said Pitt. "But I'd like to go up as well."

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

We managed to get off in time to catch the train. Handforth was feeling

rather sore. He saw no reason at all why he should not go. He regarded it as a personal affront that he—Handforth—had not been invited.

"It's simply rotten!" he declared. "Me—one of the leaders of the Remove, if not the leader—left out in the cold!"

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

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

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

"It seems to me that our plan has received the kybosh," put in Bell. "How the dickens can we go to London now? Mr. Lee's there, and it's quite likely that he'll spot us, and that would mean the sack. It isn't worth the risk, Fully!"

Fullwood snorted.

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

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

"You lunatic!" said Fullwood witheringly. "That's the last thing in the world we shall do! We'll wear soft hats. We can easily nip to Bannington this evening to buy them."

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

A little later on in the evening, the nuts returned from Bannington, and they managed to smuggle their parcels into Study A without any difficulty.

"Now we're all serene," said Fullwood pleasantly. "We shan't know ourselves when we're dressed in these

togs. An' if anybody happens to spot us in London—well, they'll have to be pretty keen to recognise us."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You chaps awake?" he whispered.

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

"Same here," murmured Gulliver.

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

Unfortunately for the nuts' plans, Handforth awakened.

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

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

Handforth was out of bed in a second. "By George!" he muttered, "I'll put a stop to their rotten game."

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

Handforth hastened silently down.

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

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

He grasped the handle, and swung the door open.

"Great goodness!" gasped Bell. "We're spotted!"

"Handforth!" grated Fullwood.

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

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

Fullwood scowled.

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

"I'm not going to see three rotters acting the goat after lights-out!" said Handforth grimly. "I'm about fed-up

with your rotten ways, Fullwood, and it's about time you were taught a lesson. You've made a bloomer if you think you are going out to-night."

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

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm not going to argue!" he exclaimed. "In any case, jawing to rotters like you would be worse than jawing to a gate-post. I'm going to act!"

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

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

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

"Yaroo!"

Fullwood sat on the floor, and he drew the tablecloth over him, to say nothing of a pile of books and an inkstand.

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

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

Slap!

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

It seemed to him that Handforth's interference was to mean that the nuts' night out would be ruined. Fullwood wasn't afraid of Handforth sneaking.

He knew he was safe enough in this respect, and if he could get away safely he would risk the consequences.

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

Handy was a great fighter, but the odds just now were rather too much for him. Fullwood attacked him from behind, and landed a hard blow on his ear.

Handforth staggered back a trifle, swung round, and glared at Fullwood.

"You—you cad!" he roared. "You cowardly rotter!"

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

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

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

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

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

They left Handforth writhing on the floor.

The nuts were bruised and sore.

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

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

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

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

"We only tied him up loosely," said Fullwood. "He's free by this time, I'll bet. Rats to Handforth! There's the car, waitin'. We shall have to tell Jenkins to buzz like the deuce."

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

"Good-evening, young gents," he said, as they came up.

"We want to buzz as hard as you can go—get to London in record time," said Fullwood. "You're takin' us straight to Gadsby's Hotel, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

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

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

The nuts did not get any sleep, as the Hon. Douglas suggested. They were too excited to think of having a nap en route.

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

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

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

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

He was looking quite pleased when

he came out of the station, but he would give his chums no hint as to the meaning of his action. They did not know why the telegram had been sent, or whom it was sent to.

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

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

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

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

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

"Cards, sir?" asked Bell.

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

"What place is it?" asked Fullwood. Mr. Gore shook his head.

"Ah!" he smiled. "I shall not tell you just yet, but you will see for yourselves soon."

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

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

The situation was rather interesting.

CHAPTER 6.

The Gamblers!

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You'll find out very shortly," replied Gore. "Mr. Varney's flat is not so innocent as it appears to be. But it is hopeless for an outsider to gain admittance. I have been here before, and I know the ropes. That shows the advantage of knowing an old hand like myself."

"Rather," agreed Singleton. "Who shall we meet in here?"

"Quite a number of people, I dare say," said Mr. Gore. "The flat, to be frank, is a kind of gentlemen's club, and a club of a most exclusive character. I do not know Mr. Varney personally; in fact, I have only been here once before. But I think I can manage to obtain admittance for our little party."

"I hope so, sir," said Fullwood.

They mounted two flights of marble stairs, and then came to a halt before a door on the second landing. Mr.

Gore pressed the bell-push, and within a few moments the door was opened by a staid-looking man in evening dress, apparently a butler. He regarded the party with an expressionless face.

"Mr. Varney in?" inquired Gore.

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

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

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

Gore passed out of the lobby with the butler.

"Well, this is a rummy business!" murmured Gulliver. "There's nothin' very excitin' about this affair!"

"Wait!" said the Hon. Douglas languidly. "I've got an idea that we shall all be surprised soon. There's something good in this, I'll bet!"

A minute or two later Mr. Gore reappeared.

"Everything is all right," he said, smiling. "You are all at liberty to enter. Mr. Varney is engaged at the moment, but that makes little difference. We shall be quite occupied in other directions. Come, boys!"

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

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

The Hon. Douglas was under the impression that Gore and Carslake were almost strangers to the flat, and that they had come for sport, too. Quite

the contrary was the case. Gore had merely enticed the fly into the web.

"This way, boys!" said Gore genially.

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

"By gad!" murmured Fullwood.

They passed inside, and they knew at once the exact nature of this harmless-looking "private residence." It was, to be exact, a high-class gambling-den—a resort for those members of Society who had more money than they knew what to do with.

Roulette was being played, and other "games" of a similar nature. Twenty or thirty men were present, the majority of them in evening-dress.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Singleton did his utmost to remain calm; but the gambling spirit was upon him, and his face was flushed. He was just in the mood to bet heavily, and he did so. There appeared to be no limit in this establishment.

"Go easy, my lad—go easy!" said Gore warningly. "You mustn't bet so recklessly."

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

"I hope so," said Mr. Gore. "I've had bad luck—I'm five thousand pounds out of pocket already. If my luck doesn't change soon I shall chuck the game for to-night. I should advise you to ease up."

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

The astute Mr. Gore knew well enough that his advice would be rejected, otherwise he would not have tendered it. But the giving of that advice, coupled with the fact that Gore himself had lost heavily, naturally gave Singleton the impression that Gore was in no possible way connected with the fiat.

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

But with the spendthrift things were different.

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

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

completely intoxicated with the excitement of the gamble.

But at length his recklessness was brought to an end, for his money gave out.

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

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

Gore shook his head.

"I warned you, Singleton. When a fellow's luck is out, he might as well keep the money in his pocket," he said. "However, you are rather headstrong, and this lesson will do you no harm."

"But won't you lend me anything?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well?" smiled Mr. Gore grimly.

"Say it—say 'I told you so,'" smiled Singleton. "I shan't be offended if you do, because I deserve it. Roulette is a

ripping game, but it's deucedly expensive. Egad!"

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

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

"You can make a fortune out of roulette," declared Gore. "I know men who have started with five thousand, and who have retired with a hundred thousand after a week's play. And it generally happens that on the first night they lose badly. It's just the luck of things."

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

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

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

Mr. Gore nodded.

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

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

"I don't know," said Singleton. "I'm at least twenty thousand pounds down to-night."

"Great Scott!"

"By gad!"

"My goodness!"

"Twenty—twenty thousand!" gasped Bell. "Why, you—you silly fool! You'll never get all that back! It's a fortune!"

Singleton laughed.

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

"Well, you've got nobody to blame

but yourself!" declared Fullwood. "We could all see you were losin', an' you kept on just the same. You ought to have taken Mr. Gore's advice."

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

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

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

On the morrow the story would probably be the same.

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

"Well, boys, we had better be going now," said Mr. Gore, glancing at his watch. "You three must get back to St. Frank's. The car will be waiting outside."

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

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

After the limousine had left Gadsby's Hotel, and Gore and Singleton had passed within, a figure moved out of the

shadows again and mounted a motorcycle. It was the same figure that had been there before.

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

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

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

CHAPTER 7. The Telegram!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He did not forget how they had

trussed him up; he did not forget that he had struggled with his bonds for twenty minutes before freeing himself. And Handforth was fully determined to make the nuts see the error of their ways.

He crossed over to one of the wash-stands, selected a jug of icy water, and plunged a sponge into it. Then he advanced across the dormitory to the beds of Fullwood & Co. He was watched by many of the other fellows, who were all grinning with anticipation.

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

Cold water was certainly what they got!

Handforth held the sponge immediately over Fullwood's face and squeezed it. A stream of icy water plunged down upon Fullwood's face. It soaked his hair, filled his ear, and trickled down over his face. Fullwood gave a wild howl, a gasp, and rolled out of bed.

"Gug-gug-grooh!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My hat, yes," said Church.

But there was no letter in the rack from McClure.

"Thoughtless boulder!" grunted Handforth. "He might have dropped us a line, anyway."

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

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

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

"I am," said Handforth.

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

"A wire for me?" asked Handforth wonderingly. "I wonder who it's from?"

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

Handforth tore open the envelope, and extracted the form. And as he read the words which were written there, his eyes grew round with excitement and anxiety.

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped.

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

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

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

"Poor old chap!" muttered Handforth.

Church took the telegram and read it feverishly. And he, too, changed colour, for the form read:

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

"McCLURE."

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

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

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

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

"Oh, go easy——"

"His pater's got some catching disease or other, I expect," said Handforth.

"I—I can't believe McClure's dying," muttered Church.

The two juniors were thunderstruck—staggered. They stood there looking blankly before them.

"My goodness! What shall we do?" said Handforth.

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

"To the Head? What for?"

"He'll give us permission to go up——"

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

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

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

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

"You idiot!" snapped Handforth. "As if anybody would joke on a subject like this! If you won't come I'll go by myself. We can't be punished

for slipping off, because it's the last wish of a dying chap!"

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

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

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

Those faces belonged to Fullwood & Co., and it was not long before Gulliver and Bell fully understood the meaning of the telegram which Fullwood had despatched the night before.

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

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

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

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

"Aren't—aren't you dying?" demanded Handforth faintly.

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

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

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

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

"And we've been bemoaning your fate all the way up from St. Frank's," said Handforth warmly. "But I'm jolly glad to see you safe and sound. How's your pater?"

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

Church's eyes suddenly sparkled.

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

"Then we can go to a theatre together to-night!" said McClure eagerly. "It's a brain-wave, Churchy. I say, if it turns out all serene, we'll bless the chap who sent that giddy wire."

As it happened, it did turn out all serene.

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

When Nelson Lee had heard Handforth & Co.'s explanation, and when he had seen the wire, he could not be angry.

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

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

The gov'nor chuckled.

"Very well, you young rascals," he said. "You may remain. Go to a theatre this evening—do anything you like—but don't bother me. I have important work on hand."

Handforth & Co. were delighted, and they fairly hugged themselves with glee.

But, as events turned out, there was to be some excitement before we left London to go back to St. Frank's!

CHAPTER 8.

A Fool and His Money!

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Douglas had hopes. He felt certain that he would recover his losses before the night was out.

The door opened and Mr. Gore appeared.

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

"That's the idea!" agreed Gore,

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

"I'm not worrying," said Singleton lightly. "Dash it all, why should I? I lost twenty thousand last night, I know, but I'm not the kind of fellow to go into hysterics over a trifle. If I lose it altogether, I shan't sit down and mope."

Gore smiled.

"That's the spirit, my boy—that's the spirit!" he said heartily. "If we remain calm, there's practically no risk. Study the table carefully, watch every move, and, above all, play cautiously until you know that you are winning."

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

"How much cash have you got on you?"

"Same as last night."

"Twenty thousand?"

"Yes," said the Hon. Douglas. "I thought I might as well be prepared, you know."

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

"Isn't Carslake coming?"

"Carslake will probably be at Varney's place when we arrive; he's going there independently," said Mr. Gore. "Come along, Singleton!"

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

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

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

"I think we'd better watch just to start with," said Gore cautiously. "Let's see how things are going first."

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

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

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

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

Singleton thought nothing of putting down a fifty-pound note as a single stake, and quite frequently he put two at once.

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

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

Long before an hour had elapsed he had lost several thousands of pounds.

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

But somehow it did not alter.

And, at length, the foolish boy succeeded in losing every farthing of the money he had brought with him. This was because he had wagered the money in a reckless manner.

There was no limit in the game, and this was not very astonishing, for the whole place had been prepared for Singleton's own benefit.

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

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

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

"I've lost," he said shortly.

"Sorry to hear that. How much?"

"All of it."

"The whole twenty thousand?"

"Yes."

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

"And what method is that?"

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

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

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

croupier' game, he has completely recovered his losses within an hour."

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

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

"You see, my boy, it is this way," said Mr. Gore. "You must use larger sums of money than ever. Back the same number continuously, and place thousands of pounds on at a time. There is no limit to the amount you may stake. The croupier will become nervous; he will spin the wheel erratically. And, in the long run, you are bound to win. By the law of averages, you are bound to win; but you must have large capital. That is the difficulty with most people."

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

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

"Twenty last night and twenty to-night," replied Singleton. "That is to say, forty thousand pounds in two nights."

Gore nodded.

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

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

"You can give me a cheque."

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

"Yes, certainly."

"How much?"

"To any extent you like," said Gore. "I happen to have a big supply on me,

and I know your cheques are good. I can let you have fifty thousand, if you wish—or even sixty thousand. Write out your cheque."

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas heartily. "I feel that I shall win, after all!"

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

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

He produced a thick bundle of bank-notes and handed them to the junior. They were mostly one-hundred-pound notes.

Singleton's face was hot and flushed, and there was a feverish light in his eyes. He was excited and nervous.

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

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

The Hon. Douglas walked rather unsteadily to the table, and Gore watched him with a curious expression in his eyes.

"The boy has got the gambling fever badly," he muttered. "I never believed that the trick could be worked so easily. Within an hour he will have lost the lot, and I can cash this cheque on Monday. Good gad! I have heard the expression 'a fool and his money are soon parted,' and it's certainly very true in Singleton's case!"

Carslake strolled up.

"Everything going well?" he murmured.

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

"You think he'll lose it all!"

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

"Singleton is in our hands com-

pletely—he can be worked as easily as a piece of new putty!" said Carslake.

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

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

Singleton had already followed Gore's extraordinary advice. The boy did not seem to realise that he was plunging to certain disaster. The fever had got hold of him, and he hardly knew what he was doing.

Again and again he lost, and occasionally he won. But it was noticed that when he won his stake was usually a comparatively small one.

But he received encouragement, and he continued to gamble.

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

And his sheaf of notes disappeared rapidly.

The plan did not seem to be working right; but Singleton was altogether too excited to call a halt.

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

He lost!

For a moment or two the Hon. Douglas did not seem to realise the dreadful truth. He had lost it all! He had lost a hundred thousand pounds in two nights!

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

"You played well, my boy," he said softly. "You played with judgment and skill. And if you had only been able to continue for another ten minutes all would have been well. Look here, I will risk a few thousands myself. No, I don't want any cheque for this little lot. Take this money, and use

it exactly as I tell you. You will win. You will pay me back, and keep the rest for yourself. Then you will be able to—"

Ting-ting-ting!

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Douglas laughed with sheer nervous shock.

"The police!" he said unsteadily. "Egad! That's good! A fine finish to the evening, what? I suppose we shall finish in chokey!"

"Pull yourself together, Singleton!" said Gore sharply. "You are a bit hysterical, I can see. It won't do, boy! We must escape from the police!"

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

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

Gore seized the boy's arm.

"Come with me," he murmured, "I know a way. Trust to me, Singleton, and we shall get out of this all right!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Narrow Escape!

"POLICE!"

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm not suggesting that we should," said Mr. Gore. "There is a fire escape just to the left—one of those iron affairs, you know. But we shall need to be cautious, my lad. Follow me."

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

"Come along, Singleton!" murmured Gore.

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

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

"A policeman!" muttered Singleton huskily.

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

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

Mr. Gore's fist landed on the left side of the constable's head, and his helmet went one way, and his truncheon another. He staggered slightly, tripped and fell. Before he could get to his feet, Mr. Gore and Singleton were speeding away.

They dashed across a lawn and found themselves at the bottom of the grounds. Gore climbed to the top of the wall and helped Singleton over.

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

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

"Yes, rather!" panted the Hon. Douglas. "I thought we were collared

for the moment. Egad! It was a narrow squeak!"

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

"I shouldn't have worried much about that," said Singleton. "I'm annoyed because I've lost the opportunity of trying to get my money back now."

"My dear lad, you will have many opportunities," declared Gore. "This little incident is annoying, I will admit, but you must not worry yourself. Before long you will win your money back."

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

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

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

Before Mr. Gore could stop him the Hon. Douglas had dived down a side turning.

Mr. Gore smiled to himself.

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

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

He had been thinking—wondering how on earth he had lost such a lot

of money. He could hardly remember the events which had taken place in the roulette room. It was all misty.

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

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

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

He commenced walking back towards the Strand, having a kind of hazy idea that if he went to Charing Cross he could reach Piccadilly Circus fairly easily.

Just as he reached a side turning, however, six schoolboys swung into Aldwych, and the Hon. Douglas was momentarily surrounded by them.

The six fellows were Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Handforth & Co. and myself. We had just walked from the Prince's Theatre, where we had been to see "The Frog," and were rambling round the streets before going home. We had wasted a good deal of time, not caring how late we got back. It would be Sunday on the morrow, and we should not be compelled to rise early.

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

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

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

"Singleton!"

"My hat!"

The Hon. Douglas stared at us in amazement.

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

"Yes, and what are you doing here?" I put in. "I thought you were in bed, suffering from a nasty whack——"

Singleton nodded.

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

We looked at the Hon. Douglas suspiciously.

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

"I'm not ill——"

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

"Really?" yawned the Hon. Douglas.

"You stayed in London to go on the razzle, you bounder!"

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

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

Singleton stared, his troubles brought to mind again.

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

Somehow his manner changed; he became different. His face, although he endeavoured to wear an expression of bored indifference, showed signs of worry and anxiety.

I had never seen the Hon. Douglas like this before, and the change had come about because I had mentioned money.

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

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

Before we could stop him, he walked on hurriedly.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Watson.

"What's the matter with the idiot?" demanded Handforth. "He seems to be dazed over something. It strikes me there's something wrong with the chap!"

I was watching Singleton with interest.

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

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

I remembered that the man had stopped under the lamp at the same time as we had run into the Hon. Douglas. Somehow I was suspicious—and the more so when the stranger turned into the Strand, immediately behind Singleton.

He was shadowing the junior.

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

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

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

I took no notice, but hastened away. Handforth, I believe, attempted to follow me, but Sir Montie and Tommy held him back. I knew that there was no time to be lost, for there were

still many people in the Strand, and it is quite easy to lose sight of anyone in that crowded thoroughfare.

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

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

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

And then I received a bit of a shock.

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

It was the stranger!

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

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

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

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

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

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

The others were probably at Gray's Inn Road by this time, and I reckoned that I should have to walk. It was too late for buses, and there were no taxis in sight.

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

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

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

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

"I want you to drive me to——"

"I ain't drivin' nobody nowhere," said the taximan. "I'm off home—an' late enough, too!"

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

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

I entered the taxi, and we were soon speeding along. Within a few minutes the cab drew up in front of Nelson Lee's house in Gray's Inn Road. I jumped out, paid the fare, and the cab drove off.

I was just about to insert my key into the lock when I heard familiar voices.

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

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

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

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

"Keep your hair on!" I interrupted.

"I walked back to Piccadilly Circus, and I thought you'd be home, so I came in a taxi."

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

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

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

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

But when I tried the door of the gov'nor's bed-room, it was locked.

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

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

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

"Just one moment, Nipper—that's all."

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

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

"I had a reason, young 'un."

"What reason?"

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

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

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My dear, Nipper, you are singularly

acute to-night," he observed. "Perhaps I was disguised—and then, again, perhaps I was not."

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

Was it possible that—

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

CHAPTER 10.

A Profitable Undertaking!

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE meanwhile had been active.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He grinned, and Mr. Gore passed on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I think it worked very nicely," he observed, as he lay back in his chair. "Singleton never guessed that our raid was only a fake, and that our policemen were hired men dressed up for the occasion."

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

Gore nodded.

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

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

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

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

"Exactly," replied Mr. Gore.

"Phew! It seems too good to be true," said Carslake. "It's a fortune, Gore! Don't you think it would be advisable to drop the game?"

"No, I do not."

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

Mr. Gore smiled.

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

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

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

"Yes, quite liberal," said Carslake. "You are doing most of the work, Gore, and it is only right that you should have the lion's share of the proceeds. Personally, I should be content to drop

out of the game at once—that is, to take my twenty-five thousand——"

"The same with me," put in Crosse. But Mr. Gore shook his head.

"No, no; that doesn't suit me at all," he said. "You must keep to the bargain, my friends. I shall need your assistance very shortly; and, besides you will be putting money into your own pocket. Surely you are not content with half when you can easily obtain the whole?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm worrying about one thing," said Carslake. "Don't you think it's prob-

able that the boy will stop payment of this cheque?"

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

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

Mr. Gore was thoughtful for a few moments.

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

"What are they, Gore?" asked Crosse.

"I cannot tell you just now; but before I go to St. Frank's, I shall require the assistance of you two fellows," replied Gore.

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

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

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

"Now I think I'll be getting along to Gadsby's Hotel," he remarked. "Singleton will be there by now, and I want to have a word with him before he turns in. The lad probably needs consoling."

Within five minutes Mr. Gore was speeding along in a taxi towards Glasshouse Street, and very shortly afterwards he pulled up in front of the hotel and entered. As it happened, the Hon. Douglas was in the lounge hall.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Douglas had received an eye-opener.

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

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

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

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

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

"How much did you lose?"

"Twelve thousand."

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

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

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

"You can't understand what?"

"You say you have nothing——"

"That is quite correct."

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

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

"I pressed you?"

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

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

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

"Not yours?"

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

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

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

"I shall go back to-morrow."

"Sunday?"

"I might as well," said the Hon. Douglas. "It's Sunday already, as a matter of fact. I'm going to bed now, and I want a long sleep."

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

The boy did not wake up until Sunday was well advanced.

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

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

CHAPTER 11.

A Decided Change!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

Handforth grinned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Dry up, Handy!" I interrupted. "There's no need to discuss it."

I quickly changed the subject, for it wouldn't do to make Singleton's deception common knowledge.

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

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

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

Or was there something deeper in it?

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

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

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

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

Fullwood & Co. were the first to notice it. The nuts of the Ancient House held a consultation in Study A almost immediately after breakfast.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, don't shout!" said Fullwood.

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

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

"A few thousand, I suppose," remarked Fullwood. "The ass is rash enough for anything. But a thousand to him is like a penny to anybody else. My suggestion is this: I'll go along to Singleton's study now, and touch him for my fifty. Bell can follow in a few minutes, an' then Gulliver can go—"

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

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

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

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

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

Gulliver snorted.

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

Fullwood hesitated.

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

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

Gulliver and Bell tossed again, and Gulliver won. By this time Fullwood

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

"Hallo, Fully," he said. "Squat down. Help yourself to one of those cigarettes."

Fullwood availed himself of the invitation.

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

"Yes, pretty decent."

"In funds?"

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

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

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

Fullwood coloured slightly.

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

"How much is that?"

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

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

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

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

Fullwood picked it up, and stared at it.

"A—a fiver!" he exclaimed blankly. "Is—is this all you can lend me?"

"Yes."

"But your case is stuffed with fivers—"

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

Fullwood was rather staggered.

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

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

"You won't, really?"

"No."

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

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

"You want some tin?" he asked bluntly.

"I—I—I— That is to say—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

A vast change had taken place, and Fullwood & Co. could not understand

it. The spendthrift of St. Frank's was just beginning to realise, it seemed, that money had value, after all.

The change was coming about, but it would take a good deal yet before the Hon. Douglas fully learned his lesson.

CHAPTER 12.

Handforth on the Warpath!

QUESTION of honour!

"A" "Eh?"
"It simply must be attended to," declared Handforth firmly. "Yorke's nose has got to be punched, and I'm not the kind of chap to waste time. I mean to find the cad, tell him what I think of him, and punch his nose."

"Yes, but look here——"

"Be reasonable, Handy——"

"I'm not going to listen to any of your rot," interrupted Edward Oswald Handforth. "You heard Yorke as well as I did—and I'm surprised that you should try to dissuade me from my purpose."

The three Remove juniors were standing in the doorway of the Ancient House. Afternoon lessons were over, and the day was drawing to a close. The weather was rather mild and the sky clear.

The chums of Study D were having a little argument—as usual. It was generally Handforth's fault. He had a mania for performing headstrong actions, and his chums were continually holding him in check—or trying to.

"Look here, Handy——" began Church again.

"I don't want to listen to any of your rot," interjected Handforth firmly. "You might as well save your breath, my son. I'm going to punch Yorke's nose—and there's an end of it."

"Yes, I can believe it, too!" said McClure.

"What?"

"I can believe that it'll be the end of Yorke's nose——"

"You funny ass!" snapped Handforth. "If you can't make better jokes than that I should advise you to dry up. You don't seem to realise the position. Not an hour ago in the Form-room, Yorke insulted me."

"He only drew your likeness, and passed it round the room——"

"My what?" roared Handforth.

"Likeness, of course!"

"Likeness!" bellowed Handforth. "Do you call that horrible-looking drawing a likeness? It was an insult, and Yorke made it worse by saying that his effort was so life-like that it could almost speak!"

Church grinned at the recollection.

"Well, it was only a joke," he said.

"You mustn't take these things to heart, Handy——"

"I haven't taken anything to heart, you fathead!" interrupted Handforth. "But I'm not going to stand insults at any price. Understand? Those College House asses giggled and squirmed when Yorke passed his drawing round—they laughed at me. Me, you understand!"

"Awful!" said Church.

"Horrible!" added McClure.

"That drawing was horrible, anyhow," declared Handforth. "And Yorke had the nerve to say it looked like me! I'm going over to the College House, and I'm going to punch Yorke's nose."

"But do be reasonable, Handy," said McClure. "You'll get chucked out on your neck if you go into the College House——"

"It'll take more than those silly Monks to chuck me out," interrupted Handforth disdainfully. "Yorke slipped out of my way when lessons were over, but I'm going to get hold of him soon! By George! I'll pulverize him!"

Handforth was quite determined, and his chums knew that it was a hopeless task even to attempt to dissuade him from his object. Yorke's nose had to be punched—and that's all there was about it.

Handforth did not consider the possibility of getting into trouble himself.

He never counted the odds, and was quite willing to enter a hornets' nest if occasion demanded.

He would regret it afterwards, of course, but he never realised the danger until it was too late. Consequently, Handforth was a record breaker in the way of finding trouble.

Church and McClure had fears for their chief, and they naturally wanted to give him a word of warning. They might just as well have attempted to warn a doorpost.

"Well, it'll serve the ass right—that's one thing," remarked Church, after Handforth had passed out of the Ancient House. "He'll come back looking a bit of a wreck, I expect. It ought to teach him not to be so jolly pig-headed."

"Teach him?" repeated McClure, with a sniff. "Is it possible to teach Handy anything? He's like a mule—only worse! If he doesn't get half-skinned in the Monks' camp, I shall be surprised."

Meanwhile, Handforth strode across the Triangle with a light of determination in his eyes. He arrived at the College House, and entered the lobby boldly. The lobby was rather smaller than that of the Ancient House, and certainly far less impressive. Handforth looked round him with disdain.

"Miserable hole!" he murmured. "Thank goodness I don't board in this barn of a place. The best thing I can do is to go straight along to Study Q and barge in. Christine and Co. will be at tea, probably, and I shall be able to collar Yorke."

Handforth did not consider the possibility of being stopped before he arrived at Study Q. He strode along the passage, and only came to a halt when he heard the sound of approaching voices.

He paused for a moment, thinking—and he realised, for the first time, that his position was not one of absolute security.

He was in the rival House, far from friends, and he would certainly receive

no assistance if he fell into the hands of the Monks. Christine and Co. would take a special pleasure in ragging a prize victim like Handforth.

As usual, Handforth did not grasp these obvious facts until it was almost too late. He thought about retreating, but he heard voices from his rear, too. Either he had to hide, or he would have to fight his way out.

And that wasn't on Handforth's programme at all. He had come here to punch Yorke's nose—not to fight the whole Remove.

"What the dickens shall I do?" muttered Handforth, looking round him anxiously.

A solution suggested itself at once. He was just at an angle of the passage, and in the corner there stood a cupboard. It was generally used for old lumber, and the doors were always unlocked.

Handforth had no time to pick and choose.

He slipped into the cupboard, and drew the doors to. A second later several College House fellows came round the bend of the passage. They were Bob Christine, Talmadge, Yorke, Clapson, and Nation. From the other direction Page, Barron and Oldfield appeared.

The intruder was between two fires! Escape was cut off completely, and if he was discovered he would be "put through it" thoroughly.

So he remained in the cupboard, as still as a mouse.

"Hallo, you chaps," came Christine's voice, through the doors. "Just the fellows we were looking for. I've got a wheeze."

"Leave it until after tea," said Clapson.

"Rats!"

"It's a topping idea," chuckled Talmadge. "You wait until you hear it, my sons. We're going to jape those Ancient House bounders."

"Oh," said Clapson. "That's different. We haven't had a shot at the

Fossils for weeks. About time something was done."

The two parties of juniors had come to a halt—as was only natural—at the bend of the passage where they had met. Nothing could have been more unfortunate for Handforth—if, by chance, the door was opened.

But the situation had other possibilities.

The Monks had stopped in the passage, and were talking there. It seemed that Handforth would possibly overhear something of extreme interest. He did not believe in eavesdropping—but he couldn't help it here. For he certainly had no intention of betraying himself.

"Well, what's the wheeze?" asked Nation. "It'll have to be something pretty cute, you know. Nipper and his crowd are fairly wide awake——"

"Don't you worry," said Christine. "This wheeze will beat the lot of 'em hollow. It'll be the joke of the term."

"Well, get it out, you ass!"

"Let's hear it!"

"Is it a new idea?"

"Or an old hashed-up thing?"

"If you all speak at once, I can't answer," said Christine warmly. "Don't be such a set of asses! This wheeze is new in certain respects, although it's not exactly novel. Still, it's pretty certain that we shall be able to dish the Fossils all right."

"Oh, will you?" muttered Handforth grimly. "It seems to me that it's a jolly good thing I came. If I hear the details of this jape it'll be great! These bounders will be done in the eye beautifully."

Handforth took care to remain very still. It was something of an ordeal for him, but he managed it. And the Monks did not seem at all anxious to clear away from that particular section of the corridor. They had met there, and were discussing the scheme on the spot.

"The idea is mainly up against that chap with all the money—Singleton," explained Christine.

"The Hon. Douglas?"

"Yes."

"I'm blessed if I can see much fun in japing that rotter," said Page bluntly.

"You will when I've explained," replied Christine. "Besides, it'll be a joke against the whole crowd, really. I shall do all the work, and you chaps will simply laugh at the finish."

"If everything goes all right, that is," added Yorke.

"Well, naturally," said Christine. "But I've got plenty of confidence in myself, and I'm very certain I can work the dodge."

"But what is it, you ass?"

"Explain, you duffer!"

"Get it off your chest, you long-winded bounder!"

Bob Christine grinned.

"Well, one of the Ancient House chaps told me during lessons that somebody is coming to see Singleton this evening—some chap from London. He'll arrive at about seven o'clock."

"Well?"

"My idea is to dress up as a man," explained Christine. "I can wear a morning coat and top hat, and glasses, and do the thing properly. My wheeze is to go to Singleton's study, and spoof him up to the eyes——"

"But how the dickens can you?" demanded Clapson. "He'll know in a tick you aren't the right chap. You can't disguise yourself as somebody you've never seen!"

"That's all you know," said Christine. "As it happens, Singleton has never seen the chap, so he can't possibly tell. I shall go at half-past six, of course, and say I got here early. During that half-hour I can spoof everybody, and have no end of a game."

"Well, it's not so bad," admitted Clapson. "It all depends upon your ability to deceive Singleton and the rest. But if you're spotted over there—well, you'll be half slaughtered."

"I'll risk that."

"And how do you know this for certain?" asked Page. "That Ancient House chap might have been pulling your leg——"

"I didn't overlook that point," interrupted Christine. "So when I passed Mr. Lee a quarter of an hour ago I asked him if Singleton was expecting a visitor to-day. And Mr. Lee said a man was coming at seven. That's good enough, isn't it? Are you all satisfied?"

"Quite," grinned Clapson. "But somehow it doesn't seem complete enough to me. It ought to be elaborated. Why shouldn't you make the jape more thorough?"

"How?"

"Well, you could get some of the bounders to go to the village with you on some pretext," said Clapson. "Singleton and those chaps of Study C, Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West. A crowd of us could be waiting in the lane, and when you've lured them out we shall simply fall on them and give them socks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Two heads are better than one," said Christine. "That's a ripping idea, Clappy. It'll sort of put the finishing touch to the jape. We can't leave it till after tea, because there won't be enough time. I want you to come with me to the box-room where we keep the props of the dramatic club. I'm going to disguise myself, and I want you fellows to assist."

"Good!" said Page. "We're game."

"Tea can wait until later on," declared Talmadge. "Come on!"

Handforth breathed a sigh of relief—and then gave a gulp.

"What about this cupboard?" asked Yorke, grasping the door handle. "I believe there's an old topper here—and some clobber, too!"

"Good idea," said Page. "Let's have a look."

Handforth clenched his fists and got ready. At the same moment he bitterly realised that the jape was off. For, after the Monks had discovered him, they would be unable to carry out their scheme. But Handforth need not have worried.

"Rats!" said Christine briskly. "I don't want to wear the old rubbish

that's in there. I want good stuff. Let's buzz upstairs and examine the wardrobe. Buck up."

The juniors hurried away down the corridor, Handforth breathing a huge sigh of relief. He had escaped detection by a hair's breadth.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I thought it was all up!"

He waited until all sounds of the juniors had vanished. Then, when everything was quiet, he cautiously opened the cupboard doors, and peeped through the middle crack. As the cupboard was situated in the angle, at the corner, he could see up both passages quite distinctly.

The coast was clear.

And Handforth lost no time in taking advantage of the opportunity. He slipped out of the cupboard and hastened away towards the lobby as silently as he could manage—which was not at all silent, in any case.

But, more by luck than skill, he reached the open air in safety, and breathed a sigh of relief and triumph as he emerged.

"Great!" he muttered exultantly. "Everything's all serene—and I shall be able to spoil the wheeze beautifully!"

Handforth had been into the lions' den, and had emerged in safety. And he brought out with him most valuable information.

It did not seem that the Monks were to gain very much of a victory!

CHAPTER 13.

Handforth & Co. Do the Trick!

"WELL, I'm blessed!" exclaimed McClure, in surprise.

"Amazing!" said Church.

"He's not even scratched!"

"Not a bruise to be seen!"

Church and McClure gazed at Handforth in wonder. They were in Study D, and tea was just about ready. Handforth had strode in, and he was looking exceedingly pleased with himself, and there was a gleam in his eye.

"What's that?" he said as he closed the door. "I don't want any of your rot, my sons——"

"I don't expect he's been into the College House at all," exclaimed Church. "Have you, Handy?"

"Yes, I have," said Handforth.

"Did you see Yorke?" demanded Church.

"Well, no——"

"Oh, that explains it," said McClure. "I suppose you went in quietly, and then slipped out again. I thought you were going to punch Yorke's nose?"

"I've left that until later—there's no immediate hurry," explained Handforth. "I went into the College House, and I was just passing down the passage when a crowd of chaps happened to come along——"

"So you bunked?"

"No, I didn't bunk," roared Handforth. "I held my ground—well, I stopped where I was, anyhow," he added. "There was a cupboard just handy, so I slipped into it——"

"Is that what you call holding your ground?" asked Church, with a sniff.

"Anybody could do it!" added McClure.

Handforth glared.

"If you chaps are going to be idiotic, I'll dry up," he exclaimed threateningly. "I dodged into the cupboard, as I said, and stood there for four or five minutes. And that crowd of Monks remained outside—within two yards of me. I overheard the bounders planning a jape, and when they'd finished, I slipped out—and here I am."

"So they didn't see you after all?"

"No," said Handforth. "On the whole, I'm jolly pleased with myself, and the Ancient House ought to be grateful to me."

"Well, I can't see anything particularly wonderful in sticking in a cupboard—eavesdropping," sniffed Church, as he buttered the bread.

"Eavesdropping!" roared Handforth.

"You—you insulting rotter!"

"Rats! Didn't you listen to what the Monks said?"

"Yes, but——"

"Isn't that eavesdropping?"

"No, it isn't," retorted Handforth warmly. "I couldn't help overhearing. I bunked into the cupboard for safety, and those chaps stopped outside, jawing. You don't suppose I was going to give myself away, do you? Besides, what I overheard is of the utmost value—to us."

"What did you overhear?" asked McClure.

"Well, a gentleman is coming at seven o'clock to see Singleton," said Handforth.

"There's nothing much in that—I could have told you the same thing," retorted Church. "Singleton was mentioning it only five minutes ago, when we passed him in the passage."

"I overheard more than that, you duffer," said Handforth. "Christine is coming in at half-past six, dressed up—and he's going to try to spoof everybody. I expect he'd have done the trick, too, if I hadn't heard all that. But now we can spoil the little game, and turn the tables."

Church and McClure were interested at last.

"My hat! Rather!" said Church. "We'd better buzz along and give Singleton the tip. Perhaps it will be as well to warn Nipper, too. Then he can prepare a surprise for Christine."

Handforth regarded his chums pityingly.

"You brainy bounders!" he exclaimed with scorn. "You clever asses! Do you think I'm going to spoil everything like that? This is our affair—not Nipper's. We're going to deal with it, don't forget."

"Oh!" said McClure. "That's not a bad idea. But do you think we shall be able to manage it?"

"I don't think—I know we shall manage!" roared Handforth. "This is going to be our night out—and Christine will wish he'd never been born by the time I've done. He's coming at half-past six—alone. And I'm going to make things hot for him."

"Well, of course, you can do as you like," remarked Church; "but if I were you I should tell Nipper. It's not good enough just to biff Christine on the nose. You want something more—more elaborate."

Handforth sat down, and stirred his tea.

"We shall have something more elaborate," he remarked calmly. "I've been thinking it all out. For example, we can bring Christine along here, get him inside, and then paint his face."

"That's good!" said Church, nodding. "It'll be easy enough to wangle Christine into this study—and then we can get busy. What time is he coming, did you say?"

"Half-past six."

"Then we shall have to get tea over pretty smartly, and then rout out some paint," said McClure briskly. "We must be prepared, you know."

"Yes, of course," said Handforth. "I think we shall find two or three pots of paint in the tool-shed—"

"Not house-paint, you ass!" grinned McClure. "I mean grease-paint!"

Handforth nodded calmly.

"Perhaps it would be better," he admitted. "There's plenty of grease-paint in the Common-room cupboard. We want red and green and blue—in fact, all colours. We'll make the chap look a regular freak, and then exhibit him to the Remove."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure were inclined to believe that Handforth had some sense, after all. It would certainly be "putting one over" on the Monks, if everything turned out all right.

The chums of Study D hurried over their tea, for they had no time to spare. It would be necessary to wait on the Ancient House steps before six-thirty arrived, in case Christine was a little early.

Tea being finished, Church hurried down to the Common-room, and returned within a few minutes with several sticks of grease-paint. They

were highly-coloured, and the prospect of the would-be japer did not look rosy.

"Good!" said Handforth. "Just the very articles, Churchy. We've got a pile of rope here, and it'll only take a couple of minutes to tie the bounder up tight. Then we'll lead him round on a string!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three juniors switched off the electric light and passed out of the study. They stationed themselves just outside the Ancient House, and pretended to be discussing football with much animation.

Actually they were watching the gateway.

By the time six-thirty struck, the argument had assumed realistic proportions. Handforth was talking most of the time, and he was laying down the law with regard to the off-side game. Church and McClure listened, and were so interested that they nearly forgot their real object.

"Shush!" muttered McClure suddenly. "He's here!"

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"That chap—Christine, I mean—"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Handforth. "I nearly forgot!"

They had become so engrossed in the football "jaw" that they had momentarily overlooked the real issue at stake. But now they gazed across the Triangle, in the direction of the gateway, and observed a stranger approaching. At all events, he seemed to be a stranger.

The individual was rather short, inclined to be stout, and he was wearing a morning-coat and top-hat. He carried a small leather bag, and walked with short, brisk strides. As he came nearer, Handforth & Co. observed his features.

The man seemed to be elderly, for he wore slightly grey side-whiskers, and his face was rather ruddy in hue. Pince-nez adorned his nose, and he held his head in a quaint kind of peering attitude.

"Jolly good make-up!" muttered Church.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Anybody can tell he's Christine—look at his height; look at his shape! In my opinion, he's overdone it. Those whiskers don't look real, either, and his chivvy is too red!"

The newcomer halted half-way up the steps, and gazed at Handforth & Co. quizzically.

"Ah, my boys, can you tell me if this is the Ancient House?" he inquired in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir, this is the Ancient House," replied Handforth promptly, giving Church a nudge. "Is there anybody you particularly want to see?"

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there is," replied the other. "My name is Mr. Partington, and I am anxious to have a few words with a junior school-boy whose name is the Hon. Douglas Singleton. I think he boards in this house."

Handforth gave Church another nudge, and nearly knocked Church down the steps.

"I see, sir," said Handy. "I fancy I heard that Singleton was expecting a visitor. If you'll come this way, we'll trot you along. Perhaps you're feeling tired after your long journey across the Triangle—I mean, from London?"

Mr. Partington nodded.

"I'm certainly feeling somewhat tired," he admitted. "Travelling is always somewhat exhausting."

"Particularly walking, sir," said Handforth.

"Shut up, you ass!" muttered McClure. "If you give hints like that, you'll give the game away."

Mr. Partington entered the lobby, and looked about him with interest.

"H'm! Quite interesting!" he remarked. "I must confess that I expected to see something rather more impressive. However, this is only a small portion of St. Frank's, of course. If you'll be kind enough to lead me to Master Singleton, I shall be greatly indebted to you."

"This way, sir," said Church briskly.

They passed out of the lobby, along the Remove passage, and halted at the door of Study D. Handforth & Co. were rather anxious for a moment. Christine, of course, knew that it was their study, and he might be suspicious.

"This way, sir—step in, please!" said Handforth invitingly.

Mr. Partington blinked at the doorway.

"Is—er—Master Singleton here?" he inquired.

"It's all right, sir; you'll see in a tick," said Handforth. "Now then, you chaps, lend a hand!"

He gave the stout gentleman a violent shove in the back, and Mr. Partington, with a loud gasp, went hurtling through the doorway into Study D. He brought up with a bang against the table, and when he turned round Handforth & Co. were in the room, too—and the door was closed.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Mr. Partington. "How—how dare you? Boys, I protest strongly! How dare you treat me in this outrageous manner—"

"Chuck it!" grinned Handforth.

"What—what did you say?"

"You can't diddle us, you fathead!" chuckled Church.

The visitor fairly gulped.

"I—I cannot diddle you!" he repeated dazedly. "Good gracious me! This—this is simply outrageous! How dare you treat me in this manner, you impertinent young rascals? I shall report this behaviour to your headmaster—"

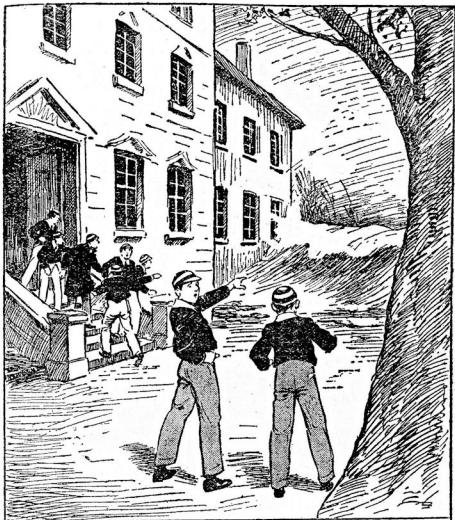
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul!"

"You're doing it pretty well, you know," grinned Handforth. "All the same, you can't spoof us, you rotter!"

Mr. Partington nearly dropped his pince-nez.

"Did—did I understand you to call me a rotter?" he asked blankly. "I've never been so insulted in all my experience—never! Good gracious! When I see your headmaster I shall complain in



"Look!" exclaimed Pitt. "The flood! Run! Jump into a tree—anything!" A great volume of foaming water was surging towards the school, washing away everything before it! "Oh, my goodness!" I gasped. The flood was upon us!

the strongest possible language, and I shall not be satisfied until you are all severely punished!"

Handforth & Co. roared.

"Can't you ring off, you silly josser?" asked Handforth. "If you think you're diddling us, you're mistaken! I'd know your voice in a tick—and you needn't think that that disguise is any good!"

"Dis-disguise!" stuttered Mr. Partington.

"Well, what you call a disguise," amended Handforth. "Why, a kid in the Second could do it better than that! No real chap has got cheeks of that rotten colour——"

"This—this is beyond all endurance!" shouted the visitor furiously. "I can only assume that you have brought me here with the deliberate intention of insulting me!"

"And look at your giddy whiskers!" went on Handforth. "Anybody can see they're false——"

"False!" roared Mr. Partington. "False!"

"Yes, as false as your blessed wig!" grinned Handforth. "And your voice is all put on, too! The best thing you can do, my son, is to own up. If you go down on your knees, and say you're sorry, we'll let you off lightly."

The visitor turned to McClure.

"This—this boy is mad!" he panted huskily. "It seems that you are all mad! Can it be possible that you are making some mistake——"

"Does it well, doesn't he?" chuckled McClure. "But the best thing we can do is to rope him at once, and apply the giddy grease-paints. You're in for it nicely this time, Christine. It'll teach you not to try any of your funny business in the Ancient House!"

"Christine!" said the visitor, panting hard. "My name's Partington! I am a solicitor, and I order you to open that door and to let me go free! Furthermore, I shall report—— Great heavens! How dare you lay hands on me? Release me at once, you wretched youths!"

Handforth glared.

"Wretched youths, are we!" he belated. "All right, my son! That'll mean an extra bump when we get you tied up!"

Mr. Partington was quite helpless in the grasp of the three strong juniors. They had the rope round him in next to no time. Church looked at his chums with a peculiar light in his eyes. His face had been within a few inches of Mr. Partington's, and Church was rather scared.

"I—I say, you chaps," he whispered, "I believe we've made a bloomer! This—this hair is real, you know—they're real whiskers! Oh, my goodness! We've collared the real chap!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Look at this!"

He grabbed at Mr. Partington's hair, and it came away in his hand—revealing a head which was as bald as a billiard ball. Mr. Partington let out a whoop, and Handforth & Co. went pale.

In no circumstances was it possible for that head to belong to Bob Christine, of the Remove. Handforth was shivering now, and he grabbed frantically at Mr. Partington's whiskers—in order to make doubly sure.

"Ow! Yaroo!" roared the unfortunate gentleman. "Boy, you shall be expelled for this—this outrage——"

"They're real!" said Handforth faintly. "Oh, my only topper! We've made a bloomer. This is the real Mr. Partington—not Christine at all!"

The chums of Study D were staggered. They knew that they had committed a terrible offence, and they had visions of public flogging and expulsion. Nothing less than the sack could possibly be the result of this outrage.

Mr. Partington had been dropped like a hot brick—which was rather unfortunate. With his feet bound already he found it difficult to stand, and he collapsed upon the floor with a thud.

The sudden shock brought Handforth & Co. to their senses.

"Just a minute, sir," gasped Church. "We'll take the rope off."

"Here's your wig, sir," said Handforth, placing it on backwards. "My hat! It doesn't seem to fit right! It's all a mistake, sir!"

"A mistake!" bellowed Mr. Partington, regaining his feet. "You—you dare to say that—after you have grossly assaulted me! After you have treated me in a manner which can only be described as ruffianly! I shall take full care that you are expelled from this school."

Handforth gulped.

"You—you see, sir, one of our fellows planned to play a joke on us," he explained. "This chap knew you were coming, and meant to spoof us——"

"His idea was to disguise himself and pretend that he was you," put in Church anxiously.

"And we thought that you were our chap in disguise, sir," said McClure. "It's all a mix-up, sir, and we're frightfully sorry. Until we pulled your wig off, we didn't know."

Mr. Partington, having adjusted his wig to his satisfaction, and feeling rather more comfortable, eyed the juniors sternly.

"Have you been telling me the truth?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir, honour bright!"

"Absolutely the truth, sir!"

"We wouldn't dream of insulting a visitor, sir," panted Church. "But we were so sure that you were Christine in disguise—that's the chap's name—that we went for you baldheaded—— I mean——"

Mr. Partington frowned, having been unfortunately reminded of the worst aspect of the affair.

"You deserve to be soundly flogged!" he said stiffly. "But I think I can understand your mistake now that you have explained. I am beginning to realise that you did not maliciously attack me, but did so under a mistaken impression."

"That's right, sir, exactly."

"Are—are you going to report us, sir?" asked Church anxiously.

"I'm not quite certain," said the visitor. "It all depends, my lad—it all depends. I shall think the matter over, and do as I think fit. That you deserve punishment of some kind is obvious."

"But—but can't you tell us at once, sir?" asked Handforth humbly. "We shall be in terrible suspense if you leave it undecided. We can't tell you how upset we are, sir. What a mercy we found out in time—we were going to smother your face in grease-paint, sir!"

"Dear me! Then it seems that I have escaped an even worse ordeal," said Mr. Partington. "Well, my boys, seeing that you are so contrite, I will overlook the matter—providing that you do not discuss it among your school-fellows. If you will give me your word that you will keep the incident quiet, I will say nothing."

"We won't breathe a word, sir."

"On our word of honour, sir!"

"Honest Injun, sir!"

Mr. Partington smiled.

"Very well," he said. "We will let it go at that."

And, picking up his hat, he withdrew from Study D. Handforth & Co. stared at one another, and looked somewhat fagged.

"My hat!" said Church. "What a narrow squeak!"

"Well, he's a decent old bird—by George, he is!" said Handforth. "I didn't think we were going to get out of it. Just fancy us making a bloomer of that sort. We'd better go along and see where the real Christine is."

But when the heroes of Study D went out in search of the japer they could see no sign of him. It was fairly obvious, in fact, that Mr. Partington's early arrival had upset the Monks' game, and it had apparently been abandoned.

Handforth & Co. had blundered badly, but good luck had been with

them—in the guise of Mr. Partington's good nature. If the visitor had been of a crusty disposition, it would have been very bad indeed for Study D!

CHAPTER 14.

A Very Serious Matter.

MR. PARTINGTON walked down the Remove passage rather aimlessly. He was feeling decidedly more comfortable now, and once or twice he chuckled—as he recollected the blank dismay of the juniors who had made the mistake.

As it happened, I came along the passage with Sir Montie Tregellis-West at that moment, and we both regarded the stranger with some surprise.

"Begad! I wonder who this imposin' lookin' gentleman is," murmured Sir Montie. "A visitor for somebody, I suppose."

"Anything we can do, sir?" I asked politely, as the stranger reached us.

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Partington. "I should like you to direct me to the study which is occupied by Master Singleton."

"Study N, sir; just along the passage, on your right," I replied. "You can't mistake it if you keep straight on, sir."

"Thank you, my boy—thank you very much," said the stranger.

He passed on, and Montie and I entered Study C, still wondering who the visitor could be. But it was none of our business, in any case. Mr. Partington looked eminently respectable.

He came to a halt outside Study N, tapped upon the door, and entered.

"Dear me!" he murmured.

The study was in darkness, which proved that Singleton was not there.

And just then Pitt and Grey came along and paused at the doorway.

"Looking for Singleton, sir?" asked Pitt.

"Yes, my lad, I am."

"I'm afraid I don't know where he is at the moment, sir," said Pitt. "Do you know, Jack?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Grey.

"Never mind, my boys—never mind," said Mr. Partington. "I can see the lad later. At the moment I will go to the headmaster's study, if you will be good enough to direct me there."

"With pleasure, sir."

Pitt volunteered to escort the visitor to the Head's door, and very shortly they arrived. Mr. Partington was not exactly sorry; for, upon second thoughts, he thought it just as well to see Dr. Stafford first.

"Ah, my dear sir, I was expecting you," said the Head, as Mr. Partington entered. "Come in, Mr. Partington. Please take a seat and make yourself quite at home. You may go, Pitt."

"Yes, sir," said Pitt, closing the door.

Mr. Partington made himself comfortable.

"I received your letter this morning, my dear sir," said the Head.

"As you will have gathered from it, Dr. Stafford, I am the senior partner in the firm of Partington and Dodd, solicitors," said the new arrival. "And I have come to you with reference to one of your scholars—the Hon. Douglas Singleton, to be exact."

"Ah, yes," said the Head. "I know the lad slightly. I think he is in the Fourth Form, which we call the Remove."

"That is so," agreed Mr. Partington. "Have you any idea of Singleton's mode of living?"

The Head raised his eyebrows.

"Surely he lives as the other boys do?" he asked. "I am not intimately acquainted with the movements of junior boys, I must admit, but I seem to have an impression that Singleton is rather extravagant. One or two of my masters have mentioned that he is somewhat lavish in regard to his study furniture."

"But you have no idea of Singleton's real expenditure?"

"I cannot say that I have," replied the Head.

"Then, my dear sir, I'm afraid I am

about to give you something of a shock," said Mr. Partington gravely. "Singleton's affairs are nominally in my hands, but, unfortunately, the lad has complete control over his own money. It is not necessary for me to go into any details at the moment, but all I need say is, owing to some legal point, the boy is in a position to draw upon his fortune exactly as he pleases. I am powerless to stop his expenditure. His legal guardian, I may add, is at present in South America, and we cannot possibly get in touch with him."

"That is rather awkward," said the Head. "But I must confess, sir, that I do not quite follow your argument. It is not within my power to interfere with the lad—any more than it is within yours. So long as he conforms to the school rules, I can do nothing. He is at liberty to spend his money as he pleases."

"I will grant you that," agreed Mr. Partington, "but I cannot help being convinced that the boy has too many opportunities of giving way to his mad desire for spending money. The lad is a most appalling spendthrift."

"Has he spent so much, then?"

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Partington. "You will be appalled when I tell you—which I shall do presently. For I have come to St. Frank's with two objects in view. Firstly, I want to speak to Singleton, and I want you to arrange things so that he will have fewer opportunities of getting about. Secondly, I am determined to reason with the lad myself."

"The latter will be by far the more profitable, I dare say," said the Head. "I really cannot see how I can interfere in the matter, Mr. Partington. I cannot very well take away the lad's liberties. That would not be fair to him."

"But you do not realise how much money he has spent in less than a single term—in less than two months, I might say," said Mr. Partington. "I almost fail to credit the truth myself—"

"You must remember that a boy

needs a certain amount of money in a school of this type, my dear sir," said Dr. Stafford gently. "There are some pupils here who spend as much as five and ten pounds weekly—although such expenditure does not meet with my approval. Singleton is a junior, I will admit, and two or three pounds a week ought to be ample for his needs—"

"Good gracious!" interrupted the visitor. "Two or three pounds!"

"Singleton has been spending more than that?"

"More!" shouted Mr. Partington. "More!"

He jumped up excitedly, and paced the room, much to the Head's astonishment.

"It is obvious to me, my dear sir, that you have no understanding of the true position," he exclaimed quickly. "You have not the faintest idea of the truth. Singleton has been at St. Frank's less than one term, as I said before, and during that period he has spent, not one thousand pounds, but very many thousands!"

The Head started.

"Nonsense, sir," he said sharply.

"You will pardon me, Dr. Stafford, but I am not talking nonsense," exclaimed Mr. Partington. "I will tell you the truth bluntly. And the truth is this. Singleton has squandered a sum which roughly amounts up to one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. Now, perhaps, you will understand my anxiety."

The Head rose to his feet, his face grim.

"You are jesting with me, surely?" he said, with ominous quietness.

"I am speaking the truth."

"You tell me, in all seriousness, that a junior boy in this school has squandered a hundred and twenty thousand pounds in less than two months?" said the Head. "You actually wish me to believe that, sir?"

"I have stated a simple fact," said the other. "It is the truth, Dr. Stafford, and I am not at all surprised that you are staggered."

"Good heavens!"

The Head sat down again, looking rather pale.

"One hundred and twenty thousand pounds," he repeated almost dazedly. "It is unbelievable—it is incredible! Frankly, Mr. Partington, I think there must be some terrible mistake about this. No boy—no man—could spend that amount of money in such a short time. I am absolutely at a loss for words."

Mr. Partington nodded.

"And yet it is the truth," he said. "Do you blame me for coming here, Dr. Stafford? Do you wonder that I have requested you to speak to the boy, and to curtail his liberties?"

"I don't wonder at all! I am rather astounded that you did not come to me before—weeks ago," said the Head grimly.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have been away from London on business for several weeks," said Mr. Partington. "I only returned ten days ago—to find that Singleton had spent twenty thousand pounds. That worried me sufficiently, I will confess. But within this last week he has squandered a further hundred thousand."

"But how?" asked the Head. "In heaven's name, how?"

"I cannot possibly tell you, for I do not know myself," said the solicitor. "But I do know that the money has been withdrawn from the boy's banking account."

"But can you do nothing to stop it?"

"Nothing whatever—until we hear from the lad's guardian."

"It is simply appalling," said the headmaster. "The boy must be mad. Judging from what you have told me, I imagine that he is something of a millionaire——"

"That is just the pity of it—he is not," interrupted Mr. Partington. "Singleton has already run through half his fortune. Think of it, sir—half his fortune in less than two months!"

"It hardly bears thinking about," said the Head huskily. "Why, before

the term is ended he will be a pauper!"

"Unless something is done," said the other.

"Something shall be done—you may be sure of that," declared the Head grimly. "If I had known of this before, I would have taken immediate steps. But what could I do when I knew nothing? Have you no idea at all as to where the money went?"

"Well, I only know that two cheques at least were drawn in favour of a man named Philip Smith Gore," said Mr. Partington. "Those cheques represent three-fifths of the amount which Singleton has squandered, so it seems that this man has some power over the lad."

"Do you know who he is?"

"I have not the faintest idea."

"Have you not attempted to find out?"

"Naturally," said the solicitor; "but so far I have been unsuccessful, and, as a last resource, I have come to you. I sincerely hope that you will be able to make an impression on the boy. I shall make an attempt to reason with him, too."

"Reason with him!" echoed the Head. "Reason, indeed! I shall demand to know the truth—I shall lecture the lad in the most severe terms. And, further, I shall positively forbid him to spend more than five pounds weekly! Furthermore, I shall make him tell me who this Mr. Gore is!"

"You will do well if you succeed," said the solicitor. "If we can lay our hands upon Mr. Gore, there may be some hope of regaining possession of the lost money. I had intended speaking to Singleton first, but I am rather glad now that I failed to find him."

The Head did not reply. He had seated himself again, and was drumming his fingers upon the blotting-pad, and frowning thoughtfully at the ink-pot.

"A junior boy—one hundred and twenty thousand pounds!" he murmured. "I cannot understand how he had the opportunity—— Good gracious! It is stupendous. Mr. Part-

ington. Years ago we had a senior boy here who spent ten thousand in the course of one term—and that was deemed to be positively staggering. But this—this is unheard of; it is unprecedented."

"That is what I thought," said the visitor. "Well, sir, do you intend to have Singleton here at once?"

"Most certainly," said the Head. "I will ring."

He pressed the bell on his desk.

"I think it is better that we should both be here," said Mr. Partington. "Possibly we may be able to make an impression—although, I must warn you, Singleton is decidedly self-willed. Moreover, you must not overlook the fact that he is complete master of his own money."

"I will remember those facts," said the Head quietly. "I will do my best — Ah, Tubbs, I want you."

The page-boy had just entered the Head's study.

"Yes, sir," he said respectfully.

"You must find Singleton of the Remove, and bring him to me as soon as possible," said the Head. "Bring him back with you, Tubbs, and do not mention that I have a visitor."

"Right, sir," said the page-boy. "I'll be as quick as I can."

He hurried off, and the two gentlemen waited grimly for the appearance of the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

CHAPTER 15.

On the Carpet!

"**S**EEN Master Singleton, sir?" Tubbs asked the question in the Remove passage. De Valerie and Hart were just passing along, and they paused.

"He's in the study, I think," replied Hart.

"He ain't, sir," said the page-boy. "I just looked in, an' the study's all dark. I can't find him nowhere—"

"Singleton's in his study," repeated

Hart. "I saw him go in ten minutes ago. I expect he's sitting in the dark. He seems to be a bit moody this week."

"Thank you, Master Hart!" said Tubbs.

The page-boy turned, and bumped into a junior who was just coming along. The junior was Timothy Tucker, of the Remove.

"Sorry, sir," grinned Tubbs.

"Don't mention it, my dear sir," said T.T. "Don't mention it. It is quite all right"

The page-boy grinned—he couldn't help it. Tucker was a very peculiar junior, and he was already referred to by many fellows as the comedian of the Remove. Certainly he always kept the juniors amused. He was a comedian unconsciously; he couldn't help it.

"How goes it, T.T.?" asked De Valerie cheerfully.

"The position is this," said Tucker. "I am looking for Pitt. I arranged to meet him, and he has failed to turn up. H'm! Most careless of him."

"Awful!" chuckled Hart.

"Well, it cannot be helped," said T.T.

He wandered down the passage.

"Hallo! Here's the giddy millionaire," said Hart. "Whither bound, Singleton?"

The Hon. Douglas had appeared with Tubbs, and he paused.

"It's a frightful bore," he explained languidly. "The Head wants me for something—goodness knows what."

"Trouble?" asked Hart.

"I expect so," said Singleton calmly. "I hear that my solicitor has called. But troubles don't worry me."

He went with Tubbs to the head-master's study, and lounged in.

"Ah, Singleton, I wish to have a serious talk with you," said Dr. Stafford. "Tubbs, you may go."

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs.

He went, and closed the door.

"Anything important, sir?" asked the Hon. Douglas. "Hallo, you're Mr.

Partington, I believe? How goes it? You're looking pretty bright."

"I am not feeling bright, my lad," said the solicitor severely.

"No?" said Singleton. "That's bad."

"Singleton, you must address Mr. Partington respectfully in my presence," said the Head grimly. "He has brought me most astounding news concerning yourself. I am amazed to hear such startling news concerning your recent expenditure of money."

The Hon. Douglas sighed.

"Egad! Somehow I had an idea that the subject would be concerning money," he said. "What's the trouble, sir?"

"First of all, Singleton, I must tell you that I have been totally unaware of these facts until this evening," said the Head. "Had I known of them earlier, I should have taken immediate steps to alter your—your disgraceful conduct."

"Disgraceful, sir?"

"That is the only word I can use which fitly describes the position," declared the Head.

"Hang it all, sir, I can do as I like—"

"You will be silent, my boy!"

"But——"

"Let me speak, Singleton," snapped the Head. "Ever since you have been at St. Frank's, you have, it seems, spent money in the most reckless fashion. I have heard one or two remarks concerning your extravagance, but I did not dream that you had been so extravagant as to spend your money in thousands of pounds."

Singleton sighed again.

"Any more, sir?" he asked patiently.

"There is a lot more, my boy," said the Head. "You have been brought here because I want you to tell me how you have spent this money, and why. Mr. Partington informs me that since you came to this school you have squandered no less than one hundred and twenty thousand pounds—in fact, half your fortune."

Singleton nodded.

"Something like that, sir," he said calmly.

"Do you admit that you have squandered the money?"

"No, sir."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Partington.

"Why, you cannot possibly deny——"

"I didn't squander it, sir," said Singleton. "I invested it."

"Invested it?" echoed the Head.

"That, of course, is different."

"Singleton is merely attempting to get out of his responsibility," said Mr. Partington sharply. "He has invested nothing. I have made every inquiry possible, and there is no trace whatever of the investment. Moreover, he is not old enough to deal with anything of that nature."

"Singleton, how did you invest the money?" asked the Head.

"I can't tell you, sir."

"But I order you to tell me!" exclaimed the Head.

"I'm sorry, sir, but it can't be done."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "You dare to defy me, Singleton?"

"I'm not defying you, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "But this thing happens to be my business—that's all."

"Upon my soul! This is simply past all bearing!" exclaimed the Head.

"Singleton, I order you to tell me how you invested that money."

"And I'm sorry I can't obey you, sir," said the Hon. Douglas warmly.

"Dash it all, I can do what I like with my own, I suppose? If you want to know the absolute truth, I spent the money—I spent every penny of it."

"Good heavens! You spent it?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"What on?"

"That's my business, sir," said the Hon. Douglas.

"I cannot permit you to continue in this strain, Singleton," said the Head grimly. "I want you thoroughly to understand, here, at once, that you must answer my questions. Do not

forget that I am your headmaster, and that you are under my control. While you are at St. Frank's, I'm your guardian, and it is your duty to obey me."

"Yes," said Singleton. "I quite understand that. I'm ready to obey you in everything connected with the school. But this is different. My own private money is my own concern. I have a perfect right to spend it as I choose, and there's not a soul on earth who can stop me."

The Head bit his lip.

"My boy, you must be reasonable," he said. "Good gracious me! Do you grasp the fact that you have squandered a fortune in less than eight weeks?"

"I had bad luck, sir," said Singleton. "I spent the money, but I shall get it all back again. You needn't worry. I can look after myself, thanks. There's no need to get alarmed."

"I am alarmed—and greatly concerned for your own good," said Dr. Stafford. "You are young—you do not realise what you have been doing, in all probability. For a boy of your age to spend such a sum of money is disgraceful!"

Singleton frowned.

"But it's my money," he protested. "I can do what I like with it, and I don't intend to answer any more questions. In this matter I am my own master, so you will greatly oblige me by changing the subject."

"I have no intention of doing so!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "You are trying my patience sorely, boy, and I may tell you that I am deeply distressed by your attitude. Mr. Partington informs me that you have drawn big cheques in favour of a man named Mr. Smith Gore. What have you to say, Singleton?"

The Hon. Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't seem necessary to say anything," he remarked.

"Do you admit that you have drawn these cheques?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then, perhaps, you will tell me who this Mr. Gore is?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Singleton. "Mr. Gore is a friend of mine."

"What is he?"

"A gentleman."

"A gentleman—that is no description!" exclaimed the Head. "What does Mr. Gore do? Who is he? Where does he reside?"

"They are all questions I can't answer, sir," replied the junior. "Mr. Gore is a friend of mine, and that's all I can say—and it's all I intend to say. And if I like to spend the rest of my money in the same way, I can spend it."

"Good gracious!" muttered Mr. Partington. "Open defiance!"

The headmaster breathed hard.

"You are a very difficult boy to deal with, Singleton," he said as calmly as he could. "It is quite clear that you intend to defy me. Do you realise that it is within my power to expel you from the school?"

"Of course, I realise it, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "But you wouldn't do that—it wouldn't be playing the game."

"I shall certainly expel you if you continue in the same manner as you have been going on," declared Dr. Stafford grimly. "Now, Singleton, for the last time, will you tell me why you have spent these large sums of money, and who this Mr. Gore is?"

"I've said all I will say, sir."

"In other words, you refuse to tell me."

"If you like to put it that way, sir—yes," said Singleton. "The money is mine—mine, to do as I like with. I don't see that it concerns anybody else."

"Dear me," said the Head sadly. "I don't know what to make of this boy, Mr. Partington. He is certainly beyond my comprehension. It is clear that he intends to maintain this—this position he has taken up. Very well, Singleton, I will not question you further."

"Thank goodness! I—I mean thank you, sir," said the Hon. Douglas.

"But I wish to tell you that you must

not continue your extravagance, in any circumstances," declared the Head. "I will not permit you to spend your money as though it were of no value."

"That, again, sir, is my concern——"

"Enough!" snapped the Head. "You apparently think that you can do just as you like. You cannot, Singleton. In the future, I shall see that your movements are restricted."

The Hon. Douglas started.

"Restricted, sir?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Dr. Stafford grimly. "It is fairly clear that you are not to be trusted out of bounds of this school. You could not have spent all that money within the four walls of St. Frank's. Temptations came in your way, and you succumbed—and perhaps that is only natural with a weak-willed boy such as you have proved yourself to be."

"Thank you, sir," said Singleton smoothly.

"Therefore, in future, as I have just said, your movements will be restricted," said the headmaster. "From henceforth, Singleton, you will be confined to the school precincts—that is to say, you are forbidden to move out of the gates—in any circumstances whatsoever."

Singleton turned red with growing wrath.

"And how long is this to last, sir?" he demanded.

"Throughout the term."

"But it's a deuced imposition!" roared the Hon. Douglas. "I've done nothing to deserve this treatment! I've got as much right to go out as the other fellows——"

"You have surrendered your right to the freedom of the other boys," said the Head. "And I can see that the only method of keeping you in check is to curtail your liberties. I regret to do so, Singleton, but it is for your own good. From now onwards, you will not go out of school grounds unless you have a special permit from myself or your Housemaster, Mr. Lee. If you break this rule, you'll be flogged!"

"All right, sir; I expect I shall be flogged a good few times!" said Singleton savagely.

"You mean that you will deliberately disobey me?" roared Dr. Stafford. "Good gracious! You are unendurable, Singleton! I shall take heed of what you have said—and you can understand that you'll be carefully watched. To-night, and every night in future, you will sleep in a small bed-room, instead of in the dormitory. And Morrow, of the Sixth Form, will sleep with you."

Singleton fairly shook with anger.

"It's shameful, sir! It's not playing the game! I've a good mind to leave the school altogether——"

"Don't talk wildly, boy!" said the Head. "Mind you, if you show visible signs of improvement during the next two weeks, I may be disposed to make a concession. But, for the present, you will do as I order."

"And what if I refuse, sir?"

"In that event, you will be expelled," said Dr. Stafford.

For a moment it seemed that Singleton was about to make a violent outburst. But, by a huge effort, he held himself in check. He clenched his fists, looked round him helplessly, and then glared at the Head.

"May I go, sir?" he asked between his teeth.

Dr. Stafford nodded; and the Hon. Douglas walked to the door and passed out.

Dr. Stafford and Mr. Partington were rather pleased. They had an idea that they had conquered the obstinate junior. But in that idea they were quite wrong—as the Head was very soon to learn!

The Hon. Douglas Singleton was a hard nut to crack!

CHAPTER 16.

The Rebel Party!

"HALLO! What's wrong?" asked Fullwood, in astonishment.

He had just entered Stud N with Gulliver and Bell. The light

was full on, and the Hon. Douglas was pacing up and down the study, a cigarette between his lips, and his eyes glittering.

"What's wrong?" Fullwood repeated.

"Eh?" snapped the Hon. Douglas. "Come in and shut the door. I was hoping you chaps would come along. I want to speak to you."

The door was closed, and the nuts regarded the dandy of the Remove with open astonishment.

"Trouble?" asked Bell curiously.

"Trouble's not the word!" shouted Singleton. "I can tell you I'm furious! I've been gated!"

"Phew!"

"For how long, Duggy?"

"All the term!" said Singleton.

"But what on earth for?" asked Quiliver.

"Because I've been spending money too freely—my own money, mark you!" said Singleton bitterly. "So, if you please, I've got to be kept indoors—like an infernal baby!"

"That's a bit steep, you know," said Bell seriously. "We won't be able to go out with you, Singleton."

"He can sneak out after lights-out—"

"Can I?" said Singleton fiercely. "That's all you know! The Head has put the ban on that, too! To-night, and every night in future, I've got to sleep in a separate bed-room—with a prefect to guard me!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"That's a bit rotten!"

"It's not only rotten—it's unbearable," said the Hon. Douglas. "What am I going to do about Mr. Gore? I can't get out to meet him—I can't have any more flutters—I can't do anything!"

"Perhaps that's why you're being gated—"

"Of course, it's why," said Singleton fiercely. "That's just the object of it. That old fool of a Partington has come here, and the Head says that I'm not going to be allowed to spend any more

money. So I'm being wrapped up in cottonwool. I don't know what I'm going to do—but I'm jolly certain I won't stick it!"

"Of course you won't," said Fullwood. "Dash it all, you must have a bit of freedom!"

"I've got an idea in the back of my head—but it's not quite complete yet," said the Hon. Duggy slowly. "You fellows are with me, aren't you?"

"Of course."

"Good! It's just as well to know that I've got support," said the Hon. Douglas. "I can tell you at once that I'm not going to put up with this imposition. I can't very well break bounds, because it'll mean a flogging every time—and perhaps the sack. So I shall have to think of something else. But, before I start on the new line, I want to know how many supporters I can rely on."

"Quite a crowd, I should say," said Fullwood. "But let's get this thing clear. 'Supporters in what? What do you want support for?'"

"Rebellion!" said Singleton grimly.

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"What?"

"Rebellion!" repeated the Hon. Douglas. "I don't mean to say that we shall break out at once, but I want to know how many fellows will back me up. I mean to revolt against this treatment—but I can't very well do it alone. If I have a crowd of supporters behind me I stand a better chance. Do you see the idea? How many chaps do you think will fall into line?"

"A couple of dozen probably."

"Splendid!" said Singleton. "Look here, you fellows might do me a favour. Go round to the studies, and put the thing to the chaps you think likely, and ask what they'll do. We might as well have a preliminary list."

"What about funds?" asked Fullwood.

"Funds?"

"Are you willing to pay the expenses of your supporters?" asked Fullwood.

"Or, in more blunt language, will you

give each chap a tip? It'll work wonders, I may add."

"Rather!" said Gulliver and Bell.

Singleton's eyes gleamed.

"It's a ripping idea," he declared. "I shan't be able to spend money on anything else for a bit, so I'll spend it on this. I'll pay you chaps twenty quid each if you back me all through——"

"Done!" said Gulliver.

"You bet!" added Bell. "I'm game."

"And so am I," said Fullwood. "But you don't mean to say that you'll give twenty quid to everybody who joins the party?"

"Well, no," replied Singleton. "My idea is to offer ten pounds each—ten pounds if they'll join us. That's to pay their exes; but, of course, it'll really be a kind of tip."

"You can rely on a good few supporters," grinned Fullwood. "Anyhow, we'll go round and see."

"Good!"

Singleton was feeling much better after Fullwood & Co. had gone. He felt that he would be able to get the better of the headmaster, after all.

Exactly how he would run his rebellion he did not know. But he fully intended to get his own way in the finish.

He would certainly not remain a prisoner.

While he waited for Fullwood to return, he picked up a newspaper and scanned the pages in an aimless kind of fashion.

But suddenly his eyes caught a paragraph which claimed his attention.

"Egad!" he muttered.

He read the item through again. It was in the advertisement column, and it had attracted his attention because the word "Bannington" was most obvious, in conjunction with the other words "school for sale."

"BANNINGTON—SCHOOL FOR SALE.

"The splendid residential school, known as Beechwood College, situated on the outskirts of Bannington, Sussex, for sale, freehold. Price includes all

furniture, contents of class-rooms—in fact, everything, complete. The school has a good reputation throughout the county, and is in a most excellent financial position. Full particulars upon application to the headmaster, Mr. Rodney Briggs. Price, including goodwill, five thousand pounds."

"There must be a catch in it," muttered Singleton. "Five thousand quid. Why, it's nothing to me—nothing at all! Why, if only I can——"

But Singleton did not allow his thoughts to run much further. But he fully intended to visit Mr. Rodney Briggs on the morrow—gating or no gating. That advertisement had suggested an idea to him—a wild, insane kind of idea, it is true. But just then Singleton was feeling wild.

Fullwood & Co. turned up shortly afterwards, and they were all looking extremely pleased.

"Well, we've got a few supporters—at ten quid a time!" grinned Fullwood. "Study G is solid——"

"Who the deuce lives in Study G?" demanded the Hon. Douglas.

"Merrell, Marriott and Noys."

"Decent chaps?"

"Sports," replied Fullwood.

"Good! Who else?"

"Hubbard is with us, and so is Long," said Fullwood. "I think Clifton and Simmons will join in, too, and we can pretty well rely on Skelton and Eilmore and Lincoln. Doyle and Armstrong are a bit uncertain, but they'll probably cave in before long. And there's one or two others, too!"

"Well, that's a good start, anyhow," said the Hon. Douglas. "In fact, we hardly need any more. We've simply got to show the Head we're determined—and that's all that matters. As soon as he finds that a good many of the fellows won't stand this sort of treatment, he will cave in."

"He's bound to," said Gulliver. "But I should like to know what the game is. You're not suggesting that we should all go out on strike, are you?"

Singleton shook his head.

"No," he replied. "But we're up against the Head—that's the long and short of it. Leave it until to-morrow, and I'll give you further details. For the present I want to think things over."

"But you might give us a hint——"

"I can't, because I don't know exactly what to hint at," said the Hon. Douglas. "But let me wrestle with it alone, and I shall be all right. Anyhow, we're going to have some excitement."

"I reckon we are," said Gulliver. "Being up against the Head isn't much of a game. You seem to forget that we shall be on the worst side, and I'm not anxious to get the sack, for one."

"You won't get the sack," said Singleton. "The Head can't sack all of us—and, as long as we stick together, we shall be all right."

"Of course," said Fullwood. "Come on, you chaps."

They passed out of the study, leaving Singleton alone. The spendthrift immediately picked up the newspaper, and once more studied the advertisement.

That night Singleton did not sleep much. His mind was too full for sleep. Morrow was quite decent to him, and actually sympathised with the Hon. Douglas. The latter was somewhat morose, and said little.

He lay in bed, thinking of the scheme he had in mind. The Head's decision had come as a great blow to him.

For the stopper had been put on his little game—a most effective stopper, too. Confined to the school grounds, he would be unable to practise his little games; he would be unable to attend race meetings and card parties.

So something drastic was necessary.

The next morning Singleton rose in good time, and was looking quite cheerful when the Remove trooped in to breakfast. During morning lessons the Hon. Douglas was very much the same as usual—except for the fact that he was preoccupied.

But as soon as morning lessons were over, Singleton put on his overcoat and hat, and calmly walked out of the gate-

way—careless of whether he was seen. It was open defiance.

But Singleton had an object in view.

He just managed to catch the mid-day train for Bannington. Arriving there, he sought out Beechwood College. It turned out to be an old-fashioned place on the outskirts of the town—near the road which led to Bellton.

The school lay back from the road, and stood in its own grounds. The building itself was somewhat aged, but in a fairly good state of preservation. And the board in the big front garden announced Beechwood College, "a high-class boarding school for young gentlemen."

Singleton entered the place boldly, and requested to see Mr. Rodney Briggs. This gentleman came after a little waiting. He turned out to be a man of about fifty, tall, and rather forbidding-looking.

"Well, my lad?" he inquired, as he greeted Singleton in the hall. "What can I do for you?"

"I've come about the advertisement in the paper," said the Hon. Douglas. "I understand that this school is for sale?"

"It is," said Mr. Briggs.

"Well, I've come to buy it," said Singleton calmly.

"Indeed," said the headmaster. "Surely you are not serious?"

"Yes, I am," said the junior. "But I should like to hear more particulars. For example, what accommodation is there here?"

"Sufficient for eighty boys."

"Yes, but how many fellows are there in the place at present?"

"Fifty-two."

"That leaves room for twenty-eight more," said the Hon. Douglas. "Good, couldn't be better. And what about servants, and masters——"

"The school staff will remain, of course," said Mr. Briggs. "When the sale is effected everything will remain as it is now—except, of course, the ownership will be different."

"Are you the owner?" asked Singleton.

"No, but I'm acting as his agent in this matter," said the headmaster of Beechwood College. "I presume you are making inquiries for somebody else?"

"Not at all," said the Hon. Douglas. "But to get down to the facts. Who is the owner of this property?"

"Major Rigby," said the other. "He lives on the other side of the town, and he is in very failing health. He did not want to sell the place, for it is in a good financial position. But it is better, perhaps, that he should do so."

Singleton's eyes gleamed.

"Am I to understand that if anybody puts down five thousand pounds he buys the property?" he asked.

"Yes—intact."

"And the school will run on as hitherto?"

"Yes, of course," said the Head. "But the new owner will naturally introduce his own ideas—that, of course, cannot be prevented."

"What sort of a school is it now?" asked Singleton.

"Well, to tell the truth, young man, the discipline here is decidedly strict," said Mr. Briggs. "Far too strict for my own personal liking. The boys are kept hard at it continuously, and I do not fancy their lives are very happy. I shall be glad when the ownership is changed, in one way."

"It can be changed now—within two minutes, if you like," said the Hon. Douglas.

"I don't quite understand——"

"It's very simple," said the Hon. Douglas. "I'll buy the place!"

"You'll—you'll buy it?"

"Yes—spot cash!"

Singleton had produced his notebook, and he proceeded to take out a sheaf of banknotes. He handed Mr. Briggs the sum of five thousand pounds, and Mr. Briggs couldn't quite understand it.

"But I can't see what——" he began.

But Singleton proceeded to explain matters, and before half an hour had elapsed he had secured Mr. Briggs' promise that everything would be put in order for the sale to be made legal.

There was likely to be some trouble because Singleton was a minor, but perhaps this could be got over. Singleton had special privileges, as he possessed a fortune in his own right. And money, as he said, would do anything. At all events, he regarded Beechwood College as his own.

And he was to enter into possession on the following Monday.

There was certainly an exciting time ahead!

CHAPTER 17.

Supporters in Plenty!

"MEETING?" said Merrell.

"Exactly," said Fullwood. "The meeting is to be held down in the old vault, under the monastery ruins. It's the best place, considering, because we shall be private. We don't want Nipper and his beastly crowd nosin' about."

"Rather not," said Merrell. "I'll be there."

"At seven sharp, don't forget."

"Right."

Fullwood went round to the other juniors with the same story. A meeting had been called by the rebel leader—the Hon. Douglas Singleton. The majority of the fellows who were in the scheme decided to go merely for the sport of it. They did not think for a minute that anything would come of the meeting.

It was the evening of the same day that Singleton had gone to Bannington. The Hon. Douglas had not returned to St. Frank's until late afternoon—he had missed practically the whole of the afternoon lessons, and a good many fellows had assumed that he had run away.

But this, of course, was not the case. Singleton had merely been making his astounding plans.

A flogging had awaited him—not that he cared a rap. He considered that the game was worth it.

And, at seven o'clock exactly, the Hon. Douglas descended into the old vault of the monastery ruins, a place which had frequently been used by the juniors for secret meetings.

The vault was already occupied.

Fullwood & Co. were there, Merrell and his two chums were to be seen; Hubbard, Long, and a good many others had put in an appearance. The place was illuminated by means of candles.

"Here comes the rebel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No rot!" said Singleton. "I'm going to suggest a rebellion—but this will be a peaceful one, and in a good cause, too."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the style, Duggy!"

"Get busy on the speech, old son!"

Singleton rose upon a box, which had been placed there for his especial benefit. He looked round at the grinning faces, with his own countenance expressing tense excitement and grim determination.

"I want you fellows to realise that I'm serious," he said. "This affair is no laughing matter——"

"Of course not!"

"Go ahead, old son!"

"And it'll be a lot better if you don't interrupt so much," went on Singleton. "You all know the position, so it's not necessary for me to describe it again. The Head has gated me in the most unjust manner——"

"Shame!"

"He's gone too far!"

"We're with you, Duggy."

"We'll sign a petition with you——"

"A petition be hanged!" shouted Singleton. "That's not what I'm after. As you fellows know, I have decided to defy the Head—I'm up against Dr. Stafford. It'll pay you to help me in this affair, because——"

"We're going to get ten quid each!" grinned Merrell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll get the money if you agree to fall into line with me," said Singleton. "And I called this meeting to put the thing to you. In plain language, to put it bluntly, the idea is this—I'm going to open a rival school."

"A—a which?"

"Great Scott!"

"A—a rival school!"

"Yes!" shouted the Hon. Douglas grimly.

"Rot!" said Fullwood. "You must be off your head, Singleton."

"How can a junior start a rival school on his own?" demanded Marriott.

"He can—and he's going to," shouted Singleton. "I want to know if you fellows are willing to back me up. I may as well tell you that I've already bought the school——"

"You've—you've bought it?"

"Exactly."

"A—a real school?"

"A real school!" said Singleton. "It's called Beechwood College, and it stands just on the outskirts of Bannington——"

"Why, I've seen it many a time," shouted Hubbard. "It's quite a decent place. I've spoken to some of the fellows, too. They say it's a bit rough there, but it's quite a high-class place."

"Exactly," said Singleton. "And I paid five thousand for it this morning, in solid cash."

"Phew!"

"He's spoofing!"

"It can't possibly be true!"

"But it is true!" shouted Singleton. "That school is mine now—lock, stock and barrel. The details will be fixed up within three days, and I shall enter into full possession on Monday."

"Great Scott!"

"A—a rival school!"

"It's past belief!"

The juniors were now thoroughly interested and excited. At first they did

not believe Singleton's statement, but they were compelled to later. The Hon. Douglas had bought a school of his own!

"You see the idea?" he asked. "Every fellow who joins me must leave St. Frank's and come along to Beechwood College. The scheme is to dish the Head out of as many chaps as we can manage."

"It's impossible!" said Fullwood.

"Rather!" declared Bell. "We couldn't leave without our people's consent—and they'd never consent to a thing like that."

"My idea is to do it without asking anybody," said the Hon. Douglas grimly. "You can simply clear off on Monday morning, before breakfast. You'll all write to your people, explaining what you've done, and telling them that you'd rather be at Beechwood. It's a first-class place, so they can't object."

"Can't they?" said Hubbard. "My people would object pretty strongly."

"Besides, we should only get the sack from St. Frank's—"

"Nonsense!" said Singleton. "If the thing fails, the Head can't sack over twenty of us. If anybody gets expelled, it will be me."

The juniors were more excited than ever.

"My hat!"

"It's a jolly big scheme!"

"A bit too big, I'm afraid," remarked Marriott. "Besides, I'm not very keen on leaving St. Frank's. Beechwood College isn't much of an exchange, I must say. I've heard pretty rotten reports about Beechwood."

"What sort of reports?" asked Singleton.

"Well, reports that make me want to stop here," replied Marriott. "For example, the fellows are restricted awfully—locking up at six o'clock in the evening, and bed at nine, without supper. There are extra lessons, too; and the grub isn't everything it ought to be. I'd rather stay at St. Frank's."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's not quite good enough, Duggy."

"We're staying where we are."

"Yes, rather!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton looked round him grimly.

"It's not quite good enough, eh?" he asked. "Don't forget that you'll each get ten quid. And it may interest you to know that the conditions at Beechwood College will be totally altered from next Monday onwards."

"Altered?"

"Exactly," said Singleton. "I'm the owner now, and I've already given my instructions to the headmaster—"

"Your—your instructions to the headmaster!" gasped Bell.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Just listen to him!"

"That's what I want you to do," said the Hon. Douglas. "I'm the owner of this school, and it's in my power to give any orders I like. I have retained the services of all the masters, including the Head, and everything will go on as usual—except for the changes I mentioned."

"What changes are they?"

"I'll give them to you in detail," said Singleton. "Firstly, with regard to lessons, there will be nothing doing until ten o'clock in the morning. Lessons at Beechwood will start at ten, and will be over by twelve. Afternoon lessons will start at three, and will finish at four-thirty. That's the end of the day. There will be no prep. And Wednesday and Saturday will be half-holidays, as they are here."

"Great Scott! No prep!"

"An' only two hours in the morning and less in the afternoon!"

"It's too good to be true."

"It is true, anyhow," said Singleton. "Then there's the question of freedom. Locking up won't be until nine, and supper at nine-thirty. That brings me to the question of grub."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the most important point!"

"What about the fodder?"

"For breakfast there will be eggs and

bacon, generally—and plenty of it!" said Singleton.

"Great pip! That's living in luxury!"

"That's the idea," said Singleton. "Dinner will consist of four courses, and will be equal to any served in a first-class West End restaurant. Tea will be partaken of in your own studies—and the school will supply the tuck."

"Plain bread and butter!" sniffed Hubbard.

"No—anything you like," replied Singleton. "A school-shop is being prepared now, and it will be well stocked. At tea-time the fellows can go over there and get exactly what they want—free of charge."

"My only hat!"

"It'll be the best school going," said Singleton firmly. "Supper will be another fine meal. And there will be all sorts of other privileges which I can't detail here. In short, the school will provide the chaps with every luxury, and life will be easy."

The juniors were greatly impressed now.

"Are you coming in with me or not?" asked the Hon. Douglas. "That's what I want to know. Hands up those who join the movement!"

Every hand went up.

"Good!" said Singleton heartily. "That's ripping! You're all sports! We shall beat the Head yet!"

"Well, even if we don't, we shall have a bit of excitement," remarked Fullwood. "An' I dare say we can get some other fellows to join, too—some of the College House chaps."

"The more the merrier," said Singleton. "The more we have the stronger we shall be. The Head couldn't sack half the Remove—and that's what I'm aiming at. Just think of the sensation on Monday, when we all walk out!"

"By Jove, rather!"

The meeting broke up at last, and every junior who had taken part in it was determined to see the Hon. Douglas Singleton through. They held that he

had been unjustly treated, and they were all up against the Head.

Singleton had opened a rival school. On the face of it, it seemed a wild idea; but in practice, it might turn out all right. It remained to be seen what would happen.

CHAPTER 18.

The Deserters!

MONDAY morning dawned fine and clear.

For some curious reason, every junior in the Remove was up in record time. Those fellows who generally lazed in bed until the last minute were up before anybody else.

Teddy Long, for example, bounced out of bed at the first note of the rising bell. As a rule he stayed between the sheets until the last possible second—until he was hauled out on his neck.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Handforth, sitting up. "Who said the age of miracles was past?"

"Eh?" yawned McClure. "What's the matter?"

"Long's getting up—he's actually dressing!" said Handforth wonderingly. "Hubbard, too—and Merrell and Marriott—by George! I'm hanged if Fullwood isn't out as well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's certainly something wrong this morning," observed De Valerie.

"Look here, you chaps, what's on?"

"Nothing that matters to you," said Teddy Long importantly. "Before long you'll see what the game is—and then you'll be jolly jealous—"

"Shut up, you young fool!" snapped Fullwood.

Long shut up—mainly because he feared the boot which Fullwood held suggestively in his hand.

I did not fail to notice the signs.

"I'm blessed if I can quite make it out, my sons," I murmured to Sir Montie and Tommy. "Just look at them! All getting up as though a wager depended upon it."

"Dear fellow, it's most remarkable—it is, really!" declared Tregellis-West. "There's been somethin' the matter for the last two or three days. Most of the chaps have been fairly bubbling with excitement, and I've noticed that they're mainly the bounders of the Remove."

I nodded.

"I've noticed that, too," I said. "Exactly what the stunt is, I can't imagine; but I'm jolly sure that Singleton is at the head of it."

"Well, it's not our place to interfere," said Tommy Watson.

"There was some talk about a revolt," I went on. "At least, a whisper; but if these chaps start a revolt, they'll soon find themselves in the wrong box. The Head isn't the kind of man to be played about with."

"Begad! It'll be rather interestin' to see what happens, you know," observed Sir Montie. "But I fancy it'll fizzle out!"

"Let's hope so, anyhow," said Watson.

Fullwood & Co. and the others were dressing with all haste, and when they were all ready they marched downstairs in a body. Out in the Triangle eight or ten College House boys were waiting, all of them looking considerably excited—and somewhat nervous.

"I—I say!" asked somebody. "Are we really going?"

"Of course we're going!" said Gulliver. "Now, too!"

Altogether, there were twenty-two fellows, quite a formidable force. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was at their head, and he was looking determined. He, at all events, was intent upon seeing the thing through.

"Right!" he exclaimed briskly. "Quick march!"

The whole crowd of rebels passed out through the gateway, and marched down towards the village. Every junior carried a bag of some kind, containing enough personal articles to last a week or so. And in the village twenty-two letters were placed in the post office letter-box.

"Well, we've done that!" said Fullwood. "By to-morrow morning our

people will know all about it, and if they don't like the change—they can lump it! I expect we shall have to go back to St. Frank's before the week is out; but it'll be a fine bit of sport, all the same."

"Rather!"

The juniors crowded on to the early train which left for Bannington, and very shortly afterwards they arrived in the old town.

They marched straight to Beechwood College.

Outside the gates a crowd of boys were watching, and several shouts went up as the St. Frank's party was seen.

"Here they are!"

"Give them a cheer!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hallo!" said Bell. "How did these bounders know we were coming?"

"I happened to tell them," explained Singleton calmly.

As soon as they reached the grounds of Beechwood College, the St. Frank's fellows were surrounded by fellows of their own age.

And Mr. Rodney Briggs stood upon the steps of the school.

"So you have come over, boys?" he said genially. "It is a most extraordinary state of affairs, but I suppose you know what you are doing. In celebration of this occasion, to-day is to be a whole holiday!"

"Hurrah!"

"My hat! This is first rate!" said Hubbard. "I'm jolly glad I came to this school! What a ripping idea of Singleton's!"

"Yes, by jingo, rather!"

Mr. Briggs further intimated that there would be extra special food that day—a regular feast. The boys would be able to get accustomed to their new quarters, and acquainted with their new school-fellows.

The latter were highly excited.

"Just fancy!" said one of them. "This place has been bought by one of your chaps. He's really the Head now—Singleton, I mean. He can give orders just when he likes."

"Yes, rather!"

And, meanwhile, some exciting events were taking place at St. Frank's.

Nothing was particularly noticed until breakfast-time, and then, of course, it was quite apparent to all that something remarkable had happened to the Remove, for the Remove had shrunk in the most astonishing fashion.

"Nipper!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, the Form-master. "Can you explain the meaning of this remarkable state of affairs?"

"No, sir."

"Do you not know where the missing boys are?"

"I haven't the least idea, sir!"

"Most astonishing!" said Mr. Crowell. "I am completely at a loss. Fifteen or sixteen boys gone, and for no apparent reason! Is it possible that they have left the school grounds?"

"They have, sir," said Pitt. "I saw them go."

"And Singleton was amongst them, sir."

"Singleton!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, frowning. "But Singleton is forbidden to leave the school premises! Dear me! The boy will pay dearly if he has dared to defy the headmaster's orders!"

Breakfast progressed, but there was no sign of the missing juniors. The meal came to an end at last, and then there was a further outburst of excitement when news came along that a large party of boys had been seen in the village.

"Where the dickens can they have got to?" asked Watson. "What's the idea of going out like that? You can't call it a rebellion to desert the school. It seems a potty idea!"

Pitt chuckled.

"Well, we shan't miss the absentees much," he remarked. "They're mostly fellows we can easily do without—Fullwood and Merrell, and those sort. If they cleared off for good, it'd be all the better."

"That's one way of looking at it," observed Hart. "But you needn't kid yourselves that they've gone for ever."

We shan't be so lucky as all that. The bounders are certain to turn up again, like bad pennies."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Pitt. Meanwhile, the Head was rather alarmed.

He received the report at breakfast-time, but did not think much of it. He assumed that the missing boys would turn up before lessons. But now—The time arrived, but the boys did not.

Mr. Crowell came to report again.

"Well, Mr. Crowell?" demanded the Head. "Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"It is most amazing," said the Head, "for so many boys to leave the school in a body! Where on earth could they have got to?"

"I cannot possibly imagine, sir."

Ting, ting, ting!

The telephone-bell rang sharply.

The Head lifted the receiver from the instrument and placed it to his ear.

"Hallo!" he called.

"Ah! Is that you, Dr. Stafford?" came a voice.

"Yes. Who is it speaking?" said the Head.

"Singleton!"

"Eh?" exclaimed the Head. "What—what did you say?"

"I am Singleton!" came the voice over the wire. "I thought you might be interested to have a word with me, sir."

"Boy!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "How—how dare you act in this outrageous manner! You have deliberately defied my instructions!"

"That's all right, sir; I'm not coming back," said Singleton.

"What?"

"I have left St. Frank's for good."

"Good gracious!"

"It's a fact, sir!" came Singleton's voice. "You see, I got rather fed-up with the restrictions, and I don't see why I should stand it any longer. I mean to stay away from St. Frank's in future—I have found a better 'ole!"

The Head went nearly purple with anger.

"Boy!" he thundered. "Are you crazy?"

"Not quite, sir; but I should have been if I'd stayed at St. Frank's," said the Hon. Douglas. "If you want to know the truth, I've bought a school of my own——"

"You—you've done what?" gasped the Head faintly.

"I've bought a school."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, I thought you'd be a bit startled," said Singleton smoothly. "The fact is, sir, I couldn't stand it there, so I've come here, with a crowd of other chaps to keep me company. If you want my address, it's Beechwood College, Bannington."

"Great goodness!" panted the Head. "Are—are you actually serious, Singleton? Do you dare to tell me that you mean this?"

"Of course I mean it, sir!"

"And—and you have defied me?"

"Well, it went against the grain, I'll admit," said the Hon. Douglas. "But something had to be done, and as this school was for sale, I bought it. You needn't worry! We've got fine masters here, and we're all very comfortable. Good-bye, sir!"

Singleton rang off, and the Head turned to Mr. Crowell, fairly shaking with agitation and excitement.

"Mr. Crowell," he panted, "I hardly know what to say!"

"What has happened, sir?" asked the Form-master.

"Those boys, led by Singleton, have actually gone to Bannington," said the Head faintly. "Singleton has purchased a school——"

"What?"

"He has purchased it, and has taken those boys with him!" roared the Head. "I do not intend this to continue for one hour longer! Come! We will fetch Mr. Lee, and go to Bannington at once!"

But the headmaster of St. Frank's

was to find that he would have some difficulty in dislodging the Hon. Douglas and his supporters from the rival school!

CHAPTER 19.

Too Good to Last!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD stretched himself and yawned.

"This is what I call comfort, by gad!" he said languidly. "No more St. Frank's for me, thanks! This bally place beats it hollow! It was a brain-wave of Duggy's to work this stunt!"

"Rather!" agreed Gulliver lazily.

Bell grunted assent. The three precious nuts were in strange surroundings. The room they occupied was certainly not extremely luxurious; but the furniture was brand-new and of the most expensive quality; the carpet underfoot was a rich pile, and a very cheerful fire glowed in the grate.

Outside, the rain beat down pitilessly. It had been raining for two days, on and off, and previous to that there had been a large amount of bad weather. It seemed as though the elements were conspiring to make things very bad in Sussex.

But Fullwood & Co. did not care.

They were quite comfortable, and were enjoying themselves as never before.

"It's a good thing we joined Singleton's giddy party," said Bell. "Of course, there might be trouble over it, but we shall be able to face it all right. Personally, I'm goin' to refuse to budge from this place."

"Same here," declared Fullwood. "My pater will probably kick up a frightful dust—but he'll have to kick it up, that's all. I shan't care a jot. If he comes botherin' down here I'll tell him off."

"That's not the way to talk about your respected pater," exclaimed a voice in the doorway. "I'm surprised at you, Fully."

Fullwood turned, and beheld the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Oh, don't try to be funny!" said Fullwood. "It was you who got us to join your movement, Singleton—an' if we're to stick together, we shall have to defy our parents."

"There'll be no need for that," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "If your parents possess a grain of sense, they'll accept the new conditions without making a fuss. Dash it all, this school is as good as St. Frank's—and cheaper!"

Gulliver grinned.

"Of course, it's only natural that you'd say that," he remarked. "Considerin' the school is yours—your own property—it wouldn't sound right if you ran it down. I can't get the hang of it even now, you know. It's amazin' to think that you own this place, Duggy!"

"Yes, it is a bit startling," agreed Singleton. "But I simply had to do something, as you know. I wasn't going to remain at St. Frank's a prisoner. Here, in this school, I'm as free as the air."

"In fact, you've got twenty times as much freedom as you ever had before," said Fullwood. "That's the beauty of it. It's rippin' for us, too. We can go out when we like, an' if the Head kicks up a fuss—well, he'll have to deal with you."

"Being the owner," grinned Gulliver.

"Of course, we can't work it too much," said the Hon. Douglas. "Mr. Briggs is a decent sort, but he won't let things absolutely slide. He understands that his post as headmaster practically rests on me, and he'll take care not to do anything that I wouldn't approve of. But if we simply defy him, he'll resign—just for the sake of his own self-respect."

"But you've doubled his wages," said Bell.

"I know I have. I did that to keep him here," explained the Hon. Douglas. "He'd have cleared out on the spot, otherwise. I think I've worked things nicely, on the whole, and we can have a jolly decent time."

The nuts were apparently having a decent time already. Lessons were over

for the day, and yet the hour was only just four o'clock.

"I want you fellows to come along to my study," said Singleton, as he regarded Fullwood & Co. "This place is all right, but I'm never comfortable unless I'm in my own quarters. We can have a little gamble."

"Good!" said Fullwood. "That's the idea!"

The door opened, and a junior entered—somewhat nervously. Until the arrival of the St. Frank's fellows he had been the leader of the boys at Beechwood. His name was Coates, and he was quite a decent chap.

He regarded the nuts somewhat unfavourably. The air was blue with cigarette-smoke, and the whole atmosphere of the study was unhealthy.

"I say, you know," he remarked, "if Mr. Minns comes along, and sees all this smoke, he won't be particularly pleased —"

"And who may Mr. Minns be?" inquired the Hon. Douglas.

"He's the master of the Fourth," said Coates.

Fullwood yawned.

"Tell him he can go and eat coke," he said languidly.

"Mr. Minns isn't the kind of man you can speak to in that way!" exclaimed Coates grimly. "I just want to give you chaps a word of warning—that's all, Minns is down on smoking—"

"Look here," interrupted Singleton. "If he comes here interfering, he'll get the sack within two minutes. Don't forget that I'm boss of this show, and any master who displeases me will get cleared out—quick!"

Coates grinned.

"I thought you meant to carry on pretty much as usual," he said. "A junior can't very well be master, can he? And if you don't allow Mr. Minns and Mr. Briggs and others to conduct the school in the usual way—well, there'll be a pretty kind of mix-up!"

"You can clear out!" snapped Fullwood. "We didn't tell you to come here, you cad!"

The Hon. Douglas held up his hand. "My dear Fullwood, you are lacking in courtesy to a visitor," he said. "This gentle youth has done no harm. Personally, I rather like him. And his advice, when I come to think of it, is sound."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I mean that we can't go too far," remarked Singleton. "We can have things pretty well as we like, but we mustn't overstep the mark. Smoking is naturally forbidden, and just because I'm the owner of this school, it doesn't mean that you can take advantage of the fact."

"Rot!" said Fullwood.

"What's more," added the Hon. Douglas, "I'm not particularly struck with your behaviour, Fully."

"Eh?"

"This smoking, for example——"

"Why, you smoke, you ass."

"Not very often—and even then I don't enjoy a cigarette very much," said Singleton frankly. "I smoke just to keep others company—not because I like it. When I'm by myself I never touch a cigarette. But I must say you've been taking advantage of your position here."

"Well, of course I have——"

"Too much advantage, in my opinion," said Singleton. "Not two hours ago I caught you smoking in the passage—and that's absolutely inexcusable. In future, Fullwood, you'll please smoke in this study only."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Singleton," put in Coates.

Fullwood turned on him in a flash.

"Mind your own rotten business!" he roared. "Clear out of this study, confound you! If you don't go, I'll kick you out!"

"Steady!" grinned the Hon. Douglas. "Coates is all right—he's one of the best. Is there anything you particularly wanted, old son?"

"Well, yes," replied Coates. "It's always been a custom here for Fourth Form fellows to fag for the seniors. We've tried to put it down several times,

but there are some beastly bullies among the seniors, and we couldn't quite manage it. I was wondering if you could do anything?"

"Why, of course," said Singleton promptly. "Fagging of the Fourth isn't allowed. You'd better take me along to these seniors, and I'll interview them. There won't be any more bullying, my son."

"Oh, good!" said Coates. "Are you coming now?"

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"There's no time like the present," he replied. "Come on!"

"Good man!" exclaimed Coates heartily.

They passed out of the study, and walked down the narrow passage. It was very different from the wide, lofty corridors at St. Frank's. The distempered walls were dull, and covered with numberless pencillings and scratches. The floor was laid with linoleum, but the pattern had long since vanished.

"Who are these bullying merchants?" inquired Singleton, as they walked along.

"Seniors—members of the Fifth," said Coates. "The Fifth is the highest Form here, you know."

"Yes, I'm aware of that," said Singleton. "I mean, what are their names?"

"Oh, I see. The worst of the bunch is Fryer," replied Coates. "Then there's Evans and Hobson. They're the three bounders who cause all the trouble. They all share the end study in the senior passage."

"Good!" said Singleton. "Lead on, my son."

They soon arrived at their destination. The study was the largest in the school—that is, the largest boys' study. It was generally regarded as a sacred place by the juniors. The younger boys at Beechwood had always lived in fear and trembling of the bullies. Therefore, Coates was feeling particularly happy as he opened the door of the apartment. He had an idea that

the reign of Fryer & Co. was coming to an end.

He and Singleton entered the study.

Three big seniors were sitting round the fire. They were dressed in ordinary lounge suits; they were not particularly tidy, and they all had an appearance of aggressive superiority.

They glared at Coates, who entered first, but changed their expressions when they saw the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Hallo, young 'un," said one of the seniors. "Come in, you're quite welcome. Coates, you can shunt—or take a fat ear. Whichever you like, my son. We don't want you here."

"I'm with Singleton," said Coates gruffly.

"That's so," remarked Singleton. "Coates won't shunt until I shunt. We've come to have a heart-to-heart talk, my gentle beauties. Which member of this august company is Fryer?"

"I am," said one of the seniors.

"You look it," nodded the Hon. Douglas. "You look just like a Fryer, judging by the redness of your handsome face—"

"I don't want any sauce," snapped Fryer. "You may be the owner of this school, kid, but you're a junior. And you'd better realise that juniors at Beechwood are small fry—merely fags—"

"Hold on," interrupted the Hon. Douglas. "Just a word before you really get going. I'm given to understand that you have been in the habit of making Fourth Formers fag for you—"

"Of course they fag for us," snapped Fryer.

"And they always will, too," added Hobson.

"You bet!" said Evans, nodding.

"I'm not above taking a bet occasionally," said Singleton, "but I wouldn't take your money. If you want fags, you can choose them from the ranks of the Third—"

"Not likely," exclaimed Fryer. "The Third Form kids are too slow

for us. If you're not jolly careful, Singleton, we'll select you for this study! It seems to me you've got too much to say!"

The Hon. Douglas smiled.

"I don't intend to enter into any argument," he said. "I just want to give you a fair warning. From this moment I forbid you to bully the Fourth, or to make Fourth Formers fag for you. That's final. Good-afternoon!"

Singleton lounged out of the study, ignoring the roaring voices which commanded him to return.

Coates closed the door, looking rather surprised, and certainly disappointed.

"I thought you were going to tell the rotters off," he remarked.

"Sheer waste of breath," said Singleton. "I've warned them, and that's enough. If they don't take any notice of me—well, I shall adopt other measures. More drastic measures, I may say."

"I don't understand," said Coates curiously.

"You will understand—soon!"

The Hon. Douglas lounged off down the passage, and it was not long before Fryer & Co. became active. Sundry yells in the corridor told Singleton that all was not right. But he did not interfere. He waited.

A little later other shouts sounded. The bullies were not only forcing the Fourth Formers to fag for them, but they were inflicting punishments also. The juniors were having a bad time.

The seniors, to be exact, bullied worse than ever, just to show their complete contempt for Singleton and his warning. They ignored him altogether, and fondly thought that they were masters of the situation.

But they were not.

Far from it, in fact. It was not long before they had their eyes opened. While the evening was still young, Mr. Swan presented himself in Fryer's study. Mr. Swan was the master of the Fifth—a somewhat meek gentle-

man, who generally allowed the seniors to do as they liked with him.

"Ah, boys—er—I—er—have a few words to say to you," said Mr. Swan, coughing. "You, Fryer, are the leading boy of the Fifth Form."

"That's right, sir," said Fryer.

"For that reason I have come to you," went on Mr. Swan. "I'm afraid you will not receive my news with much favour. However, it is not of my doing. The Head has informed me that new regulations are to come into force for the Fifth Form on the morrow."

"New regulations, sir?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Swan. "The fact is, you are to be more restricted in your movements, my boy. You are deprived of the use of these studies, and from henceforth you will spend your leisure time in the Form-room. In addition, lessons for the Fifth will revert back to the original system—that is to say, you will be required to work in the same way as you worked before the school changed hands."

Fryer & Co. looked dismayed.

"But — but it's impossible, sir!" shouted Fryer. "It's not fair, sir! Who gave these orders?"

"The headmaster."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"It is hardly necessary for me to add that Mr. Briggs was undoubtedly inspired by the new owner—Singleton," added Mr. Swan. "Singleton interviewed Mr. Briggs not an hour ago, so I assume they came to the arrangement I mentioned. You must, of course, obey the order implicitly."

The bullies were more dismayed than ever.

They had hardly expected such prompt action as this. It was only too evident that the Hon. Douglas had the upper hand. Fryer and his set had refused to take his warning, and this was the result.

"There is just one other point I might mention," said Mr. Swan, turning to the door. "The headmaster in-

timated that if you boys are willing to respect Singleton's wishes in all matters, the new orders may not come into being. The decision will finally rest with Singleton himself. So I should advise you to see the boy at once, Fryer. Perhaps you can make matters better."

Mr. Swan retired, and the bullies looked at one another with mingled expressions of dismay, anger, and relief. The position was not so bad, after all. But, in order to continue their pleasant mode of life, it would be necessary to knuckle under to Singleton.

"The rotter!" said Fryer fiercely. "So that's his game, is it? If we don't agree to his beastly ideas, we're chucked back to the old style of things. I've a dashed good mind to ignore it all!"

"Rot!" said Evans. "We can't ignore the Head. We'd better cave in."

"It's the only course," agreed Hobson. "After all, we can find some fags in the Third. We can't afford to be on the wrong side of Singleton, anyhow."

So the bullies accepted the position. They caved in—unconditionally.

CHAPTER 20.

An Impossible Situation!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH glared round the Common-room in the Ancient House with his usual aggressive expression. There was a light of grim determination in his eyes.

"Are you chaps going to listen to me or not?" he roared.

"Dry up, Handy!"

"Muzzle the ass, somebody!"

"Chuck him out!"

"You—you rotters!" bawled Handforth. "I'm giving a speech!"

"Is that a fact?" inquired Timothy Tucker mildly. "Dear me! You surprise me, my dear sir! I must admit that you surprise me. A speech? H'm! Most remarkable! I was under

the impression that you were in pain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One more word from you, Timothy Tucker, and I'll push your face in the fireplace!" roared Handforth.

"I say, this is a serious discussion," I said firmly. "With all due respect to you, Handy, we don't want to hear you spouting. If there's any speech to be made, I'll make it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"On the ball, old son!"

The Common-room was fairly crowded, and the meeting was certainly an important one. Lessons were over for the day, and the majority of the Remove fellows had gathered in the Common-room to discuss the situation regarding the Hon. Douglas Singleton and his fellow-rebels.

"You want a speech. All right; I'll make one!" I shouted, jumping on to the table. "You all know what happened yesterday——"

"Of course, we all know, you ass!"

"Singleton bunked!"

"Exactly—or, rather, he didn't bunk at all," I said calmly. "He defied the Head, and walked out of the school, taking a band of supporters with him, numbering twenty-one—fourteen from the Ancient House, and seven from the College House. They are the main facts."

"And the best thing we can do is to let them go!" roared Handforth. "That's what I've been trying to say all along. The whole bunch ain't worth a penny! They're mostly cads and rotters, and we're well rid of 'em!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"It's been glorious to-day without Fullwood and his set," went on Handforth. "I vote that we do nothing——"

"As it happens, there are other fellows who can vote, in addition to you," I interrupted. "As a rule, Handy, you and I agree on most things. But this time I don't agree. And I say, in

all seriousness, that Singleton and his crowd ought to be fetched back."

"Quite right, old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"Hear, hear!"

"No, no!"

"Let them stop where they are!"

"What's it got to do with us?"

"Everything," I replied. "We're the Remove, and the Remove has been publicly disgraced. It's up to us to wipe out the stain, and preserve the honour of St. Frank's! Who's with me?"

"I am!" said Watson promptly.

"Begad! Same here!"

"Me, too!"

"We're with you, Nipper!"

"We'll back you up right along the line!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't allow twenty-two fellows to desert St. Frank's and go to a beastly hole like Beechwood!" I went on. "It's a slight on the school, and the only way to deal with it is to act."

"Act!" echoed Owen major. "How?"

"By applying force," I replied.

"We'll go along in a body to Beechwood College, storm the place, and bring back the rebels by force. They've defied the Head, and they've defied us. So we've got to show them that we're not taking it lying down. The Head's one of the best in the world——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"An insult to the Head is an insult to us!" I said. "If we want to do something to please him, we can go to Beechwood and bring Singleton and his crowd back. Apart from all that, there'll be some fine sport. It'll be great fun storming the blessed place. It's Singleton's own school, so it doesn't matter twopence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" grinned McClure. "I'm game, Nipper!"

"Same here!" said Church.

"What!" roared Handforth, glaring. "Are you chaps against me? Do you

mean to tell me that you, my own study chums, back up Nipper, instead of me?"

"Oh, be sensible, Handy!" said McClure. "You can't mean to say that you seriously think we ought to ignore the whole affair?"

"I do ignore it," replied Handforth. "That is to say, we ought to be jolly thankful that these chaps have gone, and it's a dotty idea to try any stunt to get them back——"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "That may apply to Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, and perhaps one or two others; but what about the rest?"

"They're all in the same boat."

"Perhaps so; but juniors like Lincoln and Skelton and Doyle—well, they're decent enough at ordinary times," I said. "That applies to Freeman and Cobb, and the others of the College House. They only entered into this thing because they thought it would be a bit of sport—because they thought they'd like a change. That's all it amounts to. It's our duty to show them the error of their ways, and to make them return."

"I don't agree," said Handforth firmly. "They were bribed! Even if they were decent before, they've lost all the right to come back to this honourable establishment. Every one deserves a jolly good whopping. I'd like to punch their noses—— Yes, we'll go—we'll rout the rotters out and haul them back."

"But I thought you didn't agree with it?" asked Church, in surprise.

"I've changed my mind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A pretty quick change, wasn't it?" grinned Pitt.

"A fellow can change his mind, I suppose, without being jeered at!" roared Handforth. "I've just remembered that those rotters ought to be punished—and I'm the only chap who can punch them in the right way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" I chuckled. "We've got you to our way of thinking, so it's all serene. My idea is for

us to go over there to-morrow afternoon—it's a half-holiday, and we can storm the fort at our leisure. Who's game?"

Practically everybody was, and the arrangements were all made. The Remove decided to take a hand in the game, and to attack Beechwood in force. Christine & Co., of the College House, were equally enthusiastic. They were determined to back us up in the whole undertaking.

Meanwhile the headmaster was worried.

Dr. Stafford had acted as he thought right. He had gated Singleton because the reckless junior had been squandering money in the most appalling manner, and now, because of that order, the Hon. Douglas had walked out of the school.

"It would not matter so much if Singleton had gone alone," declared the Head. "I should not be sorry to see the last of him, if the truth must be told. I'm afraid his influence on the other boys has not been beneficent. But we are dealing with twenty-two members of the Remove, and something must be done in the matter!"

Nelson Lee, who was with the Head, nodded.

"I quite agree, Dr. Stafford," he said. "I should advise you, however, not to act hurriedly. It is my opinion that the affair will die a natural death before long. The boys will soon get tired of this other school."

"That is my opinion also, but I am afraid they will stay too long," said the Head. "And we must think of the boys' parents, Mr. Lee. I have already written to them all, explaining matters, and I expect to hear to-morrow."

"Therefore, I should leave the whole question over for to-day," said Nelson Lee. "This rebellion must collapse—there is nothing else for it. I cannot see how the affair can last very long."

"I hope you are right, Mr. Lee."

"We may be quite certain that the majority of the parents will be decidedly against the change, and will issue stern instructions for the boys to return."

said Lee. "The result will be, in my opinion, a serious split in the camp. And with half the boys back, it will be a far easier method to deal with the others."

The Head nodded slowly.

"Perhaps you are right," he remarked; "in fact, I am convinced that your suggestion is a sound one, Mr. Lee. I will wait until to-morrow—I will see what occurs then, and I will act accordingly."

So, for the moment, Singleton & Co. were allowed to have their own way.

CHAPTER 21.

Parents Galore!

"THERE'S somebody asking for you, Singleton," said Coates.

He had just put his head into the door of Singleton's study. It was the following day, and morning lessons were over. Being a half-holiday, there would be nothing further to do that day.

"Somebody asking for me?" repeated Singleton, turning in his chair.

"Yes—a man."

"That's very interesting," yawned the Hon. Douglas. "Did he give his name?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, bring him along here, if it isn't too much trouble," said Singleton. "Egad! I expect it's a fellow for the rates, or something to do with the gas company. I'm responsible for this place now, you know!"

Coates grinned and departed, leaving Singleton wondering who the visitor could be. It was not necessary for him to wonder long. Coates soon returned with the visitor.

"This way, sir," said Coates. "Singleton's inside."

"Thank you, my lad—thank you!"

The Hon. Douglas gave a little start, then smiled with welcome as he hurried across the room.

"This is fine!" he exclaimed heartily. "I didn't expect to see you, Mr. Gore.

It's ripping of you to come here and look me up. How did you know? Who told you I had left St. Frank's?"

Mr. Philip Smith Gore smiled.

"It was only necessary for me to keep my ears open," he observed. "The majority of the people in Bannington are discussing your little affairs, my lad. So you have left St. Frank's, and have settled down here? Splendid! We shall have more opportunities of meeting, I hope."

"That's just the idea, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "I only left St. Frank's because I was gated—because I was a bally prisoner. But it's all different here. I can pop out any time you like, and be safe."

"That, of course, is quite excellent," said Mr. Gore.

He seated himself, and looked at Singleton smilingly. Coates had gone, and the Hon. Douglas was alone with his visitor.

"I haven't seen you for nearly a week," remarked Singleton. "How are things going with you?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Mr. Gore. "I thought about bringing Carslake, but he had another appointment. The real object of my visit is to ask you to come over to the Grapes Hotel this evening."

"Certainly," said Singleton. "I'll come with pleasure. I'll bring some of the other fellows—"

"No, I don't want you to do that," interrupted Mr. Gore. "I want to have a little talk with you alone, my boy. Get to the Grapes at about half-past ten. Everything will be quiet then, and we can have quite an enjoyable chat. I am assuming, of course, that you will have no difficulty in getting out."

The Hon. Douglas grinned.

"It'll be child's play," he remarked. "I can walk in and out of this place as I like. I've taken care that I've got a bed-room to myself, and nobody disturbs me. There's a back staircase leading to a rear door—and I've got the key of it in my pocket."

"You seem to have arranged things very nicely," smiled Mr. Gore. "But, to return to our former subject. Come to the Grapes Hotel alone, as I want to have a confidential chat with you."

"I thought perhaps we could have a little gamble," said Singleton.

Mr. Gore shook his head.

"Not to-night," he replied. "And surely you have had rather a sickener of gambling, my lad? It is remarkable if you have an appetite for more——"

"It's the only way to get my money back" said the Hon. Douglas.

"You won't be able to get it back by obtaining money from me in the way of gambling successes," smiled Mr. Gore. "I'm not poor, but my resources would not run to such an extent, my dear lad. You must realise that you have lost a large amount of money. I am rather sorry to see you taking it so lightly. It is a serious matter—a matter of the utmost gravity, in fact."

"Oh, I shall be able to work things all right," said Singleton. "I have every confidence in you, Mr. Gore, and you have promised to help me out."

Mr. Gore could not help marvelling at his young companion's attitude. He still had confidence!

"What's the private chat to be about?" the Hon. Douglas went on.

"I will tell you that when you arrive at my rooms," said Gore. "I can, however, hint that the subject is a financial one. My boy, I have some splendid news for you. I am confident that I shall be able to put you in the way of getting back every penny of your losses. Not only that, but I will double your fortune. I say this with every confidence."

Singleton's eyes sparkled.

"I knew you'd turn up trumps, sir," he said enthusiastically. "I've been relying on you all along, and I know that you'll see me through."

"Why, of course," smiled Mr. Gore easily. "I am your friend, my boy—I am determined to help you to the utmost that is in my power."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Gore."

"Not at all—not at all," said the visitor. "In a way, I feel that it is my duty. You must not forget that it was I who introduced you to that little place in London, where you lost so much money at roulette——"

"But that wasn't your fault," said the Hon. Douglas.

"We are not exactly talking about fault," said Mr. Gore smoothly. "I introduced you there, and you lost an enormous sum. Luck was bad for both of us, in fact. However, I am an optimist, and I never look upon the worst side. I can assure you, Singleton, that you will have every reason to be pleased within a few days. I am going to make great changes for you."

"But how?" asked Singleton curiously.

"Well, never mind how at the moment," said Mr. Gore. "I wish to discuss that matter with you to-night—not here. It is of a very private nature, and I should not like to take any risks. Just have patience until this evening, and your curiosity will be satisfied. You will come?"

"Rather!" said Singleton.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Gore, rising. "Be at the Grapes at ten-thirty. I will be waiting for you. Good-bye, my lad, for the moment."

Mr. Gore looked quite a gentleman as he stood there, smiling at the boy. How was it possible for the Hon. Douglas to even guess that this man had taken every penny of the money he had lost? How was Singleton to know that Mr. Philip Smith Gore was now paving the way for another coup?

Singleton escorted his visitor to the outer door, and saw him go across the recreation ground to the gateway. It was a wide, flat, uninviting-looking piece of ground, with gaunt trees standing out here and there.

After Mr. Gore had disappeared Singleton stood for a few moments, lost in thought. There was no need for him to be cautious, as he had been at

St. Frank's. Mr. Gore would come and go as he pleased. This school was no prison at all for the spendthrift school-boy. He had complete freedom.

He was about to turn back into the school when he paused. A motor-car had just driven into the gateway, and it was followed by two taxis from the station.

"More visitors," he murmured. "Egad! Who can it be?"

A small crowd of other juniors were near by, and they were equally interested in the movements of the newcomers.

"Blessed if I can understand it," remarked Marriott. "We don't usually have motor-cars and cabs coming up like this."

"It seems to be something special," said Skelton.

"Rather!"

"Somebody to see the Head, I expect," said Doyle. "I—I—I— Great pip! Good heavens!"

Doyle gasped, and went pale.

"What's the matter, you ass?" demanded Fullwood sourly.

"The—the matter?" panted Doyle. "There's—there's my pater! And mater, too! They've come down—Oh, my hat! Where can I bunk to?"

Doyle didn't wait to receive any advice. He scooted off as hard as he could go, and vanished into the school. The other fellows were grinning.

"Silly ass!" said Merrell, with a sniff. "Fancy being afraid of his people like that! Supposing his pater has come? What about it?"

"They might be a bit ratty, you know," said Armstrong. "My people are away in the South of France, so I don't mind much. I shouldn't have come here otherwise. Don't forget we all left St. Frank's without permission—and Doyle's people have probably come to ask what the dickens it means."

"Rot!" sneered Fullwood. "If my pater came down I'd go up to him and ask him for a fiver! You wouldn't see me bunkin'! Not likely! I'm not

afraid—I've got just as much right to be here as— Hallo! Why, what —"

Fullwood paused, and his voice broke. He stared at the second taxi.

"Anything wrong?" asked Armstrong politely.

Fullwood was staring harder than ever. His face went pale, and a sickly kind of expression came into his eyes.

"By gad," he muttered, "it's the guv'nor!"

"The which?"

"My—my pater!" gasped Fullwood.

"He's—he's come down!"

"That's rather interesting," said Armstrong. "Let's see you go up to him and ask for a fiver, Fully— Hallo! Where are you off to, you ass? You're going in the wrong direction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood had fled.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Skelton. "I can see my mater, too! What the dickens does it mean? All our people are coming down!"

Skelton did not flee as the others had done. He was probably feeling nervous, but he swallowed hard, and ran across to the other taxi, where a portly lady was just looking round with interest.

While Skelton was greeting his mother, a crowd of people entered the gateway—elderly people on foot. There were several ladies, and two or three gentlemen, and sundry exclamations from other juniors told their own story.

Parents were arriving galore!

The reason for it was obvious.

Not only had the boys written to their people on the same day as they had deserted St. Frank's, but the Head had written also. The juniors, no doubt, had told the story completely in their own favour—in rosy words, so to speak. Dr. Stafford, on the other hand, had written the blunt truth.

So these good people had come down to inquire into the matter, which was only natural.

Fullwood, it seemed, was having a

somewhat lively time. His father was a big man, with a big moustache. He had a fiery eye, and he greeted his offspring with a glare which was not calculated to make the lordly Fullwood feel comfortable.

"Well, sir!" shouted Mr. Fullwood. "What is the meaning of this? What are you doing here, Ralph—here, in this disreputable place?"

"It's all right, pater!" said Fullwood huskily. "I—I explained in my letter, you know——"

"Explained! Fiddlesticks!" roared his father. "You wrote me a letter which I could neither understand nor elucidate. I merely grasped the fact that you had left St. Frank's, and that was sufficient. You impertinent young rascal——"

"Hold on, pater!" said Fullwood, with a gulp. "If you'll only be calm I'll explain things. This place is heaps better than St. Frank's, and the fees are cheaper——"

"Confound the fees!" barked Fullwood senior. "Confound the place, and confound you! I have paid your fees at St. Frank's, and at St. Frank's you shall be! Do you imagine you can shift about as you please?"

"You see——"

"Silence, boy!" thundered Mr. Fullwood. "You have brought me down from London on this errand, and I do not intend to return until I know the truth. That you should have the amazing effrontery to leave your school against Dr. Stafford's orders is staggering! Yes, sir—staggering! What explanation have you to offer?"

"I'll tell you about it——"

"How dare you speak before I have finished!" demanded the enraged man. "I intend to teach you a lesson which you will not forget in a hurry! You think you can defy your headmaster, and you think you can defy me! We will see, Ralph—we will see! Your allowance will be stopped——"

"But listen, pater——"

"I will listen to nothing!" shouted Mr. Fullwood. "I intend to take you

back to St. Frank's by the scruff of your neck!"

Fullwood's father did not cease at that point. He continued his tirade with great gusto. Ralph Leslie was unable to get a word in edgewise.

And the lordly Fullwood felt very small. Other juniors were gathered round, listening with interest. Fullwood had frequently spoken of the manner in which he habitually told his pater off; he had boasted of his influence at home. And now he was being exposed.

The fellows were seeing, in fact, that Fullwood's glory vanished before his father like mist before a summer's sun. The chief of the nuts was evidently of very little account in the Fullwood household.

And he was not the only junior who was on the carpet.

Doyle was going through it properly, and Gulliver had very great difficulty in explaining matters to his own people. Skelton's mother was an easy-going lady, and she was inclined to be over-ruled by her son. There were one or two others of the same type. But, upon the whole, the situation was a lively one. In the school and in the recreation ground juniors were talking to their parents—or, to be more exact, parents were talking to the juniors.

Mr. Fullwood and others had interviewed Mr. Briggs, the headmaster, but had received little satisfaction. The Head was under orders from the owner of the school, and he was merely doing his duty. Mr. Briggs did not think it necessary to mention that the owner was the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Somehow, I thought this would happen," said Armstrong. "How it'll end I don't know, but some of the chaps will have to go back. Fullwood seems to have been getting it in the neck pretty stiffly."

"Oh, most of the old folks will be talked over!" said Simmons. "Thank goodness, my people haven't come!"

"I shouldn't be too cheerful!"

grinned Armstrong. "There's another train in soon."

"My people are in Scotland," said Simmonds. "Why doesn't Singleton do something? Why doesn't he explain things to all these people? It only needs a few words, well put, to set things right."

As it happened, the Hon. Douglas Singleton was already moving.

He sent word round that he wished to make an explanation to all the parents who had come down, and requested them to gather in the junior Common-room. It was some little time before everybody turned up, but Singleton gathered them all together after some trouble.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to listen to me for five minutes," he said smoothly. "Your sons have come to this school because I requested them to do so. I want you thoroughly to understand that point."

"Oh, indeed!" snapped Mr. Fullwood. "And who the deuce may you be?"

"My name is Singleton, sir, and I left St. Frank's because the headmaster acted most unjustly towards me," said the Hon. Douglas. "These fellows decided to back me up, rather than see injustice done. We have come here, and we are quite satisfied that our education will be well looked after. There is not the slightest doubt that Beechwood College sees after its pupils far better than St. Frank's does. The food is good, and the accommodation is perfect, and the fees considerably smaller. There is every advantage in our remaining here. If we only have your consent, everything will be splendid!"

The Hon. Douglas continued talking for some little time, and he talked to such good purpose that quite a number of parents were half inclined to let things rest as they were. Others, of course, were determined to take their sons back to St. Frank's without delay.

"All I ask is that you should let your sons remain here for one week,

just as a trial," said Singleton, by way of conclusion. "If at the end of that time, they are not quite happy and content, you will be informed. And if you still disapprove of this new arrangement——"

The door suddenly burst open, and Bell appeared, hot and excited.

"Quick!" he gasped. "You'd better come, Singleton!"

"Don't interrupt me now!" said the Hon. Douglas, frowning. "I am talking to these ladies and gentlemen!"

"Go away, boy!" snapped Mr. Fullwood fiercely.

"But you've got to come—you must!" yelled Bell. "Nipper's here!"

"Egad! Who?"

"Nipper!" said Bell excitedly. "Nipper and all the Remove! The whole giddy crowd! They say they've come to take us back to St. Frank's by force!"

CHAPTER 22.

Attacking the Rebels!

"ST. FRANK'S for ever!"

"Down with the traitors!"

"Hurrah!"

"Charge!"

"Collar the bounders, by George!"

It was Handforth who made the last remark, and he made it in a voice which sounded nearly in the centre of Bannington. The other juniors were excited and eager, and they swarmed through the gateway of Beechwood College, and rushed towards the building with grim determination.

I was at their head, and I was just as determined as the others. We had come to Beechwood College for the purpose of capturing Singleton and his men, and we meant to take them back to St. Frank's.

They would have their choice. They could either come quietly, or by force. Probably they would prefer the former course, as it would entail far less expenditure of energy.

Before we could reach the main entrance a stern figure in cap and

gown appeared, and my guess was not far wrong when I set him down as Mr. Rodney Briggs, the headmaster.

"Boys—boys!" shouted this gentleman. "Stop at once—stop! What is the meaning of this extraordinary scene?"

"We want Singleton and his crowd!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not going without them!"

"They've got to come back to St. Frank's!"

"But I am not keeping them here —" began the Head.

"Dry up, you chaps, and let me speak!" I shouted. "We don't want to be disrespectful to you, sir. We're from St. Frank's, and we have come here to see those fellows who arrived a day or two ago. We want to know if you will order them out here—that is, the St. Frank's boys. We don't want to interfere with your own pupils. We're only interested in Singleton and his crowd."

Mr. Briggs nodded.

"I quite understand," he said. "But I am afraid I cannot do much in the matter. It is not in my power to assist you, my lad."

"You can tell the chaps to come out, sir."

"Perhaps so; but it is a half-holiday, and I do not wish to interfere in this affair," said the Head. "Furthermore, there are some ladies and gentlemen within the school at the present moment, and I should not like to trouble them, or cause them any worry —"

"We're going to have the bounders!"

"We've come here for them, and we mean to take them away!"

"Hurrah!"

"Charge, ye cripples — charge!" roared Handforth. "Don't wait for Nipper! While he's jawing here the rotters will escape!"

But at that moment Singleton himself appeared in the doorway, and behind him were a good many members

of the Remove—Gulliver, Bell, Hubbard, Simmons, and others.

A big shout went up at once.

"Here they are!"

"Surrender, you bounders!"

"What's all the trouble?" inquired the Hon. Douglas smoothly. "I'm pleased to see everybody, but I'm pained to see that you do not seem pleased to welcome me. If you've got anything to say, Nipper, you'd better get busy on the job."

I nodded.

"It won't take me long," I said grimly. "The long and short of it is this: The Remove has voted solid that you fellows must return to St. Frank's."

"Oh, has it?" said Singleton. "That's interesting!"

"You ran away from St. Frank's—you rebelled against the Head," I went on. "That sort of thing can't be allowed. If you think that you can defy Dr. Stafford, you're mistaken, and if you think you can defy the Remove—well, you're still more mistaken. Is that clear?"

"As clear as the crystal spring," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "Your frankness is quite refreshing, old man. Unfortunately, I can't take you seriously. We have come to this school, and we're stopping here!"

"You're coming back with us, you bounders!"

"Willingly, or by force!"

"So you'd better choose!"

"We're not coming back at all. That's how we choose!" shouted Singleton. "We don't care what the Remove has decided, or anything else!"

"Look here, Singleton!" I said grimly. "There's no reason—"

"Quite right!" said Singleton.

"There's no reason why you should stop here. You are wasting my time, and I'm wasting yours. Good-afternoon! Drop in when you like, but choose a slack afternoon next time!"

A roar of anger went up, but I was calm.

"That sort of thing won't do, Single-

ton!" I said sharply. "I haven't got any particular quarrel with you——"

"Good!"

"In fact, I think you're a decent chap in some ways——"

"That's awfully kind of you!"

"You stand a chance of getting the sack, you reckless idiot!" I exclaimed. "Take my advice, and come back while you're still safe. The other fellows will only receive light punishment, I believe—lines, or something of that sort. So take our advice, and return while you've got a decent chance."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to do what Nipper says!" muttered Simmons.

"A jolly good idea!" said Skelton.

"Rot!" exclaimed Singleton. "We're not standing any of this rot, and I expect it's bluff, at the best. Look here, Nipper," he went on, facing me again. "I want to give you a final answer, straight away. We have no intention of returning to St. Frank's."

"Is that final?" I asked grimly.

"It is—absolutely!"

"Then I shall only waste my breath in talking any longer," I said. "You can thank only yourself for the consequences. St. Frank's to the attack! Charge! Rout the rebels out!"

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball, Remove!"

We ascended the front step, my idea being to enter at once, and to sweep away all resistance before Singleton & Co. recovered from the first shock.

But he was rather too quick for me.

He dodged back and slammed the door.

And, as I attempted to turn the handle, I heard the bolts shoot into their sockets.

"Fetch a log, somebody!" roared Handforth. "We'll soon have this door down."

"None of that!" I shouted. "We're not going to do any damage to property. We've come here to fetch the rebels—not to destroy the building. We'd better get in by the windows."

"That's the idea!" said Christine excitedly. "This way."

He led a crowd of College House fellows. De Valerie led another crowd, Pitt had charge of a third, and I marched at the head of a fourth. Handforth attempted to do likewise, but, by some remarkable circumstance, he found himself leading nobody but Church and McClure.

"We'll go round the back!" roared Handforth. "This way, my sons! Ten or twelve of us can go inside, while the others wait—— Eh? What the dickens—— Where's everybody gone to?"

"They've all followed Nipper and Pitt and the others," explained Church. Handforth snorted.

"The asses!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I distinctly tell a whole crowd of chaps to follow me when the right moment came?"

"I expect they changed their minds," suggested McClure. "Anyhow, we can't do much by ourselves, so we'd better join the rest."

"Rats! Look here—— Hi, where are you going——"

But Church and McClure thought they had better escape before their reckless leader led them into trouble. So Handforth was left without any followers at all. Not that this made any difference.

He was still determined to carry out his project, and he hurried away to the rear of the school, with set teeth and clenched fists.

Meanwhile, I was busy in another part of the school. With twelve or fifteen supporters, I charged at two windows which promised to be easily taken. Several of us managed to get inside, but the defenders were there in time.

And after a short, sharp scrap, we were ejected.

Pitt was more successful. While I was being treated to a fine ride through the window in company with my men, Reginald Pitt got through a window farther along, and a score of Removites

followed him. There was no further resistance.

The attackers passed along the passage, and met Fullwood & Co. and four other rebels. The nuts had been taken completely by surprise. Before they could escape they were surrounded.

"Good!" exclaimed Pitt. "Here's seven of 'em, anyhow. The other chaps ought to be able to deal with the rest —"

"You'd better not lay fingers on me, you fool!" shouted Fullwood. "My pater's inside, an' he'll — Yaroo! Ow! Why, I'll — Oh, by gad!"

Fullwood was rolled over, and before he realised what was happening, he was hurried towards the window, firmly held. Gulliver and Bell were similarly treated, and the others could not escape.

"Out with 'em!"

"Take them right, across to the road," ordered Pitt. "I'll go along and help —"

"Look out!" roared Grey. "There's somebody coming."

Coates and a whole crowd of Beechwood followers hove in sight. They swept down the passage in overwhelming numbers, and before Pitt and his men knew where they were, they found themselves out in the open, ruffled, hot, and muddy.

"And if you try to come in again, you'll get another taste!" roared Coates from the window. "Cheek! Invading our school!"

Pitt picked himself up.

"Well, that wasn't much of a success!" he said ruefully. "I didn't know these other chaps would join in. It's just put a stopper to our game. We can't hope to fight the school."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Owen major. "My ear feels two inches thick!"

The other attackers had similar tales to tell. Nobody met with any success, and this was mainly because of a miscalculation on our part. We had not reckoned on the Beechwood fellows.

Instead of remaining neutral, as we had supposed, they had joined in the battle, throwing in their lot with Singleton & Co. This, of course, was an overwhelming drawback, from our point of view.

Fatty Little, who was with us, succeeded in getting into the building—but not on the offensive. He happened to spot the larder window, and he couldn't resist the temptation.

When we finally found him, the larder was pretty well cleared, and Fatty was feeling full and content, and at peace with the world. Handforth, on the other hand, was feeling extremely sore.

He had carried out his project—and Singleton & Co. had carried out Handforth!

The leader of Study C, having entered the school by a rear window, fondly imagined that he would do wonders. But he only met a large crowd of the enemy. They lost no time in ejecting the intruder.

If Handforth had possessed any sense, he would have submitted to the ejection meekly. But this was not his way. He resisted, and he certainly had the satisfaction of punching at least four noses before his own was flattened.

After that he hardly knew what occurred.

He had faint recollections of being sat on by about a dozen fellows, and he had a hazy notion that he was used as a doormat. After that he went through one of the windows head first.

Whether by chance, or whether by intention, the window was one which immediately overlooked a large pool of water—the result of recent rain. Handforth entered the pool face first. And when he managed to crawl away he was looking more like a drowned rat than a member of the St. Frank's Remove.

But still Handforth was not discouraged. Battered, soaked, and reduced to a wreck generally, he was more than ever determined to win the

day. When Church and McClure found their leader they imagined that he would want to return to St. Frank's forthwith. But Handforth snorted when they made the suggestion.

"You—you silly asses!" he gasped. "Do you think I'm going away—after this? Everyone of those chaps will be chucked in that puddle before I've done—and every nose will be punched, too! By George! I'll show them!"

But the defenders showed us something first. Not content with beating us off, they sallied out to the attack, on their own account. And their numbers were so great that we could do nothing but retire.

We were finally chased right off the school grounds, and we gathered together in the road, in order to discuss matters. The afternoon was still quite early, and so we had heaps of time before us.

I glanced somewhat anxiously at the sky. The clouds were low and ragged, and promised rain. We had already had a tremendous amount of rain, and we were not anxious to have any more.

For nearly ten days there had been continuous downpours, and many meadows in the district were flooded already, owing to the Stowe having burst its banks. Mud lay thick everywhere, and the landscape was not pretty.

But rain or no rain, we were determined to get some satisfaction. So we put our heads together and tried to find some plan of action. We were resolved upon one thing—and that was to rout out the rebels.

CHAPTER 23.

The Flood!

"THE problem, my sons, is a stiff one," I said, as I stood in the centre of the crowd. "We thought we should have to deal with a smaller force than ourselves. As it turns out, we're dealing with a larger.

That alters everything, and I don't exactly see how we can get over the difficulty."

"Oh, rot!" said Handworth. "All we've got to do is to get a lot of sticks and rush up to the school again——"

"That sort of thing won't do, Handy," I put in. "A direct attack is pretty hopeless, because the defenders are on the alert, and waiting for us. We've got to think of something subtle—some scheme where we can take the boundaries by surprise."

Pitt nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But those sort of schemes need thinking out."

"They do—and that's where your brains have got to come in," I said. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to make an attack in the front of the school as a kind of feint. Then we can dodge round to the back—— But that won't do," I added. "They'll be on the alert for that sort of thing. Besides, I don't quite see how we can sort out our own chaps from the Beechwood crowd. That's where the trouble comes in."

"Hallo!" said Watson. "What are those vans for?"

I glanced round, and saw two big covered vans. They had just come up, and were about to turn into the main gateway of the school.

"We needn't bother about them," I said. "I suppose—— My only hat! I wonder——"

I paused, as I noticed the name on the two vans—the name of the biggest grocer in Bannington.

"Well?" said Pitt. "You wonder what?"

"Grocery—biscuits, tinned stuff—luxuries of every description," I murmured. "Ordered by Singleton for his crowd, I'll bet a penny. That's about the truth of it!"

"What the dickens are you jawing about?" demanded Watson.

"Keep your hair on!" I said briskly. "I've got an idea."

"Out with it!"

"No time to explain!" I exclaimed.

"I want to stop those vans from going in."

Before the others could do anything, I hurried away and stood in front of the foremost van. The driver looked at me in some surprise.

"What's the idea, youngster?" he asked. "Want anything?"

"Yes," I replied. "I want to speak to you."

"Well, I'm here."

"What do these vans contain?" I asked.

"Supplies for a lord, I should think," said the carman. "All the most expensive things in the guv'nor's shop, by what I can understand. A regular assortment of classy articles. They ain't the sort of goods that we usually bring up here, I can tell you."

"Did Mr. Briggs order them?" I inquired.

"No; they were ordered by a young feller named Singleton," said the carman.

"Just what I thought!" I exclaimed, turning to the others. "These goods aren't the school supplies at all, but special tit-bits for Singleton's crowd. I tell you what we'll do, my bucks. We'll besiege the bounders."

"Eh?"

"We'll do which?"

"Besiege Singleton's crowd," I said grimly. "We'll turn these vans back—or, better still, hold them here. Without these supplies the rebels will be compelled to eat the poor quality school stuff—and they'll soon get tired of that. It'll be the first step, anyhow."

"Good wheeze!"

The carman got down from his seat, and joined the youth who was in charge of the second van.

"What's the game, young gents?" asked the carman. "We're waiting to get inside these gates. We can't very well stop here all the afternoon, waiting for you to—"

"Look here," I broke in. "You're not going to deliver those goods. We've decided to send them back. I think it'll be the best way, after all. You've

got to take all those things home again."

"If you're trying to be funny, my lad —"

"I'm not trying to be funny," I interrupted. "I'm serious. Take my advice, and take your vans away. If you attempt any resistance, we shall be compelled to handle you pretty roughly. So go easy."

The carman was considerably astonished, and it was some few minutes before he fully realised that we were in earnest. At first he was angry, then he calmed down, and realised that it was a hopeless task to get the better of the whole crowd of us.

"Well, it's none of my business," said the man at last. "If you boys like to prevent me from delivering the goods, I can't be blamed. The guv'nor will have something to say about it, I expect—but that'll be your trouble!"

"Good!" said I briskly. "You see, we've got a little trouble on here already. We want you to clear off as soon as you can—and here's something to buy a bottle of ginger-beer with."

The man grinned as he pocketed the half-crown I gave him. Other tips followed, and when the pair drove off with the vans they were feeling quite contented.

"Well, that's one thing done," I said briskly. "Now I'm going to inform Singleton of the disaster to his grub."

"You'll get collared, you ass," said Watson.

"Not if I go under a flag of truce," I replied.

I entered the school grounds, waving my handkerchief, and I soon saw that the rebels were ready for us. There were faces at every window, and Singleton himself stood on the front doorstep, with a crowd behind him.

I waved my improvised flag above my head.

"Right-ho!" shouted Singleton. "Come on, my son. We won't touch you."

I reached the steps, and tucked my handkerchief away.

"I've got a little piece of information for you—something that ought to cheer you up," I said calmly. "I believe you were expecting the delivery of a big consignment of special grub?"

"As a matter of fact, we were," said the Hon. Douglas. "It's a big lot of stuff coming from the stores—"

"Exactly," I said. "I know all about it. I've just had an interesting conversation with the van-man, and you will be delighted to learn that all the stuff has been returned."

"What!"

"Returned?" yelled Fullwood.

"Every ounce of it," I said calmly.

"Collar him!" shouted Bell thickly. "We'll teach the rotter to interfere with our food—"

"Drag him up here, and—"

"Stand back—the lot of you!" ordered Singleton. "You seem to forget that Nipper is here under a flag of truce."

"But he's stopped all our stuff comin'!" roared Fullwood. "We've got nothin' left—except the ordinary school rubbish. There's not even a tin of sardines for tea. You promised us every luxury—"

"I didn't know this was going to happen, did I?" interrupted Singleton. "Nipper, allow me to compliment you. Without that grub, my army will lose all its determination."

"If you'd only be sensible, you'd come back to St. Frank's at once," I said earnestly. "This thing is simply a bit of foolery—ignoring the Head in this way. We're going to besiege you. That stuff won't be delivered to-day, or to-morrow, either. And I may as well tell you at once that I'm determined to win—"

"If that's the case, you'll be interested to hear that I'm just as determined to make you lose!" said Singleton smoothly. "I don't want to have a quarrel with you, Nipper, because I rather like you, but you must

allow me to remark that you're a bally nuisance. What's the idea of bothering about me? Can't you let me go my own way, without butting in?"

"No," I replied. "If you were alone in this affair it would be a different matter. But you're not alone. You've dragged in twenty-one other Remove chaps, and the result is that we consider it a slight on the honour of St. Frank's. It's an insult to the old school."

"Of course, that's one way of looking at it," admitted the Hon. Douglas. "I suppose you're right, in a way, and—Egad! What in the world is that noise? And why are those chaps capering about like that? They all seem to have gone dotty!"

I glanced round, and saw that Pitt and Grey, and a number of others, were standing in the entrance, waving wildly. Others were staring away across the playing-field which adjoined the school. And everybody seemed tremendously excited. I also heard a curious roaring noise.

"There's something wrong evidently," I remarked. "I can't quite understand the idea. Pitt will tell us."

Pitt was rushing towards me at top speed, and he commenced speaking while he was still some distance off.

"Run!" he roared. "Come on, you ass! And all you other chaps had better get inside—quick!"

"But what on earth—" I began.

"The flood!" gasped Pitt.

"Eh? The which?"

"Can't you hear it?" panted Pitt. "The locks have burst, I believe—those big locks, just above the river. I heard somebody say they were likely to go! There's a terrific wall of water coming over the meadows—it'll be here in a few seconds—Oh, my goodness! Look out!"

There was not much time for thinking.

I looked round, fully aware of the danger in a moment. It had come upon us so suddenly, without anybody,

being prepared. The juniors on the steps stood there, staring across the meadows with expressions of awe.

And as I turned round and looked, I saw something which made me feel rather queer. We were right inland, some distance from the river. At least, the river flowed by at the foot of the adjoining meadows, but quite out of sight ordinarily, owing to the intervening trees and hedges.

But now a change had occurred.

There, before my eyes, a great volume of foaming water was charging down towards the school—a solid mass of water, six foot high—or so it seemed to me, as I looked at it. And it was coming on with the speed of an express train, tearing down hedges and railings in its progress.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Run!" gasped Pitt. "Jump into a tree—anything!"

I looked round desperately.

"You'd better come up here!" shouted Singleton. "We can't interfere with you now—it's a truce, in the cirs."

"Thank you, all the same," I said; "we'll run for it."

I gave one more glance at the oncoming flood. It had nearly reached the school grounds. Farther away, the Removites had rushed up to high ground, where they reckoned they would be safe. But there was no time for Pitt and I to run that distance; we had to seek refuge on the spot!

The flood was upon us!

The roar of the oncoming water was simply enormous. It sounded terrifying, and I realised that Pitt and I were in a position of considerable danger. If we were caught by that charging mass of water, we should probably be killed. It would lift us up and hurl us against the school buildings with appalling violence.

"Any tree will do!" I panted quickly. "This one!"

I rushed at a massive oak tree—a huge affair which had probably been

standing there a hundred years or more. Pitt charged at it at the same moment. Exactly how we scrambled up I don't know, but we succeeded somehow.

And as we got into the lower fork, the flood came. It surged beneath us, and the tree swayed like a sapling. For one awful moment I thought it was going to collapse, but it held firm to its roots.

Pitt's feet were soaked by the muddy, foaming water as it rushed by; but my feet were higher up in the tree. We had escaped the flood by the very skin of our teeth, and we were feeling rather shaky.

To talk was almost impossible, owing to the terrific noise.

Trees were down everywhere, and great masses of hedge-growth swirled past us. Huge waves were battering against the school walls, and I was half afraid that the building would collapse.

For it had received the full force of the flood. The windows rattled madly, and two chimney-pots fell with dull crashes. It was as though an earthquake had suddenly struck the place.

It held together, but I was convinced that the foundations were seriously weakened by the enormous shock.

The water was surging in through the lower windows, for the glass had been smashed at the first onslaught.

Shouts were sounding everywhere, but, so far, nobody had fallen into the flood—as far as we could see. The road, of course, was submerged, and the whole length of wooden railings, which separated the school from the highway, had collapsed. The damage was enormous.

"Great Scott!" gasped Pitt. "Did you ever see anything like it?"

"It's awful!" I replied. "What I'm afraid of is the school collapsing. The building is as old as ages, and that north wall seems a bit rocky——"

"My hat! Look there!"

An outbuilding crumbled to pieces as we watched. The four walls simply fell,

and the roof surged away with the flood. A large assortment of boxes, barrels, and other oddments floated away at the same time.

The flood was getting quieter now, although it still flowed swiftly.

And we could hear people shouting to us. Singleton and a crowd of other fellows were lining the upper windows—for the ground floor had been deserted. All the lower floors, in fact, were completely flooded out.

"Are you fellows all right!" roared Singleton.

"Yes."

"There's terrible trouble in here!" shouted the Hon. Douglas. "Fullwood's pater has just had apoplexy—and we can't ring up for the doctor, because the telephone's not working."

"Is that the truth?" I shouted back.

"No, it is not!" bawled Fullwood. "My pater's fainted—that's all. An' this flood is enough to make anybody faint. I thought we were all finished!"

Fullwood was evidently in a state of blue funk; but Singleton seemed to accept the position quite calmly.

"What about your merry little attack now?" he asked. "You're quite welcome to come and haul us out, if you like."

"The best thing you can do is to come back to St. Frank's," I yelled. "Take my advice, and leave this place as soon as you can. It doesn't seem particularly safe to me."

"We're stopping, thanks!" said Singleton. "I'm fond of boating!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Pitt. "That chap seems to be absolutely the limit."

Meanwhile, the other fellows—the St. Frank's crowd—had only just managed to reach safety before the flood came. There was a steep hill leading up from the other side of the road. It rose at a sharp angle, and on the top stood a small spinney.

One glance round had told the juniors that their only chance of safety was to run up the hill—and they had

done so without any loss of time. They only just reached the summit before the flood arrived.

It did not reach them, but swirled past a good many yards lower down the hill, and then rapidly settled lower still. But the juniors were very anxious concerning us.

"The silly asses!" exclaimed De Valerie. "They were in the grounds—they must have been caught by the flood, and there's no telling where they are by this time."

"Hallo! Look over there!" yelled Grey.

"Where?"

"Down there—to the right!" shouted Grey. "Can't you see a boat?"

All the others stared.

"Great corks! He's right!" gasped Christine. "It's an empty boat, too—drifting with the flood. I believe it'll touch this high ground—"

He didn't wait to complete his sentence, but rushed away with a dozen other fellows behind him. And Grey was right. The object he had seen was certainly a boat, and it grounded on the meadow, and was about to drift back in the flood when a crowd of juniors seized it and drew it up into safety.

"What luck!" said De Valerie excitedly. "By Jove! This is simply great! Oars and everything! It must have drifted along from the river. We shall be able to get to the school now."

It wasn't long before the boat was pushed off. Only two fellows were in it—De Valerie and Grey. There was no sense in a crowd going, for De Valerie did not overlook the possibility that some rescue work might be necessary.

With a boat under them, the whole position was altered.

They were able to approach the school once more, and to see at close quarters what had happened. It was not necessary to steer their vessel through the gateway, for the railings had been washed away.

"No sign of Nipper!" said Grey

anxiously. "I can't see Pitt, either! It'll be terrible if they're washed away!"

"I expect they dashed indoors," said De Valerie. "They wouldn't be such asses as to stop outside——"

"Ahoy there!"

"Come over here, my sons!"

Those shouts came from us, in the tree. We had caught sight of the boat at the same moment, and we were delighted when we saw who the occupants were. And Grey and De Valerie were equally delighted when they spotted us.

"Oh, good!" said Grey. "They're safe, after all."

"Yes, rather!"

The boat pulled over to the tree, and bumped against the stout trunk. Pitt and I had some difficulty in holding the boat there, for the flow of the flood was still very strong.

"Thank goodness you're safe!" said De Valerie. "We were beginning to think that you'd been swept away. Did you ever see anything like it? Anybody might think we were at sea!"

"We're safe for the time being, anyhow," I said. "It's ripping of you chaps to come along like this! Where on earth did you find the boat?"

"It floated to us, knowing that it was in good hands," replied Grey. "What about everybody in the school? Are they all right?"

"Yes, as far as I know," I replied. "I expect some of the ladies are frightened, but that's only to be expected."

"Ladies?" repeated Grey.

"Yes; you know that a lot of the chaps' parents came down this afternoon," I said. "I expect they're wishing they hadn't by this time. They're marooned now, and they'll probably have to remain in the school until to-morrow."

"We can take them to the station in this boat——"

"Only on one condition," I broke in. "If the chaps agree to come back to

St. Frank's—that is, if they surrender—we'll lend a hand. So it's up to the bounders to be sensible. But, if it comes to that, I expect the railway is flooded, too. There'll be terrible damage over this!"

We were all in the boat by this time, and we drifted away towards the school. And just at that moment we noticed something which attracted our attention. Caught against the top of a high hedge—the top being the only part visible—were three big rowing boats. They were really within the school property, and I immediately concluded that they were boats which had been washed out of the school boat-house some little distance away.

"We'd better collar those at once," I said briskly. "If we take command of all the available boats, we shall be masters of the situation. The whole crowd will be marooned, and we shall have the upper hand."

"Good wheeze!" said Pitt. "Pull away!"

De Valerie and Grey plied their oars with a will—although it was necessary to go with caution, for there was no telling what we should bump against. The water was at least seven or eight feet deep at this point.

The whole landscape presented a remarkable appearance. As far as we could see, up and down the valley, the water stretched endlessly. Trees stuck their branches out here and there, and buildings looked strange, some of them almost completely submerged.

And every imaginable kind of article floated on the flood. It was a spectacle which made everybody feel serious, for we could not help thinking that there would be many tales of tragedy to tell later on.

We secured the boats easily, and then towed them back to the high ground where the other Removites were waiting.

Everybody was delighted, and the boats soon filled.

"This is great!" said Handforth

"We shall be able to make another attack now. We can sweep up in these boats, and get in at the upper windows—"

"Well I'm blessed!" He still wants to lead an attack!" exclaimed Church wonderingly. "The best thing we can do is to get back to St. Frank's, I reckon, and see how things are going there."

"It's not getting dark yet," I said. "We might as well have a look round first. There's a chance that we shall be able to help somebody— Good heavens! Look at Fatty, over there! He's fallen in!"

There was plenty of evidence of this from Fatty Little himself.

"Rescue!" he roared. "Lend a hand, you bouncers!"

"He's all right," grinned Hart. "He's like a balloon—he'll float!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But it was no laughing matter, really. Fatty Little had been rather too venturesome. The ground overhung at a certain point, and he had walked upon it rather thoughtlessly.

And before he knew where he was, the ground slipped, and Fatty was precipitated into the flood. The next moment he was swept away by the current, and carried yards out of our reach.

"All right, Fatty—we'll haul you out!" yelled Handforth.

Fatty was a bit of a swimmer, but the current was strong, and he was hampered by all his clothing, which included a thick overcoat. He was out of his depth, and the affair might have been serious but for the fact that an aged hen-coop came floating along on the flood.

The fat boy clutched at it desperately, and managed to get a hold.

Everybody was grinning now, for Fatty was quite safe, and Handforth & Co. were hurrying to the rescue.

They had scrambled into the smallest of the boats, and Handforth stood in

the bows, flourishing a boathook, which he had found lying on the boards.

"Hold tight, Fatty!" shouted McClure. "We'll soon have you out!"

"Hurry up!" gasped Fatty. "This blessed coop will give way in a tick!"

It was certainly a precarious hold, and Little's weight was considerable. Handforth naturally went to work the wrong way, and, instead of hauling Fatty out properly, he made use of the boathook.

"Got him!" roared Handy.

At that second Little had rolled over, with the result that the boathook caught him in the rear. And Handforth hauled up with all his strength. The spectacle was certainly amusing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold tight, Fatty!"

Fatty Little had no alternative. Church and McClure edged the boat nearer, and a moment or two later the fat boy was hauled aboard. Incidentally, he nearly capsized the boat.

But he was safe, and he was immediately rushed away up the hill to a cottage, which was just visible. Several juniors went with him, and their idea was to get Fatty tucked away in blankets until his clothing was dried.

Meanwhile, we approached the school in the boats. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was as determined as ever, and he positively refused to surrender.

"I bought this school, and I'm going to keep it running," he declared. "You can go back to St. Frank's without me—thanks all the same."

I was rather annoyed, but it couldn't be helped. And darkness would soon be coming on, so there was not much prospect of us doing anything in the attacking line. Our best move was to retire.

Beechwood College was now an island.

At the best of times it was isolated, being well back from the road, and some distance from other houses; but now it seemed to be forlorn and totally deserted. Nobody came near it.

The road was flooded, so no traffic could pass. The people had fled from the houses which were nearest, and no people thought of boating to the school. The place was completely cut off.

The fathers and mothers of the boys were isolated, too, since there was no way for them to get to the town. They were forced to remain, so they could only make the best of things.

I led my little army back to St. Frank's. We concealed the boats a good distance from the flood, and left them in the shelter of some trees.

Then we went back to St. Frank's by a roundabout route, for the ordinary road was a good many feet under water. By going over the high ground, across country, we reached Bellton Wood at length, and took the footpath through.

The village itself was flooded, but at St. Frank's only a corner of the playing field was under water. The Ancient House and the College House were still high and dry, and everything was safe.

Early on the following morning I meant to return, and the Remove was with me. We were all determined to get up at daylight. Then we could sally out, and see how the prisoners were.

I had an idea that the twenty-two Removites—Singleton and his supporters—would be only too eager to get back to the old school.

CHAPTER 24.

An Appeal for Help!

THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON shook his head.

"There's only one way out of it," he said. "It won't be pleasant, but we shall have to face it. We must give in."

"Go back to St. Frank's?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes."

"I don't see that it's necessary——"

"My dear chap, we shan't be able to

stay here another day!" interrupted Singleton. "The flood's getting worse all the time. By to-morrow it will have reached the upper floors, I believe. And, in any case, the whole place is rocky. I'm not satisfied that we shall last out the night."

Bell looked startled.

"You—you think the place will collapse?"

"Well, I'm not saying that, but I don't quite like the rumblings and quakings," said the Hon. Douglas. "Not that it's any good grumbling. We can't very well get out—unless we like to swim."

Singleton was with Fullwood & Co. in his own bed-room. It was later in the evening, and Beechwood College was hidden in darkness. The rising waters were now perilously high, and there was something rather terrifying in the whole experience. It was impossible to use the lower floors, since they were flooded out.

And even the upper floors were threatened.

The building was constructed low, and it was even now only a foot or two from the bed-room windows to the level of the water. Singleton and his companions could hear it swirling on every side.

Out in the corridor, the noise was quite considerable. For the water was half-way up the stairs, and ghostly sounds were coming up from below, caused by the floating furniture bumping against walls, and wedging in passages and doorways. The experience was highly unpleasant.

All the other fellows were upstairs, of course—to say nothing of the masters and the unwilling guests. Hardly anybody thought about going to bed, for it seemed a fairly hopeless task to obtain any sleep.

The Hon. Douglas was not dismayed.

"I shall have to be thinking about going soon," he said casually.

"Eh?"

"Going where?"

"Why, to keep my appointment with Mr. Gore," replied Singleton. "I arranged to meet him at half-past ten, but I shall go about nine, because the trip will take me a good while."

Fullwood sniffed.

"I suppose you're trying to be funny?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"Then how will you get to the Grapes—swim?"

"I'm not particularly struck on that method," replied the Hon. Douglas. "There happens to be no boat, so I shall fake up something for the occasion. The actual distance by water isn't great."

"Why, it's a couple of miles to the Grapes, from here," said Bell.

"I suppose it is—something like that," agreed Singleton. "But you seem to have forgotten one thing, my sons. The Grapes stands on high ground, and it's possible to reach it by following the ridge, just on the other side of the road, from here. The flood doesn't extend to that part."

"Yes, but you've got to get across to dry land."

"That'll be easily managed," said Singleton. "There's a whacking great table in one of the other rooms, and it'll make a first-class raft, at a pinch. I want you fellows to help me."

Fullwood & Co. were not very enthusiastic, but they could not very well refuse. The raft, even when completed, was a somewhat precarious article. The table was a good stout one, and a number of long floorboards were ripped up and bound securely to the top of it.

Thus, when it was placed in the water, in an inverted position, it had quite a considerable amount of buoyancy.

The Hon. Douglas, well wrapped up, set off quite cheerfully on his journey. He knew very well that the appointment with Gore was not important, and there was no real necessity for this journey. But he was undertaking it out of sheer bravado, and because there was a spice of adventure about the whole

business. Singleton was always ready for something of a novel character.

The raft proved to be far more successful than the juniors had first imagined. It floated away well, and kept quite even when Singleton was upon it. He had a walking-stick with him—a walking-stick constructed into a rough oar, by the addition of a piece of flat wood fastened to it.

"Keep a look-out for me later on," he said, as he gazed at Fullwood & Co. in the window. "I expect I shall be back in a couple of hours."

Singleton pushed off, but the current was stronger than he had imagined, and it was no easy matter to direct the raft across towards the rising ground, which stood out clear from the water.

Singleton could not keep his precarious craft in the direction he wanted it to go. It drifted with the current, in spite of all his efforts. And, gradually, he found himself getting out upon the

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big stretch of the flood which lay near the school.

"This won't do," he muttered. "If I'm not careful I shan't get back, and then goodness knows what'll happen. I might be swept away for miles."

As it happened, it was not necessary for him to worry much.

For a few moments later something happened which was totally unexpected—something which startled him greatly, and which, incidentally, startled everybody in the whole building.

Singleton was some little distance away when he became aware of an ominous rumbling. Then, as he watched, he saw something which caused his heart to jump into his mouth. Two walls at the rear of the school collapsed!

They simply crumbled to pieces as Singleton gazed. The lad was absolutely scared for a few moments. He had a terrible fear the whole school was about to fall to pieces before his eyes.

But those two walls were the only ones that went.

They carried a portion of the roof with them, and it was possible to see right into two rooms which had been left exposed. They were occupied, too, and shrieks and shouts rang out.

Crack, crack!

Singleton listened, his heart beating fast.

He knew what those cracks meant. Other walls were going! The whole school was in a highly dangerous condition now. The flood had weakened the structure, already old and neglected.

The plight of those within was not a pleasant one.

They were absolutely helpless, for there was no way of escape; there was not a single boat which could be used to carry the inhabitants away. If things came to the worst, they would have to trust to articles of furniture for support.

Somehow or other, Singleton got back to the school wall. He had now abandoned all thought of going on his trip. He was anxious about the inmates of

the school. He wanted to find out the full extent of the damage, and, if necessary, he would go off for assistance later.

Exactly how he got back into the building he hardly knew. He scrambled through a window, and the raft drifted away for good. The Hon. Douglas found himself in a corridor.

As he hurried down it he ran into Armstrong and Doyle, and one or two others. The juniors halted, breathless.

"What are we going to do?" asked Doyle huskily. "The place is falling to bits."

"Is it serious?" demanded Singleton. "I heard one or two cracks——"

"Cracks!" shouted Armstrong. "The whole place shook! Half the school has fallen away at the back. The Head's in a terrific way. In another hour the whole place will be in ruins."

"That's a bit tall, I reckon," said the Hon. Douglas. "Dash it all, we shall last longer than an hour!"

"Well, something's got to be done, and quickly, too!" exclaimed Doyle. "Think of all these chaps here—and the ladies, too. What about my pater and mater? We simply must get them to dry land somehow."

"And there's not a boat!" groaned Armstrong. "There's nothing!"

Singleton nodded gravely.

"And we can't even use the telephone," he said. "We're isolated; we're absolutely cut off from civilisation. It's a terrible hole to be in!"

"Who told you the telephone wouldn't work?" asked Armstrong.

"I know it. It's impossible to communicate with Bannington——"

"That may be," interrupted the other junior. "Some of the wires are down, farther along. But the wires are up here all right, and Mr. Briggs said that it's possible to get in touch with Caistowe, even now."

"Caistowe!" echoed Singleton quickly. "Then we can talk with St. Frank's?"

"I suppose so."

"Good!"

"I don't see much good in it!"

"As soon as the Head's finished with the 'phone, I'm going to use it myself. I'm going to ring up St. Frank's, and ask for help. I'm pretty sure the place won't last the night out."

"My hat!" said Doyle. "If all those Remove chaps come along, it'll be fine! They've got boats, and they'll be able to clear everybody out in safety."

"That's just the very idea."

Meanwhile, the Head was sending out SOS calls.

He was thankful to find that the telephone was still in working order, although it was not possible to communicate direct with Bannington. The town was barely a mile off, but the intervening wires were washed away.

However, the Head obtained a connection through Caistowe Exchange, and managed to get into communication with the Bannington Police Station. He appealed urgently for help, and requested that a rescue-party, with boats, should be sent along without a second's loss of time.

Singleton, almost immediately afterwards, used the telephone himself.

He rang up St. Frank's, and the first person who answered was Morrow of the Sixth. Singleton had got connected through with the prefects' room, in the Ancient House.

"Hallo, who's that?" he called.

"This is St. Frank's—Ancient House."

"I know that," said Singleton. "Who is it speaking?"

"My name is Morrow—"

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas. "I'm Singleton."

"What!" came Morrow's voice, tinged with anger. "You cheeky young rascal!"

"Hold on!" shouted Singleton. "We're in danger!"

"Don't try to be funny!" said the prefect warmly.

"But it's true—every word of it!" exclaimed Singleton. "Haven't you heard about the flood? This place is completely surrounded, and two of the walls have collapsed already."

"Good heavens! Is this really true?"

"Yes; honour bright!"

"Can't you get help from close quarters?"

"The Head's done his best, but I think we shall need more than they can send from Bannington. We've got a lot of chaps here, all the servants, and quite a crowd of other people. There'll be a terrible tragedy if the school collapses over our heads. We must have help. Please bring everybody you can. It's a matter of life or death!"

"All right; you can rely on me," said Morrow quickly. "I'll arouse the whole school, and we'll come along in force."

The senior lost no time in spreading the news through St. Frank's. A sensation was caused at once.

Beechwood College was crumbling, and was liable to collapse at any moment!

CHAPTER 25.

Forced into Surrender!

"DANGER!"

"Yes, terrible danger!" said Morrow grimly. "Out you get, young 'un! It's a case of all hands to the pump!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Remove dormitory was fully awake. Lights had only been out for a few minutes, and the juniors were all wakeful; then Morrow had appeared. And Morrow had brought news of the utmost gravity.

He had just told us of the plight of Beechwood College.

And the Head had given instructions that everyone was to be roused, so that volunteers could be called for. A large rescue-party was to set off within a few minutes.

The Remove were enthusiastic, and in a very short time the juniors were fully dressed. I was at their head, and when I got down I found Nelson Lee ready, waiting for the seniors.

"Have we got to wait for the rest, sir?" I asked.

"Not necessarily, my boy," said the gov'nor. "You know your way?"

"Of course, sir!"

"Then you may as well be off at once—the sooner the better," said Nelson Lee quickly. "I have verified Singleton's appeal by ringing up the Bannington Police Station. They informed me that a rescue-party is now being prepared, Mr. Briggs having sent urgent appeals."

"Then it's serious, sir?" asked Pitt.

"It certainly seems to be, my boy."

We lost no time in getting off. Outside, the sky had cleared, and a nearly full moon was sailing in the heavens, making it easy for us to see our way. It was almost as light as day for our purpose.

"It's a good thing we're going first," I said, as we hurried along. "We know where those boats are, and we shall be able to get the people out in next to no time. I think we'd better do the journey at the double."

"Hear, hear!"

Everybody was only too willing to run, and the distance to Beechwood College was soon covered.

It was fortunate that we had no flooded area to go over, otherwise our journey would have been almost impossible. As it was, we arrived at the flooded school scarcely half an hour after we had started from St. Frank's.

We were the first rescue-party to arrive.

"Those Bannington people ought to be boiled!" said Handforth warmly. "They're a lot nearer, and yet we've got here before them. Why, we'll have everybody out, and in safety, before the police get on the scene!"

"Make for the boats," I ordered quickly.

We hurried away to the place where the boats had been concealed, and very shortly they were all out, and two or three of us got into each, and rowed as quickly as possible towards the dark bulk of the school, with its lighted windows showing out distinctly.

The experience was a curious one. The reflection of the lighted windows in the water formed a picture which

the juniors were not likely to forget in a hurry. And even as we approached the building, we heard a rumble, a roar, and a terrific splashing commotion.

"Another wall collapsed!" I said grimly. "We shall have to buck up."

"School ahoy!" roared Handforth. "We've arrived!"

Excited voices sounded from the window, and many heads were thrust out.

"Hurrah!"

It was a husky cheer of welcome.

And just as we were drawing our boats beneath the windows, other shouts came from the rear, and we knew that the Bannington party had put in an appearance. The police had come, to say nothing of other people—residents, who were anxious to lend a hand.

About a dozen boats were there altogether.

And most of them carried great flares. The lights were brilliant, and they cast a flickering radiance over the whole scene. All the women were lowered into the boats to begin with. They were quickly transported to the high ground, where our party was waiting to receive them, with blankets, hot coffee from thermos-flasks, and all manner of other things.

And while the rescue work was proceeding excitement ran high, for somehow we knew that we were fighting against time. Everybody instinctively realised that it would only be a matter of minutes before a real catastrophe took place.

For as we worked we could hear the walls cracking and crumbling in every direction. Beams were creaking, and floorboards groaned. Every now and then the whole structure of the building shivered and shook, as the flood continued to eat away the foundations.

At last everybody was out. The Hon. Douglas Singleton, at his own request, remained until the last. Everybody was out of the building before he stepped into the boat which was manned by Watson, Tregellis-West and myself.

"Thank goodness, you're all safe!" I exclaimed fervently. "It's been a ter-

rible time for everybody. We thought you were going to be buried in the ruins of the place."

"Not just yet," said Singleton calmly. "It's splendid of you fellows to come to our assistance like this! You're bricks—every one of you. My game's up, of course, and I shall be only too pleased to come back to the old life at St. Frank's."

"So you've learnt sense at last," grunted Watson.

"I couldn't very well do anything else," replied the Hon. Douglas. "This place is finished—is uninhabitable now, so the only course for me is to go back to St. Frank's, duly humbled."

"I hope you are," I said grimly. "You've been a thundering ass, and if I were you I'd offer a sincere apology to the Head, and ask him to deal lightly with you. You certainly deserve a flogging."

"Yes, I know," said Singleton. "Perhaps— Good heavens!"

The cause of his exclamation was clear.

A deep rumbling sound had come from behind us—a rumble which rapidly increased into a terrifying roar. Sounds rang out like pistol-shots, as beams and rafters cracked.

Then, with a truly appalling roar, Beechwood College fell to pieces.

The whole place crumbled entirely, and the debris was pitched into the

flood. Not a wall remained standing. It was as completely demolished as if a bomb had exploded in the very centre of the structure. The whole place crumbled to pieces.

The rescues had been effected in the very nick of time.

And, later on, Singleton and the other rebels returned to their old places in the Remove dormitory at St. Frank's. The majority of the juniors, I felt sure, were pleased that things were as they had been of old.

The Hon. Douglas was allowed in the dormitory again, and it was a pleasant surprise for him, for the last week—previous to his escapade—he had slept in a separate room with a prefect.

And on the morrow, Singleton was in the headmaster's study for quite a long time. When he came out he was looking calm, but his hands were twitching somewhat, and I noticed that they were decidedly swollen. But the Hon. Douglas said nothing regarding his punishment.

The other fellows were pardoned, in the exceptional circumstances, and their parents returned to their various homes satisfied.

The Hon. Douglas was as calm and cool as ever, and he confidently informed Fullwood & Co. that he would continue exactly as before. The boy who had bought a school had yet to learn the lesson of his extravagance.

THE END.

Look out next month for "THE SPENDTHRIFT'S LESSON!"—a great yarn telling how the Hon. DOUGLAS is finally ruined before he learns the lesson of his extravagance. This thrilling story appears in No. 297 of "THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY." Order your copy early.

MONSTERS OF THE PAST

THE Chinese keep their eggs for a hundred years before they eat them, and you might reasonably suppose that they hold the stale-food record—if there is such a thing.

They don't. In Siberia there are some Eskimos who have eaten meat 25,000 years old. It came off a mammoth.

This mammoth died, getting on for 23,000 years before Julius Cæsar came over, by falling into a snowdrift. Apparently he couldn't get out, and when the last of the great Ice Ages started shortly afterwards, his giant carcass became encased in solid ice.

And there he stayed until, a year or so ago, they had a particularly warm summer in those northern latitudes and, to the astonishment of the local Eskimos, the mammoth thawed out. They gathered round him, examined him, and hacked off a bit of leg for their dogs. When the dogs showed no ill-effects they tried it themselves. By the time scientists reached the place they found most of the great beast eaten.

First of the Elephants.

Mammoths, as you probably know, were great, hairy monsters which looked like elephants only bigger, and the last one died about 15,000 years ago—quite recently, from the scientists' point of view. Nor was the mammoth the first of the elephant tribe. Long before they appeared on the earth there were little elephant-like creatures called meotheriums. They had a kind of prolonged nose—like Schnozzle Durante—instead of a trunk, and they lived at the same time as the woolly rhinoceros, the sabre-toothed tiger, and the cave bear who hunted the very first of the men.

But long before this—long before there were any men or even any animals on earth—there was another world, a world which was ruled by giant reptiles.

Scientists call it the Mesozoic Age, and it started more than 140 million years ago. That's quite a long time.

Biggest of all these reptiles—indeed, the biggest creature which has ever walked on dry land—was the diplodocus. He sometimes measured ninety feet from his head to the tip of his long, pointed tail.

Reptile Tigers.

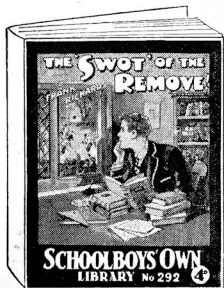
But, though the biggest, he was very far from the fiercest of the dinosaurs as these reptiles were called. That distinction was shared by the megalosaurs and tyrannosaurs, fearsome creatures like giant lizards, which towered forty feet into the air and sprang on to their prey with remarkable agility, grabbing it with their short forearms and savage teeth.

The diplodocus and his pals, the brontosaurus, were pretty scared of these reptile tigers, and as soon as they saw one coming they fled into the sea, where they could not be followed.

There were no birds in those days. But the air was not empty. Flying over the forest were queer winged reptiles, the pterodactyls. There were hundreds of other reptiles, too; rhinoceros-like creatures called triceratops; scaly reptiles like armadillos, with horns in their tails, called stegosaurs, and many more.

And what happened to them? The first Ice Age made the world too cold for them to live, and when it was over they had vanished, never to reappear.

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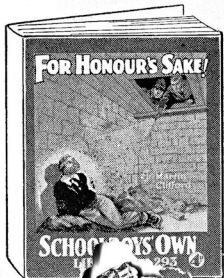


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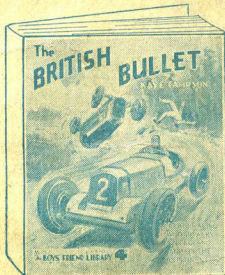
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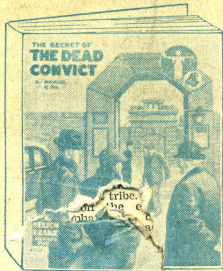


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