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THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON ARRIVES.

The Spendthrift of St. Frank's

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the author of "Dorrie's Christmas Party," "A Yuletide of Mystery," "The New Year Heroes," etc. January 10, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON ARRIVES.

"**R**ATHER a swell name!" said Tommy Watson reflectively. "Yes, it is a bit high-sounding," I agreed. "He's the son of a lord, I suppose, and he may be a bit of a bounder."

"If he is, we'll soon knock it out of him," declared Watson. "We haven't got room at St. Frank's for any more bounders. Fullwood and Co. are enough for us, thank you!"

"Begad! Rather, old boy!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "This new chap is comin' into the Ancient House, I suppose?"

"According to what Mr. Lee told me, it's a certainty," I replied. "The Hon. Douglas Singleton is booked for the Remove. Whose study he'll go into, I don't know; but I certainly don't want him to come into this one."

"Rather not," said Watson. "We won't have him."

"Well, it's hardly a question of 'won't,' my son," I said. "If the guv'nor likes to place the new chap here, we've got to stick him."

"Oh, but Mr. Nelson Lee wouldn't do that, dear old fellow," declared Montie. "He knows we're always together, an' he'll leave things as they are. I'm frightfully interested to see the new chap, but I don't want him here, begad!"

We were chatting in Study C, in the Remove passage of the Ancient House

at St. Frank's. It was early afternoon, and it was a half-holiday. The new fellow was expected to arrive at any minute.

"He'll come by the early afternoon train, I expect," said Watson. "He's bound to come before dark—Hallo—hallo! What's that out in the Triangle?" he added, staring out of the window.

"Looks like a big motor-car," I said.

"That's what it is, dear fellow," declared Montie. "Begad! It's the new chap, I expect. He's arrived in style!"

"Let's go out!" said Watson quickly.

We hurried out of Study C, and soon emerged into the Triangle. The car had come to a halt, and a crowd of juniors had already collected round. It was a gorgeous car—a magnificent limousine, glittering with nickel-plate and highly polished coachwork.

"My hat! That's a good car!" said Reginald Pitt, joining us. "Belongs to the kid's pater, I suppose. Let's have a look at the merchant."

We strolled nearer to the car, and as we did so an elegant youth of about fifteen stepped out, and surveyed the crowd of fellows with a somewhat supercilious expression upon his aristocratic countenance.

He was quite tall for his age, and his figure was slim and neat. His face was not precisely handsome, but he was undoubtedly good-looking. His dark eyes were active, and he glanced about him keenly.

A monocle reposed in one eye, and he removed it leisurely and smiled.

"All turned out to give me a welcome—what?" he asked pleasantly.

His voice was quite smooth and languid. He removed his glistening toppler, revealing a head of black hair, sleek and brushed straight back from the forehead. His whole attire was immaculate to a degree, from the tips of his patent-leather boots to the crown of his hat.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West was eyeing him much as one well-dressed woman eyes another—with a slight air of jealousy, for, without a doubt, this newcomer outshone the elegant Sir Montie.

"You're Singleton, I suppose?" I inquired, walking forward. "Well, we're jolly pleased to see you! I'm Nipper, captain of the Remove. I understand that you're coming into our form?"

"I believe there is a certain amount of truth in the rumour," said the newcomer, nodding. "But allow me to inform you that you have only imagined a portion of my name. I am the Honourable Douglas Clarence Cyril Singleton."

I grinned.

"All that first part is dropped now," I observed. "The moment you step into St. Frank's, my son, you become Singleton—just plain Singleton. We don't take any notice of titles here."

"That's awfully interesting," said the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "I don't know whether I've got a smudge on my nose, or what, but everybody is staring at me in the most pointed manner. I hope everything is all right—what?"

"Begad! You're simply toppin'—you are, really!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "I'm frightfully pleased to meet you, Singleton. My name is Tregellis-West."

"Sir Launcelot Montgomery—" began Handforth

"Dear fellow, pray cease rottin'," said Montie severely. "There is no necessity for you to tell the new fellow that I'm a baronet. It really ain't my fault, begad! It simply happened like it."

Singleton smiled, replaced his toppler, and turned to the smartly attired chauffeur at the wheel.

"As soon as my luggage is removed, Perkins, you can take the car round to

the garage and see about your own quarters," he said. "By the way, who sees after the luggage in this place?"

"Warren ought to be somewhere about," I said; "he's the school-porter."

As it happened, Warren pushed through the crowd of juniors at that very moment, and he touched his cap respectfully to the new fellow. It was always advisable to be very polite to start with. Warren was never slow to watch for tips, and the Hon. Douglas looked like a special case.

"Luggage, sir?" said the porter. "I'll take it in right at once, if you just tell me what you want took—"

"The lot, my good man—the whole bally lot!" said Singleton. "And, in case I don't see you again, you might as well freeze on to this."

He tossed Warren a pound note. The porter clutched at it, smoothed it out, and stared at it as though dazed. He frequently received tips amounting to five shillings, but this was quite unprecedented.

"Is this—is this for me, sir?" he asked blankly.

"Of course it is! You don't think I gave it to you to look at, do you?" said the Hon. Douglas. "And you might tell Perkins where the garage is."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Warren, touching his cap again. "I'll see about that there baggage straight away, sir. The garage, sir? That's round at the back—if you're meaning the Headmaster's garage?"

"It really doesn't matter what garage it is, as long as it'll accommodate my car," said Singleton. "That's the main thing."

"The ass is showing off!" murmured Watson. "Fancy tipping Warren a quid! Sheer waste of money—sheer display!"

"Seems like it," I said softly.

The Hon. Douglas turned to the chauffeur.

"Well, Perkins, I expect you'll find accommodation all right, and when I want you I'll let you know."

"Yes, sir," said Perkins, touching his cap.

"Keeping the car here for a bit, then?" I asked politely. "I suppose your pater is coming down later in the day—"

"My pater?" interrupted Singleton.
 "My pater is dead."

I flushed slightly.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry—it was clumsy of me," I said quickly.

"That's all right—no need to apologise," said Singleton. "I haven't seen my pater since I was about six months old, so I can't claim to have had very much affection for him. A fellow can't very well be loving at the squalling age of six months."

"No," I smiled. "I suppose somebody else is coming——"

"Egad! What's the idea?" asked the Hon. Douglas. "What's made you think that somebody is coming for the car?"

"Well, you told the man to take it round to the garage, and that indicates he's going to wait," I said. "If not, he would have gone off at once. But it's none of my business!"

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"I'm glad you know that," he said. "But since you seem to be interested, I might as well inform you that the bally car belongs to me——"

"To you?" I ejaculated.

"Precisely!"

"My only hat!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "The ass is only swanking!"

"You can't be serious, Singleton!" I said. "That car isn't really your own property, is it?"

"Every square inch of it," said Singleton. "But why are we standing here? I should like to go inside, and make arrangements about my rooms——"

"Your which?"

"My rooms. I presume I shall be allowed to have two or three rooms for my own personal use," said the Hon. Douglas. "In just the same way, I shall require garage accommodation for my car. Perkins, of course, will be able to live in the servants' quarters."

"But—but, my dear chap," I gasped, "you surely don't mean to say that you believe you can keep a private car on the premises—a car, with your own giddy chauffeur?"

Singleton raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?" he asked. "There's nothing extraordinary——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen to him!" yelled Handforth. "He's going to keep a private car, if you please! He wants garage accommodation for his blessed chauffeur! Is this chap a royal prince, by any chance?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can see him keeping that car at St. Frank's—I don't think!" grinned Pitt. "A junior in the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton frowned, and his face looked somewhat forbidding.

"What the blazes are you laughing at?" he demanded. "I'm hanged if I can see anything funny in what I said. If you fellows can't do anything but cackle, you'd better clear out of my way!"

"It's all right, Singleton—keep your hair on!" I said pleasantly. "The fact is, the fellows are rather amused at the idea of your keeping a car for your own private use."

"Well, is that very amusing?" demanded the new boy.

"It is—decidedly so," I replied thoughtfully. "I suppose you're only rotting? You ought to know that it's impossible for a junior to do anything of that sort. A fellow can't keep a car and a chauffeur at St. Frank's——"

"What utter nonsense!" snapped Singleton. "I shall keep my car here, anyhow, and I think you're a set of ill-mannered bounders to laugh at me. There's nothing funny in——"

"Cave!" whispered somebody. "Here comes Mr. Lee."

Nelson Lee came striding through the crowd. He was the Housemaster of the Ancient House, and he had obviously been attracted to the spot by the crowd, and by the presence of the limousine.

"Ah, Singleton! So you have arrived?" he said briskly. "I hardly expected you to come down by car."

"It's more comfortable," explained Singleton. "Railway trains are always a beastly bore to me—I get fed-up so quickly, you know. So I make a point of travelling about in my car."

"Oh, I understand," said Nelson Lee. "Well, Singleton, I'm afraid you will not be able to use your car in such a free and easy manner while you are a pupil at St. Frank's. Let me introduce myself. I am Mr. Lee, the Housemaster

of the Ancient House, to which you will belong."

"Oh, that's quite interesting," said Singleton languidly. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Lee."

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Watson. "Did you hear him?"

"The cheeky ass ought to be scalped!" said Handforth loudly.

Nelson Lee coughed.

"It appears that you are somewhat unfamiliar with public school life, Singleton," he said. "You must not address me in that blunt manner, and I shall require you to call me Mr. Lee in future—and it is usual to add 'sir' when you address me. Do you quite understand that, my boy?"

"It seems a mad sort of idea, but I suppose I had better fall into line—sir," said Singleton. "It ain't my habit to say 'sir' to anybody, and it'll be an awful bore to start now."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Lee drily. "What about this car, Singleton? I assume you are sending it back to London——"

"You are assuming quite wrong, then," said the Hon. Douglas, with a slight sneer in his voice. "I am keeping the car here, together with my chauffeur, and I shall require garage room and accommodation for Perkins."

The listening juniors waited somewhat breathlessly for Nelson Lee to reply. This extraordinary new boy was taking the juniors' breath away.

"I understand," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "You require garage room for your car, and accommodation for your chauffeur. I am sorry to disillusion you, Singleton, but you may as well know that it will be quite impossible for you to keep up a motor-car here——"

"What absolute rot!" said Singleton hotly.

"You will please moderate your language——"

"I'm hanged if I can see any reason why I should!" shouted the Hon. Douglas. "I brought this car here, and I'm going to keep it here. What's the bally idea of saying I can't?"

"It will be better, Singleton, if you will come to my study, and I will talk to you quite plainly," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You cannot keep the car here—that is absolutely final——"

"Oh, is it?" snapped Singleton.

"We'll see about that! I shall appeal to the Headmaster, direct!"

"You will do nothing of the sort, unless I give you permission to do so," said Nelson Lee sharply. "My decision is quite sufficient, Singleton, and Dr. Stafford will not alter it. Good gracious, my boy, you don't seem to realise that you have come to a public school. This is not a hotel, where you can give orders as you please, and have a car at your constant beck and call. You're now a junior boy of the Remove—a very unimportant person, let me tell you—and from henceforth you will have no private car."

Singleton frowned angrily.

"Well, I call it a confounded shame!" he said bluntly. "It's absolutely the limit—it's tyranny. The car's mine, and you've got no right to bar me from using it——"

"That will be enough, Singleton," interrupted Lee curtly. "Follow me."

"Thanks all the same—I'm staying here," said Singleton smoothly.

"You are coming with me, Singleton," said Nelson Lee grimly. "If you wish to avoid an unpleasant scene, you will come without further trouble. You must understand that you are not at liberty to do as you please here. When I give you an order, it is your duty to obey it."

"I have never obeyed orders in my life," said Singleton. "I am hanged if I can see why I should start now!"

"Come with me, boy, and I will enlighten you on a few important points," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I should advise you to say as little as possible at the moment. It will be all the better to do so."

"Oh, have your own way," said the Hon. Douglas. "But it's a lot of rot!"

He followed Nelson Lee into the Ancient House, and the juniors stared after him with mixed feelings. I was astonished, I was rather angry, and I was certainly indignant.

"The insolent rotter!" I exclaimed warmly. "He ought to be flogged for talking to Mr. Lee in that way! I thought he was decent at first, but he seems to be a swanker of the first order."

Handforth snorted.

"The chap's worse than a swanker," he said. "He doesn't seem to know the most elementary ideas of decency!"

"It would certainly seem that such is the case—admitted, my dear sir," remarked Timothy Tucker, the somewhat curious new boy in the Remove. I must remark that I'm considerably impressed. H'm! H'm! Quite so!"

"It seems that we've got a pair of freaks in the Remove now," said Handforth. "When you came, T.T., before the holidays, I thought you couldn't be beaten; but Singleton goes one better."

"Is that so?" said Tucker. "Remarkable—most remarkable!"

Tucker was certainly a curious junior. But he was rather liked by everybody, although most of the juniors regarded him as a cheerful sort of lunatic.

"Well, I must say that Singleton has started rather badly," I exclaimed. "But perhaps there is some excuse for the fellow, after all."

"Well, I can't see it," growled Watson.

"It's quite evident that he hasn't been to a public school before. Everything is new to him. I should say that he had been pampered and petted, and made a fuss of by everybody. He's got pots of money, and he's been led to believe that he can do exactly as he chooses. He'll find out his little mistake at St. Frank's—quite soon, too!"

But the Hon. Douglas Singleton was destined to cause quite a large amount of trouble before he learned his lesson!

CHAPTER II.

DECIDEDLY EXCLUSIVE!

"HERE he is!"

Quite a few juniors were waiting in the passage to get hold of Singleton when he emerged from Nelson Lee's study. They were curious to see what change there would be in the new fellow.

"Make way for the royal prince!" grinned Owen major. "Allow his highness to pass without discomfort, you low bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't make fun of the ass!" said Pitt. "The Hon. Duggie may be all right when he shakes down. It's our duty to do the shaking."

"Hear, hear!" declared Handforth. "You're right on the nail, Pitt. I vote we give the new chap a bumping, just to show him that we're standing no bunkum. It'll take some of the shine out of his clobber, too."

"No; no bumpings yet," said Pitt. "We'll give the kid a chance."

The Hon. Douglas came striding along the passage, and his expression was thoughtful and somewhat ill-tempered. I came along just then, and I was rather surprised, for I had expected Singleton to be in a vile temper.

The gov'nor had certainly lectured him straight from the shoulder, there was no doubt on that point. And, certainly, Nelson Lee had dealt with the subject tactfully.

"Well, how goes it?" inquired Hart, as the Hon. Douglas came up. "What about your car? Got permission to keep it on the premises? What about your chauffeur? Got permission to keep him on the premises, too? What about your suite of rooms? Have you booked them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To my surprise, Singleton smiled.

"My dear chap, you're chipping me," he said. "I have discovered several things within the last half-hour. I can't keep my car here, but I shall certainly garage it in Bannington or the village; and my chauffeur will take lodgings near by. These school people can't stop me from doing that."

"But, my good ass, what about the expense?" I asked.

"Expense!" said the Hon. Duggie. "Why, it's a mere nothing! Before long I shall be keeping three cars, I expect. I shall as soon as I leave this place, anyway. But I want to know where Study N is?"

I pointed down the passage.

"First turning to the left, at the end of the corridor, right-hand side," I said. "Is that where you'll make your quarters?"

"So I'm told," said Singleton. "It's an infernal nuisance—and a bit of a shock, too. I can only have one room, and I've got to sleep in a dormitory. I thought St. Frank's was a better place, hanged if I didn't!"

"There's nothing wrong with St. Frank's, you discontented rotter!" snorted Handforth. "You're the chap who's wrong! Coming here with your

beastly swanky ideas, expecting to find everybody kow-tow to you. I've a dashed good mind to punch your nose, just to do you good!"

Singleton stared.

"I wasn't aware that I asked you to address me," he said. "And if you punched my nose, my friend, you would very soon find yourself in the wrong box!"

"Oh, would I?" roared Handforth. "Take that!"

His fist shot out, but I thrust it aside just in time.

"Steady, Handy!" I grinned. "No need to——"

"You mind your own business!" shouted Handforth. "This chap needs a few punches, and I want to see what kind of box I shall get into."

"If anybody in this place assaults me, I shall inform my solicitors," said the Hon. Douglas loftily. "The matter will then be——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of his sentence was not heard, for everyone yelled. Singleton was quite serious, but the idea of a junior taking such a matter to court struck the fellows as being distinctly funny. Even Handforth was obliged to grin.

"Oh, buzz off!" he said, with a sniff. "The fact is, you've got no more sense than——than Church or McClure——"

"You silly ass!" roared Church.

"I'll show you to Study N, if you like, Singleton," I said genially. "This way. No ragging, you chaps."

The juniors allowed Singleton to pass along the passage without molesting him. It was a favourite game to rag a new fellow on his first day, but, somehow, it was not such an easy job to rag Singleton.

The ordinary run of new kids practically asked to be bumped. Nervous, unsettled, and afraid to speak to anybody, the average new kid was a butt for every humorously inclined junior in the Remove. But, in some way, the Hon. Douglas Singleton rather awed the Remove.

Study N was occupied by two fellows named Lincoln and Skelton. They were both quiet juniors, with no particular characteristics. They were not prominent in any way. Until the previous term they had had a third fellow in their study—Young. But Young had left St. Frank's for some reason.

"Here we are!" I said briskly, opening the door. "Lincoln and Skelton are home, I see. It's just as well, because they'll be your study mates for quite a long time. I'll leave you to it."

"Thanks awfully!" said Singleton. "Your kindness is amazing!"

He lounged into the study, and I closed the door. A good many other fellows had come up behind, and Handforth looked at me with indignation.

"What did you want to shut the door for, you idiot?" he demanded.

"Because Singleton's business with Skelton and Lincoln is not our business," I replied. "Leave the chap to it, for goodness sake! You'll have plenty of opportunities of chipping him later on. Let him get settled down first."

"Oh, just as you like!" growled Handforth.

Meanwhile, the Hon. Douglas was looking round Study N with an expression which did not signify an abundance of approval. He had said nothing so far, and the two owners of the study might have been non-existent for all the attention Singleton paid them.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Skelton, at last. "This is our study, you new chap, and you needn't make faces at the wallpaper. I know it wants repairing in parts, but that's a detail."

Singleton condescended to notice the junior.

"The fact is, Mr. Lee has appointed me to this study," he said. "I suppose you boys are Lincoln and Skelton?"

Skelton glared.

"My name's Skelton, you ass!" he roared.

"Oh, sorry!" said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "Just a little mistake of mine. I'm sorry you chaps are here, because I wanted the room for myself."

"Oh, did you?" snapped Lincoln.

"Yes. I object to sharing a room with other fellows——"

"You can object all you jolly well like! For two pins we'll kick you out!" exclaimed Lincoln warmly. "I've never heard of such awful cheek. I shall appeal to Mr. Lee to have you shoved into some other study."

"Hear hear!" said Skelton.

"It's not such a bad idea," agreed Singleton, nodding. "I can't say that I particularly like this box of a place."

"Box!" snorted Lincoln. "It's one of the biggest studies in the passage."

"Well, I suppose I'd better make it do," said the Hon. Douglas. "But this furniture will have to go, of course——"

"What's the matter with it?" snapped Skelton.

"Well, for one thing, it's rubbish—common rubbish," said the new boy disdainfully. "I simply couldn't exist in quarters of this sort. The chairs are hard and rickety, the table's made of deal, and you've only got a piece of rotten oil-cloth on the floor. It's simply appalling—poverty stricken!"

The two owners gazed at one another.

"Well, if this ain't the limit!" exclaimed Lincoln hotly. "You—you insulting new bounder! If you don't like this furniture, you can clear out! I don't care if you're a beastly duke! You can go and eat coke!"

"Rats to you!" said Skelton.

The Hon. Douglas smiled.

"No need to get excited," he said, sitting on the edge of the table. "Before I came to St. Frank's I had an idea that I should have a study to myself——"

"You were wrong!" said Skelton tartly.

"I was," admitted Singleton. "Well, I don't much care for the idea of sharing this room with you fellows——"

"We certainly don't care for your company, anyway," snapped Lincoln.

"I don't mean to offend you," proceeded the new boy. "Egad! Give me a chance to explain myself. First and foremost, I want this study to myself. Is that quite understood?"

"Quite," said Skelton grimly. "It is also understood that you're a blithering ass, and you won't shift us from this study."

"I might—one never knows," remarked the Hon. Douglas. "I don't want to appear unsociable, or anything of that sort; but it's just the fact that I'm an exclusive beggar, and I like a room to myself."

"You said that before," exclaimed Lincoln shortly.

"And you can shift out of here as soon as you like," added Skelton. "We don't want you, anyway!"

"The Housemaster has placed me here, and I'm going to stay," said Singleton smoothly. "You can't alter it, my friends. What I want to get at is this. Will you fellows clear out, and leave me in sole possession?"

Skelton and Lincoln gasped at the sheer "nerve" of the request.

"Will—will we clear out?" gasped Lincoln faintly.

"Yes."

"No; we won't!" roared the two juniors.

"And it's like your confounded cheek to make such a suggestion," added Lincoln angrily. "I've never heard of such impudence in all my born days! Will we clear out, indeed!"

"That's what I said—will you clear out?" remarked Singleton calmly. "I meant it, and I repeat the request. Of course, you understand that I'm not asking you to do this for nothing?"

"No; we don't understand!"

"You're talking out of your hat!"

"Not at all," said the Hon. Douglas. "I'm quite serious, and if you will do as I request, I shall certainly compensate you as you think fit."

"You'll—you'll do what?" asked Skelton, staring.

"Compensate you."

"How?"

"Well, I don't mind buying you out, if you don't mind me putting it in that way," said Singleton. "I've got the money, you see, and there's no reason why I shouldn't make use of it. I'll make it worth while for you chaps to shunt."

The owners of Study N were not quite so hasty now.

"It's all rot!" growled Lincoln. "What's the good of compensation? We've got to find other studies, and a few bob each wouldn't be much good. It's only the beginning of term, and——"

"I didn't mention anything about a few bob," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "I wasn't dreaming of anything like that. I quite understand that you'll need a fairly substantial compensation to give this study into my full control. And I'm ready to pay it."

"What do you call substantial compensation?" asked Lincoln.

"Well, nothing less than a fiver."

"Can't we do business?"

The other juniors stared.

"A fiver!" said Lincoln. "I suppose you're trying to be funny. You don't think we believe that rot, do you? No chap would pay a fiver to get two fellows out of a study!"

"I'm quite willing to pay it," said Singleton. "Here you are."

He produced his pocket-book, and the two juniors were considerably astonished to find that it was packed with notes—banknotes and currency notes. There must have been a large amount of money in that case.

"Great Scott!" said Lincoln. "Do you actually mean to say—honour bright—that you're prepared to pay us five quid, spot cash, to shift out of this study?"

"Yes, of course I do!" said Singleton. "And cheap at the price."

Lincoln looked at his study mate, his eyes sparkling.

"Well, this makes it different, of course," he said. "I thought the ass was trying to get us out for nothing. It won't be difficult for us to find places in some other study, Skelly. What do you say?"

Skelton shook his head.

"We're not shifting," he said firmly.

"Yes, but look here——"

Lincoln paused, as Skelton gave him a private wink. Lincoln, who never had much money, was quite prepared to clear out of Study N for the sake of two pounds ten. It was a small fortune to him.

"No; it's not good enough," said Skelton, who was more cute. "You can't honestly mean to tell us, Singleton, that you'll only go to a measly five quid. It's not enough. I'm standing firm, anyhow."

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"Well, I don't blame you," he said. "If I was in your shoes, I should jib, too. Supposing we say seven-ten?"

"No fear!" said Skelton. "Not likely!"

"You silly ass——" began Lincoln anxiously.

"My dear kids, I intend to have this study for myself, and I don't care what it costs me," declared the Hon. Douglas. "It's not my way to haggle over a quid or two; it's not worth the bally bore. I'm willing to make it seven-ten each, if you'll give up all rights to this room!"

"Each?" gasped Lincoln faintly.

"Precisely."

"We'll go—rather!" said Lincoln.

"No; we won't," said Skelton, who possessed the instincts of a keen business man.

"You must be mad!" panted Lincoln. "Seven-ten each——"

"This fellow says he doesn't care how much it costs him, and, if he really wants

the study, he'll have to pay our price," declared Skelton. "And our price is ten pounds each, and not a farthing under."

"Great corks!" murmured Lincoln weakly.

"Done!" said the Hon. Douglas. "A tenner each, and you agree to give the stuff into my hands? You'll clear out, and leave me in sole possession?"

"That's understood," said Skelton, nodding.

He did not believe for a moment that the new fellow was actually serious, but he thought he might as well play Singleton's own game—and have the pleasure of laughing at him when he refused to pay out. But the Hon. Douglas Singleton did not refuse.

He took four five pound notes from his case and tossed them on to the table.

"Two each," he said. "That's twenty quid for the pair of you. And remember, it's a bargain."

Skelton picked up the fivers, and examined them closely.

"You—you mean it?" he asked incredulously.

"Of course I do."

"Then it's a go," said Skelton. "We'll clear out as soon as you like, my son. Ten quid is worth freezing on to."

"They must be dud ones!" gasped Lincoln.

The Hon Douglas laughed.

"Then the Bank of England has commenced making wrong 'uns," he said calmly. "You don't seem to realise that I'm perfectly serious. You've accepted ten quid each to clear out of this study. Well, there's your money."

The two juniors could hardly believe their eyes. For any Removite to hand out such an enormous sum was amazing. Skelton and Lincoln did not see as much pocket money in six months—and here they had it in their hands, in one lump!

"Satisfied?" asked Singleton calmly.

"Yes, rather," said Lincoln. "I don't care tuppence about the study—you can keep it till Doomsday, if you like. Come on, Skelly—we'll shift our stuff out. We can easily find quarters somewhere else."

The two juniors left the study feeling rather dazed. And when their story was spread, and they showed the money, the other Removites were staggered. I was considerably surprised, on my own account.

"Twenty quid!" I exclaimed, with a whistle. "Why, the chap is spending money like water. If he can chuck twenty quid away to get two fellows out of a study, he must be fairly rolling in tin."

"Disgustin', I call it," said Handforth. "Of course, the chap is entitled to whack out his money as he likes, but he's doing it all for show. He wouldn't get me out of my study for fifty quid!"

"I shouldn't advise him to make the offer," grinned Pitt. "I don't blame Skelton and Lincoln in the least—I dare say I should have done the same thing."

"But where are those two chaps going to?" asked Watson. "If they try to get into other studies they'll have to pay for admission, I expect."

"Begad! They will if the other fellows are cute," declared Sir Montie. "The owners of the studies they go into will require some of that money—they will, really."

Montie was quite right. Skelton soon arranged to occupy Study I, with Ellmore, and Yakama, the Japanese junior; it cost Skelton two pounds of his money, but he didn't mind that, as he was still eight pounds to the good.

Lincoln had rather a difficulty in finding a place—mainly because the fellows were too greedy. Hubbard and Long, of Study E, for example, demanded five pounds, and they thought they would get it.

But Armstrong and Co., of Study J, stepped in and accepted Lincoln into their circle for the sum of three pounds. Thus the little business deal was arranged.

And the Hon. Douglas Singleton was left in sole possession of Study N.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLE IN THE FORM-ROOM.

MR. CROWELL gazed round the Form-room with an eagle eye.

It was the following morning, and every member of the Remove was in his place with the exception of the Hon. Douglas Singleton. Although the bell had gone several minutes earlier, the new junior had failed to turn up.

"H'm! Does anybody know where Singleton is?" inquired Mr. Crowell severely.

"No, sir!"

"He was out in the Triangle when the bell rang, sir."

"We told him to buck up, too, sir,"

Several juniors answered Mr. Crowell, and the Form master was about to make a further remark when Singleton himself strolled into the Form-room. He entered quite leisurely, and did not trouble to close the door behind him.

Mr. Crowell gazed at the new fellow over the tops of his glasses.

"Ah, Singleton," he said, with a touch of sarcasm. "I am delighted to find that you have condescended to attend lessons."

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"Yes I thought I might as well look in," he remarked casually.

"I am also gratified to observe that you are thoughtful," said Mr. Crowell. "You are doubtless aware that you left the door ajar."

Singleton glanced round.

"So I did," he observed. "Push the door to, somebody."

"You will go back and close the door yourself, Singleton," snapped Mr. Crowell. "You will please understand that I will not permit you to give orders here. Close the door at once."

"Oh, just as you like," said Singleton languidly.

He strolled over to the door in the most leisurely manner, as though he had the whole morning to perform the operation, and Mr. Crowell watched him with a darkening brow. The Remove waited expectantly for developments.

"The ass!" muttered Watson. "He'll get it in the neck soon."

"Serve him right, too," whispered Church.

The signs on Mr. Crowell's brow were certainly ominous.

"I am pleased to see that you are most brisk in your actions, Singleton," said the Form master icily. "You will now go to your place, and unless you can display more speed, I shall be compelled to deal with you promptly."

Singleton looked round.

"And which is my place?" he inquired. "I can't see any empty desk."

"Any empty desk—what?" said Mr. Crowell tartly.

"Why any empty desk—well, empty!" exclaimed the new boy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Crowell.

"Singleton, I suspect that you are deliberately attempting to make fun of me. You will please understand that I require you to address me as 'sir.' Do you understand that?"

"I didn't know that it was necessary—sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "Still, if you want me to say it, I've no great objection. It doesn't take much longer to say 'sir' now and again."

"I have no wish to argue with you, Singleton," said Mr. Crowell. "You may not be aware that we are wasting our time. Go to your place."

Singleton looked round again.

"But I can't see——" he began.

"You will sit between Hubbard and Owen major—those two boys in the third row," said Mr. Crowell, using a pointer to indicate his direction. Hubbard—Owen major! Make room for Singleton!"

"Certainly, sir," said Hubbard.

"But, I say!" protested Singleton. "I can't sit there."

"Eh? What did you say?"

"I merely remarked that I cannot possibly consent to sit in the confined space you have indicated," said the Hon. Douglas. "Dash it all, there's plenty of room here, in the front. What's the idea of fetching another guest in? I'd rather have one to myself!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Crowell sarcastically. "You would prefer a desk to yourself, Singleton. That is certainly interesting. But allow me to tell you that new boys in the Remove are not allowed to speak unless they are spoken to. I have already shown you your place. Go to it!"

"Come on, you ass," whispered Owen major.

"No thanks—I want something better," said the new boy. "I'll have a new desk sent down to-morrow, and an easy chair, too. I simply couldn't stick these hard old forms!"

"The fathead!" I murmured. "He'll get Crowell's rag out in a minute. He must be dotty to jaw at Crowell like this."

The Form master nodded grimly.

"So you require a special desk, and a special seat?" he said, remaining quite

calm. "Your requirements, Singleton, are most entertaining. But you will please understand that you are to obey my instructions."

"Well, I daresay I shall manage for to-day," said Singleton. "It'll be a bit uncomfortable, but that can't be helped. I'll have the other things fixed up by to-morrow."

"You will have nothing of the sort, Singleton," snapped Mr. Crowell. "You are trying my patience sorely, my boy. You will please understand that it is out of the question for you to bring your own desk and chair into this room. You will occupy the seat I have chosen for you, and I want to hear no further examples of your impudence."

The Hon. Douglas looked astonished.

"Impudence!" he echoed. "Egad! Where does the impudence come in? I haven't said anything that you could take exception to——"

"You have made a most preposterous suggestion—a suggestion which I can only regard as being impertinent," snapped Mr. Crowell. "Will you go to your place, Singleton? I shall not ask you again!"

"But, hang it all, sir, I don't see why you should rap on at me like this," said Singleton mildly. "I'm quite willing to pay for the new desk—and the chair, too. I'll have some good things sent while I'm about it. I'm rather keen on having a leather chair, with soft cushions."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Pitt. "Observe the thunder-clouds!"

Mr. Crowell's brow was undoubtedly blacker than ever.

"Singleton, I do not intend to waste any further time with you," he exclaimed angrily. "You will have no padded chair, and you will have no special desk——"

"I'm willing to pay for them——"

"Silence," roared Mr. Crowell. "You will understand, boy, that money will not buy everything—and it certainly will not buy the furniture you have mentioned. Good gracious! Do you believe for a moment that I would permit you to sit here in ease and luxury, with padded chairs?"

"Only one chair, sir," said Singleton. "There's no need to——"

"One more word from you, my boy, and I will cane you," shouted Mr. Crowell. "It is quite obvious to me

that you have been pampered and petted, and you do not seem to realise that a public school is no place for luxury. You must conform to the school rules."

"But I didn't know there was any rule about desks——"

"Whether there is such a rule or not, I would not permit you to sit in any different manner than the other boys," said Mr. Crowell tartly. "You will not be privileged in any way. It seems that you have a good deal of money in your possession, but you cannot use it just as you fancy. Will you go to your place at once, or shall I cane you?"

"You're making a lot of fuss," he said languidly. "I'll go—but I'm dashed if I can see——"

"Come here, boy!" roared Mr. Crowell.

Singleton turned, and adjusted his monocle.

"What's the idea?" he inquired. "Just now you told me to go to my place—and now you tell me to come back. I'm blessed if I know what I'm doing!"

"In that remark you are probably correct," said Mr. Crowell sharply. "You told me that I am making a fuss—a most impudent remark. You will understand, Singleton, that you are not permitted to criticise my actions."

"I seem to be going wrong everywhere," smiled the new boy. "Never mind, sir. I expect we shall get on all right soon—when we get to know one another better. I don't worry about it."

Mr. Crowell hardly knew what to say. It was impossible to be really angry with the new boy. The Remove listened with great interest, and hoped that the little argument would continue—for it was wasting a considerable portion of the first lessons. It was, therefore, all to the good.

"I will not punish you, Singleton," said Mr. Crowell, at length. "Go to your place, and try to behave yourself. I warn you, however, that I am not disposed to stand much more of your nonsense."

Singleton nodded, and strolled up the Form-room to the desk occupied by Hubbard and Owen major. He seated himself between the two juniors, and bumped down upon the hard form.

"Egad!" he said "This seems pretty rough——"

"Silence boy!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "We have wasted sufficient time already. Get out your books, and we will proceed with the lesson. Good gracious! We shall be ten minutes short."

"That's nothing to worry about," murmured McClure.

The lesson proceeded for some little time. Singleton did nothing, except open his books, and glance at them with casual interest. A new junior was generally allowed a good deal of rope on his first visit to the Form-room, and he was never expected to do much actual work.

"These books seem rather grubby," said the Hon. Douglas, in his normal voice. "It's queer the school can't provide——"

"Singleton, you are talking!" rapped out Mr. Crowell.

The new boy looked up.

"I know I am," he said: "You needn't tell me that, sir."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The silly ass!"

"He'll get scragged in a minute!"

"Boys, I require silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Singleton, you will please understand that you are not to talk in the class-room. You will not talk unless you are spoken to."

"Well, that's all right," said Singleton. "Hubbard spoke to me a minute ago."

"Sneak!" hissed Hubbard fiercely.

"Oh, indeed!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Hubbard, you will write me twenty lines!"

"I only whispered a couple of words, sir," roared Hubbard. "'Tain't fair that I should be punished for that! This chap has been speaking——"

"Silence!" thundered the Form-master. "Singleton will write me fifty lines."

The Hon. Douglas looked astonished.

"With pleasure," he said. "What sort of lines, sir? I'm a bit fogged over this line business. I don't quite catch on——"

"Have you not been to a public school before, boy?" demanded Mr. Crowell.

"No, sir."

"Good Heavens!" said the Form-master. "You have never been to school?"

"Not until I came to St. Frank's."

"You were educated privately, I presume?"

"I had a tutor, if that's what you mean," said Singleton. "A silly old ass he was, too. Didn't know what he was talking about half the time. I used to get fed up to the neck——"

"I have no desire to listen to your remarks concerning your late tutor," snapped Mr. Crowell. "Within a few days you will probably settle down to this new life, Singleton. I can warn you that you will have very little rope here. I am not a private tutor, and you cannot deal with me as you would please."

"Oh, I expect we shall hit it together," said the Hon. Douglas.

He bent over his books again, and the Remove grinned. The new fellow was certainly something of a novelty in the "new kid" line. He was providing the Form with unexpected amusement—and he hadn't finished yet.

Mr. Crowell had his back to the class, for he was preparing something on his blackboard for the next lesson. The Removes knew better than to talk; for Mr. Crowell had ears of the most acute variety.

But Singleton had no fears.

He produced a small box from his pocket, and handed it to Owen major.

"Take one," he said invitingly. "They're pretty decent."

"Shurrup, you ass!" murmured Owen major. "You must——"

Mr. Crowell looked round, frowning.

"Singleton!" he shouted.

The Hon. Douglas selected something from the box, and placed it in his mouth.

"Yes, sir?" he said calmly. "Just having a chocolate——"

"You—you are doing what, Singleton?" roared the Form-master. "Good gracious me! You are daring to eat sweetmeats in the class-room—before my face? How dare you, Singleton? How dare you, sir?"

The Hon. Douglas sighed.

"Have I put my foot in it again?" he asked. "I'm always doing something wrong, it seems! Eating chocolates isn't a crime——"

"Bring that box to me, Singleton," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "And please understand that it is not permissible to eat anything whatever in the Form-room. If you are guilty of such conduct again, I will cane you severely. You ap-

parently know nothing whatever of school routine."

"Well, that's true enough," admitted Singleton. "I'm finding out a few things. School seems to be a bit like prison! A chap daren't do anything, you know. It's rather awful."

"Bring that box of chocolates to me," ordered Mr. Crowell.

Singleton sighed again, and left his place. He took the chocolates to Mr. Crowell, and handed them over. The Form-master took the box, glanced into it, and then put it away in his desk.

"I shall keep this until lessons are over, Singleton," he said shortly. "And please remember that it is forbidden to bring eatables of any character into the Form-room. If you offend again I shall have no alternative but to inflict a severe punishment."

"I shall remember, sir," said the new boy. "I'm finding out a lot of things at St. Frank's. I hope I haven't done wrong in ordering a few bits of furniture for my study? I didn't know that all these rules——"

"Furniture for your study, Singleton, is a different matter," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "There are no restrictions in that respect."

"Oh, thank goodness," said the Hon. Douglas. "You've relieved me tremendously, sir."

He did not offend again that morning, and when lessons were over the other juniors chipped him considerably. It was generally felt that Singleton was not exactly a rotter. In many ways he seemed quite decent.

"Ordered furniture for your study, eh?" remarked Handforth, as the juniors trooped down the passage. "I suppose you've been getting something rather special? You seem to be a chap with expensive tastes, anyhow."

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"Well, I suppose it is a bit special," he said. "You'll see it soon. I ordered the stuff by 'phone—cash on delivery, you know—an it will be here this morning, if the fellow keeps his promise."

"I say!" shouted Teddy Long, pushing down the passage. "There's a whacking great motor-van waiting in the Triangle—from Bannington. It's full of furniture—you chaps! Somebody's going strong——"

"It'll be Singleton's stuff, I expect,"

said Watson. "Let's have a look at it."

We passed out into the Triangle, and could not fail to see the big van standing close to the Ancient House. It was not full of furniture, as Teddy Long had intimated, but it contained quite a large amount of stuff.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "This must be some stuff for the Head. Even Singleton wouldn't have furniture of this kind in his blessed study!"

"Rather not!"

There was a good reason for Handforth's remark, for the furniture which came out of the van was of the most exquisite variety. Two easy chairs came into view which could not possibly have cost less than twenty pounds each; a beautifully carved bookcase worth as much as the two chairs put together; a rich carpet and rugs, and a superb roll-top desk—a desk which the Head himself would have envied. Its value was at least sixty pounds. And there were pictures, and plush curtains and other articles of a similarly expensive taste.

"There's not much likelihood of this stuff being for Singleton—lavish as he is," I said. "Why, dash it all, this stuff couldn't have cost a farthing less than two hundred pounds."

The Hon Douglas nodded, as he strolled up.

"As a matter of fact, the bill amounts to two-twenty-five pounds," he remarked calmly. "I don't want to make myself short of cash, so I'm paying by cheque. Study N will look rather decent when these fellows have finished."

Handforth snorted.

"You can't kid us with a yarn like that," he said. "All this stuff isn't for you—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but we should just like a word," said one of the furniture men, touching his cap. "We thought mebbe you'd stay in the room and show us just where you want the things put."

"That's all right," said Singleton. "I'll come."

"Then—then it's true!" gasped Handforth.

"Bogad, it seems like it," grinned Sir Montie. "After this, dear old fellows, we shall all have to sing frightfully small—we shall really. Singleton seems to be goin' it strong."

"He not only seems to be, but he

is," I said grimly. "Over two hundred quid for study furniture! Phew! Where the dickens does he get all his money from? It fairly beats me, you know."

And nearly every other junior in the Remove was beaten, too. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was "going it" in a most staggering manner.

CHAPTER IV.

FULLWOOD AND CO'S. CHANCE.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD, of the Remove, was looking very thoughtful.

He did not seem to notice the fact that Gulliver and Bell had just entered Study A. He lay back in his chair, an unlighted cigarette between his lips, and he stared into vacancy.

"Seen that new chap's study?" asked Gulliver enviously. "Some fellows have all the luck in this world, you know. Study N looks like a palace now—it's absolutely the last word in luxury. I've never seen such gorgeous stuff in all my life—have you, Fully?"

Fullwood took no notice.

"And the fellow paid for it all spot cash, too," put in Bell. "At least, he gave an open cheque—and that's the same thing. I'm wondering what the Housemaster will say when he sees that study."

"I don't suppose he'll say anythin'—a fellow can spend what he likes on his own study," said Gulliver. "But I think we ought to cultivate that chap—he's rollin' in tin, an' we might be able to hook some of it."

Still Fullwood said nothing.

"What's the matter with you, you chump?" demanded Bell. "Can't you speak?"

"Eh?" said Fullwood, starting. "Talkin' to me?"

"Oh no!" said Bell sarcastically. "I was just holdin' a conversation with the bookcase! You silly ass! We've been jawin' for five minutes—an' you've stuck there like a stuffed dummy all the time!"

"I was thinkin'," said Fullwood.

"It seems to be a pretty big effort, anyhow," said Bell sourly.

"You needn't get sarcastic—I was thinkin' of somethin' which will benefit all of us," said Fullwood. "My idea is to cultivate Singleton. He's got heaps of money, an' there's no reason why we shouldn't get hold of some."

"Why, you ass, they're my words exactly," said Gulliver. "I said that not two minutes ago——"

"Well, I didn't hear you," said Fullwood. "But I'm glad you said it, because it shows that we're of the same mind. We certainly ought to get pally with this new kid. He's chuckin' money about as though it were pebbles. An' if we only play our cards properly, we shall be able to make a good haul. I don't suppose he's much of a hand at nap or poker, and it won't take us long to get hold of his surplus cash. I was thinkin' about invitin' him to tea."

"Good idea," said Bell. "We'll do it. We can have a game of cards afterwards. But supposin' this chap is cute? Suppose we play for high stakes—and lose?"

Fullwood grinned.

"We sha'n't lose—I'll see to that," he said. "I've got a pretty keen idea that Singleton is a mug—and a prize mug, too."

"He seems wide-awake enough," remarked Gulliver.

"A mug at cards, I mean," went on Fullwood. "Anyhow, there's no tellin' until we test him, an' I mean to do that this evenin'."

"If Singleton will take the bait," remarked Bell.

"He'll take it all right," declared Fullwood. "By what we've seen of him, he's got pots of money—he's simply rollin' in filthy lucre. Over two hundred quids' worth of furniture—a giddy car of his own—an' ten quid each to Skelton an' Lincoln for clearin' out of Study N! Why, the chap's a young millionaire."

"He seems to be one," admitted Gulliver.

"He's got plenty of money for us, in any case," said Fullwood. "There's no reason why we shouldn't have some of it. The ass doesn't know what to do with his tin, so we'll show him. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't line our pockets with Singleton's brass now that we've got the chance."

"It's a jolly good idea," said Bell. "All I'm worryin' about is Singleton."

He may not be willin' to fall into the little trap——"

"Trap!" snapped Fullwood. "Who's talkin' about a trap?"

"Well, we shall have to trick him——"

"Rot," said Fullwood. "I'm goin' to be straightforward over the whole thing. If you take me for a swindler, Bell, you're mistaken. If Singleton likes to join in a game of cards, an' lose his money, that's his look-out."

Gulliver grinned.

"That's one way of lookin' at it," he observed. "We'll certainly take means to see that Singleton does lose, by gad! An' I vote we go along to his study now, an' put the proposition to him."

"That's my idea," said Fullwood.

Afternoon lessons were over, and most of the juniors were thinking about tea. The passage was almost deserted when Fullwood and Co. strolled out. They were particularly anxious to get on good terms with the Hon. Douglas—not because they had any special liking for the new chap, but because they had a special liking for his worldly goods.

As it happened, Singleton was lounging down the passage as Fullwood and Co. turned the corner.

"Hold on, Singleton—just a word," called Fullwood.

The Hon. Douglas turned.

"As many as you like," he said. "It doesn't make any difference to me if you come along to my study. I can't stand here—it's too draughty, and I want to sit down."

"Right," said Fullwood. "We'll come."

They all entered Study N, and although Fullwood and Co. were aware of the fact that the little apartment had greatly changed its appearance, they were nevertheless awe-struck by the splendour which surrounded them.

Their feet sunk deep into a soft pile carpet; the easy chairs were the last word in comfort; the roll top desk looked magnificent against the wall. Beautiful gilded pictures hung on all sides, and the whole study, in fact, looked far too good for any junior schoolboy.

The Hon. Douglas took his stand upon the rich fur rug, with his back to the blazing fire. He adjusted his monocle, and eyed the visitors with considerable interest.

"Pretty decent place you've made of it," remarked Fullwood, looking round.

"Not so bad," said Singleton. "I mean to make one or two improvements soon, but this'll do just to be getting on with."

"My hat!" murmured Bell. "To be getting on with!"

"I'm glad you chaps have dropped in," went on Singleton. "I don't know you yet—but that's a little matter that can soon be rectified. You see, I'm in a bit of a difficulty, and I want some advice."

"You can rely on us," said Fullwood. "We'll give you any amount of tips, old man. By the way, do you object to smokin'?"

"Not at all," said Singleton. "As a matter of fact, I was wondering if smoking was allowed here. There are so many bally restrictions that I've given up taking things for granted. It's good to know that smoking is permitted."

Fullwood and Co. grinned.

"It's not exactly permitted," explained Fullwood. "The masters are down on it frightfully. But if you take a little care in keepin' the door closed, there's not much risk. We smoke in our studies regularly."

"Oh, I see," said the Hon. Douglas. "Try one of these."

He produced a box from his desk—a box of the most expensive cigarettes obtainable. The Nuts selected one each, and presently they were all smoking as though they enjoyed it which, of course, they didn't.

"Now, what about that advice?" asked Fullwood, throwing himself into one of the easy chairs. "You couldn't have asked better chaps than us. We're not very particular about the confounded rules. We consider ourselves to be rather sporty, an' we do pretty much as we like. It's no good pallin' up with a set like Nipper an' his crowd—they're too jolly good to live."

"Thanks for the tip," said Singleton. "I don't mind a bit of a flutter myself, now and again. By the way, I don't think I know your name?"

"I'm Fullwood," said the leader of Study A, "an' these chaps are Gulliver an' Bell—Gulliver with the ginger hair."

"You ass!" said Gulliver warmly. "My hair's fair, not ginger."

Singleton smiled as he shook hands with his visitors. Everything was going

quite nicely, and Fullwood and Co. were more than pleased. They hardly expected to meet with such success as this.

"Now we can get along better," said the Hon. Douglas. "What I want to know is this—who's goin' to do things for me in this study, as regards to lighting fires, and washing up crockery, and that sort of thing?"

"Well, you'll have to do that yourself —"

"My—myself," said Singleton, in dismay.

"Of course."

"But isn't there somebody kept to look after the studies?"

"They're swept out in the morning, of course," said Fullwood. "The servants do that sort of thing before brekker. But we have to light our own fires and see after our own crocks."

"It's impossible!" declared Singleton. "You don't suppose I'm going to wash dishes, do you? You don't think I'm going to light fires—and all that sort of rot? It couldn't be done!"

Bell grinned.

"Then you'll have to use dirty crocks, and be without a fire," he observed. "You've got this study to yourself, so you can't plant the work on to a study-mate."

"But I can get somebody to help me. I suppose?"

"That would be faggin'," put in Gulliver. "Remove chaps ain't allowed to keep fags, you know. There'd be a frightful row with Nipper if you fagged anybody here."

"And what's Nipper got to do with it?"

"Nothin', really," said Fullwood. "But he's Form skipper, an' he always shoves his nose where it's not wanted. Strictly speakin', fagging in the Remove ain't allowed, but there's no sense in stickin' to hard and fast rules."

"A mad idea it seems to me," said Singleton. "But fagging, I've always understood, means making a lower form kid do a chap's work?"

"Something like that," said Bell.

"Well, my idea's quite different," went on the Hon. Douglas. "I wouldn't dream of fagging anybody—it's rather a dirty business, to my mind. If a fellow does something, he ought to be paid for it—and I mean to give my helper a considerable weekly salary—a quid a week, at least."

"You won't have any difficulty in gettin' anybody, then," grinned Gulliver. "A quid a week! Why, you'd get half a dozen fags for that price."

"But you'd better keep it quiet," advised Fullwood. "We'll find somebody for you, an' fix things up. We'll say Teddy Long, for example. He's not much good for anythin' except lightin' fires and washin' crocks. We'll arrange it with him, an' send him along to take orders. A quid, you said?"

"Yes."

The Nuts were certainly impressed. For the new fellow to offer such a salary for a fag was rather startling. Most boys in the Remove did not receive half that sum as their weekly allowance.

"It's decent of you," said Singleton. "It's taken quite a load off my mind, you know. I'm glad you chaps dropped in."

"That reminds me," said Fullwood. "We want to invite you to our study, Singleton. We can promise you a decent tea, and we might be able to have a little flutter afterwards—cards, for example."

"That's not a bad idea," said the new boy, nodding. "But I'm afraid it can't be done. Thanks all the same."

"Can't be done," said Fullwood. "Why not?"

"Because I don't feel inclined to leave this study," said the Hon. Douglas. "I don't want to be personal, but your show is rather bad, and I hate anything of that sort. I want comfort. If you fellows care to come to tea here, you're quite welcome."

"That'll do splendidly," said Fullwood. "Thanks very much, Singleton. We don't mind giving you a hand to get the fodder ready. I wouldn't trust grub to Long, if I were you."

The Nuts were highly satisfied with their success. Everything was going well, and very shortly afterwards tea was in progress—an extremely lavish tea, for Singleton provided everything, of the best.

He seemed to be quite pleased with his new friends. He was a bit of a rotter on his own account, or several kinds of an idiot. Personally, I had an idea that the Hon. Duggy was an inexperienced young ass, with plenty of good in him, which was unable to find an outlet.

Tea over, Fullwood suggested cards. Singleton made no objection, and presently the four of them were playing poker for high stakes—with the door locked.

Fullwood and Co. were experts at this gambling game, but Singleton, although he knew the rules, was quite a duffer.

By a prearranged system of bluffing, the Nuts worked their hands exactly as they willed. And after half-an-hour's play, Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell had little piles of money by their sides. It was all Singleton's money, for the Nuts had been raking it in steadily.

"Had enough?" asked Fullwood at last.

"Me? Of course not," said Singleton.

"But you've gone down pretty heavily

"Rubbish!" said Singleton. "It's only a mere eight or nine quid. A trifle like that doesn't make me worry."

"Ten quid a trifle!" murmured Bell. "Oh, my hat!"

The game progressed, and it would have gone on longer, but Fullwood was rather nervous; he was afraid that some of the other juniors would look in.

So, at length, the game finished—leaving the Hon. Douglas nearly fourteen pounds out of pocket. He didn't seem to mind in the slightest degree. Money appeared to have no value for him. He had a never-ending supply of cash, and he used it just as the fit took him.

"You had rough luck this evenin'," said Fullwood. "It won't last like that always, of course. When it comes to our turn to pay out we'll pay out just as freely as you've done."

"That's all right," said the Hon. Douglas. "A hundred quid or so makes no difference to me."

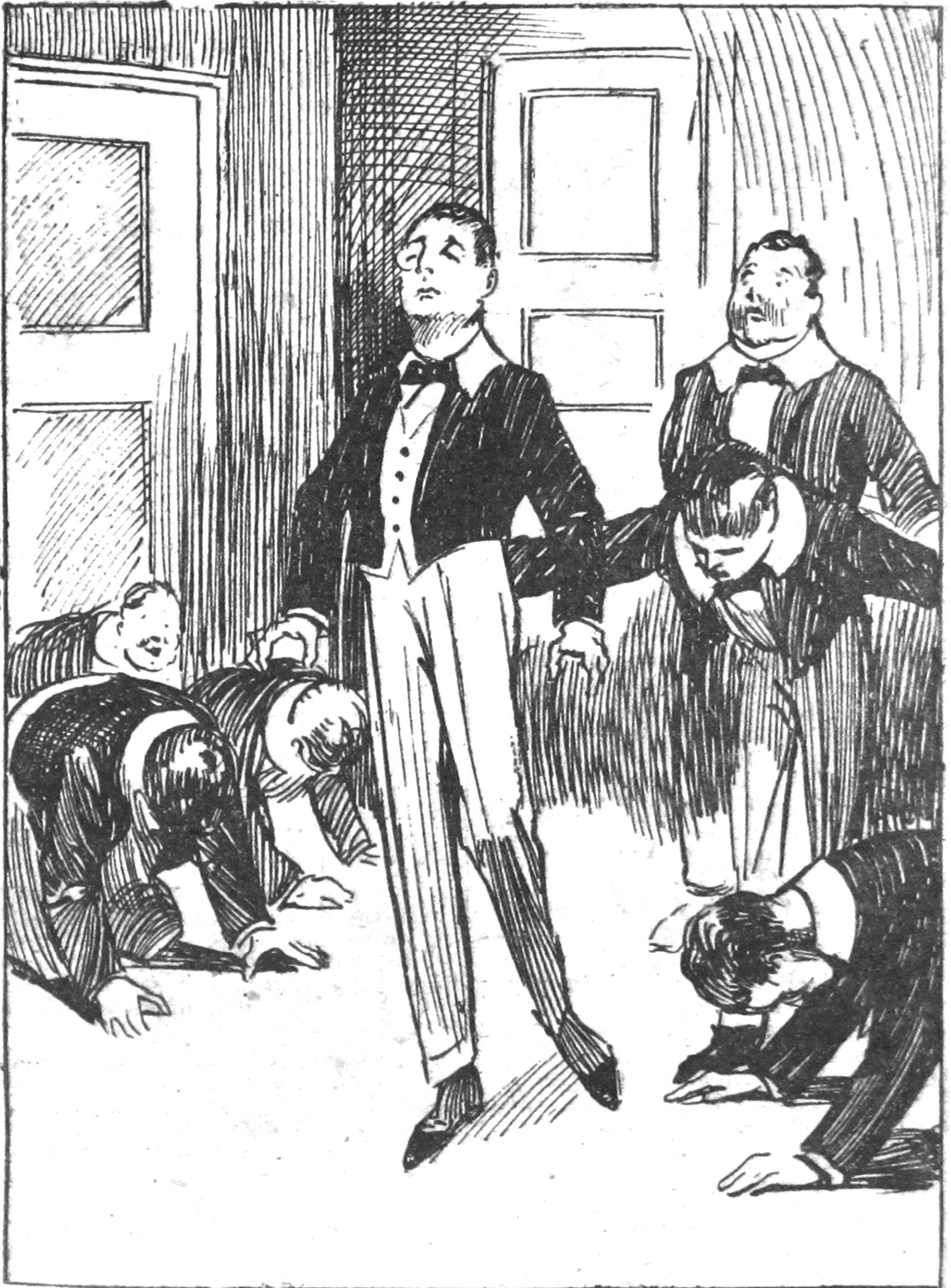
"A—a hundred quid or so?" gasped Gulliver. "You ain't serious?"

"Of course I am," said Singleton lightly. "My dear chaps, you don't seem to realise that I've got an unlimited supply of money—of my own. But we don't want to go into details of that sort."

"I suppose you couldn't lend me a tenner?" said Fullwood casually. "I owe it to a man—"

"You needn't go into personal affairs," yawned Singleton. "Here's the tenner. Pay me back when you like."

He tossed a ten-pound note across the



"Make way for the royal prince," grinned Owen major. "Allow his highness to pass without discomfort, you low bounders!"

table as though it were of no more value than a threepenny bit. Fullwood picked it up, and winked at his chums warningly; he did not want them to follow his example.

"Thanks awfully," said Fullwood. "You will have it back soon."

A few minutes later the Nuts left Study N, and they returned to their own quarters with twenty-four pounds in their possession. They could hardly believe it, but it was certainly true.

"By gad!" said Fullwood, taking a deep breath. "What a mug—what a double-distilled ass! Twenty-four quid between us—"

"Equal shares!" put in Bell quickly.

"Rot! I borrowed the tenner—"

"That doesn't make any difference," said Gulliver warmly. "We're entitled to eight quid each, so you'd better fork out."

"Oh, all right," said Fullwood. "Anything for a quiet life."

They shared the booty between them.

"We're nicely set for the week now," said Fullwood comfortably. "An' there's no tellin' when a chap like Singleton starts throwin' his money about. We won't be satisfied with twenty-four next time. While we've got the chance we'll skin him. If he's fool enough to be skinned, he deserves it, that's all I can say. One of you had better go along an' fetch Teddy Long here."

"I'll go," said Bell. "I'll send him straight to Study N—"

"No, you won't," said Fullwood. "You'll bring him here. We're going to arrange this faggin' business with him. We're goin' to give him ten bob a week to fag for Singleton."

"But Singleton is willin' to pay a pound," said Gulliver.

"Exactly," agreed Fullwood. "But Teddy will fall over himself to do the job for ten bob. I'll arrange it with him, an' pay at the end of every week. I get ten bob for myself like that."

"We'll have that ten bob in turn," said Bell firmly. "We're all in this!"

Bell went off, and returned within a few minutes with Teddy Long behind him. The sneak of the Remove was looking rather nervous, and he took care to remain near the door.

"I—I say, Fullwood," he said shakily.

"I—I haven't done anything—"

"Don't snivel—we're not goin' to hurt you," said Fullwood. "Singleton wants somebody to make his fire an' wash his crocks, an' do odd jobs every day. Are you game?"

"No jolly fear!" said Long. "It's likely, ain't it. I'm not a fag—"

"You'll get paid for doing it."

"Eh?" Teddy stared. "Paid?"

"Yes."

"That's makes a difference, of course," said Long. "As a favour I might be inclined to oblige Singleton. I always believe in being pally to a chap. How much will he pay me every week?"

"Ten shillings."

"Right!" said Teddy eagerly. "I'll go along at once—"

"No, you won't," interjected Fullwood. "Singleton wants to be careful about this affair. If anybody asks him, he's goin' to say that he pays you nothing—that you don't get a penny from him."

"But you said ten bob?"

"I know I did," agreed Fullwood. "You see, Singleton will give me the money, and I'll hand it straight to you. It comes to exactly the same thing. When you go to Singleton pretend to be doing the work as a favour."

Teddy looked doubtful.

"I'm not so sure about this," he said. "You won't pay me—"

"Hang it all, you're goin' to get your wages in advance," snapped Fullwood. "Here's the first ten bob. Now cut!"

Long grabbed at the note, saw that it was genuine, and "cut."

"It worked all right, you see," grinned Fullwood. "Now I'll go along an' interview the Hon. Duggy."

The three of them went, and found Singleton lolling back in one of his luxurious chairs, reading a magazine. He looked up languidly, and nodded.

"Glad you fellows have come back," he remarked. "I forgot to mention something rather important. I want your advice."

"Good!" said Fullwood. "I've fixed up things with Long—an' I've paid him the first quid in advance. It'll be better for you to give me the money every week, Singleton, an' I'll pay Long. Then you'll be able to tell the chaps, if you're asked, that you don't give Long anything. So don't discuss the wages with Long at all."

"Right you are," said Singleton. "It's just as well, perhaps. Now, about that important matter. I've been thinking it would be a decent idea to stand the Remove a supper one night this week—in about two days' time."

"A supper!" repeated Bell.

"Yes. To celebrate my arrival, so to speak," said the Hon. Douglas, who evidently thought a lot of himself. "I'll make it a rather grand affair while I'm about it. Might as well do it in style, you know. A champagne supper, to be exact. We could have it in the lecture hall."

"It's a ripping idea," said Gulliver.

"No trouble would crop up, I suppose?" asked Singleton. "I don't want to run against the bally rules, you see. Will it be all serene if I invite the whole Remove to a supper?"

Fullwood sat on the edge of the table.

"Well, I'm not sure," he said slowly. "Champagne is rippin' stuff, of course. But if I were you I wouldn't tell the other fellows about it when you invite them. It might get talked about. When the supper happens it won't matter, because it'll be too late to alter things."

"Right you are," said Singleton. "You know best, of course. I'll simply invite all the Remove fellows to a grand supper. I don't suppose the arrangements can be made at once, because a London firm will have to do the catering. So we'll say next Monday evening at eight o'clock."

Fullwood and Co. stared.

"A London firm?" repeated Fullwood. "What's wrong with the local people? Stone's, of Bannington, will be able to provide a decent feed——"

"That's just it—a decent feed," interrupted Singleton languidly. "I dare say Stone's—whoever they are—can fix up quite a good supper. But I want to provide something extra special—something the fellows haven't seen before. It'll be a supper par excellence."

"It'll cost a pretty penny, too," said Gulliver.

The Hon. Douglas smiled.

"That's nothing—nothing at all," he observed. "Money isn't any object with me, my friend. I've got to get rid of it somehow, so I might as well treat the Remove to a good feed. I'll invite the crowd to-night."

"College House fellows as well?" asked Bell.

"Well, no—it's hardly necessary," replied Singleton. "I'm an Ancient House chap, and my invitation will be confined to Ancient House boys. I'll announce the thing in the dormitory to-night."

Fullwood and Co. were not averse to partaking of a special supper at the Hon. Duggy's expense, so they raised no objection. And, just before lights out, when most of the juniors were in bed, Singleton sprang his surprise.

"I want everybody to come," he said, in conclusion. "Every fellow in this dormitory. You'll all be welcome, and I can promise you a top-hole time. It is a go? Will you all turn up?"

"You bet!"

"Rather!"

"We'll be there to a man, Duggy!"

"Great doughnuts!" said Fatty Little. "I'll only eat a small tea on Monday evening, so that I can do justice to the supper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll do justice to the supper, without stinting yourself at tea-time, Fatty," I grinned. "With an appetite like yours, Singleton will have to order a double quantity of everything!"

The new fellow was thanked heartily by the Remove, and one fact was certain—there would be no voluntary absentees at eight o'clock on Monday evening!

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING LIKE A SUPPER!

JUDGING by Singleton's short record at St. Frank's, I should say that the supper will be something extra good," I remarked. "He's got pots of money, and he wouldn't do the thing stintingly."

"That's what I've been thinking," said Tommy Watson. "But it's Monday morning already, and there's not a sign of anything—not even a parcel of grub for Singleton. He'll have to buck up about his arrangements."

"Begad! The lecture hall is as deserted as ever, dear boys," observed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "But there is plenty of time yet—there is, really. It's surprisin' what a lot can be done in a little time."

Morning lessons were almost due to begin, and the Hon. Douglas Singleton had fled to his study soon after brekker, and had locked himself in—to escape the inquiries which were hurled at him from all sides.

But he had to appear when the bell rang, and he lounged into the Form-room the last of all—as usual. He was getting on better with Mr. Crowell now, but he was still somewhat lax in his attentions to school duty.

"What about the supper, Singleton?" demanded Handforth. "I thought you were going to provide a spread——"

"Haven't you made any arrangements, you ass?"

"There's not much time, Duggy!"

"We're expecting a special feed, too!"

"Where's the grub?"

All sorts of questions were put to the new fellow, but he merely smiled.

"You needn't worry," he said calmly. "Everything will be ready by eight o'clock this evening. It's all fixed up. I've planned——"

"Attention!" ordered Mr. Crowell, striding into the room.

Further discussion was impossible, and morning lessons proceeded in the usual way. But when the Remove was released from the class-room, at the end of lessons, a surprise was awaiting it.

In the Triangle stood a light motor-van, and two men were busily carrying trays and flat boxes into the side-door of the Ancient House. A crowd soon gathered round, for there could be little doubt as to the meaning of that van's arrival.

It had brought Singleton's special supper.

"This must have cost the chap a tidy sum of money," I remarked as I watched. "Nothing short of fifty pounds, anyway."

"Oh, rot!" said Watson. "Fifty quid for a supper? Impossible!"

"Don't you be too sure," I said. "There are a good few mouths to provide for in the Remove, and Singleton told us that the feed is to be a special one. Some swell suppers cost hundreds of pounds."

"But this couldn't—it ain't reasonable," declared Watson. "We shall have plenty of good things, I suppose; but for twenty quid Singleton can buy enough to satisfy the Remove twice over."

"Well, we shall see," I said, "and I'll wager that my estimate is, if anything, far under the actual figure."

"Begad! I'm inclined to agree with you, old boy," said Sir Montie.

The van was still in the Triangle when the dinner-bell rang. The men in charge had gone to the domestic quarters; and, later on, I heard a rumour that Mrs. Poulter, the housekeeper, had been liberally tipped in order to get her to agree that the supper-party people should have the use of the small kitchen from six till ten.

There was probably some truth in this, for, when afternoon lessons were over, it was noticed by several fellows that two men in white coats and caps were to be seen in the domestic section of the Ancient House.

"Chefs!" said Reginald Pitt. "Chefs, by Jove! Singleton means to do everything in style, then. I shouldn't be surprised if we have a hot dish or two, or something hot to drink."

"Well, the chefs aren't here for nothing," I said.

It was noticed that quite a number of juniors refrained from tea altogether. The greater portion of the Remove, in fact, went tea-less. The fellows wanted to leave plenty of room for the big feed.

And then, at about six o'clock, there were fresh arrivals.

Six men, well dressed and stately, entered the gateway, and inquired the way to the Ancient House. They marched solemnly into the side-door—and the juniors were provided with a fresh subject for conversation.

"Six of 'em," said Owen major mildly. "Who the dickens can they be?"

"Blessed if I know," confessed Hubbard.

"There's only one explanation," declared De Valerie. "Those six strangers are waiters!"

"Waiters?"

"Yes."

"Gammon!" grinned Jack Grey. "Even Singleton wouldn't squander money on waiters! I can't believe it, you know."

"Well, I should say that De Valerie is right," I remarked. "Those men are waiters, sure enough. My sons, this supper is going to be a swell affair. We must be on our best behaviour—no larking about, remember."

"What's the time?" asked Fatty Little anxiously.

"Just after six, you fat ass!"

Little groaned.

"Only six!" he said dolefully. "Two hours yet! Two hours to wait—and I didn't eat any tea to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nicodemus Trotwood chuckled.

"You didn't eat any tea?" he repeated. "Then I must have seen double! What about those beef-pies, Fatty?"

"Well, I only had three—a mere biting-on," said Fatty. "It wasn't tea—"

"And what about the mince-pies—six of 'em?"

"Only a mouthful, altogether!"

"And the cake, and the tarts!" grinned Nicodemus. "You didn't have any tea? Oh, no! You had three teas, rolled into one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I had to have something—just to keep my strength up," said Fatty. "I didn't satisfy my appetite, you know. I'm frightfully hungry. I'm so hungry that I can feel a pain!"

"That's the result of over-eating, you ass!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty took it all in good part. He had, he admitted, only partaken of a light repast at tea-time, so that his appetite should be in no way impaired when Singleton's gorgeous supper came along. The majority of the other fellows had missed tea altogether.

Prep was hurried over by the Remove that evening in record time; and it was most probable that Mr. Crowell would have many faults to find on the morrow. But that didn't matter at the moment.

Many fellows attempted to get near the lecture hall, for there was much curiosity concerning the preparations. But a large man in evening-dress was stationed in the passage, and nobody was allowed to pass him.

So the crowd waited, anxiously and impatiently. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was regarded as one of the very best; a fellow who was willing to stand the whole Remove a feed couldn't be anything else but decent.

But I had my own ideas.

"Of course, we'll go," I said to Tommy and Sir Montie, as we cleared up after prep in Study C. "But I can't say that I altogether like the idea. Singleton isn't the kind of fellow I particularly admire."

"What's wrong with him?" asked Watson.

"You've seen as much of him as I have, so you ought to know," I replied. "He's inclined to be fast; he's palled up with Fullwood and Co. already, and a chap who makes a friend of Fullwood can't be much good."

"It's quite true, old boy," admitted Sir Montie. "At the same time, I believe that Singleton is a bit strange yet—he hasn't quite found his feet. begad! Before long he'll find out Fullwood's real character—and then he'll drop him like a hot brick. Singleton ain't such a bad sort."

"Well, that's my belief, too," I said. "He's not such a bad sort, but he's spoilt—he's had his own way for so long that he hardly knows how to keep to the right path. His pater's dead, you see, and, by what I can understand, he's had nobody to control him."

"Well, he's standing a feed to-night, and we're going to enjoy ourselves," said Watson bluntly. "That's the only thing that matters just now."

Eight o'clock struck at last.

There was a rush for the lecture hall, but the juniors had enough presence of mind to calm themselves down before actually entering the improvised supper-room. The excitement was quite considerable, nevertheless.

I was one of the first to enter, and I don't mind admitting that I received a bit of a shock.

"Good heavens!" I muttered, aghast.

"Is this the lecture hall?" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Begad! It can't be, old boys—it can't, really," breathed Sir Montie.

The other juniors were equally amazed.

For the lecture hall was transformed. In place of the usual drab walls, the whole place was festooned with gay decorations; the ordinary electric lights had been taken away, and much more powerful ones substituted.

The whole floor space was filled with tables, and each table was a picture. Snowy white linen dazzled the eyes; flowers abounded; and the silver and cutlery and glassware made a picture which is seldom seen outside of the most expensive West End restaurants.

The supper, in fact, was laid out magnificently.

At the side a number of benches had been transferred into sideboards, and

draped so cunningly that their real nature was hidden. And food of every description was displayed.

"It's—it's gorgeous!" I said, taking a deep breath; "in fact, it's too gorgeous!"

"Eh?"

"I don't quite like it," I went on. "The fellow must have spent a small fortune over this supper—and it doesn't seem right to me. It's simply a display—a show of money!"

"Oh, rats!" said Watson. "We're going to enjoy ourselves."

The other juniors crowded in, and the exclamations of astonishment were general. Some of the fellows had never seen anything like it in all their lives, and they were rather awed.

Waiters glided about everywhere—for De Valerie's assumption was correct. The six strangers who had arrived in the early evening were indeed waiters—and they were professional men, who knew their work to perfection.

Fatty Little was simply hugging himself with delight, and he hovered near the food all the time. He didn't want to take his place at one of the tables, but was compelled to at last.

And then the Hon. Douglas Singleton strolled in—immaculate, calm, and smiling.

"Well, you chaps, I'm glad to see everything looking so bright," he observed languidly. "You've got to enjoy yourselves now—you're my guests for the rest of the evening. We're going to have a royal time."

"Yes, rather!"

"Good old Singleton!"

"Three cheers for the host!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The Hon. Douglas bowed as the cheers rang out.

"I'm frightfully gratified," he observed when he could make himself heard. "But it's not my intention to make a speech, and I wouldn't think of inflicting such an ordeal on you. So we'll get busy as soon as you like, and do something more interesting."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bring on the grub!" said Fatty Little eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The supper commenced, and it was certainly one of the most gorgeous affairs that had ever been given—certainly,

nothing like it had ever been seen at St. Frank's before.

Most of the dishes were hot, and everything was served as one would expect it to be served in a West End club. The majority of the fellows did not pause to think. The feed was there, and they were the guests. All they had to do was to get busy on the job of eating.

But I ate every mouthful of food in a thoughtful way. I couldn't help thinking that Singleton was squandering money in the most reckless fashion. The very fact that he should have such large amounts at his disposal was astounding enough.

And I also observed that he was wearing real diamonds in his cuff-links, and there were many other signs of extravagance. The Hon. Douglas, in fact, seemed to have far more money than was good for him.

"I'm getting thirsty," murmured Watson, who was sitting next to me. "I shouldn't mind some of that ripping looking ginger-ale."

"You'll have some soon," I said. "The waiter's just coming round."

Watson had indicated the bottles which were dotted about, and I could not help observing that Fullwood gave vent to a chuckle. Fullwood was sitting a few seats from me, at the next table, and he bent over towards Gulliver.

"Did you hear that?" he murmured, grinning.

"Eh?" said Gulliver. "Hear what?"

"Watson called it ginger-ale," said Fullwood, in a low voice. "He'll get a bit of a surprise when he finds it's champagne. Duggy told me that the stuff cost him over thirty bob a bottle!"

"Phew!" whistled Gulliver. "An' there are dozens of bottles here."

They went on with their supper, but I was rather serious. Was there any truth in what they said? Did the bottles really contain champagne, or were they got up to look like it? I beckoned to one of the waiters, and he glided noiselessly to my side.

"What's in those bottles, waiter?" I asked.

"Why, champagne, sir," replied the waiter, mildly.

"Thanks."

I went on with my supper, but after a few moments I turned to Watson.

"Look here, Tommy, I don't feel comfortable," I said bluntly.

"Sitting on a tack, or something?" asked Watson.

"Oh, don't be dotty!" I exclaimed. "I've just heard that these bottles are filled with champagne—not with ginger-ale. Champagne isn't made for occasions of this kind, and the Head would have a fit if he knew of it. Not only that, but the Head is bound to know of it sooner or later, and Singleton will get into terribly hot water. We shall have to do something."

"What can we do?" asked Tommy.

"I don't know exactly," I replied. "Some of these chaps will be half-intoxicated after drinking a glass of champagne—they're not used to it. Anyhow, I'm going to take prompt action."

I'd made up my mind, and I stood up.

"I'm sorry to interrupt the festivities, but there's something I'd like to say," I exclaimed loudly. "Only a few words—"

"Dry up, Nipper!"

"You ain't the host!"

"This is Singleton's show——"

"My dear chaps, let him speak," drawled Singleton. "I've no objection."

"Well, it's just this," I said. "I wasn't aware, until a moment ago, that you had provided champagne with this supper, Singleton——"

"Champagne?" echoed Pitt. "Gammon!"

"Don't be funny, Nipper!"

"It's not true, is it, Duggy?"

Singleton rose to his feet.

"Not true?" he repeated. "Of course it's true. When I do a thing in style, I do it properly. I don't want to boast, but I can tell you that this champagne cost thirty-three shillings a bottle——"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The guests were startled and amazed.

"I didn't know that you had provided champagne, Singleton," I went on. "It's hateful to mention the subject, but I want to tell you at once, that if champagne is to be drunk, here, I shall leave the tables."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Same here!"

"I shall go, too!"

"Yes, rather!"

"We don't want any beastly champagne!"

A crowd of fellows supported me on the instant—for they, too, had no sus-

picion that the bottles contained intoxicants. Fullwood and a crowd of his followers lost no time in making noisy protest.

"You dry up, Nipper," roared Fullwood. "There's nothin' wrong in champagne! We're goin' to have it——"

"Yes, rather!"

"Champagne is just the thing for a supper like this," said Bell.

The whole room was in an uproar.

"If one of those bottles is opened, I'm clearing out," shouted Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

The Hon Douglas rose to his feet.

"Steady, steady!" he shouted.

"Egad! There's no need to get excited over a trifle. If I have caused offence to anybody by providing champagne, I beg to tender my humble apologies. I didn't know it was against the rules, or anything of that sort. It's not necessary to tell me twice. Waiter, clear the champagne away."

"Yes, but look here," roared Fullwood. "I don't see——"

"Clear the champagne away," repeated the Hon. Douglas calmly. "Pack it, and send it back to London. And get some ginger pop from the little shop in the Triangle—Mrs. Hake's got quite a good supply."

"Good man!" I exclaimed heartily.

"That's the style, Singleton," shouted Pitt. "I didn't think you'd be such a sport. Good business!"

Fullwood and Co. were defeated, and three-fourths of the Remove continued the supper enjoyably. For it was a fact that the majority of the fellows were against having champagne. And Singleton had had the good sense to give in gracefully to the popular demand.

I felt rather warmer towards him, for his action in so doing had been distinctly sportsmanlike. He had not even protested. A spendthrift, he was probably weak and easily led; but, in the main, he was not such a bad sort.

The supper was half-way through when the door opened, and Nelson Lee strode in. As Housemaster of the Ancient House, he had a perfect right to do so. He had given permission for supper to be held, and he had probably looked in to see how things were going on.

I noticed the gov'nor at once. He was smiling as he entered; but then his

smile vanished, and a brief expression of surprise gave place to a frown.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This—this is somewhat surprising, boys. I certainly did not expect to see anything of this nature in the lecture hall."

Nelson Lee, to tell the truth, was rather staggered by the splendour of the affair. "Just a little celebration, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "I hope we haven't been making much noise?"

"I have not come here to complain in that respect, Singleton," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "It was not my intention to complain at all. But I certainly feel bound to ask you one or two questions."

"You're quite welcome to, sir," said the Hon. Duggy.

"I should like to know who is paying the expenses for this somewhat grand affair," said Nelson Lee.

"I am, sir," said Singleton.

"You are—out of your own money?"

"Why, of course, sir."

"You must allow me to tell you, Singleton, that you are appallingly extravagant," said Nelson Lee sternly. "There was no necessity for you to provide a supper on such a lavish scale as this. Later on I shall request you to inform me of the cost——"

"I can tell you that now, sir," interrupted Singleton. "I've paid the bill already. It amounts to one hundred and ninety pounds."

"Phew!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Great doughnuts!"

"Near two hundred quid!"

"My only Topper!"

There were many ejaculations of sheer amazement—but I wasn't at all surprised. I had mentally decided that two hundred pounds was about the figure; for this supper was extravagant to a degree.

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Do you seriously mean to tell me, Singleton, that you have paid two hundred pounds for a mere supper?"

"A hundred and ninety, sir," corrected Singleton.

"I am astonished that you should have such large sums at your disposal," went on the Housemaster sternly.

"Furthermore, I cannot countenance such a display of extravagance as this—much as I dislike mentioning the matter now. Singleton, you are very foolish, you will please understand that you

are not allowed to spend your money in this way——"

"But it's my own money, sir!" said the Hon. Douglas warmly.

"Unfortunately, yes," agreed Lee. "But I will not permit you to waste it in this fashion. It is not my intention to inform the Headmaster of this occurrence, and I trust it will not reach his ears—or you will be severely punished. I advise you to conclude your repast as rapidly as possible."

And Nelson Lee, angry at the wanton waste of money, turned on his heel and left the lecture hall. He left the Remove somewhat dampened, and the gorgeous supper was not quite such a success after all.

The Hon. Douglas Singleton, in fact, had overdone it.

CHAPTER VI.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT.

FATTY LITTLE found it impossible to sleep.

Lights were already out, and most of the juniors, well-filled, were sleeping peacefully in the Remove dormitory.

But Jimmy Little lay awake.

Not because he was in pain; not because he had over-eaten himself; but because his mind was too busy to allow him to sleep. He couldn't help remembering that large quantities of food still lay exposed in the lecture hall.

"Biscuits by the hundredweight," murmured Fatty. "Chocolate biscuits, wine biscuits, and everything of the best! Cakes galore, and any amount of other good things. And they're all going to waste!"

The fact was, Little had heard that the motor-van was coming in the early morning to clear away the remnants of the supper. Everything had been paid for; so the food that was left over would go back to the caterers. Singleton didn't care at all, but it went against Fatty's grain.

There was all that stuff—bought and paid for—and it would be returned! Singleton had ordered too much—and paid too much—and it was his property.

He didn't want it, so Fatty considered that he had a perfect right to it. And in a way, he was undoubtedly correct. The food certainly didn't belong to the catering firm. For they had received their money.

And, at last, Fatty could rest no longer.

He slipped out of bed, and shook the shoulder of Nicodemus Trotwood, his study mate. Trotwood turned over, and blinked up into Fatty's round face.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he muttered. "I was just dropping off—"

"I've got an idea," said Fatty. "We're rather short of grub in Study L, ain't we, Trotty?"

"Good gracions! Grub again!" said Nicodemus. "I've never known such a glutton! After all you demolished at that supper—"

"Oh, ring off!" protested Fatty. "You don't understand. I'm satisfied for the moment—I'm not a bit hungry."

"Marvellous!"

"But there's all that grub there—wasted!" went on Fatty warmly. "Our cupboard's a bit bare, so I thought it would be a good idea to slip down and transfer all those biscuits and things into Study L. What do you say?"

Nicodemus Trotwood sat up.

"What do I say?" he repeated. "I say you're a burglar!"

"Oh, rot!" protested Fatty.

"The stuff's not yours—"

"What does that matter? Singleton provided it for the Remove—and we're a part of the Remove, ain't we?" argued Fatty. "He doesn't want the grub himself, and I'm blessed if I can see why the caterers should have it—after overcharging so frightfully. I regard it as a matter of duty to pack some of that grub into our study."

Trotwood grinned.

"Well, I'm not going to prevent you from doing your duty," he said. "You'd better get busy on the job."

"You agree?" asked Fatty eagerly.

"Well, I don't see anything wrong in it—especially if you tell Singleton in the morning," said Trotwood. "If he raises any objection, you can hand the grub over to him—but I don't suppose he'll care tuppence."

"Good!" said Fatty. "Slip some things on!"

"Eh?"

"Get dressed—"

"But I'm not coming, you fat ass!"

"Be a sport!" urged Fatty. "I don't mind going down alone, but we can get the job done in half the time. Buck up!"

Trotwood was quite a good-natured fellow, and he slipped out of bed, and donned his dressing-gown. Little was already in his trousers and jacket, and the pair soon slipped out of the dormitory, and made their way downstairs.

Everything was quiet and still in that quarter of the Ancient House, and the lecture hall was deserted. Fatty had an electric torch with him, and the light from it showed all the tables, exactly as they had been left by the supper party.

"Looks a bit of a wreck," murmured Trotwood. "Now, where's the grub you talked about?"

"On the benches, at the end."

They crossed over to the other side of the lecture hall. And here they found all the surplus food—quite large quantities of it. Some of the stuff was perishable, and the raiders only seized a small quantity of this, for it would not keep good for long.

But of other things they took as much as they could manage—biscuits, and cakes and other good things. They made several journeys, and by the time they had finished the big cupboard in Study L was packed out.

Fatty Little's face expressed supreme satisfaction when, at last, the two juniors made their way up to the dormitory once more.

"We shall be all right for weeks now, Trotty," he said joyfully. "Don't you think it was a ripping idea of mine?"

"It wasn't so bad," admitted Trotwood. "But I don't agree with your remark about weeks—unless I fit a lock on that cupboard, and keep the key!"

"Oh, don't be funny," said Fatty. "I sha'n't eat much—"

"Shush!" breathed Trotwood. "I can hear somebody!"

He looked round sharply, and pulled Little into a window recess. They had just arrived on the landing. And, certainly, there were faint sounds of moving people near by.

The pair only got into the recess in the nick of time.

Then four figures came creeping down the corridor. They moved stealthily,

and the two hidden watchers wondered who they could be. But it was not necessary for them to be long in doubt.

"This way," murmured a voice. "Keep close to me, Duggy, an' you'll be all right. This is a rippin' idea of yours, an' we shall finish up the evenin' in style."

"That's what I was thinking," said Singleton.

The four figures passed down the stairs, and Trotwood and Fatty emerged from their place of concealment.

"Fullwood and Co. and the new chap," said Trotwood grimly. "They're up to no good, I'll bet. Look here! I'm going to slip downstairs, and see what the rotters are doing."

"I'll come with you," said Fatty.

There was no time to raise objections, and the two juniors slipped downstairs, and made their way to the Remove passage—for Trotwood had an idea that the Nuts meant to gamble in their study.

But he was wrong.

The four juniors had slipped out into the Triangle by the time Nicodemus and Fatty had got downstairs. The watchers saw this from the window of their study.

"Going out on the randan!" murmured Trotwood. "We'll just slip to the wall, and see which direction the bounders take. And I'll have a jaw with Singleton to-morrow; I'll give him a lecture."

"He needs it," said Fatty gruffly.

They easily got out of the window, and hurried across the dark Triangle to the school wall. By the time they reached it they heard a low throbbing out in the road. One glance was sufficient to tell them what it meant.

A big car was waiting out in the lane, and four figures were just piling into it.

"Go to Bannington, Jenkins," came Singleton's voice. "I'll give you other directions when we get there."

"Yes, sir."

The car glided noiselessly off.

"My hat!" breathed Trotwood. "What do you think of that? Four juniors going off to Bannington after lights-out, in a whacking great car!"

"It's amazing," said Fatty blankly.

"Singleton's car, of course," said Trotwood. "He's keeping it in Bellton, I believe, and the chauffeur's got lodgings there. But he must be mad to use his car in this kind of way."

"Well, we can't do anything," said Fatty. "It's jolly cold out here—I'm not fully dressed, you know. Let's get back into the House."

They slipped across the Triangle, and within a few minutes they were once more in the Remove dormitory. Fatty accidentally pushed against my bed as he passed, and I was awake on the instant.

"Who's that?" I asked, sitting up.

"Only me," said Fatty. "I say, Trotty, we might as well tell Nipper about it, now he's awake. What do you say?"

"The best thing to do," said Nicodemus.

The two juniors lost no time in informing me of what they had seen, and I was rather furious—not with Singleton, but with Fullwood and Co. In all probability, they had suggested this night jaunt. Unless the Hon. Douglas took care, he would be drawn into all sorts of shady matters by the unscrupulous trio of Study A.

"Singleton has started early," I said grimly. "Well, he'll get a thundering good talking to from me to-morrow. I'll lecture him—although it isn't generally my habit to lecture anybody."

"The new chap doesn't seem to know the value of money," whispered Trotwood. "He is the biggest spendthrift I've ever heard of. He simply chucks his tin about as though he had millions!"

"Even if he had millions, that's no excuse for spending money on things that aren't worth it," I said grimly. "The fact is, Singleton needs a lesson—and I fancy he'll receive one while he's at St. Frank's!"

CHAPTER VII.

UNDESIRABLE ACQUAINTANCES.

"HERE we are!" said Fullwood genially.

Singleton's magnificent car had pulled up smoothly within the courtyard of the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington. It was the best hotel in the town, and it was still open—for the hour was not very late.

"This is where we meet your pals, isn't it!" said the Hon. Douglas, as he got down. "Good! There's no reason

why we shouldn't have a little sport. What's the good of living if we don't enjoy ourselves?"

"That's my argument, exactly," said Fullwood. "This way."

Singleton gave instructions to his chauffeur, and the four juniors entered the big hall of the hotel.

Some few days earlier Fullwood had been introduced to a man named Mr. Carslake, by a bookmaker. Mr. Carslake, Fullwood understood, was residing at the Grapes Hotel, and the man, although presumably a gentleman, was something in the nature of a cardsharp.

But he was altogether too big a "pot" to have any dealings with a fellow like Ralph Leslie Fullwood. However, Fullwood had a scheme in his mind, and he thought he might as well give it a run.

"Mr. Carslake in?" asked Fullwood, addressing the hotel clerk.

"Mr. Carslake is in the billiard room, I think," said the clerk.

"You might send for him," said Fullwood. "I want to speak to him urgently."

The clerk looked rather surprised, but he rang a bell, and a youth in buttons appeared. Fullwood remained by the desk, while his chums lolled elegantly on the plush lounges.

Within three minutes a man appeared—a man in evening-dress about forty years of age, clean shaven, and with dark hair. He looked at Fullwood with a questioning frown as he came up.

"Well?" he said. "You want to see me?"

"Yes, Mr. Carslake," said Fullwood. "If you will just come over to the corner, I'll have a few private words."

They went over into the corner, and it was quite obvious that Fullwood's companion was impatient.

"Look here, young man, I can only spare a couple of minutes," he said. "I've left a game of billiards to come to you—"

"I sha'n't keep you long," said Fullwood. "You remember when I was introduced to you the other day?"

"Well?"

"The fellow who made the introduction told me you were pretty keen at cards," went on Fullwood. "He said that it needed a very clever fellow to get the better of you when it came to a

little gamble, and that you were always open to have a flutter."

Mr. Carslake grunted.

"Well, I don't feel inclined to have a flutter with you, my lad," he said gruffly. "I might as well tell you the truth straight out. I play with people who have more money at their disposal than you have."

"Exactly," said Fullwood. "That's why I have come to you now. I'm not proposing that you should make any money out of me, but I can put you on to a good thing, if you feel inclined."

"What are you getting at?" demanded the other.

"I've brought a fellow here named Singleton—the Hon. Douglas Singleton," said Fullwood. "He's simply rollin' in money, an' he's absolutely a mug at cards. You can get almost anythin' you like out of him—"

"Do you take me for a cardsharp, or a swindler?" demanded Carslake angrily.

Fullwood smiled.

"There's no need for us to be at cross-purposes," he said calmly. "I know well enough that you're open to make a bit of money—easily," he said. "I can show you the way, and you get ratty."

"I don't play cards with kids," snapped Carslake, rising.

"Not if it's worth a hundred quid?" asked Fullwood quickly.

Carslake sat down again.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said. "No schoolboy's capable of paying out a hundred pounds—or even playing with such a sum."

"Singleton is," said Fullwood. "He's simply rollin' in money. I've never seen anybody spend cash like he does. He's got a huge car of his own, and the second day he was at St. Frank's he spent over two hundred pounds on furniture. He gave a supper to the Remove to-night, and it cost him nearly two hundred quid. He's got about three hundred on him now—in notes."

Mr. Carslake, at last, was interested.

"Is this true?" he demanded.

"Of course it is."

"And you say the boy is a mug?"

"The biggest mug you could wish to meet," grinned Fullwood. "It's my idea that you can make fifty quid in an hour easily. We don't want to be here any longer—for the first time. And all

I want is ten per cent. of your winnings. What do you say?"

"We'll talk about that afterwards," said Carslake. "We'll go up to my private room, and it won't take me long to test your yarn. I've got a friend with me, a man named Crosse. We three will play together—Crosse and I and this pal of yours, I mean."

The matter was settled for the moment, and Carslake strolled over the lounge, and was introduced to Fullwood's companions. Then they all went up the big staircase to room 50.

It was Carslake's private apartment, and it was quite a cheerful place. The electric lights were soft, and the fire was blazing cheerfully. Mr. Crosse turned out to be another gentleman of Carslake's own set, only somewhat younger. Both were crooks, strictly speaking.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't have a little enjoyment while we're up here," said Carslake genially. "I'm rather glad of you for company, and we can have quite a decent time. Who says champagne?"

They all did, and the champagne was partaken of.

Then cigarettes were lighted, cards were produced, and the real object of Fullwood's visit began.

"Feel like a game, young 'un?" asked Carslake smoothly.

"I don't mind," said Singleton. "What's it to be?"

"Poker, if you care for it?"

"Good enough," said the Hon. Douglas. "What's the limit?"

"Oh, I don't bother about limits," said Carslake carelessly. "I only play with people who can put down the money if they lose. But supposing we say a twenty pound limit? No bet to be more than twenty pounds?"

"That'll suit me all right," said the Hon. Douglas.

The limit was double Carslake's usual amount, but he didn't mind. He was quite certain that he would not lose any money on the game.

Fullwood and Co. stood looking on, and Fullwood had no compunction whatever. He had brought Singleton here for the express purpose of placing him in the hands of these sharpers.

But the Hon. Douglas, although he prided himself upon his smartness, was really an absolute fool at cards. He didn't care how much money he lost, or how much money he spent. Money

had no value to him; he had such a large supply of cash at his disposal that he never gave it a thought.

Like all spendthrifts, the knowledge that he could always obtain further supplies was sufficient for him.

The game, as Fullwood had anticipated, was a mere farce.

The sharpers were all over their victim. To begin with, they allowed him to win, and Singleton was quite pleased with himself. But, after about twenty minutes, he made very rash bets. He laid down fifteen pounds on a very poor hand—two of a kind, and he was beaten with extreme ease.

Carslake and his companions, in all probability, knew the cards by heart; they knew exactly what cards were in Singleton's hands, for they were probably marked. At all events, the Hon. Douglas lost heavily.

Before an hour had elapsed over a hundred pounds of his money was in the possession of Carslake and Crosse. By this time the men were thoroughly convinced that Fullwood had put them on to a good thing. They could have gone on further, for Singleton was prepared for it, but Carslake called a halt. He did not want to be too hasty, or the pigeon might take fright before it was plucked.

"I think that'll be enough for to-night," said Carslake carelessly. "You've lost rather heavily, young man—you had all the bad luck."

The Hon. Douglas yawned.

"It doesn't matter to me," he said. "A few hundred quid makes no difference to me. When a fellow can get ten thousand at a moment's notice, and as many ten thousands as he likes, he doesn't think much of a hundred."

"I expect you're joking," said Carslake. "I've never met a boy who could lay his hands on ten thousand pounds yet."

Singleton laughed.

"Yes, you have," he said; "you've met me. I don't exactly know how much money I've got, it amounts to such a lot; but I can always get hold of twenty thousand or so, if I want to."

"That's very interesting—and very useful," said Carslake. "Perhaps you'd like to make some good investments? Money makes money, you know, and I could put you on to some fine things, if you feel inclined."

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm," said

Singleton. "But we don't want to talk about that now. I've got to get back to the school with these fellows."

"That's right," said Carslake. "Very likely I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again, eh?"

"We'll try to get down on Wednesday evening," said Fullwood. "Or, better still, Wednesday afternoon."

"That's right," said Carslake. "We can all run over to Helmford Races, perhaps. There's nothing like a bit of sport to make a fellow feel bucked."

The juniors took their departure very soon afterwards, and Carslake and Crosse were in a very contented frame of mind. They had progressed well, and Carslake had no hesitation in presenting Fullwood with his stipulated ten per cent. It was not often that Carslake got hold of such a "mug" as the Hon. Douglas Singleton. And he and Crosse had hardly commenced operations yet.

They realised that they were dealing with an irresponsible, reckless schoolboy, who had an enormous amount of money at his disposal. How it happened that Singleton possessed so much money did not trouble the sharpers; as long as they could rake in the "brass," they cared nothing.

The Nuts and Singleton passed out of the Grapes Hotel, and walked straight into the car, which was still waiting outside in the courtyard. The four boys did not observe a dark figure who was standing on the other side of the road, and the car drove out.

The dark figure moved slightly forward after the car had gone, and he stood for some moments, motionless.

"Most interesting!" he murmured to himself. "The lad is evidently intent upon squandering his money in the shortest amount of time possible, and talking to him, I am afraid, will be quite useless. He needs a very stiff lesson!"

The man was Nelson Lee.

If Fullwood and Co. had known of Lee's presence, they would have been vastly perturbed. But Nelson Lee had not shown himself, and he had no intention

of letting the Nuts know that he had seen them. There would be plenty of time to deal with the young rascals later on; they would certainly not escape punishment.

"The boy's a problem," murmured Lee, as he moved away. "It is rather fortunate I recognised the car, or I should not have known. Yes, Singleton needs a lesson—and, by Jove, I intend to let him have one!"

Lee would not act at once.

He saw what was happening, and he knew well enough that Singleton, left to himself, would continue the down grade rapidly—until he crashed. Then it would be too late for recovery.

But Nelson Lee had a plan in mind, and he would not hesitate to put it into execution as soon as he saw a favourable opportunity.

"By acting now, I shall probably do more harm than good," murmured the schoolmaster-detective. "Punishment would only make the boy worse—it will intensify his reckless spirit, and he will plunge even deeper. No, I must be very wary; I must make the boy redeem himself by tactful scheming."

Nelson Lee was not the kind of man to rush into a thing headlong. He had a fairly shrewd idea that Singleton was more of a fool than a knave, and Lee felt rather sorry for him.

And the Hon. Douglas was a fool only because he was inexperienced and easy-going. Until he came to St. Frank's, he had had no control of his money; but now he could do as he liked with it, it seemed. And the Hon. Douglas was intent upon making up for lost time.

Nelson Lee would not be harsh; he would take cautious steps.

And so, for a moment, nothing was done. But Lee knew a great deal about Messrs. Carslake and Crosse, and he was quite certain that he would not allow those two crooks to have everything their own way.

Singleton had commenced his spendthrift career—he was fairly launched upon it—and many exciting events were destined to occur before the natural end came, and he had learned his lesson.

THE END.

**MORE ABOUT THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON NEXT
WEEK IN ANOTHER SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE STORY
ENTITLED
"ON THE DOWNWARD GRADE!"**

TO MY READERS.

My very best wishes for a prosperous and bright New Year to all my chums.

These greetings, I know, would have been more appropriate in last week's number, which contained a special New Year story. Unfortunately, I had not then the space available for a chat.

Some of my chums, I suppose, have been making good resolutions for 1920 and are trying hard to keep them. I trust they will fulfil their intentions and not follow the bad example of Handforth, Fatty Little, etc., who, though they did make brave attempts to win through, have given way already, I am sorry to say, to their various weaknesses. Fatty Little, for instance, is still as big a gourmand as of yore, and Handforth as free as ever with his fists.

In next week's story, "On the Downward Grade," you will follow with great interest, I am sure, the further adventures of the Hon. Douglas Singleton. Though not a bad lad at heart, Singleton's ignorance of the value of money, shown by his reckless display of wealth, leads him into the dangerous clutches of such vampires in the gaming world as Carslake and his associates.

At the conclusion of "In Trackless Space" next week, I hope to be able to announce the title of our new Serial.

There is just one other thing I should like to mention to my readers this week, particularly to those who are interested in the adventures of Nelson Lee, the famous detective, and his worthy assistant, Nipper.

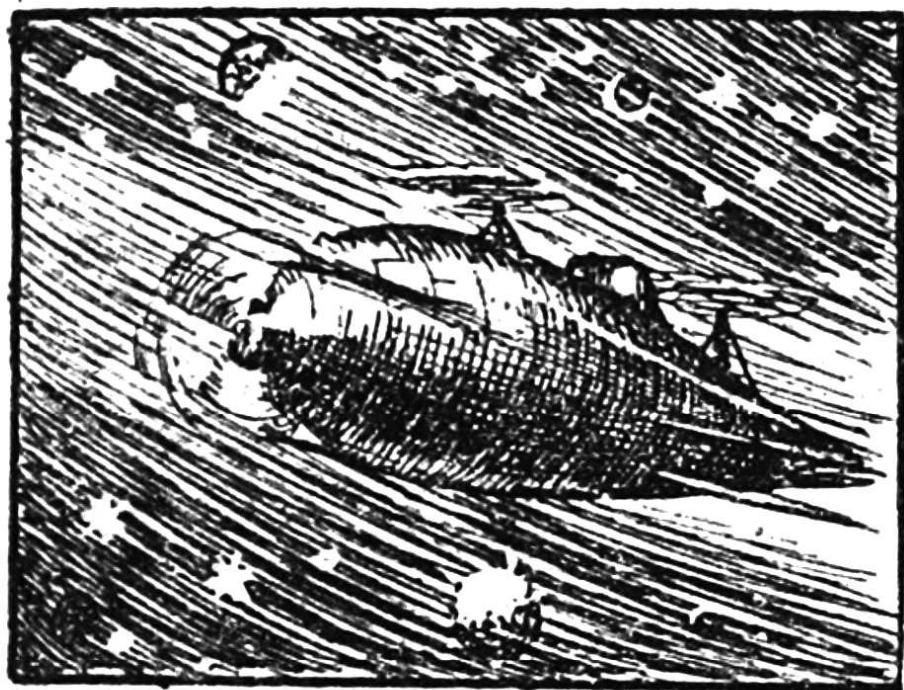
In this week's issue of "The Prairie Library" appear the opening chapters of "The Black Pearl," a magnificent new serial of the well-known investigator's thrilling adventures in China, introducing Ah Wah and Dr. Huxton Rymer (arch-adventurer), a popular and favourite character to those who have read the past adventures of Nelson Lee.

The same number includes a splendid long complete tale of Wild West adventure entitled "The Tenderfoot," introducing Buffalo Bill, the famous scout and Indian tracker.

"The Prairie Library" is on sale at all newsagents every Thursday, price 1½d. Get a copy now. "The Black Pearl" is certain to fascinate you from beginning to end.

In addition to this, a magnificent presentation coloured plate of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales as "Morning Star" (the Red Indians' pale-face chief), together with a calendar for 1920, will be given FREE with this number of "The Prairie Library." Do not miss this splendid opportunity. Order a copy to-day.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL TO COMMENCE SHORTLY

IN TRACKLESS SPACE.

A Thrilling Account of a Wonderful Voyage to the Moon, Venus, and Mars and of a Flying Machine known as the "Solar Monarch," the Most Marvellous Invention of the Age.

By ROBT. W. COMRADE.

Author of "The Stowaway's Quest," "Scorned by the School," etc.

INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM, inventor of the *Solar Monarch*, an airship designed to travel through space, decides to put his theories to the test by making a journey to the moon and other planets. He is accompanied by

FRANK HILLSWORTH and **MACDONALD GUTHRIE**, both wealthy young adventurers; **PROFESSOR PALGRAVE**, a renowned scientist; and **ABBIE**, a burly negro, who acts as cook and engineer. The airship is secretly constructed in England. At last everything is in readiness to start. The adventurers are aboard, and as Gresham pulls a lever the *Solar Monarch* shoots up into space. The moon is reached in a week, the projectile attaining a speed of 2,000 miles an hour. The surface of the moon appears destitute of life, but the explorers learn, after many exciting adventures, that the dark fissures and caves are inhabited by strange monsters. They return to the *Solar Monarch*, and set off for Venus. In this world of whiteness the adventurers encounter many extraordinary beings and fresh scenes, such as have never before been seen by the inhabitants of our Mother Earth. They next proceed to Mars and in the following chapter you will read of some of their exploits, adding new experiences to their remarkable series of adventures.

(Now read on.)

Captured by the Martians.

"I'm hanged if there's not a light ahead!" he cried. "We're evidently coming to civilization! Shall we go on, or retreat? Do you think there will be any danger, Mr. Gresham?"

"There will certainly be no more danger ahead than that which we have left behind," the inventor replied gravely, and Frank, understanding, pressed forwards once more.

Presently the passage began to widen, until at last they were enabled to walk abreast. And, as the tunnel broadened, so it lightened, until there was no longer the need of the torches.

"We shall strike another city soon, in all probability," observed Gresham, lighting his last cigar, with an air of carelessness he was far from feeling. "The planet seems to be literally smothered with them."

Five minutes later they emerged into yet another of the now familiar caverns. Straight in front of them stretched a road of pure, glittering gold, while on either side it was flanked with grove upon grove of the tall trees, laden with red nuts. About half a mile ahead another city could be seen, while barely a hundred yards to their left a softly gurgling stream flowed by. Whether it was the same one as they had encountered formerly they could not, of course, tell.

"Now then, put your best foot foremost boys! We'll walk boldly in, as if we owned the place, and see what effect it has upon these Martians."

He did not say that it was almost certain death to do so. But it was unnecessary; they already knew that fact. Nevertheless, they made no comment, but walked along briskly, the elder man as unconcerned outwardly as if he was taking a stroll through Hyde Park. At last, the first house was reached; but no inhabitants were near. With a motion of his hand, Gresham directed his young companions to follow him. They did so, but before they had taken three strides in the direction of the building a metal-

lie sound made itself apparent and a huge piece of the house-wall slid upwards, revealing fully a score of the Martians. These hurried out, and the human beings stood waiting for what might happen. They had no fear; they were just genuinely curious. Each had made up his mind that hope was lost, and cared little about the manner in which they died.

The Martians came silently up to them, and now they could distinguish a very slight hissing noise, as of escaping steam. They looked at one another with curiosity in their eyes. Now that they were face to face with the Martians, the planet's inhabitants seemed more than ever to resemble some weird and peculiar variety of steam-engine.

"Now then, my friends," said Gresham, addressing them, "I'll wager you're rather puzzled as to what we happen to be and where we sprung from. Ah, would you, you brute?"

Gresham shook his arm, but it was useless. Two of the Martians had fastened several of their feeler-tipped tentacles to the inventor's arm, and, try as he would, he could not shake them off. Frank and Mac were in similar positions. Not that they were in any way hurt. They were amazed at the gentleness with which their captors grasped them when they were still. When they struggled the grip tightened perceptibly, and threatened to become painful. Therefore, they allowed themselves to be examined without resisting. The experience was altogether uncanny. The gently hissing Martians uttered no sound save that just mentioned, and quite systematically felt the three Britons from crown to heel, their great globule eyes waving about in a most weird manner. These latter were large, saucer-like objects, opaque-pink in colour, and appeared to be made of glass, for all the expression they displayed.

Finally, having been examined in every limb, the explorers felt a gentle pressure being placed upon them, and they understood they were expected to walk. They did so, and the procession started. Never in the world's history had there been such a grotesque escort for three inoffensive human beings—such a nightmare-like crowd of living creatures.

"I wonder what they intend to do with us?" Gresham said, in a quiet voice, a voice expressing idle curiosity more than anything else. "It's a marvel

to me they didn't knock us over the head immediately——"

"Or else given us a free trial sample of their patent cylinder-gas, guaranteed to kill at the first breath," put in Frank.

He was surprised with himself even for taking matters so calmly.

"They mean to take us before their king, chief, or whatever they have in this community," said Mac. "Then I suppose he'll gie orders for the execution to be carried out in some hair-brained, out-of-the-way manner. I wonder what the average life of these fellows happens to be."

"You'd better ask one of them," said Frank. "I daresay he'd answer you, if he could. To be frank, though, I must say I can't understand the beggars. Look at them! The ones we are passing through—hundreds, if one—don't take one iota of notice of little us. I kidded myself we should create a sensation, at least. Gosh! Where on Mars are we going now, I wonder?"

They had entered one of the buildings, a portion of the wall sliding up just before they reached it. It was a bare, empty place. The escort having all entered, the floor on which they were standing started dropping with terrific swiftness. The travellers clung to one another, gasping. It seemed as if they were never going to stop. Then, after descending a considerable distance, the floor came to a gradual standstill. Once more they were grasped, and marched out into another underground city, illuminated exactly like the last, but of greater magnificence. After a weary walk, they were led into a small building, and here left to themselves.

"Well, of all the rum goes——" began Frank.

Then he stopped. A portion of the far wall had vanished, and a figure had appeared—a Martian, similar in every respect save one to the others. It was nearly three times the size, a truly huge and menacing-looking creature. In a few metallic strides he had reached them. Swiftly, he felt them all over. Then he waved two long tentacles aloft. Instantly, a score of ordinary sized Martians appeared, and grasped the prisoners once again.

Back they were taken, over all the ground they had previously covered, up the amazing lift at lightning speed, and marched through the streets of the

uppermost town. On they progressed, until they reached a peculiar open space. In the centre of this a circular hole yawned, some thirty feet in diameter.

"This is where we say good-bye, I imagine," Gresham exclaimed gravely. "I do not know what this cavity contains, but it is evident we have reached our destination."

They had. After the Martians had waved their wire-like tentacles about—their evident method of conversing—they were led to the edge of the hole. Then they looked curiously into it. Far below them—some fifty feet—there flowed a river; but a river so terrible that a look of horror and despair took possession of their features. They went ashen grey, and set firmly. Notwithstanding the stifling heat which arose

from the river, the three explorers looked again. This is what they saw. Flowing, with sluggish laziness, across the bottom of the pit was a stream, a stream which at first sight appeared to be of beautiful transparent water, but which, on closer scrutiny, proved to be nothing less than molten metal—a metal so hot that it was thin as water and as clear.

All at once there was a commotion, and the watchers could see that the river was seething and boiling violently. What it was caused by they could not even conjecture. It was quite enough to realise that they were doomed to die a death as terrible and fearful as any in the world's history.

"Ah, my poor, dear boys!" cried Gresham hoarsely, tears standing in his eyes. "Had I known what awaited us, I would never have dreamt of leaving the earth——"

"It is not your fault, Mr. Gresham," Mac said quietly. "None of us expected the professor to act as he has done—not even himself. It is Fate. If we are destined to die on Mars, we must resign ourselves to the inevitable."

Mac stopped, and a look of incredulous bewilderment entered his eyes, the expression being reflected by his companions. In their dire extremity, that same sound had smote their ears as had once before smote them on Venus—the sound of the Solar Monarch's screws!

For a moment they refused to believe the evidence of their own ears. It was impossible! Foolish to dream of such a thing! Too like a fairy—— And yet

when they looked up, there was the aeronef speeding towards them at close on sixty miles an hour. Were they dreaming? No; that could not be. For a moment later Professor Montague Palgrave's well-known tones—the old, genial voice—made itself heard:

"Stop exactly where you are! Don't move an inch until I tell you!"

With the utmost coolness—amazing cheek, Frank called it afterwards—the Solar Monarch came to rest not five yards from where the three excited prisoners were standing, right into the midst of the Martians, who seemed stupefied, and relaxed their grip.

"Now!" roared Palgrave from the deck. "Jump! Don't wait to think! Jump as you've never jumped before in your lives!"

And Frank, Gresham, and Mac followed his advice to the letter.

With a sharp movement, the professor jerked the telegraph over. The screws shrieked in answer, and the gallant Solar Monarch dashed skywards, literally dragging the prisoners from the jaws of death in its most horrible form!

Gresham, Frank, and Mac sat in the conning-tower, pale as death itself, and shivering from head to foot. It was the reaction. They had not realised until then the nerve-wracking trials through which they had passed. When there had been no hope of succour, they were calm, collected, and cheerful. Now that they had been saved at the crucial moment, they were weak, hysterical, and faint.

At a height of 200 feet, the aeronef stopped, and remained stationery. The professor dashed into the saloon, and appeared a moment later with decanter and glasses. A stiff dose of brandy worked wonders with the three rescued members of the crew, and ten minutes later they were almost feeling their old selves again. But they were amazed, and eagerly demanded information.

"Gresham," the scientist exclaimed gravely, laying a hand on the inventor's shoulder affectionately, "I cannot find words to express my regret that I should have, for the second time, taken leave of my normal senses. I can hardly realise it myself; I thought I was of a stronger constitution. And, even as it is, had it not been for that dear fellow,

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

Abbie, you would have perished a terrible death——"

"Abbie again!" Frank exclaimed. "Tell us all about it, professor. I reckon you must have had an experience as bad as us."

"Frank, you may not believe it, but I have been in far greater agony of mind than you even were. The last thing I remembered was picking up some amazing diamonds on a little rock-island in the centre of a large, stagnant lake. Then everything is a blank until—— But Abbie can tell you the rest better than I."

"By golly, massas! I'se almighty pleased to set eyes on yo' again," he said. "Suah, I'd begun a-thinkin' as yo'd got kilt fo' good'n all!"

"Not yet, Abbie," smiled Gresham. "But let's hear this about the professor. How you discovered we had got left, and your subsequent adventures."

A serious expression came into Abbie's jovial, black face, and he commenced gravely:

"Wall, sah, to start at de beginnin', when I heard de telegraf ring, when yo' was on de island, I tought eberybody was aboard, so started de engines again. It weren't till dis niggah had pilotted de craft froo anoder tunnel, and was flyin' across a town, dat I foun' out dat Massa Professor was——was——"

"Insane, Abbie," Palgrave suggested, smiling.

"I didn't like to say it, sah," explained Abbie apologetically. "I come up from below, an', by golly, I felt mighty queer when I saw only Massa Professor here. An' most before I could get my bref, de gentleman frew himself at me. I was dat 'mazed, I got a whack ober der ear 'fore I could do anything. Den I saw as de massa was kinder off colour, as yo' might say. So I defends myself, an' yells an' hollers out. But it weren't till I gib him a knock on de head—which I now 'pologise for—dat de professor, sah, came roun'. He lay on de floor, starin' at me, like as if he was kinder dazed; den asked dis chile what had happened to de ship——"

"I can take up the thread now," Palgrave interrupted at this point. "In

a few minutes I was on my feet, and had elicited the terrifying news that I had left you on the rock in utter loneliness. I was half demented with worry, and turned the ship about, and hastened back to the stagnant lake. You can imagine my utter consternation when I discovered you were no longer there." The professor wiped his brow. "I was half insane—not in the same sense as before, though—with grief and mortification. I paced the deck feverishly, but there was nothing for it but to leave the place; for I fully believed you to be dead, probably eaten by some monster of the deep. And how, I asked myself, could I return to earth alone? Then, as I was crossing this city Abbie came tearing up the companion with the news that you were being marched along in a crowd of Martians! I refused to believe it until he pointed you out to me. Oh, the rapturous joy of that spectacle! I shall never forget it as long as I live!"

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