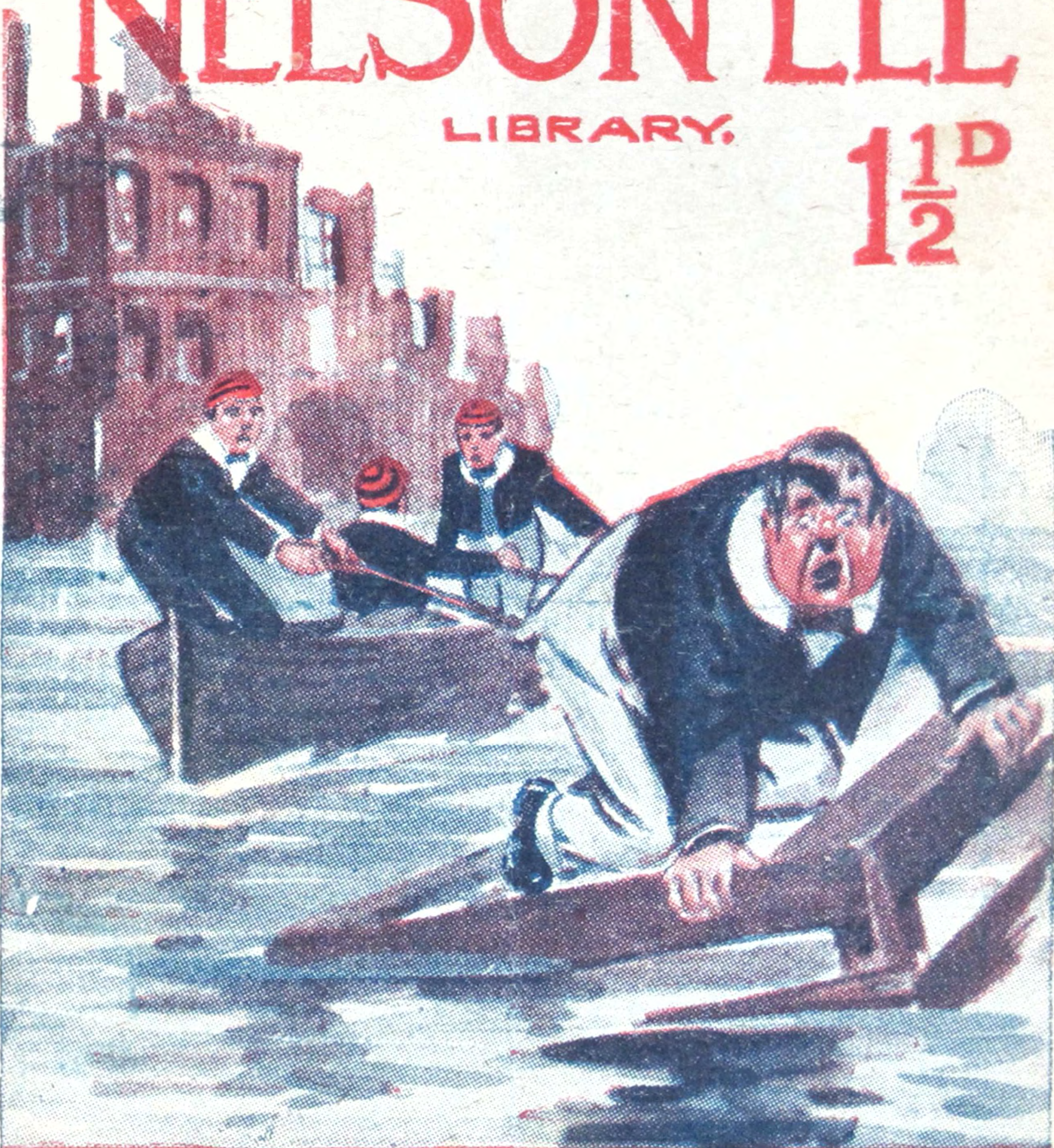


No. 246.—Harmsworth's **UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA.** Part I—**ON SALE!**

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Fatty clung desperately to the hen-coop, while Handforth rendered assistance with a boathook.

Singleton's Rival School

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER** and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Waster's Progress," "Singleton in London," "Deeper in the Mire," etc.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

TOO GOOD TO LAST!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD stretched himself and yawned. "This is what I call comfort, by gad!" he said languidly. "No more St. Frank's for me, thanks! This bally place beats it hollow. It was a brain wave of Duggy's to work this stunt!"

"Rather!" agreed Gulliver lazily.

Bell granted assent. The three precious Nuts of the Ancient House at St. Frank's were in strange surroundings. The room they occupied was certainly not extremely luxurious; but the furniture was brand new and of the most expensive quality; the carpet underfoot was a rich pile, and a very cheerful fire glowed in the grate.

Outside, the rain beat down pitilessly. It had been raining for two days, on and off, and previous to that there had been a large amount of bad weather. It seemed as though the elements were conspiring to make things very bad in Sussex.

But Fullwood and Co. did not care.

They were quite comfortable, and were enjoying themselves as never before considering they were at school. But it was not school in the ordinary sense. This establishment was quite a remarkable one.

"Of course, St. Frank's is a lot better

than this, takin' it as a buildin'," remarked Gulliver. "But we're thinkin' about the comfort—an' this place beats St. Frank's into a cocked hat."

"It's a good thing we joined Singleton's giddy party," said Bell. "Of course, there might be trouble over it, but we shall be able to face it all right. Personally, I'm goin' to refuse to budge from this place."

"Same here," declared Fullwood. "My pater will probably kick up a frightful dust—but he'll have to kick it up, that's all. I sha'n't care a jot. If he comes botherin' down here I'll tell him off."

"That's not the way to talk about your respected pater," exclaimed a voice in the doorway. "I'm surprised at you, Fully."

Fullwood turned, and beheld the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Oh, don't try to be funny," said Fullwood. "It was you who got us to join your movement, Singleton—an' if we're to stick together, we shall have to defy our parents."

"There'll be no need for that," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "If your parents possess a grain of sense, they'll accept the new conditions without making a fuss. Dash it all, this school is as good as St. Frank's—and cheaper!"

Gulliver grinned.

"Of course, it's only natural that you'd say that," he remarked. "Con-

siderin' the school is yours—your own property—it wouldn't sound right if you ran it down. I can't get the hang of it, even now, you know. It's amazin' to think that you own this place, Duggy!"

"Yes, it is a bit startling," agreed Singleton. "But I simply had to do something, as you know. I wasn't going to remain at St. Frank's a prisoner. Here, in this school, I'm as free as the air."

"In fact, you've got twenty times as much freedom as you ever had before," said Fullwood. "That's the beauty of it. It's rippin' for us, too. We can go out when we like, an' if the Head kicks up a fuss—well, he'll have to deal with you."

"Being the owner," grinned Gulliver.

"Of course, we can't work it too much," said the Hon. Douglas. "Mr. Briggs is a decent sort, but he won't let things absolutely slide. He understands that his post as Headmaster practically rests on me, and he'll take care not to do anything that I wouldn't approve of. But if we simply defy him, he'll resign—just for the sake of his own self respect."

"But you've doubled his wages," said Bell.

"I know I have. I did that to keep him here," explained the Hon. Douglas. "He'd have cleared out on the spot, otherwise. I think I've worked things nicely, on the whole, and we can have a jolly decent time."

The Nuts were apparently having a decent time already. Lessons were over for the day, and yet the hour was only just four o'clock.

Lessons at Beechwood College were remarkably scant. They commenced at ten and proceeded until twelve. They recommenced at two, and finished for the day at three-thirty.

So it could hardly be said that the fellows were overworked.

It can well be supposed that these conditions were not the conditions which had always prevailed. Singleton, having brought the school, lock, stock, and barrel, he had made his own regulations.

And, being one of the schoolboys himself, he had not unnaturally drawn up the rules according to his own ideas—and not from the point of view of a master. Strictly speaking, Beechwood College was a farce.

It was situated just on the outskirts of Bannington, and stood quite by itself some little distance away from the road. Behind it ran the river Stowe, fairly close, with only a single meadow intervening.

Singleton had brought the property for one reason only. Owing to his amazing faculty for spending money—for wasting money, rather—the Headmaster of St. Frank's had confined him to gates.

The Hon. Douglas, rebelling against this order, conceived the extraordinary idea of starting a rival school! Nobody else but Singleton would have thought of such a scheme.

It was wild in the extreme, but he had secured a good few supporters, nevertheless. It is true that he had found it necessary to pay his followers ten pounds each as an inducement to join the novel rebellion.

But they had certainly joined, and had walked out of St. Frank's in a body. And now they were fully installed at Beechwood. How long they were likely to remain was something of a problem.

Mr. Rodney Briggs, the Headmaster, was inclined to believe that the farcial situation could not last for long. It was altogether too absurd to continue; but he did not object, for he was being paid a princely salary by Singleton.

He could not very well get into trouble with anybody. He had only to answer to his employer, who, of course, was the Hon. Douglas. The Headmaster of St. Frank's had already telephoned, and a furious conversation had resulted; but Mr. Briggs had merely stated that it was not his concern.

Exactly how the situation would end was rather difficult to foretell. Even Fullwood and Co. had an idea that the life at Beechwood was too good to last. The other boys, that is to say, the original pupils at the school—were in a kind of maze. They hardly knew where they were.

For, previous to Singleton's purchase, Beechwood had been a very strict place indeed. Discipline had been maintained with an iron rod. And now things had gone from one extreme to the other.

Beechwood was a place of ease and freedom and splendid living. The food, instead of being meagre and poor in quality, as hitherto, was plentiful and of the very finest description.

Consequently, the old boys, so to speak, were in a kind of heaven. And they naturally looked upon Singleton as a benefactor. The Hon. Douglas held complete sway in the junior section of the school. And even the seniors regarded him with politeness and something like awe.

It was quite a novel situation, and one which had many possibilities. Even Singleton himself did not realise what might happen. Certainly, he didn't care. He was mildly curious, in fact, to see how things would develop.

"I want you fellows to come along to my study," said Singleton, as he regarded Fullwood and Co. "This place is all right, but I'm never comfortable unless I'm in my own quarters. We can have a little gamble."

"Good!" said Fullwood. "That's the idea."

The door opened, and a junior entered—somewhat nervously. Until the arrival of the St. Frank's fellows he had been the leader of the boys at Beechwood. His name was Coates, and he was quite a decent chap.

He regarded the Nuts somewhat unfavourably. The air was blue with cigarette smoke, and the whole atmosphere of the study was unhealthy.

"I say, you know," he remarked. "If Mr. Minns comes along, and sees all this smoke, he won't be particularly pleased—"

"And who may Mr. Minns be?" inquired the Hon. Douglas.

"He's the master of the Fourth," said Coates.

Fullwood yawned.

"Tell him he can go and eat coke," he said languidly.

"Mr. Minns isn't the kind of man you can speak to in that way," exclaimed Coates grimly. "I just want to give you chaps a word of warning—that's all. Minns is terribly down on smoking—"

"Look here," interrupted Singleton. "If the fool comes here interfering, he'll get the sack within two minutes. Don't forget that I'm boss of this show, and any master who displeases me will get cleared out—quick!"

Coates grinned.

"I thought you meant to carry on pretty much as usual," he said. "A junior can't very well be master, can he? And if you don't allow Mr. Minns and

Mr. Briggs and others to conduct the school in the usual way—well, there'll be a pretty kind of mix-up!"

"You can clear out!" snapped Fullwood. "We didn't tell you to come here, you cad!"

The Hon. Douglas held up his hand.

"Your manners, my dear Fullwood, are rather bad," he said. "This gentle youth has done no harm. Personally, I rather like him. And his advice, when I come to think of it, is sound."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I mean that we can't go too far," repeated Singleton. "We can have things pretty well as we like, but we mustn't overstep the mark. Smoking is naturally forbidden, and just because I'm the owner of this school, it doesn't mean that you can take advantage of the fact."

"Rot!" said Fullwood.

"What's more," added the Hon. Douglas, "I'm not particularly struck with your behaviour, Fully."

"Eh?"

"This smoking, for example—"

"Why, you smoke, you ass."

"Not very often—and even then I don't enjoy a cigarette very much," said Singleton frankly. "I smoke just to keep others company—not because I like it. When I'm by myself I never touch a cigarette. But I must say you've been taking advantage of your position here."

"Well, of course I have—"

"Too much advantage, in my opinion," said Singleton. "Not two hours ago I caught you smoking in the passage—and that's absolutely inexcusable. In future, Fullwood, you'll please smoke in this study only."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Singleton," put in Coates.

Fullwood turned on him in a flash.

"Mind your own rotten business!" he roared. "Clear out of this study, confound you. If you don't go within a second I'll kick you out!"

"Steady!" grinned the Hon. Douglas. "Coates is all right—he's one of the best. Is there anything you particularly wanted, old son?"

"Well, yes," replied Coates. "It's always been a custom here for Fourth Form fellows to fag for the seniors. We've tried to put it down several times, but there are some beastly bullies among the seniors, and we couldn't quite

manage it. I was wondering if you could do anything?"

"Why, of course," said Singleton promptly. "Fagging by the Fourth isn't allowed. You'd better take me along to these seniors, and I'll interview them. There won't be any more bullying, my son."

"Oh, good!" said Coates. "Are you coming now?"

The Hon. Douglas nodded.

"There's no time like the present," he replied. "Come on!"

"Good man!" exclaimed Coates heartily.

They passed out of the study, and walked down the narrow passage. It was very different to the wide, lofty corridors at St. Frank's. The distempered walls were dull, and covered with numberless pencillings and scratches. The floor was laid with linoleum, but the pattern had long since vanished.

"Who are these bullying merchants?" inquired Singleton as they walked along.

"Seniors—members of the Fifth," said Coates. "The Fifth is the highest form here, you know."

"Yes, I'm aware of that," said Singleton. "I mean, what are their names?"

"Oh, I see. The worst of the bunch is Fryer," replied Coates. "Then there's Evans and Hobson. They're the three bounders who cause all the trouble. They all share the end study in the senior passage."

"Good," said Singleton. "Lead on, my son."

They soon arrived at their destination. The study was the largest in the school—that is, the largest boys' study. It was generally regarded as a sacred place by the juniors. The younger boys at Beechwood had always lived in fear and trembling of the bullies. Therefore, Coates was feeling particularly happy as he opened the door of the apartment. He had an idea that the reign of Fryer and Co. was coming to an end.

He and Singleton entered the study.

Three big seniors were sitting round the fire. They were dressed in ordinary lounge suits; they were not particularly tidy, and they all had an appearance of aggressive superiority.

They glared at Coates, who entered first, but changed their expressions when they saw the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Hallo, young 'un," said one of the

seniors. "Come in, you're quite welcome. Coates, you can shunt—or take a fat ear. Whichever you like, my son. We don't want you here."

"I'm with Singleton," said Coates gruffly.

"That's so," remarked Singleton. "Coates won't shunt until I shunt. We've come to have a heart-to-heart talk, my gentle beauties. Which member of this august company is Fryer?"

"I am," said one of the seniors.

"You look it," nodded the Hon. Douglas. "You look just like a Fryer, judging by the redness of your handsome face—"

"I don't want any sauce," snapped Fryer. "You may be the owner of this school, kid, but you're a junior. And you'd better realise that juniors at Beechwood are so much dirt. Do you understand? So much dirt!"

Singleton nodded.

"That's what I understood from Coates," he said. "Very interesting, of course, but it doesn't happen to impress me. The juniors may have been dirt under the old system—but they're not dirt under mine. Do you get me, Steve?"

Coates grinned, and the seniors frowned.

"Look here, Doubleton, or Singleton, or whatever your name happens to be," said Fryer sourly, "you can get it firmly fixed in your head that I'm not going to stand any nonsense from you—"

"Hold on," interrupted the Hon. Douglas. "Just a word before you really get going. This school is now under my control, and I want to give you a fair warning that I am not inclined to stand that rot. I'm given to understand that you have been in the habit of making Fourth Formers fag for you—"

"Of course they fag for us," snapped Fryer.

"And they always will, too," added Hobson.

"You bet!" said Evans, nodding.

"I'm not above taking a bet occasionally," said Singleton, "but on this occasion I don't think I'll risk it. If you want fags, you can choose them from the ranks of the Third—"

"Not likely," exclaimed Fryer. "The Third Form kids are too slow for us. If you're not jolly careful, Singleton,

we'll select you for this study! It seems to me you've got too much to say!"

The Hon. Douglas smiled.

"I'm not going to lose my temper—and I don't intend to enter into any argument," he said. "I just want to give you a fair warning, as I just said. From this moment I forbid you to bully the Fourth, or to make Fourth Formers fag for you. That's final. Good afternoon!"

Singleton lounged out of the study, ignoring the roaring voices which commanded him to return.

Coates closed the door, looking rather surprised, and certainly disappointed.

"I thought you were going to tell the rotters off," he remarked.

"Sheer waste of breath," said Singleton. "I've warned them, and that's enough. If they don't take any notice of me—well, I shall adopt other measures. More drastic measures, I may say."

"I don't understand," said Coates curiously.

"You will understand—soon!"

The Hon. Douglas lounged off down the passage, and it was not long before Fryer and Co. became active. Sundry yells in the corridor told Singleton that all was not right. But he did not interfere. He waited.

A little later other shouts sounded. The bullies were not only forcing the Fourth Formers to fag for them, but they were inflicting punishments also. The juniors were having a bad time.

The seniors, to be exact, bullied worse than ever, just to show their complete contempt for Singleton and his warning. They ignored him altogether, and fondly thought that they were masters of the situation.

But they were not.

Far from it, in fact. It was not long before they had their eyes opened. While the evening was still young, Mr. Swan presented himself in Fryer's study. Mr. Swan was the master of the Fifth—a somewhat meek gentleman, who generally allowed the seniors to do as they liked with him.

"Ah, boys—er—I—er—have a few words to say to you," said Mr. Swan, coughing. "You, Fryer, are generally regarded as the leading boy of the Fifth Form."

"That's right, sir," said Fryer.

"For that reason I have come to you," went on Mr. Swan. "I'm afraid you

will not receive my news with much favour. However, it is not of my doing, so you must not visit your wrath upon me."

"We don't understand, sir," put in Hobson.

"I will explain," said the master. "The Head has informed me that new regulations are to come into force for the Fifth Form on the morrow."

"New regulations, sir?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Swan. "The fact is, you are to be more restricted in your movements, my boy. You are deprived of the use of these studies, and from henceforth you will spend your leisure time in the Form-room. In addition, lessons for the Fifth will revert back to the original system—that is to say, you will be required to work in the same way as you worked before the school changed hands."

Fryer and Co. looked dismayed.

"But—but it's impossible, sir!" shouted Fryer. "We're having an easy time now—I—I mean, we're— But it's not fair, sir! Who gave these orders?"

"The Headmaster."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"It is hardly necessary for me to add that Mr. Briggs was undoubtedly inspired by the new owner—Singleton," added Mr. Swan. "Singleton interviewed Mr. Briggs not an hour ago, so I assume they came to the arrangement I mentioned. You must, of course, obey the order implicitly."

The bullies were more dismayed than ever.

They had hardly expected such prompt action as this. It was only too evident that the Hon. Douglas had the upper hand. Fryer and his set had refused to take his warning, and this was the result. They were not to share in the easy time; they were ordered to go back to the old grinding system.

"There is just one other point I might mention," said Mr. Swan, turning to the door. "The Headmaster intimated that if you boys are willing to respect Singleton's wishes in all matters, the new orders may not come into being. The decision will finally rest with Singleton himself. So I should advise you to see the boy at once, Fryer. Perhaps you can make matters better."

Mr. Swan retired, and the bullies

looked at one another with mingled expressions of dismay, anger, and relief. The position was not so bad, after all. But, in order to continue their pleasant mode of life, it would be necessary to knuckle under to Singleton.

"The rotter!" said Fryer fiercely. "So that's his game, is it? If we don't agree to his beastly ideas, we're chucked back to the old style of things. I've a dashed good mind to ignore it all!"

"Rot!" said Evans. "We can't ignore the Head. We'd better cave in."

"It's the only course," agreed Hobson. "After all, we can find some fags in the Third. We can't afford to be on the wrong side of Singleton, anyhow."

So the bullies accepted the position. They caved in—unconditionally.

CHAPTER II.

AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, glared round the common-room in the Ancient House with his usual aggressive expression. There was a light of grim determination in his eyes.

"Are you chaps going to listen to me or not?" he roared.

"Dry up, Handy!"

"Muzzle the ass, somebody!"

"Chuck him out!"

"You—you rotters!" bawled Handforth. "I'm giving a speech!"

"Is that a fact?" inquired Timothy Tucker mildly. "Dear me! You surprise me, my dear sir! I must admit that you surprise me. A speech? H'm! Most remarkable! I was under the impression that you were in pain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old lunatic!"

"One more word from you, Timothy Tucker, and I'll push your face in the fireplace!" roared Handforth. "You can be funny with the other chaps, but you'd better not try any of your dotty wheezes on with me!"

T.T. smiled.

"Is that so?" he inquired. "I regret to say it, but you worry me, my dear

sir. You worry me exceedingly. When I hear your voice I'm reminded of stone-grinders at work. When I see your face a pain goes down my spine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be a pain all over you in two ticks!" roared Handforth grimly. "I'm not going to stand any rot from you!"

"Little boys should get under the table," said T.T., holding up a finger and shaking it spasmodically. "However, we will close the subject. H'm! Yes, I think so. Admitted! That is so!"

Handforth charged through the crowd towards Tucker, but I pushed him back, assisted by Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson.

"No violence, Handy!" I grinned. "Leave the chap alone!"

"I'm going to squash him!" shouted Handforth.

"Rats! He can't help it!" I said. "It's just his manner, that's all. He's not half such a lunatic as he seems, and he's worth his weight in gold as a comedian. We should be dull without T.T."

Tucker grinned until his mouth stretched from ear to ear.

"Dear, dear, dear! Is that so?" he murmured. "You surprise me, my dear sir—I must confess that you surprise me! A comedian? I am honoured. Your generosity is only excelled by your wonderful beauty!"

Everybody grinned, and even Handforth lost his wrath. Somehow, it was impossible to be seriously angry with T.T., the lunatic of the Remove. He was not a lunatic, by any means, although he certainly acted like one at times.

"This is a serious discussion, not a joking competition!" I said firmly. "Handforth started all the row by insisting upon making a speech. With all due respect to you, Handy, we don't want to hear you spouting. If there's any speech to be made, I'll make it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"On the ball, old son!"

The common-room was fairly crowded, and the meeting was certainly an important one. Lessons were over for the day, and the majority of the Remove fellows had gathered in the common-room to discuss the situation regarding the

Hon. Douglas Singleton and his fellow-rebels.

"You want a speech. All right; I'll make one!" I shouted, jumping on to the table. "You all know what happened yesterday——"

"Of course, we all know, you ass!"

"Singleton bunked!"

"Exactly—or, rather, he didn't bunk at all," I said calmly. "He defied the Head, and walked out of the school, taking a band of supporters with him, numbering twenty-one—fourteen from the Ancient House, and seven from the College House. They are the main facts."

"And the best thing we can do is to let them go!" roared Handforth. "That's what I've been trying to say all along. The whole bunch ain't worth a penny! They're mostly cads and rotters, and we're well rid of 'em!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"It's been glorious to-day without Fullwood and his set," went on Handforth. "I vote that we do nothing——"

"As it happens, there are other fellows who can vote, in addition to you," I interrupted. "As a rule, Handy, you and I agree on most things. But this time I don't agree. And I say, in all seriousness, that Singleton and his crowd ought to be fetched back."

"Quite right, old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"Hear, hear!"

"No, no!"

"Let them stop where they are!"

There were many differences of opinion.

"Let me explain the whole thing," I went on. "Handy, you'll oblige me by keeping quiet until I've done, if that's humanly possible!"

"Somebody might have a gag," suggested Watson. "The only way to make Handy quiet is to smother him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For some moments it seemed that Handforth was determined to create a disturbance. But when he was given to understand that any further remarks from him would mean swift and sudden ejection, he dried up.

I faced the excited crowd of fellows again.

"In one way, Handy seems to be

right," I said. "We could easily do without the majority of the fellows who walked out of St. Frank's under Singleton's banner. But that's not exactly the point."

"What is the point, then?"

"I'm coming to that!" I exclaimed. "We'll analyse the position. Singleton was gated by the Head on account of his spendthrift nature. He was not only gated, but restricted in other ways——"

"He brought it on himself!"

"Of course he did!" I agreed. "And, in a way, he deserved the gating. The way he was spending money was simply appalling, and something positively had to be done. But, in spite of all his faults, I can't help liking the chap, somehow. I think he's good enough at heart, and when he gets over this mad spasm, he'll settle down to normal living, and he'll turn out trumps!"

"Are you a prophet?" demanded Handforth sarcastically.

"No, but I fancy I can read characters a bit," I replied. "Singleton is not a rotter, although he's certainly been a fool. He decided to clear out of St. Frank's, and he actually had the nerve to buy another school at Bannington."

"The cheeky ass!"

"Well, it wasn't exactly cheeky," I disagreed. "Singleton had the money, and he thought he'd go one better than the Head. He's bought Beechwood College, and he's gone there with his crowd."

"It's not much of a place, anyhow," remarked Pitt. "It sounds grand, but there's not much in it. A hole of a place, in my opinion. And I can't quite understand why he took all the other chaps with him. It must have been a terrible lot of trouble to get them to agree."

I nodded.

"I think he paid them ten quid each to obtain their support," I said. "So it cost him a pretty penny, too."

"But why did he want them?"

"It's fairly obvious why he wanted them," I replied. "He was pretty sure that if he defied the Head on his own, he would be sacked and disgraced. But even the Head can't very well sack twenty-two fellows. There's safety in numbers, don't forget. And that was Singleton's dodge."

"Perhaps you're right," said Pitt.

"The Head's nearly dotty with worry

now, wondering how on earth he can get the fellows back again. If Singleton had gone alone, the Head would have wiped him off the slate, so to speak, and thought no more of it."

"That's just the idea!" I declared. "Singleton prepared himself for the worst, you see. I think he's got an idea that the affair will collapse, and he wants to be sure of getting back to St. Frank's. That's why he took all the other chaps with him. The Head's getting busy, but, in my opinion, it's up to the Remove to get busy, too. It's our job to bring the rebels back."

"Our job?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Rats!"

"What's it got to do with us?"

"Everything," I replied. "We're the Remove, and the Remove has been publicly disgraced. It's up to us to wipe out the stain, and preserve the honour of St. Frank's! Who's with me?"

"I am!" said Watson promptly.

"Begad! Same here!"

"Me, too!"

"We're with you, Nipper!"

"We'll back you up right along the line!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't allow twenty-two fellows to desert St. Frank's and go to a beastly hole like Beechwood!" I went on. "It's a slight on the school, and the only way to deal with it is to act."

"Act!" echoed Owen major. "How?"

"By applying force," I replied grimly.

"We'll go along in a body to Beechwood College, storm the place, and bring back the rebels by force. They've defied the Head, and they've defied us. So we've got to show them that we're not taking it lying down. The Head's one of the best in the world——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"An insult to the Head is an insult to us!" I said. "If we want to do something to please him, we can go to Beechwood and bring Singleton and his crowd back. Apart from all that, there'll be some fine sport. It'll be great fun storming the blessed place. It's Singleton's own school, so it doesn't matter two-pence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" grinned McClure. "I'm game, Nipper!"

"Same here!" said Church.

"What!" roared Handforth, glaring. "Are you chaps against me? Do you mean to tell me that you, my own study chums, back up Nipper, instead of me?"

"Oh, be sensible, Handy!" said McClure. "You can't mean to say that you seriously think we ought to ignore the whole affair?"

"I do ignore it," replied Handforth. "That is to say, we ought to be jolly thankful that these chaps have gone, and it's a dotty idea to try any stunt to get them back——"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "That may apply to Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, and perhaps one or two others; but what about the rest?"

"They're all in the same boat."

"Perhaps so; but juniors like Lincoln and Skelton and Doyle—well, they're decent enough at ordinary times," I said. "That applies to Freeman and Cobb, and the others of the College House. They only entered into this thing because they thought it would be a bit of sport—because they thought they'd like a change. That's all it amounts to. It's our duty to show them the error of their ways, and to make them return."

"I don't agree," said Handforth firmly. "They were bribed! Even if they were decent before, they've lost all the right to come back to this honourable establishment. Every one deserves a jolly good whipping. I'd like to punch their noses—— Yes, we'll go—we'll rout the rotters out and haul them back!"

"But I thought you didn't agree with it?" asked Church, in surprise.

"I've changed my mind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A pretty quick change, wasn't it?" grinned Pitt.

"A fellow can change his mind, I suppose, without being jeered at?" roared Handforth. "I've just remembered that those rotters ought to be punished—and I'm the only chap who can punch them in the right way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" I chuckled. "We've got you to our way of thinking, so it's all serene. My idea is for us to go over there to-morrow afternoon

—it's a half-holiday, and we can storm the fort at our leisure. Who's game?"

Practically everybody was, and the arrangements were all made. The Remove decided to take a hand in the game, and to attack Beechwood in force. Christine and Co., of the College House, were equally enthusiastic. They were determined to back us up in the whole undertaking.

Meanwhile the Headmaster was worried.

Dr. Stafford had acted as he thought right. He had gated Singleton because the reckless junior had been squandering money in the most appalling manner, and now, because of that order, the Hon. Douglas had walked out of the school.

"It would not matter so much if Singleton had gone alone," declared the Head. "I should not be sorry to see the last of him, if the truth must be told. I'm afraid his influence on the other boys has not been beneficent. But we are dealing with twenty-two members of the Remove, and something must be done in the matter!"

Nelson Lee, who was with the Head, nodded.

"I quite agree, Dr. Stafford," he said. "I should advise you, however, not to act hurriedly. It is my opinion that the affair will die a natural death before long. The boys will soon get tired of this other school."

"That is my opinion also, but I am afraid they will stay too long," said the Head. "And we must think of the boys' parents, Mr. Lee. I have already written to them all, explaining matters, and I expect to hear to-morrow."

"Therefore, I should leave the whole question over for to-day," said Nelson Lee. "This rebellion must collapse—there is nothing else for it. I cannot see how the affair can last very long."

"I hope you are right, Mr. Lee."

"And, between ourselves," smiled the schoolmaster detective, "I cannot help being somewhat amused."

"Amused?" repeated the Head mildly.

"Surely you agree that the position is amusing?" asked Lee.

"I really fail to see it."

"Moreover, Singleton has proved that

he's a very daring youngster," continued Nelson Lee. "He organised the little affair quite well, and for him to buy a school of his own, and to set up in opposition, as it were, is decidedly diverting—to my mind, at least. The audacity of the thing somewhat appeals to me."

The Head frowned.

"I am sorry I cannot share your view, Mr. Lee," he said gruffly. "I think the boy is an unmitigated young rascal, and he will certainly be flogged before the whole school when he does return. I am determined upon that."

"You are not thinking of expelling him?"

"It all depends," said Dr. Stafford. "If he defies me for long, I shall have no other course; but if he sees reason, and brings his force back by to-morrow, I may be inclined to overlook the affair. Singleton will be flogged, and the other boys punished as they deserve. I have already communicated with Mr. Briggs, the Headmaster of Beechwood. But he can do nothing; he seems to be a mere puppet."

"He is, of course, employed by Singleton," smiled Nelson Lee. "As I said before, the whole position is farcical, and not without its humorous side. Mr. Briggs naturally wants to keep the boys at Beechwood, and he will take no notice of you. My advice is to wait until to-morrow."

"I thought about going to Beechwood to-day—with the intention of bringing Singleton to reason," said the Head.

"I should advise you to wait until the boys have heard from their parents," said Lee. "We may be quite certain that the majority of the parents will be decidedly against the change, and will issue stern instructions for the boys to return. The result will be, in my opinion, a serious split in the camp. And with half the boys back, it will be a far easier method to deal with the others."

The Head nodded slowly.

"Perhaps you are right," he remarked; "in fact, I am convinced that your suggestion is a sound one, Mr. Lee. I will wait until to-morrow—I will see what occurs then, and I will act accordingly."

So, for the moment, Singleton and Co. were allowed to have their own way.

CHAPTER III.

PARENTS GALORE!

"THERE'S somebody asking for you, Singleton," said Coates.

He had just put his head into the door of Singleton's study. It was the following day, and morning lessons were over. Being a half-holiday, there would be nothing further to do that day.

"Somebody asking for me?" repeated Singleton, turning in his chair.

"Yes—a man."

"That's very interesting," yawned the Hon. Douglas. "A man asking for me, eh? Did he give his name?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, bring him along here, if it isn't too much trouble," said Singleton.

"Egad! I expect it's a fellow for the rates, or something to do with the gas company. I'm responsible for this place now, you know!"

Coates grinned and departed, leaving Singleton wondering who the visitor could be. It was not necessary for him to wonder long. Coates soon returned with the visitor.

"This way, sir," said Coates. "Singleton's inside."

"Thank you, my lad—thank you!"

The Hon. Douglas gave a little start, then smiled with welcome as he hurried across the room.

"This is fine!" he exclaimed heartily. "I didn't expect to see you, Mr. Gore. It's ripping of you to come here and look me up. How did you know? Who told you I had left St. Frank's?"

Mr. Philip Smith Gore smiled.

"It was only necessary for me to keep my ears open," he observed. "The majority of the people in Bannington are discussing your little affairs, my lad. So you have left St. Frank's, and have settled down here? Splendid—quite splendid! We shall have more opportunities of meeting, I hope."

"That's just the idea, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "I only left St. Frank's because I was gated—because I was a bally prisoner. But it's all different here. I can pop out any time you like, and be safe."

"That, of course, is quite excellent," said Mr. Gore.

He seated himself, and looked at

Singleton smilingly. Coates had gone, and the Hon. Douglas was alone with his visitor. The latter was a tall, immaculately attired individual, with dark, sleek hair and a waxed moustache.

"I haven't seen you for nearly a week," remarked Singleton. "How are things going with you?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Mr. Gore. "I thought about bringing Carslake, but he had another appointment. The real object of my visit is to ask you to come over to the Grapes Hotel this evening."

"Certainly," said Singleton. "I'll come with pleasure. I'll bring some of the other fellows—"

"No, I don't want you to do that," interrupted Mr. Gore. "I want to have a little talk with you alone, my boy. Get to the Grapes at about half-past ten. Everything will be quiet then, and we can have quite an enjoyable chat. I am assuming, of course, that you will have no difficulty in getting out."

The Hon. Douglas grinned.

"It'll be child's play," he remarked. "I can walk in and out of this place as I like. I've taken care that I've got a bedroom to myself, and nobody disturbs me. There's a back staircase leading to a rear door—and I've got the key of it in my pocket."

"You seem to have arranged things very nicely," smiled Mr. Gore. "Upon my soul, Singleton, you are rather an audacious fellow. In a way, I admire you for it. But to return to our former subject. Come to the Grapes Hotel alone, as I want to have a confidential talk with you."

"I thought perhaps we could have a little gamble," said Singleton.

Mr. Gore shook his head.

"Not to-night," he replied. "And surely you have had rather a sickener of gambling, my lad? It is remarkable if you have an appetite for more—"

"It's the only way to get my money back," said the Hon. Douglas.

"You won't be able to get it back by obtaining money from me in the way of gambling successes," smiled Mr. Gore. "I'm not poor, but my resources would not run to such an extent, my dear lad. You must realise that you have lost a terrible amount of money. I am rather sorry to see you taking it so lightly. It is a serious matter—a matter of the utmost gravity, in fact."

"Oh, I shall be able to work things all right," said Singleton. "I have every confidence in you, Mr. Gore, and you have promised to help me out."

Mr. Gore could not help marvelling at his young companion's attitude. He still had confidence! And it was Mr. Gore who had led him into everything, right from the first. It was Mr. Gore who had caused him to lose more than half his fortune. And yet Singleton did not see; he did not grasp the fact that Mr. Philip Smith Gore was doing his utmost to fleece him to the last shred.

The man was certainly a master of the art of bluff, and he always succeeded in making Singleton believe that he was sincere. If the Hon. Douglas had had a little more experience of the world he would not have been so completely duped.

"What's the private chat to be about?" he asked.

"I will tell you that when you arrive at my rooms," said Mr. Gore. "I can, however, hint that the subject is a financial one. My boy, I have some splendid news for you. I am confident that I shall be able to put you in the way of getting back every farthing of your losses. Not only that, but I will double your fortune. I say this with every confidence."

Singleton's eyes sparkled.

"I knew you'd turn up trumps, sir," he said enthusiastically. "I've been relying on you all along, and I know that you'll see me through."

"Why, of course," smiled Mr. Gore easily. "I am your friend, my boy—I am determined to help you to the utmost extent in my power."

"That's very good of you, Mr. Gore."

"Not at all—not at all," said the visitor. "In a way, I feel that it is my duty. You must not forget that it was I who introduced you to that little place in London, where you lost so much money at roulette——"

"But that wasn't your fault," said the Hon. Douglas.

"We are not exactly talking about fault," said Mr. Gore smoothly. "I introduced you there, and you lost an enormous sum. Luck was bad for both of us, in fact. However, I am an optimist, and I never look upon the worst side. I can assure you, Singleton, that you will have every reason to be pleased within a few days. I am going to make great changes for you."

"But how?" asked Singleton curiously.

"Well, never mind how at the moment," said Mr. Gore. "I wish to discuss that matter with you to-night—not here. It is of a very private nature, and I should not like to take any risks. Just have patience until this evening, and your curiosity will be satisfied. You will come?"

"Rather!" said Singleton.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Gore, rising. "Be at the Grapes at ten-thirty. I will be waiting for you. Good-bye, my lad, for the moment."

Mr. Gore looked a perfect gentleman as he stood there, smiling at the boy. How was it possible for the Hon. Douglas to even guess that this man had taken every penny of the money he had lost? How was Singleton to know that Mr. Philip Smith Gore was now paving the way for another coup?

Singleton escorted his visitor to the outer door, and saw him go across the recreation ground to the gateway. It was a wide, flat, uninviting looking piece of ground, with gaunt trees standing out here and there.

After Mr. Gore had disappeared, Singleton stood for a few moments, lost in thought. There was no need for him to be cautious, as he had been at St. Frank's. Mr. Gore would come and go as he pleased. This school was no prison at all for the spendthrift school-boy. He had complete freedom.

He was about to turn back into the school when he paused. A motor-car had just driven into the gateway, and it was followed by a taxi from the station. By the time the pair had pulled up in front of the main door, a four-wheeler drove in. Singleton watched with interest.

"More visitors," he murmured. "Egad! Who can this lot be?"

A small crowd of other juniors was near by, and they were equally interested in the movements of the newcomers.

"Blessed if I can understand it," remarked Marriott. "We don't usually have motor-cars and cabs coming up like this."

"It seems to be something special," said Skelton.

"Rather!"

"Oh, there's no sense in making a

fuss over a trifle," exclaimed Doyle. "It's a half-holiday, don't forget. Somebody to see the Head, I expect—I—I—Great pip! Good—good heavens!"

Doyle gasped, and went pale.

"What's the matter, you ass?" demanded Fullwood sourly.

"The—the matter?" panted Doyle.

"Yes."

"I—I—"

"Can't you speak, you fool?"

"Speak!" said Doyle dreamily. "There's—there's my pater! And mater, too! They've come down—Oh, my hat! Where can I bunk to?"

Doyle didn't wait to receive any advice. He scooted off as hard as he could go, and vanished into the school. The other fellows were grinning.

"Silly ass!" said Merrell, with a sniff. "Fancy being afraid of his people like that! Supposing his pater has come! What about it?"

"They might be a bit ratty, you know," said Armstrong. "My people are away in the South of France, so I don't mind much. I shouldn't have come here otherwise. Don't forget we all left St. Frank's without permission—and Doyle's people have probably come to ask what the dickens it means."

"Rot!" sneered Fullwood. "If my pater came down, I'd go up to him and ask him for a fiver! You wouldn't see me bunkin'! Not likely! I'm not afraid—I've got just as much right to be here as—Hullo! Why, what—"

Fullwood paused, and his voice broke. He stared at the four-wheeler.

"Anything wrong?" asked Armstrong politely.

"Of course not!" said Hubbard. "He doesn't look scared, does he?"

Fullwood was staring harder than ever. His face went pale, and a sickly kind of expression came into his eyes.

"By gad!" he muttered. "It's the governor!"

"The which?"

"My—my pater!" gasped Fullwood. "He's—he's come down!"

"That's rather interesting," said Armstrong. "Let's see you go up to him and ask him for a fiver, Fully—Hullo! Where are you off to, you ass? You're going in the wrong direction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood had fled.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Skelton. "I can see my mater, too! What the dickens does it mean? All our people are coming down!"

Skelton did not flee as the others had done. He was probably feeling nervous, but he swallowed hard, and ran across to the taxi, where a portly lady was just looking round with interest.

And while Skelton was greeting his mother, a crowd of people entered the gateway—elderly people on foot. There were several ladies, and two or three gentlemen, and sundry exclamations from other juniors told their own story.

Parents were arriving galore!

The reason for it was obvious.

Not only had the boys written to their people on the same day as they had deserted St. Frank's, but the Head had written also. The juniors, no doubt, had told the story completely in their own favour—in rosy words, so to speak. Dr. Stafford, on the other hand, had written the blunt truth.

So these good people had come down to inquire into the matter, which was only natural.

Fullwood, it seemed, was having a somewhat lively time. His father was a big man, with a big moustache. He had a fiery eye, and he greeted his offspring with a glare which was not calculated to make the lordly Fullwood feel comfortable.

"Well, sir!" shouted Mr. Fullwood. "What is the meaning of this? What are you doing here, Ralph—here, in this disreputable-looking place?"

"It's all right, pater!" said Fullwood huskily. "I—I explained in my letter, you know—"

"Explained! Fiddlesticks!" roared his father. "You wrote me a letter which I could neither understand nor elucidate. I merely grasped the fact that you had left St. Frank's, and that was sufficient. You impertinent young rascal—"

"Hold on, pater!" said Fullwood, with a gulp. "If you'll only be calm, I'll explain things. This place is heaps better than St. Frank's, and the fees are cheaper—"

"Confound the fees!" barked Fullwood senior. "Confound the place, and confound you! I have paid your fees at St. Frank's, and at St. Frank's you shall be! Good heavens! Do you imagine you can shift about as you please?"

"You see——"

"Silence, boy!" thundered Mr. Fullwood. "You have brought me down from London on this errand, and I do not intend to return until I know the truth. That you should have the amazing effrontery to leave your school against Dr. Stafford's orders, is staggering! Yes, sir—staggering! What explanation have you to offer?"

"I'll tell you all about it——"

"How dare you speak before I have finished!" demanded the enraged man. "I intend to teach you a lesson which you will not forget in a hurry! You think you can defy your Headmaster, and you think you can defy me! We will see, Ralph—we will see! Your allowance will be stopped——"

"But listen, pater——"

"I will listen to nothing!" shouted Mr. Fullwood. "I intend to take you back to St. Frank's by the scruff of your neck!"

Fullwood's father did not cease at that point. He continued his tirade with as much gusto—as Bell afterwards remarked—as a cheap gramophone. Ralph Leslie was unable to get a word in edgeways.

And the lordly Fullwood felt very, very small. Other juniors were gathered round, listening with terrific interest. Fullwood had frequently spoken of the manner in which he habitually told his pater off; he had boasted of his influence at home. And now he was being exposed.

The fellows were seeing, in fact, that Fullwood's glory vanished before his father like mist before a summer's sun. The chief of the Nuts was evidently of very little account in the Fullwood household.

And he was not the only junior who was on the carpet.

Doyle was going through it properly, and Gulliver had very great difficulty in explaining matters to his own people. Skelton's mother was an easy-going lady, and she was inclined to be overruled by her son. There were one or two others of the same type. But, upon the whole, the situation was a lively one. In the school, and in the recreation-ground, juniors were talking to their parents—or, to be more exact, parents were talking to the juniors.

Mr. Fullwood and others had interviewed Mr. Briggs, the Headmaster, but

had received little satisfaction. The Head was under orders from the owner of the school, and he was merely doing his duty. Mr. Briggs did not think it necessary to mention that the owner was the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

"Somehow, I thought this would happen," said Armstrong. "How it'll end, I don't know, but some of the chaps will have to go back. Fullwood seems to have been getting it in the neck pretty stiffly."

"Oh, most of the old folks will be talked over!" said Simmons. "Thank goodness, my people haven't come!"

"I shouldn't be too cheerful!" grinned Armstrong. "There's another train in soon."

"My people are in Scotland," said Simmons. "Why doesn't Singleton do something? Why doesn't he explain things to all these people? It only needs a few words, well put, to set things right."

As it happened, the Hon. Douglas Singleton was already moving.

He sent word round that he wished to make an explanation to all the parents who had come down, and requested them to gather in the junior common-room. It was some little time before everybody turned up, but Singleton gathered them all together after some trouble.

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I want you to listen to me for five minutes," he said smoothly. "Your sons have come to this school because I requested them to do so. I want you to thoroughly understand that point."

"Oh, indeed!" snapped Mr. Fullwood. "And who the deuce may you be?"

"My name is Singleton, sir, and I left St. Frank's because the Headmaster acted most unjustly towards me," said the Hon. Douglas. "These fellows decided to back me up, rather than see injustice done. We have come here, and we are quite satisfied that our education will be well looked after. There is not the slightest doubt that Beechwood College sees after its pupils far better than St. Frank's does. The food is good, and the accommodation is perfect, and the fees considerably smaller. There is every advantage in our remaining here. If we only have your consent, everything will be splendid!"

The Hon. Douglas continued talking for some little time, and he talked to such good purpose that quite a number of

parents were half inclined to let things rest as they were. Others, of course, were determined to take their sons back to St. Frank's without delay.

"All I ask is that you should let your sons remain here for one week, just as a trial," said Singleton, by way of conclusion. "If, at the end of that time, they are not quite happy and content, you will be informed. And if you still disapprove of this new arrangement——"

The door suddenly burst open, and Bell appeared, hot and excited.

"Quick!" he gasped. "You'd better come, Singleton!"

"Don't interrupt me now!" said the Hon. Douglas, frowning. "I am talking to these ladies and gentlemen!"

"Go away, boy!" snapped Mr. Fullwood fiercely.

"But you've got to come—you must!" yelled Bell. "Nipper's here!"

"Egad! Who?"

"Nipper!" said Bell excitedly. "Nipper and all the Remove! The whole giddy crowd! They say they've come to take us back to St. Frank's by force!"

CHAPTER IV.

ATTACKING THE REBELS!

"**S**T. FRANK'S for ever!"
 "Down with the traitors!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Charge!"

"Collar the bounders, by George!"

It was Handforth who made the last remark, and he made it in a voice which sounded nearly in the centre of Bannington. The other juniors were excited and eager, and they swarmed through the gateway of Beechwood College, and rushed towards the building with grim determination.

I was at their head, and I was just as determined as the others. We had come to Beechwood College for the purpose of capturing Singleton and his men, and we meant to take them back to St. Frank's.

They would have their choice. They could either come quietly, or by force. Probably they would prefer the former course, as it would entail far less expenditure of energy.

Before we could reach the main entrance, a stern figure in cap and gown appeared, and my guess was not far wrong when I set him down as Mr. Rodney Briggs, the Headmaster.

"Boys—boys!" shouted this gentleman. "Stop at once—stop! What is the meaning of this extraordinary scene?"

"We want Singleton, and his crowd!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not going without them!"

"They've got to come back to St. Frank's!"

"But I am not keeping them here——" began the Head.

"Dry up, you chaps, and let me speak!" I shouted. "We don't want to be disrespectful to you, sir, but I think I had better explain the position. We're from St. Frank's, and we have come here to see those fellows who arrived a day or two ago——"

"We've come to take the asses back, you fathead!" roared Handforth.

"How dare you!" exclaimed Mr. Briggs. "How dare——"

"I was talking to Nipper!" shouted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't take any notice of that fellow, sir; he can't help it!" I went on. "We want to know if you will order the boys out here—that is, the St. Frank's boys. We don't want to interfere with your own pupils. We're only interested in Singleton and his crowd."

Mr. Briggs nodded.

"I quite understand," he said. "But I am afraid I cannot do much in the matter. It is not in my power to assist you, my lad."

"You can tell the chaps to come out, sir."

"Perhaps so; but it is a half-holiday, and I do not wish to interfere in this affair," said the Head. "Furthermore, there are some ladies and gentlemen within the school at the present moment, and I should not like to trouble them, or cause them any worry——"

"We're going to have the bounders!"

"We've come here for them, and we mean to take them away!"

"Hurrah!"

"Charge, ye cripples—charge!" roared Handforth. "Don't wait for Nipper! While he's iawing here, the rotters will escape!"

But at that moment Singleton himself appeared in the doorway, and behind him were a good many members of the Remove—Gulliver, Bell, Hubbard, Simmons, and others.

A big shout went up at once.

"Here they are!"

"Surrender, you bounders!"

"What's all the trouble?" inquired the Hon. Douglas smoothly. "What's all this terrific noise about? I'm pleased to see everybody, but I'm pained to see that you do not seem pleased to welcome me. If you've got anything to say, Nipper, you'd better get busy on the job."

I nodded.

"It won't take me long," I said grimly. "The long and the short of it is this: The Remove has voted solid that you fellows must return to St. Franks."

"Oh, has it?" said Singleton. "That's beastly interesting!"

"You ran away from St. Frank's—you rebelled against the Head," I went on. "That sort of thing can't be allowed. If you think you can defy Dr. Stafford, you're mistaken, and if you think you can defy the Remove—well, you're still more mistaken. Is that clear?"

"As clear as the crystal spring," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "Your frankness is quite refreshing, old man. Unfortunately, I can't take you seriously. We have come to this school, and we're stopping here!"

"You're coming back with us, you bounders!"

"Willingly, or by force!"

"So you'd better choose!"

"We're not coming back at all. That's how we choose!" shouted Singleton. "We don't care what the Remove has decided, or anything else!"

"Look here, Singleton!" I said grimly. "There no reason——"

"Quite right!" said Singleton. "There's no reason why you should stop here. You are wasting my time, and I'm wasting yours. Good-afternoon! Drop in when you like, but choose a slack afternoon, next time!"

A roar of anger went up, but I was calm.

"That sort of thing won't do, Singleton!" I said sharply. "I haven't got any particular quarrel with you——"

"Good!"

"In fact, I think you're a decent chap in some ways——"

"That's awfully kind of you!"

"But the fact is quite obvious that you mean to be obstinate," I went on. "Take my advice, and listen to reason. You will find that it will pay in the long run. I can't give you any official information, but I can fairly safely assure you that if you return to St. Frank's now—to-day—you won't be punished very severely. That applies to the whole crowd of you."

"Splendid!" said Singleton mockingly.

"Dash it all—listen to him!" muttered Armstrong. "We sha'n't be punished severely—eh? That sounds very good!"

"By what I can understand, you'll be flogged, Singleton," I continued.

"You'll be publicly flogged!"

"How cheerful!" said the Hon. Douglas calmly.

"You stand a chance of getting the sack, you reckless idiot!" I shouted.

"Take my advice, and come back while you're still safe. The other fellows will only receive light punishment, I believe—lines, or something of that sort. So take our advice, and return while you've got a decent chance."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to do what Nipper says!" muttered Simmons.

"A jolly good idea!" said Skelton.

"Rot!" exclaimed Singleton. "We're not standing any of this rot, and I expect it's bluff, at the best. Look here, Nipper!" he went on, facing me again. "I want to give you a final answer, straight away. We have no intention of returning to St. Frank's."

"Is that final?" I asked grimly.

"It is—absolutely!"

"Then I shall only waste my breath in talking any longer," I said. "You can thank only yourself for the consequences. St. Frank's to the attack! Charge! Rout the rebels out!"

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball, Remove!"

We rushed up the front step, my idea being to enter at once, and to sweep away all resistance before Singleton and Co. could recover from the first shot.

But he was rather too quick for me.

He dodged back and slammed the door.

And as I attempted to turn the handle, I heard the bolts shoot into their sockets.

"Fetch a log, somebody!" roared Handforth. "We'll soon have this door down."

"None of that!" I shouted. "We're not going to do any damage to property. We've come here to fetch the rebels—not to destroy the building. We'd better get in by the windows."

"That's the idea!" said Christine excitedly. "This way."

He led a crowd of College House fellows. De Valerie led another crowd, Pitt had charge of a third, and I marched at the head of a fourth. Handforth attempted to do likewise, but, by some remarkable circumstance, he found himself leading nobody but Church and McClure.

"We'll go round the back!" roared Handforth. "This way, my sons! Ten or twelve of us can go inside, while the others wait—Eh? What the dickens—Where's everybody gone to?"

"They've all followed Nipper and Pitt and the others," explained Church. Handforth snorted.

"The asses!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I distinctly tell a whole crowd of chaps to follow me when the right moment came?"

"I expect they changed their minds," suggested McClure. "Anyhow, we can't do much by ourselves, so we'd better join the rest."

"Rats! Look here—Hi, where are you going—"

But Church and McClure thought they had better escape before their reckless leader led them into trouble. So Handforth was left without any followers at all. Not that this made any difference.

He was still determined to carry out his project, and he hurried away to the rear of the school, with set teeth and clenched fists.

Meanwhile, I was busy in another part of the school. With twelve or fifteen supporters, I charged at two windows which promised to be easily taken. Several of us managed to get inside, but the defenders were there in time.

And after a short, sharp scrap, we were ejected.

Pitt was more successful. While I was being treated to a fine ride through the window in company with my men, Reginald Pitt got through a window further along, and a score of Removites followed him. There was no further resistance.

The attackers passed along the passage, and met Fullwood and Co. and four other rebels. The Nuts had been taken completely by surprise. Before they could escape they were surrounded.

"Good!" exclaimed Pitt. "Here's seven of 'em, anyhow. The other chaps ought to be able to deal with the rest—"

"You'd better not lay fingers on me, you fool!" shouted Fullwood. "My pater's inside, an' he'll—Yaroo! Ow! Why, I'll—Oh, by gad!"

Fullwood was rolled over, and before he realised what was happening, he was hurried towards the window, firmly held. Gulliver and Bell were similarly treated, and the others could not escape.

"Out with 'em!"

"Take them right across to the road," ordered Pitt. "I'll go along and help—"

"Look out!" roared Grey. "There's somebody coming."

Coates and a whole crowd of Beechwood followers hove in sight. They swept down the passage in overwhelming numbers, and before Pitt and his men knew where they were, they found themselves out in the open, ruffled, hot, and muddy.

"And if you try to come in again, you'll get another taste!" roared Coates from the window. "Cheek! Invading our school!"

Pitt picked himself up.

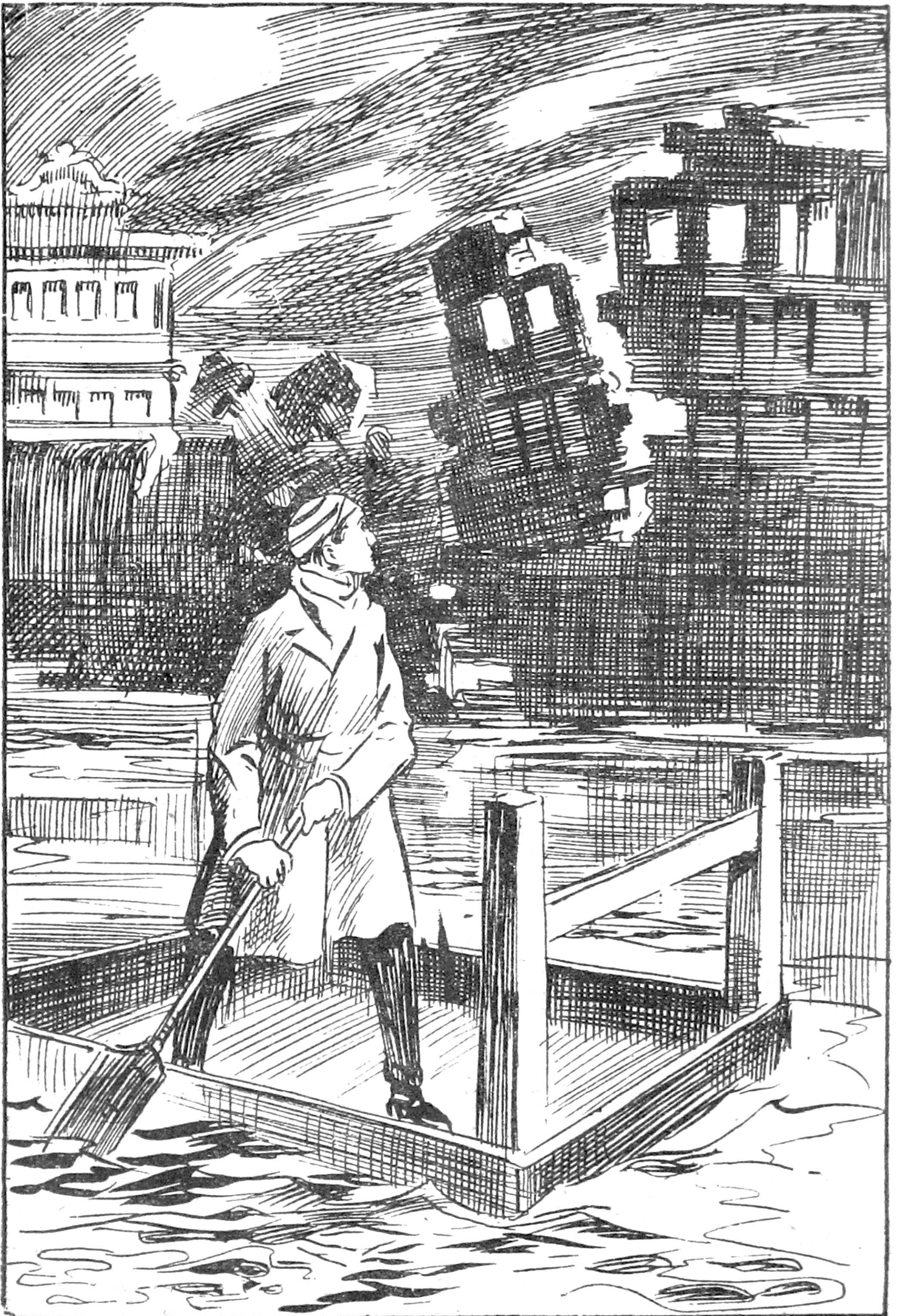
"Well, that wasn't much of a success!" he said ruefully. "I didn't know these other chaps would join in. It's just put a stopper to our game. We can't hope to fight the school."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Owen major. "My ear feels two inches thick!"

The other attackers had similar tales to tell. Nobody met with any success, and this was mainly because of a miscalculation on our part. We had not reckoned on the Beechwood fellows.

Instead of remaining neutral, as we had supposed, they had joined in the battle, throwing in their lot with Singleton and Co. This, of course, was an overwhelming drawback—from our point of view.

Fatty Little, who was with us, succeeded in getting into the building—but not on the offensive. He happened to



As Singleton proceeded in his precarious craft, he watched with dismay two walls of the school collapse.

spot the larder window, and he couldn't resist the temptation.

When we finally found him, the larder was pretty well cleared, and Fatty was feeling full and content, and at peace with the world. Handforth, on the other hand, was feeling extremely sore.

He had carried out his project—and Singleton and Co. had carried out Handforth!

The leader of Study C, having entered the school by a rear window, fondly imagined that he would do wonders. But he only met a large crowd of the enemy. They lost no time in ejecting the intruder.

If Handforth had possessed any sense, he would have submitted to the ejection meekly. But this was not his way. He resisted, and he certainly had the satisfaction of punching at least four noses before his own was flattened.

After that he hardly knew what occurred.

He had faint recollections of being sat on by about a dozen fellows, and he had a hazy notion that he was used as a doormat. After that he went through one of the windows head first.

Whether by chance, or whether by intention, the window was one which immediately overlooked a large pool of water—the result of recent rain. Handforth entered the pool face first. And when he managed to crawl away he was looking more like a drowned rat than a member of the St. Frank's Remove.

But still Handforth was not discouraged. Battered, soaked, and reduced to a wreck generally, he was more than ever determined to win the day. When Church and McClure found their leader they imagined that he would want to return to St. Frank's forthwith. But Handforth snorted when they made the suggestion.

"You—you silly ass!" he gasped. "Do you think I'm going away—after this? Everyone of those chaps will be chucked in that puddle before I've done—and every nose will be punched, too! By George! I'll show them!"

But the defenders showed us something first. Not content with beating us off, they sallied out to the attack, on their own account. And their numbers were so great that we could do nothing but retire.

We were finally chased right off the school grounds, and we gathered together in the road, in order to discuss matters. The afternoon was still quite early, and so we had heaps of time before us.

The skies were threatening rain, but it held off, and we had hopes that the brief spell of fine weather would last until our operations were completed.

"Even if it rains, we've got to finish the job now," I said grimly. "These bounders have won the first round—but only because they had the support of the Beechwood chaps. We're not going back until we've obtained some satisfaction!"

Handforth wiped the mud from his face.

"We're not going back until we've made the whole crowd look like mince-meat!" he said fiercely. "By George! There's going to be some trouble soon! There's going to be wholesale slaughter!"

"We won't do anything rash," I said. "This proposition seems to be a handful. We'd better hold a discussion—that is, among the leaders. Some plan of campaign will have to be devised."

"That's the wheeze," said Pitt. "Let's put our thinking caps on."

"Rot!" growled Handforth. "This isn't a time to think—this is a time to act!"

"Acting doesn't seem to have done much good, old chap," grinned Somerton. "You went into action without planning your campaign—and now we behold the result. It's a lesson to us."

While De Valerie and Pitt and Christina were holding a little discussion I glanced somewhat anxiously at the sky. The clouds were low and ragged, and promised rain. We had already had a tremendous amount of rain, and we were not anxious to have any more.

For nearly ten days there had been continuous downpours, and many meadows in the district were flooded already, owing to the Stowe having burst its banks. Mud lay thick everywhere, and the landscape was not pretty.

And then and there, without wasting any further time, we put our heads together and tried to get some plan of action. We were determined upon one thing—and that was to rout out the rebels.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVER TAKES A HAND.

"THE problem, my sons, is a stiff one," I said, as I stood in the centre of the crowd. "We thought we should have to deal with a smaller force than ourselves. As it turns out, we're dealing with a larger. That alters everything, and I don't exactly see how we can get over the difficulty."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "All we've got to do is to get a lot of sticks and rush up to the school again——"

"That sort of thing won't do, Handy," I put in. "A direct attack is pretty hopeless, because the defenders are on the alert, and waiting for us. We've got to think of something subtle—some scheme where we can defeat the bounders by surprise."

Pitt nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But those sort of schemes need thinking out."

"They do—and that's where your brains have got to come in," I said. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to make an attack in the front of the school as a kind of feint. Then we can dodge round to the back—— But that won't do," I added. "They'll be on the alert for that sort of thing. Besides, I don't quite see how we can sort out our own chaps from the Beechwood crowd. That's where the trouble comes in."

"Hallo!" said Watson. "What are those things?"

"Vans, by the look of them, dear old boy," said Sir Montie.

I glanced round, and saw two big covered vans. They had just come up, and were about to turn into the main gateway of the school.

"We needn't bother about them," I said. "Some surprise, I suppose—— My only hat! I wonder——"

I paused, as I noticed the name on the two vans—the name of the biggest grocer in Bannington.

"Well?" said Pitt. "You wonder what?"

"Surprise!" I murmured. "Grocery—biscuits, tinned stuff—luxuries of every description. Ordered by Singleton for his crowd, I'll bet a penny. That's about the truth of it!"

"What the dickens are you jawing about?" demanded Watson. "What's the idea of muttering to yourself?"

"Keep your hair on!" I said briskly. "I've got an idea."

"Out with it!"

"No time to explain," I exclaimed. "I want to stop those vans from going in."

Before the others could do anything, I hurried away and stood in front of the foremost van. The driver looked at me in some surprise.

"What's the idea, youngster?" he asked. "Want anything?"

"Yes," I replied. "I want to speak to you."

"Well, I'm here."

"What do these vans contain?" I asked.

"Supplies for a lord, I should think," said the carman. "All the most expensive things in the gov'nor's shop, by what I can understand. A regular assortment of classy articles. They ain't the sort of goods that we usually bring up here, I can tell you."

"Did Mr. Briggs order them?" I inquired.

"No; they was ordered by a young feller named Singleton," said the carman.

"Just what I thought," I exclaimed, turning to the others. "These goods aren't the school supplies at all, but special tit-bits for Singleton's crowd. I tell you what we'll do, my bucks. We'll besiege the bounders."

"Eh?"

"We'll do which?"

"Besiege Singleton's crowd," I said grimly. "We'll turn these vans back—or, better still, hold them here. Without these supplies the rebels will be compelled to eat the poor quality school stuff—and they'll soon get tired of that. It'll be the first step, anyhow."

"Good wheeze!"

The carman got down from his seat, and joined the youth who was in charge of the second van.

"What's the game, young gent?" asked the carman. "I suppose you know we're waiting to get inside these gates? We can't very well stop here all the afternoon, waiting for you to——"

"Look here," I broke in. "You're not going to deliver those goods. We've decided to send them back. I think it'll be the best way, after all. You've

got to take all those things home again."

"If you're trying to be funny, my lad —"

"I'm not trying to be funny," I interrupted. "I'm serious. Take my advice, and take your vans away. If you attempt any resistance, we shall be compelled to handle you pretty roughly. So go easy."

The carman was considerably astonished, and it was some few minutes before he fully realised that we were in earnest. At first he was angry, then he calmed down, and realised that it was a hopeless task to get the better of the whole crowd of us.

"Well, it's none of my business," said the man at last. "If you boys like to prevent me from delivering the goods, I can't be blamed. The gov'nor will have something to say about it, I expect—but that'll be your trouble!"

"Good!" said I briskly. "You see, we've got a little trouble on here already. We want you to clear off as soon as you can—and here's something to buy a bottle of ginger-beer with!"

The man grinned as he pocketed the half-crown I gave him. Other tips followed, and when the pair drove off with the vans they were feeling quite contented. They considered that they had done a good afternoon's work.

"Well, that's one thing done," I said briskly. "Now I'm going to inform Singleton of the disaster to his grub."

"You'll get collared, you ass," said Watson.

"Not if I go under a flag of truce," I replied.

I entered the schoolgrounds, waving my handkerchief, and I soon saw that the rebels were ready for us. There were faces at every window, and Singleton himself stood on the front doorstep, with a crowd behind him.

I waved my improvised flag above my head.

"Right-ho!" shouted Singleton. "Come on, my son. We won't touch you."

"Won't we!" muttered Fullwood. "As soon as he gets near enough, we'll collar the rotter——"

"None of that!" said the Hon. Douglas sharply. "If you try any of those games, Fullwood, I'll pitch you out of the place. That's a white flag, and we're going to respect it. Understand?"

Fullwood grunted something under his breath, and said no more.

I reached the steps, and tucked my handkerchief away.

"I've got a little piece of information for you—something that ought to cheer you up," I said calmly. "I believe you were expecting the delivery of a big consignment of special grub?"

"As a matter of fact, we were," said the Hon. Douglas. "It's a big lot of stuff coming from the stores——"

"Exactly," I said. "I know all about it. I've just had an interesting conversation with the van-man, and you will be delighted to learn that all the stuff has been returned."

"What!"

"Returned?" yelled Fullwood.

"Every ounce of it," I said calmly.

"Collar him!" shouted Bell thickly. "We'll teach the rotter to interfere with our food——"

"Drag him up here, and——"

"Stand back—the lot of you!" ordered Singleton. "You seem to forget that Nipper is here under a flag of truce. We can't touch him."

"But he's stopped all our stuff comin'!" roared Fullwood. "We've got nothin' left—except the ordinary school rubbish. There's not even a tin of sardines for tea. You promised us every luxury——"

"That's got nothing to do with the question," interrupted the Hon. Douglas. "I didn't know this was going to happen, did I? Nipper, allow me to take off my hat to you. You've delivered a master stroke. Without that grub, my army will lose all its determination."

"If you'd only be sensible, you'd come back to St. Frank's at once," I said earnestly. "This thing is simply a bit of foolery—ignoring the Head in this way. We're going to besiege you. That stuff won't be delivered to-day, or to-morrow, either. And I may as well tell you at once that I'm determined to win——"

"If that's the case, you'll be interested to hear that I'm just as determined to make you lose!" said Singleton smoothly. "I don't want to have a quarrel with you, Nipper, because I rather like you, but you must allow me to remark that you're a bally nuisance. What's the idea of bothering about me? Can't you

let me go my own way, without butting in?"

"No," I replied. "If you were alone in this affair it would be a different matter. But you're not alone. You've dragged in twenty-one other Remove chaps, and the result is that we consider it a slight on the honour of St. Frank's. It's an insult to the old school."

"Of course, that's one way of looking at it," admitted the Hon. Douglas. "I suppose you're right, in a way, and—Egad! What in the world is that noise? And why are those chaps capering about like that? They all seem to have gone dotty!"

I glanced round, and saw that Pitt and Grey, and a number of others, were standing in the entrance, waving wildly. Others were staring away across the playing field which adjoined the school. And everybody seemed tremendously excited. I also heard a curious roaring noise.

"There's something wrong, evidently," I remarked. "I can't quite understand the idea. Perhaps Pitt will tell us."

Pitt was rushing to-wards me at top speed, and he commenced speaking while he was still some distance off.

"Run!" he roared. "Come on, you ass! And all you other chaps had better get inside—quick!"

"But what on earth——" I began.

"The flood!" gasped Pitt.

"Eh? The which?"

"Can't you hear it?" panted Pitt. "The locks have burst, I believe—those big locks, just up the river. I heard somebody say they were likely to go! There's a terrific wall of water coming over the meadows—it'll be here in a few seconds—Oh, my goodness! Look out!"

There was not much time for thinking. I looked round, fully aware of the danger in a moment. It had come upon us suddenly, without anybody being prepared. The juniors on the steps stood there, staring across the meadows with expressions of awe.

And as I turned round and looked, I saw something which made me feel rather queer. We were right inland, some distance from the river. At least, the river flowed by at the foot of the adjoining meadows, but quite out of sight ordinarily, owing to the intervening trees and hedges.

But now a change had occurred

There, before my eyes, a great volume of foaming water was charging down towards the school—a solid mass of water, six foot high—or so it seemed to me, as I looked at it. And it was coming on with the speed of an express train, tearing down hedges and railings in its progress.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Run!" gasped Pitt. "Jump into a tree—anything!"

I looked round desperately.

"You'd better come up here!" shouted Singleton. "We won't interfere with you now—it's a truce, under the cires."

"Thank you all the same," I said; "we'll run for it."

I gave one more glance at the oncoming flood. It had nearly reached the school grounds. Further away, the Removites had rushed up to high ground, where they reckoned they would be safe. But there was no time for Pitt and I to run that distance; we had to seek refuge on the spot.

The flood was upon us!

I had heard of such things happening before—indeed, on one famous occasion there had been almost a parallel at St. Frank's. The locks had burst in just the same way lower down the river, and St. Frank's had been inundated.

This time, it seemed, Bannington was getting a taste of it.

The roar of the oncoming water was simply enormous. It sounded terrifying, and I realised that Pitt and I were in a position of considerable danger. If we were caught by that charging mass of water, we should probably be killed. It would lift us up and hurl us against the school buildings with appalling violence.

"Any tree will do," I panted quickly. "This one!"

I rushed at a massive oak tree—a huge affair which had probably been standing there a hundred years or more. Pitt charged at it at the same moment. Exactly how we scrambled up, I don't know, but we succeeded somehow.

And as we got into the lower fork, the flood came. It surged beneath us, and the tree swayed like a sapling. For one awful moment I thought it was going to collapse, but it held firm to its roots.

Pitt's feet were soaked by the muddy, foaming water as it rushed by; but my

feet were higher up in the tree. We had escaped the flood by the very skin of our teeth, and we were feeling rather shaky.

To talk was almost impossible, owing to the terrific noise.

Trees were down everywhere, and great masses of hedge-growth swirled past us. Huge waves were battering against the school walls, and I was half afraid that the building would collapse.

For it had received the full force of the flood. The windows rattled madly, and two chimney-pots fell with dull crashes. It was as though an earthquake had suddenly struck the place.

It held together, but I was convinced that the foundations were seriously weakened by the enormous shock.

The water was surging in through the lower windows, for the glasses had been smashed at the first onslaught. And as Pitt and I clung to the tree, we watched everything with horror, being sure that terrible tragedies would occur.

Shouts were sounding everywhere, but, so far, nobody had fallen into the flood—as far as we could see. The road, of course, was submerged, and the whole length of wooden railings, which separated the school from the highway, had collapsed. The damage was enormous.

"Great Scott!" gasped Pitt. "Did you ever see anything like it?"

"It's awful!" I replied. "What I'm afraid of is the school collapsing. The building is as old as ages, and that north wall seems a bit rocky——"

"My hat! Look there!"

An outbuilding crumbled to pieces as we watched. The four walls simply fell, and the roof surged away with the flood. A large assortment of old boxes, barrels, and other oddments floated away at the same time.

The flood was getting quieter now, although it still flowed swiftly.

And we could hear people shouting to us. Singleton and a crowd of other fellows were lining the upper windows—for the ground floor had been deserted. All the lower floors, in fact, were completely flooded out.

"Are you fellows all right?" roared Singleton.

"Yes."

"There's terrible trouble in here!" shouted the Hon. Douglas. "Fullwood's pater has just had apoplexy—and we

can't ring up for the doctor, because the telephone's gone wrong."

I couldn't help grinning.

"Is that the truth?" I shouted back.

"No, it is not!" bawled Fullwood. "My pater's fainted—that's all. An' this flood is enough to make anybody faint. I thought we were all finished!"

Fullwood was evidently in a state of blue funk; but Singleton seemed to accept the position quite calmly.

"What about your merry little attack now?" he asked. "You're quite welcome to come and haul us out, if you like."

"The best thing you can do is to come back to St. Frank's," I yelled. "Take my advice, and leave this place as soon as you can. It doesn't seem particularly safe to me."

"We're stopping, thanks!" said Singleton. "I'm fond of boating!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Pitt. "That chap seems to be absolutely the limit. I don't know how the dickens he keeps so cool."

Meanwhile the other fellows—the St. Frank's crowd—had only just managed to reach safety before the flood came. There was a steep hill leading up from the other side of the road. It rose at a sharp angle, and on the top stood a small spinney.

One glance round had told the juniors that their only chance of safety was to run up the hill—and they had done so without any loss of time. They only just reached the summit before the flood arrived.

But it did not reach them, but swirled past a good many yards lower down the hill, and then rapidly settled lower still. But the juniors were very anxious concerning us.

"The silly asses!" exclaimed De Valerie. "They were in the grounds—they must have been caught by the flood, and there's no telling where they are by this time."

"Perhaps they're dead!" said Handforth cheerfully.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Church. "Nipper's not the chap to go and get killed, you know! I think we'd better find a way down, and do everything we can to locate the chaps——"

"Hallo! Look over them!" yelled Grey.

"Where? Which way, you ass?"

"Down there—to the right!" shouted Grey. "Can't you see a boat?"

All the others stared.

"Great corks! He's right!" gasped Christine. "It's an empty boat, too—drifting with the flood. I believe it'll touch this high ground——"

He didn't wait to complete his sentence, but rushed away with a dozen other fellows behind him. And Grey was right. The object he had seen was certainly a boat, and it grounded on the meadow, and was about to drift back in the flood when a crowd of juniors seized it and drew it up into safety.

"What luck!" said De Valerie excitedly. "By Jove! This is simply great! Oars and everything! It must have drifted along from the river. We shall be able to get to the school now."

It wasn't long before the boat was pushed off. Only two fellows were in it—De Valerie and Grey. There was no sense in a crowd going, for De Valerie did not overlook the possibility that some rescue work might be necessary.

With a boat under them, the whole position was altered.

They were able to approach the school once more, and to see at close quarters what had happened. It was not necessary to steer their vessel through the gateway, for the railings had been washed away.

"No sign of Nipper!" said Grey anxiously. "I can't see Pitt, either! It'll be terrible if they're washed away!"

"I expect they dashed indoors," said De Valerie. "They wouldn't be such asses as to stop outside——"

"Ahoy there!"

"Come over here, my sons!"

Those shouts came from us, in the tree. We had caught sight of the boat at the same moment, and we were delighted when we saw who the occupants were. And Grey and De Valerie were equally delighted when they spotted us.

"Oh, good!" said Grey. "They're safe, after all. But that tree might have been washed away——"

"There's no sense in thinking what might have happened!" interrupted De Valerie practically. "The tree's still standing, and the beggars are safe. My only hat! Just look at the school! It's a wreck already! This has put a stop to Singleton's little game, anyhow."

"Yes, rather!"

The boat pulled over to the tree, and bumped against the stout trunk. Pitt and I had some difficulty in holding the boat there, for the flow of the flood was still very strong.

"Thank goodness you're safe!" said De Valerie. "We were beginning to think that you'd been swept away. Did you ever see anything like it? Anybody might think we were at sea!"

"We're safe for the time being, anyhow," I said. "It's ripping of you chaps to come along like this! Where on earth did you find the boat?"

"It floated to us, knowing that it was in good hands," replied Grey. "What about everybody in the school? Are they all right?"

"Yes, as far as I know," I replied. "I expect some of the ladies have fainted, but that's only to be expected."

"Ladies?" repeated Grey.

"Yes; you know that a lot of the chaps' parents came down this afternoon," I said. "I expect they're wishing they hadn't by this time. They're marooned now, and they'll probably have to remain in the school until tomorrow."

"We can take them to the station in this boat——"

"Only on one condition," I broke in. "If the chaps agree to come back to St. Frank's—that is, if they surrender—we'll lend a hand. So it's up to the-bounders to be sensible. But, if it comes to that, I expect the railway is flooded, too. There'll be terrible damage over this!"

We were all in the boat by this time, and we drifted away towards the school. And just at that moment we noticed something which attracted our attention. Caught against the top of a high hedge—the top being the only part visible—were three big rowing boats. They were really within the school property, and I immediately concluded that they were boats which had been washed out of the school boat-house some little distance away.

"We'd better collar those at once," I said briskly. "If we take command of all the available boats, we shall be masters of the situation. The whole crowd will be marooned, and we shall have the upper hand."

"Good wheeze!" said Pitt. "Pull away!"

De Valerie and Grey plied their oars with a will—although it was necessary to go with caution, for there was no telling what we should bump against. The water was at least seven or eight feet deep at this point.

The whole landscape presented a remarkable appearance. As far as we could see, up and down the valley, the water stretched endlessly. Trees stuck their branches out here and there, and buildings looked strange, some of them almost completely submerged.

And every imaginable kind of article floated on the flood. It was a spectacle which made everybody feel serious, for we could not help thinking that there would be many tales of tragedy to tell later on.

We secured the boats easily, and then towed them back to the high ground, where the other Removites were waiting.

Everybody was delighted, and the boats were soon filled.

"This is great!" said Handforth. "We shall be able to make another attack now. We can sweep up in these boats, and get in the upper windows—"

"Well I'm blessed! He still wants to lead an attack!" exclaimed Church wonderingly. "The best thing we can do is to get back to St. Frank's, I reckon, and see how things are going there."

"It's not getting dark yet," I said. "We might as well have a look round first. There's a chance that we shall be able to help somebody—Good heavens! Look at Fatty, over there! He's fallen in!"

There was plenty of evidence of this from Fatty Little himself.

"Rescue!" he roared. "Lend a hand, you bounders!"

"He's all right," grinned Hart. "He's like a balloon—he'll float!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But it was no laughing matter, really. Fatty Little had been rather too venturesome. The ground overhung at a certain point, and he had walked upon it rather thoughtlessly.

And before he knew where he was, the ground slipped, and Fatty was precipitated into the flood. The next moment he was swept away by the current, and carried yards out of our reach.

"All right, Fatty—we'll haul you out!" yelled Handforth.

Fatty was a bit of a swimmer, but the current was strong, and he was hampered by all his clothing, which included a thick overcoat. He was out of his depth, and the affair might have been bad but for the fact that an aged hen-coop came floating along on the flood.

The fat boy clutched at it desperately, and managed to get a hold.

Everybody was grinning now, for Fatty was quite safe, and Handforth and Co. were hurrying to the rescue.

They had scrambled into the smallest of the boats, and Handforth stood in the bows, flourishing a boathook, which he had found lying on the boards.

"Hold tight, Fatty!" shouted McClure. "We'll soon have you out!"

"Hurry up!" gasped Fatty. "This blessed coop will give way in a tick!"

It was certainly a precarious hold, and Little's weight was considerable. Handforth naturally went to work the wrong way, and, instead of hauling Fatty out properly, he made use of the boathook.

"Got him!" roared Handy.

At that very second Little had rolled over, with the result that the boathook caught him in the rear. And Handforth hauled up with all his strength. The spectacle was certainly amusing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold tight, Fatty!"

Fatty Little had no alternative. Church and McClure edged the boat nearer, and a moment or two later the fat boy was hauled aboard. Incidentally, he nearly capsized the boat.

But he was safe, and he was immediately rushed away up the hill to a cottage, which was just visible. Several juniors went with him, and their idea was to get Fatty tucked away in blankets until his clothing was dried.

Meanwhile we approached the school in the boats. The Hon. Douglas Singleton was as determined as ever, and he positively refused to surrender.

"I bought this school, and I'm going to keep it running," he declared. "You can go back to St. Frank's without me—thanks all the same."

I was rather annoyed, but it couldn't be helped. And darkness would soon be coming on, so there was not much prospect of us doing anything in the attacking line. Our best move was to retire.

Beechwood College was now an island. At the best of times it was isolated, being well back from the road, and some distance from other houses; but now it seemed to be forlorn and totally deserted. Nobody came near it.

The road was flooded, so no traffic could pass. The people had fled from the houses which were nearest, and no people thought of boating to the school. The place was completely cut off.

The fathers and mothers of the boys were isolated, too, since there was no way for them to get to the town. They were forced to remain, so they could only make the best of things.

I led my little army back to St. Frank's, after making sure that the boats were secure. We concealed them a good distance from the flood, and left them in the shelter of some trees.

Then we went back to St. Frank's by a roundabout route, for the ordinary road was a good many feet under water. By going over the high ground, across country, we reached Bellton Wood at length, and took the footpath through.

The village itself was flooded, but at St. Frank's only a corner of the playing-field was under water. The Ancient House and the College House were still high and dry, and everything was safe.

Early on the following morning I meant to return, and the Remove was with me. We were all determined to get up at daylight. Then we could sally out, and see how the prisoners were.

I had an idea that the twenty-two Removites—Singleton and his supporters—would be only too eager to get back to the old school.

CHAPTER VI.

AN APPEAL FOR HELP!

THE HON. DOUGLAS SINGLETON shook his head.

"There's only one way out of it," he said. "It won't be pleasant, but we shall have to face it. We must give in."

"Go back to St. Frank's?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes."

"I don't see that it's necessary——"

"My dear chap, we sha'n't be able to stay here another day!" interrupted Singleton. "The flood's getting worse all the time. By to-morrow it will have reached the upper floors, I believe. And, in any case, the whole place is rocky. I'm not satisfied that we shall last out the night."

Bell looked startled.

"You—you think the place will collapse?"

"Well, I'm not saying that, but I don't quite like the rumblings and quakings," said the Hon. Douglas. "Not that it's any good grumbling. We can't very well get out—unless we like to swim."

Singleton was with Fullwood and Co. in his own bedroom. It was later in the evening, and Beechwood College was hidden in darkness. The rising waters were now perilously high, and there was something rather terrifying in the whole experience. It was impossible to use the lower floors, since they were flooded out.

And even the upper floors were threatened.

The building was constructed low, and it was even now only a foot or two from the bedroom windows to the level of the water. Singleton and his companions could hear it swirling on every side.

Out in the corridor, the noise was quite considerable. For the water was half-way up the stairs, and ghostly sounds were coming up from below, caused by the floating furniture bumping against walls, and wedging in passages and doorways. The experience was highly unpleasant.

All the other fellows were upstairs, of course—to say nothing of the masters and the unwilling guests. Hardly anybody thought about going to bed, for it seemed a fairly hopeless task to obtain any sleep.

The Hon. Douglas was not dismayed.

"I shall have to be thinking about going soon," he said casually.

"Eh?"

"Going where?"

"Why, to keep my appointment with Mr. Gore," replied Singleton. "I arranged to meet him at half-past ten, but I shall go about nine, because the trip will take me a good while."

Fullwood sniffed.

"I suppose you're trying to be funny?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"Then how will you get to the Grapes—will you swim?"

"I'm not particularly struck on that method," replied the Hon. Douglas. "There happens to be no boat, so I shall fake up something for the occasion. The actual distance by water isn't great."

"Why, it's a couple of miles to the Grapes, from here," said Bell.

"I suppose it is—something like that," agreed Singleton. "But you seem to have forgotten one thing, my sons. The Grapes stands on high ground, and it's possible to reach it by following the ridge, just on the other side of the road, from here. The flood doesn't extend to that part."

"Yes, but you've got to get across to dry land."

"That'll be easily managed," said Singleton. "There's a whacking great table in one of the other rooms, and it'll make a first-class raft, at a pinch. I want you fellows to help me soon—now, in fact."

Fullwood and Co. were not very enthusiastic, but they could not very well refuse. The raft, even when completed, was a somewhat precarious article. The table was a good stout one, and a number of long floor-boards were ripped up and bound securely to the top of it.

Thus, when it was placed in the water, in an inverted position, it had quite a considerable amount of buoyancy.

The Hon. Douglas, well wrapped up, set off quite cheerfully on his journey. He knew very well that the appointment with Gore was not important, and there was no real necessity for this journey. But he was undertaking it out of sheer bravado, and because there was a spice of adventure about the whole business. Singleton was always ready for something of a novel character.

The raft proved to be far more successful than the juniors had first imagined. It floated away well, and kept quite even when Singleton was upon it. He had a walking-stick with him—a walking-stick constructed into a rough oar, by the addition of a piece of flat wood fastened on the handle.

"Keep a look-out for me later on," he said, as he gazed at Fullwood and Co. in

the window. "I expect I shall be back in a couple of hours."

"You're mad!" said Fullwood bluntly. "You're absolutely dotty, going on a journey like this! You might be killed!"

"I shall be all right," said Singleton. "Trust me!"

He pushed off, but was not at all sure about his being all right a few minutes later, the current was stronger than he had imagined, and it was no easy matter to direct the raft across towards the rising ground, which stood out clear from the water.

Singleton could not keep his precarious craft in the direction he wanted it to go. It drifted with the current, in spite of all his efforts. And, gradually, he found himself getting out upon the big stretch of the flood which lay near the school.

"This won't do," he muttered. "If I'm not careful I sha'n't get back, and then goodness knows what'll happen. I might be swept away for miles."

As it happened, it was not necessary for him to worry much.

For a few moments later something happened which was totally unexpected—something which startled him greatly, and which, incidentally, startled everybody in the whole building.

Singleton was some little distance away when he became aware of an ominous rumbling. Then, as he watched, he saw something which caused his heart to jump into his mouth. Two walls at the rear of the school collapsed!

They simply crumbled to pieces as Singleton gazed. The lad was absolutely scared for a few moments. He had a terrible fear the whole school was about to fall to pieces before his eyes.

But those two walls were the only ones that went.

They carried a portion of the roof with them, and it was possible to see right into two rooms which had been left exposed. They were occupied, too, and shrieks and shouts rang out.

Crack, crack!

Singleton listened, his heart beating fast.

He knew what those cracks meant. Other walls were going! The whole school was in a highly dangerous condition now. The flood had weakened the structure, already old and neglected.

The plight of those within was not a pleasant one.

They were absolutely helpless, for there was no way of escape; there was not a single boat which could be used to carry the inhabitants away. If things came to the worst, they would have to trust to articles of furniture for support.

Somehow or other, Singleton got back to the school wall. He had now abandoned all thought of going on his trip. He was anxious about the inmates of the school. He wanted to find out the full extent of the damage, and, if necessary, he would go off for assistance later.

Exactly how he got back into the building he hardly knew. He scrambled through a window, and the raft drifted away for good. The Hon. Douglas found himself in a corridor.

As he hurried down it he ran into Armstrong and Doyle, and one or two others. The juniors halted, breathless.

"What are we going to do?" asked Doyle huskily. "The place is falling to bits."

"Is it serious?" demanded Singleton. "I heard one or two cracks——"

"Cracks!" shouted Armstrong. "The whole place shook! Half the school has fallen away at the back. The Head's in a terrific way. In another hour the whole place will be in ruins."

"That's a bit tall, I reckon," said the Hon. Douglas. "Dash it all, we shall last longer than an hour!"

"Well, something's got to be done, and quickly, too!" exclaimed Doyle. "Think of all these chaps here—and the ladies, too. What about my pater and mater? We simply must get them to dry land somehow."

"And there's not a boat!" groaned Armstrong. "There's nothing!"

Singleton nodded gravely.

"And we can't even use the telephone," he said. "We're isolated; we're absolutely cut off from civilisation. It's a terrible hole to be in!"

"By George, rather!" muttered Doyle.

"Who told you the telephone wouldn't work?" asked Armstrong.

"I know it. It's impossible to communicate with Bannington——"

"That may be," interrupted the other junior. "Some of the wires are down, further along. But the wires up here are all right, and Mr. Briggs said that it's possible to get in touch with Caistowe, even now."

"Caistowe!" echoed Singleton quickly.

"Then we can talk with St. Frank's?"

"I suppose so."

"Good!"

"I don't see much good in it!"

"As soon as the Head's finished with the 'phone, I'm going to use it myself. I'm going to ring up St. Frank's, and ask for help. I'm pretty sure the place won't last the night out."

"My hat!" said Doyle. "If all those Remove chaps come along, it'll be fine! They've got boats, and they'll be able to clear everybody out in safety."

"That's just the very idea."

Meanwhile, the Head was sending out S.O.S. calls.

He was thankful to find that the telephone was still in working order, although it was not possible to communicate direct with Bannington. The town was barely a mile off, but the intervening wires were washed away.

However, the Head obtained a connection through Caistowe Exchange, and managed to get into communication with the Bannington police-station. He appealed urgently for help, and requested that a rescue-party, with boats, should be sent along without a second's loss of time.

Singleton, almost immediately afterwards, used the telephone himself.

He rang up St. Frank's, and the first person who answered was Morrow, of the Sixth. Singleton had got connected through with the prefects' room, in the Ancient House.

"Hallo, who's that?" he called.

"This is St. Frank's—Ancient House."

"I know that," said Singleton. "Who is it speaking?"

"My name is Morrow——"

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas. "I'm Singleton."

"What!" came Morrow's voice, tinged with anger. "You cheeky young rascal! What the dickens do you think you're playing at? I'm not going to listen to your nonsense, my lad! You can talk to the moon if you want to; I'm hanging up the receiver!"

"Hold on!" shouted Singleton. "We're in danger!"

"What!"

"We need help——"

"Don't try to be funny!" said the prefect warmly.

"But it's true—every word of it!" exclaimed Singleton. "Haven't you heard?"

about the flood? This place is completely surrounded, and two of the walls have collapsed already."

"Good heavens! Is this really true?"

"Yes; honour bright!"

"Can't you get help from close quarters?"

"The Head's done his best, but I think we shall need more than they can send from Bannington. We've got a lot of chaps here, all the servants, and quite a crowd of other people. There'll be a terrible tragedy if the school collapses over our heads. We must have help. Please bring everybody you can. It's a matter of life or death!"

"All right; you can rely on me," said Morrow quickly. "I'll arouse the whole school, and we'll come along in force. Look out for us in less than an hour. But if you've been hoaxing me——"

"It's true, Morrow, every word of it! We're in serious danger!"

Morrow could tell by Singleton's tone that he was speaking the truth, and the senior lost no time in spreading the news through St. Frank's. A sensation was caused at once.

Beechwood College was crumbling, and was liable to collapse at any moment!

CHAPTER VII.

FORCED INTO SURRENDER.

"DANGER!"

"Yes, terrible danger!" said Morrow grimly. "Out you get, young 'un! It's a case of all hands to the pump!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Remove dormitory was fully awake. Lights had only been out for a few minutes, and the juniors were all wakeful; then Morrow had appeared. And Morrow had brought news of the utmost gravity.

He had just told us of the plight of Beechwood College.

And the Head had given instruction, so that everyone was to be roused, so that volunteers could be called for. A tremendous rescue-party was to set off within a few minutes.

"I'm going, anyhow," said Handforth, jumping out of bed. "And if anybody in this dormitory refuses to go, I'll smash

him! It's a case of life or death, and we've got to put our best efforts foremost."

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll all go!"

"Rather!"

The Remove was enthusiastic, and in a very short time the juniors were fully dressed. I was at their head, and when I got down I found Nelson Lee ready, waiting for the seniors.

"Have we got to wait for the rest, sir?" I asked.

"Not necessarily, my boy," said the gov'nor. "You know your way?"

"Of course, sir!"

"Then you may as well be off at once—the sooner the better," said Nelson Lee quickly. "I have verified Singleton's appeal by ringing up the Bannington police-station. They informed me that a rescue-party is now being prepared, Mr. Briggs having sent urgent appeals."

"Then it's serious, sir?" asked Pitt.

"It certainly seems to be, my boy."

We lost no time in getting off. Outside, the sky had cleared, and a nearly full moon was sailing in the heavens, making it easy for us to see our way. It was almost as light as day for our purpose.

"It's a good thing we're going first," I said, as we hurried along. "We know where those boats are, and we shall be able to get the people out in next to no time. It would be too terrible for words if the place collapsed before we arrived."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Don't talk about it, my boy."

"There's a possibility that a tragedy will happen, anyhow," I said grimly. "And talking about it won't make any difference, Montie. I think we'd better do the journey at the double."

"Hear, hear!"

Everybody was only too willing to run, and the distance to Beechwood College was soon covered.

It was fortunate that we had no flooded area to go over, otherwise our journey would have been almost impossible. As it was, we arrived at the flooded school scarcely half an hour after we had started from St. Frank's.

We were the first rescue-party to arrive.

"Those Bannington people ought to be boiled!" said Handforth warmly. "They're a lot nearer, and yet we've got here before them. Why, we'll have

everybody out, and in safety, before the police get on the scene!"

"Make for the boats," I ordered quickly.

We hurried away to the place where the boats had been concealed, and very shortly they were all out, and two or three of us got into each, and rowed as quickly as possible towards the dark bulk of the school, with its lighted windows showing out distinctly.

The experience was a curious one. The reflection of the lighted windows in the water formed a picture which the juniors were not likely to forget in a hurry. And even as we approached the building; we heard a rumble, a roar, and a terrific splashing commotion.

"Another wall collapsed!" I said grimly. "We shall have to buck up."

"School ahoy!" roared Handforth. "We've arrived!"

Excited voices sounded from the window, and many heads were thrust out.

"Hurrah!"

It was a husky cheer of welcome.

And just as we were drawing our boats beneath the windows, other shouts came from the rear, and we knew that the Bannington party had put in an appearance. The police had come, to say nothing of other people—residents, who were anxious to lend a hand.

About a dozen boats were there altogether.

And most of them carried great flares. The lights were brilliant, and they cast a flickering radiance over the whole scene. It reminded me of a weird scene from some savage country in a far corner of the world. Certainly it did not look like a calm piece of English countryside.

The school was lit up by the flickering flares, and all the women were lowered into the boats to begin with. They were quickly transported to the high ground, where our party was waiting to receive them, with blankets, hot coffee from thermos-flasks, and all manner of other things.

And while the rescue work was proceeding excitement ran high, for somehow we knew that we were fighting against time. Everybody instinctively realised that it would only be a matter of minutes before a real catastrophe took place.

For as we worked we could hear the walls cracking and crumbling in every

direction. Beams were creaking, and floorboards groaned. Every now and then the whole structure of the building shivered and shook, as the flood continued to eat away the foundations.

At last everybody was out. The Hon. Douglas Singleton, at his own request, remained until the last. Everybody was out of the building before he stepped into the boat which was manned by Watson, Tregellis-West, and myself.

"Thank goodness, you're all safe!" I exclaimed fervently. "It's been a terrible time for everybody. We thought you were going to be buried in the ruins of the place."

"Not just yet," said Singleton calmly. "It's splendid of you fellows to come to our assistance like this! You're bricks—every one of you. My game's up, of course, and I shall be only too pleased to come back to the old life at St. Frank's."

"So you've learnt sense at last," grunted Watson.

"I couldn't very well do anything else," replied the Hon. Douglas. "This place is finished—is uninhabitable now, so the only course for me is to go back to St. Frank's, duly humbled."

"I hope you are," I said grimly. "You've been a thundering ass, and if I were you I'd offer a sincere apology to the Head, and ask him to deal lightly with you. You certainly deserve a flogging."

"Yes, I know," said Singleton. "Perhaps—— Good heavens!"

The cause of his exclamation was clear.

A deep rumbling sound had come from behind us—a rumble which rapidly increased into a terrifying roar. Sounds rang out like pistol-shots, as beams and rafters cracked.

Then, with a truly appalling roar, Beechwood College fell to pieces.

The whole place crumbled to dust, and the debris was pitched into the flood. Not a wall remained standing. It was as completely demolished as if a bomb had exploded in the very centre of the structure. The whole place crumpled to pieces.

The rescues had been effected in the very nick of time.

And, later on, Singleton and the other rebels returned to their old places in the Remove dormitory at St. Frank's. The majority of the juniors, I felt sure, were pleased that things were as they had been of old.

The Hon. Douglas was allowed in the dormitory again, and it was a pleasant surprise for him, for the last week—previous to his escapade—he had slept in a separate room with a prefect.

And on the morrow, Singleton was in the Headmaster's study for quite a long time. When he came out he was looking calm, but his hands were twitching somewhat, and I noticed that they were decidedly swollen. But the Hon. Douglas said nothing regarding his punishment.

The other fellows were pardoned, under the exceptional circumstances, and their parents returned to their various homes satisfied.

The Hon. Douglas was as calm and cool

as ever, and he confidently informed Fullwood and Co. that he would continue exactly as before. He was even determined to see Mr. Philip Smith-Gore at the first opportunity.

For Singleton was anxious to know what Mr. Gore's "good thing" was.

He knew very shortly afterwards; but there was one thing he did not know. He had not the faintest inkling of the terrible trouble which was in store for him. The Beechwood College incident had been a diversion. But now the real drama was to begin.

The Hon. Douglas Singleton took the plunge—the plunge which was to lead him to the end of the road!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Even though the flood brought Singleton's latest and most audacious scheme to a speedy termination, such flouting of authority without the smallest justification was, in any case, foredoomed before long to failure. In defying Dr. Stafford, Singleton had levelled an insult at the school-itself, for the Headmaster of St. Frank's was held in the highest esteem by the vast majority of the boys. Dr. Stafford was, in fact, as much part of the school as its crest and its colours. He was always fair and finely tempered, with a kindly nature which made him both respected and loved. Singleton's action, therefore, constituted a breach of esprit de corps and a stain on the escutcheon of the honour of the school. Particularly was this felt by his form fellows of the Remove. Thus, with the whole school against him, Singleton's position would have been hopeless.

To be fair to the Hon. Douglas, we must admit that he did not consider his wrongdoing from quite this point of view. For he was one of those individuals who believed that money, like charity, could cover a multitude of sins; and, as we trace his adventures to their conclusion, we shall find this blindness continues as long as he has money at his command.

In NEXT WEEK'S STORY, "TAKING THE PLUNGE," you will read how Singleton is finally reduced to the state of a pauper by his friend, Mr. Phillip Gore.

At the request of several readers, I have started a portrait gallery of some of our leading characters, which you will find on the first page of each number, beginning this week, as you will have noticed, with NIPPER.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST COMMENCED!

Three Boys in Canada.



by S.S. Gordon.

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

INTRODUCTION.

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

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

Shortly following this incident Gerald is informed by his guardian, **MR. CARDONE**, that all the money the boy was to inherit had been lost with the exception of £50. With this sum Gerald joins partnership with the Royces, and the three lads agree to try their luck in Canada. They book their passages to Montreal. Little do they suspect being shadowed by a man in the pay of Mr. Cardone. This man secures a berth on the same boat. At last they set sail from Liverpool, and at Montreal they disembark and entrain for Winnipeg, Obed Snath, the hireling of Mr. Cardone, secretly travels by the same train.

(Now read on.)

The Mad Prospector,

BETTER ask a copper," Teddy grinned; which made Jack frown greatly. The idea to him of asking his way of a policeman struck him as most impertinent. The man who boasted he could find his way through the thickest bush, to be lost in a Winnipeg slum!

"We'll go this way," Jack said at length, decisively, pointing to a side street that looked the most forbidding of all they had travelled yet. They were in the very heart of the foreign quarter now—that part at the north end of the

city which is even now an eyesore to all who see it, infested as it is with the worst scum of the European cities.

Teddy and Gerald shrugged their shoulders, but followed their leader until they were in such a dark street that they could barely grope their way along it. In each gloomy doorway they could dimly see figures standing or sitting. They were not molested, however, although many an evil-looking fellow cast a second look at the two. Jack Royce carried a revolver in his hip-pocket, and, used though he was to the seamy side of Canadian life, he felt rather glad within him that he was so "heeled."

All at once, however, as they passed a darker, more evil-smelling side alley, they heard a loud shout for help. All three halted, and, listening, they could hear the sounds of a struggle going on somewhere in the dark depths of that alley.

"Now what's the matter?" Jack asked, and his fingers closed upon the butt of the revolver in his hip-pocket.

"Somebody wants help!" said Teddy quickly.

The cry came to them again. It was uttered in an English voice. Following it came shouts that were not uttered by English-speaking men. This fact decided Jack Royce.

"Britisher or Canadian up against it. Game to chip in?" asked Jack.

Teddy Royce's heart gave a great jump. But he was not afraid.

"Rather!" he said. "Lead the way, old man."

"I'm with you," Gerald Telford

added, turning back the cuffs of his coat.

"Right-oh, then," cried Jack, and set off at a run down into the dark alley.

It was not until they were practically at the spot where the struggle was taking place that they saw anything. Then they saw a dark mass of people, struggling fiercely together. There was the sound of breath being drawn in and expelled again hissing. Then, before Jack and his companions could pick out one from the other of this bunch of men, there was a bitter shriek.

Jack jumped right into the thick of it then, followed immediately by Teddy and Gerald. The big Britisher's hard, heavy fists shot out like piston-rods. They could be heard to strike soft flesh and harder bone crunchingly. Two men went down in two quick, well-aimed blows.

Teddy Royce tripped another fellow up—and just in time, for he could see the faint gleam of steel in the man's hand as he went down to the ground. Gerald also speedily accounted for another man. It was Gerald who saw a fellow trying to break away from the rest. Gerald tackled this fellow in the most approved Rugby style, and the two came crashing to the ground. His antagonist's head must surely have struck the street-paving very heavily, for the man never moved, and Telford was able to get to his feet without any trouble. As he did so, Gerald saw something white in the man's hand. Some impulse, for which he was never able to account, urged him to take this white object—which he did. It was only an envelope, somewhat bulky; but he stuffed it into his pocket, then looked about him to see how the fight was going.

As he looked, the men seemed to dissolve suddenly. Their heavy, running footsteps could be heard as they dashed deeper into the dark alley. In a few seconds there was nobody on the spot but the three companions, the unconscious man Telford had brought low, and another man—a huddled figure that was lying in the doorway. This man was groaning heartrendingly.

Jack Royce bent over him; then he struck a match, and the flickering flame fell upon the face of a man with a longish grey beard, and long grey hair. This man's eyes were closed; but, as

Jack felt about at his heart, his eyes came open, and they blinked at the light of the match.

"They've got it!" he gasped; and his hand went to his chest. He began to cough. Jack shuddered a little as he felt his own hand which had been feeling the old man's breast, was covered with something warm and moist. "They've got the chart!"

"Where do you live" asked Jack softly.

"In here, third floor up," was the reply.

Jack guessed he meant the tenement in the doorway of which the man was now reclining. He turned to Telford and his brother.

"Let's carry the poor chap up," he said. "I seem to know the man, too." He struck another match, then, after another long gaze at the twisted, aged face, he started, and dropped the match. "Why," he exclaimed, "of course, I know him now! It's the old Mad Prospector! Whatever's he doing here, in Winnipeg—and in such a hole as this?"

"I think he ought to be taken inside somewhere, and help fetched," said Telford quietly.

"The chart—the Gold Reef chart!" the old man muttered again.

Gerald felt in his pocket suddenly, and produced the envelope. Stooping, he put that gently into the old man's hand.

"Is that it?" he asked

The man Jack had named the Mad Prospector made no reply, but he clutched the envelope fiercely, and held it to his breast.

"Teddy," said Jack quickly, "you go up the stairs, and show us a light as you go. Telford, you take his feet; I'll take his head. Now, lift!"

In a couple of minutes they had the old man in a very dingy room, contain-

(Continued on page iii. of cover.)

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

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ing a dirty bed, a table with a cheap tin lamp on it, and very little else. They laid the man on the bed, and Jack began to examine his wounds, after Teddy had applied his match to the lamp. The elder Royce, who knew a little about first aid to the injured, shook his head at length.

"Get along, you two," he said. "Find a policeman somewhere, and a doctor. I think he's done for, but—think you can manage?"

Teddy and Gerald nodded, and went down the rickety stairs again. Jack remained with the old man, trying to stem the flow of blood that came from a wound in the left side.

"Who did it?" Jack asked, bending low.

"Don't know!" said the Mad Prospector faintly. "Think it was Naylor's doing. I found the reef. Oh, yes, I know you, Jack Royce. You're one of those who used to call me mad, and say I was on a rainbow trail for gold. But I found the gold! And here's the chart I drew to show me the way back, lest I should forget. I found it, but was too old to work the reef. So I brought the map here, thinking to sell my secret for enough to live on the rest of my life. I tried to sell it to Naylor. I believe Naylor tried to get it to-night without paying for it. He laughed at me; said he didn't believe me. But he lied; he did believe me. So you came along to me when I shouted for help?"

"Yes," said Jack quietly, "with my two comrades. It was one of my friends who gave you that packet back. He must have got it from the man who stole it."

The Mad Prospector gave a queer little choke. Jack went on his knees beside him, tried to support him. A dreadful tremor passed over the old man.

"So this is the end of the Mad Prospector's gold trail!" the old man muttered. "Ah, well! But I found the reef! I found it! And I have no kith or kin to leave the secret to." He stared at Jack for a long while, then suddenly his dulling eyes brightened. He smiled, and the expression on his face for a moment was inexpressibly sweet. "Ah, you!" he said. "You thought me mad, like the rest, I remember; but you were kind to old Mervyn, weren't you? And you tried to help him to-night. Here—

take it! The Mad Prospector's secret! It's yours! Follow the trail marked on the map, and untold wealth is yours!"

He fell back again; Jack's fingers gently closed on the packet. Then there was a long silence, broken only by the broken breathing of the Mad Prospector.

When Teddy and Gerald returned with two policemen and a doctor, the old man was nearly gone. A glance from the doctor, and the medico shrugged. He knew he could do nothing.

"Keep that packet, boy, and use it well!"

They were the Mad Prospector's last words. A moment later he was dead.

(To be continued.)



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