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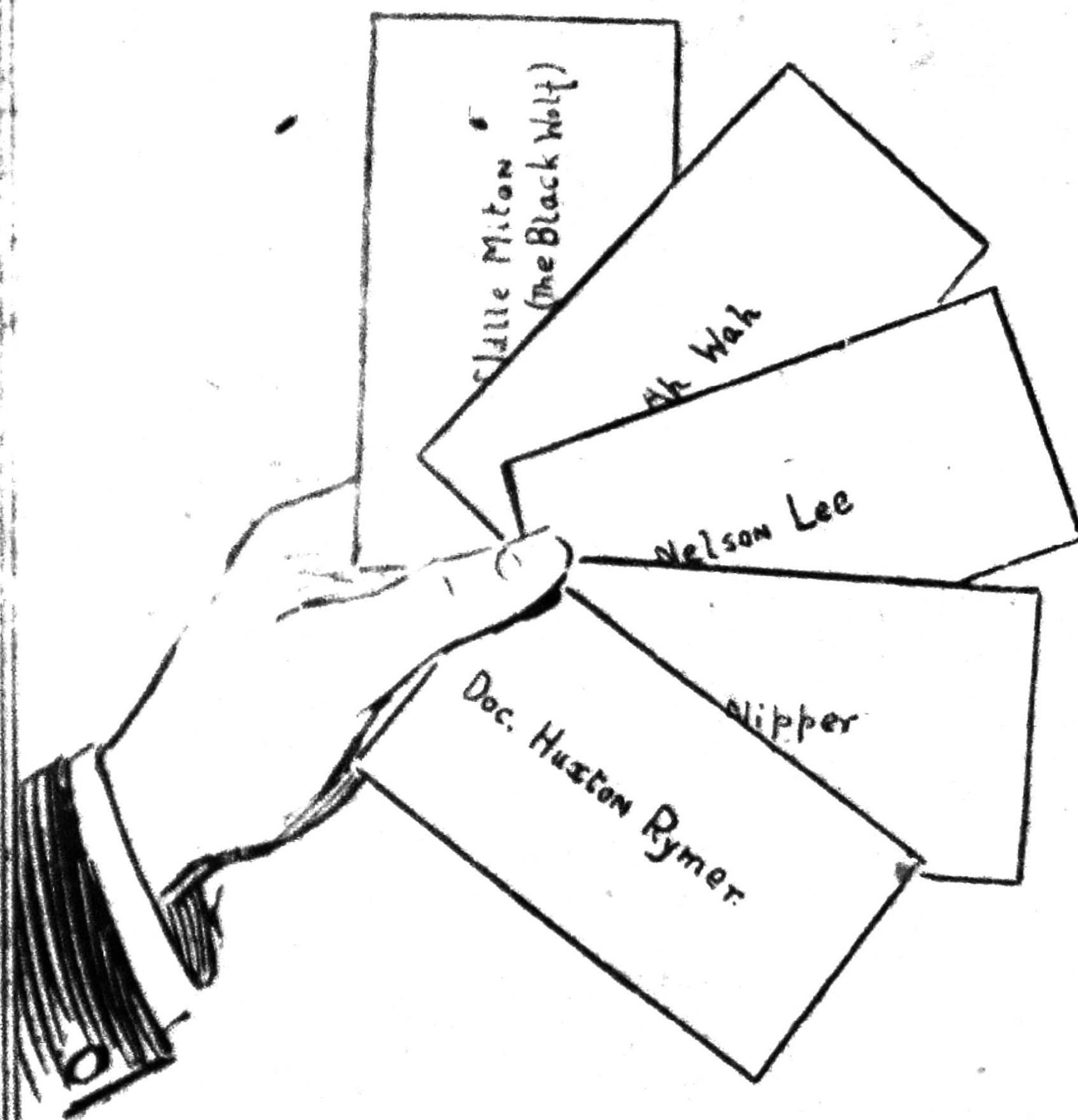
"Got them!" exclaimed Singleton, as he pushed the heavy door to.

A Lesson Well Learnt

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 "Singleton's Rival School," "Taking the Plunge," "On His Uppers," etc.

March 13, 1920.

ALL TRUMPS!



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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 "Singleton's Rival School," "Taking the Plunge," "On His Uppers," etc.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

PAYING UP!

"WHAT about Singleton, dear old boys?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West put that question as he seated himself before the well-laden tea-table in Study C, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.

"Well, what about him?" I inquired.

"Dear fellow, I've got an idea that the poor chap is broke—clean on his uppers, begad," said Sir Montie. "I thought it would be rather decent if we invited him here to tea. What do you say?"

"I've no objection," remarked Tommy Watson. "Singleton seems to be going straight now, and it must be, awfully hard for him to be stony—after being accustomed to spending hundreds of quids in a week."

I nodded thoughtfully.

"He'll probably have tea in Hall," I said. "It's ten-to-five yet, so we've got plenty of time to catch him before he goes in. I'll just run along to his study and see if he is there."

As I walked along the passage to Study N, I couldn't help feeling rather sorry for the Hon. Douglas Singleton—the boy who had come to St. Frank's at the beginning of the term with a fortune of practically two hundred thousand in his possession. In a few short weeks

he had squandered everything; or, to be more exact, he had been swindled out of it by three infamous rogues, who had got Singleton into their clutches.

Mr. Philip Smith Gore, Mr. Horace Carslake, and Mr. William Crosse, were the three gentlemanly scoundrels who had worked the succession of tricks upon the unsuspecting schoolboy. They had skinned him clean—they had fleeced him of every penny, and had then vanished into obscurity.

Carslake and Crosse had been the originators of the scheme. It was they who had opened the innings, so to speak. Then Mr. Gore, with superior brains, and with almost unbelievable audacity, had taken the reins. And he had driven Singleton's chariot to destruction with amazing speed.

Left to themselves, Carslake and Crosse would have taken longer, but Mr. Gore was an amazing individual in every way, and he had hoodwinked the Hon. Douglas from the very start.

The boy's eyes were opened now—when it was too late. And, although he had been an arrant fool, I couldn't help feeling a certain sympathy for him. In the main he was true blue—plucky, decent, and made of the right stuff. But he had fallen into bad company, and his easy-going nature had been unable to withstand the combined efforts of those against him. Even Fullwood and Co., the Nuts of Study A, had done their utmost to fleece the spendthrift

junior—and in their own small way they had made a success of it.

Singleton realised now that he had been mad. And his position was not an ideal one. His guardian, Lord Bellmore, was on his way to England, from Africa, where he had been lost in the interior for many months. It was owing to Lord Bellmore's inaccessibility that Singleton's lawyers had been unable to communicate with him. And before his lordship returned to civilisation, Singleton had squandered his fortune.

The boy had been wretched when he knew the absolute truth.

In desperation, he had fled from the school; but I had managed to get him back, and now he was resigned to the fate which awaited him—to the interview with his guardian, which would come in due course. Singleton did not know how he could face that ordeal; but he was resolved to be brave.

And now, during the period of waiting, he was living at St. Frank's as usual. But his whole character had changed. He was a spendthrift no longer; even if he had had the money he would have rejected temptation. Fullwood and Co. had ceased to be his friends, for they could get nothing further out of him.

And the Remove was finding out that Singleton, having had his lesson, was a far better fellow than he had been given credit for. He was independent, too. His glorious study was now a place of bareness and poverty. All his luxurious furniture had been sold in order to pay local debts.

He was truly "on his uppers." But he was far more cheerful than he had been—or, at least, seemed to be. But the knowledge of what he had done—the knowledge of his own folly—weighed upon him heavily, and he vainly regretted his rash, insane action.

When I entered Study N, I found the Hon. Douglas just about to leave. He nodded to me, and smiled. His clothing was not so smart as usual; he had ceased to be a glorified dandy.

"Glad I caught you, Singleton," I said cheerfully. "We want you to come along to Study C, and help us to get through the grub."

The Hon. Douglas shook his head.

"It's jolly decent of you," he said. "Thanks very much and all that—but I can't come."

"Why not?"

"Well, I— The fact is, I'm taking tea somewhere else."

"Oh, all right, then," I said. "Another study, I suppose?"

Singleton hesitated.

"Well, no," he admitted. "Not exactly that—"

"Do you mean that you're going to have tea in Hall, you ass?" I asked sharply.

"Yes."

"And that's the reason why you can't come, I suppose?" I demanded, grasping his arm. "Don't be a silly fathead, Singleton. Tea in Hall is all very well, but tea in Study C is a thousand times better. Come on! You've got to come with me. We've got quite a decent spread—"

"Look here, Nipper, I can't come," interrupted Singleton uncomfortably. "I don't want you to think I'm nasty, or anything like that, but— Well, to tell the truth, I'm not a sponger."

I glared at him.

"You—you babbling idiot!" I exclaimed. "Can't one chap ask another to tea nowadays? You can accept an invitation, I suppose?"

"I can, of course—but I sha'n't be able to invite you back," said the Hon. Douglas, flushing. "I—I— Well, you know my position. I haven't got a red cent—I'm stony, and it's a bit strange to me. I'm used to spending money on other chaps—not having them spend money on me."

"Well, it's about time there was a change," I declared. "Now, I'm firm. You needn't make any more excuses, because I won't take any notice. You're coming to Study C—or you'll take a punch on the nose."

Singleton grinned.

"Well, if you put it like that, I suppose I shall have to come," he said. "Thanks awfully, Nipper. You're a brick."

"Rats!" I said. "I've never had so much trouble to invite a fellow to tea, in my life! Put on your best smile, and walk this way."

We hurried along the passage, and were soon sitting down in Study C to a cheerful meal. The Hon. Douglas was delighted; but he was still somewhat uncomfortable. He had a horror of imposing on other fellows.

"I can't help saying that I don't like this," he remarked, as he sipped his tea.

"Everything's splendid, of course, but I'm not in a position to return the compliment. I don't want to be a sponger——"

"Oh, my hat!" I sighed. "There he goes again! He was trotting out that rubbish before I brought him here."

"Begad! Is that really a fact?" inquired Montie severely. "Singleton, old boy, you must allow me to protest——"

"You're too decent to me—that's the truth of it," said the Hon. Douglas, with quiet feeling. "I've been an outsider, a spendthrift, and a rotter—and yet you treat me like this! I—I don't deserve it!"

"Rot!" said Watson gruffly. "If you brazened it out, and said that you were sensible, we should be down on you. But you've done the right thing, and any chap is bound to be pally—except rotters like Fullwood and Co."

Singleton frowned.

"Egad! And to think I made them my friends!" he said, taking a long breath. "I must have been mad——"

"You were mad—clean off your rocker!" said Watson bluntly.

"Don't rub it in, Tommy," I grinned.

"I deserve it," said Singleton. "Fullwood and his set were all over me; they pretended to be my friends; they borrowed money off me——"

"Eh?" I said sharply. "They did what?"

"Borrowed money."

"Much?"

"Well, a decent bit," admitted Singleton. "You see, I was too free with my cash. I did just what they wanted—like a fool. Just before the—the crash came I actually gave them about two hundred quid!"

"Begad!"

"Two—two hundred quid!" gasped Watson.

"Yes."

"You madman!" I said grimly. "And I suppose they borrowed as much as that beforehand?"

"Something like it," replied the Hon. Douglas. "I was particularly foolish to give them the money—because I needed it frightfully badly a day or two later. But when I asked Fullwood to pay his debts he laughed at me. We had a bit of a scrap, as a matter of fact. Since then I haven't spoken to the cads."

"I'll speak to them!" I said grimly.

"Please don't——" began Singleton, looking alarmed.

"Rats! I'm going to force——"

"But I gave them the money—gave it!"

"Perhaps you did, and I sha'n't mention that little piece of work," I replied. "But you didn't give them the previous sums. I expect they've been betting on horses, and that sort of foolery. They'll throw away your other money, and you could do with it just now. It's yours—they owe it to you."

"Of course it is," said Watson. "We'll make the rotters pay you back out of your own giddy money!"

"Begad! That's rather curious, you know," murmured Montie.

Singleton looked worried.

"I wish you'd let the matter drop," he said uncomfortably. "I don't want the rotten money—I'm better without it."

"That's not the point," I said. "Fullwood and Co. can't be trusted with all that cash—and I'm going to make them shell out."

"I can't force you to keep out of it, but I ask you to," said Singleton quietly. "There's been enough trouble about my money already—without making a lot more. For goodness' sake change the subject."

We did so, but I kept it well in mind. Under no circumstance would I allow the cads of Study A to keep the money they had wrongfully acquired from the Hon. Douglas. They had borrowed it, knowing that they could not pay it back. That money was gone, of course.

But Singleton had made them a present of a large sum. We could not compel the cads to return that, for it had been given. But we could force them to pay their debts out of it.

As soon as tea was over Singleton rose from his seat, and asked to be excused. He had been looking thoughtful and serious for over five minutes, and I at once consented to let him depart.

He went, after thanking us profusely for our hospitality.

"I'll bet he's going to Fullwood and Co.," said Watson.

"That's pretty obvious," I agreed. "We'll give him a few minutes, and then go along, too. The interview is likely to be rather interesting."

Meanwhile, the Hon. Douglas had

certainly made for Study A. He tapped upon the door, and entered. Fullwood and Co. had just finished tea, and they were sprawling about lazily, smoking. They didn't actually enjoy smoking, but they thought it looked rather "big" to do so.

Fullwood frowned as he saw who the newcomer was.

"You can clear!" he said curtly.

"Thanks—but I'm not clearing," exclaimed Singleton, closing the door. "You didn't speak to me in that way a week ago, did you, Fullwood?"

"I didn't know what you were, then," snapped Fullwood.

"You mean that you didn't have any objection to taking my money," retorted Singleton smoothly. "It's just as well we know one another perfectly—because your character has been revealed to me: I've come here at present, Fullwood, to ask you to fulfil your obligation. The same applies to Gulliver and Bell."

"Oh, does it!" said Gulliver.

"I don't understand what the fool's talkin' about!" snapped Bell.

"He doesn't understand himself," said Fullwood. "An' if he isn't on the other side of that door within one minute he'll get kicked out on his bally neck."

Singleton smiled.

"I shouldn't advise you to try any of those games," he said smoothly. "I'm not anxious to use my fists just now—and it would be a bit of a bore to punch your nose, Fullwood. Besides, I don't want to soil my knuckles!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Are you goin' to clear out?" he roared.

"Yes—when you've fulfilled your obligation."

"What do you mean, you silly fool?"

"I mean that you owe me a good deal of money—money I lent you in solid cash," replied Singleton. "Between the three of you it amounts to something like two hundred pounds—at the very least. You agreed to pay me back when I asked for it. Well, I ask now."

Fullwood and Co. roared.

"You fatheaded idiot!" sneered Fullwood. "When we borrowed that money from you we had no intention of returning it."

"None at all," grinned Gulliver.

"You won't even see the colour of it again," jeered Bell.

"I expected you to adopt this strain,"

said Singleton grimly. "But, as it happens, you'll probably be forced into handing over what you owe."

"I suppose you mean to tell the Head?"

"Not at all——"

"Because you're quite at liberty to tell him if you like," went on Fullwood contemptuously. "It doesn't make any difference to us. We shall deny ever havin' had a penny from you—an' you can't prove it. We never gave you any promissory notes, or anythin' of that sort, my son!"

"There are other means of gaining my end," said Singleton smoothly. "I don't intend to quarrel with you—it's too much trouble—but I give you fair warning that you'd better pay up while you're still safe. If you refuse, I'll take you one at a time and thrash you until you can't stand. That'll give me some satisfaction, anyhow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Nuts roared, and the Hon. Douglas compressed his lips. He was rapidly losing his temper, but he showed no sign of it. And nobody in the study noticed that the door had just opened.

As a matter of fact, I was about to enter. Sir Montie was just behind me, but Watson had paused up the passage to secure an unruly bootlace. I wanted us all to go in together, so I waited.

"You think you could thrash us, do you?" sneered Fullwood. "You poor, pitiful idiot! You couldn't thrash corn! An' as for seein' that money we owe you—there's just as much chance of that as there is of seein' the other side of the moon! I know exactly how much I owe you, an' so do these chaps. We've been reckonin' it up—an' it's quite anusin', by gad."

"Really?" said Singleton cynically.

"Yes, really," jeered Fullwood.

"Would you like to hear? I borrowed one hundred and eighty-five pounds from you. Gulliver owes you ninety-five, an' Bell owes you ninety-five. That makes three seventy-five altogether, doesn't it?"

"I think your reckoning is correct," said the Hon. Douglas smoothly. "I don't expect you to pay it all back—but you'd better pay me everything you can. I'm not going to stand any nonsense from you—that's flat."

"Look here—clear out!" roared Fullwood, jumping up. "Lend a hand, you chaps! We'll soon clear this fool out!"

"This is where we enter!" I murmured.

I had waited a little longer, just to hear what Fullwood had to say. But now I strode into the study with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West at my heels. Fullwood and Co., who had been on the point of hurling themselves at Singleton, paused and stared at us.

"Who told you to come here?" snarled Fullwood.

"Three people," I said calmly. "Nipper told us, and Tregellis-West told us, and Watson told us. And as we're always good boys and obey, we thought we'd better come in."

"You—you funny fool!" roared Fullwood.

"If I hadn't come on important business, I should create a diversion by punching your face for that remark," I said grimly. "We've come on business for Singleton—who's here himself, I see."

"Oh, indeed!" snapped the leader of Study A.

"You owe Singleton some money —"

"What in the name of thunder has it got to do with you?" shouted Fullwood furiously. "All you can do is to interfere in business that doesn't concern you! You call yourself the leader of the Remove, and you're nothin' but a squirmin' busybody—a spyin' cad who — Yaroooh!"

I couldn't quite stand that, and Fullwood went down upon the hearthrug with one of his eyes duly prepared for blackening. He jumped up, rather dazed, but his passion had cooled down.

"You—you wait until I get my chance!" he snarled thickly. "I'll—I'll—"

"You'll perform any dirty trick you can—I know all about it," I said, nodding. "But I happen to be wary of you, Fullwood, so your threats have no effect. To continue about Singleton —"

"I say, chuck it up!" muttered the Hon. Douglas. "I don't want to create a scene. I'll thrash these cads later on —"

"Before you thrash them we're going to settle the matter," I interrupted firmly. "Just now I heard Fullwood say that he and his two precious pals

owe you the sum of three hundred and seventy-five quid."

"You—you sneakin' eavesdropper!" said Gulliver violently.

"Not at all," I retorted. "I couldn't help hearing what Fullwood said—but if you like to think I was spying—well, you can think it. Your opinion doesn't matter in the slightest to me. It's rather an honour to be in your black book. But the question is, are you going to pay up?"

"No!" shouted the three Nuts.

"You positively refuse to pay?"

"Singleton won't get a penny—not a bally cent!" shouted Fullwood. "We don't owe it to him, as a matter of fact —"

"You can't deny it now!" I interrupted. "For the last time, will you pay the money back—or as much of it as you can?"

"No, we won't!"

"Right!" I said briskly. "Now we know how we stand."

I proceeded to remove my jacket—calmly and deliberately. Sir Montie pocketed his pince-nez, and commenced to remove his jacket. Watson had performed the latter operation already. And the cads of the Remove eyed us with looks of utter dismay and consternation.

"Good!" said Singleton. "I might as well join in this!"

"That's just exactly what I was going to suggest," I said. "I'll take Fullwood alone—and you chaps can go for the other two. I'm afraid there'll be some crockery smashed, but it can't be helped."

Fullwood gave a huge gulp.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "I—I—I —"

"Well?" I said coldly.

Fullwood gulped again. He knew well enough that we meant business. There was no doubt about the question. It was either pay up—or be smashed.

"We—we admit that we owe Singleton somethin'," panted Fullwood desperately.

"We'll pay all we can!" gasped Bell.

"Every penny we've got!" chimed in Gulliver faintly.

We regarded the cowards with the contempt they deserved.

"Right you are—pay up!" I said briskly. "Give Singleton everything you've got—and if you attempt any

tricks, you'll get the hiding just the same."

Fullwood hastily searched his pockets, and produced four fivers and five pound currency notes. Gulliver placed five pounds on the table, and Bell did the same.

"That's the first contribution, I suppose?" I asked grimly.

"It's—it's all we've got, hang you!" snarled Fullwood.

"Thirty-five quid!" I said. "Thirty-five out of three seventy-five! My dear asses, it's not good enough. You'd better search again. You've forgotten some in an odd pocket, perhaps."

"We've got nothin' more—except a few odd shillin's," declared Fullwood.

"Honour bright!" panted Bell.

"Considering that you don't know what honour means, I don't think we'll accept that statement," I said coldly. "You can either shell out of your own accord, or you'll be searched. Fullwood will be the first victim. You've just got ten seconds to decide. One—two—three—four—five——"

"Here you are!" gasped Fullwood frantically.

"I thought that would work the trick!" I said sweetly.

We had an appalling amount of trouble getting that money. It was like drawing blood from a stone. But in the end, after we had threatened to search the study as well, we obtained the somewhat princely sum of one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Over half of it had been kept stored away in the bureau. Fullwood and Co. had been using Singleton's money for weeks, and they had grown accustomed to having a little home bank on the premises.

"I expect you've got some more," I said at length. "But Singleton seems satisfied, and it's too much trouble to press you further. You can consider yourselves jolly lucky that you've got off so lightly!"

Fullwood and Co. did not trust themselves to reply. They were altogether too flabbergasted and filled with disappointed fury. They had assumed that they would be able to stick to their booty, and it caused them intense agony to shell out.

"It was awfully decent of you fellows to lend me a hand like that," said Singleton, when we got out into the passage. "I think it is only right that I

should have this money—it's positively mine——"

"Of course it's yours—and a few hundred pounds besides, I expect," I said. "In any case, it's just as well to take it away from those rotters. We're only too pleased to have been of service to you, Singleton."

The Hon. Douglas fingered the notes uncomfortably.

"Are they burning?" asked Watson, with his usual bluntness. "I should advise you to go easy with that money, Singleton. It ought to last you until to-morrow, anyhow."

Singleton smiled.

"I deserve that sarcasm," he said quietly. "It cuts a bit, but it's my own fault. I was just wondering if—"

"If what?" I asked.

"If you'd mind taking care of this money for me," said the Hon. Douglas awkwardly. "It'll be safer in your possession."

I looked at him squarely.

"Why, don't you trust yourself?" I asked.

"Yes, but——"

"You think you can keep it without spending it rashly?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then keep it," I said. "There'll be no effort of will about it if I have the money. But if you have it yourself, Duggy, and still manage to keep it chained to you—well, you'll be all serene."

And we left him there, looking after us with compressed lips and a warm light in his eyes.

Singleton was certainly improving by leaps and bounds.

CHAPTER II.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

"YOU'RE wanted, Master Singleton."

Tubbs, the page-boy, stood in the doorway of Study N. Several days had elapsed, and afternoon lessons were just over. The Hon. Douglas had gone to his study at once, and he looked up at Tubbs in surprise.

"I'm wanted?" he repeated.

"Yessir."

"Who by?"

"The Head, Master Singleton."

"Egad! I wonder what can be wrong," muttered the Hon. Douglas, frowning.

"I don't know as anything is exactly wrong, sir," said the page-boy. "There are two gents with the Head—"

Singleton started.

"Two gentlemen!" he repeated sharply. "Who are they?"

"One of 'em is the same gent as oalled a week or two back—Mr.—Mr. Morningly, or something like that."

"Mr. Mornington!" exclaimed Singleton. "He's my solicitor. Confound it! What on earth has he come down to-day for?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you, Master Singleton."

"I wasn't expecting him for weeks—for another fortnight, at least," muttered Singleton. "I can't understand why he's come bothering to-day."

"There's another gent, sir—a gent with a title, too," said Tubbs, in an awed voice. "A big gent, with brown face and hands—"

"Good heavens!" panted Singleton. "What is his name?"

"Lord Bellmore, sir—"

"My—my guardian!" panted Singleton huskily. "It can't be true! He hasn't had time to get here from Africa. No liner on the seas could have brought him here in the time!"

"I don't know nothing about it, Master Singleton," said the page-boy. "All I know is that the Head told me to tell you as you was wanted. The Head says to me: 'Tubbs,' he says, 'go to Master Singleton, of the Remove, and tell him that I want him at once,' he says. So I come straight along, sir."

"All right, Tubbs, you can go—here's something for yourself," said the Hon. Douglas. "I'll go to the Head's study in a minute."

For a moment Singleton had been on the point of handing Tubbs a pound note as a tip, one of his former little habits—and one which Tubbs had no objection to. But the former spendthrift remembered himself, and substituted the pound note for half-a-crown. Tubbs was pleased enough, and he went off cheerily. He really had expected no tip at all.

Singleton, left alone, paced his barren study almost feverishly.

He was taken by surprise—off his guard. He had not prepared his story as he had been planning to do. And now, all in a moment, he learned that his guardian was here—actually in the school.

The junior was filled with a great nervousness, and he hardly dared leave his own study. The ordeal had come—he had to go in and face Lord Bellmore. It was almost too appalling to contemplate.

"What shall I do?" he muttered. "What the deuce shall I do?"

He knew well enough what to do, but somehow, he could not bring himself to the point of making the move. And he was still pacing up and down when I looked into the study.

"You here, Duggy?" I said cheerfully. "Good! I just want to have a word about the football. There's not much of the season left, but you might like to—Hallo! Anything wrong?"

"Eh? I—I—" Singleton stared at me. "What did you say?" he asked blankly.

"I was talking about the football," I replied. "But what's the matter? You seemed to be bowled over, old son. Has anything happened?"

"Not yet," said Singleton, with a curious note in his voice. "It's going to happen almost at once, though. I've just heard that my guardian, Lord Bellmore, is here."

"Phow!" I whistled. "Already?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't expect him for another fortnight, did you?"

"No," said Singleton. "I can't understand what it means. He hasn't had time to get here from Africa. And I'm wanted in the Head's study at once. I've got to go on the carpet this afternoon."

"Good!" I exclaimed heartily.

"What!"

"The sooner it's over the better," I said. "The longer you're kept in suspense, Singleton, the worse it'll seem. It's rather good that it's come upon you unexpectedly. Take my advice and walk boldly. Tell your yarn, and face the music. They can't kill you, and they'll probably understand that you weren't altogether to blame."

"But I was to blame," declared Singleton. "I was an arrant fool, and it's no good saying anything else. Yes, I'll go—and get it over."

He walked out of the study without another word, and disappeared down the passage. I felt rather sorry for him.

He had a bad time in front of him, and in spite of his own remark, I knew well enough that the blame was far from being his entirely. I only hoped that his guardian would be just and humane. I was quite anxious for Singleton to remain at St. Frank's. It would be a bad thing for him if he was removed.

He went to the Head's study, and he felt that he would like to drop through the floor, as he tapped upon the door of that famous sanctum.

"Come in!"

Singleton entered, his heart in his mouth. Even now he was hoping that Tubbs had made some mistake.

But no, there was no mistake. The Head sat behind his desk, looking unusually grave. Near him, in an easy chair, was Mr. Mornington, a solicitor with a somewhat sour cast of countenance. And over by the window stood the figure which Singleton dreaded to see—a tall, well-built man with broad shoulders, and attired in a Norfolk suit. He was clean-shaven, and his face was bronzed by the sun of tropical climes. He was Lord Bellmore, Singleton's guardian.

The Hon. Douglas stood there, just inside the door, waiting for somebody to speak. Somehow, he couldn't say anything himself. No words would come, and something was filling his throat.

"Ah, Singleton, I have a little surprise for you," said the Headmaster. "Your guardian is here, having arrived much sooner than we anticipated."

"Much, much sooner!" murmured Mr. Mornington pleasantly.

"Y-y-yes, sir!" stuttered Singleton, in a whisper. "I—I'm awfully pleased to see you, sir," he added, turning to Lord Bellmore. "I—I—"

"You need not tell me any falsehoods, Douglas," said Lord Bellmore, in a deep voice. "You are not awfully pleased to see me—you are very alarmed at seeing me, if you would only tell the truth."

"Yes, sir," gasped the Hon. Douglas. "I—I'm alarmed, but I'm awfully pleased, too. I'm pleased because I know I deserve what's coming, and I want to get it over. I deserve anything

you care to condemn me to, sir—anything! I've been the biggest fool that any boy could possibly be. I'm changed now, sir—I've had my eyes opened. And I wish to heaven I'd never had the money in my control."

The three men exchanged glances.

"I am pleased to find that you are in a contrite mood, Douglas," said Lord Bellmore gravely. "It is a somewhat pleasant surprise—for I have been led to believe that you were arrogant and unruly. Your expressions of regret, at the outset of this matter, have had their due effect upon me."

"Really, your lordship, he has quite surprised me," said Mr. Mornington. "When I last saw him he was almost insulting——"

"I was worse than that, Mr. Mornington," put in the Hon. Douglas quietly. "Somehow, I seem to have realised within the last two or three days what a contemptible little worm I have been. And I want to apologise to you, sir, for treating you so badly."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Mornington. "It sounds well, my boy, but I'm afraid that it is difficult to believe you. How am I to know that this is not a mere pose, in order to gain sympathy?"

"I'm speaking from my heart, sir," replied Singleton. "I can't say more."

Lord Bellmore came across the room, and took Singleton squarely by the shoulders.

"My boy," he said gravely, "do you realise what you have done?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that you are a beggar?"

"Yes, sir, I know that," replied the Hon. Douglas steadily. "I shall have to pay for it, and I deserve anything I get. It means that when I start in the world, I shall start with nothing. I shall have to fight—and I mean to fight, too! One day I'll make up for my folly now."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "I hardly expected this, Lord Bellmore. The boy seems truly penitent, and all my anger has oozed away. I really cannot see how we can punish the boy as we originally intended. I am deeply impressed by what he has said—deeply impressed."

"You think he means it?" muttered Mr. Mornington gruffly.

"I know he means it," said the Head quietly. "I have had much experience of boys, and I know when they are telling the truth, and when they are

affecting a pose. Singleton, I feel sure, is speaking from his heart—and I am more than delighted to notice this radical change in his attitude.”

The Hon. Douglas looked at the Head.

“I haven’t been saying anything to escape punishment, sir,” he exclaimed firmly. “I deserve anything—I deserve—I don’t know what, sir; but it ought to be something—awful. And I don’t want you to think I’m trying to wriggle out of anything because I say that I’m sorry. I’ve acted wickedly and madly, and I’ve had a lesson I shall never forget in all my life.”

Lord Bellmore nodded with approval. He was delighted to find Singleton so obviously penitent. There was no doubt on the point. The boy had changed completely. His recent experience had pulled the film from his eyes, and he saw the truth clearly. And it was gratifying to find that he had sufficient courage to acknowledge his fault.

His lordship did not say anything for a moment. As a matter of fact, he hardly knew what to say, for he had prepared a harsh, severe lecture—fully anticipating that the Hon. Douglas would be stubborn and arrogant.

Lord Bellmore was immensely wealthy. He was, as a matter of fact, a millionaire; and Singleton’s fortune of two hundred thousand a mere trifle. His lordship could replace the money without feeling it, if he so desired.

But he had no intention of doing this.

The Hon. Douglas had squandered his fortune, and it was only right that he should feel the loss. At the same time, it was gratifying to know that he fully appreciated his folly, and was prepared to fight his way in the world.

“To tell you the truth, my boy, I don’t know what to say to you,” said Lord Bellmore quietly. “I may tell you that you have disarmed me by your attitude. Before we proceed further, I should like you to tell me exactly how you managed to spend your money so swiftly. I understand that you got into the hands of crooks? How? Where did you meet them?”

“I’ll tell you everything, sir,” said the Hon. Douglas.

And he proceeded to explain in detail how he had become acquainted with Mr. Horace Carslake and Mr. William Crosse; he did not mention that he had been introduced to the two men originally by Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

But for that one fact, things might have been very different with the Hon. Douglas. Fullwood was the actual cause of the boy’s downfall.

Continuing, Singleton explained how Mr. Philip Smith Gore had come upon the scene, and how he induced the Hon. Douglas to take an interest in race-horses; how he had sold the lad a worthless horse for a big sum of money, and all the other details of that episode.

Then Singleton passed on to the affair which occurred in London, when he had been introduced into a gambling flat—a place which had been especially prepared for his benefit by the ingenious Mr. Gore.

Singleton did not attempt to excuse himself in any way. He told his story truthfully and in a straightforward manner. He condemned himself continuously, and knew full well that one-tenth of his admissions was sufficient to get him expelled from St. Frank’s in dire disgrace.

But he was telling the truth—and he gloried in it.

He had finished with lies and excuses, and it was splendid to stand there, stating the bald facts, and getting them off his mind. And his listeners knew that he was speaking from his heart, and they respected his candour.

When a person admits his fault openly, it is difficult to be harsh.

The lad’s story was by no means over. He told how he had complete faith in Mr. Gore and the others, and how they had swindled him right and left—finally by selling him spurious shares in a copper mine which did not exist. The junior had bought them, hoping to retrieve his fortune, but he had only sunk deeper into the mire.

He explained how he had beaten Mr. Gore by withdrawing his money from the bank before Gore’s cheque could be paid in. But the cash had been stolen from Singleton’s desk the same night, so he had lost it just the same.

That had been the final blow.

Nothing was left to him. By the time he had paid his local debts, he found himself penniless. And Mr. Gore and his companions had vanished with their booty.

“That’s the story, sir—I’ve told you everything,” said Singleton at last. “I know it sounds a pretty rotten yarn, and you’ll think me a mad young fool. If

you do, you'll think right—because I was a mad fool."

The Head was the first to speak.

"After all you have said, Singleton, it is my duty to flog you before the whole school, and to expel you in utmost disgrace afterwards," he said gravely. "Do you realise that?"

"Yes, sir," said Singleton steadily.

"You know that you would be expelled before telling us your story?"

"I don't see how I can be allowed to remain, sir," replied the Hon. Douglas. "I thought I should have been sacked long ago—but I knew the evil day was only being put off. It'll be terribly rough luck to leave now—just when I'm getting on so well with the decent chaps. But that's not right, sir; I mustn't say that. I've sacrificed all right to stop here, and the sooner I'm gone the better. Perhaps St. Frank's will be all the sweeter for my absence," he added miserably.

"Ahem!" coughed the Head. "We—er—we must not get pessimistic, Singleton. You have changed to an extraordinary extent, and I know that you are sincerely sorry for what you have done. You have had a bitter lesson, and it has had the right effect. Under the exceptional circumstances, I may be disposed to overlook your grave delinquencies—"

"You—you'll let me stay at St. Frank's, sir?" asked Singleton, with a gulp.

"Such a thing is not impossible," said the Head quietly.

"But—but I've done some terrible things, sir—"

"You have, Singleton; but you know they are terrible, and you are sorry for them," said the Head. "Furthermore, it is quite obvious that you were led into these evil ways by cunning rogues who had you in their power. I am not excusing your own conduct, but I will say, that the greater part of the blame attaches itself to the three men you have mentioned."

"Oh, sir, if—if I could remain at St. Frank's, I'd—I'd—" Singleton paused, his eyes shining with hope. "I'd work hard, sir," he panted. "I'd do everything in my power to make up for the past. I've lost the money—but I'm a better chap now. I'm no longer a fool

and a snob and a miserable worm. Perhaps it's worth the money to be different! I feel like another fellow, sir—I look upon my other self as something beneath my contempt. If—if I could only have another chance, sir, I'd make good! I would—honestly, sir!"

There was such an appeal in the junior's tone—such anxiety and eagerness and hope—that the Head felt rather uncomfortable. He was astonished at this change in Singleton. It was so unexpected—and so welcome, too. The old gentleman tapped his desk thoughtfully.

"You can manage it, Dr. Stafford, surely?" asked Lord Bellmore. "The lad is sincere—I know it. Give him another chance—"

"I will," said the Head. "I intend doing so."

"Splendid!" exclaimed his lordship. "You hear, Douglas?"

"Yes, sir!" panted Singleton. "It's—it's too good to be true! I—I don't deserve this treatment. Everybody seems to be kind to me now! There's Nipper, of the Remove—and all the other chaps. They treat me better in every way—and yet I've done these awful things!"

"The awful things have changed your character; my boy," said Lord Bellmore gently. "I was prepared to be very, very angry with you; but your story has completely disarmed me, as I said before."

"You may go now, Singleton," said the Head. "I will have a long talk with your guardian, and you will be called for later."

"Thank—thank you, sir!" said the Hon. Douglas dreamily.

He went out of the study like a fellow in his sleep. He hardly knew where he went or what he did. The news was too glorious to be true. He was forgiven! It wasn't right, he told himself. He ought to be punished!

But Singleton did not realise that he had been punished already—punished in a way which could not be improved upon. He had been punished so severely, in fact, that his whole character was changed.

His lesson had been well learnt!

CHAPTER III.

ROGUES IN COUNCIL.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE stretched his legs towards the fire.

"Yes, the whole affair will be finished with to-night," he said smoothly. "A very profitable game—eh, Carslake?"

Mr. Carslake nodded.

"It seems rather too good to be true," he said. "My share amounts to fifty thousand—and it'll suit me splendidly. I shall certainly retire, and become a respectable citizen."

"The same applies to me," observed Mr. William Crosse. "We've had no risk in this game; but our luck won't always be in. And it'll be safer to leave things alone. Carslake went pretty close to the mark this time."

"By entering St. Frank's, you mean?" asked Mr. Gore.

"Yes," replied Crosse. "He fetched that money away from Singleton's desk."

"It was a foolish risk to take," said Mr. Gore, shaking his head. "I should not have advised such action. I never advocate direct action. However, the mission was a success, and our spoils are swelled accordingly."

The three men were sitting in a private room of the Pier Hotel, in Caistowe. It was evening, and the trio had met there by arrangement. The final details of the "Singleton" affair were to be cleared up—and the booty was to be divided.

According to Mr. Gore's previous arrangement, he was to receive a half, and the other two a quarter each. This was only fair, considering that Mr. Gore had manipulated the strings from the first.

So far, Carslake and Crosse had seen no money—except the liberal working expenses which Mr. Gore had allowed them. The actual spoils were entirely in Gore's possession.

He had arranged this at the outset.

He was the prime mover in the fraud, and the others were obliged to do as he dictated. And now the time had come for a division of the stolen money. Carslake and Crosse had been rather anxious hitherto, fearing that their leader would fail to fulfil his obligations.

"I presume that you have our money with you, Gore?" remarked Carslake casually.

Mr. Gore smiled.

"You need not worry yourself on that point," he said. "I arranged for everything to be settled to-night—and it will be settled. I am a man of my word. For the moment I wish to turn to another subject."

"Another subject?" repeated Crosse curiously.

"Well, perhaps the expression was wrong," said Gore. "The subject is really the same—that is to say, it concerns Singleton. I do not think we have quite done with him yet."

"How is that?" asked Carslake. "I understood that we had got every penny out of him? Was his fortune larger than two hundred thousand?"

"No," replied Gore. "We have secured everything—from the boy. But if there is a chance of making our success even bigger than it stands at the present moment—well, I shall seize that chance."

"I don't understand," said Crosse.

"That is only natural, considering that we have not discussed the subject," went on Gore smoothly. "Now, listen. I happen to know that Singleton's guardian is at St. Frank's to-day."

"What on earth does that matter to us?"

"Everything," said Gore. "Lord Bellmore—that's the man's name—is extremely rich. In point of fact, he is a millionaire, and I have every reason for believing that he is generous. There is more than a possibility that we shall be able to get a further sum of money—and a very substantial amount—if we go to work in the right way."

Carslake shook his head.

"I think we'd better be satisfied with what we've got," he said firmly. "There's no need to run our heads into a noose——"

"Tut-tut!" snapped Gore. "What do you take me for? Have I not done everything safely so far? Can't you trust me to settle the whole thing in a satisfactory manner? I must see Singleton to-night——"

"See Singleton?" exclaimed the other two men.

"Precisely."

"You must be mad!" shouted Crosse.

"You are quite complimentary!"

"But, man alive, you cannot mean it!" exclaimed Crosse. "After what Singleton knows about us, it is impossible to approach him again. The lad may be a fool, but it is possible to go too far."

"Quite possible," agreed Gore; "and very easy, too. But I shall make certain of not doing that. You can trust me to that, my friends. Lord Bellmore is actually at St. Frank's now, and I shall see Singleton with a definite object; and, what is more, I can guarantee that my journey will not be fruitless."

"What is this definite object?" asked Crosse.

"I will tell you the details later," replied Gore. "In any case, you can safely trust me to take every precaution. I mean to win through to-night, and then everything will be smooth. Do you understand? This is to be the last effort—and it will be a success."

"Well, I can't help saying that I don't care for it," exclaimed Carslake uncomfortably. "I'm perfectly satisfied to take fifty thousand."

"And I echo that opinion," declared Crosse. "Give us the money, Gore, and we'll go—you can do this extra affair on your own account."

Gore looked at his companions grimly.

"I think not!" he said, in a cold voice. "We started this enterprise together—and we finish it together. I shall need both of you to-night—urgently. Quite apart from all that, you must be extremely nervous, if you cannot rely upon my discretion for another two hours. It is as much for your benefit as it is for mine, and, instead of being scared in this way, you ought to back me up. Don't forget that I have done the major portion of the work all through!"

"We don't forget that," said Carslake. "But we like to be safe, Gore; we don't quite see the idea of running into danger——"

"You will see everything clearly later," said Gore. "For the moment you must leave matters to me. I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without making an effort. I am a man who believes in seizing a chance when it crops up—and here we have a glorious chance. I shall stand no risk whatever—I can guarantee that. There is not the slightest possibility of anything serious happening. I shall be safe the whole time."

"Why are you so sure?"

"Because I know for a positive fact

that no danger can come—for the simple reason that I shall take care of myself," replied Gore smoothly. "Now, remember, I am going off at once to St. Frank's, for I intend to scout about, and get Singleton alone. Then I shall bring him to a spot where you will be——"

"I?" said Carslake.

"Both you and Crosse," replied Gore. "I want you to meet me at eight-thirty exactly at the corner of the Triangle wall—you know the place. It juts out near the lane, and you cannot mistake the spot, because a tall fir-tree grows in the corner. Be there at eight-thirty, and I will meet you."

"But what on earth for?" demanded Crosse.

"You will understand what for in good time," said Gore. "We will have our little talk with Singleton, arrange the matter I suggest, and then will come the time for settling up."

The two men looked at one another.

"I don't like it, Crosse," said Carslake, "but I suppose we shall have to agree."

"I suppose we shall," said Crosse. "But do you really mean, Gore, to settle the account to-night?"

"I do."

"Everything will be squared up between us?"

"Everything," said Gore. "I guarantee that, so you need not look so uncertain; and there is no necessity to give me suspicious looks. It is rather a pity if you cannot trust me after all this time."

"There's no question about not trusting you," exclaimed Carslake. "The only point I'm worried about is whether it will be safe to venture near the school."

Gore laughed.

"Safe!" he echoed easily. "How can it be otherwise? The boy has no proof against us—I have taken good care of that. We can face him openly, and if he tries any tricks, it will be an easy matter for us to silence him. Do you think he would like his Headmaster to know all his dealings with us?"

"Well, I suppose the boy will be rather nervous," said Crosse.

"My dear fellow, we have him in our hands," smiled Gore. "Even if things came to the worst, and my plans failed, our position would be the same as it is now. Singleton can do nothing because

he has no proof, and the whole detective force of the country cannot touch us. So why worry? And why not do everything we can to make our scheme a bigger success than ever?"

"Perhaps you are right," said Carslake slowly. "Seeing that we are the same in any case, we might just as well go the whole hog, so to speak. You can rely on us being at the meeting place at eight-thirty, Gore."

"Good!"

Mr. Gore took his departure almost at once.

It was quite dark in the little side street when he emerged from the Pier Hotel—for he left by the side exit, and not by the main door, which led directly upon the esplanade.

Even at the height of the season, in the summertime, Caistowe was a quiet place. Now, in March, the little town was practically dead after sunset. Mr. Gore walked briskly along until he came to the outskirts of the town. Then he set off for Bellton by road—walking still.

But, in spite of his precautions, he was unaware of the fact that a dim figure had emerged from the shadows near the Pier Hotel; he was unaware that the dim figure had been following him, and was still keeping him within view.

The mysterious stranger was a somewhat shabby man with a thick beard. He had often lurked about the district, and he had witnessed the comings and goings of Mr. Gore on many an occasion.

Who could this mysterious individual be?

That was a question which required an answer—and which was probably going to be answered that very night. The figure remained upon Gore's trail, but gave Gore no chance of learning the truth.

And thus the pair covered the distance from Caistowe to Bellton, and then on to St. Frank's. It seemed that developments were close at hand!

CHAPTER IV.

A DECIDED IMPROVEMENT.

"CONFOUNDED beast!" said Gulliver savagely.

"Skinned me out of everything!" snapped Bell. "I was reckoning that I should have heaps of

tin all through the term—an' now I've only got ten quid left."

"I saved fifteen," said Gulliver. "He wasn't goin' to have the bally lot, I can tell you!"

Fullwood scowled.

"It was Nipper's fault—the interferin' cad!" he said hotly. "If he hadn't stuck his beastly nose in, we should have been all right. I was only able to save a tenner, so I reckon we ought to share that extra fiver of yours, Gully——"

"Rot!" said Gulliver. "You had twenty or thirty quid more than us originally—but you didn't offer to share it. I'm stickin' to what I've got."

The Nuts were in a bad humour. They felt that they had been robbed, and their feelings towards the Hon. Douglas were bitter and resentful.

They blamed Singleton for everything. It didn't strike them that the money they had had was actually his, and that he had every right to it. They simply told themselves that he had robbed them.

But it would be quite impossible to get the money back—that was a certainty.

For they were not in a position to air their grievance. They could not very well complain to the other fellows that the Hon. Douglas had taken the money; for they would get into extremely hot water if the truth came out.

They could do nothing.

"It wouldn't matter so much if he had plenty of money still," said Fullwood. "We should be able to get some more cash later on. But the fellow's broke, an' we shall never see a farthin' back. It's amazing to me that he's still allowed to stop here. The beast ought to have been sacked long ago!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver. "He's a disgrace to the school, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to give him a public ragging."

Fullwood's eyes gleamed.

"Rather," he agreed. "We'll do it ourselves—just the three of us. We'll collar the beast when we find him alone, drag him away, an' make an example of him. We'll show him that he ain't wanted in the Remove."

Bell shook his head.

"It'll be a bit too risky," he said. "Singleton can hit out, and I don't feel inclined to take chances."

"Rot," said Fullwood. "The chap can't do any harm to the three of us—we shall be all over him. But we ought

to fix upon some plan—some definite scheme, you know.”

“It’s all very well to talk, but definite schemes ain’t very easy to find out,” said Gulliver. “Hang the fellow! The best thing we can do is to ignore him—show him as plain as anythin’ that he’s beneath our notice.”

“Rot!” said Fullwood. “I’m not going to be content with that. We’ll leave the matter for the present, and decide upon a course of action later on. I’d like to get the beast hounded out of school—and so I could, if I told the Head about the gamblin’ place an’ all the rest of it.”

“You—you ass!” said Bell, in alarm. “We were there, too——”

“Keep your bally hair on,” sneered Fullwood. “You don’t think I’m goin’ to take a risk like that, I suppose? We’ll get even with Singleton—on our own. We’ll make him squirm.”

“How?”

“We’ll find a way,” said Fullwood vaguely. “I’m going down to the common-room now, an’ if Singleton’s there, you’ll see what I’ll do.”

It was in keeping with Fullwood’s character to utter veiled threats—threats which would probably never be carried out. He knew well enough that Singleton was a better fellow than himself—and it was this very knowledge which had enraged him, and which filled his heart with malevolent enmity.

The Nuts went down to the common-room, and found that noisy apartment quite respectably filled. There were a good many juniors present, including the Hon. Douglas. Tregellis-West and Watson and I were there, too.

Singleton looked happier than he had looked for days past. His interview in the Head’s study had put new life into him, and there was such a marked change in his expression, and in his attitude, that I could not help wondering.

I had not spoken with him yet, for I had only just come in. But I knew that his interview with Lord Bellmore had not been tragic. The Hon. Douglas’s guardian had evidently listened to the boy’s story with sympathy and understanding.

“Well, old son?” I said softly, tapping him on the arm. “What about it?”

“Eh?” said Singleton, turning. “Oh! It’s you, Nipper!”

“Yes. How did you get on?”

“With my guardian, you mean?”

“Of course.”

“I don’t exactly know where I am,” exclaimed Singleton. “It all seems impossible—too good to be really true, Nipper. They were—they were bricks! It’s the only word to describe them—my guardian and the Head! I’m even going to be allowed to stay at St. Frank’s.”

I clapped him on the shoulder.

“Good!” I exclaimed heartily.

“Why, do you agree?”

“Yes, rather,” I said. “We don’t want to lose you, Singleton, after the fine way you’ve been bucking up lately. We could do without a few cads in the Remove—but we want to keep the best chaps with us.”

The Hon. Douglas smiled rather bitterly.

“You’re being sarcastic,” he muttered.

“I’m not,” I said quickly. “I mean it, honestly!”

“But you can’t mean it—I’m not one of the best chaps,” said Singleton grimly. “I’m one of the worst—the very worst of all, in fact!”

“Rats!” I said. “You were a double-barrelled ass at one time, but you’ve changed since then. If you had kept up the same old rot your guardian would not have forgiven you, and the Head would have presented you with the order of the boot.”

Singleton nodded.

“I believe you’re right,” he said quietly. “I was scared out of my wits when I went into the Head’s study. I was so nervous that I didn’t know what I was doing. I—I thought I was going to die for a minute or two, I felt so rotten. But then, when I got inside, and faced them, I took my courage in both hands.”

“Good!” I exclaimed. “It was the best way. You told the whole truth, I suppose? You made a clean breast of everything?”

“Yes, I did,” replied the Hon. Douglas quietly. “Heaven knows that lies had got me into enough trouble on other occasions, and I knew that lies would put the finish on everything if I resorted to them. Besides, I hate telling lies now—it’s a beastly, caddish, filthy habit.”

“All I wanted was to tell the truth. I was reckless, and it was an absolute pleasure to get the whole rotten story off my chest. I made myself out as bad as

I actually am. I didn't spare myself in the slightest degree—and they sympathised with me! Think of it, Nipper! Just think of it! Instead of rounding on me, and going for me bald-headed, they became kindly and gentle!"

"Well, that was only to be expected," I smiled. "You don't seem to understand, Singleton, that when a fellow is genuinely sorry for his misdeeds, he earns the respect of everybody. But when he tries to brazen things out—well, it's a different matter. He doesn't deserve respect, and he doesn't deserve anything except punishment. But it's difficult to punish a fellow who absolutely breathes a penitence with every word he utters. You were genuinely sorry, and you were brave enough to tell the whole truth."

"I—I wasn't brave," said Singleton. "Somehow, I don't think it's right. I deserve to be punished. When I think of all the money I've lost—or, rather, wasted—I feel scared. Thank goodness, I've come to my senses!"

"You've come to your senses, and now you're Douglas Singleton," I said. "You're yourself, if you know what I mean. Until now, you've been somebody else—you've been a reckless idiot in the hands of crooks."

Singleton nodded, and hung his head.

"It's a wonder to me you care to speak to me, Nipper," he said in a low voice. "I'm going straight now—I'm not going to be a fool any longer. I've had my lesson, and it's been bitter enough to last me all my time. Thank goodness, I came to my senses before it was too late. And the Head's a brick!"

It was impossible to bear any resentment towards Singleton. He was really and truly sorry for all he had done, and I was sure he was speaking from his heart. In future he would be a changed boy.

Tregellis-West and Watson had heard everything. He didn't mind who heard, if it came to that. He was not ashamed of admitting his faults, now that he saw them. He gloried in the fact that he had changed.

"Dear old boy," said Sir Montie, "you can count upon us as your friends. If ever you're in trouble, come to us—and we'll give you a hand!"

"Thanks," said Singleton quietly.

He really did not know what else to say. For the moment he was rather overwhelmed by the events of the evening.

Somehow or other, all his troubles seemed to be fading away.

And yet he felt, inwardly, that he deserved the sack.

Perhaps he did, but he had proved himself to be so truly penitent that it was impossible to treat him harshly.

And while I was thinking of these matters, I became aware of a somewhat loud conversation on the other side of the common-room. Fullwood was doing most of the talking, and Gulliver and Bell and Merrell and one or two others were standing by. Other juniors grinned as they listened.

But I didn't grin; I frowned angrily.

"That's what I say," exclaimed Fullwood firmly. "It's no laughing matter, my bucks. A cad like Singleton ought to be ragged—and ragged publicly. It's a rotten shame that he's allowed to stop at St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bell.

"He ought to be kicked out!" shouted Fullwood.

"Good!"

"He ain't fit to be amongst decent chaps!"

"And I vote we show our disapproval by raggin' him," went on Fullwood. "The fellow's a funk and a cad an' a beastly outsider."

The Hon. Douglas nudged me.

"Cheerful conversation, eh?" he said calmly. "What do you think, Nipper?"

"I think Fullwood is asking for a hiding," I said quietly. "I think he'll get one, too!"

"It's quite possible," admitted Singleton. "I don't want to make a scene in the common-room, and I sha'n't interfere so long as Fullwood talks rot to the other chaps. But if he addresses me——"

The Hon. Douglas paused significantly.

"You'll get busy?" said Watson eagerly.

"I shall!"

"Good!" said Tommy. "I hope he addresses you!"

I grinned.

"Tommy evidently wants to see some excitement," I remarked. "I suppose you can see now, Singleton, what kind of fellows those cads in Study A are? I knew you would find out sooner or later, so I didn't interfere."

"You ought to have interfered," exclaimed the Hon. Douglas. "You ought

to have told me plainly what worms they are—"

"My dear fellow, you wouldn't have taken any notice," I interrupted. "You would simply have ignored my warning—because, at that time, your eyes were closed to all sense and reason."

"Yes, you're right," said Singleton. "It's better that I should find out for myself. Egad! They seem to be quite amused over there."

The knot of cads were chuckling more than ever.

"Of course, the chap's a rotter," went on Fullwood. "He's got no more grit than a garden beetle! And I vote we get up a petition to the Head, demanding that he shall be sacked."

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll draft out the thing at once," went on Fullwood. "You can see he's a funk even now. He can hear all we're sayin', an' yet he doesn't do a bally thing. I say, Singleton, you cad!"

The Hon. Douglas looked up.

"Did you address me?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, I did," snapped Fullwood.

"Come here!"

"Good egg!" murmured Watson, hugging himself.

Singleton lounged forward, his hands in his pockets.

"Well?" he asked with ominous quietness. "What do you want?"

"I just want to tell you somethin'," said Fullwood, looking round him in order to gain the attention of the room. "I want to tell you that you ain't fit to live at St. Frank's. We've got no room here for funks and cads, an' if you want to know the truth, you're nothin' better than a common criminal. Your record during this term proves that."

Singleton didn't move a hair.

He stood there, and the Removites looked on, wondering what would happen. Many of the fellows were openly sneering, for it seemed that the Hon. Douglas had no intention of resenting the insults.

"Yah! Funk!"

"You ain't fit to be in the second!"

"Why don't you go for him?"

The Hon. Douglas moved closer to Fullwood.

"You've insulted me in public, Fullwood," he said quietly.

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "It's impossible to insult a cad like you!"

"Really?" exclaimed Singleton. "My opinion is slightly different. You called me a cad and a funk, and you needn't think that I'm going to let that pass without taking action."

"Oh!" sneered Fullwood. "An' what will you do?"

"I don't like to cause a disturbance in the common-room, but I find it necessary to give you a hiding," replied Singleton, turning up his coat-sleeves with calm deliberation. "I'm going to thrash you until you apologise."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fullwood.

"A fight—a fight!"

"Go it, Singleton!"

"You asked for it, Fully, and you'll have to go through with it," exclaimed Handforth. "I'll see that we have fair play. Look alive, my son!"

Fullwood laughed unpleasantly.

"Do you think I'm goin' to fight with a worm like Singleton?" he snapped. "I wouldn't soil my fingers by touching him!"

Handforth stalked forward.

"You're going to fight!" he said grimly.

"You fool—I won't do anythin' of the sort!" roared Fullwood, backing away. "I think the chap's a cad, but I don't want to hurt him—Hi! Look out, you silly idiot—Yaroooh!"

"That's for calling me a fool," said Handforth. "You'll get another—"

"Steady on, Handy," I broke in. "This is Singleton's fight—not yours. You can take a back seat for this occasion."

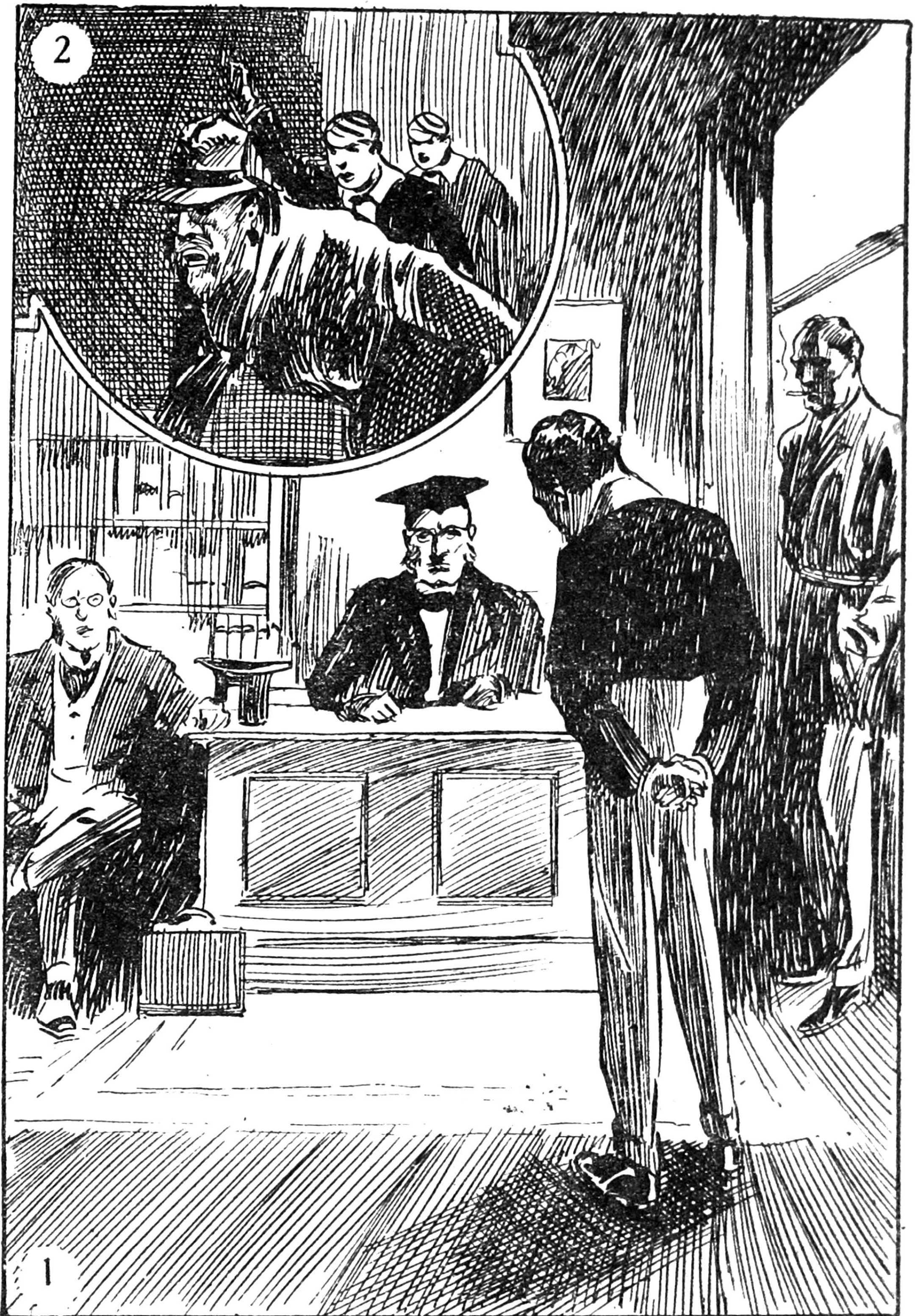
Fullwood began to look somewhat alarmed.

"Back me up, you chaps!" he shouted. "Let's collar Singleton, an' frog-march him round the Triangle."

"Good wheeze!" said Gulliver. "I'm game!"

He and a crowd of others pushed forward, with the obvious intention of collaring the Hon. Douglas—in order to save Fullwood from the fight. But the cads were not allowed to have their own way.

Pitt and De Valerie and Handforth and a crowd of other chaps got busy and forced Fullwood's supporters back, leaving him standing bare, so to speak. He was separated from his pals, and he realised, with sudden alarm, that the fight would have to come off.



1. "I deserve anything you care to condemn me to, sir," said Singleton, with genuine sorrow.

2. The juniors gave chase to the mysterious watcher.

"Look here," he gasped, "I—I'm not going to have a scrap with Singleton—"

"Yes, you are," I said grimly. "Your only escape is to apologise—humbly and sincerely."

"I'm not goin' to apologise to that worm!" snarled Fullwood.

Singleton touched my arm.

"It's all right, Nipper," he said quietly. "Leave him to me."

"Good!" I said. "I will."

"Now, Fullwood, if you want to back out of this fight you can do so," said the Hon. Douglas smoothly. "But you'll have to go down on your knees, and beg my pardon for insulting me. After that you'll have to apologise to the whole Remove for being such an arrant cad."

"You madman!" snarled Fullwood. "I won't do—"

While he was speaking he suddenly leapt forward—without the slightest warning. He intended to send his fist crashing into Singleton's face. He thought that by taking a mean, unfair advantage, he would be able to gain the upper hand.

But Singleton dodged, being on the look-out for such a move, and Fullwood's fist merely caught him on the shoulder. He reeled back, sent off his balance, but practically unhurt.

"Foul!"

"You cad, Fullwood!"

"You dirty rotter!"

"Go for him, Singleton—smash him!"

And this was precisely what Singleton proceeded to do.

He sailed in without any more argument. He went for Fullwood fairly and squarely, and he gave the Remove a display which the Remove remembered for quite a long time. Blows reigned upon Fullwood in a steady stream.

"Good business!"

"Go it, Singleton!"

"That's the way to make him dance!"

"Hit him harder!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Singleton was already hitting far harder than Fullwood cared about. The chief of the Nuts had asked for trouble quite plainly, and he was finding plenty. His nose was red and inflamed; one eye was rapidly closing, his left ear was in that condition which the juniors generally described as "thick."

Altogether, Ralph Leslie was in an unhappy plight, Singleton, on the other hand, was not even touched. Fullwood really had no chance.

Not that the Hon. Douglas gave a display of expert boxing. He showed a little science, but, on the whole, his boxing was poor. Pitted against an expert he would have been floored within a minute.

It was the courage which Singleton displayed that aroused the admiration of the fellows. He simply sailed in, reckless of the consequences—and, as a result, was hardly touched.

His fists were at work constantly, and Fullwood had no chance to hit out; all his time was occupied in defending himself; and even in this he failed. Singleton was by far the better man.

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"That's the style, Duggy—wipe him up!"

"It'll be all right if a prefect happens to look in," grinned Hart. "They'll both be reported to the Head for a flogging. Somebody had better stand by the door, to give warning."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," I said.

Tommy Watson obliged, and went to the door at once. He opened it rather cautiously, and then went out into the passage, in order to see that everything was all clear. But before he could return an unexpected incident occurred.

Fullwood made a wild dash across the room. The juniors were so surprised that no attempt was made to stop him. The next second he had reached the door, and he dashed out, colliding violently with Watson, who was just coming back.

Crash!

"Yow-yaroooh!" howled Tommy, sitting on the floor.

Fullwood dashed down the passage, and disappeared from view.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with derision. This was indeed a fitting end to the scene. The great Fullwood, after goading Singleton to fight, had broken away, and had fled! It was rather rich.

"The awful funk!" snorted Handforth. "Just when things were getting interesting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he won't be able to sneer at Singleton again—that's one thing," said Pitt. "Fullwood will have to sing

small for evermore. He's always getting lessons like this, but he never seems to learn."

"After him!" roared Handforth. "We're not going to let him escape!"

The juniors rushed out of the common-room in a struggling crowd, Handforth at their head. It was Handforth's gentle intention to see Fullwood, and to administer the punishment which Fullwood himself had suggested—a frog-march round the Triangle.

But Fullwood himself would be the victim.

However, there was nothing doing.

The crowd of fellows searched in vain, and Fullwood was not to be found. He had hidden away in some obscure corner, skulking in fear. His humiliation was complete, and when he did venture to show himself, it was a certainty that Singleton would not touch him.

Watson was particularly anxious to find the leader of Study D—almost as anxious as Handforth, in fact.

"He asked for this trouble, and it's only right that he should get it," he declared. "He must be in the Triangle somewhere—he's certainly not in the House—and he wouldn't go into the Monks' camp."

"Dear old boy, I'm afraid it's a hopeless proceedin'," said Sir Montie. "It's very dark to-night, an' we can't very well find Fullwood if he keeps in one place. I say let the cad alone, begad."

"Rot," said Watson. "He bowled me over in the passage—I'm aching now—and I want to give him a punch on my own account."

"But where can we look, my dear chap?" I asked.

"By jingo, I've got it!" said Watson brilliantly. "He's probably hiding in the old monastery ruins!"

"I don't think so," I said. "Fully hasn't got enough courage to go there himself after dark. Still, we might as well have a look."

We walked across the Triangle, and soon entered the grim and dismal ruins of the ancient monastery. Everything was quiet and still here, except for the slight rustle of the ivy as the wind caught it.

"Ugh! It's a pretty chilly place," remarked Tommy. "I don't suppose he's here, after all. He wouldn't have the nerve."

"That's just what I said," I remarked. "We're simply wasting our time—By Jove, though! What was that?"

"What—what was what?" asked Watson, half nervously.

"I saw nothin', dear old boy," murmured Tregellis-West.

"Just against that outer wall," I said. "I can swear I saw something move just now—a human figure. There you are! There it is again! It must be Fullwood, after all."

"Begad!" muttered Montie. "Dear fellow, you are right."

"On him!" hissed Watson.

We all flung ourselves forward at the same moment.

As we did so, a figure leapt over the wall, and rushed away down the lane. But we were after him in a moment, and although he attempted to dodge, we rapidly overhauled him and grasped him from behind.

"Got you, you funk!" gasped Watson. "Great pip! I—I—"

For he had suddenly discovered, to his dismay, that the prisoner was not Ralph Leslie Fullwood at all—but a total stranger!

We stared at him in astonishment.

He was a shabby man with an unkempt beard!

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE.

THE mysterious watcher!

I knew the man in a moment. He was the individual who had kept watch on Singleton when the Hon. Douglas had been in the hands of Gore and Carslake; he was the man who had paid so much attention to Mr. Philip Smith Gore on that particular night at Caistowe.

Who was he?

This was the first time we had seen him at close quarters, and I couldn't help confessing to myself that I was intensely curious. I had had my suspicions for long, and now I was becoming fairly certain.

I remembered particularly one occasion in London.

This mysterious individual had been watching the gambling flat, where Gore

and his fellow crooks had gone. And late that night, at Gray's Inn Road, Nelson Lee had locked himself in his bed-room—removing a disguise.

The inference was obvious, but I did not jump to hasty conclusions. I set myself to note details, and to watch carefully.

And I found that whenever the mysterious watcher was paying attention to Gore and Carslake, Nelson Lee was always away from St. Frank's. It was significant, to say the least.

And now we had the chance to prove the thing.

I was sure that our prisoner was the guv'nor himself, and I hesitated for a moment wondering whether I should take the plunge.

Probably Nelson Lee would be angry with me—but we were all alone, so it wouldn't matter much. And I thought it was a bit of cheek to keep me in the dark so long. Why hadn't the guv'nor taken me into his confidence? It would only serve him right to be bowled out in this way.

"We're awfully sorry, sir," I said politely. "We thought you were one of our chaps—that's why we ran after you."

"Oh, indeed!" said the stranger gruffly. "Allow me to inform you that you are impertinent rascals. Release me at once!"

"Hold on!" said Watson. "We've seen you hanging about before. I'd like to know what you were doing among those ruins?"

"I regret that I cannot explain."

"You'll have to," snapped Watson. "I suppose you know it's private property, and that strangers have no business to be there—especially at night. In my opinion, it looks jolly suspicious."

"Tut-tut! Do not be absurd, boy!" snapped the bearded stranger. "You will please attend to your own business, and leave me to attend to mine. It was like your infernal impudence to touch me at all!"

"Oh, was it?" said Tommy. "Well, you'd better explain——"

"Leave it to me, old son," I said smoothly. "This gentleman is only pulling your leg——"

"Gentleman!" snapped Watson. "He's only a tramp!"

"That's what you'd think," I said calmly. "You'd be a bit surprised if I told you the truth—and I'm going to

tell it. You know this gentleman almost as well as you know me."

"What?"

"Begad!"

"You're talking nonsense, boy!" snapped the stranger gruffly, and with some alarm. "How is it possible for this lad to know me?"

"He doesn't know you in your present personality," I said; "but he knows you when you're—well, yourself."

"You are talking riddles!" declared the stranger. "I have no time to argue with you. I am going at once—it is most important that I should go. Release me this instant, or you will be sorry——"

"It won't work, sir," I said smoothly. "We know you all right, and you might as well drop this little bluff. You wouldn't like to pull your beard off, would you?"

"My—my beard!" exclaimed the man, startled.

"Is he disguised?" gasped Watson.

"Of course he's disguised! Didn't you know that? All this hair—beard and wig—is camouflage. So are the clothes. He's a well-known, highly respected member of society in private life——"

"Confound you, Nipper! Why can't you drop this——"

The man paused abruptly.

"Hallo, sir!" I said severely. "You made a slip that time. How do you know my name is Nipper? It hasn't been mentioned here, so it stands to reason that you knew me already. Why not drop this little game? We know you, so you might as well tell us what the wheeze is to-night."

The bearded stranger uttered an exclamation.

"I'll tell you anything, if you'll only let me go!" he snapped. "I thought you had more sense, Nipper, than to play about like this. You know me, so I might as well drop the pretence."

I stared at him in wonder, for he had altered his voice completely—he was now using his own voice. But it was not that of Nelson Lee! It was familiar to me, though, and I was filled with astonishment.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "I seem to have heard that voice before—— Why, yes! It's just like Mr. Lennard's——"

"That's right!" said Tommy Watson. "It's Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard! Well, I'm jiggered!"

"You knew me all along, you young beggars—it's no good pretending like this," exclaimed the C.I.D. man gruffly. "A pretty mess you've made of things, Nipper, by interfering in this way!"

"But—but——" I gasped.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I—I thought you were Mr. Lee," I exclaimed. "I was sure of it! I was willing to swear that you were the guv'nor."

"Well, I'm not!" exclaimed our companion. "I don't know where Mr. Lee is, as a matter of fact—unless he's in the school. I want him rather particularly this evening, too. It's a matter of the utmost importance."

"What is?" I asked, still filled with amazement—for I had been absolutely positive that the stranger was really Nelson Lee. It was rather a shock to find that he was Lennard of the Yard.

"You don't seem to realise, Nipper, that you've spoilt everything!" exclaimed the chief inspector sharply. "I've just arrived here from Caistowe—I was on the track of Mr. Gore——"

"Gore!" I exclaimed quickly.

"Yes."

"Great Scott! Do you mean to say that he had dared to come back here?" I asked blankly. "I thought he was hundreds of miles away by this time——"

"It doesn't matter what you think!" snapped Lennard. "Gore isn't a hundred miles away—he's here—on the school premises at this very minute!"

"Begad!"

"But—but I thought you were Mr. Lee," I repeated. "It's absolutely astounding! I've never been so surprised in all my life!"

"I can't help your surprises, young 'un," interrupted the inspector. "The fact remains that I'm on Gore's trail, and you've messed things up properly. I'll admit that I lost sight of him for a minute, but I should have found him again."

"We'll find him—all of us," I declared. "This is rather a staggerer for me, Mr. Lennard. I've thought for days and days that you were the guv'nor—and I can't quite understand it, even now."

"Take my advice, and don't try to understand anything," said the inspector quickly. "Help me to find Gore, and I'll love you for evermore. I've got an idea that things will come to a head to-night—I'm pretty sure of it, in fact."

He moved off, and we followed. I had no further opportunity of questioning him. But a very simple explanation of the puzzle occurred to me. The mysterious stranger was, of course, Nelson Lee himself. But on this particular evening Lennard was deputising for the guv'nor. That was the probable explanation. Lee had business elsewhere, and so he had got Lennard down to take his place—and the Yard man was naturally wearing the same disguise.

We entered the Triangle, and I at once made a suggestion.

"You say that Gore is here—positively?" I asked.

"He is."

"Do you know which direction he took?"

"He went towards the Ancient House, and then dodged back into the shadows," replied Lennard. "That was when I lost him—and Lee advised me to be particularly careful to-night. Confound the luck!"

"Well, look here," I said. "I'll rush indoors and tell the guv'nor——"

"He's not in the school, is he?" asked Lennard.

"I don't know—it's most probable that he is," I replied. "At any rate, I don't remember him going out this evening. I'll tell the guv'nor, and bring him out. Then we'll all join in the search."

"And we'll spread ourselves out meanwhile," said Lennard. "Mind you don't tell any of the other boys—we don't want a whole crowd out."

"Right!" I said briskly.

"I hurried off, and went straight into the Ancient House. I met Handforth and Co. in the lobby. They were all grinning."

"Why the dickens weren't you indoors?" demanded Handforth.

"Because I was outside!" I replied promptly.

"Ass!" said Handforth. "You've missed something, I can tell you. Full wood was skulking in one of the giddy box-rooms, and he's been frog-marched all round the passages—— Hi! What the dickens——"

I had no time to waste on Handforth, and I had walked on.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Handforth. "Of all the cheek! Ignoring me like that, you know!"

"I expect he's in a hurry," said McClure.

I passed down the passages, and arrived at Nelson Lee's study. I tapped and was gratified to see that a light gleamed out from beneath the door.

"Come in!"

I entered, and was still further delighted to find that Nelson Lee was at home. The gov'nor was sitting in the easy chair before the fire, reading the evening newspaper. He looked round and smiled.

"Well, Nipper?" he said.

"Haven't you heard anything?" I asked quickly. "Great Scott! You're sitting here calmly reading the giddy paper, when there's all sorts of excitement about! Don't you know what's afoot?"

"My dear Nipper, you are talking in riddles!" said the gov'nor.

"Well, Mr. Lennard's outside," I said grimly.

"Eh?"

"Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard—if you understand that better," I went on. "He's disguised as a shabby old fellow with a beard——"

"How did you know this, Nipper?" interrupted Nelson Lee.

"I didn't know it—until ten minutes ago," I replied. "Montie and Tommy and I happened to collar him in mistake for one of our chaps. I had it firmly fixed in my head that that old fellow was you, sir."

"I?" repeated the gov'nor, in surprise.

"Yes—and I believe you've played the part a good few times, too!" I declared.

"Well, we kept telling our prisoner that we knew him, and at last he revealed the fact that he was Mr. Lennard. He's on the track of Gore!"

"He seems to be rather bloodthirsty, then," smiled Lee.

"Gore! Mr. Philip Smith Gore, I mean—not gore!" I shouted.

"You are wonderfully lucid, Nipper," chuckled the gov'nor. "But surely it cannot be true that Mr. Gore has dared to return to St. Frank's? It seems very remarkable that such should be the case——"

"It's amazing, sir," I interrupted, "and the only explanation seems to be that Gore has come here for Singleton—perhaps he means to do the chap some harm. Anyhow, he's here, on the school premises."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"It looks very suspicious, Nipper, as you suggest. I think we shall have to take some sort of action. And perhaps the best thing we can do is to venture out, and help the worthy inspector in his search."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "That's the idea, sir. Buck up!"

We were out in the Triangle within a few minutes, and we found Lennard waiting near the wall in the dark.

"This is rather good, Lee," said the inspector. "I didn't expect to find you here. I kept watch on Gore, as you required, and I followed him here. He came into the Triangle, but I lost him after that. It's a ten-to-one chance that he's after Singleton."

"It seems to be quite likely," said Nelson Lee. "Just a word, Nipper. Go indoors and see if you can locate Singleton. When you have found him, tell him to go straight into my study. Do you understand? He is to go to my study, and to remain there until I tell him to go out."

"Good idea, sir," I exclaimed. "He'll be safer there."

"That is exactly my reason for suggesting the move," said Nelson Lee. "Gore has come for Singleton—whether to do the lad harm or not remains to be seen. If Singleton is allowed to walk about freely he may be in danger, so tell him to take refuge in my study—and he had better lock the door on the inside."

"Right you are, gov'nor," I said briskly.

I hurried into the Ancient House, and found the Hon. Douglas in Study N. He was looking quite pleased with himself, and was just sitting down to do his prep. I thought it just as well not to go into any details.

"I say, Singleton, I've got a message for you," I said.

"Oh!" said the Hon. Douglas. "Who from?"

"The Housemaster," I replied. "Mr. Lee wants you to go to his study at once."

Singleton groaned.

"Oh, my hat!" he exclaimed dismally. "I thought something like this would happen! Egad! I expect I shall be caned for fighting——"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "It's got nothing to do with that. I say, old man, I'm awfully delighted with you—you wiped Fullwood up beautifully. But I'll

congratulate you more thoroughly later on."

"You seem to be in a bit of a hurry —"

"I am in a hurry," I interrupted. "Please take my advice, and go to Mr. Lee's study at once. You won't quite understand the game just now, but you will later on. Go to the Housemaster's study, and when you get there, lock yourself in."

"But what on earth for?"

"You'll know what for later," I replied. "Don't ask any questions now, old son. Take my advice, and go as soon as you can."

Singleton smiled.

"Well, I don't pretend to know what it means, but I'll take your tip," he said. "I'm to go to the Housemaster's study, and lock myself in. Egad! It's a bit of a mystery! I suppose you're not pulling my leg?"

"Of course I'm not!"

"It's not a new kind of joke——"

"You silly ass! I'm absolutely serious," I persisted. "Go at once, and don't waste any further time. Dash it all, I'll come with you."

The Hon. Douglas was considerably astonished, but he went without any further argument. I saw him to Nelson Lee's study, and heard him lock the door; then I went away, satisfied.

I hastened outside—to join in the hunt for the elusive Mr. Gore.

Somehow, I had an idea that a climax was near at hand.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER STAGGERING SURPRISE.

MR. PHILIP SMITH GORE chuckled.

"Good!" he murmured to himself. "Nothing could have happened better for my purpose. Splendid! I shall be able to see the lad without fear of interruption."

Mr. Gore was standing behind one of the old chestnut trees in the Triangle. He held a pair of night glasses in his hand, and for the last minute he had been staring fixedly at the window of Nelson Lee's study.

The blind was not fully down.

And Mr. Gore had seen quite clearly the Hon. Douglas enter the room and sit down in one of the easy chairs.

He was only able to catch a glimpse through the slit of the blind, but this was quite sufficient.

Mr. Gore had been watching through his glasses for some little time, and it seemed that he had been very lucky, for, happening to gaze at the window of Nelson Lee's study, he had seen a movement which had attracted his further attention. And now he was in possession of the very information he required.

He crept forward stealthily, realising that his game was a somewhat risky one, for, although the Triangle was dark, it was only middle evening, and there were also quite a number of searchers about.

Mr. Gore was well aware of this fact. He knew quite well that the alarm had been given, and that he was being hounded. But he was quite calm and cool, and was as determined as ever to carry out his project.

He had waited until the Triangle was clear—until the searchers had moved out of his immediate vicinity—and now he stole forward like a shadow, taking care to remain hidden in the shadow of the wall. He did not allow his silhouette to appear against the sky-line.

At last he reached the window of Nelson Lee's study. Here he crouched very low, and did not allow his head to project above the window-sill, for, by doing so, he would have betrayed himself at once.

He reached up a hand, and tapped lightly upon the extremity of the glass. Then he waited. For some time nothing happened. Again he tapped. And within a minute a shadow appeared on the blind. The window was slightly open at the bottom, and Mr. Gore saw Singleton's face for a moment.

"Who's having a game out there?" came the voice of the Hon. Douglas. "What's the idea of tapping at the bally window?"

"Come outside at once, Singleton!" muttered Mr. Gore. "Be quick about it, because we might be watched, and the matter is of the utmost importance—to you as well as to me!"

"Egad!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas. "Is that Mr. Gore?"

"Yes."

"But—but——"

"Ask no questions—come out!" said Gore keenly. "I want you urgently, Singleton. I have great news for you."

For a moment the Hon. Douglas hesitated. Then he came to a decision, and quickly slipped up the window, and dodged outside. He ducked at once, so that he, too, was below the level of the sill.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked coldly.

"We cannot talk here," said Gore. "Come; we must go to a place of quietness without being seen."

Again Singleton hesitated, for he naturally suspected that Mr. Gore was upon some further trickery. He followed his companion without any fear, however, and they soon passed across the Triangle to the thick trees which grew near the ruins of the old monastery. Here Mr. Gore came to a halt.

"Now we can talk comfortably, my young friend," said Mr. Gore smoothly. "Probably you are very surprised to see me here——"

"It absolutely amazes me to think that you should have the staggering audacity to show your face at St. Frank's," said the Hon. Douglas calmly. "But I'm glad you have come, Mr. Gore, because it provides me with an opportunity of telling you exactly what I think of you."

"Come, come," smiled Gore. "You must not speak like that——"

"I speak as I feel," interrupted Singleton hotly. "I trusted you, and I believed in you, and my only reward was to be fleeced of everything I possessed. You sucked me dry, and left me without a cent. I've changed now. I'm a fool no longer, Mr. Gore. And I know you to be a scoundrel!"

"That is highly interesting," said Gore, with perfect calmness. "But you must not judge me too rapidly, my dear Singleton. I will admit that my actions have been unaccountable. Your money was lost owing to my unfortunate speculations. But there is now a chance of recovering your fortune——"

"If I provide you with another few hundred thousand, I suppose?" suggested Singleton with sarcasm. "No, Mr. Gore, that game won't work with me now."

"But, listen," exclaimed Gore earnestly. "Your whole future depends upon your decision now. Your guardian, Lord

Bellmore, is here—in the school. I want you to get some money from him. If you hand that to me, I'll guarantee to return it to you multiplied a hundred fold."

"It is quite impossible."

"I do not believe you," said Gore. "All you need get is two thousand pounds, and I will increase it to two hundred thousand. My dear lad, it is an opportunity you cannot afford to miss. It is absolutely a splendid chance, and I am telling this to you in all seriousness. Just consider! You will get your whole fortune back—and all you need to risk is two thousand. Surely you can get that amount from your guardian? What do you think?"

"Possibly I could get it—but I've no intention of trying," said Singleton. "You must be mad to think that I shall entrust any money to you after what has already happened."

"Tut, tut," said the man. "I am proving to you, by my very action in coming here to-night, that I am thinking only of your welfare. I want to regain your losses for you, and I have just found the opening for which I have been waiting. Surely you can tell your guardian that you have a debt of two thousand pounds to pay? Tell him it is a pressing matter, and he will advance you the money. He is a millionaire. And then, within a week, your fortune will be restored. My dear lad, you must know that I am not attempting to swindle you—I am in deadly earnest."

Mr. Gore spoke with deep feeling, and it really sounded as though he was sincere in what he said. Would Singleton be deceived?

The lad was silent for a few moments, and then he looked at his companion squarely.

"Perhaps it will be as well if we talk this matter over, Mr. Gore," he said quietly. "I don't quite like to stay here—we might be surprised. And you are not very safe, because Mr. Lee or the Head would detain you at once if you were seen."

Mr. Gore chuckled.

"I have no fear of being detained," he said. "And Mr. Lee can do me no harm, since I am not a criminal. I have dealt honourably with you from the start, and I am in no danger whatever. However, if you wish to go to some quieter spot, I am quite willing. Where would you suggest?"

Singleton looked round.

"Just near here are the ruins of an old monastery," he said. "There is a stairway leading down into an ancient vault. We can slip down there, and talk without fear of any interruption."

"Excellent!" said Mr. Gore. "A splendid idea, Singleton."

"Good!" said the Hon. Douglas. "We will go at once——"

"No, no," interrupted the other. "We cannot go just yet. I have arranged to meet Carslake and Crosse. They are, in fact, waiting at the present moment outside the school wall. I thought it would be better for them to be present during this discussion."

Singleton's eyes gleamed, although Mr. Gore did not see this.

"Oh, splendid!" he exclaimed. "It will be far better for us to discuss the matter with all present. We'll all go down into the vault, and talk quietly and without fear of interruption. Did you say the others are here now?"

"Yes; outside in the lane, at the corner of the Triangle wall," replied Mr. Gore. "If you will come with me, I will show you the place, and then you can guide us all back to this special retreat of yours."

Singleton approved, and a few moments later he found himself face to face with Mr. Carslake and Mr. Crosse, who were waiting. They did not know what the game was, and could not understand Mr. Gore's movements.

But it was obvious that he had not undertaken this trip for nothing, and they knew he was capable of dealing with the situation.

"This way!" said Singleton softly.

"Where are we going to?" demanded Carslake.

"A secret conference chamber?" smiled Mr. Gore. "We shall be able to talk in peace, there, my dear Carslake. And I hope to convince our young friend that his best policy will be to fall in with my suggestions."

They climbed over the school wall, and were soon picking their way through the ruins of the ancient monastery. And here Singleton led the way down into the opening which led to the crumbling circular stairway.

Descending this, the quartette soon came to the bottom. And here they found themselves in a somewhat dank vault, where everything was utterly silent

and pitchy black. But the latter defect was soon remedied, for Mr. Gore produced an electric torch, and flashed it round.

"Quite a remarkable place!" he observed. "It is somewhat chilly, but we are well clothed——"

"There's an inner vault," interrupted Singleton. "It is much better than this place, and warmer, too, I believe. This way, Mr. Gore. I'm very anxious to hear your scheme, for everything may depend upon it."

"Good," said Mr. Gore. "I am glad you are sensible."

They passed through a big doorway, which was cut out of solid stone. The inner vault was smaller, the roof being lower. Gore passed in first, and Singleton stood aside while Carslake and Crosse followed their leader.

And then the Hon. Douglas performed a remarkable action.

Instead of following the men into the vault, he seized the heavy door, and slammed it to with a thud which echoed and re-echoed throughout the great vault. Instantly he shot the huge bolts, with which the outside of the door was fitted.

"Got them!" exclaimed Singleton, with a deep breath. "Trapped—trapped as neatly as rats in a cage!"

A faint banging came from within.

"Open this door, you young hound!" sounded Mr. Gore's voice faintly. "By Heaven! You shall suffer for this, you young dog!"

"I've got you bottled up this time, Mr. Gore," shouted Singleton triumphantly. "There's no escape—and you won't get away. Before you're a free man once more, you'll see the inside of a prison!"

The Hon. Douglas could hardly believe that it had actually happened.

He had trapped the three men neatly. They had walked unsuspectingly into the trap which he had prepared. Thinking that he was about to fall in with their new plans, they had followed him down into the vault.

In spite of all their cunning and skill, they had fallen a victim to the junior's astute scheme. At last he had got the better of his enemies. And he hardly knew what to do.

He knew there was no escape for them.

The inner vault had only one exit, and that was closed and bolted. From

within there was no means of forcing the bolts, and the trio would be compelled to stop there until they were allowed to come out.

The Hon. Douglas was trembling with excitement, and he was hardly able to find his way to the stairway. But at last, with the aid of a match, he did so, and then he stumbled hurriedly up to the surface.

His first thought was to rush straight to Nelson Lee, and he was soon pelting away across the Triangle in the direction of the Ancient House. Before he had covered half the distance he was aware of running figures near by, and he paused.

"Collar him!" exclaimed a voice. "It's our man, sure enough."

The running figures belonged to Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. We had been searching about in vain, and returned to the Triangle rather disgusted. Then we had spotted the running figure.

"I don't think it's Mr. Gore," I said, as we came up. "Why, hallo! What the dickens is the meaning of this, Singleton? I thought I left you in Mr. Lee's study?"

"So you did; but I came out," said the Hon. Douglas.

"What on earth for?"

"I found Mr. Gore——"

"What!"

"I've captured the scoundrel—and two other men as well," said Singleton, his voice vibrating with triumph.

"Captured them?" I exclaimed. "You must be joking——"

"I'm not—it's the truth!"

"But where are they——"

"I enticed them down into the old vault," said the Hon. Douglas. "They wanted to speak to me privately, so I suggested the vault under the monastery ruins. They walked right in—and I bolted them there. Now I've come up to tell Mr. Lee and my guardian. Egad! It's the best night's work I've ever done."

I clapped him on the back.

"This is splendid news!" I exclaimed. "I'm not going to ask you how you did it, my son, because we can't waste any time now. Do you know where Mr. Lee is?"

"No; I came up to find him——"

"He was out here not long ago," interrupted Watson. "He must be somewhere about, searching for Gore, I believe."

"I expect he's round at the back, with Mr. Lennard," I said.

"Mr. Lennard?"

"Yes," I replied. "We might as well tell you now, Singleton, for things have come to a head all right. There's a Scotland Yard detective here."

"Egad!"

"One of the smartest men in the Criminal Investigation Department—a chief detective-inspector," I explained. "He's in disguise, and he was on Gore's track when we found him. He had followed Gore here from Caistowe, and then lost him."

Singleton looked pleased.

"And I've found him again," he exclaimed. "It's fine, Nipper. Look here, I'm going indoors to tell my guardian. If you can find Mr. Lee, all the better. But wait until I come back. Then we'll all go down into the vault, and capture those three criminals. Gore wanted me to discuss some other rotten scheme with him, but I wasn't having any. I've got my senses now, and I'm not quite a mug. Gore's soft tongue doesn't deceive me any longer."

"I knew you had your wits about you," agreed Nipper. "Well, you get indoors, and we'll see if we can locate the guv'nor."

Singleton hurried off, and we looked at one another in surprise.

"Do you think he was telling the truth?" asked Watson doubtfully.

"Of course, he was telling the truth," I replied. "You don't suppose he'd fake up a yarn like that, do you? My sons, Singleton has put one over on us, as the Yanks say. He's captured the rotters while we've been searching the wrong places. The guv'nor's in the same boat, too. We've all been shown up."

"Dear old boys, it's quite surprising," declared Sir Montie. "It is splendid news to hear that Gore is a prisoner. Nothing better could have happened, begad! I feel frightfully bucked—I do, really!"

I looked round as I heard a footstep.

"Somebody's coming," whispered Watson. "Mr. Lee, I think."

But the newcomer proved to be Detective-inspector Lennard.

"Nothing doing?" he asked gruffly.

"A fine mess you've made of things, my sons! You've made me lose my man, and I expect he's miles away by this

time. I can tell you I'm very wild. I've lost sight of Mr. Lee, too——"

"You needn't worry," I interrupted, "Mr. Gore isn't far away—a few hundred feet beneath us, as a matter of fact."

"What the thunder are, you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Mr. Gore," I replied smoothly. "He happens to be a prisoner——"

"What!"

"A prisoner," I repeated. "To say nothing of two gentlemen named Mr. Carslake and Mr. Crosse. They've all been collared in the same net."

Lennard grunted.

"If you're trying to pull my leg, young man, you'd better stop it before you get hurt," he exclaimed tartly. "I'm in no humour for that style of joking. I can't imagine where Gore's got to——"

"I've already told you he's a prisoner," I said. "It's true, Mr. Lennard. They're all prisoners—all three of them. Singleton caught them—and trapped them down in the old monastery vault."

It was some moments before Mr. Lennard could quite credit the statement. But when, at last, he was convinced, his whole attitude changed, and he became quite cheerful. But before he could ask us many questions, Singleton reappeared—and now he was accompanied by Lord Belmore, Mr. Mornington, and the Head.

"Here we are, sir," said Singleton briskly. "I say, who's this stranger——"

"Shall we tell?" I whispered in Lennard's ear.

The chief inspector did not reply to my question direct. Instead, he pulled off most of his disguise, and introduced himself to the Head, who, of course, knew him already. Dr. Stafford was quite surprised, and more than pleased.

"This is splendid, Mr. Lennard!" he exclaimed. "We have no necessity to send for the police—for you will be quite capable of dealing with the whole matter. I want you to arrest the three men, and they will be charged with conspiracy and fraud. We have ample evidence to convict them, I can assure you."

"I can quite agree with you there," said the chief inspector grimly. "I wanted to get the brutes weeks ago, but

Mr. Lee made me hold my hand—until, as a matter of fact, I thought he had left it too late. By the way, do you know where Mr. Lee is now?"

"I think he is still searching for Gore," I put in. "It's a queer thing, because the gov'nor isn't usually left out of any excitement."

"Well, we will not trouble to find him now," said the C.I.D. man briskly. "I dare say he'll turn up before we come from the vault with our prisoners. I'm glad the business is over, for I'm about tired of it all."

Without further delay, we hurried to the vault, and everything was got ready for the capture. There were quite sufficient of us to stop any attempt to escape. Lennard and Lord Bellmore were easily capable of dealing with a man each, while the juniors and myself were ready to lend a hand if we were required.

The chief inspector shot back the bolts of the door, and pulled the door wide open. As he expected, there was a rush at once. But after a quick, brief struggle, Gore and his two companions were made prisoners.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" gasped Carslake hoarsely.

"You are all arrested—that is what it means!" replied Lennard. "You will please understand that you are my prisoners——"

"But surely, my dear Lennard, you are not placing me under arrest?" asked Mr. Gore smoothly. "You wouldn't be so unfriendly, would you?"

The Scotland Yard man looked at Gore with a quick, searching glance. I looked at the man, too, for there was something in his voice—something in his tone—which caused my heart to jump.

"Surely you are sharp enough to catch the truth, Nipper!" smiled Mr. Gore, calmly removing his waxed moustache. "And you, Lennard? There is no need for me to tell you who I am?" I gazed at Mr. Gore, and gasped with utter amazement.

For I suddenly realised the truth. It was such a staggering surprise that I clutched at Sir Montie for support. It seemed too preposterous to be true—too utterly wild for a moment's consideration.

But it was true—a solid fact.

Mr. Philip Smith Gore was none other than NELSON LEE!

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

NELSON LEE!

My mind was in a state of chaos for a moment or two.

The gov'nor stood there, removing those portions of his disguise which were easily got rid of without the aid of any preparation. And it was already possible to recognise his well-known features.

His disguise had been a simple one—and the more effective because of its very simplicity. He smiled at us genially, and was quite amused at our genuine expressions of amazement.

"But—but I cannot understand what this means!" ejaculated Detective-Inspector Lennard. "Why are you impersonating Gore in this extraordinary fashion? I must confess that I did not suspect——"

"My dear Lennard," interrupted Lee, "I intend to explain everything almost immediately, so you will not be in the dark for long. When your two prisoners are placed in a position of safety, we will adjourn to the Headmaster's study, and I will give you an explanation."

"May I be there, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"You must ask for Dr. Stafford's permission on that point," replied the gov'nor.

The Head did not refuse, and I was delighted. Tommy and Montie could not be there, of course, but I promised to tell them all the details afterwards.

And so, less than twenty minutes later, we were all in the Headmaster's study—the Head himself, Nelson Lee, Lennard, Mr. Mornington, Lord Bellmore, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and myself.

Nelson Lee had seized an opportunity to remove the last of his disguise, and now he was looking quite himself. Nobody knew what the game was, or what was to be revealed, and we were all considerably mystified.

Carslake and Crosse had been handcuffed and placed in an outhouse, with Warren and two of the gardeners in charge. There was no possibility of their escaping; and the Bannington police had been telephoned for.

"Now, gentlemen, you doubtless require an explanation," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"We do!" exclaimed Lennard. "To begin with, you might explain where Mr. Gore is at the present moment!"

"Mr. Gore has vanished!"

"Do you mean to say he has tricked us?"

"Not at all," replied Lee. "Mr. Gore has gone for ever. He is a myth, and he will never return. Surely you understand?"

The Hon. Douglas bent forward.

"Egad! You don't mean to say, sir, that you are Mr. Gore—that you have been Mr. Gore all the time, right from the start?" he asked incredulously.

"That is exactly what I do mean to say!"

"Great Scott!"

"This—this is too ridiculous!" exclaimed Lennard. "Why, I've been following Gore about for weeks——"

"You have been following me about," smiled Lee. "You behold in me the 'master criminal' who fleeced Singleton out of his fortune."

"Good gracious!" said Lord Bellmore.

"But—but I don't understand, sir!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas. "Was it you who took me to London, who introduced me to that gambling flat, who tried to sell me the worthless copper shares——"

"It was, Singleton, and I will proceed to go into details," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "When you first came to St. Frank's, it was quite obvious that you were reckless and rash; that you had no regard for the value of money; and that you were intent upon squandering your fortune within the shortest amount of time possible."

"That's true, sir," admitted Singleton, hanging his head. "I was a fool—I didn't know what I was doing."

"You had been taught no lesson, my lad," said Lee. "You did not realise the full meaning of your actions. I discovered that Carslake and Crosse were intent upon bleeding you, and, although I could have stopped their game, I did not choose to do so."

"Why not?" asked the Head curiously.

"Because it would have been useless," replied Nelson Lee. "It would have mended matters for the time being, no doubt; but I could see that Singleton was determined to spend money—and if he found no outlet through the medium of Carslake and Crosse, he would find

an outlet elsewhere. In short, I knew that he would squander his money in the shortest amount of time possible."

"That is quite true," admitted Mr. Mornington, nodding. "Quite true, my dear sir. The lad was utterly reckless. My partner, Mr. Partington, who came down here on one occasion, was shocked by the lad's expenditure."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Well," he continued, "I thought it would be advisable to take some action, so I decided to become a crook on my own account—simply and solely for Singleton's benefit. He was intent upon spending money—or, rather, upon wasting money—so I thought it would be a wise move on my part to help him—in short, to gain possession of everything he possessed. I did this with a two-fold reason. Firstly, to teach the lad a lesson which he would remember for the rest of his life; and, secondly, to prevent the money from going into other hands—into hands from which it could never be recovered. So there was quite a method in my extraordinary conduct."

"There was—a splendid method," declared Lord Bellmore. "And am I to understand, sir, that you helped Douglas to squander his money?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Exactly," he agreed. "I tempted him in every way; I used every endeavour to trick the money out of him—mainly in order to prove how easy it is for an accomplished crook to swindle an inexperienced young fellow out of his fortune. My arrangement with Carslake and Crosse was to the effect that the spoils would be divided when all was finished. Their share, as you will guess, will consist of a term of imprisonment. And Singleton's fortune, needless to add, is quite intact."

"Intact!" shouted the Hon. Douglas.

"More than intact," agreed Lee. "There is a certain amount of interest due to you, I believe. Your money, my lad, is deposited in London, and it is my intention to present your guardian with a complete account of all the transactions. You have lost nothing, Singleton; your fortune is whole."

The Hon. Douglas was too startled to say anything.

"By Jove! What a splendid idea—what a wonderful idea!" declared Lord Bellmore. "I can follow your reasoning exactly, Mr. Lee. You knew that Douglas would spend his money in any

case, and so you saw that it came into your hands, instead of passing into the hands of genuine crooks."

"Precisely. Singleton was rash, and nothing would stop him. Punishment would have been useless, for it would only have made him more reckless and self-willed. I knew that the only course was to deprive him of every penny he possessed," said Nelson Lee. "Then, and not until then, did he come to his senses. My plan has worked out precisely as I anticipated, and I am more than glad to find that Singleton has benefited. He has come to his senses, and he is deserving of commendation for his newly found courage. I do not think he deserves severe punishment—for it must be remembered that I encouraged him in his spendthrift habits. I encouraged him purposely, so that he would come to his senses the sooner."

"I—I don't know how to thank you, sir," said the Hon. Douglas huskily. "In future, I want my guardian to keep my money—but it's not my money now. I don't deserve a penny of it, and I don't think I ought to take it."

Lord Bellmore laughed.

"You shall certainly take it, Douglas," he said. "But I will see that it is beyond your reach—since you desire it that way. But I have an idea that if I give it back into your full control, you will act very differently this time."

"I don't want it back, sir," said Singleton. "I trust myself—I know I shouldn't be a fool again, but I'd rather you kept it intact. All I want is just a small amount of pocket money for my ordinary needs—no more than any other junior gets."

"We will arrange that later," said Lord Bellmore genially.

He was greatly delighted at the turn of events—and so was Mr. Mornington. Nobody had expected this unlooked-for climax. It was an extraordinary finish to the whole affair.

"But look here, sir," I exclaimed. "I can't understand it. Mr. Lennard followed Gore from Caistowe—he followed him right to the school, and yet when I hurried to your study, I found you there."

"Which explains why Mr. Lennard lost Mr. Gore," smiled the gov'nor. "I simply dodged into the master's entrance, went to my study, and removed my disguise. There was then no possibility of Mr. Gore being discovered.

I arranged things so that I could get a word with Singleton on the quiet. That is why I told Singleton to go to my study. When I went into the Triangle to search for Mr. Gore, I simply went off alone, and donned my disguise; then I approached Singleton."

"With what object?" inquired the Head curiously.

"I wanted to give him a final test—to prove his change of character," replied Nelson Lee. "I put a very plausible story before him, and was gratified to find that, instead of falling in with my plan, he made plans of his own to entrap me. Needless to say, I fell into the trap—for that is just what I wanted. I took Carslake and Crosse with me—and you all know what happened after that."

Detective-Inspector Lennard, it seemed, had been a kind of watch-dog. He had noted every movement of Carslake and Crosse, and the accumulated evidence against the pair was sufficient to prove their guilt a hundred times over.

Even now, after we had heard everything, we were still in a state of considerable wonderment, and the Hon. Douglas was in a kind of maze. He couldn't bring himself to believe that everything was all right—that his troubles were over.

None of the details was made public.

And later on that evening, Fullwood and Co. spent a most uncomfortable half-hour in the Headmaster's study. They had urged Singleton on in his reckless ways on many an occasion—in

Nelson Lee's company. And they received a flogging which they would not forget in a hurry.

So everything had come out all right, and Nelson Lee found it unnecessary to continue his activity as Mr. Philip Smith Gore. That gentleman had disappeared for all time. But he had done a great deal of good during his short spell of life.

He had converted the Hon. Douglas Singleton from a reckless, arrogant lad, into an upright, thoroughly decent fellow. The spendthrift of St. Frank's was a spendthrift no longer.

The lesson had done him an enormous amount of good, and I was convinced that he would stick to the right road in future. He had paid dearly for his folly—he had passed through hours and days of agony. They had been bitter days, but they had been necessary—as a part of the treatment. Something drastic had been essential, and Nelson Lee had not hesitated to act as he thought fit. He wanted to save the boy from himself, and he had done so.

The Hon. Douglas Singleton, of Study N, became one of the best fellows in the Remove. The end of the term was not far distant, and we thought that there would be no further excitement to help to pass the time.

But we were wrong.

Excitement cropped up of quite a novel character, and we were destined to have some very extraordinary times at St. Frank's in the immediate future!

THE END.

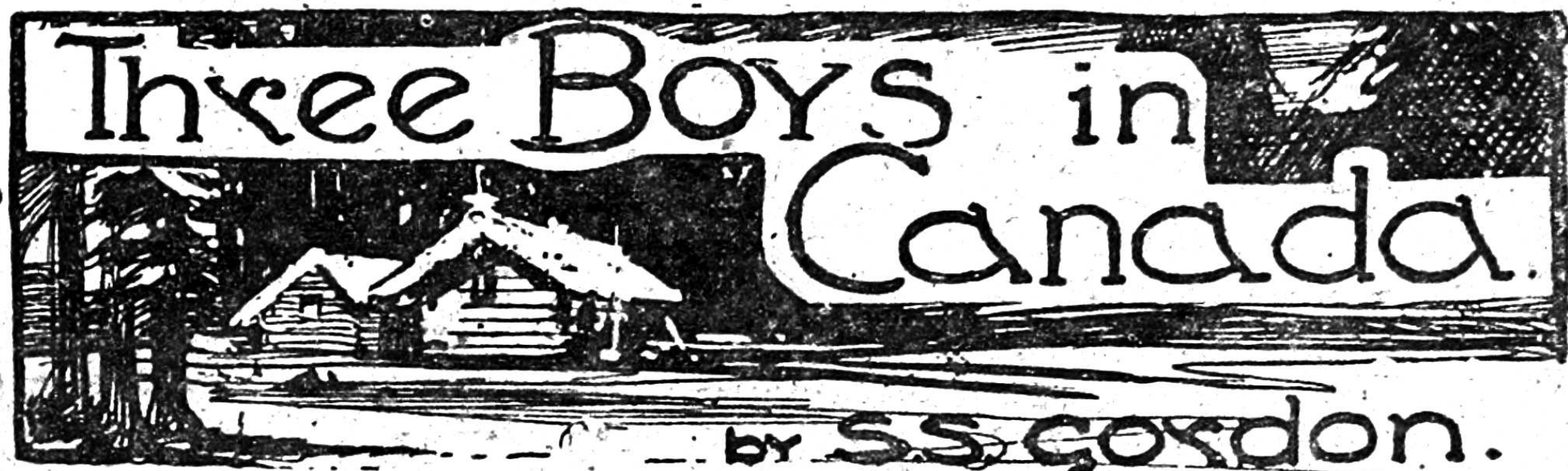
TO MY READERS.

I have more than once in the past few weeks made reference to the important yet mysterious part Nelson Lee was playing in the Singleton exploits. Most of my readers who wrote to me on the subject advanced the theory that the old man shadowing Gore was none other than Nelson Lee. One of my correspondents, who suggested that Gore was employed by Nelson Lee, came very near to solving the problem. Another theory (I quote it because it is both original and ingenious) was the assumption that Singleton's guardian, who was supposed to be far away in Africa, had disguised himself as Mr. Gore.

NEXT WEEK : "THE SCHOOLBOY AGITATORS !" opens another splendid new series, in which the staff of servants at St. Frank's go on strike.

THE EDITOR.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS FINE NEW SERIAL TO-DAY!



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

INTRODUCTION.

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

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

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

(Now read on.)

Gerald Missing.

THE brakesman gave the sign for the train to start, flashing his lamp. In a few moments the caboose rumbled over a high-trestle bridge, which, Sim had said, crossed the Devil's Falls. Even above the rumbling of the train's wheels, Jack, as he chatted in the

caboose with the conductor, could hear the roar of falling waters. This was the first time he had been in this actual part of the country, and he wished the light had been strong enough to enable him to see these falls, which he had heard so much about. They were one of the sights of Canada. Some said they were second only to Niagara, although Jack, not being able to see them, was not able to judge on that point for himself.

They sat and chatted in the caboose for a half-hour before Jack decided to return to his brother's and friend's side. The conductor was plainly admiring Jack's pluck and strength in tackling such a hefty person as the big Swede. In the conversation, it came out that Jack was fairly well-known in certain parts of the West as a boxer, wrestler, and general scrapper. Alec McPhee, the conductor, also prided himself on his ability to look after himself, which accounts for the time lost whilst they swapped yarns with each other. At length, however, Jack arose.

"Cheerio!"

He grinned, and scrambled out of the caboose. Again he set off on his long, somewhat tricky walk along the tops of box-cars, his jumps down on to flat-cars, and his climbs up on to cattle-trucks. At length, however, he came to the flat-car on which he had left Teddy, Gerald, and the rest of the English-speaking members of his gang.

By now the train was going at a fair rate of speed. The track was level just here, probably a little downhill. Jack steadied himself on his legs as soon as he had reached his own car, craning his ears for sounds ahead. But

all was quiet just now amongst the foreigners of his gang. He looked down the left-hand side of the truck. The English-speaking men who were travelling on that side seemed all to be asleep, lying in more or less graceful attitudes.

Then Jack stepped beside his brother. Teddy was still fast asleep, snoring unmusically, his face turned up towards the starry sky. He looked for Gerald, whom he had left sleeping close alongside his brother. Then he gave a start.

Gerald was not there. The blanket he had been lying on was still where it had been, stretched out, a little rumped. Gerald's leather gloves were also there, but there was no sign of Septimus Cardone's ward at all.

Jack thought at first the lad had merely shifted his position to some less draughty portion of the car, but, though he searched the car all over, he could find no trace of Gerald. At length he shook his brother.

"What's the matter?" Teddy muttered sleepily, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Hallo! That you, Jack? Have I been asleep?"

"Where's Gerald?" Jack asked quickly.

Teddy looked at the place where he had last seen his chum. Then he rubbed his eyes again.

"Well, he was there when I went to sleep," he said. "I say—I hope he didn't fall off the train!"

"Was he aboard when the train stopped?" Jack asked.

"Did the train stop?" Teddy demanded. "I didn't know: must have slept too soundly. He doesn't seem to be here now, though."

"Of course the train stopped—for twenty minutes, just before we came to the Devil's Falls," Jack said, rather testily. "I say, old chap, you must be some sleeper! Dash it! Then where can the man have got to?"

Teddy looked at the spread-out blanket on which Gerald had been sleeping beside him.

"He can't have rolled off the car and got under the wheels, or anything like that?" he suggested anxiously.

Jack did not think that fate could have overtaken Gerald. He looked about him. On the other side of the flat-car the English-speaking members of his gang were still sprawled out—all save one man, who sat motionless, his back to

them, the high collar of his frieze pea-jacket turned up above his ears.

"I wish you'd been awake when the train stopped," Jack said.

He glared at the back of the man known in the gang as Johnson. He bit his lips perplexedly. Knowing what he thought he knew about this man, he was not above thinking of foul play; and yet he knew he could never have proved anything. And still he believed it would have served Johnson's—or Obed Snaith's—purpose very well to get Gerald Telford separated from his chums.

"Well, then," said Jack, grinding his teeth in annoyance, his hands simply itching to get Johnson by the neck and hurl the fellow off the train; "well, then, I'll have to see if the conductor will stop the train again. I think you'd better come with me this time, old chap. You children don't seem fit to be trusted alone on a dark night!"

Teddy grunted something, but followed his elder brother as he began his climb back to the conductor's caboose. By this time the train was bowling along at a tolerably good speed, and Jack's worry grew as he stepped to each car, knowing that every moment was taking him further away from the spot where Gerald must have left the train.

And a fear was growing in Jack's heart that Gerald had more than merely fallen off the train, or been left behind as the result of his alighting during the halt it had made. There had been something grim and suggestive about the back of Obed Snaith—or Johnson, which was the only name Jack knew his enemy by. Jack was sure this fellow was dogging them wherever they went in Canada, with the motive of separating the Royces from Telford. Probably, Jack told himself, gritting his teeth, the fellow had succeeded.

And yet he knew he was foolish to get too anxious about it. Telford was eighteen or nineteen—only a year younger than Jack himself. When Jack was eighteen, he reflected, he was quite well able to look after himself, if left behind by himself. And yet, probably Gerald Telford now was in no condition to look after himself!

At length they reached the caboose again. Alec McPhee, the conductor, lifted his eyebrows when both the Royces

(Continued on page III of cover.)

climbed into his sanctuary, without any ceremony. A caboose is sacred ground to a Canadian train-crew. Unless invited, an outsider, as a rule, is not very welcome.

"Hallo! Back again?" McPhee asked, yawning; for he was very sleepy, and Jack had broken his rest once already that night. "What's it this time?"

"Another fellow off the train," said Jack disgustedly. "Oh, no," he added, as McPhee began to speak. "I didn't chuck this one off. It's a pal, and I think he's fallen off."

McPhee did not seem to be half as genial as he had been recently.

"Say," he said, "if ye've come here to ask me to stop the all-fired train again, I just guess ye've got the wrong number up, partner. Fell off the train, eh? Waal, if your pals has such habits, the chances are they'd fall out of a cradle, too; so they're not the sort that's goin' to be missed a heap."

"I think—I'm afraid, that is, there's been some foul play," said Jack slowly.

"I say, McPhee, if you could stop the train——"

"Not a stop, not on your life. Just can that stuff," said McPhee obstinately. "Guess we got to get to the construction camp some time before nineteen-ninety, and at your rate o' goin' we'll never do it. Say, if ye can't keep your gang together better'n this, why did they give you charge of it?"

Jack flushed, and bit back a sharp retort. It hurt his feelings to be told that he wasn't capable of keeping a gang of men together; but he knew no good would come of quarrelling with Alec McPhee. He shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at his brother, who also was looking very annoyed at the way this big railwayman was daring to talk to his idolised elder brother. Probably Teddy would have put his spoke in, and so made matters worse, but Jack squeezed his arm in time to stop him.

"Well, how much further to Lake St. Pierre Camp?" he asked.

"'Bout twenty-five miles," answered
(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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the conductor. Then his ill-humour left him as soon as he saw Jack was not going to try to insist on stopping the train again. "Guess your pal can catch up on foot," he said. "This track runs right to the camp."

"Right-oh!" said Jack, with bad enough grace. "Sorry you couldn't stop the train. Cheerio!"

He left the caboose again, followed by Teddy. Soon they were back on their own flat-car, and were sitting with their legs over the edge, while the train drummed steadily on towards its destination.

"What are you going to do, then?" Teddy asked. "Wait for Gerald to come up to us? Poor old Gerald! He won't like a twenty-five mile walk on a railroad track."

"As soon as I've got to the camp and handed the gang over," said Jack, "I'm going to get back to Devil's Falls, and look for Gerald. Of course, I might meet him coming along, but—"

He paused, and turned his head to look at Snaith, still sitting in his old position, cold pipe in mouth, hands rammed down into the pockets of his pea-jacket.

"You don't—don't think—" Teddy began.

"I'm not thinking anything," said Jack savagely. "I'm a fool for being anxious over the chap! After all, he's not a baby; but I'll come back this way to meet him."

The train came to a halt about an hour and a half after then, when it was close on midnight. Here was the end of the track for the present; this camp, Lake St. Pierre, so named because it stood on the bank of a lake of the same name, was the railhead. The men who dwelt in the camp were the men who were throwing the new line forward all the time.

The train was expected, evidently, for there were sundry lights burning as it stopped, and Jack's men, most of them a little cramped and stiff from the long night ride in the open air, dropped to the ground. Several men, holding lighted lanterns, moved from a cluster of tents and roughly built shacks towards the track. A burly fellow in a black shirt and blue pants, with knee-boots on his feet, a slouch hat on his head, and a coloured handkerchief about his neck, came walking along the line of cars until he reached Jack and his assembled gang.

(To be continued.)

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