

Wrap him up in an overcoat, he's surely goin' wild!  
Arrah, Patsy, mind the baby; just ye mind the child awhile!  
He'll kick an' bite an' cry all night! Arrah, Patsy, mind  
the child!"

#### AN UNSAVORY INTERLUDE.

It was a maiden aunt of Stalky who sent him both books, with the inscription, "To dearest Artie, on his sixteenth birthday;" it was McTurk who ordered their hypothecation; and it was Beetle, returned from Bideford, who flung them on the window-sill of Number Five study with news that Bastable would advance but ninepence on the two; "Eric; or, Little by Little," being almost as great a drug as "St. Winifred's." "An' I don't think much of your aunt. We're nearly out of cartridges, too--Artie, dear."

Whereupon Stalky rose up to grapple with him, but McTurk sat on Stalky's head, calling him a "pure-minded boy" till peace was declared. As they were grievously in arrears with a Latin prose, as it was a blazing July afternoon, and as they ought to have been at a house cricket-match, they began to renew their acquaintance, intimate and unholy, with the volumes.

"Here we are!" said McTurk. "'Corporal punishment produced on Eric the worst effects. He burned not with remorse or regret'--make a note o' that, Beetle--' but with shame and violent indignation. He glared'--oh, naughty Eric! Let's get to where he goes in for drink."

"Hold on half a shake. Here's another sample. 'The Sixth,' he says, 'is the palladium of all public schools.' But this lot--" Stalky rapped the gilded book--"can't prevent fellows drinkin' and stealin', an' lettin' fags out of window at night, an'--an' doin' what they please. Golly, what we've missed--not goin' to St. Winifred's!..."

"I'm sorry to see any boys of my house taking so little interest in their matches."

Mr. Prout could move very silently if he pleased, though that is no merit in a boy's eyes. He had flung open the study-door without knocking--another sin--and looked at them suspiciously. "Very sorry, indeed, I am to see you frowsting in your studies."

"We've been out ever since dinner, sir," said McTurk wearily. One house-match is just like another, and their "ploy" of that week happened to be rabbit-shooting with saloon-pistols.

"I can't see a ball when it's coming, sir," said Beetle. "I've had my gig-lamps smashed at the Nets till I got excused. I wasn't any good even

as a fag, then, sir."

"Tuck is probably your form. Tuck and brewing. Why can't you three take any interest in the honor of your house?"

They had heard that phrase till they were wearied. The "honor of the house" was Prout's weak point, and they knew well how to flick him on the raw.

"If you order us to go down, sir, of course we'll go," said Stalky, with maddening politeness. But Prout knew better than that. He had tried the experiment once at a big match, when the three, self-isolated, stood to attention for half an hour in full view of all the visitors, to whom fags, subsidized for that end, pointed them out as victims of Prout's tyranny. And Prout was a sensitive man.

In the infinitely petty confederacies of the Common-room, King and Macrea, fellow house-masters, had borne it in upon him that by games, and games alone, was salvation wrought. Boys neglected were boys lost. They must be disciplined. Left to himself, Prout would have made a sympathetic house-master; but he was never so left, and with the devilish insight of youth, the boys knew to whom they were indebted for his zeal.

"Must we go down, sir?" said McTurk.

"I don't want to order you to do what a right-thinking boy should do gladly. I'm sorry." And he lurched out with some hazy impression that he had sown good seed on poor ground.

"Now what does he suppose is the use of that?" said Beetle.

"Oh, he's cracked. King jaws him in Common-room about not keepin' us up to the mark, an' Macrea burbles about 'dithcipline,' an' old Heffy sits between 'em sweatin' big drops. I heard Oke (the Common-room butler) talking to Richards (Prout's house-servant) about it down in the basement the other day when I went down to bag some bread," said Stalky.

"What did Oke say?" demanded McTurk, throwing "Eric" into a corner.

"Oh, he said, 'They make more nise nor a nest full o' jackdaws, an' half of it like we'd no ears to our heads that waited on 'em. They talks over old Prout--what he've done an' left undone about his boys. An' how their boys be fine boys, an' his'n be dom bad.' Well, Oke talked like that, you know, and Richards got awf'ly wrathful. He has a down on King for something or other. Wonder why?"

"Why, King talks about Prout in form-room--makes allusions, an' all that--only half the chaps are such asses they can't see what he's drivin' at. And d'you remember what he said about the 'Casual House' last Tuesday? He meant us. They say he says perfectly beastly things to his own house, making fun of Prout's," said Beetle.

"Well, we didn't come here to mix up in their rows," McTurk said wrathfully. "Who'll bathe after call-over? King's takin' it in the cricket-field. Come on." Turkey seized his straw and led the way.

They reached the sun-blistered pavilion over against the gray Pebblerridge just before roll-call, and, asking no questions, gathered from King's voice and manner that his house was on the road to victory.

"Ah, ha!" said he, turning to show the light of his countenance. "Here we have the ornaments of the Casual House at last. You consider cricket beneath you, I believe "--the crowd, flannelled, sniggered "and from what I have seen this afternoon, I fancy many others of your house hold the same view. And may I ask what you purpose to do with your noble selves till tea-time?"

"Going down to bathe, sir," said Stalky.

"And whence this sudden zeal for cleanliness? There is nothing about you that particularly suggests it. Indeed, so far as I remember--I may be at fault--but a short time ago--"

"Five years, sir," said Beetle hotly.

King scowled. "One of you was that thing called a water-funk. Yes, a water-funk. So now you wish to wash? It is well. Cleanliness never

injured a boy or--a house. We will proceed to business," and he addressed himself to the call-over board.

"What the deuce did you say anything to him for, Beetle?" said McTurk angrily, as they strolled towards the big, open sea-baths.

"'Twasn't fair--remindin' one of bein' a water-funk. My first term, too. Heaps of chaps are--when they can't swim."

"Yes, you ass; but he saw he'd fetched you. You ought never to answer King."

"But it wasn't fair, Stalky."

"My Hat! You've been here six years, and you expect fairness. Well, you are a dithering idiot."

A knot of King's boys, also bound for the baths, hailed them, beseeching them to wash--for the honor of their house.

"That's what comes of King's jawin' and messin'. Those young animals wouldn't have thought of it unless he'd put it into their heads. Now they'll be funny about it for weeks," said Stalky. "Don't take any notice."

The boys came nearer, shouting an opprobrious word. At last they moved

to windward, ostentatiously holding their noses.

"That's pretty," said Beetle. "They'll be sayin' our house stinks next."

When they returned from the baths, damp-headed, languid, at peace with the world, Beetle's forecast came only too true. They were met in the corridor by a fag--a common, Lower-Second fag--who at arm's length handed them a carefully wrapped piece of soap "with the compliments of King's House."

"Hold on," said Stalky, checking immediate attack. "Who put you up to this, Nixon? Rattray and White? (Those were two leaders in King's house.) Thank you. There's no answer."

"Oh, it's too sickening to have this kind o' rot shoved on to a chap. What's the sense of it? What's the fun of it?" said McTurk.

"It will go on to the end of the term, though," Beetle wagged his head sorrowfully. He had worn many jests threadbare on his own account.

In a few days it became an established legend of the school that Prout's house did not wash and were therefore noisome. Mr. King was pleased to smile succulently in form when one of his boys drew aside from Beetle with certain gestures.

"There seems to be some disability attaching to you, my Beetle, or else

why should Burton major withdraw, so to speak, the hem of his garments?  
I confess I am still in the dark. Will some one be good enough to  
enlighten me?"

Naturally, he was enlightened by half the form.

"Extraordinary! Most extraordinary! However, each house has its  
traditions, with which I would not for the world interfere.  
We have a prejudice in favor of washing. Go on, Beetle--from  
'jugurtha tamen'--and, if you can, avoid the more flagrant forms of  
guessing."

Prout's house was furious because Macrea's and Hartopp's houses joined  
King's to insult them. They called a house-meeting after dinner--an  
excited and angry meeting of all save the prefects, whose dignity,  
though they sympathized, did not allow them to attend. They read  
ungrammatical resolutions, and made speeches beginning, "Gentlemen, we  
have met on this occasion," and ending with, "It's a beastly shame,"  
precisely as houses have done since time and schools began.

Number Five study attended, with its usual air of bland patronage. At  
last McTurk, of the lanthorn jaws, delivered himself:

"You jabber and jaw and burble, and that's about all you can do. What's  
the good of it? King's house'll only gloat because they've drawn  
you, and King will gloat, too. Besides, that resolution of Orrin's is



chock-full of bad grammar, and King'll gloat over that."

"I thought you an' Beetle would put it right, an'--an' we'd post it in the corridor," said the composer meekly.

"Par si je le connai. I'm not goin' to meddle with the biznai," said Beetle. "It's a gloat for King's house. Turkey's quite right."

"Well, won't Stalky, then?"

But Stalky puffed out his cheeks and squinted down his nose in the style of Panurge, and all he said was, "Oh, you abject burblers!"

"You're three beastly scabs!" was the instant retort of the democracy, and they went out amid execrations.

"This is piffling," said McTurk. "Let's get our sallies, and go and shoot bunnies."

Three saloon-pistols, with a supply of bulleted breech-caps, were stored in Stalky's trunk, and this trunk was in their dormitory, and their dormitory was a three-bed attic one, opening out of a ten-bed establishment, which, in turn, communicated with the great range of dormitories that ran practically from one end of the College to the other. Macrea's house lay next to Prout's, King's next to Macrea's, and Hartopp's beyond that again. Carefully locked doors divided house from

house, but each house, in its internal arrangements--the College had originally been a terrace of twelve large houses--was a replica of the next; one straight roof covering all.

They found Stalky's bed drawn out from the wall to the left of the dormer window, and the latter end of Richards protruding from a two-foot-square cupboard in the wall.

"What's all this? I've never noticed it before. What are you tryin' to do, Fatty?"

"Fillin' basins, Muster Corkran." Richards's voice was hollow and muffled. "They've been savin' me trouble. Yiss."

"Looks like it," said McTurk. "Hi! You'll stick if you don't take care."

Richards backed puffing.

"I can't rache un. Yiss, 'tess a turncock, Muster McTurk. They've took an' runned all the watter-pipes a storey higher in the houses--runned 'em all along under the 'ang of the heaves, like. Runned 'em in last holidays. I can't rache the turncock."

"Let me try," said Stalky, diving into the aperture.

"Slip 'ee to the left, then, Muster Corkran. Slip 'ee to the left, an' feel in the dark."

To the left Stalky wriggled, and saw a long line of lead pipe disappearing up a triangular tunnel, whose roof was the rafters and boarding of the college roof, whose floor was sharp-edged joists, and whose side was the rough studding of the lath and plaster wall under the dormer.

"Rummy show. How far does it go?"

"Right along, Muster Corkran--right along from end to end. Her runs under the 'ang of the heavens. Have 'ee rached the stopcock yet? Mr. King got un put in to save us carryin' watter from down-stairs to fill the basins. No place for a lusty man like old Richards. I'm tu thickabout to go ferritin'. Thank 'ee, Muster Corkran."

The water squirted through the tap just inside the cupboard, and, having filled the basins, the grateful Richards waddled away.

The boys sat round-eyed on their beds considering the possibilities of this trove. Two floors below them they could hear the hum of the angry house; for nothing is so still as a dormitory in mid-afternoon of a midsummer term.

"It has been papered over till now." McTurk examined the little door.

"If we'd only known before!"

"I vote we go down and explore. No one will come up this time o' day. We needn't keep cave'."

They crawled in, Stalky leading, drew the door behind them, and on all fours embarked on a dark and dirty road full of plaster, odd shavings, and all the raffle that builders leave in the waste room of a house.

The passage was perhaps three feet wide, and, except for the struggling light round the edges of the cupboards (there was one to each dormer), almost pitchy dark.

"Here's Macrea's house," said Stalky, his eye at the crack of the third cupboard. "I can see Barnes's name on his trunk. Don't make such a row, Beetle! We can get right to the end of the Coll. Come on!... We're in King's house now--I can see a bit of Rattray's trunk. How these beastly boards hurt one's knees!" They heard his nails scraping, on plaster.

"That's the ceiling below. Look out! If we smashed that the plaster 'ud fall down in the lower dormitory," said Beetle.

"Let's," whispered McTurk.

"An' be collared first thing? Not much. Why, I can shove my hand ever so far up between these boards."

Stalky thrust an arm to the elbow between the joists.

"No good stayin' here. I vote we go back and talk it over. It's a crummy place. 'Must say I'm grateful to King for his water-works."

They crawled out, brushed one another clean, slid the saloon-pistols down a trouser-leg, and hurried forth to a deep and solitary Devonshire lane in whose flanks a boy might sometimes slay a young rabbit. They threw themselves down under the rank elder bushes, and began to think aloud.

"You know," said Stalky at last, sighting at a distant sparrow, "we could hide our sallies in there like anything."

"Huh!" Beetle snorted, choked, and gurgled. He had been silent since they left the dormitory. "Did you ever read a book called 'The History of a House' or something? I got it out of the library the other day. A French woman wrote it--Violet somebody. But it's translated, you know; and it's very interestin'. Tells you how a house is built."

"Well, if you're in a sweat to find out that, you can go down to the new cottages they're building for the coastguard."

"My Hat! I will." He felt in his pockets. "Give me tuppence, some one."

"Rot! Stay here, and don't mess about in the sun."

"Gi' me tuppence."

"I say, Beetle, you aren't stuffy about anything, are you?" said McTurk, handing over the coppers. His tone was serious, for though Stalky often, and McTurk occasionally, manoeuvred on his own account, Beetle had never been known to do so in all the history of the confederacy.

"No, I'm not. I'm thinking."

"Well, we'll come, too," said Stalky, with a general's suspicion of his aides.

"Don't want you."

"Oh, leave him alone. He's been taken worse with a poem," said McTurk.

"He'll go burbling down to the Pebbleridge and spit it all up in the study when he comes back."

"Then why did he want the tuppence, Turkey? He's gettin' too beastly independent. Hi! There's a bunny. No, it ain't. It's a cat, by Jove! You plug first."

Twenty minutes later a boy with a straw hat at the back of his head, and his hands in his pockets, was staring at workmen as they moved about a half-finished cottage. He produced some ferocious tobacco, and

was passed from the forecourt into the interior, where he asked many questions.

"Well, let's have your beastly epic," said Turkey, as they burst into the study, to find Beetle deep in Viollet-le-Duc and some drawings.

"We've had no end of a lark."

"Epic? What epic? I've been down to the coastguard."

"No epic? Then we will slay you, O Beetle," said Stalky, moving to the attack. "You've got something up your sleeve. I know, when you talk in that tone!"

"Your Uncle Beetle"--with an attempt to imitate Stalky's war-voice--"is a great man."

"Oh, no; he jolly well isn't anything of the kind. You deceive yourself, Beetle. Scrag him, Turkey!"

"A great man," Beetle gurgled from the floor. "You are futile--look out for my tie!--futile burlers. I am the Great Man. I gloat. Ouch! Hear me!"

"Beetle, de-ah"--Stalky dropped unreservedly on Beetle's chest--"we love you, an' you're a poet. If I ever said you were a doggaroo, I apologize; but you know as well as we do that you can't do anything by yourself

without mucking it."

"I've got a notion."

"And you'll spoil the whole show if you don't tell your Uncle Stalky. Cough it up, ducky, and we'll see what we can do. Notion, you fat impostor--I knew you had a notion when you went away! Turkey said it was a poem."

"I've found out how houses are built. Le' me get up. The floor-joists of one room are the ceiling-joists of the room below."

"Don't be so filthy technical."

"Well, the man told me. The floor is laid on top of those joists--those boards on edge that we crawled over--but the floor stops at a partition. Well, if you get behind a partition, same as you did in the attic, don't you see that you can shove anything you please under the floor between the floor-boards and the lath and plaster of the ceiling below? Look here. I've drawn it."

He produced a rude sketch, sufficient to enlighten the allies. There is no part of the modern school curriculum that deals with architecture, and none of them had yet reflected whether floors and ceilings were hollow or solid. Outside his own immediate interests the boy is as ignorant as the savage he so admires; but he has also the savage's



resource.

"I see," said Stalky. "I shoved my hand there. An' then?"

"An' then They've been calling us stinkers, you know. We might shove somethin' under--sulphur, or something that stunk pretty bad--an' stink 'em out. I know it can be done somehow." Beetle's eyes turned to Stalky handling the diagrams.

"Stinks?" said Stalky interrogatively. Then his face grew luminous with delight. "By gum! I've got it. Horrid stinks! Turkey!" He leaped at the Irishman. "This afternoon--just after Beetle went away! She's the very thing!"

"Come to my arms, my beamish boy," caroled McTurk, and they fell into each other's arms dancing. "Oh, frabjous day! Calloo, callay! She will! She will!"

"Hold on," said Beetle. "I don't understand."

"Derr man! It shall, though. Oh, Artie, my pure-souled youth, let us tell our darling Reggie about Pestiferous Stinkadores."

"Not until after call-over. Come on!"

"I say," said Orrin, stiffly, as they fell into their places along the

walls of the gymnasium. "The house are goin' to hold another meeting."

"Hold away, then." Stalky's mind was elsewhere.

"It's about you three this time."

"All right, give 'em my love... Here, sir," and he tore down the corridor.

Gamboling like kids at play, with bounds and sidestarts, with caperings and curvetings, they led the almost bursting Beetle to the rabbit-lane, and from under a pile of stones drew forth the new-slain corpse of a cat. Then did Beetle see the inner meaning of what had gone before, and lifted up his voice in thanksgiving for that the world held warriors so wise as Stalky and McTurk.

"Well-nourished old lady, ain't she?" said Stalky. "How long d'you suppose it'll take her to get a bit whiff in a confined space?"

"Bit whiff! What a coarse brute you are!" said McTurk. "Can't a poor pussy-cat get under King's dormitory floor to die without your pursuin' her with your foul innuendoes?"

"What did she die under the floor for?' said Beetle, looking to the future.

"Oh, they won't worry about that when they find her," said Stalky.

"A cat may look at a king." McTurk rolled down the bank at his own jest. "Pussy, you don't know how useful you're goin' to be to three pure-souled, high-minded boys."

"They'll have to take up the floor for her, same as they did in Number Nine when the rat croaked. Big medicine--heap big medicine! Phew! Oh, Lord, I wish I could stop laughin'," said Beetle.

"Stinks! Hi, stinks! Clammy ones!" McTurk gasped as he regained his place. "And"--the exquisite humor of it brought them sliding down together in a tangle--"it's all for the honor of the house, too!"

"An' they're holdin' another meeting--on us," Stalky panted, his knees in the ditch and his face in the long grass. "Well, let's get the bullet out of her and hurry up. The sooner she's bedded out the better."

Between them they did some grisly work with a penknife; between them (ask not who buttoned her to his bosom) they took up the corpse and hastened back, Stalky arranging their plan of action at the full trot.

The afternoon sun, lying in broad patches on the bed-rugs, saw three boys and an umbrella disappear into a dormitory wall. In five minutes they emerged, brushed themselves all over, washed their hands, combed their hair, and descended.

"Are you sure you shoved her far enough under?" said McTurk suddenly.

"Hang it, man, I shoved her the full length of my arm and Beetle's broly. That must be about six feet. She's bung in the middle of King's big upper ten-bedder. Eligible central situation, I call it. She'll stink out his chaps, and Hartopp's and Macrea's, when she really begins to fume. I swear your Uncle Stalky is a great man. Do you realize what a great man he is, Beetle?"

"Well, I had the notion first, hadn't I--? only--"

"You couldn't do it without your Uncle Stalky, could you?"

"They've been calling us stinkers for a week now," said McTurk. "Oh, won't they catch it!"

"Stinker! Yah! Stink-ah!" rang down the corridor.

"And she's there," said Stalky, a hand on either boy's shoulder.

"She--is--there, gettin' ready to surprise 'em. Presently she'll begin to whisper to 'em in their dreams. Then she'll whiff. Golly, how she'll whiff! Oblige me by thinkin' of it for two minutes."

They went to their study in more or less of silence. There they began to laugh--laugh as only boys can. They laughed with their foreheads on the

tables, or on the floor; laughed at length, curled over the backs of chairs or clinging to a book-shelf; laughed themselves limp.

And in the middle of it Orrin entered on behalf of the house. "Don't mind us, Orrin; sit down. You don't know how we respect and admire you. There's something about your pure, high young forehead, full of the dreams of innocent boyhood, that's no end fetchin'. It is, indeed."

"The house sent me to give you this." He laid a folded sheet of paper on the table and retired with an awful front.

"It's the resolution! Oh, read it, some one. I'm too silly-sick with laughin' to see," said Beetle. Stalky jerked it open with a precautionary sniff. "Phew! Phew! Listen. 'The house notices with pain and contempt the attitude of indifference' --how many f's in indifference, Beetle?"

"Two for choice."

"Only one here--'adopted by the occupants of Number Five study in relation to the insults offered to Mr. Prout's house at the recent meeting in Number Twelve form-room, and the House hereby pass a vote of censure on the said study. That's all."

"And she bled all down my shirt, too!" said Beetle.

"An' I'm catty all over," said McTurk, "though I washed twice."

"An' I nearly broke Beetle's broolly plantin' her where she would blossom!"

The situation was beyond speech, but not laughter. There was some attempt that night to demonstrate against the three in their dormitory; so they came forth.

"You see," Beetle began suavely as he loosened his braces, "the trouble with you is that you're a set of unthinkin' asses. You've no more brains than spidgers. We've told you that heaps of times, haven't we?"

"We'll give the three of you a dormitory lickin'. You always jaw at us as if you were prefects," cried one.

"Oh, no, you won't," said Stalky, "because you know that if you did you'd get the worst of it sooner or later. We aren't in any hurry. We can afford to wait for our little revenges. You've made howlin' asses of yourselves, and just as soon as King gets hold of your precious resolutions to-morrow you'll find that out. If you aren't sick an' sorry by to-morrow night, I'll--I'll eat my hat."

But or ever the dinner-bell rang the next day Prout's were sadly aware of their error. King received stray members of that house with an exaggerated attitude of fear. Did they purpose to cause him to be

dismissed from the College by unanimous resolution? What were their views concerning the government of the school, that he might hasten to give effect to them? he would not offend them for worlds; but he feared--he sadly feared--that his own house, who did not pass resolutions (but washed), might somewhat deride.

King was a happy man, and his house, basking in the favor of his smile, made that afternoon a long penance to the misled Prouts. And Prout himself, with a dull and lowering visage, tried to think out the rights and wrongs of it all, only plunging deeper into bewilderment. Why should his house be called "Stinkers"? Truly, it was a small thing, but he had been trained to believe that straws show which way the wind blows, and that there is no smoke without fire. He approached King in Common-room with a sense of injustice, but King was pleased to be full of airy persiflage that tide, and brilliantly danced dialectical rings round Prout.

"Now," said Stalky at bedtime, making pilgrimage through the dormitories before the prefects came by, "now what have you got to say for yourselves? Foster, Carton, Finch, Longbridge, Marlin, Brett! I heard you chaps catchin' it from King--he made hay of you--an' all you could do was to wriggle an' grin an' say, 'Yes, sir,' an' 'No, sir,' an' 'O, sir,' an' 'Please, sir!' You an' your resolution! Urh!"

"Oh, shut up, Stalky."

"Not a bit of it. You're a gaudy lot of resolutionists, you are! You've made a sweet mess of it. Perhaps you'll have the decency to leave us alone next time."

Here the house grew angry, and in many voices pointed out how this blunder would never have come to pass if Number Five study had helped them from the first.

"But you chaps are so beastly conceited, an'--an' you swaggered into the meetin' as if we were a lot of idiots," growled Orrin of the resolution.

"That's precisely what you are! That's what we've been tryin' to hammer into your thick heads all this time," said Stalky. "Never mind, we'll forgive you. Cheer up. You can't help bein' asses, you know," and, the enemy's flank deftly turned, Stalky hopped into bed.

That night was the first of sorrow among the jubilant King's. By some accident of under-floor drafts the cat did not vex the dormitory beneath which she lay, but the next one to the right; stealing on the air rather as a pale-blue sensation than as any poignant offense. But the mere adumbration of an odor is enough for the sensitive nose and clean tongue of youth. Decency demands that we draw several carbolized sheets over what the dormitory said to Mr. King and what Mr. King replied. He was genuinely proud of his house and fastidious in all that concerned their well-being. He came; he sniffed; he said things. Next morning a boy in that dormitory confided to his bosom friend, a fag of Macrea's, that



there was trouble in their midst which King would fain keep secret.

But Macrea's boy had also a bosom friend in Prout's, a shock-headed fag of malignant disposition, who, when he had wormed out the secret, told--told it in a high-pitched treble that rang along the corridor like a bat's squeak.

"An'--an' they've been calling us 'stinkers' all this week. Why, Harland minor says they simply can't sleep in his dormitory for the stink. Come on!"

"With one shout and with one cry" Prout's juniors hurled themselves into the war, and through the interval between first and second lesson some fifty twelve-year-olds were embroiled on the gravel outside King's windows to a tune whose leit-motif was the word "stinker."

"Hark to the minute-gun at sea!" said Stalky. They were in their study collecting books for second lesson--Latin, with King. "I thought his azure brow was a bit cloudy at prayers. 'She is comin', sister Mary. She is--'"

"If they make such a row now, what will they do when she really begins to look up an' take notice?"

"Well, no vulgar repartee, Beetle. All we want is to keep out of this row like gentlemen."

"'Tis but a little faded flower.' Where's my Horace? Look here, I don't understand what she means by stinkin' out Rattray's dormitory first. We holed in under White's, didn't we?" asked McTurk, with a wrinkled brow.

"Skittish little thing. She's rompin' about all over the place, I suppose."

"My Aunt! King'll be a cheerful customer at second lesson. I haven't prepared my Horace one little bit, either," said Beetle. "Come on!"

They were outside the form-room door now. It was within five minutes of the bell, and King might arrive at any moment.

Turkey elbowed into a cohort of scuffling fags, cut out Thornton tertius (he that had been Harland's bosom friend), and bade him tell his tale.

It was a simple one, interrupted by tears. Many of King's house trod already battered him for libel.

"Oh, it's nothing," McTurk cried. "He says that King's house stinks. That's all."

"Stale!" Stalky shouted. "We knew that years ago, only we didn't choose to run about shoutin' 'stinker.' We've got some manners, ir they haven't. Catch a fag, Turkey, and make sure of it."

Turkey's long arm closed on a hurried and anxious ornament of the Lower Second.

"Oh, McTurk, please let me go. I don't stink--I swear I don't!"

"Guilty conscience!" cried Beetle. "Who said you did?"

"What d'you make of it?" Stalky punted the small boy into Beetle's arms.

"Snf! Snf! He does, though. I think it's leprosy--or thrush. P'raps it's both. Take it away."

"Indeed, Master Beetle"--King generally came to the house-door for a minute or two as the bell rang--"we are vastly indebted to you for your diagnosis, which seems to reflect almost as much credit on the natural unwholesomeness of your mind as it does upon your pitiful ignorance of the diseases of which you discourse so glibly. We will, however, test your knowledge in other directions."

That was a merry lesson, but, in his haste to scarify Beetle, King clean neglected to give him an imposition, and since at the same time he supplied him with many priceless adjectives for later use, Beetle was well content, and applied himself most seriously throughout third lesson (algebra with little Hartopp) to composing a poem entitled "The Lazar-house."

After dinner King took his house to bathe in the sea off the Pebbleridge. It was an old promise; but he wished he could have evaded it, for all Prout's lined up by the Fives Court and cheered with intention. In his absence not less than half the school invaded the infected dormitory to draw their own conclusions. The cat had gained in the last twelve hours, but a battlefield of the fifth day could not have been so flamboyant as the spies reported.

"My word, she is doin' herself proud," said Stalky. "Did you ever smell anything like it? Ah, an' she isn't under White's dormitory at all yet."

"But she will be. Give her time," said Beetle. "She'll twine like a giddy honeysuckle. What howlin' Lazarites they are! No house is justified in makin' itself a stench in the nostrils of decent--"

"High-minded, pure-souled boys. Do you burn with remorse and regret?" said McTurk, as they hastened to meet the house coming up from the sea. King had deserted it, so speech was unfettered. Round its front played a crowd of skirmishers--all houses mixed--flying, reforming, shrieking insults. On its tortured flanks marched the Hoplites, seniors hurling jests one after another--simple and primitive jests of the Stone Age. To these the three added themselves, dispassionately, with an air of aloofness, almost sadly.

"And they look all right, too," said Stalky. "It can't be Rattray, can it? Rattray?"

No answer.

"Rattray, dear? He seems stuffy about something or other. Look here, old man, we don't bear any malice about your sending that soap to us last week, do we? Be cheerful, Rat. You can live this down all right. I dare say it's only a few fags. Your house is so beastly slack, though."

"You aren't going back to the house, are you?" said McTurk. The victims desired nothing better. "You've simply no conception of the reek up there. Of course, frowzin' as you do, you wouldn't notice it; but, after this nice wash and the clean, fresh air, even you'd be upset. 'Much better camp on the Burrows. We'll get you some straw. Shall we'?" The house hurried in to the tune of "John Brown's body," sung by loving schoolmates, and barricaded themselves in their form-room. Straightway Stalky chalked a large cross, with "Lord, have mercy upon us," on the door, and left King to find it.

The wind shifted that night and wafted a carrion-reek into Macrea's dormitories; so that boys in nightgowns pounded on the locked door between the houses, entreating King's to wash. Number Five study went to second lesson with not more than half a pound of camphor apiece in their clothing; and King, too wary to ask for explanations, gibbered a while and hurled them forth. So Beetle finished yet another poem at peace in

the study.

"They're usin' carbolic now. Malpas told me," said Stalky. "King thinks it's the drains."

"She'll need a lot o' carbolic," said McTurk. "No harm tryin', I suppose. It keeps King out of mischief."

"I swear I thought he was goin' to kill me when I sniffed just now. He didn't mind Burton major sniffin' at me the other day, though. He never stopped Alexander howlin' 'Stinker!' into our form-room before--before we doctored 'em. He just grinned," said Stalky. "What was he frothing over you for, Beetle?"

"Aha! That, was my subtle jape. I had him on toast. You know he always jaws about the learned Lipsius."

"'Who at the age of four'--that chap?" said McTurk.

"Yes. Whenever he hears I've written a poem. Well, just as I was sittin' down, I whispered, 'How is our learned Lepsius?' to Burton major. Old Butt grinned like an owl. He didn't know what I was drivin' at; but King jolly well did. That was really why he hove us out. Ain't you grateful? Now shut up. I'm goin' to write the 'Ballad of the Learned Lipsius.'"

"Keep clear of anything coarse, then," said Stalky. "I shouldn't like to be coarse on this happy occasion."

"Not for wo-orlds. What rhymes to 'stanches,' someone?"

In Common-room at lunch King discoursed acridly to Prout of boys with prurient minds, who perverted their few and baleful talents to sap discipline and corrupt their equals, to deal in foul imagery and destroy reverence.

"But you didn't seem to consider this when your house called us--ah--stinkers. If you hadn't assured me that you never interfere with another man's house, I should almost believe that it was a few casual remarks of yours that started all this nonsense."

Prout had endured much, for King always took his temper to meals.

"You spoke to Beetle yourself, didn't you? Something about not bathing, and being a water-funk?" the school chaplain put in. "I was scoring in the pavilion that day."

"I may have--jestingly. I really don't pretend to remember every remark I let fall among small boys; and full well I know the Beetle has no feelings to be hurt."

"May be; but he, or they--it comes to to same thing--have the fiend's

own knack of discovering a man's weak place. I confess I rather go out of my way to conciliate Number Five study. It may be soft, but so far, I believe, I am the only man here whom they haven't maddened by their--well--attentions."

"That is all beside the point. I flatter myself I can deal with them alone as occasion arises. But if they feel themselves morally supported by those who should wield an absolute and open-handed justice, then I say that my lot is indeed a hard one. Of all things I detest, I admit that anything verging on disloyalty among ourselves is the first."

The Common-room looked at one another out of the corners of their eyes, and Prout blushed.

"I deny it absolutely," he said. "Er--in fact, I own that I personally object to all three of them. It is not fair, therefore, to--"

"How long do you propose to allow it?" said King.

"But surely," said Macrea, deserting his usual ally, "the blame, if there be any, rests with you, King. You can't hold them responsible for the--you prefer the good old Anglo-Saxon, I believe--stink in your house. My boys are complaining of it now."

"What can you expect? You know what boys are. Naturally they take advantage of what to them is a heaven-sent opportunity," said little



Hartopp. "What is the trouble in your dormitories, King?"

Mr. King explained that as he had made it the one rule of his life never to interfere with another man's house, so he expected not to be too patently interfered with. They might be interested to learn--here the chaplain heaved a weary sigh--that he had taken all steps that, in his poor judgment, would meet the needs of the case. Nay, further, he had himself expended, with no thought of reimbursement, sums, the amount of which he would not specify, on disinfectants. This he had done because he knew by bitter--by most bitter--experience that the management of the college was slack, dilatory, and inefficient. He might even add, almost as slack as the administration of certain houses which now thought fit to sit in judgment on his actions. With a short summary of his scholastic career, and a precis of his qualifications, including his degrees, he withdrew, slamming the door.

"Heigho!" said the chaplain. "Ours is a dwarfing life--a belittling life, my brethren. God help all schoolmasters! They need it."

"I don't like the boys, I own"--Prout dug viciously with his fork into the table-cloth--"and I don't pretend to be a strong man, as you know. But I confess I can't see any reason why I should take steps against Stalky and the others because King happens to be annoyed by--by--"

"Falling into the pit he has dugged," said little Hartopp. "Certainly not, Prout. No one accuses you of setting one house against another

through sheer idleness."

"A belittling life--a belittling life." The chaplain rose. "I go to correct French exercises. By dinner King will have scored off some unlucky child of thirteen; he will repeat to us every word of his brilliant repartees, and all will be well."

"But about those three. Are they so prurient-minded?"

"Nonsense," said little Hartopp. "If you thought for a minute, Prout, you would see that the 'precocious flow of fetid imagery,' that King complains of, is borrowed wholesale from King. He 'nursed the pinion that impelled the steel.' Naturally he does not approve. Come into the smoking-room for a minute. It isn't fair to listen to boys; but they should be now rubbing it into King's house outside. Little things please little minds."

The dingy den off the Common-room was never used for anything except gowns. Its windows were ground glass; one could not see out of it, but one could hear almost every word on the gravel outside. A light and wary footstep came up from Number Five.

"Ratray!" in a subdued voice--Ratray's study fronted that way. "D'you know if Mr. King's anywhere about? I've got a--" McTurk discreetly left the end of the sentence open.

"No, he's gone out," said Rattray unguardedly.

"Ah! The learned Lipsius is airing himself, is he? His Royal Highness has gone to fumigate." McTurk climbed on the railings, where he held forth like the never-wearied rook.

"Now in all the Coll. there was no stink like the stink of King's house, for it stank vehemently and none knew what to make of it. Save King. And he washed the fags *privatim et seriatim*. In the fishpools of Hesbon washed he them, with an apron about his loins."

"Shut up, you mad Irishman!" There was the sound of a golf-ball spurting up gravel.

"It's no good getting wrathful, Rattray. We've come to jape with you. Come on, Beetle. They're all at home. You can wind 'em."

"Where's the Pomposo Stinkadore? 'Tisn't safe for a pure-souled, high-minded boy to be seen round his house these days. Gone out, has he? Never mind. I'll do the best I can, Rattray. I'm in *loco parentis* just now."

("One for you, Prout," whispered Macrea, for this was Mr. Prout's pet phrase.)

"I have a few words to impart to you, my young friend. We will discourse

together a while."

Here the listening Prout sputtered: Beetle, in a strained voice, had chosen a favorite gambit of King's.

"I repeat, Master Rattray, we will confer, and the matter of our discourse shall not be stinks, for that is a loathsome and obscene word. We will, with your good leave--granted, I trust, Master Rattray, granted, I trust--study this--this scabrous upheaval of latent demoralization. What impresses me most is not so much the blatant indecency with which you swagger abroad under your load of putrescence" (you must imagine this discourse punctuated with golf-balls, but old Rattray was ever a bad shot) "as the cynical immorality with which you revel in your abhorrent aromas. Far be it from me to interfere with another's house--"

("Good Lord!" said Prout, "but this is King.")

"Line for line, letter for letter; listen;" said little Hartopp.)

"But to say that you stink, as certain lewd fellows of the baser sort aver, is to say nothing--less than nothing. In the absence of your beloved house-master, for whom no one has a higher regard than myself, I will, if you will allow me, explain the grossness--the unparalleled enormity--the appalling fetor of the stench (I believe in the good old Anglo-Saxon word), stench, sir, with which you have seen fit to infect

your house... Oh, bother! I've forgotten the rest, but it was very beautiful. Aren't you grateful to us for laborin' with you this way, Rattray? Lots of chaps 'ud never have taken the trouble, but we're grateful, Rattray."

"Yes, we're horrid grateful," grunted McTurk. "We don't forget that soap. We're polite. Why ain't you polite, Rat?"

"Hallo!" Stalky cantered up, his cap over one eye. "Exhortin' the Whiffers, eh? I'm afraid they're too far gone to repent. Rattray! White! Perowne! Malpas! No answer. This is distressin'. This is truly distressin'. Bring out your dead, you glandered lepers!"

"You think yourself funny, don't you?" said Rattray, stung from his dignity by this last. "It's only a rat or something under the floor. We're going to have it up to-morrow."

"Don't try to shuffle it off on a poor dumb animal, and dead, too. I loathe prevarication. 'Pon my soul, Rattray--"

"Hold on. The Hartoffles never said 'Pon my soul' in all his little life," said Beetle critically.

("Ah!" said Prout to little Hartopp.)

"Upon my word, sir, upon my word, sir, I expected better things of you,

Rattray. Why can you not own up to your misdeeds like a man? Have I ever shown any lack of confidence in you?"

("It's not brutality," murmured little Hartopp, as though answering a question no one had asked. "It's boy; only boy.")

"And this was the house," Stalky changed from a pecking, fluttering voice to tragic earnestness. "This was the--the--open cesspit that dared to call us 'stinkers.' And now--and now, it tries to shelter itself behind a dead rat. You annoy me, Rattray. You disgust me! You irritate me unspeakably! Thank Heaven, I am a man of equable temper--"

("This is to your address, Macrea," said Prout.

"I fear so, I fear so.")

"Or I should scarcely be able to contain myself before your mocking visage."

"Cave!" in an undertone. Beetle had spied King sailing down the corridor.

"And what may you be doing here, my little friends?" the house-master began. "I had a fleeting notion--correct me if I am wrong" (the listeners with one accord choked)--"that if I found you outside my house I should visit you with dire pains and penalties."

"We were just goin' for a walk, sir," said Beetle.

"And you stopped to speak to Rattray en route?"

"Yes, sir. We've been throwing golf-balls," said Rattray, coming out of the study.

("Old Rat is more of a diplomat than I thought. So far he is strictly within the truth," said little Hartopp. "Observe the ethics of it, Prout.")

"Oh, you were sporting with them, were you? I must say I do not envy you your choice of associates. I fancied they might have been engaged in some of the prurient discourse with which they have been so disgustingly free of late. I should strongly advise you to direct your steps most carefully in the future. Pick up those golf-balls." He passed on.

Next day Richards, who had been a carpenter in the Navy, and to whom odd jobs were confided, was ordered to take up a dormitory floor; for Mr. King held that something must have died there.

"We need not neglect all our work for a trumpery incident of this nature; though I am quite aware that little things please little minds. Yes, I have decreed the boards to be taken up after lunch under

Richards's auspices. I have no doubt it will be vastly interesting to a certain type of so-called intellect; but any boy of my house or another's found on the dormitory stairs will ipso facto render himself liable to three hundred lines."

The boys did not collect on the stairs, but most of them waited outside King's. Richards had been bound to cry the news from the attic window, and, if possible, to exhibit the corpse.

"'Tis a cat, a dead cat!" Richards's face showed purple at the window. He had been in the chamber of death and on his knees for some time.

"Cat be blowed!" cried McTurk. "It's a dead fag left over from last term. Three cheers for King's dead fag!"

They cheered lustily.

"Show it, show it! Let's have a squint at it!" yelled the juniors. "Give her to the Bug-hunters." (This was the Natural History Society). "The cat looked at the King--and died of it! Hoosh! Yai! Yaow! Maiow! Ftzz!" were some of the cries that followed.

Again Richards appeared.

"She've been"--he checked himself suddenly--"dead a long taim."



The school roared.

"Well, come on out for a walk," said Stalky in a well-chosen pause.

"It's all very disgustin', and I do hope the Lazar-house won't do it again."

"Do what?" a King's boy cried furiously.

"Kill a poor innocent cat every time you want to get off washing. It's awfully hard to distinguish between you as it is. I prefer the cat, I must say. She isn't quite so whiff. What are you goin' to do, Beetle?"

"Je vais gloater. Je vais gloater tout le blessed afternoon. Jamais j'ai gloate' comme je gloaterai aujourd'hui. Nous bunkerons aux bunkers."

And it seemed good to them so to do.

Down in the basement, where the gas flickers and the boots stand in racks, Richards, amid his blacking-brushes, held forth to Oke of the Common-room, Gumbly of the dining-halls, and fair Lena of the laundry.

"Yiss. Her were in a shockin' staate an' condition. Her nigh made me sick, I tal 'ee. But I rowted un out, and I rowted un out, an' I made all shipshape, though her smelt like to bilges."

"Her died mousin', I reckon, poor thing," said Lena.

"Then her moused different to any made cat o' God's world, Lena. I up with the top-board, an' she were lying on her back, an' I turned un over with the brume-handle, an' 'twas her back was all covered with the plaster from 'twixt the lathin'. Yiss, I tal 'ee. An' under her head there lay, like, so's to say, a little pillow o' plaster druv up in front of her by raison of her slidin' along on her back. No cat niver went mousin' on her back, Lena. Some one had shoved her along right underneath, so far as they could shove un. Cats don't make theyselves pillows for to die on. Shoved along, she were, when she was settin' for to be cold, laike."

"Oh, yeou'm too clever to live, Fatty. Yeou go get wed an' taught some sense," said Lena, the affianced of Gumbly.

"Larned a little 'fore iver some maidens was born. Sarved in the Queen's Navy, I have, where yeou'm taught to use your eyes. Yeou go 'tend your own business, Lena."

"Do 'ee mean what you'm been tellin' us?" said Oke.

"Ask me no questions, I'll give 'ee no lies. Bullet-hole clane thru from side to side, an' tu heart-ribs broke like withies. I seed un when I turned un over. They're clever, oh, they'm clever, but they'm not too

clever for old Richards! 'Twas on the born tip o' my tongue to tell, tu, but... he said us niver washed, he did. Let his dom boys call us 'stinkers,' he did. Sarve un dom well raight, I say!"

Richards spat on a fresh boot and fell to his work, chuckling.

#### THE IMPRESSIONISTS.

They had dropped into the chaplain's study for a Saturday night smoke---all four house-masters--and the three briars and the one cigar reeking in amity proved the Rev. John Gillett's good generalship. Since the discovery of the cat, King had been too ready to see affront where none was meant, and the Reverend John, buffer-state and general confidant, had worked for a week to bring about a good understanding. He was fat, clean-shaven, except for a big mustache, of an imperturbable good temper, and, those who loved him least said, a guileful Jesuit. He smiled benignantly upon his handiwork--four sorely tried men talking without very much malice.

"Now remember," he said, when the conversation turned that way, "I impute nothing. But every time that any one has taken direct steps against Number Five study, the issue has been more or less humiliating