

A LITTLE PREP.

Easter term was but a month old when Stettson major, a day-boy, contracted diphtheria, and the Head was very angry. He decreed a new and narrower set of bounds--the infection had been traced to an out-lying farmhouse--urged the prefects severely to lick all trespassers, and promised extra attentions from his own hand. There were no words bad enough for Stettson major, quarantined at his mother's house, who had lowered the school-average of health. This he said in the gymnasium after prayers. Then he wrote some two hundred letters to as many anxious parents and guardians, and bade the school carry on. The trouble did not spread, but, one night, a dog-cart drove to the Head's door, and in the morning the Head had gone, leaving all things in charge of Mr. King, senior house-master. The Head often ran up to town, where the school devoutly believed he bribed officials for early proofs of the Army Examination papers; but this absence was unusually prolonged.

"Downy old bird!" said Stalky to the allies one wet afternoon in the study. "He must have gone on a bend and been locked up under a false name."

"What for?" Beetle entered joyously into the libel.

"Forty shillin's or a month for hackin' the chucker-out of the Pavvy on the shins. Bates always has a spree when he goes to town. Wish he was back, though. I'm about sick o' King's 'whips an' scorpions' an' lectures on public-school spirit--yah!--and scholarship!"

"'Crass an' materialized brutality of the middle-classes--readin' solely for marks. Not a scholar in the whole school,'" McTurk quoted, pensively boring holes in the mantel-piece with a hot poker.

"That's rather a sickly way of spending an afternoon. Stinks too. Let's come out an' smoke. Here's a treat." Stalky held up a long Indian cheroot. "Bagged it from my pater last holidays. I'm a bit shy of it though; it's heftier than a pipe. We'll smoke it palaver-fashion. Hand it round, eh? Let's lie up behind the old harrow on the Monkey-farm Road."

"Out of bounds. Bounds beastly strict these days, too. Besides, we shall cat." Beetle sniffed the cheroot critically. "It's a regular Pomposo Stinkadore."

"You can; I shan't. What d'you say, Turkey?"

"Oh, may's well, I s'pose."

"Chuck on your cap, then. It's two to one. Beetle, out you come!"

They saw a group of boys by the notice-board in the corridor; little Foxy, the school sergeant, among them.

"More bounds, I expect," said Stalky. "Hullo, Foxibus, who are you in mournin' for?" There was a broad band of crape round Foxy's arm.

"He was in my old regiment," said Foxy, jerking his head towards the notices, where a newspaper cutting was thumb-tacked between call-over lists.

"By gum!" quoth Stalky, uncovering as he read. "It's old Duncan--Fat-Sow Duncan--killed on duty at something or other Kotal. 'Rallyin' his men with conspicuous gallantry.' He would, of course. 'The body was recovered.' That's all right. They cut 'em up sometimes, don't they, Foxy?"

"Horrid," said the sergeant briefly.

"Poor old Fat-Sow! I was a fag when he left. How many does that make to us, Foxy?"

"Mr. Duncan, he is the ninth. He come here when he was no bigger than little Grey tertius. My old regiment, too. Yiss, nine to us, Mr. Corkran, up to date."

The boys went out into the wet, walking swiftly.

"Wonder how it feels--to be shot and all that," said Stalky, as they splashed down a lane. "Where did it happen, Beetle?"

"Oh, out in India somewhere. We're always rowin' there. But look here, Stalky, what is the good o' sittin' under a hedge an' cattin'? It's be-eastly cold. It's be-eastly wet, and we'll be collared as sure as a gun."

"Shut up! Did you ever know your Uncle Stalky get you into a mess yet?" Like many other leaders, Stalky did not dwell on past defeats. They pushed through a dripping hedge, landed among water-logged clods, and sat down on a rust-coated harrow. The cheroot burned with sputterings of saltpetre. They smoked it gingerly, each passing to the other between dosed forefinger and thumb.

"Good job we hadn't one apiece, ain't it?" said Stalky, shivering through set teeth. To prove his words he immediately laid all before them, and they followed his example...

"I told you," moaned Beetle, sweating clammy drops. "Oh, Stalky, you are a fool!"

"Je cat, tu cat, il cat. Nous cattons!" McTurk handed up his

contribution and lay hopelessly on the cold iron.

"Something's wrong with the beastly thing. I say, Beetle, have you been droppin' ink on it?"

But Beetle was in no case to answer. Limp and empty, they sprawled across the harrow, the rust marking their ulsters in red squares and the abandoned cheroot-end reeking under their very cold noses. Then--they had heard nothing--the Head himself stood before them--the Head who should have been in town bribing examiners--the Head fantastically attired in old tweeds and a deer-stalker!

"Ah," he said, fingering his mustache. "Very good. I might have guessed who it was. You will go back to the College and give my compliments to Mr. King and ask him to give you an extra-special licking. You will then do me five hundred lines. I shall be back to-morrow. Five hundred lines by five o'clock to-morrow. You are also gated for a week. This is not exactly the time for breaking bounds. Extra-special, please."

He disappeared over the hedge as lightly as he had come. There was a murmur of women's voices in the deep lane.

"Oh, you Prooshan brute!" said McTurk as the voices died away. "Stalky, it's all your silly fault."

"Kill him! Kill him!" gasped Beetle.

"I ca-an't. I'm going to cat again... I don't mind that, but King'll gloat over us horrid. Extra-special, ooh!"

Stalky made no answer--not even a soft one. They went to College and received that for which they had been sent. King enjoyed himself most thoroughly, for by virtue of their seniority the boys were exempt from his hand, save under special order. Luckily, he was no expert in the gentle art.

"Strange, how desire doth outrun performance," said Beetle irreverently, quoting from some Shakespeare play that they were cramming that term. They regained their study and settled down to the imposition.

"You're quite right, Beetle." Stalky spoke in silky and propitiating tones. "Now, if the Head had sent us up to a prefect, we'd have got something to remember!"

"Look here," McTurk began with cold venom, "we aren't goin' to row you about this business, because it's too bad for a row; but we want you to understand you're jolly well excommunicated, Stalky. You're a plain ass."

"How was I to know that the Head 'ud collar us? What was he doin' in those ghastly clothes, too?"

"Don't try to raise a side-issue," Beetle grunted severely.

"Well, it was all Stettson major's fault. If he hadn't gone an' got diphtheria 'twouldn't have happened. But don't you think it rather rummy--the Head droppin' on us that way?"

"Shut up! You're dead!" said Beetle. "We've chopped your spurs off your beastly heels. We've cocked your shield upside down and---and I don't think you ought to be allowed to brew for a month."

"Oh, stop jawin' at me. I want--"

"Stop? Why--why, we're gated for a week." McTurk almost howled as the agony of the situation overcame him. "A lickin' from King, five hundred lines, and a gatin'. D'you expect us to kiss you, Stalky, you beast?"

"Drop rottin' for a minute. I want to find out about the Head bein' where he was."

"Well, you have. You found him quite well and fit. Found him makin' love to Stettson major's mother. That was her in the lane--I heard her. And so we were ordered a lickin' before a day-boy's mother. Bony old widow, too," said McTurk. "Anything else you'd like to find out?"

"I don't care. I swear I'll get even with him some day," Stalky growled.

"Looks like it," said McTurk. "Extra-special, week's gatin' and five hundred... and now you're goin' to row about it! Help scrag him, Beetle!" Stalky had thrown his Virgil at them.

The Head returned next day without explanation, to find the lines waiting for him and the school a little relaxed under Mr. King's viceroyalty. Mr. King had been talking at and round and over the boys' heads, in a lofty and promiscuous style, of public-school spirit and the traditions of ancient seats; for he always improved an occasion. Beyond waking in two hundred and fifty young hearts a lively hatred of all other foundations, he accomplished little--so little, indeed, that when, two days after the Head's return, he chanced to come across Stalky & Co., gated but ever resourceful, playing marbles in the corridor, he said that he was not surprised--not in the least surprised. This was what he had expected from persons of their morale.

"But there isn't any rule against marbles, sir. Very interestin' game," said Beetle, his knees white with chalk and dust. Then he received two hundred lines for insolence, besides an order to go to the nearest prefect for judgment and slaughter.

This is what happened behind the closed doors of Flint's study, and Flint was then Head of the Games:--

"Oh, I say, Flint. King has sent me to you for playin' marbles in the corridor an' shoutin' 'alley tor' an' 'knuckle down.'"

"What does he suppose I have to do with that?" was the answer.

"Dunno. Well?" Beetle grinned wickedly. "What am I to tell him? He's rather wrathful about it."

"If the Head chooses to put a notice in the corridor forbiddin' marbles, I can do something; but I can't move on a house-master's report. He knows that as well as I do."

The sense of this oracle Beetle conveyed, all unsweetened, to King, who hastened to interview Flint.

Now Flint had been seven and a half years at the College, counting six months with a London crammer, from whose roof he had returned, homesick, to the Head for the final Army polish. There were four or five other seniors who had gone through much the same mill, not to mention boys, rejected by other establishments on account of a certain overwhelmingness, whom the Head had wrought into very fair shape. It was not a Sixth to be handled without gloves, as King found.

"Am I to understand it is your intention to allow board-school games under your study windows, Flint? If so, I can only say--" He said much, and Flint listened politely.

"Well, sir, if the Head sees fit to call a prefects' meeting we are bound to take the matter up. But the tradition of the school is that the prefects can't move in any matter affecting the whole school without the Head's direct order."

Much more was then delivered, both sides a little losing their temper.

After tea, at an informal gathering of prefects in his study, Flint related the adventure.

"He's been playin' for this for a week, and now he's got it. You know as well as I do that if he hadn't been gassing at us the way he has, that young devil Beetle wouldn't have dreamed of marbles."

"We know that," said Perowne, "but that isn't the question. On Flint's showin' King has called the prefects names enough to justify a first-class row. Crammers' rejections, ill-regulated hobble-de-hoys, wasn't it? Now it's impossible for prefects--"

"Rot," said Flint. "King's the best classical cram we've got; and 't isn't fair to bother the Head with a row. He's up to his eyes with extra-tu and Army work as it is. Besides, as I told King, we aren't a public school. We're a limited liability company payin' four per cent. My father's a shareholder, too."

"What's that got to do with it?" said Venner, a red-headed boy of

nineteen.

"Well, seems to me that we should be interferin' with ourselves. We've got to get into the Army or--get out, haven't we? King's hired by the Council to teach us. All the rest's gumdiddle. Can't you see?"

It might have been because he felt the air was a little thunderous that the Head took his after-dinner cheroot to Flint's study; but he so often began an evening in a prefect's room that nobody suspected when he drifted in pensively, after the knocks that etiquette demanded.

"Prefects' meeting?" A cock of one wise eye-brow.

"Not exactly, sir; we're just talking things over. Won't you take the easy chair?"

"Thanks. Luxurious infants, you are." He dropped into Flint's big half-couch and puffed for a while in silence. "Well, since you're all here, I may confess that I'm the mute with the bowstring."

The young faces grew serious. The phrase meant that certain of their number would be withdrawn from all further games for extra-tuition. It might also mean future success at Sandhurst; but it was present ruin for the First Fifteen.

"Yes, I've come for my pound of flesh. I ought to have had you out

before the Exeter match; but it's our sacred duty to beat Exeter."

"Isn't the Old Boys' match sacred, too, sir?" said Perowne. The Old Boys' match was the event of the Easter term.

"We'll hope they aren't in training. Now for the list. First I want Flint. It's the Euclid that does it. You must work deductions with me. Perowne, extra mechanical drawing. Dawson goes to Mr. King for extra Latin, and Venner to me for German. Have I damaged the First Fifteen much?" He smiled sweetly.

"Ruined it, I'm afraid, sir," said Flint. "Can't you let us off till the end of the term?"

"Impossible. It will be a tight squeeze for Sandhurst this year."

"And all to be cut up by those vile Afghans, too," said Dawson.

"Wouldn't think there'd be so much competition, would you?"

"Oh, that reminds me. Crandall is coming down with the Old Boys--I've asked twenty of them, but we shan't get more than a weak team. I don't know whether he'll be much use, though. He was rather knocked about, recovering poor old Duncan's body."

"Crandall major--the Gunner?" Perowne asked.

"No, the minor--'Toffee' Crandall--in a native infantry regiment. He was almost before your time, Perowne."

"The papers didn't say anything about him. We read about Fat-Sow, of course. What's Crandall done, sir?"

"I've brought over an Indian paper that his mother sent me. It was rather a--hefty, I think you say--piece of work. Shall I read it?" The Head knew how to read. When he had finished the quarter-column of close type everybody thanked him politely.

"Good for the old Coll.!" said Perowne. "Pity he wasn't in time to save Fat-Sow, though. That's nine to us, isn't it, in the last three years?"

"Yes... And I took old Duncan off all games for extra-tu five years ago this term," said the Head. "By the way, who do you hand over the Games to, Flint?"

"Haven't thought yet. Who'd you recommend, sir?"

"No, thank you. I've heard it casually hinted behind my back that the Prooshan Bates is a downy bird, but he isn't going to make himself responsible for a new Head of the Games. Settle it among yourselves. Good-night."

"And that's the man," said Flint, when the door shut, "that you want to

bother with a dame's school row."

"I was only pullin' your fat leg," Perowne returned, hastily. "You're so easy to draw, Flint."

"Well, never mind that. The Head's knocked the First Fifteen to bits, and we've got to pick up the pieces, or the Old Boys will have a walk-over. Let's promote all the Second Fifteen and make Big Side play up. There's heaps of talent somewhere that we can polish up between now and the match."

The case was represented so urgently to the school that even Stalky and McTurk, who affected to despise football, played one Big-Side game seriously. They were forthwith promoted ere their ardor had time to cool, and the dignity of their Caps demanded that they should keep some show of virtue. The match-team was worked at least four days out of seven, and the school saw hope ahead.

With the last week of the term the Old Boys began to arrive, and their welcome was nicely proportioned to their worth. Gentlemen cadets from Sandhurst and Woolwich, who had only left a year ago, but who carried enormous side, were greeted with a cheerful "Hullo! What's the Shop like?" from those who had shared their studies. Militia subalterns had more consideration, but it was understood they were not precisely of the true metal. Recreants who, failing for the Army, had gone into business or banks were received for old sake's sake, but in no way made too much

of. But when the real subalterns, officers and gentlemen full-blown--who had been to the ends of the earth and back again and so carried no side--came on the scene strolling about with the Head, the school divided right and left in admiring silence. And when one laid hands on Flint, even upon the Head of the Games crying, "Good Heavens! What do you mean by growing in this way? You were a beastly little fag when I left," visible haloes encircled Flint. They would walk to and fro in the corridor with the little red school-sergeant, telling news of old regiments; they would burst into form-rooms sniffing the well-remembered smells of ink and whitewash; they would find nephews and cousins in the lower forms and present them with enormous wealth; or they would invade the gymnasium and make Foxy show off the new stock on the bars.

Chiefly, though, they talked with the Head, who was father-confessor and agent-general to them all; for what they shouted in their unthinking youth, they proved in their thoughtless manhood--to wit, that the Prooshan Bates was "a downy bird." Young blood who had stumbled into an entanglement with a pastry-cook's daughter at Plymouth; experience who had come into a small legacy but mistrusted lawyers; ambition halting at cross-roads, anxious to take the one that would lead him farthest; extravagance pursued by the money-lender; arrogance in the thick of a regimental row--each carried his trouble to the Head; and Chiron showed him, in language quite unfit for little boys, a quiet and safe way round, out, or under. So they overflowed his house, smoked his cigars, and drank his health as they had drunk it all the earth over when two or three of the old school had foregathered.

"Don't stop smoking for a minute," said the Head. "The more you're out of training the better for us. I've demoralized the First Fifteen with extra-tu."

"Ah, but we're a scratch lot. Have you told 'em we shall need a substitute even if Crandall can play?" said a Lieutenant of Engineers with a D.S.O. to his credit.

"He wrote me he'd play, so he can't have been much hurt. He's coming down to-morrow morning."

"Crandall minor that was, and brought off poor Duncan's body?" The Head nodded. "Where are you going to put him? We've turned you out of house and home already, Head Sahib." This was a Squadron Commander of Bengal Lancers, home on leave.

"I'm afraid he'll have to go up to his old dormitory. You know old boys can claim that privilege. Yes, I think little Crandall minor must bed down there once more."

"Bates Sahib "--a Gunner flung a heavy arm round the Head's neck--"you've got something up your sleeve. Confess! I know that twinkle."

"Can't you see, you cuckoo?" a Submarine Miner interrupted. "Crandall

goes up to the dormitory as an object-lesson, for moral effect and so forth. Isn't that true, Head Sahib?"

"It is. You know too much, Purvis. I licked you for that in '79."

"You did, sir, and it's my private belief you chalked the cane."

"N-no. But I've a very straight eye. Perhaps that misled you."

That opened the flood-gates of fresh memories, and they all told tales out of school.

When Crandall minor that was--Lieutenant R. Crandall of an ordinary Indian regiment--arrived from Exeter on the morning of the match, he was cheered along the whole front of the College, for the prefects had repeated the sense of that which the Head had read them in Flint's study. When Prout's house understood that he would claim his Old Boy's right to a bed for one night, Beetle ran into King's house next door and executed a public "gloat" up and down the enemy's big form-room, departing in a haze of ink-pots.

"What d'you take any notice of those rotters for?" said Stalky, playing substitute for the Old Boys, magnificent in black jersey, white knickers, and black stockings. "I talked to him up in the dormitory when he was changin'. Pulled his sweater down for him. He's cut about all over the arms--horrid purply ones. He's goin' to tell us about it

to-night. I asked him to when I was lacin' his boots."

"Well, you have got cheek," said Beetle, enviously.

"Slipped out before I thought. But he wasn't a bit angry. He's no end of a chap. I swear, I'm goin' to play up like beans. Tell Turkey!"

The technique of that match belongs to a bygone age. Scrimmages were tight and enduring; hacking was direct and to the purpose; and around the scrimmage stood the school, crying, "Put down your heads and shove!" Toward the end everybody lost all sense of decency, and mothers of day-boys too close to the touch-line heard language not included in the bills. No one was actually carried off the field, but both sides felt happier when time was called, and Beetle helped Stalky and McTurk into their overcoats. The two had met in the many-legged heart of things, and, as Stalky said, had "done each other proud." As they swaggered woodenly behind the teams--substitutes do not rank as equals of hairy men--they passed a pony-carriage near the wall, and a husky voice cried, "Well played. Oh, played indeed!" It was Stettson major, white-checked and hollow-eyed, who had fought his way to the ground under escort of an impatient coachman.

"Hullo, Stettson," said Stalky, checking. "Is it safe to come near you yet?"

"Oh, yes. I'm all right. They wouldn't let me out before, but I had to

come to the match. Your mouth looks pretty plummy."

"Turkey trod on it accidental-done-a-purpose. Well, I'm glad you're better, because we owe you something. You and your membranes got us into a sweet mess, young man."

"I heard of that," said the boy, giggling. "The Head told me."

"Dooce he did! When?"

"Oh, come on up to Coll. My shin'll stiffen if we stay jawin' here."

"Shut up, Turkey. I want to find out about this. Well?"

"He was stayin' at our house all the time I was ill."

"What for? Neglectin' the Coll. that way? 'Thought he was in town."

"I was off my head, you know, and they said I kept on callin' for him."

"Cheek! You're only a day-boy."

"He came just the same, and he about saved my life. I was all bunged up one night--just goin' to croak, the doctor said--and they stuck a tube or somethin' in my throat, and the Head sucked out the stuff."

"Ugh! 'Shot if I would!"

"He ought to have got diphtheria himself, the doctor said. So he stayed on at our house instead of going back. I'd ha' croaked in another twenty minutes, the doctor says."

Here the coachman, being under orders, whipped up and nearly ran over the three.

"My Hat!" said Beetle. "That's pretty average heroic."

"Pretty average!" McTurk's knee in the small of his back cannoned him into Stalky, who punted him back. "You ought to be hung!"

"And the Head ought to get the V.C.," said Stalky. "Why, he might have been dead and buried by now. But he wasn't. But he didn't. Ho! ho! He just nipped through the hedge like a lusty old blackbird. Extra-special, five hundred lines, an' gated for a week--all sereno!"

"I've read o' somethin' like that in a book," said Beetle. "Gummy, what a chap! Just think of it!"

"I'm thinking," said McTurk; and he delivered a wild Irish yell that made the team turn round.

"Shut your fat mouth," said Stalky, dancing with impatience. "Leave it

to your Uncle Stalky, and he'll have the Head on toast. If you say a word, Beetle, till I give you leave, I swear I'll slay you. Habeo Capitem crinibus minimis. I've got him by the short hairs! Now look as if nothing had happened."

There was no need of guile. The school was too busy cheering the drawn match. It hung round the lavatories regardless of muddy boots while the team washed. It cheered Crandall minor whenever it caught sight of him, and it cheered more wildly than ever after prayers, because the Old Boys in evening dress, openly twirling their mustaches, attended, and instead of standing with the masters, ranged themselves along the wall immediately before the prefects; and the Head called them over, too--majors, minors, and tertiuses, after their old names.

"Yes, it's all very fine," he said to his guests after dinner, "but the boys are getting a little out of hand. There will be trouble and sorrow later, I'm afraid. You'd better turn in early, Crandall. The dormitory will be sitting up for you. I don't know to what dizzy heights you may climb in your profession, but I do know you'll never get such absolute adoration as you're getting now."

"Confound the adoration. I want to finish my cigar, sir."

"It's all pure gold. Go where glory waits, Crandall--minor."

The setting of that apotheosis was a ten-bed attic dormitory,

communicating through doorless openings with three others. The gas flickered over the raw pine washstands. There was an incessant whistling of drafts, and outside the naked windows the sea beat on the Pebbleridge.

"Same old bed--same old mattress, I believe," said Crandall, yawning.

"Same old everything. Oh, but I'm lame! I'd no notion you chaps could play like this." He caressed a battered shin. "You've given us all something to remember you by."

It needed a few minutes to put them at their ease; and, in some way they could not understand, they were more easy when Crandall turned round and

said his prayers--a ceremony he had neglected for some years.

"Oh, I am sorry. I've forgotten to put out the gas."

"Please don't bother," said the prefect of the dormitory. "Worthington does that."

A nightgowned twelve-year-old, who had been waiting to show off, leaped from his bed to the bracket and back again, by way of a washstand.

"How d'you manage when he's asleep?" said Crandall, chuckling.

"Shove a cold cleek down his neck."

"It was a wet sponge when I was junior in the dormitory... Hullo! What's happening?"

The darkness had filled with whispers, the sound of trailing rugs, bare feet on bare boards, protests, giggles, and threats such as:

"Be quiet, you ass!... Squattez-vous on the floor, then!... I swear you aren't going to sit on my bed!... Mind the tooth-glass," etc.

"Sta--Corkran said," the prefect began, his tone showing his sense of Stalky's insolence, "that perhaps you'd tell us about that business with Duncan's body."

"Yes--yes--yes," ran the keen whispers. "Tell us"

"There's nothing to tell. What on earth are you chaps hoppin' about in the cold for?"

"Never mind us," said the voices. "Tell about Fat-Sow."

So Crandall turned on his pillow and spoke to the generation he could not see.

"Well, about three months ago he was commanding a treasure-guard--a cart full of rupees to pay troops with--five thousand rupees in silver. He

was comin' to a place called Fort Pearson, near Kalabagh."

"I was born there," squeaked a small fag. "It was called after my uncle."

"Shut up--you and your uncle! Never mind him, Crandall."

"Well, ne'er mind. The Afridis found out that this treasure was on the move, and they ambushed the whole show a couple of miles before he got to the fort, and cut up the escort. Duncan was wounded, and the escort hooked it. There weren't more than twenty Sepoys all told, and there were any amount of Afridis. As things turned out, I was in charge at Fort Pearson. Fact was, I'd heard the firing and was just going to see about it, when Duncan's men came up. So we all turned back together. They told me something about an officer, but I couldn't get the hang of things till I saw a chap under the wheels of the cart out in the open, propped up on one arm, blazing away with a revolver. You see, the escort had abandoned the cart, and the Afridis--they're an awfully suspicious gang--thought the retreat was a trap--sort of draw, you know--and the cart was the bait. So they had left poor old Duncan alone. 'Minute they spotted how few we were, it was a race across the flat who should reach old Duncan first. We ran, and they ran, and we won, and after a little hackin' about they pulled off. I never knew it was one of us till I was right on top of him. There are heaps of Duncans in the service, and of course the name didn't remind me. He wasn't changed at all hardly. He'd been shot through the lungs, poor old man, and he was pretty thirsty.

I gave him a drink and sat down beside him, and--funny thing, too--he said, 'Hullo, Toffee!' and I said, 'Hullo, Fat-Sow! hope you aren't hurt,' or something of the kind. But he died in a minute or two--never lifted his head off my knees... I say, you chaps out there will get your death of cold. Better go to bed."

"All right. In a minute. But your cuts--your cuts. How did you get wounded?"

"That was when we were taking the body back to the Fort. They came on again, and there was a bit of a scrimmage."

"Did you kill any one?"

"Yes. Shouldn't wonder. Good-night."

"Good-night. Thank you, Crandall. Thanks awf'ly, Crandall. Good-night."

The unseen crowds withdrew. His own dormitory rustled into bed and lay silent for a while.

"I say, Crandall"--Stalky's voice was tuned to a wholly foreign reverence.

"Well, what?"

"Suppose a chap found another chap croaking with diphtheria--all bunged up with it--and they stuck a tube in his throat and the chap sucked the stuff out, what would you say?"

"Um," said Crandall, reflectively. "I've only heard of one case, and that was a doctor. He did it for a woman."

"Oh, this wasn't a woman. It was just a boy."

"Makes it all the finer, then. It's about the bravest thing a man can do. Why?"

"Oh, I heard of a chap doin' it. That's all."

"Then he's a brave man."

"Would you funk it?"

"Ra-ather. Anybody would. Fancy dying of diphtheria in cold blood."

"Well--ah! Er! Look here!" The sentence ended in a grunt, for Stalky had leaped out of bed and with McTurk was sitting on the head of Beetle, who would have sprung the mine there and then.

Next day, which was the last of the term and given up to a few wholly unimportant examinations, began with wrath and war. Mr. King had

discovered that nearly all his house--it lay, as you know, next door but one to Prout's in the long range of buildings--had unlocked the doors between the dormitories and had gone in to listen to a story told by Crandall. He went to the Head, clamorous, injured, appealing; for he never approved of allowing so-called young men of the world to contaminate the morals of boyhood. Very good, said the Head, he would attend to it.

"Well, I'm awfully sorry," said Crandall guiltily. "I don't think I told 'em anything they oughtn't to hear. Don't let them get into trouble on my account."

"Tck!" the Head answered, with the ghost of a wink. "It isn't the boys that make trouble; it's the masters. However, Prout and King don't approve of dormitory gatherings on this scale, and one must back up the house-masters. Moreover, it's hopeless to punish two houses only, so late in the term. We must be fair and include everybody. Let's see. They have a holiday task for the Easters, which, of course, none of them will ever look at. We will give the whole school, except prefects and study-boys, regular prep. to-night; and the Common-room will have to supply a master to take it. We must be fair to all."

"Prep. on the last night of the term. Whew!" said Crandall, thinking of his own wild youth. "I fancy there will be larks."

The school, frolicking among packed trunks, whooping down the corridor,

and "gloating" in form-rooms, received the news with amazement and rage. No school in the world did prep. on the last night of the term. This thing was monstrous, tyrannical, subversive of law, religion, and morality. They would go into the form-rooms, and they would take their degraded holiday task with them, but--here they smiled and speculated what manner of man the Common-room would send up against them. The lot fell on Mason, credulous and enthusiastic, who loved youth. No other master was anxious to take that "prep.," for the school lacked the steadying influence of tradition; and men accustomed to the ordered routine of ancient foundations found it occasionally insubordinate. The four long form-rooms, in which all below the rank of study-boys worked, received him with thunders of applause. Ere he had coughed twice they favored him with a metrical summary of the marriage laws of Great Britain, as recorded by the High Priest of the Israelites and commented on by the leader of the host. The lower forms reminded him that it was the last day, and that therefore he must "take it all in play." When he dashed off to rebuke them, the Lower Fourth and Upper Third began with one accord to be sick, loudly and realistically. Mr. Mason tried, of all vain things under heaven, to argue with them, and a bold soul at a back desk bade him "take fifty lines for not 'olding up 'is 'and before speaking." As one who prided himself upon the perfection of his English this cut Mason to the quick, and while he was trying to discover the offender, the Upper and Lower Second, three form-rooms away, turned out the gas and threw ink-pots. It was a pleasant and stimulating "prep." The study-boys and prefects heard the echoes of it far off, and the

Common-room at dessert smiled.

Stalky waited, watch in hand, till half-past eight. "If it goes on much longer the Head will come up," said he. "We'll tell the studies first, and then the dorm-rooms. Look sharp!"

He allowed no time for Beetle to be dramatic or McTurk to drawl. They poured into study after study, told their tale, and went again so soon as they saw they were understood, waiting for no comment; while the noise of that unholy "prep." grew and deepened. By the door of Flint's study they met Mason flying towards the corridor.--"He's gone to fetch the Head. Hurry up! Come on!" They broke into Number Twelve form-room abreast and panting.

"The Head! The Head! The Head!" That call stilled the tumult for a minute, and Stalky, leaping to a desk, shouted, "He went and sucked the diphtheria stuff out of Stettson major's throat when we thought he was in town. Stop rotting, you asses! Stettson major would have croaked if the Head hadn't done it. The Head might have died himself. Crandall says it's the bravest thing any livin' man can do, and I"--his voice cracked--"the Head don't know we know!"

McTurk and Beetle, jumping from desk to desk, drove the news home among the junior forms. There was a pause, and then, Mason behind him, the Head entered. It was in the established order of things that no boy should speak or move under his eye. He expected the hush of awe. He was

received with cheers--steady, ceaseless cheering. Being a wise man, he went away, and the forms were silent and a little frightened.

"It's all right," said Stalky. "He can't do much. 'Tisn't as if you'd pulled the desks up like we did when old Carleton took prep. once. Keep it up! Hear 'em cheering in the studies!" He rocketed out with a yell, to find Flint and the prefects lifting the roof off the corridor.

When the Head of a limited liability company, paying four per cent., is cheered on his saintly way to prayers, not only by four form-rooms of boys waiting punishment, but by his trusted prefects, he can either ask for an explanation or go his road with dignity, while the senior house-master glares like an excited cat and points out to a white and trembling mathematical master that certain methods--not his, thank God---usually produce certain results. Out of delicacy the Old Boys did not attend that call-over; and it was to the school drawn up in the gymnasium that the Head spoke icily.

"It is not often that I do not understand you; but I confess I do not to-night. Some of you, after your idiotic performances at prep., seem to think me a fit person to cheer. I am going to show you that I am not."

Crash--crash--crash--came the triple cheer that disproved it, and the Head glowered under the gas. "That is enough. You will gain nothing. The little boys (the Lower School did not like that form of address) will do me three hundred lines apiece in the holidays. I shall take no further

notice of them. The Upper School will do me one thousand lines apiece in the holidays, to be shown up the evening of the day they come back. And further--"

"Gummy, what a glutton!" Stalky whispered.

"For your behavior towards Mr. Mason I intend to lick the whole of the Upper School to-morrow when I give you your journey-money. This will include the three study-boys I found dancing on the form-room desks when I came up. Prefects will stay after call-over."

The school filed out in silence, but gathered in groups by the gymnasium door waiting what might befall.

"And now, Flint," said the Head, "will you be good enough to give me some explanation of your conduct?"

"Well, sir," said Flint desperately, "if you save a chap's life at the risk of your own when he's dyin' of diphtheria, and the Coll. finds it out, wha-what can you expect, sir?"

"Um, I see. Then that noise was not meant for--ah, cheek. I can connive at immorality, but I cannot stand impudence. However, it does not excuse their insolence to Mr. Mason. I'll forego the lines this once, remember; but the lickings hold good."

When this news was made public, the school, lost in wonder and admiration, gasped at the Head as he went to his house. Here was a man to be revered. On the rare occasions when he caned he did it very scientifically, and the execution of a hundred boys would be epic--immense.

"It's all right, Head Sahib. We know," said Crandall, as the Head slipped off his gown with a grunt in his smoking-room. "I found out just now from our substitute. He was gettin' my opinion of your performance last night in the dormitory. I didn't know then that it was you he was talkin' about. Crafty young animal. Freckled chap with eyes---Corkran, I think his name is."

"Oh, I know him, thank you," said the Head, and reflectively. "Ye-es, I should have included them even if I hadn't seen 'em."

"If the old Coll. weren't a little above themselves already, we'd chair you down the corridor," said the Engineer. "Oh, Bates, how could you? You might have caught it yourself, and where would we have been, then?"

"I always knew you were worth twenty of us any day. Now I'm sure of it," said the Squadron Commander, looking round for contradictions.

"He isn't fit to manage a school, though. Promise you'll never do it again, Bates Sahib. We--we can't go away comfy in our minds if you take these risks," said the Gunner.

"Bates Sahib, you aren't ever goin' to cane the whole Upper School, are you?" said Crandall.

"I can connive at immorality, as I said, but I can't stand impudence. Mason's lot is quite hard enough even when I back him. Besides, the men at the golf-club heard them singing 'Aaron and Moses.' I shall have complaints about that from the parents of day-boys. Decency must be preserved."

"We're coming to help," said all the guests.

The Upper School were caned one after the other, their overcoats over their arms, the brakes waiting in the road below to take them to the station, their journey-money on the table. The Head began with Stalky, McTurk, and Beetle. He dealt faithfully by them.

"And here's your journey-money. Good-by, and pleasant holidays."

"Good-by. Thank you, sir. Good-by."

They shook hands. "Desire don't outrun performance--much--this mornin'. We got the cream of it," said Stalky. "Now wait till a few chaps come out, and we'll really cheer him."

"Don't wait on our account, please," said Crandall, speaking for the Old Boys. "We're going to begin now."

It was very well so long as the cheering was confined to the corridor, but when it spread to the gymnasium, when the boys awaiting their turn cheered, the Head gave it up in despair, and the remnant flung themselves upon him to shake hands. Then they seriously devoted themselves to cheering till the brakes were hustled off the premises in dumb-show.

"Didn't I say I'd get even with him?" said Stalky on the box-seat, as they swung into the narrow Northam street. "Now all together--takin' time from your Uncle Stalky: It's a way we have in the Army,

It's a way we have in the Navy,

It's a way we have at the Public Schools,

Which nobody can deny!"

THE FLAG OF THEIR COUNTRY.

It was winter and bitter cold of mornings. Consequently Stalky and Beetle--McTurk being of the offensive type that makes ornate toilet under all circumstances--drowsed till the last moment before turning out