

"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

to call-over in the gas-lit gymnasium. It followed that they were often late; and since every unpunctuality earned them a black mark, and since three black marks a week meant defaulters' drill, equally it followed that they spent hours under the Sergeant's hand. Foxy drilled the defaulters with all the pomp of his old parade-ground. "Don't think it's any pleasure to me" (his introduction never varied). "I'd much sooner be smoking a quiet pipe in my own quarters--but I see we 'ave the Old Brigade on our 'ands this afternoon. If I only 'ad you regular, Muster Corkran," said he, dressing the line.

"You've had me for nearly six weeks, you old glutton. Number off from the right!"

"Not quite so previous, please. I'm taking this drill. Left, half--turn! Slow--march." Twenty-five sluggards, all old offenders, filed into the gymnasium. "Quietly provide yourselves with the requisite dumb-bells; returnin' quietly to your place. Number off from the right, in a low voice. Odd numbers one pace to the front. Even numbers stand fast. Now, leanin' forward from the 'ips, takin' your time from me."

The dumb-bells rose and fell, clashed and were returned as one. The boys were experts at the weary game.

"Ve-ry good. I shall be sorry when any of you resume your 'abits of punctuality. Quietly return dumb-bells. We will now try some simple drill."

"Ugh! I know that simple drill."

"It would be 'ighly to your discredit if you did not, Muster Corkran. At the same time, it is not so easy as it looks."

"Bet you a bob, I can drill as well as you, Foxy."

"We'll see later. Now try to imagine you ain't defaulters at all, but an 'arf company on parade, me bein' your commandin' officer. There's no call to laugh. If you're lucky, most of you will 'ave to take drills 'arf your life. Do me a little credit. You've been at it long enough, goodness knows."

They were formed into fours, marched, wheeled, and countermarched, the spell of ordered motion strong on them. As Foxy said, they had been at it a long time.

The gymnasium door opened, revealing McTurk in charge of an old gentleman.

The Sergeant, leading a wheel, did not see. "Not so bad," he murmured. "Not 'arf so bad. The pivot-man of the wheel honly marks time, Muster Swayne. Now, Muster Corkran, you say you know the drill? Oblige me by takin' over the command and, reversin' my words step by step, relegate them to their previous formation."

"What's this? What's this?" cried the visitor authoritatively.

"A--a little drill, sir," stammered Foxy, saying nothing of first causes.

"Excellent--excellent. I only wish there were more of it," he chirruped.

"Don't let me interrupt. You were just going to hand over to someone, weren't you?"

He sat down, breathing frostily in the chill air. "I shall muck it. I know I shall," whispered Stalky uneasily; and his discomfort was not lightened by a murmur from the rear rank that the old gentleman was General Collinson, a member of the College Board of Council.

"Eh--what?" said Foxy.

"Collinson, K.C.B.--He commanded the Pompadours--my father's old regiment," hissed Swayne major.

"Take your time," said the visitor. "I know how it feels. Your first drill--eh?"

"Yes, sir." He drew an unhappy breath. "'Tention. Dress!" The echo of his own voice restored his confidence.

The wheel was faced about, flung back, broken into fours, and restored to line without a falter. The official hour of punishment was long passed, but no one thought of that. They were backing up Stalky--Stalky in deadly fear lest his voice should crack.

"He does you credit, Sergeant," was the visitor's comment. "A good drill--and good material to drill. Now, it's an extraordinary thing: I've been lunching with your head-master and he never told me you had a cadet-corps in the College."

"We 'aven't, sir. This is only a little drill," said the Sergeant.

"But aren't they keen on it?" said McTurk, speaking for the first time, with a twinkle in his deep-set eyes.

"Why aren't you in it, though, Willy?"

"Oh, I'm not punctual enough," said McTurk. "The Sergeant only takes the pick of us."

"Dismiss! Break off!" cried Foxy, fearing an explosion in the ranks.

"I--I ought to have told you, sir, that--"

"But you should have a cadet-corps." The General pursued his own line of thought. "You shall have a cadet-corps, too, if my recommendation in Council is any use. I don't know when I've been so pleased. Boys

animated by a spirit like yours should set an example to the whole school."

"They do," said McTurk.

"Bless my soul! Can it be so late? I've kept my fly waiting half an hour. Well, I must run away. Nothing like seeing things for one's self. Which end of the buildings does one get out at? Will you show me, Willy? Who was that boy who took the drill?"

"Corkran, I think his name is."

"You ought to know him. That's the kind of boy you should cultivate. Evidently an unusual sort. A wonderful sight. Five and twenty boys, who, I dare say, would much sooner be playing cricket"--(it was the depth of winter; but grown people, especially those who have lived long in foreign parts, make these little errors, and McTurk did not correct him)--"drilling for the sheer love of it. A shame to waste so much good stuff; but I think I can carry my point."

"An' who's your friend with the white whiskers?" demanded Stalky, on McTurk's return to the study.

"General Collinson. He comes over to shoot with my father sometimes. Rather a decent old bargee, too. He said I ought to cultivate your acquaintance, Stalky."

"Did he tip you?" McTurk exhibited a blessed whole sovereign.

"Ah," said Stalky, annexing it, for he was treasurer. "We'll have a hefty brew. You'd pretty average cool cheek, Turkey, to jaw about our keenness an' punctuality."

"Didn't the old boy know we were defaulters?" said Beetle.

"Not him. He came down to lunch with the Head. I found him pokin' about the place on his own hook afterwards, an' I thought I'd show him the giddy drill. When I found he was so pleased, I wasn't goin' to damp his giddy ardor. He mightn't ha' given me the quid if I had."

"Wasn't old Foxy pleased? Did you see him get pink behind the ears?" said Beetle. "It was an awful score for him. Didn't we back him up beautifully? Let's go down to Keyte's and get some cocoa and sassingers."

They overtook Foxy, speeding down to retail the adventure to Keyte, who in his time had been Troop Sergeant-Major in a cavalry regiment, and now, war-worn veteran, was local postmaster and confectioner.

"You owe us something," said Stalky, with meaning.

"I'm 'ighly grateful, Muster Corkran. I've 'ad to run against you pretty

hard in the way o' business, now and then, but I will say that outside o' business--bounds an' smokin', an' such like--I don't wish to have a more trustworthy young gentleman to 'elp me out of a hole. The way you 'andled the drill was beautiful, though I say it. Now, if you come regular henceforward--"

"But he'll have to be late three times a week," said Beetle. "You can't expect a chap to do that--just to please you, Foxy."

"Ah, that's true. Still, if you could manage it--and you, Muster Beetle--it would give you a big start when the cadet-corps is formed. I expect the General will recommend it."

They raided Keyte's very much at their own sweet will, for the old man, who knew them well, was deep in talk with Foxy. "I make what we've taken seven and six," Stalky called at last over the counter; "but you'd better count for yourself."

"No--no. I'd take your word any day, Muster Corkran.--In the Pompadours, was he, Sergeant? We lay with them once at Umballa, I think it was."

"I don't know whether this ham-and-tongue tin is eighteen pence or one an' four."

"Say one an' fourpence, Muster Corkran... Of course, Sergeant, if it was any use to give my time, I'd be pleased to do it, but I'm too old. I'd

like to see a drill again."

"Oh, come on, Stalky," cried McTurk. "He isn't listenin' to you. Chuck over the money."

"I want the quid changed, you ass. Keyte! Private Keyte! Corporal Keyte! Terroop-Sergeant-Major Keyte, will you give me change for a quid?"

"Yes--yes, of course. Seven an' six." He stared abstractedly, pushed the silver over, and melted away into the darkness of the back room.

"Now those two'll jaw about the Mutiny till tea-time," said Beetle.

"Old Keyte was at Sobraon," said Stalky. "Hear him talk about that sometimes! Beats Foxy hollow."

The Head's face, inscrutable as ever, was bent over a pile of letters.

"What do you think?" he said at last to the Reverend John Gillett.

"It's a good idea. There's no denying that--an estimable idea."

"We concede that much. Well?"

"I have my doubts about it--that's all. The more I know of boys the less

do I profess myself capable of following their moods; but I own I shall be very much surprised if the scheme takes. It--it isn't the temper of the school. We prepare for the Army."

"My business--in this matter--is to carry out the wishes of the Council. They demand a volunteer cadet-corps. A volunteer cadet-corps will be furnished. I have suggested, however, that we need not embark upon the expense of uniforms till we are drilled. General Collinson is sending us fifty lethal weapons--cut-down Sniders, he calls them--all carefully plugged."

"Yes, that is necessary in a school that uses loaded saloon-pistols to the extent we do." The Reverend John smiled.

"Therefore there will be no outlay except the Sergeant's time."

"But if he fails you will be blamed."

"Oh, assuredly. I shall post a notice in the corridor this afternoon, and--"

"I shall watch the result."

"Kindly keep your 'ands off the new arm-rack." Foxy wrestled with a turbulent crowd in the gymnasium. "Nor it won't do even a condemned

Snider any good to be continual snappin' the lock, Mr. Swayne.--Yiss, the uniforms will come later, when we're more proficient; at present we will confine ourselves to drill. I am 'ere for the purpose o' takin' the names o' those willin' to join.--Put down that Snider, Muster Hogan!"

"What are you goin' to do, Beetle?" said a voice.

"I've had all the drill I want, thank you."

"What! After all you've learned? Come on! Don't be a scab! They'll make you corporal in a week," cried Stalky.

"I'm not goin' up for the Army." Beetle touched his spectacles.

"Hold on a shake, Foxy," said Hogan. "Where are you goin' to drill us?"

"Here--in the gym--till you are fit an' capable to be taken out on the road." The Sergeant threw a chest.

"For all the Northam cads to look at? Not good enough, Foxibus."

"Well, we won't make a point of it. You learn your drill first, an' later we'll see."

"Hullo," said Ansell of Macrea's, shouldering through the mob. "What's all this about a giddy cadet-corps?"

"It will save you a lot o' time at Sandburst," the Sergeant replied promptly. "You'll be dismissed your drills early if you go up with a good groundin' before'and."

"Hm! 'Don't mind learnin' my drill, but I'm not goin' to ass about the country with a toy Snider. Perowne, what are you goin' to do? Hogan's joinin'."

"Don't know whether I've the time," said Perowne. "I've got no end of extra-tu as it is."

"Well, call this extra-tu," said Ansell. "'Twon't take us long to mug up the drill."

"Oh, that's right enough, but what about marchin' in public?" said Hogan, not foreseeing that three years later he should die in the Burmese sun-light outside Minhla Fort.

"Afraid the uniform won't suit your creamy complexion?" McTurk asked with a villainous sneer.

"Shut up, Turkey. You aren't goin' up for the Army."

"No, but I'm goin' to send a substitute. Hi! Morrell an' Wake! You two fags by the arm-rack, you've got to volunteer."

Blushing deeply--they had been too shy to apply before--the youngsters sidled towards the Sergeant.

"But I don't want the little chaps--not at first," said the Sergeant disgustedly. "I want--I'd like some of the Old Brigade the defaulters--to stiffen 'em a bit."

"Don't be ungrateful, Sergeant. They're nearly as big as you get 'em in the Army now." McTurk read the papers of those years and could be trusted for general information, which he used as he used his "tweaker." Yet he did not know that Wake minor would be a bimbashi of the Egyptian Army ere his thirtieth year.

Hogan, Swayne, Stalky, Perowne, and Ansell were deep in consultation by the vaulting-horse, Stalky as usual laying down the law. The Sergeant watched them uneasily, knowing that many waited on their lead.

"Foxy don't like my recruits," said McTurk, in a pained tone, to Beetle.

"You get him some."

Nothing loath, Beetle pinioned two more fags--each no taller than a carbine. "Here you are, Foxy. Here's food for powder. Strike for your hearths an' homes, you young brutes--an' be jolly quick about it."

"Still he isn't happy," said McTurk.

"For the way we have with our Army
Is the way we have with our Navy."

Here Beetle joined in. They had found the poem in an old volume of
"Punch," and it seemed to cover the situation:

"An' both of 'em led to adversity,
Which nobody can deny!"

"You be quiet, young gentlemen. If you can't 'elp--don't 'inder." Foxy's
eye was still on the council by the horse. Carter, White, and Tyrrell,
all boys of influence, had joined it. The rest fingered the rifles
irresolutely. "Wait a shake," cried Stalky. "Can't we turn out those
rotters before we get to work?"

"Certainly," said Foxy. "Any one wishful to join will stay 'ere. Those
who do not so intend will go out, quietly closin' the door be'ind 'em."

Half a dozen of the earnest-minded rushed at them, and they had just
time to escape into the corridor.

"Well, why don't you join?" Beetle asked, resettling his collar.

"Why didn't you?"

"What's the good? We aren't goin' up for the Army. Besides, I know the drill--all except the manual, of course. 'Wonder what they're doin' inside?"

"Makin' a treaty with Foxy. Didn't you hear Stalky say: 'That's what we'll do--an' if he don't like it he can lump it'? They'll use Foxy for a cram. Can't you see, you idiot? They're goin' up for Sandhurst or the Shop in less than a year. They'll learn their drill an' then they'll drop it like a shot. D'you suppose chaps with their amount of extra-tu are takin' up volunteerin' for fun?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought of doin' a poem about it--rottin' 'em, you know--'The Ballad of the Dogshooters'--eh?"

"I don't think you can, because King'll be down on the corps like a cartload o' bricks. He hasn't been consulted, he's sniffin' round the notice-board now. Let's lure him." They strolled up carelessly towards the honse-master--a most meek couple.

"How's this?" said King with a start of feigned surprise. "Methought you would be learning to fight for your country."

"I think the company's full, sir," said McTurk.

"It's a great pity," sighed Beetle.

"Forty valiant defenders, have we, then? How noble! What devotion! I presume that it is possible that a desire to evade their normal responsibilities may be at the bottom of this zeal. Doubtless they will be accorded special privileges, like the Choir and the Natural History Society--one must not say Bug-hunters."

"Oh, I suppose so, sir," said McTurk, cheerily. "The Head hasn't said anything about it yet, but he will, of course."

"Oh, sure to."

"It is just possible, my Beetle," King wheeled on the last speaker, "that the house-masters--a necessary but somewhat neglected factor in our humble scheme of existence--may have a word to say on the matter. Life, for the young at least, is not all weapons and munitions of war. Education is incidentally one of our aims."

"What a consistent pig he is," cooed McTurk, when they were out of earshot. "One always knows where to have him. Did you see how he rose to that draw about the Head and special privileges?"

"Confound him, he might have had the decency to have backed the scheme. I could do such a lovely ballad, rottin' it; and now I'll have to be a giddy enthusiast. It don't bar our pulling Stalky's leg in the study, does it?"

"Oh, no; but in the Coll. we must be pro-cadet-corps like anything. Can't you make up a giddy epigram, a' la Catullus, about King objectin' to it?" Beetle was at this noble task when Stalky returned all hot from his first drill.

"Hullo, my ramrod-bunger!" began McTurk. "Where's your dead dog? Is it Defence or Defiance?"

"Defiance," said Stalky, and leaped on him at that word. "Look here, Turkey, you mustn't rot the corps. We've arranged it beautifully. Foxy swears he won't take us out into the open till we say we want to go."

"Dis-gustin' exhibition of immature infants apin' the idiosyncrasies of their elders. Snff!"

"Have you drawn King, Beetle?" Stalky asked in a pause of the scuffle.

"Not exactly; but that's his genial style."

"Well, listen to your Uncle Stalky--who is a great man. Moreover and subsequently, Foxy's goin' to let us drill the corps in turn--privatim et seriatim--so that we'll all know how to handle a half company anyhow. Ergo, an' propter hoc, when we go to the Shop we shall be dismissed drill early; thus, my beloved 'earers, combinin' education with wholesome amusement."

"I knew you'd make a sort of extra-tu of it, you cold-blooded brute," said McTurk. "Don't you want to die for your giddy country?"

"Not if I can jolly well avoid it. So you mustn't rot the corps."

"We'd decided on that, years ago," said Beetle, scornfully. "King'll do the rottin'."

"Then you've got to rot King, my giddy poet. Make up a good catchy Limerick, and let the fags sing it."

"Look here, you stick to volunteerin', and don't jog the table."

"He won't have anything to take hold of," said Stalky, with dark significance.

They did not know what that meant till, a few days later, they proposed to watch the corps at drill. They found the gymnasium door locked and a fag on guard. "This is sweet cheek," said McTurk, stooping.

"Mustn't look through the key-hole," said the sentry.

"I like that. Why, Wake, you little beast, I made you a volunteer."

"Can't help it. My orders are not to allow any one to look."

"S'pose we do?" said McTurk. "S'pose we jolly well slay you?"

"My orders are, I am to give the name of anybody who interfered with me on my post, to the corps, an' they'd deal with him after drill, accordin' to martial law."

"What a brute Stalky is!" said Beetle. They never doubted for a moment who had devised that scheme.

"You esteem yourself a giddy centurion, don't you?" said Beetle, listening to the crash and rattle of grounded arms within.

"My ordcrs are, not to talk except to explain my orders--they'll lick me if I do."

McTurk looked at Beetle. The two shook their heads and turned away.

"I swear Stalky is a great man," said Beetle after a long pause. "One consolation is that this sort of secret-society biznai will drive King wild."

It troubled many more than King, but the members of the corps were muter than oysters. Foxy, being bound by no vow, carried his woes to Keyte.

"I never come across such nonsense in my life. They've tiled the lodge, inner and outer guard, all complete, and then they get to work, keen as

mustard."

"But what's it all for?" asked the ex-Troop Sergeant-Major.

"To learn their drill. You never saw anything like it. They begin after I've dismissed 'em--practisin' tricks; but out into the open they will not come--not for ever so. The 'ole thing is pre-posterous. If you're a cadet-corps, I say, be a cadet-corps, instead o' hidin' be'ind locked doors."

"And what do the authorities say about it?"

"That beats me again." The Sergeant spoke fretfully. "I go to the 'Ead an' 'e gives me no help. There's times when I think he's makin' fun o' me. I've never been a Volunteer-sergeant, thank God--but I've always had the consideration to pity 'em. I'm glad o' that."

"I'd like to see 'em," said Keyte. "From your statements, Sergeant, I can't get at what they're after."

"Don't ask me, Major! Ask that freckle-faced young Corkran. He's their generalissimo."

One does not refuse a warrior of Sobraon, or deny the only pastry-cook within bounds. So Keyte came, by invitation, leaning upon a stick, tremulous with old age, to sit in a corner and watch.

"They shape well. They shape uncommon well," he whispered between evolutions.

"Oh, this isn't what they're after. Wait till I dismiss 'em."

At the "break-off" the ranks stood fast. Perowne fell out, faced them, and, refreshing his memory by glimpses at a red-bound, metal-clasped book, drilled them for ten minutes. (This is that Perowne who was shot in Equatorial Africa by his own men.) Ansell followed him, and Hogan followed Ansell. All three were implicitly obeyed. Then Stalky laid aside his Snider, and, drawing a long breath, favored the company with a blast of withering invective.

"Old 'ard, Muster Corkran. That ain't in any drill," cried Foxy.

"All right, Sergeant. You never know what you may have to say to your men.--For pity's sake, try to stand up without leanin' against each other, you blear-eyed, herrin'-guttled gutter-snipes. It's no pleasure to me to comb you out. That ought to have been done before you came here, you--you militia broom-stealers."

"The old touch--the old touch. We know it," said Keyte, wiping his rheumy eyes. "But where did he pick it up?"

"From his father--or his uncle. Don't ask me! Half of 'em must have been

born within earshot o' the barracks." (Foxy was not far wrong in his guess.) "I've heard more back-talk since this volunteerin' nonsense began than I've heard in a year in the service."

"There's a rear-rank man lookin' as though his belly were in the pawn-shop. Yes, you, Private Ansell," and Stalky tongue-lashed the victim for three minutes, in gross and in detail.

"Hullo!" He returned to his normal tone. "First blood to me. You flushed, Ansell. You wriggled."

"Couldn't help flushing," was the answer. "Don't think I wriggled, though."

"Well, it's your turn now." Stalky resumed his place in the ranks.

"Lord, Lord! It's as good as a play," chuckled the attentive Keyte. Ansell, too, had been blessed with relatives in the service, and slowly, in a lazy drawl--his style was more reflective than Stalky's--descended the abysmal depths of personality.

"Blood to me!" he shouted triumphantly. "You couldn't stand it, either." Stalky was a rich red, and his Snider shook visibly.

"I didn't think I would," he said, struggling for composure, "but after a bit I got in no end of a bait. Curious, ain't it?"

"Good for the temper," said the slow-moving Hogan, as they returned arms to the rack.

"Did you ever?" said Foxy, hopelessly, to Keyte.

"I don't know much about volunteers, but it's the rummiest show I ever saw. I can see what they're gettin' at, though. Lord! how often I've been told off an' dressed down in my day! They shape well--extremely well they shape."

"If I could get 'em out into the open, there's nothing I couldn't do with 'em, Major. Perhaps when the uniforms come down, they'll change their mind."

Indeed it was time that the corps made some concession to the curiosity of the school. Thrice had the guard been maltreated and thrice had the corps dealt out martial law to the offender. The school raged. What was the use, they asked, of a cadet-corps which none might see? Mr. King congratulated them on their invisible defenders, and they could not parry his thrusts. Foxy was growing sullen and restive. A few of the corps expressed openly doubts as to the wisdom of their course; and the question of uniforms loomed on the near horizon. If these were issued, they would be forced to wear them.

But, as so often happens in this life, the matter was suddenly settled

from without.

The Head had duly informed the Council that their recommendation had been acted upon, and that, so far as he could learn, the boys were drilling. He said nothing of the terms on which they drilled. Naturally, General Collinson was delighted and told his friends. One of his friends rejoiced in a friend, a Member of Parliament--a zealous, an intelligent, and, above all, a patriotic person, anxious to do the most good in the shortest possible time. But we cannot answer, alas! for the friends of our friends. If Collinson's friend had introduced him to the General, the latter would have taken his measure and saved much. But the friend merely spoke of his friend; and since no two people in the world see eye to eye, the picture conveyed to Collinson was inaccurate. Moreover, the man was an M.P., an impeccable Conservative, and the General had the English soldier's lurking respect for any member of the Court of Last Appeal. He was going down into the West country, to spread light in somebody's benighted constituency. Wouldn't it be a good idea if, armed with the General's recommendation, he, taking the admirable and newly established cadet-corps for his text, spoke a few words--"Just talked to the boys a little--eh? You know the kind of thing that would be acceptable; and he'd be the very man to do it. The sort of talk that boys understand, you know."

"They didn't talk to 'em much in my time," said the General, suspiciously.

"Ah! but times change--with the spread of education and so on. The boys of to-day are the men of to-morrow. An impression in youth is likely to be permanent. And in these times, you know, with the country going to the dogs?"

"You're quite right." The island was then entering on five years of Mr. Gladstone's rule; and the General did not like what he had seen of it. He would certainly write to the Head, for it was beyond question that the boys of to-day made the men of to-morrow. That, if he might say so, was uncommonly well put.

In reply, the Head stated that he should be delighted to welcome Mr. Raymond Martin, M.P., of whom he had heard so much; to put him up for the night, and to allow him to address the school on any subject that he conceived would interest them. If Mr. Martin had not yet faced an audience of this particular class of British youth, the Head had no doubt that he would find it an interesting experience.

"And I don't think I am very far wrong in that last," he confided to the Reverend John. "Do you happen to know anything of one Raymond Martin?"

"I was at College with a man of that name," the chaplain replied.

"He was without form and void, so far as I remember, but desperately earnest."

"He will address the Coll. on 'Patriotism' next Saturday."

"If there is one thing our boys detest more than another it is having their Saturday evenings broken into. Patriotism has no chance beside 'brewing.'"

"Nor art either. D'you remember our 'Evening with Shakespeare'?"
The Head's eyes twinkled. "Or the humorous gentleman with the magic lantern?"

"An' who the dooce is this Raymond Martin, M.P.?" demanded Beetle, when he read the notice of the lecture in the corridor. "Why do the brutes always turn up on a Saturday?"

"Ouh! Reomeo, Reomeo. Wherefore art thou Reomeo?" said McTurk over his shoulder, quoting the Shakespeare artiste of last term. "Well, he won't be as bad as her, I hope. Stalky, are you properly patriotic? Because if you ain't, this chap's goin' to make you."

"Hope he won't take up the whole of the evening. I suppose we've got to listen to him."

"Wouldn't miss him for the world," said McTurk. "A lot of chaps thought that Romeo-Romeo woman was a bore. I didn't. I liked her! 'Member when she began to hiccough in the middle of it? P'raps he'll hiccough. Whoever gets into the Gym first, bags seats for the other two."

There was no nervousness, but a brisk and cheery affability about Mr. Raymond Martin, M.P., as he drove up, watched by many eyes, to the Head's house.

"Looks a bit of a bargee," was McTurk's comment. "Shouldn't be surprised if he was a Radical. He rowed the driver about the fare. I heard him."

"That was his giddy patriotism," Beetle explained. After tea they joined the rush for seats, secured a private and invisible corner, and began to criticise. Every gas-jet was lit. On the little dais at the far end stood the Head's official desk, whence Mr. Martin would discourse, and a ring of chairs for the masters.

Entered then Foxy, with official port, and leaned something like a cloth rolled round a stick against the desk. No one in authority was yet present, so the school applauded, crying: "What's that, Foxy? What are you stealin' the gentleman's broolly for?--We don't birch here. We cane! Take away that bauble!--Number off from the right"--and so forth, till the entry of the Head and the masters ended all demonstrations.

"One good job--the Common-room hate this as much as we do. Watch King wrigglin' to get out of the draft."

"Where's the Raymondiferous Martin? Punctuality, my beloved 'earers, is

the image o' war--"

"Shut up. Here's the giddy Dook. Golly, what a dewlap!" Mr. Martin, in evening dress, was undeniably throaty--a tall, generously designed, pink-and-white man. Still, Beetle need not have been coarse.

"Look at his back while he's talkin' to the Head. Vile bad form to turn your back on the audience! He's a Philistine--a Bopper--a Jebusite--an' a Hivite." McTurk leaned back and sniffed contemptuously.

In a few colorless words, the Head introduced the speaker and sat down amid applause. When Mr. Martin took the applause to himself, they naturally applauded more than ever. It was some time before he could begin. He had no knowledge of the school--its tradition or heritage. He did not know that the last census showed that eighty per cent. of the boys had been born abroad--in camp, cantonment, or upon the high seas; or that seventy-five per cent. were sons of officers in one or other of the services--Willoughbys, Paulets, De Castros, Maynes, Randalls, after their kind--looking to follow their fathers' profession. The Head might have told him this, and much more; but, after an hour-long dinner in his company, the Head decided to say nothing whatever. Mr. Raymond Martin seemed to know so much already.

He plunged into his speech with a long-drawn, rasping "Well, boys," that, though they were not conscious of it, set every young nerve ajar. He supposed they knew--hey?--what he had come down for? It was not often

that he had an opportunity to talk to boys. He supposed that boys were very much the same kind of persons--some people thought them rather funny persons--as they had been in his youth.

"This man," said McTurk, with conviction, "is the Gadarene Swine."

But they must remember that they would not always be boys. They would grow up into men, because the boys of to-day made the men of to-morrow, and upon the men of to-morrow the fair fame of their glorious native land depended.

"If this goes on, my beloved 'earers, it will be my painful duty to rot this bargee." Stalky drew a long breath through his nose.

"Can't do that," said McTurk. "He ain't chargin' anything for his Romeo."

And so they ought to think of the duties and responsibilities of the life that was opening before them. Life was not all--he enumerated a few games, and, that nothing might be lacking to the sweep and impact of his fall, added "marbles." "Yes, life was not," he said, "all marbles."

There was one tense gasp--among the juniors almost a shriek--of quivering horror, he was a heathen--an outcast---beyond the extremest pale of toleration--self-damned before all men. Stalky bowed his head in his hands. McTurk, with a bright and cheerful eye, drank in every word,

and Beetle nodded solemn approval.

Some of them, doubtless, expected in a few years to have the honor of a commission from the Queen, and to wear a sword. Now, he himself had had some experience of these duties, as a Major in a volunteer regiment, and he was glad to learn that they had established a volunteer corps in their midst. The establishment of such an establishment conduced to a proper and healthy spirit, which, if fostered, would be of great benefit to the land they loved and were so proud to belong to. Some of those now present expected, he had no doubt--some of them anxiously looked forward to leading their men against the bullets of England's foes; to confronting the stricken field in all the pride of their youthful manhood.

Now the reserve of a boy is tenfold deeper than the reserve of a maid, she being made for one end only by blind Nature, but man for several. With a large and healthy hand, he tore down these veils, and trampled them under the well-intentioned feet of eloquence. In a raucous voice, he cried aloud little matters, like the hope of Honor and the dream of Glory, that boys do not discuss even with their most intimate equals, cheerfully assuming that, till he spoke, they had never considered these possibilities. He pointed them to shining goals, with fingers which smudged out all radiance on all horizons. He profaned the most secret places of their souls with outcries and gesticulations, he bade them consider the deeds of their ancestors in such a fashion that they were flushed to their tingling ears. Some of them--the rending voice cut a

frozen stillness--might have had relatives who perished in defence of their country. They thought, not a few of them, of an old sword in a passage, or above a breakfast-room table, seen and fingered by stealth since they could walk. He adjured them to emulate those illustrious examples; and they looked all ways in their extreme discomfort.

Their years forbade them even to shape their thoughts clearly to themselves. They felt savagely that they were being outraged by a fat man who considered marbles a game.

And so he worked towards his peroration--which, by the way, he used later with overwhelming success at a meeting of electors--while they sat, flushed and uneasy, in sour disgust. After many, many words, he reached for the cloth-wrapped stick and thrust one hand in his bosom. This--this was the concrete symbol of their land--worthy of all honor and reverence! Let no boy look on this flag who did not purpose to worthily add to its imperishable lustre. He shook it before them--a large calico Union Jack, staring in all three colors, and waited for the thunder of applause that should crown his effort.

They looked in silence. They had certainly seen the thing before--down at the coastguard station, or through a telescope, half-mast high when a brig went ashore on Braunton Sands; above the roof of the Golf-club, and in Keyte's window, where a certain kind of striped sweetmeat bore it in paper on each box. But the College never displayed it; it was no part of the scheme of their lives; the Head had never alluded to it; their

fathers had not declared it unto them. It was a matter shut up, sacred and apart. What, in the name of everything caddish, was he driving at, who waved that horror before their eyes? Happy thought! Perhaps he was drunk.

The Head saved the situation by rising swiftly to propose a vote of thanks, and at his first motion, the school clapped furiously, from a sense of relief.

"And I am sure," he concluded, the gaslight full on his face, "that you will all join me in a very hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Raymond Martin for the most enjoyable address he has given us."

To this day we shall never know the rights of the case. The Head vows that he did no such thing; or that, if he did, it must have been something in his eye; but those who were present are persuaded that he winked, once, openly and solemnly, after the word "enjoyable." Mr. Raymond Martin got his applause full tale. As he said, "Without vanity, I think my few words went to their hearts. I never knew boys could cheer like that."

He left as the prayer-bell rang, and the boys lined up against the wall. The flag lay still unrolled on the desk, Foxy regarding it with pride, for he had been touched to the quick by Mr. Martin's eloquence. The Head and the Common-room, standing back on the dais, could not see the glaring offence, but a prefect left the line, rolled it up swiftly, and

as swiftly tossed it into a glove and foil locker.

Then, as though he had touched a spring, broke out the low murmur of content, changing to quick-volleyed hand-clapping.

They discussed the speech in the dormitories. There was not one dissentient voice. Mr. Raymond Martin, beyond question, was born in a gutter, and bred in a board-school, where they played marbles. He was further (I give the barest handful from great store) a Flopshus Cad, an Outrageous Stinker, a Jelly-bellied Flag-flapper (this was Stalky's contribution), and several other things which it is not seemly to put down.

The volunteer cadet-corps fell in next Monday, depressedly, with a face of shame. Even then, judicious silence might have turned the corner.

Said Foxy: "After a fine speech like what you 'eard night before last, you ought to take 'old of your drill with re-newed activity. I don't see how you can avoid comin' out an' marchin' in the open now."

"Can't we get out of it, then, Foxy?" Stalky's fine old silky tone should have warned him.

"No, not with his giving the flag so generously. He told me before he left this morning that there was no objection to the corps usin' it as their own. It's a handsome flag."

Stalky returned his rifle to the rack in dead silence, and fell out. His example was followed by Hogan and Ansell. Perowne hesitated. "Look here, oughtn't we--?" he began.

"I'll get it out of the locker in a minute," said the Sergeant, his back turned. "Then we can--"

"Come on!" shouted Stalky. "What the devil are you waiting for? Dismiss! Break off."

"Why--what the--where the--?"

The rattle of Sniders, slammed into the rack, drowned his voice, as boy after boy fell out.

"I--I don't know that I shan't have to report this to the Head," he stammered.

"Report, then, and be damned to you," cried Stalky, white to the lips, and ran out.

"Rummy thing!" said Beetle to McTurk. "I was in the study, doin' a simply lovely poem about the Jelly-Bellied Flag-Flapper, an' Stalky came in, an' I said 'Hullo!' an' he cursed me like a bargee, and then

he began to blub like anything. Shoved his head on the table and howled.
Hadn't we better do something?"

McTurk was troubled. "P'raps he's smashed himself up somehow."

They found him, with very bright eyes, whistling between his teeth.

"Did I take you in, Beetle? I thought I would. Wasn't it a good draw?
Didn't you think I was blubbin'? Didn't I do it well? Oh, you fat old
ass!" And he began to pull Beetle's ears and checks, in the fashion that
was called "milking."

"I knew you were blubbin'," Beetle replied, composedly. "Why aren't you
at drill?"

"Drill! What drill?"

"Don't try to be a clever fool. Drill in the Gym."

"'Cause there isn't any. The volunteer cadet-corps is broke
up--disbanded--dead--putrid--corrupt---stinkin'. An' if you look at me
like that, Beetle, I'll slay you too... Oh, yes, an' I'm goin' to be
reported to the Head for swearin'."