

THE LAST TERM.

It was within a few days of the holidays, the term-end examinations, and, more important still, the issue of the College paper which Beetle edited. He had been cajoled into that office by the blandishments of Stalky and McTurk and the extreme rigor of study law. Once installed, he discovered, as others have done before him, that his duty was to do the work while his friends criticized. Stalky christened it the "Swillingford Patriot," in pious memory of Sponge--and McTurk compared the output unfavorably with Ruskin and De Quincey. Only the Head took an interest in the publication, and his methods were peculiar. He gave Beetle the run of his brown-bound, tobacco-scented library; prohibiting nothing, recommending nothing. There Beetle found a fat arm-chair, a silver inkstand, and unlimited pens and paper. There were scores and scores of ancient dramatists; there were Hakluyt, his voyages; French translations of Muscovite authors called Pushkin and Lermontoff; little tales of a heady and bewildering nature, interspersed with unusual songs--Peacock was that writer's name; there was Borrow's "Lavengro"; an odd theme, purporting to be a translation of something, called a "Ruba'iyat," which the Head said was a poem not yet come to its own; there were hundreds of volumes of verse---Crashaw; Dryden; Alexander Smith; L. E. L.; Lydia Sigourney; Fletcher and a purple island; Donne; Marlowe's "Faust "; and--this made McTurk (to whom Beetle conveyed it) sheer drunk for three days--Ossian; "The Earthly Paradise"; "Atalanta in

Calydon"; and Rossetti--to name only a few. Then the Head, drifting in under pretense of playing censor to the paper, would read here a verse and here another of these poets, opening up avenues. And, slow breathing, with half-shut eyes above his cigar, would he speak of great men living, and journals, long dead, founded in their riotous youth; of years when all the planets were little new-lit stars trying to find their places in the uncaring void, and he, the Head, knew them as young men know one another. So the regular work went to the dogs, Beetle being full of other matters and meters, hoarded in secret and only told to McTurk of an afternoon, on the sands, walking high and disposedly round the wreck of the Armada galleons, shouting and declaiming against the long-ridged seas.

Thanks in large part to their house-master's experienced distrust, the three for three consecutive terms had been passed over for promotion to the rank of prefect--an office that went by merit, and carried with it the honor of the ground-ash, and liberty, under restrictions, to use it.

"But," said Stalky, "come to think of it, we've done more giddy jesting with the Sixth since we've been passed over than any one else in the last seven years."

He touched his neck proudly. It was encircled by the stiffest of stick-up collars, which custom decreed could be worn only by the Sixth. And the Sixth saw those collars and said no word. "Pussy," Abanazar, or Dick Four of a year ago would have seen them discarded in five minutes

or... But the Sixth of that term was made up mostly of young but brilliantly clever boys, pets of the house-masters, too anxious for their dignity to care to come to open odds with the resourceful three. So they crammed their caps at the extreme back of their heads, instead of a trifle over one eye as the Fifth should, and rejoiced in patent-leather boots on week-days, and marvellous made-up ties on Sundays--no man rebuking. McTurk was going up for Cooper's Hill, and Stalky for Sandhurst, in the spring; and the Head had told them both that, unless they absolutely collapsed during the holidays, they were safe. As a trainer of colts, the Head seldom erred in an estimate of form.

He had taken Beetle aside that day and given him much good advice, not one word of which did Beetle remember when he dashed up to the study, white with excitement, and poured out the wondrous tale. It demanded a great belief.

"You begin on a hundred a year?" said McTurk unsympathetically. "Rot!"

"And my passage out! It's all settled. The Head says he's been breaking me in for this for ever so long, and I never knew--I never knew. One don't begin with writing straight off, y'know. Begin by filling in telegrams and cutting things out o' papers with scissors."

"Oh, Scissors! What an ungodly mess you'll make of it," said Stalky.

"But, anyhow, this will be your last term, too. Seven years, my dearly

beloved 'earers--though not prefects."

"Not half bad years, either," said McTurk. "I shall be sorry to leave the old Coll.; shan't you?"

They looked out over the sea creaming along the Pebbleridge in the clear winter light. "Wonder where we shall all be this time next year?" said Stalky absently.

"This time five years," said McTurk.

"Oh," said Beetle, "my leavin's between ourselves. The Head hasn't told any one. I know he hasn't, because Prout grunted at me to-day that if I were more reasonable--yah!--I might be a prefect next term. I s'ppose he's hard up for his prefects."

"Let's finish up with a row with the Sixth," suggested McTurk.

"Dirty little schoolboys!" said Stalky, who already saw himself a Sandhurst cadet. "What's the use?"

"Moral effect," quoth McTurk. "Leave an imperishable tradition, and all the rest of it."

"Better go into Bideford an' pay up our debts," said Stalky. "I've got three quid out of my father--ad hoc. Don't owe more than thirty bob,

either. Cut along, Beetle, and ask the Head for leave. Say you want to correct the 'Swillingford Patriot.'"

"Well, I do," said Beetle. "It'll be my last issue, and I'd like it to look decent. I'll catch him before he goes to his lunch."

Ten minutes later they wheeled out in line, by grace released from five o'clock call-over, and all the afternoon lay before them. So also unluckily did King, who never passed without witticisms. But brigades of Kings could not have ruffled Beetle that day.

"Aha! Enjoying the study of light literature, my friends," said he, rubbing his hands. "Common mathematics are not for such soaring minds as yours, are they?"

("One hundred a year," thought Beetle, smiling into vacancy.)

"Our open incompetence takes refuge in the flowery paths of inaccurate fiction. But a day of reckoning approaches, Beetle mine. I myself have prepared a few trifling foolish questions in Latin prose which can hardly be evaded even by your practised acts of deception. Ye-es, Latin prose. I think, if I may say so--but we shall see when the papers are set--'Ulpian serves your need.' Aha! 'Elucescebat, quoth our friend.' We shall see! We shall see!"

Still no sign from Beetle. He was on a steamer, his passage paid into the wide and wonderful world--a thousand leagues beyond Lundy Island.

King dropped him with a snarl.

"He doesn't know. He'll go on correctin' exercises an' jawin' an' showin' off before the little boys next term--and next." Beetle hurried after his companions up the steep path of the furze-clad hill behind the College.

They were throwing pebbles on the top of the gasometer, and the grimy gas-man in charge bade them desist. They watched him oil a turncock sunk in the ground between two furze-bushes.

"Cokey, what's that for?" said Stalky.

"To turn the gas on to the kitchens," said Cokey. "If so be I didn't turn her on, yeou young gen'lemen 'ud be larnin' your book by candlelight."

"Um!" said Stalky, and was silent for at least a minute.

"Hullo! Where are you chaps going?" A bend of the lane brought them face to face with Tulke, senior prefect of King's house--a smallish, white-haired boy, of the type that must be promoted on account of its intellect, and ever afterwards appeals to the Head to support its

authority when zeal has outrun discretion.

The three took no sort of notice. They were on lawful pass. Tulke repeated his question hotly, for he had suffered many slights from Number Five study, and fancied that he had at last caught them tripping.

"What the devil is that to you?" Stalky replied with his sweetest smile.

"Look here, I'm not goin'--I'm not goin' to be sworn at by the Fifth!" sputtered Tulke.

"Then cut along and call a prefects' meeting," said McTurk, knowing Tulke's weakness.

The prefect became inarticulate with rage.

"Mustn't yell at the Fifth that way," said Stalky. "It's vile bad form."

"Cough it up, ducky!" McTurk said calmly.

"I--I want to know what you chaps are doing out of bounds?" This with an important flourish of his ground-ash.

"Ah," said Stalky. "Now we're gettin' at it. Why didn't you ask that before?"

"Well, I ask it now. What are you doing?"

"We're admiring you, Tulke," said Stalky. "We think you're no end of a fine chap, don't we?"

"We do! We do!" A dog-cart with some girls in it swept round the corner, and Stalky promptly kneeled before Tulke in the attitude of prayer; so Tulke turned a color.

"I've reason to believe--" he began.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" shouted Beetle, after the manner of Bideford's town crier, "Tulke has reason to believe! Three cheers for Tulke!"

They were given. "It's all our giddy admiration," said Stalky. "You know how we love you, Tulke. We love you so much we think you ought to go home and die. You're too good to live, Tulke."

"Yes," said McTurk. "Do oblige us by dyin'. Think how lovely you'd look stuffed!"

Tulke swept up the road with an unpleasant glare in his eye.

"That means a prefects' meeting--sure pop," said Stalky. "Honor of the Sixth involved, and all the rest of it. Tulke'll write notes all this afternoon, and Carson will call us up after tea. They daren't overlook

that."

"Bet you a bob he follows us!" said McTurk. "He's King's pet, and it's scalps to both of 'em if we're caught out. We must be virtuous."

"Then I move we go to Mother Yeo's for a last gorge. We owe her about ten bob, and Mary'll weep sore when she knows we're leaving," said Beetle.

"She gave me an awful wipe on the head last time--Mary," said Stalky.

"She does if you don't duck," said McTurk. "But she generally kisses one back. Let's try Mother Yeo."

They sought a little bottle-windowed half dairy, half restaurant, a dark-brewed, two-hundred-year-old house, at the head of a narrow side street. They had patronized it from the days of their fagdom, and were very much friends at home.

"We've come to pay our debts, mother," said Stalky, sliding his arm round the fifty-six-inch waist of the mistress of the establishment. "To pay our debts and say good-by--and--and we're awf'ly hungry."

"Aie!" said Mother Yeo, "makkin' love to me! I'm shaamed of 'ee."

"Rackon us wouldn't du no such thing if Mary was here," said McTurk,

lapsing into the broad North Devon that the boys used on their campaigns.

"Who'm takin' my name in vain?" The inner door opened, and Mary, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and apple-checked, entered with a bowl of cream in her hands. McTurk kissed her. Beetle followed suit, with exemplary calm. Both boys were promptly cuffed.

"Niver kiss the maid when 'e can kiss the mistress," said Stalky, shamelessly winking at Mother Yeo, as he investigated a shelf of jams.

"Glad to see one of 'ee don't want his head slapped no more?" said Mary invitingly, in that direction.

"Neu! Reckon I can get 'em give me," said Stalky, his back turned.

"Not by me--yeou little masterpiece!"

"Niver asked 'ee. There's maids to Northam. Yiss--an' Appledore." An unreproducible sniff, half contempt, half reminiscence, rounded the retort.

"Aie! Yeou won't niver come to no good end. Whutt be 'baout, smellin' the cream?"

"Tees bad," said Stalky. "Zmell 'un."

Incautiously Mary did as she was bid.

"Bidevoor kiss."

"Niver amiss," said Stalky, taking it without injury.

"Yeou--yeou--yeou--" Mary began, bubbling with mirth.

"They'm better to Northam--more rich, laiike an' us gets them give back again," he said, while McTurk solemnly waltzed Mother Yeo out of breath, and Beetle told Mary the sad news, as they sat down to clotted cream, jam, and hot bread.

"Yiss. Yeou'll niver zee us no more, Mary. We're goin' to be passons an' missioners."

"Steady the Buffs!" said McTurk, looking through the blind. "Tulke has followed us. He's comin' up the street now."

"They've niver put us out o' bounds," said Mother Yeo. "Bide yeou still, my little dearrs." She rolled into the inner room to make the score.

"Mary," said Stalky, suddenly, with tragic intensity. "Do 'ee lov' me, Mary?"

"Iss--fai! Talled 'ee zo since yeou was zo high!" the damsel replied.

"Zee 'un comin' up street, then?" Stalky pointed to the unconscious Tulke. "He've niver been kissed by no sort or manner o' maid in hees borned laife, Mary. Oh, 'tees shaamful!"

"Whutt's to do with me? 'Twill come to 'un in the way o' nature, I rackon." She nodded her head sagaciously. "You niver want me to kiss un--sure-ly?"

"Give 'ee half-a-crown if 'ee will," said Stalky, exhibiting the coin.

Half-a-crown was much to Mary Yeo, and a jest was more; but

"Yeu'm afraid," said McTurk, at the psychological moment.

"Aie!" Beetle echoed, knowing her weak point. "There's not a maid to Northam 'ud think twice. An' yeou such a fine maid, tu!"

McTurk planted one foot firmly against the inner door lest Mother Yeo should return inopportunately, for Mary's face was set. It was then that Tulke found his way blocked by a tall daughter of Devon--that county of easy kisses, the pleasantest under the sun. He dodged aside politely. She reflected a moment, and laid a vast hand upon his shoulder.

"Where be 'ee gwaine tu, my dearr?" said she.

Over the handkerchief he had crammed into his mouth Stalky could see the boy turn scarlet.

"Gie I a kiss! Don't they larn 'ee manners to College?"

Tulke gasped and wheeled. Solemnly and conscientiously Mary kissed him twice, and the luckless prefect fled.

She stepped into the shop, her eyes full of simple wonder. "Kissed 'un?" said Stalky, handing over the money.

"Iss, fai! But, oh, my little body, he'm no Colleger. 'Zeemed tu-minded to cry, like."

"Well, we won't. Yell couldn't make us cry that way," said McTurk.

"Try."

Whereupon Mary cuffed them all round.

As they went out with tingling ears, said Stalky generally, "Don't think there'll be much of a prefects' meeting."

"Won't there, just!" said Beetle. "Look here. If he kissed her--which is our tack--he is a cynically immoral hog, and his conduct is blatant indecency. Confer orationes Regis furiosissimi, when he collared me

readin' 'Don Juan.'"

"Course he kissed her," said McTurk. "In the middle of the street. With his house-cap on!"

"Time, 3.57 p.m. Make a note o' that. What d'you mean, Beetle?" said Stalky.

"Well! He's a truthful little beast. He may say he was kissed."

"And then?"

"Why, then!" Beetle capered at the mere thought of it. "Don't you see? The corollary to the giddy proposition is that the Sixth can't protect 'emself from outrages an' ravishin's. Want nursemaids to look after 'em! We've only got to whisper that to the Coll. Jam for the Sixth! Jam for us! Either way it's jammy!"

"By Gum!" said Stalky. "Our last term's endin' well. Now you cut along an' finish up your old rag, and Turkey and me will help. We'll go in the back way. No need to bother Randall."

"Don't play the giddy garden-goat, then?" Beetle knew what help meant, though he was by no means averse to showing his importance before his allies. The little loft behind Randall's printing office was his own territory, where he saw himself already controlling the "Times." Here,

under the guidance of the inky apprentice, he had learned to find his way more or less circuitously about the case, and considered himself an expert compositor.

The school paper in its locked formes lay on a stone-topped table, a proof by the side; but not for worlds would Beetle have corrected from the mere proof. With a mallet and a pair of tweezers, he knocked out mysterious wedges of wood that released the forme, picked a letter here and inserted a letter there, reading as he went along and stopping much to chuckle over his own contributions.

"You won't show off like that," said McTurk, "when you've got to do it for your living. Upside down and backwards, isn't it? Let's see if I can read it."

"Get out!" said Beetle. "Go and read those formes in the rack there, if you think you know so much."

"Formes in a rack! What's that? Don't be so beastly professional."

McTurk drew off with Stalky to prowl about the office. They left little unturned.

"Come here a shake, Beetle. What's this thing?" aid Stalky, in a few minutes. "Looks familiar."

Said Beetle, after a glance: "It's King's Latin prose exam. paper.

In--In Varrem: actio prima. What a lark!"

"Think o' the pure-souled, high-minded boys who'd give their eyes for a squint at it!" said McTurk.

"No, Willie dear," said Stalky; "that would be wrong and painful to our kind teachers. You wouldn't crib, Willie, would you?"

"Can't read the beastly stuff, anyhow," was the reply. "Besides, we're leavin' at the end o' the term, so it makes no difference to us."

"Member what the Considerate Bloomer did to Spraggon's account of the Puffin'ton Hounds? We must sugar Mr. King's milk for him," said Stalky, all lighted from within by a devilish joy. "Let's see what Beetle can do with those forceps he's so proud of."

"Don't see now you can make Latin prose much more cock-eye than it is, but we'll try," said Beetle, transposing an aliud and Asiae from two sentences. "Let's see! We'll put that full-stop a little further on, and begin the sentence with the next capital. Hurrah! Here's three lines that can move up all in a lump."

"One of those scientific rests for which this eminent huntsman is so justly celebrated." Stalky knew the Puffington run by heart.

"Hold on! Here's a vol--voluntate quidnam all by itself," said McTurk.

"I'll attend to her in a shake. Quidnam goes after Dolabella."

"Good old Dolabella," murmured Stalky. "Don't break him. Vile prose Cicero wrote, didn't he? He ought to be grateful for--"

"Hullo!" said McTurk, over another forme. "What price a giddy ode? Qui--quis--oh, it's Quis multa gracilis, o' course."

"Bring it along. We've sugared the milk here," said Stalky, after a few minutes' zealous toil. "Never thrash your hounds unnecessarily."

"Quis munditiis? I swear that's not bad," began Beetle, plying the tweezers. "Don't that interrogation look pretty? Heu quoties fidem! That sounds as if the chap were anxious an' excited. Cui flavam religas in rosa--Whose flavor is relegated to a rose. Mutatosque Deos flebit in antro."

"Mute gods weepin' in a cave," suggested Stalky. "'Pon my Sam, Horace needs as much lookin' after as--Tulke."

They edited him faithfully till it was too dark to see.

"Aha! Elucescebat, quoth our friend.' Ulpian serves my need, does it? If King can make anything out of that, I'm a blue-eyed squatteroo," said Beetle, as they slid out of the loft window into a back alley of old acquaintance and started on a three-mile trot to the College. But the revision of the classics had detained them too long. They halted, blown and breathless, in the furze at the back of the gasometer, the College lights twinkling below, ten minutes at least late for tea and lock-up.

"It's no good," puffed McTurk. "Bet a bob Foxy is waiting for defaulters under the lamp by the Fives Court. It's a nuisance, too, because the Head gave us long leave, and one doesn't like to break it."

"Let me now from the bonded ware'ouse of my knowledge," began Stalky.

"Oh, rot! Don't Jorrocks. Can we make a run for it?" snapped McTurk.

"Bishops' boots Mr. Radcliffe also condemned, an' spoke 'ighly in favor of tops cleaned with champagne an' abricot jam.' Where's that thing Cokey was twiddlin' this afternoon?"

They heard him groping in the wet, and presently beheld a great miracle. The lights of the Coastguard cottages near the sea went out; the brilliantly illuminated windows of the Golf-club disappeared, and were followed by the frontages of the two hotels. Scattered villas dulled, twinkled, and vanished. Last of all, the College lights died also. They

were left in the pitchy darkness of a windy winter's night.

"Blister my kidneys. It is a frost. The dahlias are dead!" said Stalky. "Bunk!"

They squattered through the dripping gorse as the College hummed like an angry hive and the dining-rooms chorused, "Gas! gas! gas!" till they came to the edge of the sunk path that divided them from their study. Dropping that ha-ha like bullets, and rebounding like boys, they dashed to their study, in less than two minutes had changed into dry trousers and coat, and, ostentatiously slipped, joined the mob in the dining-hall, which resembled the storm-centre of a South American revolution.

"Hellish dark and smells of cheese." Stalky elbowed his way into the press, howling lustily for gas. "Cokey must have gone for a walk. Foxy'll have to find him."

Prout, as the nearest house-master, was trying to restore order, for rude boys were flicking butter-pats across chaos, and McTurk had turned on the fags' tea-urn, so that many were parboiled and wept with an unfeigned dolor. The Fourth and Upper Third broke into the school song, the "Vive la Compagnie," to the accompaniment of drumming knife-handles; and the junior forms shrilled bat-like shrieks and raided one another's victuals. Two hundred and fifty boys in high condition, seeking for more light, are truly earnest inquirers.

When a most vile smell of gas told them that supplies had been renewed, Stalky, waistcoat unbuttoned, sat gorgedly over what might have been his fourth cup of tea. "And that's all right," he said. "Hullo! 'Ere's Pomponius Ego!"

It was Carson, the head of the school, a simple, straight-minded soul, and a pillar of the First Fifteen, who crossed over from the prefects' table and in a husky, official voice invited the three to attend in his study in half an hour. "Prefects' meetin'! Prefects' meetin'!" hissed the tables, and they imitated barbarically the actions and effects of the ground-ash.

"How are we goin' to jest with 'em?" said Stalky, turning half-face to Beetle. "It's your play this time!"

"Look here," was the answer, "all I want you to do is not to laugh. I'm goin' to take charge o' young Tulke's immorality--a' la King, and it's goin' to be serious. If you can't help laughin' don't look at me, or I'll go pop."

"I see. All right," said Stalky.

McTurk's lank frame stiffened in every muscle and his eyelids dropped half over his eyes. That last was a war-signal.

The eight or nine seniors, their faces very set and sober, were ranged in chairs round Carson's severely Philistine study. Tulke was not popular among them, and a few who had had experience of Stalky and Company doubted that he might, perhaps, have made an ass of himself. But the dignity of the Sixth was to be upheld. So Carson began hurriedly: "Look here, you chaps, I've--we've sent for you to tell you you're a good deal too cheeky to the Sixth--have been for some time--and--and we've stood about as much as we're goin' to, and it seems you've been cursin' and swearin' at Tulke on the Bideford road this afternoon, and we're goin' to show you you can't do it. That's all."

"Well, that's awfully good of you," said Stalky, "but we happen to have a few rights of our own, too. You can't, just because you happen to be made prefects, haul up seniors and jaw 'em on spec., like a house-master. We aren't fags, Carson. This kind of thing may do for Davies Tertius, but it won't do for us."

"It's only old Prout's lunacy that we weren't prefects long ago. You know that," said McTurk. "You haven't any tact."

"Hold on," said Beetle. "A prefects' meetin' has to be reported to the Head. I want to know if the Head backs Tulke in this business?"

"Well--well, it isn't exactly a prefects' meeting," said Carson. "We only called you in to warn you."

"But all the prefects are here," Beetle insisted. "Where's the difference?"

"My Gum!" said Stalky. "Do you mean to say you've just called us in for a jaw--after comin' to us before the whole school at tea an' givin' 'em the impression it was a prefects' meeting? 'Pon my Sam, Carson, you'll get into trouble, you will."

"Hole-an'-corner business--hole-an'-corner business," said McTurk, wagging his head. "Beastly suspicious."

The Sixth looked at each other uneasily. Tulke had called three prefects' meetings in two terms, till the Head had informed the Sixth that they were expected to maintain discipline without the recurrent menace of his authority. Now, it seemed that they had made a blunder at the outset, but any right-minded boy would have sunk the legality and been properly impressed by the Court. Beetle's protest was distinct "cheek."

"Well, you chaps deserve a lickin'," cried one Naughten incautiously. Then was Beetle filled with a noble inspiration.

"For interferin' with Tulke's amours, eh?" Tulke turned a rich sloe color. "Oh, no, you don't!" Beetle went on. "You've had your innings. We've been sent up for cursing and swearing at you, and we're goin' to be let off with a warning! Are we? Now then, you're going to catch

it."

"I--I--I" Tulke began. "Don't let that young devil start jawing."

"If you've anything to say you must say it decently," said Carson.

"Decently? I will. Now look here. When we went into Bideford we met this ornament of the Sixth--is that decent enough?--hanging about on the road with a nasty look in his eye. We didn't know then why he was so anxious to stop us, but at five minutes to four, when we were in Yeo's shop, we saw Tulke in broad daylight, with his house-cap on, kissin' an' huggin' a woman on the pavement. Is that decent enough for you?"

"I didn't--I wasn't."

"We saw you!" said Beetle. "And now--I'll be decent, Carson--you sneak back with her kisses" (not for nothing had Beetle perused the later poets) "hot on your lips and call prefects' meetings, which aren't prefects' meetings, to uphold the honor of the Sixth." A new and heaven-cleft path opened before him that instant. "And how do we know," he shouted--"how do we know how many of the Sixth are mixed up in this abominable affair?"

"Yes, that's what we want to know," said McTurk, with simple dignity.

"We meant to come to you about it quietly, Carson, but you would have

the meeting," said Stalky sympathetically.

The Sixth were too taken aback to reply. So, carefully modelling his rhetoric on King, Beetle followed up the attack, surpassing and surprising himself, "It--it isn't so much the cynical immorality of the biznai, as the blatant indecency of it, that's so awful. As far as we can see, it's impossible for us to go into Bideford without runnin' up against some prefect's unwholesome amours. There's nothing to snigger over, Naughten. I don't pretend to know much about these things--but it seems to me a chap must be pretty far dead in sin" (that was a quotation from the school chaplain) "when he takes to embracing his paramours" (that was Hakluyt) "before all the city" (a reminiscence of Milton). "He might at least have the decency--you're authorities on decency, I believe--to wait till dark. But he didn't. You didn't! Oh, Tulke. You--you incontinent little animal!"

"Here, shut up a minute. What's all this about, Tulke?" said Carson.

"I--look here. I'm awfully sorry. I never thought Beetle would take this line."

"Because--you've--no decency--you--thought--I hadn't," cried Beetle all in one breath.

"Tried to cover it all up with a conspiracy, did you?" said Stalky.

"Direct insult to all three of us," said McTurk. "A most filthy mind you have, Tulke."

"I'll shove you fellows outside the door if you go on like this," said Carson angrily.

"That proves it's a conspiracy," said Stalky, with the air of a virgin martyr.

"I--I was goin' along the street--I swear I was," cried Tulke, "and--and I'm awfully sorry about it--a woman came up and kissed me. I swear I didn't kiss her."

There was a pause, filled by Stalky's long, liquid whistle of contempt, amazement, and derision.

"On my honor," gulped the persecuted one. "Oh, do stop him jawing."

"Very good," McTurk interjected. "We are compelled, of course, to accept your statement."

"Confound it!" roared Naughten. "You aren't head-prefect here, McTurk."

"Oh, well," returned the Irishman, "you know Tulke better than we do. I am only speaking for ourselves. We accept Tulke's word. But all I can say is that if I'd been collared in a similarly disgustin' situation,

and had offered the same explanation Tulke has, I--I wonder what you'd have said. However, it seems on Tulke's word of honor--"

"And Tulkus--beg pardon--kiss, of course---Tulkiss is an honorable man," put in Stalky.

"--that the Sixth can't protect 'emselves from bein' kissed when they go for a walk!" cried Beetle, taking up the running with a rush. "Sweet business, isn't it? Cheerful thing to tell the fags, ain't it? We aren't prefects, of course, but we aren't kissed very much. Don't think that sort of thing ever enters our heads; does it, Stalky?"

"Oh, no!" said Stalky, turning aside to hide his emotions. McTurk's face merely expressed lofty contempt and a little weariness.

"Well, you seem to know a lot about it," interposed a prefect.

"Can't help it--when you chaps shove it under our noses." Beetle dropped into a drawling parody of King's most biting colloquial style--the gentle rain after the thunder-storm. "Well, it's all very sufficiently vile and disgraceful, isn't it? I don't know who comes out of it worst: Tulke, who happens to have been caught; or the other fellows who haven't. And we--" here he wheeled fiercely on the other two--"we've got to stand up and be jawed by them because we've disturbed their intrigues."

"Hang it! I only wanted to give you a word of warning," said Carson, thereby handing himself bound to the enemy.

"Warn? You?" This with the air of one who finds loathsome gifts in his locker. "Carson, would you be good enough to tell us what conceivable thing there is that you are entitled to warn us about after this exposure? Warn? Oh, it's a little too much! Let's go somewhere where it's clean."

The door banged behind their outraged innocence.

"Oh, Beetle! Beetle! Beetle! Golden Beetle!" sobbed Stalky, hurling himself on Beetle's panting bosom as soon as they reached the study.

"However did you do it?"

"Dear-r man" said McTurk, embracing Beetle's head with both arms, while he swayed it to and fro on the neck, in time to this ancient burden--

"Pretty lips--sweeter than--cherry or plum.
Always look--jolly and--never look glum;
Seem to say--Come away. Kissy!--come, come!
Yummy-yum! Yummy-yum! Yummy-yum-yum!"

"Look out. You'll smash my gig-lamps," puffed Beetle, emerging. "Wasn't it glorious? Didn't I 'Eric' 'em splendidly? Did you spot my cribs from King? Oh, blow!" His countenance clouded. "There's one adjective

I didn't use--obscene. Don't know how I forgot that. It's one of King's pet ones, too."

"Never mind. They'll be sendin' ambassadors round in half a shake to beg us not to tell the school. It's a deuced serious business for them," said McTurk. "Poor Sixth--poor old Sixth!"

"Immoral young rips," Stalky snorted. "What an example to pure-souled boys like you and me!"

And the Sixth in Carson's study sat aghast, glowering at Tulke, who was on the edge of tears. "Well," said the head-prefect acidly. "You've made a pretty average ghastly mess of it, Tulke."

"Why--why didn't you lick that young devil Beetle before he began jawing?" Tulke wailed.

"I knew there'd be a row," said a prefect of Prout's house. "But you would insist on the meeting, Tulke."

"Yes, and a fat lot of good it's done us," said Naughten. "They come in here and jaw our heads off when we ought to be jawin' them. Beetle talks to us as if we were a lot of blackguards and--and all that. And when they've hung us up to dry, they go out and slam the door like a house-master. All your fault, Tulke."

"But I didn't kiss her."

"You ass! If you'd said you had and stuck to it, it would have been ten times better than what you did," Naughten retorted. "Now they'll tell the whole school--and Beetle'll make up a lot of beastly rhymes and nick-names."

"But, hang it, she kissed me!" Outside of his work, Tulke's mind moved slowly.

"I'm not thinking of you. I'm thinking of us. I'll go up to their study and see if I can make 'em keep quiet!"

"Tulke's awfully cut up about this business," Naughten began, ingratiatingly, when he found Beetle.

"Who's kissed him this time?"

"--and I've come to ask you chaps, and especially you, Beetle, not to let the thing be known all over the school. Of course, fellows as senior as you are can easily see why."

"Um!" said Beetle, with the cold reluctance of one who foresees an unpleasant public duty. "I suppose I must go and talk to the Sixth again."

"Not the least need, my dear chap, I assure you," said Naughten hastily.

"I'll take any message you care to send."

But the chance of supplying the missing adjective was too tempting. So Naughten returned to that still undissolved meeting, Beetle, white, icy, and aloof, at his heels.

"There seems," he began, with laboriously crisp articulation, "there seems to be a certain amount of uneasiness among you as to the steps we may think fit to take in regard to this last revelation of the--ah--obscene. If it is any consolation to you to know that we have decided--for the honor of the school, you understand--to keep our mouths shut as to these--ah--obscenities, you--ah--have it."

He wheeled, his head among the stars, and strode statelily back to his study, where Stalky and McTurk lay side by side upon the table wiping their tearful eyes--too weak to move.

The Latin prose paper was a success beyond their wildest dreams. Stalky and McTurk were, of course, out of all examinations (they did extra-tuition with the Head), but Beetle attended with zeal.

"This, I presume, is a par-ergon on your part," said King, as he dealt out the papers. "One final exhibition ere you are translated to loftier spheres? A last attack on the classics? It seems to confound you

already."

Beetle studied the print with knit brows. "I can't make head or tail of it," he murmured. "What does it mean?"

"No, no!" said King, with scholastic coquetry. "We depend upon you to give us the meaning. This is an examination, Beetle mine, not a guessing-competition. You will find your associates have no difficulty in--"

Tulke left his place and laid the paper on the desk. King looked, read, and turned a ghastly green.

"Stalky's missing a heap," thought Beetle. "Wonder hew King'll get out of it!"

"There seems," King began with a gulp, "a certain modicum of truth in our Beetle's remark. I am--er--inclined to believe that the worthy Randall must have dropped this in ferule--if you know what that means. Beetle, you purport to be an editor. Perhaps you can enlighten the form as to formes."

"What, sir! Whose form! I don't see that there's any verb in this sentence at all, an'--an'--the Ode is all different, somehow."

"I was about to say, before you volunteered your criticism, that an

accident must have befallen the paper in type, and that the printer reset it by the light of nature. No--" he held the thing at arm's length--"our Randall is not an authority on Cicero or Horace."

"Rather mean to shove it off on Randall," whispered Beetle to his neighbor. "King must ha' been as screwed as an owl when he wrote it out."

"But we can amend the error by dictating it."

"No, sir." The answer came pat from a dozen throats at once. "That cuts the time for the exam. Only two hours allowed, sir. 'Tisn't fair. It's a printed-paper exam. How're we goin' to be marked for it! It's all Randall's fault. It isn't our fault, anyhow. An exam.'s an exam.," etc., etc.

Naturally Mr. King considered this was an attempt to undermine his authority, and, instead of beginning dictation at once, delivered a lecture on the spirit in which examinations should be approached. As the storm subsided, Beetle fanned it afresh.

"Eh? What? What was that you were saying to MacLagan?"

"I only said I thought the papers ought to have been looked at before they were given out, sir."

"Hear, hear!" from a back bench. Mr. King wished to know whether Beetle took it upon himself personally to conduct the traditions of the school. His zeal for knowledge ate up another fifteen minutes, during which the prefects showed unmistakable signs of boredom.

"Oh, it was a giddy time," said Beetle, afterwards, in dismantled Number Five. "He gibbered a bit, and I kept him on the gibber, and then he dictated about a half of Dolabella & Co."

"Good old Dolabella! Friend of mine. Yes?" said Stalky, pensively.

"Then we had to ask him how every other word was spelt, of course, and he gibbered a lot more. He cursed me and MacLagan (Mac played up like a trump) and Randall, and the 'materialized ignorance of the unscholarly middle classes,' 'lust for mere marks,' and all the rest. It was what you might call a final exhibition--a last attack--a giddy par-ergon."

"But o' course he was blind squiffy when he wrote the paper. I hope you explained that?" said Stalky.

"Oh, yes. I told Tulke so. I said an immoral prefect an' a drunken house-master were legitimate inferences. Tulke nearly blubbed. He's awfully shy of us since Mary's time."

Tulke preserved that modesty till the last moment--till the journey-money had been paid, and the boys were filling the brakes that

took them to the station. Then the three tenderly constrained him to wait a while.

"You see, Tulke, you may be a prefect," said Stalky, "but I've left the Coll. Do you see, Tulke, dear?"

"Yes, I see. Don't bear malice, Stalky."

"Stalky? Curse your impudence, you young cub," shouted Stalky, magnificent in top-hat, stiff collar, spats, and high-waisted, snuff-colored ulster. "I want you to understand that I'm Mister Corkran, an' you're a dirty little schoolboy."

"Besides bein' frabjously immoral," said McTurk. "Wonder you aren't ashamed to foist your company on pure-minded boys like us."

"Come on, Tulke," cried Naughten, from the prefects' brake.

"Yes, we're comin'. Shove up and make room, you Collegers. You've all got to be back next term, with your 'Yes, sir,' and 'Oh, sir,' an' 'No sir' an' 'Please sir'; but before we say good-by we're going to tell you a little story. Go on, Dickie" (this to the driver); "we're quite ready. Kick that hat-box under the seat, an' don't crowd your Uncle Stalky."

"As nice a lot of high-minded youngsters as you'd wish to see," said McTurk, gazing round with bland patronage. "A trifle immoral, but

then--boys will be boys. It's no good tryin' to look stuffy, Carson.

Mister Corkran will now oblige with the story of Tulke an' Mary Yeo!"

SLAVES OF THE LAMP.

Part II.

That very Infant who told the story of the capture of Boh Na Ghee [A Conference of the Powers: "Many Inventions"] to Eustace Cleaver, novelist, inherited an estateful baronetcy, with vast revenues, resigned the service, and became a landholder, while his mother stood guard over him to see that he married the right girl. But, new to his position, he presented the local volunteers with a full-sized magazine-rifle range, two miles long, across the heart of his estate, and the surrounding families, who lived in savage seclusion among woods full of pheasants, regarded him as an erring maniac. The noise of the firing disturbed their poultry, and Infant was cast out from the society of J.P.'s and decent men till such time as a daughter of the county might lure him back to right thinking. He took his revenge by filling the house with choice selections of old schoolmates home on leave--affable detrimentials, at whom the bicycle-riding maidens of the surrounding families were allowed to look from afar. I knew when a troop-ship was in