

# Cosmopolis

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## SLAVES OF THE LAMP.\*

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No. I.

THE music-room on the top floor of Number Five was filled with the "Aladdin" company at rehearsal. Dickson Quartus, commonly known as Dick Four, was Aladdin, stage-manager, ballet-master, half the orchestra, and largely librettist, for the "book" had been re-written, and filled with local allusions. The pantomime was to be given next week in the downstairs study occupied by Aladdin, Abanazar, and the Emperor of China. The Slave of the Lamp, with the Princess Balroulbadour and the Widow Twankay, owned the little study across the same landing, so that the company could be easily assembled. The floor shook to the stamp-and-go of the ballet, while Aladdin, in pink cotton tights, a blue and tinsel jacket, and a plumed hat, banged alternately on the piano and his banjo. He was the moving spirit of the game, as befitted a senior who had passed his Army Preliminary, and hoped to enter Sandhurst next spring.

Aladdin came to his own at last, Abanazar lay poisoned on the floor, the Widow Twankay danced her dance, and the company decided it would "come all right on the night."

"What about the last song, though?" said the Emperor, a tallish, fair-headed boy with the ghost of a moustache, at which he pulled manfully. "We need a rousing old tune."

"'John Peel?' 'Drink, Puppy, Drink?'" suggested Abanazar, smoothing his baggy lilac pyjamas. Abanazar never looked to

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be more than one half awake, but he owned a soft slow smile which well suited the part of the Wicked Uncle.

"Stale," said Aladdin. "Might as well have 'Grandfather's Clock.' What's that thing you were humming at 'prep.' last night, Stalky?"

The Slave of the Lamp, in black tights and doublet, a black silk half-mask on his forehead, whistled lazily where he lay on the top of the piano, a catchy music-hall tune.

Dick Four cocked his head critically, and squinted down a large red nose.

"Once more, and I can pick it up," he said, strumming. "Sing the words."

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

"Rippin'! Oh, rippin'!" said Dick Four. "Only we shan't have any piano on the night. We must work it with the banjoes—play an' dance at the same time. You try, Tertius."

The Emperor pushed aside his pea-green sleeves of state and followed Dick Four on a heavy nickel-plated banjo.

"Yes, but I'm dead. Bung in the middle of the stage, too," said Abanazar.

"Oh, that's Beetle's biznai," said Dick Four. "Vamp it up, Beetle. Don't keep us waiting all night. You've got to get Pussy out of the light somehow, and bring us all in dancin' at the end."

"All right. You two play it again," said Beetle, who in a grey skirt, and a wig of chestnut sausage-curls set slantwise above a pair of spectacles mended with an old bootlace, represented the Widow Twankay. He waved one leg in time to the hammered refrain, and the banjoes grew louder.

"Um! Ah! Er—'Aladdin now has won his wife,'" he sang, and Dick Four repeated it.

"'Your Emperor is appeased.'" Tertius flung out his chest as he delivered his line.

"Now, jump up, Pussy! Say, 'I think I'd better come to life!' Then we all take hands and come forward: 'We hope you've all been pleased.' *Twiggez-vous?*"

"*Nous twiggons.* Good enough. What's the chorus for the ballet? It's four kicks and a turn," said Dick Four.

"Oh! Er!

John Short will ring the curtain down,  
And ring the prompter's bell;  
We hope you know before you go  
That we all wish you well."

"Rippin'! Rippin'! Now for the Widow's scene with the Princess. Hurry up, McTurk."

A dark, sallow, raw-boned Irish boy in a violet silk skirt and a coquettish blue turban slouched forward as one thoroughly ashamed of himself. The Slave of the Lamp climbed down from the piano, and dispassionately kicked him. "Play up, Turkey," he said, "this is serious." But there fell on the door the knock of authority. It happened to be King, most hated of the housemasters—King in gown and mortar-board enjoying a Saturday evening prowl before dinner.

"Locked doors! Locked doors!" he snapped with a scowl. "What's the meaning of this; and what, may I ask, is the intention of this—this epicene attire?"

"Pantomime, sir. The Head gave us leave," said Abanazar, as the only member of the Sixth concerned. Dick Four stood firm in the confidence born of well-fitting tights, but Beetle strove to efface himself behind the piano. A grey princess-skirt borrowed from a day-boy's mother, a spotted cotton bodice unsystematically padded with writing-paper, make one ridiculous. And in other regards Beetle had a bad conscience.

"As usual!" sneered King. "Futile foolery just when your careers, such as they may be, are hanging in the balance. I see! Ah, I see! The old gang of criminals—allied forces of disorder—Corkran (the Slave of the Lamp smiled politely), McTurk (the Irishman scowled), and, of course, the unspeakable Beetle, our friend Gigadibs." Abanazar, the Emperor, and Aladdin had more or less of characters, and King passed them over. "Come forth, my inky buffoon, from behind yonder instrument of music! You supply, I presume, the doggerel for this entertainment. Esteem yourself to be, as it were, a poet?"

"He's found one of 'em," thought Beetle, noting the flush on King's cheek-bone.

"I have just had the pleasure of reading an effusion of yours to my address, I believe; an effusion intended to rhyme. So—so you despise me, Mister Gigadibs, do you? I am quite aware—you need not explain—that it was ostensibly *not* intended for my edification. I read it with laughter, yes, with laughter! These paper pellets of inky boys—still a boy we are, Master Gigadibs—do not disturb my equanimity."

"Wonder which it was," thought Beetle. He had launched many lampoons on an appreciative public ever since a discovery that it was possible to convey reproof in rhyme.

For sign of his unruffled calm, King proceeded to tear Beetle, whom he called Gigadibs, slowly asunder. From his untied shoestrings to his mended spectacles (the life of a poet at a big school is hard) he held him up to the derision of his associates—with the usual result. His wild-flowers of speech—King had an unpleasant tongue—restored him to good humour at the last. He drew a lurid picture of Beetle's latter end as a scurrilous pamphleteer dying in an attic, scattered a few compliments over McTurk and Corkran, and, reminding Beetle that he must come up for judgment when called upon, went to Common-room, where he triumphed anew over his victims.

"And the worst of it," he explained in a loud voice behind his soup, "is that I waste such gems of sarcasm on their thick heads. It's miles above them, I'm certain."

"We—ell" said the school chaplain slowly. "I don't know what Corkran's appreciation of your style may be, but young McTurk reads Ruskin for his amusement."

"Nonsense, Clay! He does it to show off. I mistrust the dark Celt."

"He does nothing of the kind. I went into their study the other night, unofficially, and McTurk was glueing up the back of four odd numbers of 'Fors Clavigera.' 'Odd.'"

"I don't know anything about their private lives," said a mathematical master hotly, "but I've learnt by bitter experience that Number Five study are best left alone. They are utterly soulless young devils." He blushed, as the others laughed.

But in the music-room there was wrath and bad language. Only "Stalky" Corkran, Slave of the Lamp, lay on the piano unmoved.

"That little swine Manders minor must have shown him your stuff. He's always suckin' up to King. Go out and kill him," he drawled. "Which one was it, Beetle?"

"Dunno," said Beetle struggling out of the skirt. "There was one about his hunting for popularity with the small boys, and the other one was the one about him in hell, tellin' the devil he was a Balliol man. I swear both of 'em rhymed all right. By gum! P'raps Manders minor showed him both! I'll correct his cæsuras!"

He disappeared down two flights of stairs, flushed a small pink and white boy in a form-room next door to King's study, which, again, was immediately below his own, and chased him up the corridor into a form-room sacred to the revels of the Lower Third. Thence he came back, greatly disordered, to find McTurk, Stalky, and the others of the company in his study enjoying an unlimited "brew"—coffee, cocoa, buns, new bread hot and steaming, sardine, sausage, ham-and-tongue paste, pilchards, three jams, and at least as many pounds of Devonshire cream.

"My hat!" said he, throwing himself upon the banquet. "Who stumped up for this, Stalky?" It was within a month of term-end, and blank starvation had reigned in the studies for weeks.

"You," said Stalky serenely.

"Confound you! You haven't been popping my Sunday bags, then?"

"Keep your hair on. It's only your watch."

"Watch? I lost it—weeks ago. Out on the Burrows, when we tried to shoot the old ram—the day the pistol burst."

"It dropped out of your pocket (you're so beastly careless, Beetle) and McTurk and I kept it for you. I've been wearing it for a week and you never noticed. 'Took it into Bideford after dinner to-day. 'Got thirteen and sevenpence. Here's the ticket."

"Well, that's pretty average cool," said Abanazar behind a slab of cream and jam, as Beetle, reassured upon the safety of

his Sunday trousers, showed not even surprise, much less resentment. Indeed it was McTurk who grew angry, saying:—

“You gave him the ticket, Stalky? You *pawned* it? You unmitigated badger! Why, last month you and Beetle sold mine! Never got a sniff of any ticket.”

“Ah, that was because you locked your trunk and we wasted half the afternoon hammering it open. We might have pawned it if you’d behaved like a Christian, Turkey.”

“My aunt!” said Abanazar, “You chaps *are* communists. Vote of thanks to Beetle, though.”

“That’s beastly unfair,” said Stalky, “when I took all the trouble to pawn it. Beetle never knew he had a watch. Oh, I say, Rabbits-Eggs gave me a lift into Bideford this afternoon.”

Rabbits-Eggs was the local carrier—an outcrop of the early Devonian formation. It was Stalky who had invented his unlovely name. “He was pretty average drunk or he wouldn’t have done it. Rabbits-Eggs is a little shy of me, somehow. But I swore it was *pax* between us, and gave him a bob. He stopped at two pubs on the way in; he’ll be howling drunk to-night. Oh, don’t begin reading, Beetle, there’s a council of war on. What the deuce is the matter with your collar?”

“’Chivied Manders minor into the Lower Third form-room. Had all his dirty little friends on top of me,” said Beetle from behind a jar of pilchards and a book.

“You ass! Any fool could have told you where Manders would bunk to,” said McTurk.

“I didn’t think,” said Beetle meekly, scooping out pilchards with a spoon.

“’Course you didn’t. You never do.” McTurk adjusted Beetle’s collar with a savage tug. “Don’t drop oil all over my ‘Fors,’ or I’ll scrag you!”

“Shut up, you—you Irish Biddy. ’Tisn’t your beastly ‘Fors.’ It’s one of mine.”

The book was a fat brown-backed volume of the later Sixties which King had once thrown at Beetle’s head that Beetle might see whence the name Gigadibs came. Beetle had quietly annexed the book, and had seen—several things. The quarter-

comprehended verses lived and ate with him, as the bedropped pages showed. He removed himself from all that world, drifting at large with wondrous men and women, till McTurk hammered the pilchard-spoon on his head and he snarled.

"Beetle! You're oppressed and insulted and bullied by King. Don't you feel it?"

"Leave me alone! I can make up some more poetry about him if I am, I suppose."

"Mad! Quite mad!" said Stalky to the visitors, as one exhibiting strange beasts. "Beetle reads an ass called Brownin', and McTurk reads an ass called Ruskin; and——"

"Ruskin isn't an ass," said McTurk. "He's almost as good as the Opium Eater. He says we're 'children of noble races trained by surrounding art.' That means me, and the way I decorated the study when you two badgers would have stuck up brackets and Christmas-cards. Child of a noble race, trained by surroundin' art, stop reading, or I'll shove a pilchard down your neck!"

"It's two to one," said Stalky warningly, and Beetle closed the book, in obedience to the law under which he and his companions had lived for six chequered years.

The visitors looked on delighted. Number Five study had a reputation for more variegated insanity than the rest of the school put together; and, so far as its code allowed friendship with outsiders, it was polite and open-hearted to its neighbours on the same landing.

"What rot do you want to do now?" said Beetle.

"King! War!" said McTurk, jerking his head towards the wall, where hung a small wooden West African war-drum, a gift to McTurk from a naval uncle.

"Then we shall be turned out of the study again," said Beetle, who loved his flesh-pots. "Mason turned us out for——for just warbling on it." Mason was the mathematical master who had testified in Common-room.

"Warbling—O Lord!" said Abanazar. "We couldn't hear ourselves speak in our study when you played the infernal thing, What's the good of getting turned out of your study, anyhow?"

"We lived in the form-rooms for a week, too," said Beetle tragically. "And it was beastly cold."

"Ye—es, but Mason's rooms were filled with rats every day we were out. It took him a week to draw the inference," said McTurk. "He loathes rats. 'Minute he let us go back the rats stopped. Mason's a little shy of us now, but there was no evidence."

"Jolly well there wasn't," said Stalky, "when I got out on the roof and dropped the filthy things down his chimney. But, look here, 'question is, are our characters good enough just now to stand a study-row?"

"Never mind mine," said Beetle. "King swears I haven't any."

"I'm not thinking of you," Stalky returned scornfully. "You aren't going up for the Army, you old bat. I don't want to be expelled—and the Head's getting rather shy of us, too."

"Rot!" said McTurk. "The Head never expels except for beastliness or stealing. But I forgot, you and Stalky *are* thieves. Regular burglars."

The visitors gasped, but Stalky interpreted the parable with large grins.

"Well, you know, that little beast Manders minor saw Beetle and me hammerin' McTurk's trunk open in the dormitory when we took his watch last month. Of course, Manders sneaked to Mason, and Mason solemnly took it up as a case of theft, to get even with us about the rats."

"That delivered Mason into our hands," said McTurk, blandly. "We were awfully nice to him, 'cause he was a new master and wanted to win the confidence of the boys. 'Pity he draws inferences, though. Stalky went to his study and pretended to blub, and told Mason he'd lead a new life if Mason let him off this time, but Mason wouldn't. 'Said it was his duty to report him to the Head."

"Vindictive swine!" said Beetle. "It was all those rats! Then I blubbed too, and Stalky confessed that he'd been a thief in regular practice for six years, ever since he came to the school; and that I'd taught him—*à la* Fagin. Mason turned white with joy; thought he had us on toast."

"Gorgeous! Gorgeous!" said Dick Four. "We never heard of this."

"'Course not. Mason kept it jolly quiet. He wrote down



all our statements on impot-paper. There wasn't anything he wouldn't believe," said Stalky.

"And handed it all up to the Head, *with* an extempore prayer. It took about forty pages," said Beetle. "I helped a lot."

"And then, you crazy idiots?" said Abanazar.

"Oh, we were sent for; and Stalky asked to have the 'depositions' read out, and the Head knocked him spinning into a waste-paper-basket. Then he gave us eight cuts apiece—welters—for—for—takin' unheard of liberties with a new master. I saw his shoulders shaking when we went out. Do you know," said Beetle pensively, "that Mason can't look at us now in second lesson without blushing? We three stare at him sometimes till he regularly trickles. He's an awfully sensitive beast."

"He read 'Eric, or Little by Little,'" said McTurk; "so we gave him 'St. Winifred's, or the World of School.' They spent all their spare time stealing at St. Winifred's, when they weren't praying or getting drunk at pubs. Well, that was only a week ago, and the Head's a little bit shy of us. He called it constructive devilry. Stalky invented it all."

"Not the least good having a row with a master unless you can make him ridiculous," said Stalky, extended at ease on the hearth-rug. "If Mason didn't know Number Five well, he's learnt, that's all. Now, my dearly beloved 'earers" (Stalky curled his legs under him and addressed the company) "we've got that strong, perseverin' man King on our hands. He went miles out of his way to provoke a conflict." (Here Stalky snapped down the black silk domino and assumed the air of a judge.) "He has oppressed Beetle, McTurk, and me, *privatim et seriatim*, one by one, as he could catch us. But *now* he has insulted Number Five up in the music-room, and in the presence of these—these ossifers of the Ninety-third, wot look like hairdressers. Benjamin, we must make him cry 'Capivi!'"

Stalky's reading did *not* include Browning or Ruskin.

"And besides," said McTurk, "he's a Philistine, a basket-hanger. He wears a tartan tie. Ruskin says that any man who wears a tartan tie will, without doubt, be damned everlastingly."

“Bravo, McTurk,” said Tertius; “I thought he was only a beast.”

“He’s that, too, of course, but he’s *worse*! He has a china basket with blue ribbons and a pink kitten on it hung up in his window to grow musk in. You know when I got all that old oak carvin’ out of Bideford Church when they were restoring it (Ruskin says any man who’ll restore a church is an unmitigated sweep) and stuck it up here with glue? Well, King came in and wanted to know whether we’d done it with a fret-saw! Yah! He is the King of basket-hangers!”

Down went McTurk’s inky thumb over an imaginary arena full of bleeding Kings. “*Placetne*, child of a generous race?” he cried to Beetle.

“Well,” began Beetle, doubtfully; “he comes from Balliol, but I’m going to give the beast his chance. You see I can always make him hop with some more poetry. He can’t report me to the Head, because it makes him ridiculous. (Stalky’s quite right.) But he shall have his chance.”

Beetle opened the book on the table, ran his finger down a page, and began at random:—

“Or who in Moscow towards the Czar  
With the demurest of foot-falls  
Over the Kremlin’s pavement white  
With serpentine and syenite  
Steps with five other generals——”

“That’s no good. Try another,” said Stalky.

“Hold on a shake, I know what’s coming.” McTurk was reading over Beetle’s shoulder.

“That simultaneously take snuff  
For each to have pretext enough  
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash  
Which—softness’ self—is yet the stuff

(Gummy! What a sentence!)

To hold fast where a steel chain snaps  
And leave the grand white neck no gash.

(Full stop).”

“Don’t understand a word of it,” said Stalky.

“More ass you! Construe,” said McTurk. “Those six Johnnies scragged the Czar, and left no evidence. *Actum est* with King.”

“He gave me that book, too,” said Beetle, licking his lips:—

“There’s a great text in Galatians  
Once you trip on it entails  
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,  
One sure if another fails.”

Then irrelevantly:—

“Setebos! Setebos! and Setebos!  
’Thinketh he liveth in the cold of the moon.”

“He’s just come in from dinner,” said Dick Four, looking down through the window. “Manders minor is with him.”

“Safest place for him just now,” said Beetle.

“Then you chaps had better clear out,” said Stalky politely to the visitors. “’Tisn’t fair to mix you up in a study-row. Besides, we can’t afford to have any evidence.”

“Are you going to begin at once?” said Aladdin.

“Immediately, if not sooner,” said Stalky, and turned out the gas! “Strong, perseverin’ man is King. Make him cry ‘Capivi.’ G’way, Benjamin!”

The company retreated to their own neat and spacious study with expectant souls.

“When Stalky blows out his nostrils like a horse,” said Aladdin to the Emperor of China, “he’s on the war-path. ’Wonder what King *will* get?”

“Beans,” said the Emperor. “Number Five always pays in full.”

“’Wonder if I ought to take any notice of it officially,” said Abanazar, who had just remembered he was a prefect.

“It’s none of your business, Pussy. Besides, if you did, we’d have them hostile to *us*; and we shouldn’t be able to do any work,” said Aladdin. “They’ve begun already.”

Now that West African war-drum had been made to signal across estuaries and deltas. Number Five was forbidden to wake the diabolical engine within earshot of the school. But a deep devastating drone filled the passages, as McTurk and Beetle scientifically rubbed the top. Anon it changed into the blare of trumpets—of savage pursuing trumpets. Then, as McTurk slapped one side smooth with the blood of ancient sacrifice, the roar broke into short coughing howls such as the wounded gorilla throws in his native forest. These were followed

by the wrath of King—three steps at a time, up the staircase, with a dry whirr of the gown. Aladdin and company, listening, squeaked with excitement as the door crashed open, King stumbled into the darkness and cursed those performers by the gods of Balliol and quiet repose.

“Turned out for a week,” said Aladdin, holding the study door on the crack. “Key to be brought down to his study in five minutes. ‘Brutes! Barbarians! Savages! Children!’ He’s quite agitated. ‘Arrah, Patsy, mind the baby,’” he sang in a whisper as he clung to the door-knob, dancing a noiseless war-dance.

King went downstairs again, and Beetle and McTurk lit the gas to confer with Stalky. But Stalky had vanished!

“Looks like no end of a mess,” said Beetle, collecting his books and mathematical instrument-case. “A week in the form-rooms isn’t any ‘vantage to us.”

“Yes, but don’t you see that Stalky isn’t here, you owl?” said McTurk. “Take down the key, and look sorrowful. King ‘ll only jaw you for half an hour. I’m going to read in the lower form-room.”

“But it’s always me,” mourned Beetle.

“Wait till we see,” said McTurk hopefully. “I don’t know any more than you do what Stalky means, but it’s something. Go down and draw King’s fire. You’re used to it.”

No sooner had the key turned in the door than the lid of the coal-box, which was also the window-seat, lifted cautiously. It had been a tight fit, even for the lithe Stalky, his head between his knees, and his stomach under his right ear. From a drawer in the table he took a well-worn catapult, a handful of buck-shot, and a duplicate key of the study; noiselessly raised the window and kneeled by it, his face turned to the road, the wind-sloped trees, the dark levels of the Burrows, and the white line of breakers calling nine deep along the Pebble-ridge. Far down the steep-banked Devonshire lane he heard the husky hoot of the carrier’s horn. There was a ghost of melody in it, as it might have been the wind in a gin-bottle essaying to sing, “It’s a way we have in the Army.”

Stalky smiled a tight-lipped smile, and at extreme range opened fire: the old horse half wheeled in the shafts.

"Where be gwaine tu?" hiccupped Rabbits-Eggs. Another buck-shot tore through the rotten canvas tilt with a vicious *zipf*.

"*Habet!*" murmured Stalky, as Rabbits-Eggs swore into the patient night, protesting that he saw the "domned colleger" who was assaulting him.

"And so," King was saying in a high head-voice to Beetle, whom he had kept to play with before Manders minor, well knowing that it hurts a Fifth-form boy to be held up to a fag's derision—"And so, Master Beetle, in spite of all our verses which we are so proud of, when we presume to come into direct conflict with even so humble a representative of authority as myself, for instance, we are turned out of our studies, are we not?"

"Yes, sir," said Beetle, with a sheepish grin on his lips, and murder in his heart. Hope had nearly left him, but he clung to a well-established faith that never was Stalky so dangerous as when he was invisible.

"You are *not* required to criticise, thank you. Turned out of our studies, we are, just as though we were no better than little Manders minor. Only inky school-boys we are, and must be treated as such."

Beetle pricked up his ears, for Rabbits-Eggs was swearing savagely on the road, and some of the language entered at the upper sash. King believed in ventilation. He strode to the window, gowned and majestic, very visible in the gaslight.

"I zee 'un! I zee 'un!" roared Rabbits-Eggs, now that he had found a visible foe (another shot from the darkness above). "Yess, yeou, yeou long-nosed, fower-eyed, gingy-whiskered beggar! Yeu'm tu old for such goin's on. Aie! Poultice yeour nose, I tall'ee! Poultice yeour long nose!"

Beetle's heart leapt up within him. Somewhere, somehow, he knew Stalky moved behind these manifestations. There was hope and the prospect of revenge. He would embody the suggestion about the nose in deathless verse. King threw up the window and sternly rebuked Rabbits-Eggs. But the carrier was beyond fear or fawning. He had descended from the cart and was groping by the road-side.

It all fell swiftly as a dream. Manders minor raised his

hand to his head with a cry, as a jagged flint cannoned on to some fine tree-calf bindings in the book-shelf. Another quoited along the writing-table. Beetle made zealous feint to stop it, and in that endeavour overturned a student's lamp, which dripped, *viâ* King's papers and some choice books, greasily on to a Persian rug. There was much broken glass on the window-seat; the china basket—McTurk's aversion—cracked to flinders, had dropped her musk-plant and its earth over the red repp cushions; Manders minor was bleeding profusely from a cut on the cheekbone, and King, using strange words, every one of which Beetle treasured, ran forth to find the school-sergeant, that Rabbits-Eggs might be instantly cast into gaol.

"Poor chap!" said Beetle, with a false, feigned sympathy. "Let it bleed a little. That'll prevent apoplexy," and he held the blind head skilfully over the table, and the papers on the table, as he guided the howling Manders to the door.

Then did Beetle, alone with the wreckage, return good for evil. How, in that office, a complete set of Gibbon was scarred all along the back as by a flint; how so much black and copying ink came to be mingled with Manders' blood on the table-cloth; why the big gum-bottle, unstoppered, had rolled semicircularly across the floor, and in what manner the white china door-knob grew to be painted with yet more of Manders' gore, were matters which Beetle did not explain when the rabid King returned to find him standing politely over the reeking hearthrug.

"You never told me to go, sir," he said, with the air of Casabianca, and King consigned him to the outer darkness.

But it was to a boot-cupboard under the staircase on the ground-floor that he hastened to loose the mirth that was destroying him. He had not drawn breath for a first whoop of triumph when two hands choked him dumb.

"Go to the dormitory and get me my things. Bring 'em to Number Five lavatory. I'm still in tights," hissed Stalky, sitting on his head. "Don't run. Walk. I'm all right here."

But Beetle staggered into the form-room next door, and delegated his duty to the yet unenlightened McTurk with

an hysterical *précis* of the campaign thus far. So it was McTurk, of the wooden visage, who brought the clothes from the dormitory while Beetle panted on a form. Then the three buried themselves in Number Five lavatory, turned on all the taps, filled the place with steam, and dropped weeping into the baths, where they pieced out the war.

"*Moi! Je! Ich! Ego!*" gasped Stalky. "I waited till I couldn't hear myself think, while you played the drum. 'Hid in the coal-locker, and tweaked Rabbits-Eggs, and Rabbits-Eggs rocked King. Wasn't it beautiful? Did you hear the glass?"

"Why, he—he—he!" shrieked McTurk, one trembling finger pointed at Beetle.

"Why, I—I—I was through it all," Beetle howled. "In his study, being jawed."

"Oh, my soul!" said Stalky, with a yell, disappearing under water.

"The—the glass was nothing! Manders minor's head's cut open! La—la—lamp upset all over the rug. Blood on the books and papers! The gum! The gum! The gum!—The ink! The ink! The ink! Oh, Lo—ord!"

Then Stalky leaped out, all scarlet as he was, and shook Beetle into some sort of coherence; but his tale prostrated them afresh.

"I bunked for the boot-cupboard, the second I heard King go downstairs. Beetle tumbled in on top of me. The spare key's hid behind the loose board. There isn't a shadow of evidence," said Stalky. They were all chanting together.

"And he turned us out himself—himself—himself!" This from McTurk. "He can't begin to suspect us. Oh, Stalky, it's the loveliest thing we've ever done.

"Gum! Gum! Dollops of gum!" shouted Beetle, his spectacles gleaming through a sea of lather. "Ink and blood all mixed. I held the little beast's head all over the Latin proses for Monday. Golly, how the oil stunk! And Rabbits-Eggs told King to poultice his nose! Did you hit Rabbits-Eggs, Stalky?"

"Did I jolly well not? Tweaked him all over! Did you

hear him curse? Oh, I shall be sick in a minute if I don't stop."

But dressing was a slow process, because McTurk was obliged to dance when he heard that the musk-basket was broken, and, moreover, Beetle retailed all King's language with emendations and purple insets.

"Shockin'!" said Stalky, collapsing in a helpless welter of half-hitched trousers. "So dam' bad, too, for innocent boys like us! Wonder what they'd say at 'St. Winifred's, or The World of School.' By gum! That reminds me we owe the Lower Third one for assaultin' Beetle when he chivied Manders minor. Come on! It's an alibi, Samivel; and besides, if we let 'em off they'll be worse next time."

The Lower Third had set a guard upon their form-room for the space of a full hour, which to a boy is a lifetime. Now they were busy with their Saturday evening businesses—cooking sparrows over the gas on rusty nibs; brewing unholy drinks in gallipots; skinning moles with pocket knives; attending to paper trays full of silk-worms, or discussing the iniquities of their elders with a freedom, detail, and point that would have amazed their parents. The blow fell without warning. Stalky upset a form crowded with small boys among their own cooking utensils, McTurk raided the untidy lockers as a terrier digs at a rabbit-hole, while Beetle poured ink upon such heads as he could not appeal to with a Smith's Classical Dictionary. Three brisk minutes accounted for many silk-worms, pet larvæ, French exercises, school caps, half-prepared bones and skulls, and a dozen pots of home-made sloe jam. It was a great wreckage, and the form-room looked as though three conflicting tempests had smitten it.

"Phew!" said Stalky, drawing breath outside the door (amid groans of "Oh, you beastly ca-ads! You think yourselves awfully funny," and so forth). "*That's* all right. Never let the sun go down upon your wrath. Rummy little devils, fags. Got no notion o' combinin', though."

"Six of 'em sat on my head when I went in after Manders minor," said Beetle. "I warned 'em what they'd get."

"Yes, but they don't combine as *we* used to do. 'Member



when Blundell major came in and tried to slap McTurk's head for cheek at call-over? That was our second term."

"Your second, my first," said Beetle. "My hat! Wasn't Blundell major wrathful! I got hold of his legs and hung on, like Billy O!"

"Well, we tore the clothes off his back," said McTurk, reflectively. "We fought him from just after tea till prep. 'Member he tried to say it was a joke, and we half slew him! 'Never touched any one of us again."

"Any three o' those little beasts could have tackled us in the same way—if they only kept it up," said Stalky.

"Lucky job for us they don't," said Beetle, as they strolled along the corridor.

"'Everybody paid in full—beautiful feelin'," said McTurk absently. "Don't think we'd better say too much about King, though, do you, Stalky?"

"Not *much*. Our line is injured innocence, of course—same as when the Sergeant reported us on suspicion of smoking in the Bunkers. If I hadn't thought of buyin' the pepper and spillin' it all over our clothes, he'd have smelt us. King was gha-astly facetious about that. Called us 'bird-stuffers' in form for a week."

"Ah, King hates the Natural History Society because little Hartopp is president. Mustn't do anything in the Coll. without glorifyin' King," said McTurk. "But he must be a putrid ass, you know, to suppose at *our* time o' life we'd go out and stuff birds like fags."

"Poor old King!" said Beetle. "He's awf'ly unpopular in Common-room, and they'll chaff his head off about Rabbits-Eggs. Golly! How lovely! How beautiful! How holy! But you should have seen his face when the first rock came in! *And* the earth from the basket!"

So they were all stricken helpless for five minutes.

They repaired at last to Abanazar's study, and were received reverently,

"What's the matter?" said Stalky, quick to realise new atmospheres.

"You know jolly well," said Abanazar. "You'll be expelled if you get caught. King is a gibbering maniac."

"Who? Which? What? Expelled for how? We only played the war-drum. 'Got turned out for that already."

"Do you chaps mean to say you didn't make Rabbits-Eggs drunk and bribe him to rock King's rooms?"

"Bribe him? No, that I'll swear we didn't," said Stalky, with a relieved heart, for he loved not to tell lies. "What a low mind you've got, Pussy! We've been down having a bath. *Did* Rabbits-Eggs rock King? Strong, perseverin' man, King. Shockin'!"

"Awf'ly. King's frothing at the mouth. There's bell for prayers. Come on."

"Wait a sec.," said Stalky, continuing the conversation in a loud and cheerful voice, as they descended the stairs. "What did Rabbits-Eggs rock King for?"

"I know," said Beetle, as they passed King's open door. "I was in his study."

"Hush, you ass!" hissed the Emperor of China.

"Oh, he's gone down to prayers," said Beetle, watching the shadow of the housemaster on the wall. "Rabbits-Eggs was only a bit drunk, swearin' at his horse, and King jawed him through the window, and then, of course, he rocked King."

"Do you mean to say," said Stalky, "that King began it?"

King was behind them, and every well-weighed word went up the staircase like an arrow. "I can only swear," said Beetle, "that King cursed like a bargee. Simply disgustin'. I'm goin' to write to my father about it."

"Better report it to Mason," suggested Stalky. "He knows our tender consciences. Hold on a shake. I've got to tie my bootlace."

The other study hurried forward. They did not wish to be dragged into stage asides of this nature. So it was left to McTurk to sum up the situation beneath the guns of the enemy.

"You see," said the Irishman, hanging on the banister, "he begins by bullying little chaps; then he bullies the big chaps; then he bullies someone who isn't connected with the College, and then he catches it. Serves him jolly well right. . . . I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't see you were coming down the staircase."

The black gown tore past like a thunderstorm, and in its wake, three abreast, arms linked, the Aladdin Company rolled up the big corridor to prayers, singing with most innocent intention—

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

RUDYARD KIPLING.

*(To be continued.)*