



STRANDED!



HARD LUCK ON HORACE COKER!

(An Exciting Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

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STRANDED!

A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. on their Caravan Tour.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

Jays of the Road!

"WHO wouldn't go caravanning!"

"Oh dear!"
"What a life!"
"Oh swains!"

To judge by their remarks, the St. Jim's caravanners were growing exasperated.

And there was no mistake about it—they were.

The caravan was stuck fast.

There had been rain—plenty of rain. The rain had passed, and the weather was brighter and sunny again; but the lane the van was following showed the results of the recent downpour. It was a narrow lane; it was uphill; and the mud was deep and thick and sticky and clinging.

Circumstances, the boys, did his best. He pulled, and the caravanners shoved. Tom Merry and Mamma were at one wheel, Lowther and Blake at another. Herries and Digby had a wheel each. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed behind. And the caravan did not move.

The wheels had sunk in deep, muddy ruts, and looked as if they had settled there as a permanent arrangement. The caravanners laboured, and made remarks.

"P'ray exert yourselves, you fellows!" called out Arthur Augustus from behind.

"Are you exertin' yourself, Tom Mewwy?"

"Am!" was Tom Merry's reply.

Tom Merry was perspiring with his strenuous exertions, and Gussy's question seemed, to him, superfluous.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Shove, you ass!" gasped Blake.
"Use your biceps and not your jaw-bone!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Now, then, all together!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Go it!"

The caravanners put their beef into it, and the van moved a couple of inches. Then it settled a little deeper into the mire.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Ow!"

"Better take a rest," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I am gettin' feahfully muddly! We shall wessual a fwightful lot of bwushin' afteh this."

Tom Merry & Co. gathered round the van gasping. They needed a rest after their latest effort. Circumstances ceased to pull, and looked round at them reproachfully. He seemed to want to know what his masters considered they were up to.

"Blow the van!" said Manners fiercely. "Blow the mud! Blow the road! Blow everything!"

"Weally, Mamma——"

"And blow you!" said Manners crossly.

"I shall not reply to that remark, Mamma, as I considah it in the worst of taste!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "We shall wessual help to wemove the van. P'awwaps somebody had bettah go for help."

Tom Merry looked round the countryside in the hope of catching sight of some good-natured labourer in the fields who would lend a hand. But there was no one to be seen.

The lane was a short cut, a good distance from the high road, and the luckless caravanners really seemed to have landed on the loneliest spot in Dorsetshire.

There were fields and hedges and trees and hills in the distance, but there was no inhabitant to be seen.

Tom Merry pushed back his straw hat, and snopped his damp brow with a handkerchief.

"What a life!" he remarked.

"Patience, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Afteh all, it's all in the day's work, you know. P'robably somebody will come along soonah or laah."

"Talk of angels!" said Monty Lowther. "Here comes somebody!"

A pedestrian turned into the lane lower down, from a field-path hidden by a high hedge. He came up the steep lane towards the halted van, and the eyes of all the St. Jim's vanners turned on him at once.

He was a youth of sixteen or seventeen, very big and burly for his age, with strongly-marked features that were not exactly beautiful. There was something in his rugged face that caused Tom Merry to remark:

"I've seen that chap before somewhere."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on the new-comer scrutinisingly, and nodded.

"Yaas, watah! I have seen him somewhah."

"He'll lend us a hand, anyhow," said Herries.

The burly youth glanced at the caravan and the vanners as he came up, and smiled. Apparently he saw something amusing in the plight of the St. Jim's vanners.

"Stuck in the mud—what?" he asked, stopping.

"That's it!" said Tom.

"Yaas, watah!"

"My hat! You must be duffers!"

The St. Jim's vanners began to glare. They wanted assistance; and they would not have objected to sympathy; but they did not want criticism, and were not prepared to receive it politely.

But the burly youth went on, without waiting for their replies—which might have been pointed and emphatic.

"Haven't I seen you kids before somewhere?"

"I was just thinkin' I'd seen you somewhere," said Tom Merry. "Do you happen to belong to Greyfriars School? I think I've seen you there."

The burly youth nodded.

"I'm in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars!" he answered loftily.

"Bai Jove! I know you now!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You are Coker!"

"My name's Coker, certainly."

"Coker of the Fifth!" murmured Blake; and all the caravanners smiled. They remembered Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars now.

Coker of the Fifth looked them over. "I remember now," he said. "You're

the kids who came over from St. Jim's to play our juniors—Wharton and his fag cricket team. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," said Tom.
"I've seen you play," said Coker.
"You don't play a bad game, for fags. Not what I call 'cricket, of course. But not bad for fags."

"Bai Jove!"
"And we've seen you play cricket," remarked Monty Lowther. "Not what we call cricket. But not a bad game, for a fag's cricket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I didn't ask for any cheek!" said Tom of the Fifth, with a glare at the mascot of St. Jim's.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Would you mind lending us a hand, Coker, to get the van out of the mud? We can nearly manage it, and with a little help."

Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth gave a sniff.

"Don't put it like that!" he said. "I'll get the van out of the mud for you, if you like, if that's what you mean."

Evidently Coker of the Fifth regarded himself as one of those individuals who are born to command.

"Well, that will do, if you can manage it," said Tom good-humouredly. "Any old thing, so long as we get the old 'bus moving."

"In your man!" said Coker briskly. "Stand round and take my orders—do exactly as I tell you—and we'll get you going in two jiffies!"

And Horace Coker threw off his coat, pushed back his shirt-sleeves, and prepared for work.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Valuable Assistance!

TOM MERRY & Co. looked at Coker. They were glad of his help—or anybody's help—just then; but certainly Coker's method of offering assistance was neither grateful nor comforting. Still, it was said of old that it is not advisable to look a gift-horse in the mouth; so they gave Horace Coker his head, so to speak.

Certainly Coker was strong and sturdy enough to be of good use in such an emergency. There was plenty of muscle available, whatever might be said of the brains. Brains were not Coker's strong point—a fact of which he was blissfully ignorant.

Tom Merry & Co. remembered the remarks they had heard concerning Coker at Greyfriars, and they remembered the way he played cricket and football, though they had not had the honour of playing against him.

That remembrance was enough to enable them to "place" him intellectually, as it were. Still, it seemed probable that even an ass like Horace Coker would prove useful in so simple a task as shoving a van out of the mire, as only physical strength was needed.

Coker, having made his preparations, set to work. His first task seemed to be giving instructions, which the experienced caravaners really did not need.

"Now, then, get round the van and hold!"

"We are wound it already, Cokah!" cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Lay hold of the wheels, you—what's your name?"

"My name is D'Arcy, Cokah."

"You get to the horse's head, and pull him. See that he doesn't slack."

"Woolly, Cokah—"

"Go it, Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"But I should wostly be of more use shovin' behind than pullin' at the horse's head, Blake."

"Never mind; go it!"

"Oh, verwoy well!"

Arthur Augustus went to the horse's head, to keep Circumstances up to the mark.

"Lay hold, you kids!" commanded Coker. "Don't slack!"

"Look here—" began Herries.

"No back-chat, please!"

"What?"

"We're got to get through this job before sunset, said Coker earnestly. "Blessed if I ever saw such a set of noodles! Are you afraid of soiling your blessed lily fingers?"

"Look here—"

"Now, then, all together when I say 'Go!'" said Coker, taking hold of a wheel himself. "And mind you shove!"

"And mind how you shove!" said Tom Merry. "We're jolly close on the ditch!"

"Never mind the ditch," said Coker.

"The ditch is all right. I'm doing this job, and it won't go into the ditch. You're rather a young ass, Merry!"

"Thanks!"

"I speak as I find," said the Greyfriars senior cheerfully. "If I think a chap's an ass, I tell him so."

"Do you ever get your nose punched?" inquired Monty Lowther, with an air of friendly interest.

"What?"

"Shurrup, Monty! We're all ready, Coker!" said Tom Merry hastily.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pull that horse on, D'Arcy!"

"I'm pullin' him like anythin', deah boy!"

"Pull harder, then!"

"Bai Jove! I should be verwoy sorry to pull the poor animal's head off!"

"Rot!"

"Oh!"

"Now, then!" sang out Coker, matters being arranged to his satisfaction. "All together—go!"

Coker bent to his task, like Hercules to a thirteenth job. There was no doubt that Coker was a strong fellow. The addition of his strength made all the difference. The van moved at last—and moved quickly!

It was simply unfortunate that Coker had miscalculated a little, and that the van, once dislodged from the mire, lurched over heavily towards the ditch.

"There! Sho's going!" panted Coker.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

Crash!

A wheel went over the slope of the ditch, and the van lurched towards the hedge. Two or three caravaners jumped clear just in time, as the St. Jim's van toppled over.

Crash! Clang! Clatter! Smash!

A window went as the van crashed on the hedge across the ditch. Crockery inside seemed to be wildly jazzing, to judge by the sounds from the interior of the van.

Crash! Smash! Jingle! Bang!

Horace Coker had a narrow escape of being squashed into the muddy ditch under the van he had so successfully moved. Fortunately, he scrambled clear in time.

With two side-wheels deep in the ditch, the caravan rested on the hedge beyond at an angle of about forty-five.

The sounds that proceeded from the horse indicated that Circumstances did not find his new position comfortable. He was half in the ditch and half out, and struggling frantically, splashing water and mud on all sides.

The juniors surveyed the disaster with feelings too deep for words. The van was fairly planted now, and certainly the caravaners could not possibly get it out

with the assistance of half a dozen Cokers. It had moved at last, there was no doubt about that; but they wished it hadn't.

They looked at Coker.
Coker looked at them.

"Well," he said—"well, of all the dummys—"

"What!" yelled Blake.

"Of all the crass idiots—"

"Are you talking about yourself?"

"I'm talking to you!" roared Coker.

"What what you've done!"

"What—what—what we've done!" said Tom Merry-darling. "Why, you did it!"

"Don't be a cheeky young idiot! You seem to have fairly smashed up your things inside, and I can't say I'm sorry for you. Why, the Remove kids at Greyfriars wouldn't have played the goat like that. Blessed if I ever saw such a set of crass idiots!"

"Well, my hat!"

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for once excited out of the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. "You crass deffah, you have wrecked our van!"

"So that's your thanks, is it?" sneered Coker. "Well, you've made a precious mess of things. Not much good trying to help silly kids who are too silly to help themselves. Go and eat cake!"

Horace Coker threw on his coat wrathfully, and turned away. Evidently he considered that he had done his best, and found it a thankful task. He started up the lane, sniffing.

That was a little too much for the patience of the St. Jim's caravaners. They were wrecked and stranded, and Coker had done it. Jack Blake made a jump after Coker, and the other fellows jumped after Blake. Before the great man of Greyfriars had taken three strides he was collared on all sides by indignant caravaners.

"Bump!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Coker, in surprise and wrath. "What the thump—Why, I'll—I'll—I'll—Yooooop!"

"Bump!"

"There!" gasped Blake, as Coker of the Fifth sprawled on the muddy ground and roared. "Now perhaps you'll stop to think next time before you wreck a caravan!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Coker scrambled up. His rugged face was crimson with wrath and indignation. Without stopping to speak, he charged at the caravaners.

Coker did not count odds, but the odds were three to one.

The genius of Greyfriars found himself rolling in the mud again, and this time he did not get up so quickly.

"Shove him into the ditch!" shouted Herries. "Ho's wrecked us, the silly chump! Shove him in after the van!"

"Good egg!"

"Roll him over!"

Coker staggered to his feet.

"You—you—ungrateful rotters!" he gasped. "You—you—you—"

"Collah him!"

"Bump him!"

Coker fled.

CHAPTER 3.

Stranded Caravaners!

"STRANDED, by gunn!"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"What a go!"

Tom Merry & Co. gathered distally round the upset van as Coker's footsteps died away up the hilly lane.

The St. Jim's van was fairly stuck now, and it was impossible, at a glance, for the juniors to get it out of the ditch.

Without Coker's valuable assistance the van would, doubtless, have been got going sooner or later. But Coker's assistance had settled the matter. There was no possibility now of getting the van going. Coker, like Caesar of old, had come, and seen, and conquered.

Blake and Dig released the horse, and circumstances began to crop the grass beside the lane with a contented air. Circumstances did not seem to mind. Perhaps the disaster was merely an incident to him in his eventful career as a caravan horse.

"Well, what the thump are we going to do?" asked Manners.

"Echo answers what," grunted Lowther.

"Let's go after that dangerous maniac and slaughter him!" was George Herries' suggestion.

"That wouldn't get the van out of the ditch," remarked Tom Merry.

"Well, it would be some satisfaction."

"No time now to indulge in luxuries. We can't move the blessed old bus without help—a good deal of help!" said Tom.

"We've got to get assistance. There must be a village somewhere."

"Pewpaws—" began Arthur Augustus, turning his eyesless thoughtfully on the slanting van.

"Well—"

"Pewpaws if we got a plank undah it from the othah side, to use as a levah, we—"

"Have you got a plank about you?" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I am not likely to have a plank about me."

"Then don't talk out of your neck, old chap."

"I was makin' a suggestion, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "And I repeat that if we got a plank undah it from the othah side—"

"Where are we to get a plank from, even it was any good!" roared Blake.

"I weally do not know, Blake; but I wish you wouldn't roar at me. It throws me into a luttah when a fellow woars at me."

"Kill him, somebody!" growled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Easy does it," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Mustn't get waxy over an accident. Let's think what's to be done."

"I was thinkin', Tom Mewwy—"

"You exaggerate, old chap," said Lowther. "Your mental processes really can't be described as thinking."

"I wegard that we mark as aspine, Lowthah!"

"Why grouse?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "We can't move the bus, and we shall have to get help. Somebody had better stay with the van and guard it while we look for a village."

"If we can find a village we can get some lunch," said Herries, more anxiously. "It's past two, and I'm jolly hungry!"

"Hame here!" said Dig.

"But where is there a blessed village?" asked Blake, with a desperate glance round the solitary landscape.

"That as Coker must have been going somewhere. Let's go in the same direction. Who's coming to stay with the van?" asked Tom Merry.

There was a unanimous silence. All the caravaners were thinking of a cosy village inn and a cherry lunch, which they felt they deserved after their exertions of the morning. Nobody wanted to be stranded with the "bus."

"After all, it will be all right here," remarked Blake. "There isn't a soul to

be seen. We can take the horse and the bike with us, and the village mayn't be far off. The van can look after itself for a bit. It can't get walked off, anyhow."

"And I'm hungry!" observed Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then let's get on," said Tom Merry. And, having locked the door of the overturned van, the St. Jim's juniors started up the hilly lane, leading the horse and wheeling the bike, and feeling, generally, that the chief thing to be considered just then was lunch.

A tramp of a quarter of a mile, however, revealed the fact that the landscape was not quite so solitary as it looked. The juniors came quite suddenly upon a cosy little village, with thatched roofs and red chimney-pots glimmering in the sun. But the most agreeable part of the view was a red-roofed inn, with a swinging sign that announced that it was the Waggon and Horses, and that refreshment could be had for man and beast.

"Bai Jove! That will suit us!" said Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "Will it suit you, Gussy?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"You see what the sign says. Now, although you are old in wisdom, dear boy, you are not old in years, and you cannot claim to be a man. If you are going to present yourself there as a beast—"

"Bai Jove! If you are gone to make wotten jokes, Lowthah, when we are all as hungry as hantahs—"

"Give us a rest, Monty!" implored Manners. "You should do these things after meals, not before. Come in, you chaps!"

The caravaners marched in. A plump and smiling landlady met them in the dusky entrance. And in a very short time the caravaners were sitting down in a dusky, old, patterned room to an extremely substantial meal.

And as the meal progressed frowns disappeared and smiles took their place. Once more the St. Jim's caravaners fell on good terms with themselves and all the world, and they even agreed that it was not such a bad thing, once in a way, to be stranded.

CHAPTER 4.

Coker is Wrathy!

"ROT!"

That expressive word, pronounced in a loud and emphatic tone, reached the ears of Tom Merry & Co. as they were chatting lazily after an ample lunch in the Waggon and Horses.

They ceased chatting, and exchanged glances. For they recognised that powerful voice. It was the voice of Horace James Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School.

"Cokah, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

The juniors glanced towards the half-open door. From the dusky passage outside the voice proceeded, and it continued in full tones that could have been heard all over the Waggon and Horses.

"Rot! I repeat Potter, that it's silly rot! It's no good arguing with me, Greene! I say rot, and I mean rot!"

"You talk rot, you mean!" asked another voice.

"Look here, Potter—"

"Easy does it, Coker!" said a third voice. "Don't lift the roof off, old chap! We're not deaf."

"You're worse than deaf; you're silly!" retorted Coker. "I say it's utter

rot! That's my opinion, for what it's worth!"

"And I wonder how much that is!" murmured Monty Lowther. And the chums of St. Jim's grinned. They found Coker, rather entertaining. Evidently the great man of Greyfriars was a little excited over something. Apparently the universe was not being run to his entire satisfaction.

"We've been here," continued Coker, "three days. We've watched them playing cricket—what these benighted villagers call cricket. I couldn't feel sorry for them. You've not the way that fellow Hodge handles a bat. Like a clothes-prop. Pah!"

"He isn't a bad bat for a country chap," said Potter.

"That remark, Potter, shows how much you know about batting. And that's nothing—less than nothing, if possible."

"Anyhow, I play in the First Eleven at Greyfriars," said Potter testily, "and they wouldn't play you in the Remove team, and you know it."

"And why?" roared Coker.

"Because you don't know a wicket from a worsted sock."

"No. Because Wingate of the Sixth is jealous of my form—"

"Rot!"

"Because he's afraid of being put in the background by a really first-class cricketer—"

"Rate!"

"And because of his ignorance of the game. His utter ignorance, Potter, is proved by the fact that he plays you in the First Eleven."

"Oh, my hat!"

The St. Jim's juniors chuckled. They remembered having seen Potter and Greene of the Fifth at Greyfriars. The two were chums of Coker's. How anybody could be chummy with Coker was a deep mystery to the St. Jim's juniors. Perhaps he had his good qualities somewhere. If so, he did not display them on the surface.

"Hodge!" repeated Coker, in tones of deep contempt. "Why, he can't bat for toffee. Look at the way he missed that ball sent him—"

"It didn't go within yards of him. I thought you were aiming at the haystack in the field!"

"You silly ass!"

"Thanks! Now, shall we have some ginger-pop?"

"Hotter ginger-pop! I'm talking cricket. The cheek of it!" resumed Coker, in tones of thrilling indignation.

"I offer my services to a village team—I, a public school club, and a first-class cricketer!—and they have the dashed impudence to refuse—rudely!"

"They weren't exactly rude," murmured Potter.

"What did that fellow Hodge say?" demanded Coker. "He said he'd play me, only he was afraid I should brain the wicket-keeper if I batted, and brain the rest of the chaps if I bowled! Do you call that polite?"

"Ahem!"

"Bai Jove! Cokah seems to had some plain English!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Ewona what membah seem' of Cokah, I should that that chap Hodge knows something."

"I joined them at practice," continued Coker, "from sheer kindness. I saw that they were a gang of buccolic fumblers, and I thought I'd give them some tips about real cricket. And that's my reward!—One of them actually got in the way of my bat, and howled like thunder when he got a clump with it! What did he expect, I'd like to know!"

"He'd have known what to expect



Crash! A wheel went over the slope of the ditch, and the van lurched towards the hedge. The caravaners jumped clear just in time as the St. Jim's van toppled over. Crash! Clang! Clatter! Smash! (See chapter 2.)

if he'd known you better, old scout. He won't get within range of your bat again."

"If you're going to talk cheeky rot, Potter—"

"I'm going to have some ginger-pop, when you've done blowing off steam, old top. Never mind the Tatham cricketers. After all, we didn't come here to play cricket."

"The bat they lent me was a rotter," said Coker. "If I'd had my own bat I'd have shown them something. But they've actually refused my offer to play for them in their next match—rudely! That's what I can't get over. I feel that it's up to me to teach that fellow Hodge a lesson!"

"Oh, let him rest!"

"I won't interrupt their game," said Coker, considerably. "It isn't cricket, but they call it cricket, and I'll let 'em finish. Then I'll drop on Hodge—"

"Look here—"

"And thrash him—"

"He's rather a hefty chap, Coker."

"If you think I can't thrash him, —"

"Well, I don't see any need to row the chap," said Greene, pacifically.

"Go on a walking tour here, not on a free-fighting start. Let him alone."

"We've been long enough here, in Tatham," said Potter. "Let's get on our way this afternoon—"

"We're staying here some days," said Coker.

"Oh!"

"I'm going to lick Hodge!"

"Oh!"

"Then I'm going to mop them up at cricket," said Coker, firmly. "I'll make

them play me, and mop them up—that will be a lesson to them!"

"Playing on eleven all on your own?"

"I can raise a team somehow. You two fellows will do, for a start. You're good enough to play these rural yokings!"

"Oh cwmbs!"

"I'll get on the telephone to some chaps—Fitzgerald and Hilton are staying somewhere in Dorset, and I can get in touch with Hobson of the Shell."

"There isn't a telephone for miles and miles."

"I'm going to mop them up at cricket!" repeated Coker. "That's what they want, and that's what they're going to have!"

"They mayn't agree—"

"Hodge will agree, or I'll thrash him again!"

"You haven't thrashed him once yet."

"I'm going to!"

"Oh dear!"

"We'll have some ginger-pop," said Coker, more amicably. "We'll talk it over, about the eleven. Come in here!"

Three big Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars marched into the raftered room where the caravaners were sipping coffee after lunch. Coker started a little as he saw the seven smiling faces. Potter and Greene nodded to the juniors, and Coker frowned loftily.

The three sat at a table by the window, and ginger-beer was brought to them. Tom Merry & Co. rose, and Tom settled the account with the landlord. The vanners' next step was to get assistance in rescuing the caravan from the ditch into which Coker's valued assistance had landed it. As they left the coffee-room, Coker's loud voice was

heard. Over his ginger-pop he was discussing his plans.

"There's Hilton and Fitz—and I think Tomkinson is somewhere about. Hobson of the Shell will jump at the chance—and there's Stewart, too. I'm pretty sure I can get a full team of Greyfriars fellows when I get on the telephone. Of course, they'll rally round and back me up—no doubt at all about that. And then—"

Tom Merry & Co. quitted the inn, and the rest of Horace Coker's remarks were lost to them. They did not envy Potter and Greene, who had to listen to the rest.

"Look here, there's no hurry about the old 'bus," remarked Jack Blake. "Let's have a look at the cricket, and if there's going to be a fight I don't see why we should miss it—what?"

"I was just thinking so," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Was, watah!"

All the caravaners were of the same opinion. They were not sorry that they had been stranded for a while in that quiet corner of Dorsetshire. Horace Coker, of Greyfriars, made Tatham quite entertaining.

The village green was across the little street, and on the green a number of youthful cricketers were at practice. Some of the villagers were gathered on the seats under the big trees by the edge of the green, watching them. Tom Merry & Co. joined the onlookers.

There were a dozen or so of the cricketers, some of them in flannels. There were no nets, but a number of small boys chased the ball when it was necessary to return it from star. The

pitch was not all that could be desired; it contrasted with the general stretch as smooth as a billiard-table, to which the juniors were accustomed at St. Jim's. But, such as it was, the Tatcham fellows were playing very good cricket on it.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on with interest.

The grand old game interested them at any time, and they had not seen much of it during their caravan tour. One tall fellow of about eighteen, whom his companions addressed alternately as Harry and as Hodge, was apparently skipper of the village team. He handled his bat remarkably well; though, as the juniors noted, some of the bowling was very good indeed.

"So that's Hodge," murmured Manners, "I fancy Coker will have all his work cut out if he's going to lick that chap."

"The silly ass!" said Tom. "The fellow looks good-natured enough. What does Coker want to row with him for?"

"His majesty is offended!" grinned Towther.

"Hallo! Here comes the leather!"

Harry Hodge had smitten the ball with a mighty smite, and it came whizzing towards the St. Jim's juniors, who were standing well away from the pitch. Tom Merry made a jump and threw up his hands.

"Well caught!" exclaimed Blake.

A goldsmith was running up, and Tom returned the ball to him, with a smile. Then he rubbed his hand.

"That was wathah a good catch, deah boy!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! It would be wathah a good ideah to get some cricket heah, if we had our things with us. I did not bring my bat in the caravan, howehah!"

"And I forgot to put in the cricket pitch," said Monty Louther regretfully.

"Wah!"

"Hallo! Here comes Coker!"

"Now look out for the circus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of St. Jim's were very much on the alert as Horace Coker of Greysfriars strode on the village green, followed—reluctantly—by Potter and Greene.

CHAPTER 5.

Coker on the War-path.

HARRY HODGE tucked his bat under his arm, and came off the pitch. Most of the village cricketers followed him; the practice was over. Coker & Co. had been looking on—Coker very grimly, and his comrades rather uneasily. Wrathful as he was, Horace Coker would not interrupt the cricket. Now that it was over, however, he strode to intercept the captain of the Tatcham crowd.

He pushed his way through the Tatcham fellows, and met Hodge face to face.

Big and burly as Horace Coker was, Hodge had the advantage of him in that respect. He was bigger and burlier, and he looked at Coker from a superior insight, with a good-natured grin.

"Step!" said Coker.

Hodge stopped.

"What be you wanting?" he inquired.

"You've cheeked me," said Coker.

Hodge's grin widened.

"I'm going to lick you!"

"You can't do it, kid," said Harry Hodge good-naturedly. "But if I've hurt your feelings, I'm sorry. There! I was only joking. But you can't play cricket, you know!"

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"Where I come from," said Coker, "we play cricket—play it, you understand. I was going to give you silly fumbles some tips about the game. Now I won't!"

"Nerer mind!" grinned Hodge. "You're taught us already how to bowl at a haystack, if we want to."

There was a chortle from the Tatcham fellows, and the crimson in Horace Coker's ruddy face deepened.

"You cheeky cad!" he roared.

"Look here—"

"Put up your hands!"

"Coker, old man—" urged Greene.

"For goodness' sake, don't let's have a row here!" implored Potter.

Coker did not heed.

He was prancing up to the big Tatcham fellow with his hands in the air and a very warlike expression on his face. Coker meant business.

"Harry Hodge gave ground."

It was pretty clear that he was not afraid of Coker; but he did not want trouble with the wrathful Horace.

"Now, look here, sir—" he began.

Clump!

One of Coker's windmill fists dabbed on Hodge's nose, and cut short his expostulation.

Then Hodge's hands came up fast enough.

"Well, if you will 'ave it!" he said.

And he sailed in.

What followed was extremely interesting to behold. It may have been interesting to undergo, but it certainly was not enjoyable. At all events, Coker did not look like a fellow who was enjoying himself.

As had happened many a time in his stormy career, Horace James Coker had bitten off more than he could conveniently masticate.

The big Dorsetshire lad simply walked over him.

On the point of science they were about equal. Coker prided himself on being a boxer. But Coker prided himself on many things without adequate grounds. As a matter of fact, what he did not know about boxing would have filled large volumes. Hodge was equally unacquainted with the scientific side of the noble art of self-defence. So it was a matter of hammer-and-tongs.

At hammer-and-tongs Coker was quite good, if he was not outclassed; but on the present occasion he was very much outclassed.

Hodge was bigger and heavier, and longer in the reach. Work in the fields in the open air had given him muscles of iron. Coker, much to his surprise, found himself facing a sort of human Tank.

But he stood up gamely.

Coker lacked many things, but he did not lack pluck. He had plenty of that— heaps of it. And he stood up to the big fise that beat like flails, and came on again and again after he was beaten—if he had only known it.

The Tatcham crowd were grinning round, and the St. Jim's juniors were interested spectators. Nobody supposed for a moment that Coker had a chance of victory; but the spectators could not help admiring his pluck and determination.

Coker fared badly; and he would have fared worse if the good-natured Hodge had not spared him a good deal. But Harry Hodge seemed contented with thumping Coker off whenever he came too close—certainly, his thumps were very energetic.

Three Coker had been down, and up again. A fourth time he went down, and lay gasping.

Potter ran to help him.

"Chuck it, old man!" murmured Potter.

Coker spluttered.

"Do you think I'm licked, you ass?"

"I know you are, old top!"

"That only shows what a silly chump you are, George Potter!"

"Look here, old chap, he's too big for you," expostulated Greene.

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

Coker sat up dizzily.

"Bai Jove! That uttah sas him plenty of pluck!" remarked Augustus.

"He's goin' on, bai Jove!"

"Silly ass!" commented Blake.

The Fifth-Former of Greysfriars staggered to his feet. He was feeling decidedly groggy, but he was game to the last.

"Come on!" he gasped.

Harry Hodge kept his hands down.

"Oh, drop it!" he said. "Can't you see you're licked!"

"Come on, you cheeky rotter!"

Coker tottered to the attack. Hodge did not thump him again; he did not need thumping. He took Coker in his powerful grasp, swept him off his feet, and sat him down with a bump on the green. There was a hoarse laugh as Coker bumped and roared.

Then Harry Hodge walked away with his friends, leaving Coker gasping.

"Ow! Ow! Ait! Yooop! Groooch!" spluttered Coker lazily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter and Greene, grinning, helped up the Greysfriars champion. Coker leaned heavily on them, breathing in jerks. He blinked round in search of Harry Hodge, whose tall form was disappearing down the village street.

"Ow! Where is he!"

"He! Who?" growled Potter.

"The chawbacon I was licking, of course! Where is he?"

"If you mean the chawbacon who was licking you, he's gone."

"Oh, the rotten funk!"

"Eh?"

"I was just going to finish him off!" gasped Coker. "Fancy a fellow running away like that!"

"Running away!" said Greene blankly.

"Still, perhaps he's had enough," said Coker generously. "He put up a good fight, and I don't want to be hard on him. Come on! I want to get my nose bathed, and there's something the matter with my eye. That chap was rather hefty; and it wasn't an easy job licking him, I can tell you!"

And Coker walked off with his friends, who did not speak. They couldn't. Coker of the Fifth had taken their breath away.

CHAPTER 6.

No Go!

"Bai Jove! That fellow Coker has taken the whole cake!"

That was Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy's opinion, and his own, fully agreed. They certainly considered that Coker of the Greysfriars Fifth had taken the whole cake. Having been completely licked in the scrap, he had walked away with the happy conviction that he was the victor; and it was very like Horace Coker, and very entertaining.

"Now, about that blessed old 'bus," said Tom Merry. "I dare say there's a wheelwright in the village, and he can help us. We'll leave the horse and the bike at the inn, and come back for supper—what?"

"Good!" said Blake. "I dare say circumstances won't mind being

stranded as long as the oats hold out. Let's look for the wheel Johnny."

The caravanners strolled down the village street, which was dotted with straggling cottages and a few little shops. A red glow from a dark interior announced a forge, and they decided to ask there for the help they needed with the van. A powerful young fellow in a black apron was handling a big hammer when the juniors looked in. He glanced at the names and smiled.

"That's Arthur. That's Hodge!" ejaculated the young man.

"Harry Hodge was out of fannels now, and in his working clothes. He looked more hefty than ever as a blacksmith, and the juniors could not help smiling at the idea of the Greysfriars Fifth-Former tackling him in combat.

"Anything I can do for you, gentlemen?" asked Hodge civilly.

Tom Merry explained.

Hodge listened, and nodded.

"That's all right," he said. "Feyther and me, we're the only smiths and wheelwrights for miles around. If there's any damage to your caravan, sir, we can mend it for you."

"I think one of the wheels is a bit awry," said Tom. "But the trouble is getting it out of the ditch."

"Feyther and me'll come along when we've done a job we're on now, if you like."

"Thanks! We'll wait, then."

"Yass, watah!"

The St. Jim's juniors waited at the entrance to the forge. The elder Hodge came in with a horse to be shod, and the juniors watched the operation with interest. After it was over they started for the spot where the caravan had been left with the two smiths.

"The St. Jim's caravan was still at the left it—with two wheels deep in the mud of the ditch, slanting across to the hedge. Harry Hodge whistled as he looked at it, and his father blinked at it seriously.

"What about getting it out!" asked Tom.

"Mr. Hodge nodded slowly.

"I could borrow some horses from the farm and pull it out," he said. "The question is—what's the damage? I'll see."

The blacksmith made an examination of the stank side of the van, and shook his head.

"There's a bad twist there!" he said.

"But you can mend it!" asked Blake rather dismally.

"Oh, yea, when I get it to my shop! I'll manage it somehow!" said the blacksmith. "It will have to go on three wheels there! Then I'll get that wheel off, sir, and tackle it!"

"How long will it take?"

"Can't say, exactly, but you might have it in two or three days."

"My hat!"

The caravanners looked at one another. Evidently the little village of Tatcham was to be their headquarters for a few days, owing to the never-to-be-forgotten assistance rendered by Horace Coker of Greysfriars.

"His feelings towards Coker at that point were somewhat Humish.

"A hurry to get on, sir?" asked Hodge.

"Well, not exactly," said Tom Merry. "We've got a good bit of the vacation still in front of us. All serious; it can't be helped! We'll see about putting up in the village for a few days!"

"You can leave it to us, if you like," said Mr. Hodge. "We'll have it to the shop before dark, somehow."

"Thank you!"

And, leaving the caravan in charge of the two smiths, Tom Merry & Co. walked back to the village.

The westward journey of the caravanners had been interrupted; but it could not be helped, so they took it as cheerfully as possible.

"After all, it won't hurt us to stay around here for a few days!" remarked Herries. "It's a beautiful spot, and there's a jolly good grub at that inn!"

"Coker seems to be staying there!" said Digby. "Suppose we call on him and give him a jolly good hiding for snatching up the van for us!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good whesse! Only, I think Coker's had enough hidings for one day!" he said. "It will take him some time to recover from what the blacksmith chap gave him!"

"Yass, watah! Pewraps we had better let Cokah off!"

The caravanners arrived at the Waggon and Horses, where they found it easy enough to engage rooms for their stay in Tatcham. Few visitors came to that out-of-the-way spot, and they had the inn to themselves, excepting for the Greysfriars walking-party and the natives who came in. At supper the St. Jim's juniors had the pleasure of seeing Coker & Co. again. Supper was served at a big table in the old raftered room, and the St. Jim's juniors and the Greysfriars seniors sat down to it together.

Horace Coker eyed them rather morosely.

He was not looking his best.

Harry Hodge had not hit as hard as he could have hit, but he had certainly hit hard; and Coker's rugged features showed the results. They looked more rugged than ever. His nose, especially, was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, as Monty Lowther postively remarked.

"You kids staying here?" Coker asked rather gruffly across the table. He seemed to think it rather a nerve for anybody to stay at the inn without his lordly will and pleasure being consulted.

"Oh, yea!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Aren't you caravanning!"

"We were—until a stray lunatic shoved our van into a ditch! Now we've got to wait while the wheel's mended."

"So it's damaged, is it?" said Coker. "Must say it serves you right for your case idiocy! I tried to help you; but there's no helping born idiots!"

"Don't give Coker any of that pie, Potter!" said Monty Lowther.

Potter stared at him.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"You heard what he said—there's no helping born idiots!"

Potter grinned.

Horace Coker held up a substantial forefinger and shook it at Monty Lowther.

"I don't want any fag cheeks!" he said warningly. "I may as well mention that I don't stand anything of the kind! If you ask Wharton or Cherry at Greysfriars they'll tell you how I keep fags in order!"

The St. Jim's juniors chuckled. Whatever Coker did in term-time at his own school, it struck them as queer that he should suppose that he could give orders to a party of almost strangers at an inn. But Horace Coker evidently fancied himself as monarch of all he surveyed wherever he found himself. It was a case of Coker first and the rest nowhere—in Coker's opinion. But Coker's opinions generally were peculiar to himself.

"Well, what are you grinning at!" demanded Coker abruptly.

"Bai Jova! I wasn't grinnin', Cokah! I was smilin'! And if you are curious on the subject, I will mention that I was smilin' at a silly ass!"

"At a howling chump!" said Tom Merry.

"At a blithering jabbercock!" said Blake.

Coker half rose from his seat.

"For goodness' sake," granted Potter, "don't kick up a shindy in the dining-room, Coker! We've fed up!"

"I'm not going to be checked by fags!" snorted Coker.

But he sat down again, and did not condescend to bestow any further attention on Tom Merry & Co. After supper the chums of St. Jim's walked down to the forge to see how the caravan was getting on; and they did not see Coker again till the next morning.

CHAPTER 7.

A Sporting Offer!

TOM MERRY & CO. spent the following morning in rambling around the village of Tatcham and punting on the stream near the village. But they did not forget the "old bus" at the village forge, and when they came back to dinner they looked in at Mr. Hodge's place to see the caravan. The St. Jim's van was in the yard next to the forge, propped on three wheels, the fourth being off, and Harry Hodge at work upon it. The young smith grinned a welcome to the caravanners.

Tom Merry & Co. chatted with him for a few minutes; they rather liked the sturdy young smith, who seemed to be a good workman as well as a good cricketer. They were about to leave when Horace Coker of Greysfriars strode into the yard.

Harry Hodge looked at Coker rather curiously. His first impression was that Coker had come there looking for more trouble; and he did not want to interrupt his work to pitch Coker out. But the great Horace—fortunately for himself, perhaps—was quite genial.

"Good-morning, Hodge!" he said cheerily, only deigning to cast a frowning glance for a moment at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Hodge. "We had a bit of a tussle yesterday!"

said Coker sabbly.

"We did!" agreed the smith.

"No malice, I hope!" said Coker.

"None on my side, I assure you!"

"Nor on mine, sir!" said Hodge.

"That's good! I like a chap who can stand up to a licking and not bear malice afterwards!" said Coker heartily.

Harry Hodge blinked at him.

He did not quite understand the drift of Coker's remark, which made the St. Jim's juniors smile. However, Coker appeared to be quite cordial, and the smith was willing to let it go at that.

"Yea!" asked Coker, as genially as ever.

"But; mending a wheel."

"Now, about cricket, Hodge!"

"What about cricket?" asked the blacksmith, with a smile.

"You play a sort of game in this village!" remarked Coker.

"We play cricket."

"Yes, I know you call it cricket! Not quite what we call cricket at Greysfriars! Still, you're a liberty to call it cricket!"

Coker was being courteous now—the Coker brand of courtesy. "You passed some remarks on my cricket when I joined you at practice. Don't think I'm annoyed, I'm not. I can make full allowance for your ignorance of the game!"

"Oh!" said Hodge.

He gave Coker a rather long look, and then turned to his labours again. It really did not matter much if Coker ran on; he could go on mending the caravan-wheel while Horace talked. Harry Hodge

had the patient good-temper which often accompanies great physical strength. Which, again, was rather fortunate for Horace Coker.

"I admit I was a bit cross yesterday," said Coker frankly, "really shouldn't have pitched into you otherwise, Hodge."

"I was afraid I'd hit you rather hard."

"Not at all."

"Well, so much the better; I'm rather a hard hitter when I get angry, and I was rather afraid that I had laid you up."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the caravanners; they simply could not help it. The bare idea of Horace Coker having laid up the rumi Hercules was too much for them.

Coker stared round at the juniors.

"What's that you about?" he demanded. "You shut up! I don't allow cheeky jags to crackle at me I can tell you! Now, Hodge, I'm going to make you a sporting offer."

"Are you, sir?" said Hodge, in surprise.

"Yes. You think you can play cricket."

"Well, I certainly think so," assented the young smith.

"I don't blame you," said Coker kindly. "You've never seen real cricket played, so how are you to know? Now, I'm going to make you an offer. You play games on Saturday afternoon. I believe I'm going to get a team of Greyfriars fellows here, and play you a few. Of course, we shall walk all over your crowd; I don't make any secret of that. I don't suppose you'll take a single run in either innings. But you'll see some good cricket. Got that?"

"My word!" said Harry Hodge.

"Now, what Saturday will suit you?" asked Coker.

Coker had settled in his mind that the match was going to take place. Apparently he did not consider it necessary for it to be settled in the Tatham captain's mind, too. But Harry Hodge, only smiled.

"If you can make it this Saturday, so much the better," continued Coker.

"You see, my friends and I are on a walking tour in Dorsetshire, and we don't want to waste too much time in this benighted hole!"

"This what?"

"Benighted hole."

"Do you mean this village?"

"That's it!"

Hodge looked at Coker across the damaged wheel. Coker was smiling genially, and evidently had his best manners on. What his worst manners might possibly be like the young smith could not guess.

"We want to get on," went on Coker cheerily, "but that match must come off first. Can you make it this Saturday? If you've got a match on with some other blessed stick-in-the-mud village, you can put it off, of course."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, almost orotomene.

"I wonder that Coker isn't lynched every day at Greyfriars!"

"I wonder that chap doesn't punch his nose," growled Jack Blake. "I know I would."

"Yass, wathiah!"

But Harry Hodge did not punch Coker's nose. He only looked at him with curious interest.

"If we had a match with some other village, I'm afraid we couldn't put it off," he said; "but as it happens, we haven't. I'll speak to the other fellows, if you like, and see if we can fix it up."

"Oh, they'll agree!" said Coker.

"You don't get a chance every day of playing a public school eleven."

"Do your friends play cricket like you?" asked Hodge.

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"Well, not all of them—some of them are not quite up to my mark, of course. I'm rather unique at Greyfriars, for my cricket."

"I think you must be, from what I've seen of it."

"As I said, I don't make any secret that you won't have the ghost of a chance," said Coker pleasantly. "Still, it will be an experience for you to meet players of my calibre—quite a new experience."

"That's quite true."

"Then it's a go?"

Harry Hodge reflected, smiling a little.

"After all, it will be as good as practice," he said at last. "I don't see why not. Yes, I'll arrange the match, if you like."

"As good as practice!" repeated Coker. "I don't quite see what you mean, Hodge."

"Never mind, we'll play," said the smith. "Stumps pitched at two—will that suit you?"

"Certainly."

"Then you can get your team together, and we'll try to give you a good match," said Hodge.

Coker grinned.

"Put your beef into it!" he said. "You won't hate an earthly; in fact, I don't think the match will take an hour. I don't mind telling you that."

"I'm sure it won't, if your friends play cricket like you!" answered the smith.

"You're beginning to tumble to my quality as a cricketer—what?" smiled Coker. "That does you credit. Well, to-ta! I must get along to lunch!"

And Coker walked out of the yard quite satisfied. Harry Hodge glanced at the caravanners, who were grinning.

"You know that young gentleman?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" answered Tom Merry. "We play a junior team of cricketers at his school. They're not like Coker, though; they can play."

"I shouldn't have thought anybody played cricket like that young gentleman."

"Never heard of anybody who does. Yes, there's a Grand of the Shell at his school; but a bit like Coker at cricket. Never heard of anybody else. But if he gets together a team of Greyfriars men you'll want to pull up your socks," said Tom. "They're not all duds like Coker. We'll jolly well come along and see the match."

"Yass, wathiah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. walked along to the inn to lunch, and laid the pleasure of Coker's company there. Potter and Greene were being informed, at lunch, of the arrangements their friend and leader had made; and they did not seem so satisfied as Coker.

"We don't want to hang out here over the week-end!" Potter said rebelliously.

"We do!" Coker assailed him.

"We came on a walking tour!" grunted Greene.

"A little cricket makes a variety."

"We've got a lot of Dorset to do yet—the Vale of Blackmoor, and—"

"The Vale of Blackmoor can wait."

"And Cranborne Chase—"

"Bless Cranborne Chase! I'll get a lift into Shaftesbury after lunch, and use the telephone there," said Coker.

"I've got to ring up a good many fellows as soon as possible, and get them to come; there isn't a very long notice, as to-morrow's Saturday."

"Do you think they'll come?" asked Potter.

"Of course!"

"Well, I don't!"

"You're rather an ass, George Potter. I've told you that before!"

"Dr-r-r!" said Potter.

Coker & Co. included in silence after that. Evidently Coker was leader of the walking party, and his word was law. It was probable that Coker was stauding the expenses of the tour; on no other theory could the St. Jim's juniors account for the curious circumstance that his comrades did not fall upon him and slap him.

The caravanners were sunning themselves outside the inn after lunch when Coker came out and mounted into a trap, and drove away briskly. He was off to the ancient and historical town of Shaftesbury to use the telephone; to call together the merry men who were to mop up the Tatham cricketers.

The caravanners could not help wondering what luck he would have. Coker was full of confidence, and never doubted; but it was an interesting question, to say the least, how many fellows would be willing to walk on to a cricket field with the egregious Coker as captain?

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise for Coker!

"W HERE are you, you chaps!" It was Coker's voice. Tom Merry & Co. were having tea on the balcony of the inn in the pleasant afternoon sun shine. Potter and Greene had joined them there. Potter and Greene were a little lofty, as Fifth-Formers and seniors; but they were bored almost to tears hanging about the inn, waiting on the pleasure of the lordly Coker, and they

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Hodge took Coker in his powerful grasp, swept him off his feet, and sat him down with a bump on the grass. There was a howl of laughter as Coker bumped and roared. (See chapter 5.)

subsidised their Fifth Form solutions a little for the sake of the company.

Their talk ran a good deal on Horace Coker, absent just then at Shalmsbury. The remarks they made about him were not flattering. According to Coker's claims, Horace was a pig-headed, obstinate ass, who did not even know enough to go in when it rained. This bold and candid opinion Potter and Greene expressed with great frankness to a considerable length. Potter even remarked that he had a good mind to "send" on to Blackmoor without waiting for Coker, and Greene said it would be a good idea. But they didn't do it, which strengthened the caravanners' suspicion that the egregious Horace was footing the bills on that walking tour.

Coker was still the subject of Potter and Greene's remarks—the jansors listening politely—when his voice was heard inquiring for his chums.

"Where the thunder— Oh, here you are!"

Horace Coker came out on the balcony.

His roused face was flushed.

"Hallo! Got back?" yawned Greene. "Can't you see I've got back? Any tea going?"

"Here you are."

"What are those dashed legs doing here?"

"Standing up, sir," grunted Potter. "If it won't give you a fit, you might be civil for once. Have you done your phoning?"

"Yes," growled Coker, putting down his teacup. "I've done it! And a precious fix it's left me in. I never even dreamed that there were so many thundering fools in my Form at Greyfriars! Here I've arranged to play a cricket-match to-morrow with a set of country jansons, and I'm left in the lurch. What do you think of that?"

"Not really!" murmured Potter, with a wink at Greene.

"Yes, really. You'd hardly believe it," said Coker, in tones of deep and indignant exasperation. "I got on the 'phone first to Hilton's place, and got

through to him. He's got Fitz and Smith major staring with him; that would have been three. And what do you think Hilton said?"

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said— Oh, the rotter!"

"What did he say that for?"

"He didn't say that, you chump—I said that. Hilton said the vacation at Greyfriars had only come just in time to save me from being slaughtered by the Fifth, and that if he saw me during the vacation he was afraid he wouldn't be able to resist slaughtering me. The chooky rotter! Why you thumping asses, what are you cackling at!" roared Coker, in great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"About? Go on, Coker! Didn't you 'phone to Holborn of the shell?"

"Yes, I did. I had to wait, but I got through to the chooky young ass. I asked him first if he had anybody with him, and he said Henkins and Stewart. I told him I'd a match on, and was short of

men, and would be willing to play some fags. I couldn't put it nicer than that, could I? I said I could even find a place for that potty idiot Hoskins. I expected a grateful reply, at least. And Holson simply said, "Go and eat cake!" That, you know, to me—no, you know! Why, I'll strow the quadrangle with him next term!"

"And is that all?"

"Well, I thought a bit, and remembered that I'd heard that Gwynne and Wingate of the Sixth had gone to a summer place in the Vale of Blackmoor. Luckily, I found the number, and rang them up, and got on to Wingate. I told him what was wanted, and said I'd be glad to play him. I thought I'd better mention right away that I was going to captain the team; it wouldn't have done to have any misunderstanding about that."

"And what did old Wingate say?"

"Nothing; he rang off. I tried again, and again, and couldn't get an answer. He had actually rung off, deliberately, from sheer cheek."

Coker gulped down tea.

"Bai Jove! What a tale of faithful woo!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and the St. Jim's juniors suppressed their merriment as well as they could. Potter and Greene contrived not to cackle any more. They simply dared not, with Coker's fiery eyes on them. Coker plainly did not regard it as a laughing matter.

"So it's all off," said Potter, after some internal struggles. "We play as well as on with our walking tour."

"Don't be an ass, Potter! I've fixed it up now to play these rural jockins to-morrow."

"You can't play them without a team, you know," murmured Greene.

"When I say a thing's going to be done," said Coker, "it's going to be done. That's me!"

"But how—"

"We're three," said Coker. "You two fellows can play cricket—not my style, but a fairly good game. I may say that I'm equal to any two ordinary players; I've no use for false modesty. That's as good as four, then. I shall have to pick up seven players somewhere. Not that I need a full eleven, if you come to that. I'd play these jockins four or five men

short and still wallop them to the wide. Still, I admit that we three couldn't very well walk on a field to play the match with them. Somehow or other I've got to get together some men. Can't either of you silly asses make a suggestion?"

"I suggest cutting the whole thing!"

"Don't talk rot, Potter. That's your chief fault—you talk such awful rot!"

"Ask the landlord to play," suggested Potter sarcastically. "And perhaps the landlord would lend a hand, and the boys—"

"Look here, you silly chump—"

"Well, we'll play if you raise an eleven of any sort," said Potter resignedly.

"But I'm blessed if I see where you're going to dig them up."

Coker reflected.

His chums went on with their tea, and Tom Merry & Co. regarded Horace Coker smilingly. The great Coker was certainly in a difficulty—owing to the failure of his schoolfellows to rally round and follow his glorious lead.

Coker gave a sudden start.

"By gad! I've got it!"

"Got what?" jawned Greene.

"The eleven!"

"In your waistcoat-pocket!" asked Potter humorously.

Coker raised his hand, and pointed at the astonished caravanners.

"There you are!" he said.

"Eh!"

"These kids can play cricket, after a fashion. I'll take them on."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Take us on!" ejaculated Blake.

Coker nodded. His face was quite clear now.

"That's it," he said. "Of course, you're only fags; but I've seen you play a fag team at Greyfriars, and you play a fair to middling game—for kids. I'll take you into my eleven. You don't amount to much, but you can play these bumpkins. It's a go!"

"Well, my hat!"

"Hold on!" remarked Tom Merry.

"It isn't quite a go, Coker!"

"What?"

"You see, we wouldn't be found dead in your eleven!" explained Tom Merry kindly. "You fellows finished! Come on, and we'll see how the van is getting on."

"Yes, wathah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. walked off the balcony, leaving Horace Coker of Greyfriars staring.

CHAPTER 9.

Nothing Doing!

TOM MERRY & CO. did not see Coker again that evening.—They learned from Potter and Greene that the great Horace had gone off on a fresh telephoning expedition. It was fortunate that Coker was well provided with that useful article, cash, for he was putting himself to a big expense in trunk calls.

The St. Jim's juniors were gone to bed when Coker returned to the inn. But that his new set of trunk calls had been paid for in vain was proved by what happened next. There was a heavy thump at the door of the room in which Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were sleeping the sleep of the just. The Terrible Three of St. Jim's started out of slumber.

"Thump, thump!"

"What the dickens—"

"What is it a fire?"

"Who's there?"

"The door opened."

"Only my cat!" came the voice of Coker in the darkness. "I think this is your room, Merry!"

"What have you woke us up for, you chump!" yelled the captain of the Shell, in great wrath.

"I've got something to say to you—"

"Get out!"

"I want to tell you—"

"Keep it till morning, you fathead!"

"It won't keep till morning; it's got to be settled now," explained Coker. "I've been on the phone to a dozen chaps, but they're all too slack to come along and play cricket here for the credit of Greyfriars. There's nothing for it but playing you kids to-morrow."

The Terrible Three sat up in their beds, breathing hard.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and they wanted to sleep. The importance of the matter, which Coker fully realised, was quite lost on them; they did not care twopenny, or a smaller sum, for the egregious Coker or his egregious cricket-match, especially in the middle of the night.

But Coker ran on cheerily:

"Sorry to wake you up, but it's got to be settled. Can I depend on you for to-morrow?"

"You can depend on us for a thumping good licking if you don't get out!" roared Manners.

"Don't talk rot! You see, it's the only way. Don't think I want to play a set of silly fags in my eleven. I don't! But there's nothing else to be done. I've hired the things for you, as I thought you wouldn't have your hats with you caravanning. I've brought the whole lot in the trap from Shaftesbury."

"You can send them back again!"

"I'm going to, after the match, of course. I've only hired them. I shall want you to turn out for practice in morning—see!"

"Will you travel off?"

"Ten o'clock sharp, on the village green," said Coker.

"Buz! off!" howled Lowther.

"Mind, it's got to be settled!"

"Pillows!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Eh? What do you mean—pillows?" asked Coker, in surprise.

Horace Coker quickly discovered what Tom Merry meant. The Terrible Three turned out of bed grasping their pillows. They could not see Coker in the dark, but his voice showed them the

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direction to take. Three pillows swiped at Horace Coker at the same moment and landed on him, and Coker went spinning.

"Yarob!"
"Give him some more!"
"Spoke it to him!"
Swipe, swipe, swipe!
Horace Coker rolled out on the landing in a dazed condition, with pillows crashing on him.

He sprawled on the landing and rasped.

"Wha-at— You— you— Grooh!
Ah! Ah! I'll— You-or-ow!"

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock. "Now we can get back to bed!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The Terrible Three turned in again. A minute later there was a shake at the door-handle, and Coker's voice came through the keyhole.

"Merry, you cheeky young swab—"
"Good-night!"
"I'll smash you!"
"Ta-ta!"
"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

Horace Coker gave it up at last and retired, and the chams of the Shell slumbered once more, undisturbed till morning. Coker had apparently discovered that the important matter would keep till the morrow, after all.

In the morning the caravanners met him at the breakfast-table. He was looking very morose, and did not deign to greet them—in fact, it was only by the exercise of great self-control that Coker did not charge the Terrible Three on the spot, and begin a battle-royal round the breakfast-table.

After breakfast he joined the caravanners as they were leaving the inn.

"Now look here, you kids," he said, as patiently as he could, "I want you to turn up for cricket practice this morning—"

"Go and eat coke!"
"I'm going to give you some coaching."
"Wag!"

"It's understood that you're playing for me this afternoon—"

"Give us a rest, Coker!" implored Monty Lowther.

"Do you refuse?" roared Coker.
"I think we've refused already," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"You're not exactly the sort of cricket captain we want to play for," Coker. "You're too funny, you know!"

"If you want a hiding, Merry—"

"Ass!"

"I must remark, Cokah, that I regard you as an utter ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "Pway wun away and play!"

Coker squared his jaw.
"You'll play in my eleven this afternoon or I'll jolly well give you a thrashing all round!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, which is it to be?" demanded Coker truculently.

"I think it had better be the thrashing," grinned Herries.

"Mind, I mean what I say!"

"So do we, old top!"

Coker wanted no more time in words. It was time for action, and Coker proceeded to action. He did not seem to have any doubts about his ability to thrash seven fags. He rushed at the caravanners, and the next moment he was swept off his feet and landed in the inn yard with a heavy bump. He was still there, trying to get his second wind, when the caravanners strolled away down the street.

CHAPTER 10.

Backing up Coker!

THE caravanners came in to dinner, after a ramble round the country, in cheerful spirits. The St. Jim's van was to start again on Monday morning, and until then the vanners had to kill time; but they were killing it very agreeably. They were in the country made famous by Thomas Hardy, and they were not sorry to spend a few days looking about them. They enjoyed their dinner, not at all discouraged by the frowns they received from Horace Coker further up the table.

Potter and Greene did not look happy. They were bored at the inn, and they had been subjected to Coker's conversation all the morning, which did not conduce to happiness. They wanted to get on with their walking tour; but for good reasons they could not go on without Coker, and Coker seemed a fixture at Tatham. Potter and Greene felt their patience wearing thin, but they were still as patient as possible.

Coker was moody.
He was booked for a cricket match that afternoon, and he was without a team. He had taken it for granted that the team would be forthcoming—that his only difficulty would be in selecting his men from the many claimants. And there weren't many claimants.

Every Greyfriars fellow he had got on to by telephone had declined, without thanks, to play for him. And the St. Jim's caravanners, his last resource, had refused, and were evidently not to be thrashed into compliance.

Once more Coker had bitten off more than he could chew, and he writhed inwardly at the thought of the Tathamites' smirks when he failed to turn up for the match.

It was borne in upon Coker's mind that his methods of recruiting for his eleven left something to be desired, so far as the caravanners were concerned. And, with great efforts, Coker succeeded in subduing his loquacity, and after dinner approached Tom Merry & Co. with quite a civil manner.

"Just a word with you fellows!" he said.

The caravanners smiled. They were "fellows" now; instead of kids and fags. Coker was learning!

"I'm in a rotten fix for this afternoon," continued Coker, in his new vein of civility. "I'm fixed for a match, and I've got only two men. I'd take it as a great favour if you fellows would play for me!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"I put it to you as cricketers and sportsmen," said Coker, making a still greater effort. "You can't refuse."

The caravanners exchanged glances.
When Coker put it like that it was rather more difficult to refuse, little as they desired to figure on the cricket-field under his egregious captainship. They would have welcomed a game of cricket that afternoon without Coker, but with him it was a different matter.

"Stand by me," said Coker. "After all, you like the game. It's glorious weather for cricket. I've hired all the things you want, and I've got them here."
"Ahem!"

"You see—" murmured Tom Merry.

"I put it to you as sportsmen. Stand by me and see me through!" said Coker.

"Bai Jore! I don't see how we can very well refuse Cokah, undah the crows, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It will be wathah widiculous to play undah Cokah's lead, but—"

"What!" roared Coker.

"It will be wathah widiculous, Cokah."

But Coker suppressed his wrath. "Startup with me pitched in half an hour," he said. "I shall look a fool if I don't turn up with a team. Be sportsmen!"

Tom Merry looked round at his comrades, and there was a general nod of assent. Coker was so civil, and so evidently at the end of his tether, that the St. Jim's caravanners could not help taking compassion on him.

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry at last. "Well, play if you like, Coker."

"Yes, wathah!"

"It's a go!" said Blake. "After all, it will bill up the afternoon."

Coker breathed more freely.

"You'll play, then?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Done!" Coker looked at his watch. "No time for any practice before the match now. That's a pity. I wanted to give you some coaching. I might have licked you into shape a little, even in one morning. For goodness' sake, do your best in the match, and don't disgrace me more than you can help!"

Coker was the old Coker again!

"We've got no flannels with us," said Tom Merry shortly, half regretting that he had promised, now that Coker was Coker again.

"That doesn't matter—the villagers don't go in for style," said Coker. "They won't all be in flannels. Come along and see the bats I've hired, and the other things, and pick out what you like."

"All right!"

A little later Coker led his flock out of the inn with a smile of satisfaction upon his face.

He did not think very much of his team, certainly; in fact, he had mentioned several times that it was rather a come-down for him to be playing with a gang of fags; but he considered that almost any team was bound to do pretty well under his leadership.

He explained his views to his recruits as they went on the green.

"What I want," said Coker, "is stone-walling, and plenty of it. I shall open the innings, and I want you kids to keep it alive as long as possible, while I score. Don't trouble about trying to make runs; you can leave that to me. See!"

"Bai Jore!"

"Simply keep your end up. I shall be first in, and not out at the finish," explained Coker. "I don't say you're not to take a chance if you see it; but, generally speaking, you can leave the run-getting to me. I simply want you to keep your wickets up as long as possible, so that I shall have a chance of piling a century in each innings. That's how the matter stands."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

"As for the bowling," continued Coker. "You won't be wanted for that. I shall whack it out with Potter and Greene. Be as lively as you can in the field. I shall give you plenty of easy catches, and for goodness' sake don't snuff them all!"

The St. Jim's juniors blinked at Coker. They really did not know what to say in reply to this. So they said nothing—only feeling inclined to kick themselves for having agreed to play for Coker at all. But it was too late to think of that. Their word was their bond.

Harry Hodge and his merry men followed them on to the ground. The young smith seemed rather surprised to find Coker there with a team at all.

"You fellows playing, then?" he asked.

"We've agreed to play for Coker," said Tom Merry.

Tom Merry. "There wouldn't have been a match otherwise."

"I see," said Hodge, with a smile. "I'm playing a man short, Hodge," said Coker carelessly. "That doesn't make any difference."

"Fair play's a jewel," answered Harry Hodge. "I'll ask a man to stand out."

"You needn't."

"I will, all the same."

"Now, look here, my dear chap," said Coker patiently. "don't you give up any advantage. I've already told you that you haven't an earthly, anyway!"

"We shall see!" grinned Hodge.

The first innings led to Coker's team.

"You'll go in with me, Potter," said Coker.

"Right-ho!" yawned Potter. "Am I going to have the bowling?"

"Certainly not! This match practically depends on me personally, and it's my object to get all the batting possible. You're simply to keep your end up as long as possible. You'll follow Potter in, Greene."

"More likely follow you, old top!"

"Don't be a silly ass! Come on, Potter!"

The two Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars went to the wickets. Harry Hodge and his men came on to the field—only ten of them. Hodge himself took the ball for the first over, and Coker stood up to face the bowling with an air of serene confidence.

His attitude at the wicket was worthy of a county cricketer at his best—in Coker's opinion. But it did not impress the beholders in the same way.

"If that chap knows how to bowl," remarked Blake, "I give Coker one ball, and no more."

"Yass, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

The caravanners looked on with smiling faces. It was pretty clear that the Tatcham captain knew how to bowl; and, still more, that Horace Coker did not know how to bat.

"Here she comes!" murmured Digby.

The ball whizzed down.

Coker of the Fifth made a mighty snipe at it—no rather, at where he supposed it to be. But it wasn't there!

Where it was, Coker didn't know—till a crash on his wicket enlightened him.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Coker blinked down at his wicket.

The middle-stump was gone, leaving the wicket with a toothless look.

He blinked, and blinked again. Potter grinned at him along the pitch. From the spectators came a howl!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By g-d!" said Coker dazedly. "Out!"

By g-d!

And after another incredulous blink at his wretched wicket, he walked off the pitch like a fellow in a dream.

CHAPTER 11.

Something like Cricket!

GRINNING faces met Coker of the Fifth as he came off the field.

The St. Jim's juniors did not want to hurt Horace's feelings, but they could not help grinning. The result of Coker's innings, after Coker's talk on the subject, was too much for them.

Greene went in to take his leader's place. Coker stared after him as he went, gloomily.

"What price ducks' eggs?" murmured Monty Lawther.

"Cheap as-day!" grinned Blake.

"Poor old Coker!"

Horace Coker glanced at the waiting Estimote. It seemed to take him quite a long time to recover from his astonish-

ment at the result of his innings. He could not understand it yet.

"You—you kids saw that!" stammered Coker at last.

"We did!" chuckled Digby.

"Yass, wathah!"

"Jervee see such a fluke!" asked Coker.

"Such a what!"

"Fluke! Fancy a bowler of that calibre taking a wicket from a batsman like me!" said Coker. "Such things do happen. In fact, I've known them happen before."

"I'll bet you have!" granted Herries.

"Cricket is full of such flukes!" said Coker thoughtfully. "Why, I was bowled once by Cherry of the Remora at Greyfriars. Me, you know! But it's no good grousing. After all, there's the second innings to come."

"You're going to do differently in the second innings!" inquired Manners.

"Oh! Yes, of course! Don't be an ass! Flukes like that don't happen twice in the same game!"

"I wathah think they do, Cokah, when you 'aro battin'!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Don't be a cheery young an, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

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"This innings is a goner!" said Coker gloomily. "Potter won't be able to stand up to the bowling, I'm afraid; or Greene. Of course, that ball was a fluke. But—"

"They're standing it all right, so far!" remarked Tom Merry.

In fact, Coker's gloomy prognostications for his chums were rather groundless. The Tatcham bowling was good; but the two Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars knew their business—being players of a calibre very different from Horace Coker's. Potter had fifteen runs to his credit when he was caught out, and Tom Merry took his place. And Greene had fourteen when he was stumped.

Coker was pleased to see the runs pile up; but somehow he did not seem wholly pleased. His chums' success contrasted a little with his own inglorious display.

And when he mentioned the "fluke" to Potter and Greene, when they were out, both of them replied tersely, "Rats!" which caused a little argument.

"Still, we've got twenty-nine!" said Coker. "With what I shall knock up in

the second innings, that ought to see us through. Of course, then gas won't do much. I never expected them to!"

But again the great Coker's expectations were falsified.

Tom Merry was doing well, and Blake, at the other end, was locking him up manfully.

To Coker's increasing astonishment, the two juniors of St. Jim's made the running in great style.

The score was at fifty when Blake came out, bowled by Hodge, and Monty Lawther went in.

Still to Coker's astonishment, the run getting went on.

Coker rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Coker at the top, Merry bats!" he remarked. "Rotten! No, my style at all—But he's getting the runs!"

"He is!" smiled Potter.

"Of course, the bowling's rotten, that accounts for it!"

"It was good enough for you, Coker."

"That was a fluke, as I've told you."

"Yes, you've told us so!" agreed Potter, with a wink at Greene. "And, of course, what you say, is so, and there's an end—what!"

"Exactly!" agreed Coker.

Whether the bowling was bad, or the batting good, certainly the St. Jim's innings went on in good style. By the time Tom Merry & Co. were finished, Coker gave the St. Jim's batsmen a gracious smile at the close of the innings.

"Jolly good!" he said.

"Not bad—what!" assented Blake.

"I mean jolly good for Lower School fags, like you kids. You can't bat—what I call batting, you know. I'm sure you don't mind my saying so. But you're done well enough against those justices, as it turns out. They couldn't bowl, so that made it even."

"You silly inthead!" snorted George Herries. "The bowling was jolly good!"

"You don't know bowling when you see it, kid!" explained Coker. "How should you—a Fourth Form fag! Still, I'm glad I played you; you're quite good enough for stoppage!"

Which was apparently the Coker method of expressing gratitude.

When the Tatcham men's innings started, Coker led his merry men into the field, impressing upon them very seriously what he wanted of them. He didn't want any bowling from them; he could manage that himself, with relief from Potter and Greene. They were to be as smart as possible in the field, and take the easy catches he was going to give them. There were several of the caravanners who could have put in some good bowling, but Coker was captain, and the captain's word was law.

Coker took the first ball himself, with Harry Hodge at the wicket. It proved to be a wide—so wide that some of the on-lookers wondered whether Coker was aiming at the wicket or at a neighbouring haystack. But the next ball came nearer home, and Harry Hodge let out at it.

The ball flew on its journey; but it was not one of the easy catches Coker promised his followers. It was boundary, and Hodge only smiled instead of stirring from his wicket.

Coker gave his field a severe look.

"For goodness' sake keep your eyes open!" he called out. "Don't throw the game away!"

"Who's throwing it away!" roared Herries.

"You are! You ought to have caught that!"

"It was yards off, you-ass!"

"It shouldn't have been! A fieldman is supposed to have some more in him! Don't go to sleep again!"

"You utteli ass, Coker—"

"Shot up! Give me that ball, Loutlier!"

Monty Loutlier had brought in the ball. He gave Coker an easy catch; but no catch was easy to Coker. It was his chin he caught the ball with, and he gave a roar.

"You clumsy young ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you play silly monkey-tricks here, Loutlier—"

"I'm leaving that to you, old top!"

Growled Loutlier. "Get on with the monkey-tricks; we're waiting!"

Coker glared; but he turned to the bowler—again.

"Bowling—again. Harry Hodge smiled as he waited for the ball. Coker took a great deal of trouble with that ball, and turned himself into a sort of Catherine-wheel as he let it fly. There was a frantic howl from George Herries, and he was seen to clap his hand to his head and dance.

"You-ow-wo-woop!" roared Herries.

"I'm brained! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Poor old Hewwies!"

"Coop!"

Coker stared at Herries. How the ball had got to Herries was a mystery to him; but Coker's bowling always was mysterious.

Herries made a rush towards his skipper; and there would certainly have been trouble on the field had not two or three other fieldsmen grasped the enraged junior and stopped him.

"He's nearly brained me!" shrieked Herries. "He must have done it on purpose. He couldn't be idiot enough to send the ball at me by accident, could he?"

"Coker's idiot enough for anything!" gasped Blake.

"I'm going to punch him—"

"Shush!"

"Order in the field, there!" roared Coker. "Where's that ball! Send in that ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Easy does it, Herries—"

"P'way control your feelin's, dear boy."

Herries gave a furious snort.

"I'm going off!" he said. "Look at that bump! Ow! I'm not going to be brained by a dangerous maniac! I'm off!"

And George Herries marched off the field rubbing his head. He had had enough of fielding while Coker bowled. Really, it required some nerve to stand up to Coker's bowling—for everybody but the batsman.

When Coker resumed the interrupted over, the fieldsmen fielded deep—very deep.

Coker seemed hooked for a series of surprises that afternoon, for his masterly bowling had no effect whatever upon the Tatcham wickets. The runs went up in jumps; and if the rules of the game had allowed Coker to bowl all the time, the Tatcham total would have reached an astounding figure. But Potter and Greene, as change bowlers, did fairly well, and the wickets fell slowly. In the field, too, there was some good work; it was Tom Merry who caught Hodge out from Herries's bowling, and Arthur Augustus caught out another man.

When Coker was fielding, he had plenty of chances at the ball, for the Tatcham bats always knugged it in his direction—knowing that it was quite safe there. His chances passed him by unregarded. When the home score reached 100 for three wickets, Coker spoke to his team very severely.

"You're throwing this game away!" he said. "I've given you catches that a blind fiddler wouldn't miss; but you've never made a single catch for my bowling! For goodness' sake look alive!"

"You cwas ass, Coker—"

"I knew you were only a set of silly fags!" added Coker. "I make allowance for that. But put your beef into it—don't stand around like a lot of grazing cows!"

"Will you give us some bowling?" asked Tom Merry patiently.

Coker shook his head.

"Couldn't trust you kids with the ball! Now, look alive, I'm going on again!"

Coker went on again. His bowling was entertaining, to say the least. When he was not giving byes, he was giving boundaries. Quite a crowd had gathered on the village green to watch that remarkable game, and Coker's efforts were followed every time by roars of laughter.

Tom Merry & Co. were not looking good-humoured now. They felt keenly the ridiculous side of the matter—which was also very plain to all the onlookers.

And at this rate it looked as if the Tatcham innings might last till dark. The St. Jim's juniors would have been glad enough to get off the field and hide their blushes at the inn; but under Coker's masterly leadership, the innings was not likely to end, unless the Tatcham skipper declared. The runs were piling up at a merry rate, and no one was surprised when the board registered 200.

At that figure Harry Hodge declared the innings closed, and his smile indicated plainly enough that he did not expect Tatcham to have to bat again. There was a short rest for tea, and then Coker's second innings came on. And when he warned his followers once more that what he wanted was stone-walling, and plenty of it, it was only by the exercise of really remarkable self-control that his followers refrained from massacring him on the spot.

CHAPTER 12.

Fed Up!

"MIND what I've said—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Stick to stone-walling—"

"Rats!"

"And leave the game to me—"

"Fai!"

"That's the way you talk to your captain!" roared Coker, in great wrath.

"Yes; when we're captained by a born idiot!" retorted Tom Merry. "We were silly asses to play for you. For goodness' sake stop gassing and get it over, and let's go and hide ourselves!"

"Yaas, washah!"

Coker grasped the cane handle of his bat as if minded to administer corporal chastisement on the spot. But he refrained, and marched out to his wicket, Potter taking the other end. Tom Merry & Co. looked on with grim faces. They could have laughed at Coker's cricket as heartily as any of the spectators if they had not been saying for him. As it was, they felt that they shared that ridicule, which was not pleasant.

Horace Coker took up a stand at the wicket a good deal like Ajax of old defying the lightning. He meant business this time, and he did not expect any repetition of the remarkable fluke that had happened before.

But, though Coker did not expect it, it came along.

Harry Hodge sent the ball down, and Coker delivered a mighty swipe which would certainly have sent the leather on a long journey—if it had touched the bat. But the bat swept an empty circle in the air, nearly overturning the batsman, and the off-stump was whipped out of the ground at the same moment.

There was a yell from a hundred throats at once.

"How's that!"

"Out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! That utteli ass has scored another duck's egg!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Give him a groan as he comes off!"

And Coker was greeted with a deep and dismal groan as he joined the waiting batsmen.

He looked dazed.

"Did you ever?" he gasped to Greene.

"No, I never did!" grunted Greene.

"But you often have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just imagine it!" said Coker. "A batsman of my form! Did you ever see such cruel luck? It isn't as if the bowling was good. It's rotten; so rotten that you're able to stand up to it, Greene. Such a coincidence is simply extraordinary. Two amazing flukes like that in the same game! Who'd have thought it!"

And Coker rubbed his nose in great amazement.

Greene went to the wicket, but did not remain there long. Coker's wonderful captaincy was not of the kind to encourage a team, and as victory was out of the question his followers were not putting much heart into the game now. It really did not seem much use. The rest of the innings petered out dimly.

Only forty runs were taken, and mostly by the St. Jim's juniors, and the great Coker match ended with a win for Tatcham by sixty runs, and an innings, a margin which made the home cricketers grin widely.

"You lads played a good game," Harry Hodge said to Tom Merry.

"You'd have given us a better tussle if you hadn't been so handicapped."

But Horace Coker's view was quite different.

He explained his views to his followers, not seeing the danger-signals in their grim looks.

"I've played with rotten cricketers before," said Coker, with lofty scorn; "but such a crowd as you lot I've never seen! You ought to be playing marble. Cricket! I was a fool to play you. I see that now! Catch me playing a game of fumbling fags again under any circumstances whatever!"

"You frabjous chump!" began Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"You cwas ass—"

"You howling jabberwock—"

"Clumsy fumbling from beginning to end!" said Coker scornfully. "I was put out of action by a couple of flukes, but that ought to have made you buck up. Did it? You missed every catch I gave you. I put all I knew into the bowling, and how did it pan out? You muffed everything! You simply threw the game away! Clucked it away, by Jove! Don't talk to me! I wonder you're not ashamed to look me in the face after the exhibition you've given on this field!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at him.

They had half-expected some sign of contrition from Coker—at least some abjuring of his lofty swank after the deplorable entertainment he had furnished.

But there was no sign of that.

The great man of Greyfriars was evidently as well satisfied with himself as ever. He visited his failure upon the shoulders of his team. His team had stood a good deal from Horace Coker, but there was a limit, and that limit was reached.

"It's no good talking to you!" said Tom Merry, at last.

"Clear off!" said Coker loftily. "I'm ashamed of you! Don't have the cheek to speak to me again! As I said."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 663.

wonder you've got the nerve to look me in the face! Pah!"

And Coker turned indignantly on his heel.

"Collar him!" gasped Hako.

"Scrag him!"

"Mop him!"

"Lynch him!"

Several infuriated youths rushed on Horace Coker as one man. The great and lofty Horace, seized in seven pairs of hands, spun round, and landed on the grass with a bowl.

"Yah! Leggal! Qat!"

"Dump him!"

"War him, dash boys!"

"Spifficate him!"

Dump, bump, bump!

Coker of the Fifth struggled wildly in the grasp of his exasperated team.

But his struggles availed not.

Coker had to go through it, and he went!

He was bumped, and bumped again, and yet again. He was rolled over, and bumped once more. His ears were jammed down, and his hat after it.

By the time the St. Jim's juniors thought he had had enough Horace Coker was feeling as if he had been through a series of air-raids in quick succession.

He was left gasping in the grass as the indignant cricketers walked off at last, feeling somewhat soiled.

Potter and Greene left him there. They were fed up with the great Horace, and the great Horace lay and gasped, and fumbled and spluttered, till at last he picked himself up and crawled wearily away.

The next morning Coker & Co. left the Wagon and Horse, resuming their walking tour. Horace Coker shook his

hat at Tom Merry & Co. as he started, and Potter and Greene grinned. There was a plentiful lack of sympathy for Horace on the part of his chums.

"Bal Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars disappeared. "We have met some very queer chawwacks down our savannahs, but I haven't done and trust that we shall not meet anybody like Coker again! I really feel that I could not stand any more Coker!"

Tom Merry & Co. were not destined to see any more of Coker. But there were other adventures in store for the camp-vans, as the St. Jim's van rolled on through the pleasant West Country.

THE END.

(Don't miss "ONLY GUEST'S WAY!" By Martin Clifford, next Tuesday.)

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

A Special New Serial by the Editor of the *Companion Papers*.

CHAPTER 13.

Log Pulling!

ALL the speaker indignantly exploded a bombshell he could not have caused greater consternation.

"Oh, comrades," faltered the boy.

"It's entirely correct, or I don't know—"

"Of course you didn't!" said Owen Conquest, with a sneering laugh. "That's all right, my son!"

"You have shown very sound judgment," murmured Owen Conquest.

"You admit that Owen Conquest marries the 'Boys' Friend'?"

The boy nodded.

"In just the same way as Frank Richards marries the 'Magnet'," he said.

"Who-a-ah!" gasped Frank Richards.

And a yell of laughter went up at his expense.

"What's wrong with the 'Magnet'?" I inquired at length, turning to the critical youth.

"Everything! The stories are ridiculous and impossible!"

"How so?"

"I was reading the other day about a boy who had done a dozen chivalrous exploits, and a whole heap of jaw-puffs at one sitting! That takes some swallowing!"

"In more senses than one!" murmured Martin Clifford. "Four old Franks! You're pulling it straight to the neck! I always did say that Billy Hunter—I suppose that's who our friend means—rather overdid it."

"Rot!" retorted Frank Richards.

"What about Fatty Wynn?" Of all the greasy, parasitising gorgers—

"Order, please!" I rapped out.

And then, pointing to the eye over the group of boys in the meadow, I said:

"Surely some of you have got a good word to say for the 'Magnet' Library?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" spoke up a bronch-faced youth. "It's topping—except for the Editorial Chat."

It was my turn to look blue. But I did not betray how deeply the arrow had gone.

"You like the Greyfriars stories?" I asked.

"Every time!"

"I think you are the boy whom we heard saying that Coker would be the death of you!"

"That's so, sir. And so be will! Coker's one of the most romantic characters ever invented!"

"Would somebody mind putting me on the back?" murmured Frank Richards.

"Certainly!" grinned Owen Conquest.

And he gave his colleague such a hearty thump that Frank Richards sat down suddenly in the grassy meadow.

"Yarwood!"

"What's that?" exactly what Coker says when he's bumped!" said the boy with the crooked nose.

Frank Richards poked himself up, and made a feeble movement in the direction of Owen Conquest. But, before he could do any damage, he caught his foot in a tuft of grass and went down for the second time.

"Next week's story will be entitled 'Frank Richards' Adventures in the Owen Conquest.' Be sure to place an order with your newsagent in advance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The speckled-faced boy clutched me by the arm.

"Is—that gentleman really 'Frank Richards'?" he gasped.

"In the flesh!" I said.

The two boys whom we had found reading the 'Magnet' gazed in admiration at the author of the stories.

As for the boy who had so severely criticised Frank Richards' work, he appeared to the earth to open and swallow him up. The earth failed to oblige, and he stood goggling at Frank Richards.

"I—I—I—I—I," he stammered.

"Get it off your chest!" said Frank Richards encouragingly.

"I—I hope I didn't offend you by what I said just now, sir?"

"Not a bit!" said Frank Richards cheerfully. "The writer has hope to escape the lash of criticism. Perhaps there is something in what you say about Hunter's excessive egotism. I will tone them down a bit. And now, gentlemen, supposing we renew our little excursion, shall we?"

"We'll travel through the gap in the hedge into the roadway, round our bicycles, and continue our ride."

"I'm getting positively excited about our little wags!" said Owen Conquest.

"Same here!" confessed Frank Richards.

"We'll start now!" called out Wynn.

Martin Clifford said nothing. An immense smile played about his lips as we rode on.

"Looks as if it's going to result in a tie," I said, as we were about to enter the main street of Woking.

"I'm afraid not," said Martin Clifford, giving tongue at last. "It seems that I shall win, and by a sweeping majority of points."

We stared at the speaker in astonishment.

"How do you make that out?" exclaimed Owen Conquest.

Martin Clifford jumped off his machine.

"Look!" he said, pointing along the road.

We also dismounted, and followed his gaze.

Coming towards us, in a meagre procession, were no less than a hundred boys.

We attached to special significance to this fact at first. And then, as the procession drew nearer, we understood.

The hundred boys swung past us like a small army. And every one of them, from the biggest to the smallest, from the leaders to the rear-guard, carried a copy of the current issue of the "Gow" Library!

Martin Clifford surveyed us with a lightning smile.

"Did I say something about a sweeping majority?" he murmured.

The rest of us were in various stages of collapse.

Frank Richards was like a person in a trance. Owen Conquest was scuttering something about withdrawal.

I, too, was utterly dumfounded.

This was the first time in my editorial career that I had met a hundred boys each carrying a copy of the "Gow" Library.

"What has the 'Magnet' man?" chuckled Martin Clifford, fairly rubbing it in. "What price the 'Boys' Friend's' Conquest, I think our names ought to be changed!"

Owen Conquest happened unconsciously to strike the road. Richards, in stumbling times, delivered an address on howling snakes.

"The result of the contest, gentlemen," said Martin Clifford, "is as follows: Frank Richards, four copies; Owen Conquest, two copies; Wynn, one hundred and four points. Martin Clifford, therefore, stands at the top of the poll with a cool majority of one hundred!"

"It's a wiper!" grinned Frank Richards.

"Outrageous!" gasped Owen Conquest.

The hundred boys were out of sight by this time, having disappeared round a bend in the road.

"What about tea?" I suggested.

"In the words of one of our eminent colleagues, that's quite a good notion!" said Martin Clifford.

We adjourned to some pleasant tea-gardens near the station, and Martin Clifford chattered away cheerfully as the smart-looking waitress bustled to and fro to attend to our wants.

Owen Conquest and Owen Conquest, however, were not alone.

"Cheer up, you poor old things!" said Martin Clifford. "You look as if you've loved your last-stoppings!"

There was a grunt and a growl from Richards and Owen Conquest respectively.

"What are you, Franky?" continued the irrepressible "Gow" author. "You've eaten two-and-a-half bolstered stones instead of your usual twenty! And you're giving the jaw to my friend Owen Conquest as just as late. Just look at him, sitting remote from all, a melancholy man!"

"Br-r-r!" growled Owen Conquest.

"Go and eat cake!" roared Frank Richards.

Martin Clifford chuckled. "Now that the desirable household commodity is about thirty-five bob a lump," he said, "I'm afraid I can't oblige."

"This is a cheery sort of meal, and no mistake!" I said at length. "I've been sitting here," said Martin Clifford. "Franky looks like an undertaker, and Owen like a bridegroom who's been mistaken for the sexton. Are you haunted by the prospect of paying out a quid, Franky? Will it cost you more than paying your instalments on the furniture?"

"Dry up, you art!" "I suppose you'd better pay and look pleasant," said Owen Conquest. And he plunged his hand into his pocket and placed a pile of silver on the tea-table in front of Martin Clifford.

Frank Richards also forged in his pocket, and handed over a Treasury note for one pound.

"Thanks!" said Martin Clifford. He made a pretence of pocketing the spoils, and then handed the money back to the real owners.

"What the thump—" began Frank Richards.

"Off your rocker?" asked Owen Conquest. Martin Clifford laughed merrily.

"I've been thinking in the pleasant pastime of leg-peddling," he said. "I didn't win that water after all."

"What!" I shouted.

"You remember the warlike inn where we had our tea?" said Martin Clifford.

We nodded.

"Well, while you were trying to knock spots off each other in the billiard-room I went to the telephone."

"And he knew that, didn't?" said Owen Conquest.

"Yes; but you don't know why?"

"Whom did you ring up?" I asked.

"A schoolmaster friend of mine who lives at Woking. I told him I wanted his assistance in carrying out a little jape."

"Great Scott!"

"I asked him to send a dozen of his pupils round the town until they had collected from the various newsagents' shops a hundred copies of the 'Gem' Library. I further requested that a hundred pupils should march out to meet us, each armed with a copy of the 'Gem.' I told him I would accept your respective applications. And did it! It was a jape worthy of Monty Leithers at his best."

"Then you—you're not the winner of the wager?" I stammered.

"Of course not! We were all square at the finish. We discovered four Gemlets, four Magnetites, and four Joys' Friendites."

"I'm a loser all the same," said Owen Conquest.

"How do you make that out?"

"I wagered you and Franky ten shillings each that we should find more Joys' Friendites than Magnetites and Gemlets put together."

"That's so," I said. "Owen Conquest pays out ten bob to each of you."

"I think we'll let him off," said Frank Richards, who had now quite recovered his composure.

"Yes, rather," said Martin Clifford. "By the way, you fellows must admit that I fairly scored off you this afternoon!"

"We admit it, notwithstanding," said Owen Conquest. "Of all the foolish japes ever played that one of yours takes the bun! If I were to make Jimmy Silver do a thing like that in one of my yarns, the readers would start sending me anonymous letters threatening my life!"

"It was a jolly good jape!" said Martin Clifford warmly.

So which three voices—the voices of Frank Richards, Owen Conquest, and a certain now-repelled with that brief but telling possibility:

CHAPTER 14.
The Gem Library to the Rescue.

I day off riddled into two.
It was Frank Richards' fault. He was acting as leader of the expedition, and he led us with such thoroughness that we found it impossible to fit back to London that night.

I suggested that we rode back as far as possible in the darkness, and completed our journey in the morning.

Had the others wouldn't hear of it.

"That day off," said Frank Richards, "has
(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MASHET. THE BOYS' FRIENDS. THE GEM. THE PENNY POPULAR. QUACKLE. Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday!

"ONLY GUSBY'S WAY!"

By Martin Clifford.

I have persuaded your favourite author to write an extra-long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. for our next issue.

This story, I am sure, will cause endless amusement to all. It is one long scream from beginning to end, and I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Martin Clifford is really giving his best in

"ONLY GUSBY'S WAY!"

I should strongly advise all my readers to avoid disappointment by ordering their copies early, as there is sure to be a great rush for this splendid, long, complete story.

"THE GREYFRIERS HERALD"

is going to be the biggest success on record in the way of school journals—that is now certain, I feel sure. As the first number of the new edition gets nearer and nearer towards completion, the impression grows stronger upon me that it is going to be pronounced by all my readers an unequalled success.

The preparation of a paper like the "Greyfriars Herald" is no simple task, for I am including nothing which has not first received the most careful and complete consideration.

MUST BE A GREAT SUCCESS!

I repeat, the "Greyfriars Herald" must be a great success, or it will not have come to stay. It would not be worth my while to spend so much time upon its preparation if it was not going to receive the loyal support of all readers of the Companion Papers. However, I am not worrying about that, because I feel absolutely convinced that it will be declared by all to be just the thing.

ARE YOU DOING YOUR BIT?

Your bit consists in letting all your boy and girl chums know that the "Greyfriars Herald" is coming out again in October, and that all who like the Companion Papers will be certain to like the famous school journal.

Nothing has been omitted that can in any way assist its success, and the only other thing I can think of that can make its popularity assured is that all my GEM readers should be quite sure that they have no chums who have not heard that it is coming out again in October.

LET ALL YOUR CHUMS KNOW!

That is not a heavy task—not nearly so heavy as mine—for you have only just to remember the one thing, or perhaps I should say two things. In the first place you have to remember that October is ten months that is to say, No. 1 of the "Greyfriars Herald," and in the second place you have to remember to mention it whenever you meet a chum.

DON'T FORGET!

THE PLAIN TRUTH.

The following is an extract from a letter written by a friend of mine at West Ham: "I have been reading the GEM for some time, and I think it is a ripping book."

"I cannot understand people writing to you and calling either the GEM or its Companion Papers bloodthirsty. I've got a letter from one of my chums who would bound books. I don't suppose there would be a word against them, because people seem to think that just because a book is bound and costs a lot of money it is all right." "That's just it. That is the whole case in a nutshell. Unfortunately, there are still many people about who are capable of judging a book by its outside appearance. If it is bound up in a stiff cover, with gilt edges, and all the rest of the adornments beloved of the bookbinder, they think it must be a splendid book, whereas heaps of books of that

kind are not nearly so good as the Companion Papers.

But simply because the Companion Papers have paper covers, in order to keep the price down within reach of all, there are people who will condemn them. And yet it ought to be obvious to all that if a book is bound up in stiff covers, etc., the price must be higher.

However, the Companion Papers are successful in spite of such views, and they will always be successful so long as I have true, loyal supporters, such as my girl chum of West Ham.

CONGRATULATIONS FROM SCOTLAND.

I have received a long and most interesting letter from a Scottish girl chum. Space will not permit me to publish it in full, but she says:

"I am writing to tell you how much I appreciate and look forward every week to the GEM. Undoubtedly, I agree with that reader of the Companion Papers who, like me, thinks none can touch the GEM."

Splendid! I am never tired of reading words like these from my readers. My girl chum has also a jolly good word for the "Penny Popular." Then comes a question: "What about the St. Jim's Gallery? Has it stopped, or will it be continued?"

Well, for the present, at any rate, it has finished. I have so many other schemes coming along that there simply won't be any room for a very long time to come. However, for those who were interested in the Gallery here is a hint. The Annual will contain a St. Jim's Gallery! That is all I can say about it now, you can keep that in mind, and be certain not to miss it.

YOUR EDITOR.

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc.

L. Flakett, 16, Holmwood Road, Seven Kings, Essex;—Gilbon's Stamp Album and 500 assorted stamps for sale, cheap.

L. J. Steggs, 92, Holloway Road, Leytonstone, Essex, wants readers for the "Victory Magazine."

Wm. G. Frintzell, 3, Foster Terrace, Ballybough, Dublin—with a boy anywhere, with a view to permanent friendship. Send photo. William Baggett, 25, Gorboeck Road, New Malden, Surrey—with readers in China. Jack Hall, 56, Felix Street, Hackney Road, E. 3—with American readers, preferably in New York, 15-16.

Hope, 13, Chester Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants branches and local members for sports club, 16-20.

H. Dickinson at Clifton Street, Leigh, Lancs—with readers interested in Esperanto.

H. Beaumont, 116, Taunton Road, Waterlooville, anti-under-Lymp—with readers anywhere, 15-16.

A. K. Blair, Albert Grove, Victoria, Australia—with readers anywhere, 16-16. Gordon Anderson, 4, Seymour Street, Observatory Road, near Cape Town—with readers anywhere.

C. C. Jackson, 81, Copper Road, Portsmouth—with readers in the United Kingdom.

John A. Johnson, 11, Finkle Street, Stockton-on-Tees, wants members in Canada, Africa, and India, for Clarion Correspondence Club. Stamped envelope.

R. Stewart, 22, Niagara Road, Fulham, N.W., wants members for "Union Jack" Hobby Club. Stamped envelope.

Miss Elsie Sharp, Hemsie House, London Road, St. Albans—with readers anywhere, 16-16.

Claude A. Iley, 13, Gordon Terrace, Thornaby-on-Tees—with readers anywhere, 15-16.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15).

Was you a world of good! The old happy flash has returned to your cheeks. When you get back to your manana one of your long-haired poets will exclaim:

"The Editor's a different man,
He's not the old, we knew;
I'm now 'substant' a splendid plan—
My 'Ode to Morning Dew'!"

"Don't be an ass, Franky!" I said.
"Certainly not! I know how keenly you prize competition!" said Frank Richards.
And there was a chuckle from the other two, whose heads I felt like banging together.

"I decided—at least, Frank Richards decided—to put up for the night at a respectable inn."

"I feel very uneasy about this stunt," I said. "The office will be in a state of chaos to-morrow."

"Bless the office!" growled Martin Clifford. "Yes—but the office won't bless me! My sub-editors will simply rave!"

"Let 'em, bless their dear hearts!" said Frank Richards.

At length I gave in.
As a matter of fact, previous to starting on the cycle-spin I had put in quite a long spell of hard work at the office, and I felt that two days' rest would clear the cobwebs from my brain.

"We slept soundly that night—with one exception."

The exception was Martin Clifford. Some persons—unknown—theory? Frank Richards was not above suspicion—had made the "Gem" author what is known as an "apple-pie" bed. Martin Clifford told us next morning that it had taken him a couple of hours to create order out of chaos.

"To rob a bar-working man of two hours' sleep," he added, "is a crime, the minimum penalty for which should be six months—with hard labour!"

But Martin Clifford got no sympathy from me. Probably Frank Richards or Owen Conquest—as both had not their own back, in some measure, for the jape played upon them the previous day.

We breakfasted late, owing to several reasons.

To begin with, none of us had brought our razors with us.

Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest, and I made up our minds to get a professional shave later in the day. But Frank Richards, who takes a pride in his personal appearance, determined not to appear at the breakfast-table in an unshorn state. Accordingly, he tried the laborious and painful experiment of shaving himself with a penknife!

Another delay occurred through the loss of Martin Clifford's collar-stud.

We found the "Gem" author grovelling on his hands and knees in his bedroom. All round him articles of apparel were scattered in sweet confusion.

"Talk about searching for Gessy's missing liver!" I exclaimed. "I can now understand where Martin gets his inspiration from!"

Martin Clifford continued to grovel. Had he been a detective he could not have examined the floor of the bedroom more minutely.

After a futile search he started muttering to himself in a strange tongue.

"Shush!" said Owen Conquest. "Tis wrong to whisper naughty things because your collar-stud takes wings!"

"Why," exclaimed Frank Richards at length, "here it is, all the time!"

And the little gold stud clattered mischievously from Martin Clifford's shirt!

"I've now 'substant' been a cop!" cried the blessed room upside-down!

Finally, at about eleven o'clock, we trooped down to breakfast.

An odour of fried bacon was wafted up to us as we descended the stairs.

"Good!" I murmured. "I'm jolly hungry!"

"You always are!" said Owen Conquest. "This is what comes of reading hundreds of stories a day!"

"I've got to put through a trunk call on the telephone, and dictate this week's 'Magnet' Chat to my sub-editor."

"Oh!"

"Couldn't the sub-editor write the Chat himself?" asked Frank Richards.

"He doesn't know what next week's story is about," I said.

"Then I'll soon enlighten him. Just wait till he comes through!"

Half an hour later the trunk call materialised.

Faintly across the wires came the weary voice of the sub-editor.

"Hello! Who's that?"

"The Editor speaking. How are things going?"

"They're not!"

"Rh?"

"The office is in a terrible state," said the sub-editor. "Yesterday was bad enough, but it was a perfect picnic by comparison with today!"

"What's gone wrong?"

"Everything! Your room's full of people falling over each other to interview you; and the printers are foaming at the mouth!"

"Let 'em foam!" I said cheerfully.

"The 'Magnet' Chat isn't written!"

"That's just why I rang you up. I want you to take it down in shorthand."

"Oh, all right!" growled the sub-editor. "Don't be too long-winded, though."

"None of your cheek, young man!" I said sharply.

And I was about to commence dictating the Editorial Chat when Frank Richards snatched the receiver from my hand and spoke into the telephone.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

There was a murmur from the other end which might have been an affirmative or a negative.

Anyway, Frank Richards started to dictate, as follows:

"For Next Monday:

"THE PRIDE OF GREYFRIARS!"

By Frank Richards.

"Our next grand, long, magnificent complete super-story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, by Frank Richards, will be a big feather in the cap of Frank Richards. Frank Richards has beaten all previous successes, and my readers may be assured that no one can write a Frank Richards story like Frank Richards. Brimming over with Frank Richards' humor, abounding in Frank Richards' wit, bubbling with Frank Richards' mirth, the story is a great personal triumph for Frank Richards. Frank Richards will have cause to thank his lucky stars that Frank Richards is Frank Richards—"

A queer, auto-casting noise came from the other end of the wire.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank Richards, breaking off in dismay. "I don't believe the fellow at the other end is taking it down!"

"I should jolly well think not!" grinned Martin Clifford. "There's rather too much Frank Richards about that Chat! You've mentioned yourself thirteen times already!"

Frank Richards smiled.

"There's nothing half so sweet in life," he murmured, "as—"

"Love's young dream!" suggested Owen Conquest.

"So-so!—advertisement! It's the secret of journalistic success."

Martin Clifford took up the receiver. "I think I'd better dictate this merry Chat," he said.

And, before anybody could prevent him, he was chattering away to the sub-editor.

"I want you to cancel the piffle that's just been dictated," he said. "What's that? You haven't taken it down? Good! I'll now proceed to dictate the real thing."

There was a brief pause while the sub-editor got ready, and then Martin Clifford launched forth as follows:

"For Next Monday:

"THE PRIDE OF GREYFRIARS!"

By Frank Richards.

"Our next potty, putrid, preposterous story of Harry Wharton & Co., the Good Little Georgies of Greyfriars, cannot fail to amuse all who are misguidedly led to read it. In fact, it is calculated to send most of our readers into hysterics. Under no consideration should the first chapter be missed. It commences thus:

"Yaroooooh!" said Billy Bunter, blinking in at the doorway of Study No. 1.

"Goo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yooooo!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered Johnny Bull.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" chimed in Harry Wharton.

"Rats!" said Mr. Quetch, looking in at that moment. "Chockit! stoopit! De! Leago!"

The last two words were uttered in real earnest by Martin Clifford as Frank Richards, striding forward, dragged him forcibly away from the telephone.

Owen Conquest and I roared with laughter. Frank Richards also roared—with indignation; and Martin Clifford roared as he sat down heavily on the floor, dragging the telephone leads of cord after him.

The cord became entwined around Martin Clifford's legs; and the more he struggled to free himself the more hopelessly he became tied up in knots.

(To be continued.)

Bessie Bunter

Editor of
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