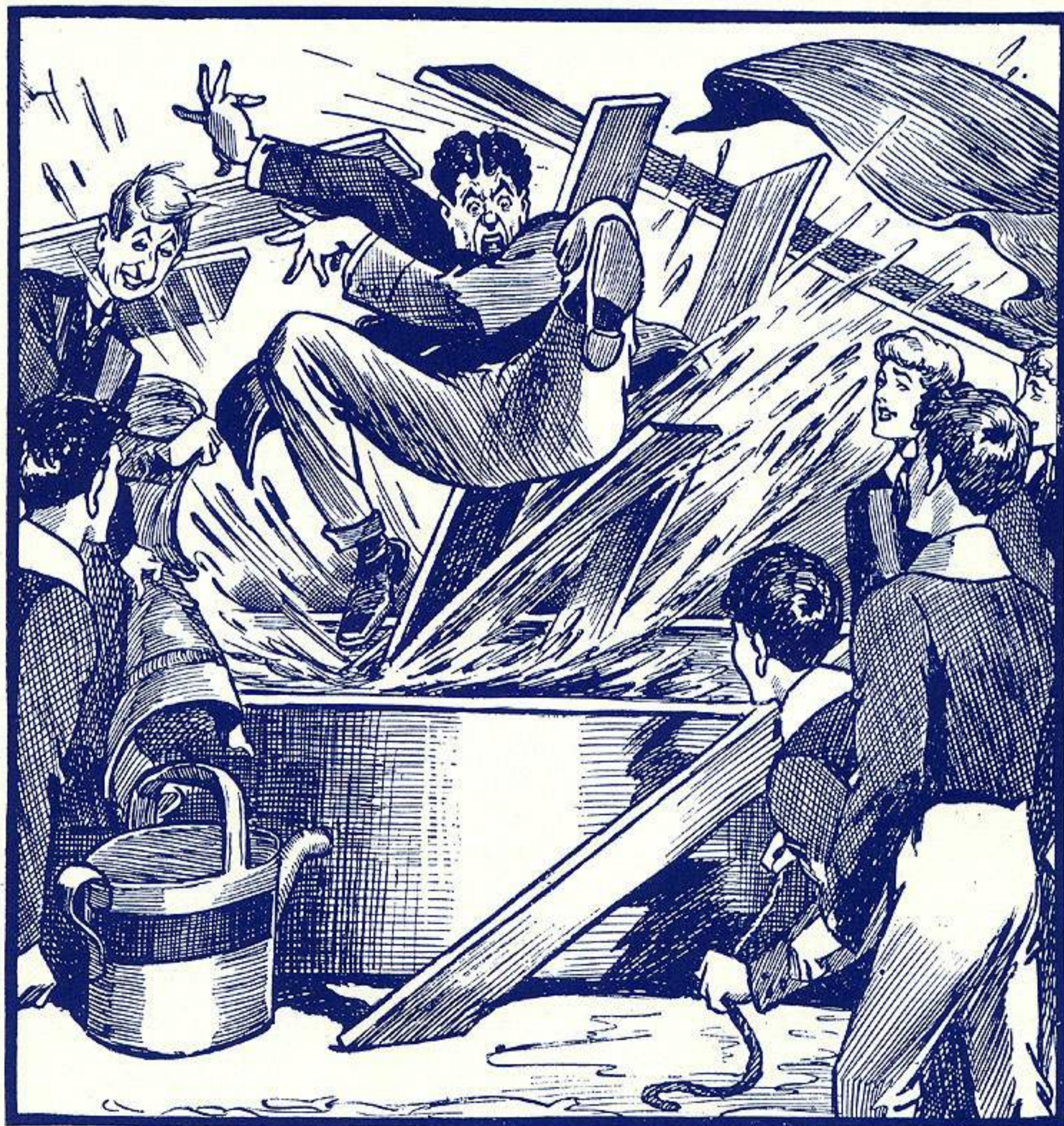


COKER THE JOKER!



The **Magnet** 1^d
Library

No. 528. Vol. XII.



A JOKE ON THE JOKER!

Copyright in the United States of America.

23-3-48

COKER THE JOKER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Patriotic!

THE Germans——
"Eh?"
"The Germans——"
"Where?"

Potter and Greene looked round the study as if in search of Germans. Horace Coker snorted impatiently.

Certainly there were no Huns in Coker's study, with the possible exception of Horace James Coker himself. According to most of the juniors of Greyfriars, Coker of the Fifth was a good deal of a Hun.

"The Germans——" recommenced Coker.

"I don't see any," said Potter, with a stare.

"Fathead! Did you expect to see any here?" howled Coker.

"Oh! Then I'll get on with my tea!" said Potter. "You quite alarmed me for a moment, Coker."

"The Germans——"
"Pass the sardines, Coker."

"The Germans——"
"Oh, come, the sardines are not German!" said Potter. "I wouldn't eat them if they were. Ahem! Shove them this way!"

"The Germans——" Coker started once more, heeding not at all Potter's request for the sardines.

"Any more war-bread?" asked Greene.

"Blow the war-bread! Bother the sardines!" exclaimed Coker, beginning to look excited. "As I was saying, the Germans——"

"Well, if you want all the sardines, you can have them," said Potter resignedly. "They're yours, of course."

"I don't want the sardines!" shrieked Coker.

"Then why don't you pass them?"

"Hang them!"

"I'd rather eat them, if it's all the same to you. I'm hungry!"

"That's all you fellows ever think of," said Coker bitterly. "Eating!"

"Well, isn't that a proper thing to think of at tea-time?" asked Potter.

"You've put away enough for a battalion of Guards yourself!"

"The Germans——"

"Pass the sardines, Greeney, as Coker won't."

"Here you are, old chap!"

"Thanks! I wonder whether we shall see any butter again before the end of the war?" remarked Potter meditatively.

"What do you think, Coker?"

"I don't think about it at all," snorted Coker. "What does it matter? Who wants any butter?"

"Well, I do, for one, if I can get any!"

"The Germans——"

Potter and Greene groaned. From that beginning they concluded that Horace Coker was starting upon "war-jaw." Coker's war-jaw was never entertaining, and his study-mates would have been glad to head him off. Anything was better than war jaw from Coker.

But Coker was evidently not to be headed off.

Potter rose hastily.

"My hat! I'd forgotten I have to speak to Wingate," he remarked. "See you later, you chaps."

"I'll come with you," said Greene, rising also.

"Stay where you are!" ordered Coker.

"But I've got to see Wingate about the footer——"

"And I've got to see Wharton about——about——about——"

Greene could not think, for a moment, what he had to see Wharton about.

"Sit down!"

"Look here, Coker——"

"I'm not going to discuss the war," said Coker wrathfully. "Tain't that, you silly chumps!"

"Oh!" said Potter. "I was afraid——"

"You chump!"

"Ahem! You see, old chap, we know how much better you could run the country than Lloyd George, and we know exactly what you'd do in Haig's place," said Potter. "You've told us, lots of times."

"Hundreds of times," said Greene sadly.

"Thousands, in fact."

"But if it's not war-jaw, go ahead!" said Greene, quite brightly. "We'll finish the sardines after all."

Coker glared at his study-mates as they resumed operations upon the sardines.

As in olden times the prophet was un-honoured in his own country, so in Coker's study the great Horace was not regarded with the admiration which was his due.

Potter and Greene ought really to have been grateful when Coker took the trouble to explain the war to them from beginning to end, and point out exactly what ought to have been done.

But they weren't.

They found Coker's war-jaw a weariness to the flesh, and they even hinted a doubt as to whether he would, in Haig's place, have reached Potsdam by this time.

"The Germans," Coker began again, without interruption at last—"the Germans are not defeated yet—I mean, not quite."

"Did you see that in the papers?" asked Potter.

"They're practically beaten," answered Coker. "They know it, too, but they're just lingering it out out of sheer obstinacy, just like caddish Huns. The war's gone on longer than most people expected. There's a shortage of grub——"

"Go hon!"

"A shortage of lots of things," continued Coker.

"Except queues," remarked Potter.

"I've heard that there are still plenty of queues."

Coker did not heed.

"What with the war going on so long, and a grub shortage, and a coal shortage, and Pacifistic chin-wag, and silly

speeches of politicians, and all that, there's danger of the country losing its moral," continued Coker. "People are likely to get discontented, and dissatisfied, and suspicious, and so on. You may have noticed lots of people are getting sharp-tempered. It's silly, but there you are."

Potter and Greene finished the sardines. They wondered what on earth Coker was getting at, but they did not care very much.

"Now," said Coker impressively, "under such circumstances every patriotic chap has a duty to do. He's got to keep on smiling."

"Oh!"

"Every fellow is bound to make light of war troubles, and keep a smiling face," said Coker. "If you treat the butter famine as a joke, it won't worry you. If you laugh at the meat shortage, it stops being a trouble. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter.

"What—what are you cackling at, Potter?"

"The meat shortage," answered Potter innocently.

"You silly ass!"

"Isn't that what you were advising?"

"Oh, don't be a born idiot, George Potter!" said Coker irritably. "Do let a chap finish without cackling like a silly old hen!"

"I'd be jolly glad if you'd finish, old chap!"

"You see my point?" demanded Coker. "The idea is, that there's a lot of pessimism about—people look on the dark side of things, and grouse and growl. Beastly unpatriotic, but people are built that way. I've thought it out. Every patriotic chap ought to be a centre of cheerfulness. He should be so cheery that people, seeing him, would think that things are not so bad after all, and they'd be encouraged to stick it out without grouching. See?"

"Well, that's not a bad wheeze," admitted Potter, plainly surprised that Horace Coker should have thought of it.

"Quite good!" remarked Greene.

"Well, I'm glad you can see it," said Coker, more amiably. "Now, there are grouchers in this school, though the fellows know very well that it's up to a school like Greyfriars to set an example to the country. It's got to be stopped! I'm going to stop it!"

"My hat!"

"By setting an example," explained Coker. "This study is going to be an example to Greyfriars, and I hope Greyfriars will be an example to the country! You fellows may have noticed that I have rather a gift of humour."

"Of—of what?"

"Humour!" snapped Coker.

"You're rather funny in some ways, it that's what you mean."

"I don't mean anything of the sort," growled Coker. "I mean that I've got a gift of humour, and humour is the thing that's required now to cheer people up. Take everything humorously, and there you are! Make jokes—good ones, of course—and set people laughing. That's

the idea. Laugh and grow fat, you know."

"Oh, dear!"

"The fact is, with my gift of humour, I could easily set Greyfriars in a roar," said Coker confidently.

"You could do that by playing footer."

"You silly ass!" roared Coker.

"Ahem!"

"Laugh and grow fat, I say," continued Coker. "That's the idea; keep 'em laughing, and they'll forget war-worry. I could cheer up a margarine queue with my humour."

Potter and Greene blinked at him.

Horace Coker laid claim to many gifts. He believed that he was a terrific footballer, a great cricketer, and many other things. He had tried his hand as a ventriloquist, to his own satisfaction. He had tried his hand at all sorts of things, always to his own satisfaction.

But Coker as a humorist was something new.

In fact, there was always something new about Coker. His mighty brain did not run in an ordinary groove.

"So—so—so you're going to start as a professional jokist?" gasped Potter at last.

"For patriotic reasons, yes. To cheer people up."

"But do you think it's likely to have that effect?" asked Potter seriously. "It might give 'em a tired feeling—"

"Don't be an ass, Potter! Now, frinstance," said Coker, "a quick brain like mine—"

"A whatter?"

"A quick brain like mine grasps a thing at once, and sees the humorous side of it," said Coker calmly. "You were speaking of the butter shortage."

"Is that humorous?"

"It has its humorous side. Frinstance, about the butter shortage, I should say that that was but a trifle."

"Some people think it's more than a trifle."

"Oh, you're crass, Potter—a crass ass! But a trifle—butter trifle—see? That's a pun."

"Is it a pun?"

"Of course it is. Butter—but a trifle—see?"

Potter and Greene assumed an expression of owl-like gravity, as if thinking it out very carefully.

"Don't you see the joke?" howled Coker.

"Was it a joke?"

"Of course it was!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter.

"Oh! You see the joke now?" asked Coker, mollified.

"Not at all."

"Eh? Then what are you laughing at?"

"I thought you wanted me to."

"You—you—you blinking chump!" roared Coker, jumping up. "By Jove, what you want is a thick ear, you silly cuckoo, and I'll jolly well give you one!"

Potter and Greene fled.

Coker glared after them in great wrath, not looking the least bit like a humorist at that moment. But when Potter and Greene retailed Coker's new scheme downstairs, there were howls of laughter. Coker might or might not be able to set Greyfriars in a roar with his gift of humour, but the bare idea of Coker of the Fifth as a humorist seemed to produce that desirable effect.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trying It On!

"CHEER up!"

"Eh?"

"Put a bright face on it, you know."

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at Coker of the Fifth.

It was the day following that conversation in Coker's study. The Famous Five of the Remove were discussing tea in the study, standing in a group under the elms in the quad, which were beginning to show their early green.

It was the food problem over again. Tea in the study was a matter of some difficulty. The regular allowance of war-bread could be taken to the study, if they liked, certainly. So could the allowance of butter—if any. And the allowance of tea—if any. Tea, as a matter of fact, was among the pleasant memories of the past. But the Famous Five did not want tea—the beverage. As Bob Cherry remarked, they were not old ladies or flappers. They could do without tea and not miss it. But something to eat they did want—especially Bob Cherry, who had an appetite that was really almost unpatriotic in war-time.

"Sardines ain't controlled, I believe," remarked Johnny Bull, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"They're nearly as scarce as if they were, though," said Bob.

"The humble and esteemed banana would be sufficient for my honourable self," observed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed banana—"

"Napoo!" said Nugent.

"The napoofulness is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur sadly.

It was then that Horace Coker of the Fifth chimed in, bidding the chums of the Remove cheer up.

Naturally, they stared.

As a matter of fact, the cheerful Co. did not want cheering up. The shortage was very short, but they took it good-humouredly. They were not the kind of fellows to complain because they were beginning to feel the hardships of war, which the soldiers had felt for years without complaining. As Harry Wharton had quietly remarked, they would have a right to grouse when the food shortage was as hurtful as bursting shells and poison-gas—and not before!

But Coker had no tact. Finding a group of juniors seriously discussing the all-important question of grub, he promptly butted in.

"Cheer up!" he repeated firmly.

"Don't grouse!"

"What are you burbling about now?" asked Harry Wharton politely.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," said Coker. "Suppose grub's short? What does it matter? Be firm! Play the man! Be like me!"

"Eh?"

"Take me as an example," said Coker encouragingly.

"An example of what?" asked Johnny Bull. "An example of the kind of chap who grows up to live at Colney Hatch?"

"Be cheerful!" said Coker, unheeding.

"Laugh and grow fat!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

He understooped now.

All the fellows had heard of Coker's new wheeze. Potter and Greene had related it far and wide, with tears of merriment in their eyes. It dawned upon the Removites that Horace Coker was starting on them in his new role of comforter and consoler and general buck-up.

"Take it smiling," said Coker. "Look on the humorous side."

"Well, you are a cheerful idiot!" said Nugent.

"Don't grouse—"

"Who's grouching?" demanded Johnny Bull belligerently.

"Well, don't do it," said Coker kindly.

"Some people have suggested that the Game Laws ought to be suspended for the duration. That would make an end of grouse—see?"

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Coker.

"Oh, my hat!" sobbed Nugent. "It's Coker the joker! He's making a pun—a pun on grouse! What Coker would call a pun, anyway."

"The punfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"He's doing this to cheer us up!" said Bob Cherry, staring at Coker open-mouthed. "My only hat!"

"That's it," said Coker. "Laugh and grow fat, you know. Look on the humorous side. Butter may be short, but it will be long enough before you get any more. Ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's another pun!" gasped Nugent. "How do you do it, Coker?"

"It's my gift of humour," explained Coker, who never could see when his leg was being pulled. "You can rely on me to cheer you up."

"About tea—" began Bob Cherry.

"Never mind tea," broke in Coker. "Dismiss it from your mind. Now, I suppose you kids haven't any sugar?"

"Haven't seen any this term, ass!"

"Well, honey is better than sugar."

"And where are we going to get honey from?" demanded Wharton. "The funds won't run to it."

"You can get honey from a selection of the letters of the alphabet," said Coker blandly.

"Wha-a-at?"

"A B C," said Coker.

"What do you mean—A B C, you ass?"

"A bee—see?" explained Coker.

The Famous Five stared at him. The atrocious pun gradually dawned upon their minds. But they did not laugh heartily, and with great enjoyment, as Coker had expected. They glared.

"You silly ass!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Coker.

"You thumping chump!" exclaimed Wharton. "Run away and play! Don't come here making fatheaded puns when a fellow's thinking out the grub question."

"Speaking of the war-bread," went on Coker recklessly, "there's a substitute. Pick out the Austrian prisoners who were born in the capital of Austria."

"Eh? Why?"

"Because they're Vienna bred," explained Coker. "Vienna bread—see? Ha, ha!"

The Famous Five exchanged a rapid glance, and then, with one accord, they fell upon Horace Coker and smote him hip and thigh.

As Hurree Singh remarked afterwards, the smitefulness was terrific.

Coker sat down and roared, and the chums of the Remove left him roaring, as they walked away to solve the grub problem in another place.

"Of all the born idiots!" said Bob Cherry. "To think that war-time is a time for bothering fellows with idiotic jokes!"

"The silly ass!"

"The howling chump!"

"The terrific burbler!"

Which was all the thanks Horace Coker received from the Famous Five for his first attempt at cheering up Greyfriars.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mr. Prout Is Not Pleased!

"PROUTY looks rather a Hun!" Squiff of the Remove made that remark when the Remove were going in to lessons the next morning.

Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, came along the passage with a decidedly cross expression on his face, and disappeared into the Fifth Form-room.

"Poor old Prout!" said Bob Cherry,

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 528.

with a grin. "Fitzgerald says he's had to take in three or four inches of his waistcoats. He could do with it!"

"Old Prout's got all the luck," said Billy Bunter, with a sigh.

"How do you make that out?" asked Squiff. "Prout doesn't get any more rations than anybody else."

"Those fat chaps have the luck," explained Bunter. "They've got a lot of fat to draw upon, you see. It's the slim fellows who will starve first. A chap like old Prout can draw on his own fat, like a Polar bear."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites. Certainly Mr. Prout had a rotund figure, which looked as if he had done himself remarkably well in peace-time. But his circumference was a joke to William George Bunter's.

"If that's the case, fatty, you are prepared for a seven years' war," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——?" "Greyfriars won't have a fat shortage while we've got Bunter," remarked Squiff.

"Some fellows have a figure," said Bunter disdainfully. "Skinny bounders may call them fat. As a matter of fact, I'm wasting away to a shadow."

"Ha, ha! A jolly substantial shadow!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I can feel myself fading away," said Bunter pathetically. "My study-mates are selfish."

"What's that?" demanded Peter Todd.

Peter had the honour—or otherwise—of being Billy Bunter's study-mate.

"You know you took the last sardine at tea-time yesterday, Peter," said Bunter, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Why, you fat worm," exclaimed Peter, "I did; but you had taken the other six."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Hallo! Here's Quelch!"

The Removites went into their Form-room as the Remove-master came along. Sometimes they thought Mr. Quelch a rather severe gentleman, but this morning they were glad they had "Quelch" and not "Prouty" in charge of them. Mr. Quelch was a very slim gentleman, and ought to have felt the grub trouble more than Mr. Prout did; but he seemed to take it cheerfully enough. There was no doubt that it had had a bad effect upon Mr. Prout's temper, and Harry Wharton & Co. did not envy the Fifth that morning.

"It's a chance for Coker to try his cheering-up game," Bob Cherry remarked. "He's got a good subject in Prouty."

"He's almost ass enough!" chuckled Nugent.

And the juniors grinned at the idea.

In point of fact, Frank Nugent was not quite right. Coker was not only almost ass enough; he was quite ass enough. That was the very idea that was working in Coker's mighty brain that morning. He confided it to Potter and Greene while they were waiting for Mr. Prout to come in.

"Prout will be ratty this morning, as usual," he remarked to them.

Potter grunted.

"He's always ratty since the beef and mutton ran short," he answered. "Like his cheek, I consider. Why shouldn't he go short, as well as anybody else?"

"He doesn't look at the matter in the right light," explained Coker. "He's rather selfish and inconsiderate."

"Better tell him so, bedad!" remarked Fitzgerald.

Coker shook his head.

"No good telling him so, Fitz. It would only make him waxy, very likely."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 528.

"Go hon!" murmured Fitzgerald.

"My idea is to set him an example of good-humour and cheerfulness, mingled with a little playful humour," said Coker.

His chums stared at him. "For goodness' sake, Coker," gasped Greene. "don't begin playing the giddy ox in the Form-room. Prout will scalp you!"

"Don't do it, old man," implored Potter. "He will take it out of the lot of us. Did you see his face when he found that there wasn't any bacon for breakfast?"

"Shush!" murmured Smith major. Mr. Prout rustled into the Form-room.

He cast a basilisk glance over his class, as if seeking something to grouse about at once. He did not really mean to, but that was what he felt like that morning.

Not that Mr. Prout was unpatriotic. He was simply bursting with patriotism. Although well over military age, he had offered his services to the authorities, and had been bitterly disappointed on finding that they had no use for him. He was quite prepared to die in the last ditch rather than give in to the unspeakable Hun.

But the food shortage had hit Mr. Prout hard.

From long custom, he expected his rashers and kidneys and eggs in the morning, much as he expected the sun to rise. He expected his two cups of strong tea, each with four lumps of sugar in it. He expected his nicely-browned toast, and the lovely little rolls of fresh butter. When those comforts were taken away the war came home to Mr. Prout with a vengeance. Like many warlike gentlemen, he had always thought of war as an affair of flashing sabres, bursting shells, pride, pomp, and circumstance. He found out that war really meant bread which took no end of chewing, and no butter therewith, and the glory had departed from war in his eyes.

Indeed, some of the fellows suspected that Mr. Prout was actually becoming Pacifistic, so acutely did he feel the loss of his beloved kidneys and rashers. He had been heard to make remarks quite unworthy of a last ditcher. His digestion was not good—very probably because of his long devotion to rashers and kidneys in the morning—and war-bread gave him great discomfort. Indigestion generally has a bad effect on the temper.

But Mr. Prout, being a patriotic gentleman, could not possibly admit, even to himself, that his temper was suffering on account of war's hardships. He had to find a moral reason for it—a reason that would satisfy his conscience. So he became very exacting and punctilious in the Form-room, and ragged the Fifth without mercy—not because he had indigestion and an empty feeling, but because somebody scraped his feet on the floor, or somebody construed badly, or somebody else whispered in class.

As Mr. Prout's fault-finding only dated from the food shortage, the Fifth-Formers drew their own conclusions about it, however.

The Form-master, in his present humour, was about the last person in the world for Coker to experiment on in his new role.

But Coker did not seem to see it. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Lessons began in a thunderous atmosphere, and the Fifth-Formers were very circumspect. They did not want lines or detentions or jawings. Mr. Prout had lately developed a most sarcastic tongue, and his way of holding a fellow

up to ridicule before the class was decidedly unpleasant.

Certainly, if Coker could have cheered up Mr. Prout to the extent of restoring his former good-humour the Fifth would have been very grateful to him. But it was not likely that Coker could.

Still, he meant to try! Mr. Prout's gleaming eye looked so dangerous that even Coker hesitated for some time. But he plunged in at last.

Coker came in for the bitter edge of Mr. Prout's tongue himself, and it made him more determined to do his best.

"You construe like a junior in the Third Form, Coker!" said Mr. Prout acidly. "Why you were placed in the Fifth Form passes my comprehension. I doubt if you could construe 'arma virumque cano' correctly!"

Coker reddened a little. That well-worn tag was well within even Coker's powers.

"'Arms and the man I sing,' sir!" grunted Coker.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Mr. Prout, with an air of great surprise.

But Coker was not finished yet.

Here was an opportunity for the playful humour which was to introduce an atmosphere of cheery good-feeling into the Form-room, and Coker did not neglect it. Not Coker!

He bestowed a propitiatory smile upon Mr. Prout, and went on:

"A German Virgil, sir——"

"What?"

"A German Virgil——"

"What do you mean, Coker? There is no German Virgil!"

"Imagine a German Virgil, sir——"

"What nonsense are you talking, Coker? Are you out of your senses, or are you not aware that Virgil was a Roman poet?"

"Certainly, sir!" persisted Coker. "But imagine a German Virgil, turning out poetry and stuff about the Germans, he would put it 'Crura virumque cano'."

"What?"

"'Crura virumque cano,' sir," said Coker pleasantly.

The Fifth-Formers stared blankly at Coker.

Mr. Prout looked at him as if he would eat him.

"Coker," he gasped, "I have always known that you were the stupidest boy in the class! But I begin to believe that you are not in your right senses. What do you mean, if you mean anything?"

"Crura's Latin for legs, sir," said Coker, a little dismayed by this reception of his playful humour.

"I am aware of that, Coker—I do not require elementary instruction in the classical languages from the most obtuse boy in the Fifth Form! I insist upon your explaining what you mean by your utterly senseless remark!"

"It—it's a joke, sir," faltered Coker, beginning to doubt whether, after all, Mr. Prout was a good subject.

"A—a—a what?"

"'Crura virumque cano—legs and the man I sing,' sir," said Coker feebly. "See? It means the beggars run away, sir. A—a pun on the words arms and legs, you see, sir. Ha, ha!"

Coker's "ha, ha" sounded hollow in the midst of a dead silence. The Fifth Form sat almost frozen. Mr. Prout's expression was rivalling that of the famous Gorgon, but Coker was not feeling quite like Perseus. He was beginning to wish that he hadn't started cheering up Mr. Prout with playful humour.

The Fifth Form-master found his voice at last.

"Coker!" he gasped. "You—you are interrupting the lesson in order to make idiotic puns to me—me, your Form-master—utterly childish playing upon

words in a manner worthy only of an infant of feeble intellect—"

"Oh!" stuttered Coker.

"What do you mean, sir?" roared Mr. Prout. "If you are not actually insane, what do you mean?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Potter.

"I—I—I—" stammered Coker.

Mr. Prout whisked to his desk, and grabbed a cane.

"Step out here, Coker!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"The Fifth Form are not usually caned," shouted Mr. Prout. "But when I find in my Form a boy who adds foolish impertinence to incredible stupidity, I have no resource but to treat him like a junior. Come here, sir!"

"Oh, dear!"

Coker came out very slowly and reluctantly before the class. It was a great humiliation to be caned like a fag, but Mr. Prout was evidently on the war-path. Somehow, Coker's playful humour had not improved his temper. It had set Mr. Prout in a roar, certainly; but it was a roar of wrath.

"Hold out your hand, sir!" roared Mr. Prout, glaring at the unhappy humorist over his spectacles. "You must learn, Coker, that the Form-room is not the place for the feeble ebullitions of a misguided and semi-idiotic humour. Hold out your hand at once! Now the other hand!"

Swish, swish!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Go back to your place, Coker!"

"Ow!"

"And another word of impertinence from you, and I will report you to Dr. Locke for a flogging, sir!"

Coker crawled back to his place.

He received Mr. Prout's very special attention after that till the end of morning lessons. Mr. Prout fairly roasted Coker, dragging out all his ignorance and obtuseness into the light of day, and making the unhappy Horace fairly squirm.

Coker did not try any more playful humour upon him. It was only too painfully clear that Mr. Prout was not a suitable subject.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Equal Rations!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were in Study No. 1 after lessons, and they were chortling in chorus when Billy Bunter rolled in.

Coker's exploits in the Fifth Form-room that morning were the talk of the school, and the fellows roared over them.

There was no doubt that Coker had set Greyfriars in a roar, though not in the way he intended.

"Coker's a success, and no mistake!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Why, war-worry and Coker can't exist together. I hope he'll keep on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove howled.

The utter fatuousness of Coker and his new scheme was irresistible. That any fellow should think he could cheer people up in dark times by a succession of feeble jokes and weak puns was a marvel in itself. Such an idea would certainly never have occurred to any brain less mighty than Coker's.

Coker as a humorist was, in fact, the very last word in humour. Everybody hoped that he would keep on as he had started. Coker's jokes, certainly, were not a laughing matter; but all Greyfriars was prepared to laugh at Coker himself.

"I say, you fellow, I've got an idea!" said Billy Bunter, interrupting the chorus of chortles. "About Coker, you know—"



Rationing toffee! (See Chapter 4.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Coker's turned out to be a humorist"

"He has—he have!" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes.

"Well, as a humorist, I suppose he would appreciate a little joke," remarked Bunter, blinking at the chums over his big spectacles.

"That doesn't follow," said Harry, laughing. "It isn't quite safe to pull the leg of a humorist, I believe."

"Well, as a humorous chap, he's bound to appreciate humour," argued Bunter. "Now, Coker's been laying in stuff for tea—lots of it."

"Is he beginning as a food-hog as well as a humorist?"

"Not controlled stuff," explained Bunter. "He's laid in about three dozen eggs—you can have as many eggs as you like, if you've got the money. There's still eggs to be had, as they're not controlled yet. Coker gave sixpence each for them—I saw him!"

"How nice to have an Aunt Judy!" sighed Nugent. "I've got three or four uncles I would swap for Coker's Aunt Judy!"

"Well, I've got an idea. Suppose one of you fellows goes to Coker's study and bags that lot of eggs?"

"Fathead!"

"You see, it would be a joke on Coker," said Bunter. "He goes in to tea expecting to find plenty of grub—and he finds the cupboard bare. You could leave a little note—'Thanks for the eggs,' or something like that. I suppose Coker would see the joke, being a humorist."

"More likely to go looking for his eggs with a tomahawk, I should think," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Well, you chaps ain't afraid of Coker," urged Bunter. "You go and collar the eggs, and bring 'em here, and I'll cook 'em for you. I can't say fairer than that. Halves, you know!"

"Fathead! If you want to burgle Coker, go and burgle him yourself!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Better not let him catch you, though!"

"Well, he oughtn't really to have the eggs," said Bunter, unrolling a chunk of toffee. "I believe in equal rations for

everybody—I don't believe in the idle rich having extra grub simply because they've got the money."

"Whack everything out fair all round—what?" asked Bob.

"That's it, exactly!"

"Good idea!" agreed Bob, as he jerked away Bunter's chunk of toffee. "Lend me your penknife, Bunter!"

"Gimme my toffee!" roared Bunter in alarm.

"Lend me your penknife," answered Bob.

"What do you want my penknife for, you ass?"

"To cut this toffee into six pieces," said Bob innocently. "There's six of us here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's face was a study. Apparently he was not prepared for that rapid application of his own principles.

"You beast, gimme me my toffee!" he roared.

"Our toffee, you mean!" said Bob, with a shake of the head. "We can't afford toffee; we're stony just now. You can, so you're the idle rich, Bunter. This toffee is going to be whacked out."

"Gimme my toffee!" shrieked Bunter, making a clutch at it in desperation.

Bob chuckled, and held the toffee high above the reach of the fat junior.

"Lend me a knife, somebody!" he said cheerfully.

"You—you beast! I say, Toddy!" yelled Bunter, as Peter Todd's lanky form passed the doorway. "Come here, Toddy!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Peter Todd, looking in.

"That beast's taken my toffee, and he won't give it to me!" wailed Bunter. "You lick him, Toddy! I'll hold your jacket!"

"Come in, Toddy!" said Bob Cherry cordially. "That makes seven. Toddy's entitled to his whack. Bunter proposes equal rations all round, and we're beginning with Bunter's toffee. See?"

Peter Todd grinned.

"First-rate!" he agreed. "Hand over my whack!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Here's a knife!" said Wharton, laughing.

Bunter made a rush at the toffee as Bob Cherry laid it on the table and began to hack. Peter Todd took hold of his collar and held him back.

"Leggo!" yelled Bunter. "M-m-my toffee!"

"What about equal rations?" demanded Bob.

"I—I—I only meant for other people's things, of course!" stammered Bunter.

"Not my own toffee, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too late!" said Bob solemnly. "This study has adopted the principle of equal rations for all. Besides, it's quite right—a good idea. Why should the rich Bunters revel in toffee, while the poor but honest Cherrys haven't a lump of sugar to their name?"

"The whyfulness is terrific!" grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Take it snilefully, my esteemed Bunter."

"Leggo, Peter, you beast!"

"Here you are, Buntty!" said Bob, holding out a seventh part of the toffee on the tip of the knife. "That's your whack. I've given you a bit over your whack, really, as you're the founder of the feast."

"You rotter! It's all mine!" howled Bunter.

"Take it or leave it!"

Bunter took it, and promptly shoved it into his mouth. It was safe there, at least. He was in dread lest somebody else might drop in to take his share in the equal rations.

But he eyed the rest hungrily.

Bob closed one eye at Peter Todd, and Peter's grasp on Bunter's collar relaxed. The fat junior made a dive at the table, grabbed the toffee, and jammed it into his mouth. It was a large consignment for one go, even for Billy, and his mouth was nearly filled.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's scooped it!" exclaimed Bob.

"Groooh!" gasped Bunter.

"He's choking! Pat him on the back!" exclaimed Wharton.

Thump, thump, thump!

Bob Cherry patted the Owl of the Remove on the back as if he were beating carpet. Bunter roared wildly and choked.

"Groooh! Groooh! Gerrroooh!"

Thump, thump!

"Yurrrrrghhh!"

Thump!

"Gogggggguggg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter dodged out of the study, gasping and spluttering. For the next ten minutes he was seated in the window, spluttering, trying to deal with the toffee. His teeth were embedded in it, and it was not easy to deal with. Bolsover major came along, and stopped to stare at him.

"What on earth are you sitting there for, you owl?" demanded Bolsover.

"Gug-gug!"

"Do you want people to fall over you?"

"Gug-gug!"

"What are you making that silly row for?"

"Gug-gug!"

"Is it a game?" demanded the mystified Bolsover.

"Grrrrrgg!"

"Can't you answer?" roared Bolsover angrily. "Why can't you speak, you silly owl?"

"Grooooooogh!"

"What are you up to?"

"Gug-gug!"

"Well, that may be funny," said Bolsover major, "but I expect an answer when I ask a fellow a question, and when I don't get one I kick him—like that!"

Thud!

"Grooh-oooooh-gug-gug!" spluttered Bunter wildly.

"Now answer, you fat idiot!"

"Gug-gug!"

"My hat! You want some more?"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

Bolsover major brought his heavy boot into play again. But the unfortunate Owl of the Remove could not answer him—his teeth were deep in the obstinate toffee, and would not come out. He rolled out of Bolsover's way, and fled.

"Silly ass!" ejaculated Bolsover, staring after him. "Why couldn't he answer a civil question? I've a jolly good mind to go after him and wallop him!"

And Bolsover walked away in great dudgeon; while William George Bunter, in his study, struggled with the obstinate toffee till at last he won.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Eggs-actly!

COKER of the Fifth smiled broadly as he came up to his study at tea-time.

There was nothing in particular for Coker to smile at, unless, indeed, his own absurdity dawned upon him; but that was far from being the case.

Coker was smiling on principle.

Whatever happened, whatever clouds might lower, though butter disappeared, and the war-bread grew browner, and the war-beef tougher, and the war-tea weaker, Coker was going to take it smiling, assisted by his great, and hitherto unsuspected, gift of humour.

Therefore he smiled.

Since his great scheme had come into his fertile brain Coker's rugged features had worn an almost continual smile, supposed to indicate good-humour, contentment, and a spirit of sticking it out. What did Coker care for offensives in the West and revolutions in the East, air-raids, and shortage of foodstuffs? Coker smiled at Fate, and defied it, like Ajax defying the lightning. He hoped to see all Greyfriars smiling, too. And he did, in a way.

Coker's humour had not failed him yet.

"What are you grinning at, old scout?" asked Greene, as he met him in the passage. And Greene looked round for the cause.

Coker had to put up with a lot of misunderstanding from his study-mates. Sometimes he suspected that they did not misunderstand so much as they made out, though he was not a suspicious chap as a rule.

His smile changed to a frown as Greene made his remark.

"Don't be an ass, Greene!" he said witheringly.

"Certainly not, old scout! I leave that to you," said Greene affably. "You can do all that's wanted in that line in our study."

"Look here——" roared Coker.

"Anything for tea?" broke in Potter pacifically.

"Only eggs," said Coker, his face clearing. "I've got two dozen. They'll help the war-bread down."

"Oh, good!"

"Eggs-actly, in fact!" said Coker, his brilliant humour breaking out again.

"Eh—what?"

"Eggs-actly!"

Potter looked puzzled.

"Is that a German word, Coker?"

"Oh, my hat! Can't you see a pun!"

"No. Where is it?" asked Potter, looking round.

Coker snorted and went into his study, and Potter and Greene followed him in, grinning. They seemed to have made an agreement never to see any of Coker's jokes, which was rather exasperating to a humorist who was determined to be funny.

There was a startled exclamation in the study as the three Fifth-Formers entered.

A fat junior swung round from the cupboard with a guilty look, and blinked at them in alarm.

"Bunter!" roared Coker. "What are you doing in my study?"

"I—I—oh, really——"

"Scoffing my grub?" exclaimed Coker, in great wrath.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Greene.

"I—I—oh, really, you fellows—not at all!" gasped Bunter. "I—I came here to—to see Coker——"

"See if the eggs are all right, before I let him clear off," said Greene, holding the Owl of the Remove by the collar.

Coker glanced into the cupboard.

"Yes, all serene!"

"I suppose the fat boulder hadn't time to scoff them," growled Potter.

"Well, I suppose even Bunter would draw the line at raw eggs," said Coker.

"I believe he'd eat a raw Hun if he was hungry."

"What were you up to here, Bunter?" demanded Coker, glancing round the study.

"N-n-nothing!"

"You fat fibber——"

"The—the fact is, Coker, I—I came to see you," stammered Bunter.

"Well, you can see me now," said Coker, taking up a cricket-stump. Billy Bunter eyed that stump very uneasily.

"I—I wanted to hear some of your jokes, Coker——"

Coker looked at him.

"Oh!" he said.

"I—I've got a keen appreciation of humour," said Bunter. "I—I thought you might tell me some of your—your funny stories."

"I don't see why Bunter shouldn't stay to tea, you fellows," remarked Coker complacently. "Let him go, Greene!"

It was said of old that the soft answer turneth away wrath, and certainly Horace Coker was born to have his leg pulled.

Bunter was nobody in particular; but Bunter was the first fellow who had shown appreciation of Coker's humour, and Coker felt a new respect for him. He reflected that Bunter wasn't such a fat fool as he had always thought.

But Greene, instead of releasing the Owl of the Remove, shook him forcibly.

"He came here to scoff the grub!" he said.

"He's told you what he came here for," said Coker.

"Oh, that's rot! He's only pulling your leg."

"Oh, really——" murmured Bunter.

Bunter was afraid that Coker would see that obvious fact. But he need not have had any fear. Coker only stared wrathfully at Greene.

"If you want a thick ear, William Greene, you've only got to be a cheeky ass like that! Let the kid alone. I'm not going to have any bullying in my study."

"B-b-bullying!" stuttered Greene.

"Yes, that's what I call it. Let him alone!"

"You silly clump!" roared Greene.

However, he let Bunter go, with a spin that sent him staggering against the door.

"Get out, you fat frog!" he snorted.

"Stay where you are, Bunter," said Coker. "You can stay to tea, if you like. We've got plenty of eggs. Hallo! He's gone!"

It was remarkable for Bunter to decline an invitation to tea. But he did. Before Coker had finished speaking the fat junior was out of the study and fleeing down the passage.

"Well, the fat duffer!" commented Coker. "I don't see what you are

grinning at Potter. That kid Bunter is unusually sensible for a Remove kid. But I dare say we can manage the eggs—only four each—”

“You got two dozen at Uncle Clegg’s,” said Potter.

“Yes; but I took a dozen to Mrs. Chirpey. Her husband’s at the Front, you know, and she doesn’t find it easy to feed the kids. I thought the eggs would be a treat for them.”

“You ain’t a bad sort of chap, Coker, if you weren’t such a born idiot!” said Potter.

“Oh, don’t be funny! I know I’ve got all the brains there are in this study,” answered Coker. “Only a brainy fellow would have thought of such a wheeze as I’ve thought of—cheering people up and banishing pessimism and things by means of a gift of humour. I don’t say it was a success with old Prout—he’s got no appreciation. But it’s bound to work. I’ve been giving Wingate some attention.”

“What on earth have you done to Wingate?” asked Green. “I wouldn’t play any jokes on the skipper if I were you!”

“But you’re not me, Greeney. You haven’t my brains and my sense of humour,” said Coker, smiling. “I’ve dropped into Wingate’s study, and looked after his things a bit. A really good practical joke makes fellows laugh no end. I’ve taken his grub out of the cupboard and hidden it in his table-drawer. He won’t think of looking there for it, of course. Ha, ha!”

Potter and Greene remained quite grave.

“Is that a joke?” asked Potter.

“Oh, you duffer, can’t you see it is? Wingate will go hunting all over the place, and he’ll think some fag has boned his sardines and biscuits and condensed milk and things. Then he’ll find that they were right under his nose all the time. Ha, ha!”

“Of all the fatheads—” said Greene.

“Oh, you fellows are dense!” said Coker impatiently. “Let’s have tea. Shove on the saucepan, Greene. That’s all you’ve got intellect enough for.”

Greene sniffed, and put the saucepan on, and stirred the fire. Coker lifted the dish of eggs out of the cupboard.

“Shove ‘em in, Potty!”

“Hallo!” exclaimed Potter, as he picked up one of the eggs to begin. “This egg weighs jolly light!”

“Does it?”

“I—I say, it’s empty!” exclaimed Potter. “That old bounder Clegg has palmed off an empty shell on you!”

“What rot!”

“There’s a hole in the end! My hat! So there is in this—and this—and this! Why, they’re all empty!” exclaimed Potter, aghast.

“They can’t be!” shouted Coker. “Do you think I’d buy a dozen empty eggshells, you ass! Those I gave Mrs. Chirpey were all right. They’re all right, too.”

“Look at them yourself!” howled Potter.

Coker examined the eggs, and his eyes grew big and round with astonishment. Every one of them weighed no more than a shell, and was evidently empty. And there was a hole in each shell. The truth dawned on Potter.

“Bunter!” he yelled.

“Eh? What do you mean by howling ‘Bunter’?”

“That’s what he was doing here!” raved Potter. “That’s why he wouldn’t stay to tea. He knew there was nothing for tea! He’s sucked all the eggs!”

“Wha-a-a-at!”

“Look at them—all sucked!”

“Oh, the blessed fat pirate!” howled Greene. “Now what are we going to have for tea?”

Coker’s face was a study as he stared at the empty eggshells. The dreadful truth was only too clear. Bunter had not ventured to carry off the plunder, in case he should be spotted in possession of it. He had stood before Coker’s cupboard and coolly sucked the eggs, one after another, taking them down like oysters. Raw eggs are very nutritious, though not to everybody’s taste. But all was grist that came to Billy Bunter’s mill.

The fat junior had evidently been careful to leave the eggs presenting their normal appearance, in case he should be caught in the study—as had happened. It was very clear now why he had not stayed to tea.

“The—the—the fat villain!” stuttered Coker. “Why, I’ll—I’ll—I’ll spifficate him! I’ll—I’ll—”

Words failed Coker. As a humorist, he ought to have taken the empty eggshells as a screaming joke. But he didn’t. He grabbed up a cricket-stump, and rushed out of the study to look for Bunter.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Unappreciated!

WINGATE of the Sixth, captain of Greyfriars, looked out of his study with a red face.

“Wharton!” he called out, as he caught sight of Harry at the end of the passage.

“Hallo, Wingate!”

“Who’s been monkeying in my study?”

Wharton looked at him.

“Blessed if I know!” he answered. “I haven’t!”

“Somebody’s cleared out my cupboard,” growled Wingate. “Gwynne’s coming to tea with me, and every blessed thing is gone!”

“My hat!”

“Have you seen anybody come into my room?”

Wharton thought a minute.

“Only Coker,” he said.

“Coker! A Fifth Form chap wouldn’t raid my cupboard. I mean any of the fags?”

Wharton shook his head.

“And phwat’s up intirely?” inquired Gwynne of the Sixth, coming out of his study.

The Greyfriars captain explained.

“The thafe of the world!” exclaimed Gwynne. “Sure, and ten to one it was that fat baste Bunter!”

“I don’t believe Bunter would have the nerve to raid your study, Wingate,” said Harry Wharton at once. “It wasn’t Bunter. Besides, I’ve been here some time, watching the aeroplanes from this window, and I haven’t seen him.”

“It couldn’t have been Coker,” growled Wingate.

“Faith, what’s that row?” exclaimed Gwynne suddenly.

There was the sound of a terrific roar, followed by a succession of wild yells, to the accompaniment of whack, whack, whack!

“Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire! Murder!”

“Whack, whack!”

“Yaroooh! Rescue! Yoo-coop!”

Whack!

Harry Wharton dashed away, and Wingate strode after him, with a frowning brow. Round the corner Billy Bunter of the Remove was struggling wildly in the grasp of Coker of the Fifth.

The wrathful Horace had run him down, and he had Bunter by the collar, and the cricket-stump was making rapid play upon the Owl’s fat person.

Harry Wharton could guess what was at the root of the trouble. He was

aware of Bunter’s nefarious designs upon Coker’s supply of eggs. But a Fifth-Former could not be allowed to handle the Remove at his own sweet will. Harry Wharton charged at Coker, and fairly bowled him over with a sudden rush. Horace went to the floor, sprawling, and dragged Bunter down with him.

Bunter roared, and Coker yelled.

“What’s this thundering row about?” exclaimed Wingate, striding up.

Coker sat up breathlessly.

“Oh, my hat!” he gasped. “Who charged me over? I’ll skin him! I’ll spifficate him! I’ll—I’ll—”

“Yow-ow-ow!” wailed Bunter.

“What are you pitching into Bunter for?” demanded Wingate.

“He’s scooped my eggs!” howled Coker.

He staggered to his feet, still warlike.

“Only a j-j-joke!” wailed Bunter, squirming behind the stalwart captain of Greyfriars. “Only a j-j-joke!”

“I’ll joke you!” roared Coker.

“Hold on,” said Wingate, taking Bunter by the ear. “I fancy you’ve been joking in my study, too, Bunter.”

“I—I haven’t!”

“Somebody’s cleared out my cupboard!”

“Oh, dear!” gasped Bunter. “I—I say, Wingate, I didn’t, you know. I—I didn’t know there was any grub there, you know.”

“My grub’s disappeared, anyway!” snapped Wingate.

“Oh, really, I—I—”

Horace Coker seemed to recover his good humour all of a sudden, as he heard Wingate’s statement. Evidently his humorous efforts in the captain’s study were bearing fruit.

“What’s that, Wingate—lost your grub?” he asked genially.

“Yes,” growled Wingate.

“Disappeared from sight—what?” grinned Coker.

“Do you know anything about it?” exclaimed Wingate.

“Ha, ha!”

“Hallo! What are you cackling at, Coker?”

“Have you looked round your study for it?” asked Coker, grinning.

“No. Why should I? I suppose the silly idiot who bagged my grub wouldn’t leave it lying about the study, would he?”

“Well, he might,” said Coker, smiling. “He might be doing it for a joke, you know, to brighten things up.”

“Wha-a-at?”

Wharton gave a yell.

“Ha, ha! It’s one of Coker’s jokes. Coker’s a humorist, you know. Oh, my hat!”

Coker tucked the cricket-stump under his arm and walked away. He did not mean to explain. That would have spoiled the joke. Wingate gave him a puzzled look, and then returned to his study. Taking Coker’s hint, he searched the room for the missing provender, Gwynne helping him. The two Sixth-Formers searched high and low, but the grub did not come to light. Naturally, they did not think at first of looking in the table drawer, among books and papers and pens, for food. That drawer was the last place Wingate thought of, but when he went to it at last, there was the missing “tommy.”

Wingate stared at it grimly. According to Coker’s humorous view, Wingate ought to have been greatly tickled at finding that the grub he had searched for so long was right under his nose all the time. Something was wrong, apparently, with George Wingate’s sense of humour, for he did not look at all tickled. He fairly glowered.

“Sure, and there it is!” exclaimed

Gwynne. "It's put there for a joke, I suppose. And, faith, the jam's leaked out over yere books, bedad!"

Wingate breathed hard.

The fact that the little pot of jam had fallen sideways, and the jam leaked out over Wingate's Latin grammar and his Virgil, would probably have been regarded by Coker as the cream of the joke.

But the humour of the situation was lost on Wingate.

He strode out of the study with a grim brow, and made his way to Coker's quarters in the Fifth. That a Fifth-Former could have played this fag joke on him appeared well-nigh incredible, yet it was pretty certain. Wingate was nearly at boiling point.

Harry Wharton had called his chums, and the Famous Five strolled after Wingate as he marched off to the Fifth Form passage, anticipating fun. The captain of Greyfriars did not glance at them. He reached Coker's study, hurled the door open, and marched in.

Coker and Potter and Greene were holding a discussion on the subject of tea, eggs no longer being available. Potter and Greene were inclined to be ratty; but Coker, true to his principles, was smiling. He was, in fact, cheering up his comrades with one of his amazing jokes.

"Don't mourn over the eggs, you fellows," said Coker brightly. "It's too late for mourning."

"Eh? What do you mean?" snapped Potter.

"I mean morning ends at twelve o'clock," explained Coker. "Morning—mourning! See?"

Potter and Greene glared at him speechlessly. If Coker supposed that a pun of that description was a substitute for new-laid eggs, he was making a mistake. They were about to speak with great eloquence, when Wingate strode in.

"Coker, you fool!" roared Wingate.

"Hallo!" said Coker, turning round.

"Have you been playing monkey-tricks in my study like a silly fag?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly chump!"

"Have you found the grub?" grinned Coker.

"Yes. I've found it in my table drawer, and the jam's smeared over three or four books!" shouted Wingate.

Coker roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Good! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's good, is it?" thundered Wingate.

"Smeared over the books!" gasped Coker. "Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha—Yah! Yaroooh!"

Coker's roar of merriment was suddenly cut short as the exasperated Sixth-Former rushed upon him. Coker was a burly fellow, and he feared no foe; he would cheerfully have "taken on" Wingate or anybody else. But he did not seem to have much chance in George Wingate's powerful grasp.

Wingate whirled him over, and bumped his head on the hearthrug, and rubbed his face in the fender, Coker struggling wildly and yelling.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from outside. The chums of the Remove were enjoying the scene. "Go it, Wingate!"

"Mop him up!"

"The mopfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Mind my nose! Groogh! Ooooh!" spluttered Coker. "You mad idiot! Ow-ow! Can't you take a—groogh!—joke? Oh, my hat! Rescue! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter and Greene were yelling, as well as the Famous Five. Wingate

seemed to be very excited—possibly owing to the lack of a sense of humour—and he fairly let Coker have it. When he released the Fifth-Former at last, and strode out of the study, Coker sat up on the hearthrug, and scratched ashes out of his hair, and spluttered wildly.

"Oh, dear! Oh, crumbs! Is he mad? Groogh! What are you laughing at, you silly idiots? Groogh! Oh, crumbs! Potter, you cackling chump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't you take a joke, Coker?" roared Bob Cherry. "Look at your face in the glass, and it will make you howl! Look at it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker gasped at the poker, and the Famous Five vanished, still yelling. Potter and Greene thought they had better fellow. The poker looked dangerous, and Horace Coker's sense of humour seemed to have deserted him utterly.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Looks for Trouble!

VERNON-SMITH came out of the School House, grinning, the following day after dinner. He joined the Famous Five in the quadrangle, finding them discussing what was to be done with the afternoon, which was a half-holiday.

"You fellows busy?" he asked.

SAVE YOUR MONEY AND HELP YOUR COUNTRY!

Buy a War Savings Certificate now for 15s. 6d. and get back £1 in Five Years' time. Particulars at any Post Office.

"No. Anything on?" inquired Wharton.

"Well, yes. Have you ever seen a murder done?" asked the Bounder.

"My hat! Not exactly."

"Like to see one?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"If you would, you'd better come along to Courtfield this afternoon," remarked the Bounder. "I'm going."

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

"Is there going to be a murder in Courtfield this afternoon?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"What-ho!"

"What on earth are you driving at?" asked Wharton, in perplexity. "Who's going to be murdered?"

"Coker of the Fifth."

"Well, it's about time somebody put a stop to his humour," grinned Bob Cherry. "But even Coker's jokes don't quite deserve that. What's going to happen?"

"I've just passed him," explained the Bounder. "Potter and Greene are trying to dissuade him. I suppose they'll miss Aunt Judy's remittances if Coker is killed. But he's made up his mind. He's going down to Courtfield this afternoon, to Smiley's Stores."

"Looking for grub?"

"No. Looking for queues!"

"Queues?" exclaimed Wharton.

"That's it! You know, there's always a margarine and bacon queue at Smiley's

Stores, and Coker doesn't approve of queues. He thinks they ought to grip and bear it, you know."

"I dare say they would grin and bear it if they had whacking remittances from Aunt Judy, and could order things by telephone," said Wharton, laughing.

"Coker doesn't see that. He's going to cheer up the queue," chuckled the Bounder. "His new role, you know—general bucker-up to the universe. He's going to talk to the people in the queue, and make 'em forget their troubles by a few first-rate humorous efforts—"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"He can't be such an idiot!" gasped Nugent.

"My dear man, there's no limit to Coker's idiocy. He goes the whole hog!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Wharton, quite aghast. "If that silly idiot goes playing the fool with a hungry queue they'll mob him!"

"Sure to!" agreed the Bounder. "He can't understand why Potter and Greene don't want to go with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My belief is, they'll murder him," said the Bounder cheerfully. "I'm going over to see it done."

"He ought to be stopped!" said Johnny Bull.

"There's no stopping Coker when he's determined to play the giddy goat. Here he comes!"

Horace Coker came down the steps, and strode away towards the gates. He was looking rather cross. Potter and Greene had talked quite plainly to him, in the hope of turning him from his extraordinary purpose. They might as well have tried to turn Niagara from its course. Coker had made up his mind, and after that there was nothing more to be said. He did not see anything absurd in his intentions. Potter and Greene had simply convinced him that they really were the duffers he had always thought them.

Harry Wharton & Co. ran in Coker's way, and stopped him. The genius of the Fifth gave them a lofty stare.

"What do you fags want?" he demanded.

"You're going to Courtfield—"

"Yes, you young ass! Don't waste my time!"

"You're really going to bother the people in the queue!" exclaimed Harry.

"I'm going to cheer them up, and make 'em forget their troubles," said Coker. "People imagine their troubles are bigger than they are. When I point out that it really doesn't matter whether they go short or not, they're bound to see reason. Of course, I shall speak in a pleasant and humorous way, and put 'em into a good temper."

"Better not," said Wharton. "You look so jolly well-fed, Coker, that you're not likely to be popular in a queue, even without your little jokes."

"Oh, you're a silly fag!" answered Coker.

And he strode on.

"He's really going!" said Johnny Bull, almost dazedly. "He's going to talk checky rot at people who're hungry! Why, they'll scalp him!"

"Let's go along and pick up the pieces," suggested Bob Cherry.

"That's a good idea!" grinned the Bounder. "We may be able to save his life. After all, Coker's too funny for us to lose him."

The six juniors followed Coker out of gates. If he carried out his purpose it was very probable that he would soon be in need of help.

Coker was striding along the road in his lofty way, when he discovered that the juniors were following, and he turned round, frowning.

"You fags cut off!" he snapped.
 "Have you bought the road?" inquired Frank Nugent.
 "Cut off, I tell you!"
 "Bow-wow!"
 "I'm not taking a gang of fags with me!" howled Coker. "Do you think I'm going to be seen out with a lot of grubby juniors?"
 "Well, you needn't mind, if we don't mind being seen out with a potty Fifth-Former!" retorted Bob Cherry.
 "Will you clear off?" roared Coker wrathfully.
 "Not this afternoon."
 "I tell you—"
 "Rats!"

Coker strode towards them. The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith lined up to receive him, and Coker paused. Even Coker realised that he could not deal effectively with six sturdy Removites.

"Look here, you little idiots!" he snapped.

"Look here, you big idiot!" replied Bob.

Coker snorted, turned away, and tramped on angrily towards Courtfield. The Removites followed. Bob Cherry, whose sense of humour was at least as great as Coker's, imitated the great Horace's lofty stride, with the result that two or three passers-by burst into loud chuckles.

Coker looked round, and caught Bob Cherry in the act. His face was a study.
 "You cheeky little beast!" he bellowed.

"Cheeky big beast!" answered Bob.
 "What are you playing these antics for?"

"Why, you ought to be pleased, Coker," said Bob, in an injured tone. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you know."

"I'll—I'll—"
 Again Coker seemed on the point of charging, and again the six juniors prepared to receive his charge. With a wrathful countenance, Coker strode on again, and the grinning juniors followed.

Coker quickened his pace, and the juniors followed suit. They were still close behind when the Fifth-Former entered Courtfield, and arrived at Smiley's Stores.

Smiley's was in the High Street. In the good old days, when margarine was as plentiful as blackberries, and butter was not far above rubies, Smiley's Stores had been a great emporium, and was stacked from cellar to roof with good things. But the good things had taken unto themselves wings and flown away. Once upon a time Smiley's had disdained to sell butter or margarine in quantities of less than a pound at a time. Now, anyone who asked for a pound of butter at Smiley's received a frozen stare—not a pound of butter!

When the shop was open the shopmen were kept incessantly busy serving out margarine in quarter-pound packets—till the supply was gone, and the unsatisfied customers had to be sent empty away.

Every day there was a long queue outside Smiley's, and every day the queue seemed to grow longer. Tempers, too, were growing sharper. Sometimes there was a miserable suspicion that food had been taken up in large quantities for the rich people of the neighbourhood—generally without grounds, though the discovery of one or two food-hogs with large stores lent colour to it. And it is to be feared that there were unscrupulous people who took pleasure in setting such rumours afloat. Hungry men and women, with hungry children at home, were not in a state of mind to weigh evidence judiciously.

Certainly, Coker was quite right in thinking that a general determination to bear troubles patiently and cheerfully

would have been very useful. It was a patriotic duty to keep a stout heart. But it was extremely doubtful whether Coker would be able to produce that cheerful tone in the queue.

There were at least two hundred people there, formed up in line, and more were adding themselves at the end every minute or two. Once or twice persons who had apparently never learned to play the game tried to shove themselves in ahead of others who had come earlier—a proceeding which evoked loud and shrill indignation.

Lowering glances were cast upon Coker, as he stood on the pavement, by a good many of the queue.

Coker was a plump, well-fed-looking fellow, and his clothes were expensive; and, naturally, his air of prosperity did not please. Worry and trouble make people a little unreasonable. Possibly there were people in the queue as well off as Coker; but if so, they had had sufficient tact to come there in their oldest clothes. But Coker was not famous for tact.

the bargee. "Margarine ain't good enough for the likes of you—what? Good enough for the likes of us! Yah!"

"I don't mean that—"
 "Never mind what you mean! You go down to your proper place."

"But I'm not here to join your blessed queue!" exclaimed Coker. "Not at all. I don't want anything."

"No; you don't look as if you do!" snorted the bargee gentleman. "You get enough without standing in queues, you do, and the likes of you."

"Shame!" said several voices.
 "Look at his fat chops!" piped a youth of ten. "Look at 'im! Feeding on the fat of the land, he is! Look at his chops!"

"Chops!" repeated Coker. "I haven't any chops, my little man. I haven't been to the butcher's, I assure you."

"Garn!" replied the youth. By "chops" he had meant Coker's plump countenance, but Coker did not understand. Faces were not called "chops" at Greyfriars.

Coker thought he had better get on to



The cheerful Coker! (See Chapter 8.)

Coker had stopped near the shop door, and two or three sharp voices hailed him.

"Take your place!"
 "Go down to the other end!"
 "Where are you shoving?"

"Now, then, keep your tempers!" said Coker genially. He was determined to be genial; in fact, he had come there to be genial. "Don't lose your tempers, you know."

"Who's losing his temper?" inquired a big bargee, with a tone that indicated that his temper, at least, was already lost beyond recovery.

"Now, then, my good man—"
 "Who are you calling a good man?"
 "Ahem!"

"Take yer place at the end!" said a lady in a red shawl. "Think you're going in out of your turn, hay?"

"My good lady—"
 "None of your cheek, young man! You go down to the end, or I'll call out to the pleeceman!"

"I haven't come here for margarine!" exclaimed Coker angrily. "Do you think I'm after beastly grease?"

"Then what are you arter?" demanded

the cheering-up process. So far, he had not had a cheering effect on the queue.

"Suppose you don't get any butter or margarine?" he said brightly. "What about jam?"

The bargee looked at him suspiciously. "There ain't any jam to be 'ad," he answered.

"Well, I can tell you—"
 "Where?" exclaimed several voices.
 Coker smiled.

"Suppose you all shove into the shop at once—" he began.

"We ain't allowed to."
 "But suppose you do, and you get blocked in the doorway, then there'll be a jam: Ha, ha!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

And Finds It!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had stopped in the roadway to look on. They wondered a little what Coker was going to do. It seemed incredible that even Coker could
 THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 528.

be ass enough to stand there in the light of day and spring idiotic jokes on the worried people in the queue. But he did. His reference to a jam in the doorway was evidently a joke.

Coker's "Ha, ha!" rang out amid a freezing silence. The people near him simply blinked at him. Harry Wharton & Co. almost gasped. They could scarcely believe their ears.

But Coker was fairly started now, and he gave his humour full rein.

"And suppose there's a shortage of margarine," he went on. "You should get up a petition to the Prime Minister to annex Greece."

"Wot?"

"Greece — grease — see?" chuckled Coker. "And you must remember, too, that the Army in Mesopotamia has taken a big slice of Turkey. Ha, ha!"

"You silly idjit—"

"Eh?"

"Don't 'it him, George!" said the lady in the shawl. "The pore young gentleman ain't in his right mind!"

"I don't care whether he's dotty or not," said the bargee. "I know he ain't going to stand 'ere making fun of 'ungry people!"

"I dare say you folk have been grumbling at the paraffin shortage," went on the ineffable Coker. "But it's nothing! I can tell you what to do. If you can't burn your lamps, make light of your troubles. Ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I believe that big chap is going to kill him!"

"Not before it's time!" growled Johnny Bull.

The bargee had left his place in the queue, and was spitting upon his hands—apparently preparatory to assaulting Coker. The Fifth-Former backed away in some alarm.

"Where will you 'ave it?" roared the bargeeman.

"Here, I say—"

"There's one for your weskit!"

"Yarooop!"

Coker sat down on the pavement with a nasty jar. He might have told his victims that that was the way to get a jar, if they could not get jam; but he was no longer in a mood of brilliant humour.

"Now get up and 'ave another!" roared the bargee, glaring down at him like a Hun.

Coker got up—but not to have another. He fairly flew at the bargeeman.

That gentleman roared as he received Coker's fist in his eye.

"This is where the circus begins!" grinned the Bounder.

He was right.

The bargeeman staggered back, more surprised than hurt. Then he recovered himself, and rushed at Coker like a bull.

Coker was not over-blessed with brains, but he had limitless pluck. Even the burly Coker was an infant in comparison with the big bargee, but he stood up to his bulky antagonist dauntlessly.

He got in two or three drives, which made the big man roar, and then he was swept over into the road. He landed in a puddle.

"Oh, my hat!"

The queue were grinning now. Coker had succeeded in making them smile, in spite of their troubles—in a quite unintended way.

"Go for 'im!" sang out the youth who had alluded to Coker's chops. "Give 'im jip, mister! Go for 'is chops!"

Coker leaped up, and charged his enemy.

"Ullo, you want some more, do you?" roared the bargeeman. "I'll look arter

you, my fine feller! I'll give you jam! I'll give you grease! Come hon!"

There was a terrific struggle in the road. The juniors had come there to rescue what was left of Coker; but really they could not interfere. If anybody had ever fairly asked for it, Coker had.

After rolling the Fifth-Former in the mud, the bargee tucked the unhappy joker under his arm, and carried him away struggling and raving.

He bore Coker along the street as if he were a naughty infant, the Fifth-Former roaring and waving his legs and arms in vain. A yell of laughter followed them from the queue.

"Put me down!" shrieked Coker. "I'll thrash you— Yaroooh! Leggo, you beast! Oh, crumbs! Leggo!"

The bargeeman grimly bore him on to the end of the street, where there was a water-trough outside the Red Lion. Right into the trough he pitched Coker, and there was a terrific splash.

"Now you go 'ome, and don't come worriting folks!" said the bargee-gentleman; and he strode back to Smiley's.

Coker sat up dazedly in the trough.

"Yurrrrgg!" was his first remark.

He dashed the water out of his eyes, and blinked. Harry Wharton & Co. came up, yelling.

"Oh, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it rather wet?"

The juniors seized Coker and yanked him out of the trough. He collapsed in a sea of water, gasping.

"Oh, crumbs! That beast— Groogh! Keep away, you cheeky fags! Groogh! I—I—I'll smash him!" howled Coker.

He leaped to his feet, and started back down the street, evidently for vengeance. Harry Wharton & Co. seized him at once. They did not want Coker to be quite killed.

"Stop, you silly ass!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Let go!" howled Coker.

"Come away, you chump—"

"I'm going to smash that boozey villain—"

"You're jolly well coming back to Greyfriars, if we have to carry you," said Harry Wharton determinedly. "You've done harm enough, you fathead! If you worry those people any more you'll get hurt."

"Leggo!"

"Bring him along!" said Harry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker struggled fiercely, but the six juniors were too many for him. He was rushed away, half-led and half-dragged, in spite of his resistance.

There was no telling what might happen if Coker tackled the bargeeman again. The opinion of the juniors was that the bargeeman had let Coker off lightly, but he might not be so merciful next time.

They hurried Coker along the road, struggling and yelling, leading him by the arms or the legs, whichever was most convenient.

By the time they were out in the road to Greyfriars Coker was smothered with mud, and looked a remarkable object.

"Now, are you going home?" panted Wharton.

"Groogh! I'll smash you!"

"Give him the frog's-march to Greyfriars!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Good egg!"

"Yaroooh! I'll smash you! I'll spifficate you! I'll— Yurrrrggggh!"

Coker went along the road in the joyful frog's-march, to an accompaniment of fiendish yells. The juniors felt that they had to save him from himself. Like Hamlet, they had to be cruel only to be kind. After a hundred yards Horace

Coker felt as if he had been through a mangle.

"Will you walk now?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Groogh! Ow! Yes!" moaned Coker.

"Hop it, then!"

Coker was released, and stood panting breathlessly.

"Now, all kick together if he doesn't start!" said Wharton.

"The kickfulness will be terrific, Coker!"

Coker started.

The grinning juniors followed him back to Greyfriars, keeping an eye on him. But Coker was done. He was not thinking any longer of warfare. He wanted a wash and a rest more than anything else in the world.

He tramped savagely in at the school gates. It was Coker's luck to meet Mr. Prout in the quadrangle, in his present dilapidated state.

Mr. Prout halted, fixing a basilisk eye on the unhappy Fifth-Former.

"Coker!" he thundered.

"Grooh! Yes, sir?" stuttered Coker.

"Are you out of your senses?" shouted Mr. Prout. "What do you mean, Coker, by appearing in public in that disgraceful, dirty state? You are a disgrace to the school, Coker! Go in and clean yourself at once!"

"I—I— Ow! I— Groogh!"

"Go in at once, you abominably dirty boy!" thundered Mr. Prout. "I shall speak to you about this later, Coker. Go in and clean yourself! Pah!"

Coker went in, leaving his Form-master snorting.

Potter and Greene met him indoors, and they eyed him smilingly. They had fully expected to see him come home looking something like that.

"Did you cheer up the queue?" asked Potter blandly.

"Did you enjoy it?" smiled Greene.

Coker's reply was not in words. He rushed at his study-mates, and smote them right and left.

Potter and Greene went sprawling, with a roar; and Coker tramped away upstairs, feeling a little solaced.

"I wonder if Coker will give up humour now?" remarked Bob Cherry, as he wiped his eyes. "At all events, I fancy he will let the margarine queues alone, and keep his merry jokes for Greyfriars."

And Bob Cherry was right there. The margarine queues could go down to the lowest depths of doleful dumps after that without the slightest sympathy from Coker of the Fifth. He was fed up with queues!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Coker is Willing to Oblige!

"I T'S up to us!"

Peter Todd of the Remove made that remark to a group of juniors in the Common-room. Peter was looking very grave—a sign that mischief was brewing.

"What's up to us, Toddy?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"About Coker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The mere mention of Coker the joker was enough to raise a laugh.

"But it's not a laughing matter," said Peter, with a shake of the head.

"It's getting serious."

"Coker's brand of humour was always serious enough," remarked Nugent.

"What beats me is how any fellow can be such a howling ass. Why can't Coker see what a hurbling chump he is?"

"Well, he an't; and he's going from bad to wors

"Thus had begins, but worse remains behind," remarked Wibley of the Remove, who was always ready with something from Shakespeare.

"It's growing on him," continued Peter. "When a fellow begins making fool jokes it's bound to grow on him. Punning is really a sort of nervous disease. Coker thinks he's doing a patriotic duty by starting as a merry jokist; but the fact is, it will grow worse than war-worry. What do you think he said to me to-day? 'If at first you don't succeed, suck liquorice.' He meant that for a pun, I believe."

"Not really?"

"The punfulness is terrific!"

"Temple of the Fourth was grumbling about the grocer to-day," went on Peter, "and what do you think Coker said? He said the Priardale grocer might have his faults, but really he was matchless!"

"Matchless!" repeated Bob Cherry.

"Yes. He hasn't any matches, you know!"

"Great pip!"

"Temple chucked an umbrella at him, and then there was a row," said Peter, "but Coker keeps on doing it. He's bent on cheering people up, and he thinks he's humorous. I think he ought to be taken in hand before it gets so bad that he has to be sent to an asylum. It would only be kind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you fellows had better back me up, and we'll give his humour a run for him," said Peter Todd.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"If it's a wheeze, I'm on!" he said.

"Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific!"

Whereupon Peter Todd propounded the wheeze that had found birth in his fertile brain, and, with a chorus of chortles, the chums of the Remove agreed to back him up. A little later half a dozen juniors presented themselves in Coker's study.

They found the great Coker alone there. Relations with his study-mates were a little strained at present.

Coker's humour had tickled his study-mates at first; not because it was funny, but because it was funny that Coker should think it funny. But they had grown fed up.

Coker's extraordinary hallucination was becoming wearing to the nerves. It was in vain that they told him he wasn't cheering them up with his humour, that he was depressing them, that he was driving them to think of suicide—Coker knew better! Matters were really growing intolerable in the study.

Potter could not remark that he had mislaid his hat without Coker asking him if the loss was felt. If Green observed that the tea was beastly, Coker was sure to tell him where he could find a capital tea—in the alphabet, it appeared. He would ask why did the cowslip, and tell them it was because the dog-rose. He said he would tell them the story of 288, only he couldn't; because it was too gross—that is, two gross, 144 being one gross. Coker fondly imagined that these were splendid jokes, and had a cheering effect—a most surprising mistake on his part.

The newly-developed humorist frowned a little as Harry Wharton & Co. presented themselves. He had not forgotten the incident in Courtfield, and he was not at all grateful for being rescued from the bargee. But the scamps of the Remove smiled their sweetest smiles.

"What do you fags want?" grunted Coker. Then he grinned, as another of his splendid jokes occurred to his mighty brain. "You needn't come here—I don't smoke!"

"Smoke!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes: I don't want a fag!" explained Coker. "Ha, ha!"

The juniors looked surprised for a moment or two, and then, realising that this was a joke—a Coker joke—they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker looked pleased. Here were six juniors whom he had set in a roar, at all events. He did not suspect that they had an ulterior motive for roaring over his joke. Coker seldom suspected anything.

"Splendid!" gasped Peter Todd.

"Splendacious! Fag—ha, ha!—fag—ha, ha! Coker doesn't smoke, so he doesn't want a fag! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused the five.

"Splendid!"

"Ripping!"

"The ripfulness is terrific! Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker smiled good-humouredly.

"How do you do these things, Coker?" inquired Bob Cherry, in great admiration.

"Simply a gift of humour," explained Coker. "Some fellows are born humorists. I am. That's all!"

"I—I see."

"You oughtn't to keep these good things for yourself, Coker," said Peter Todd seriously. "Do you mind if I put that in the next number of the Greyfriars Herald?"

"Not at all!" answered Coker graciously.

"I'll make a note of it," said Peter.

"Make a currency-note of it, and increase your pocket-money," said Coker brilliantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, perceiving at once that this was another joke.

"Besides, a currency-note is more valuable than a golden quid," pursued Coker. "You see, when you fold it up you double it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And after that you find it in creases."

"Creases?"

"Yes. Increases, you know. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed the juniors dutifully.

"Coker, old man, you'll make everybody forget the food shortage if you keep on like this," said Bob Cherry.

"Nothing to grumble at in a shortage," said the brilliant Horace. "You see, if you have a short age you have a long youth."

"Great pip—I mean, ha, ha, ha!" gasped Bob.

"Splendid!" moaned Peter. "I must make a note of that, too."

"That one, you mean," grinned Coker.

"Not that two!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Peter, almost overcome. Really, Coker's flow of humour was astounding, and it was still more astounding that Coker considered it humorous. Peter Todd was evidently right in thinking that it was time Coker was stopped.

"We've come here to make a suggestion," said Peter hurriedly, before Coker could be humorous again. "Our idea, Coker, is to have a meeting in the Rag, and for you to give a humorous entertainment. We feel convinced that any grumbling and grouching fellows will go away quite happy after listening to your—your humour."

"Quite a good idea!" said Coker.

"It will have a cheering effect upon the fellows," said Wharton.

"The cheerfulness will be terrific!"

Coker nodded.

The suggestion pleased him. This was very different from the reception his unappreciative study-mates gave his bright humour.

"I don't mind," he said. "What do you want me to do exactly?"

"Oh, your humour, you know! Your sparkling flow of good things!"

"Be yourself," said Bob solemnly.

"That will be enough."

"The way you turn everything into a brilliant joke—that's the idea," said Peter. "Simply let your humour flow, and set the whole place in a roar. The fellows will be no end bucked."

"Quite so—quite so," agreed Coker. He understood perfectly, or thought he did. "I shall be very pleased—delighted, in fact. As you know, my object is to cheer fellows up. I think I've succeeded a little."

"You have. No mistake about that!"

"The fellows will think that life's worth living again when they've seen you—I mean, heard you!" declared Peter Todd.

"It's awfully kind of you to do this for us, Coker!"

"I intend to be kind," said Coker.

"Ahem! Exactly! Now, what time would suit you?"

"Time!" said Coker. The gleam in his eye told that he was beginning again.

"Lots of time! If you're ever short of time, come to me."

"Eh? Why?"

"Because 'I know a bank whercon the wild thyme grows!'" said Coker.

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

"You see—time—thyme—"

"Yes, I—I see. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep those ripping things for the entertainment, Coker!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"We'll go and get the audience now. And you'll come?"

"Depend on me," said Coker. "Make it half-past six. I'll come, with pleasure, and I hope the fellows will be amused."

"No doubt about that," assured Peter.

"I'll bet you that every fellow present will enjoy himself. Come on, you fellows! Let's spread the good news!"

And the chums left Coker's study to spread the good news, and the humorist of Greyfriars was left feeling very satisfied, and unusually pleased with the cheeky fags who had at last recognised what a really superior person he was.

Probably he would not have felt so pleased if he had heard the remarks those cheeky fags made when they were out of hearing of his study.

"Did you ever see or hear of such a born idiot?" gasped Peter Todd.

"Never!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Well, hardly ever!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"The neverfulness is terrific!"

"He thinks we're going to get an audience to be worried with his idiotic gags! Did you ever?"

"Ha, ha! Never!"

"Still, the entertainment's going to be funny. If Coker doesn't think it's funny, he'll be the only fellow there who doesn't. Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove hurried away to make their preparations; and the preparations were not at all of the kind Coker would have expected them to make.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Tremendous Success!

LONG before half-past six there was a crowd in the Rag.

It was a large apartment, but it bade fair to be overflowed for Coker's meeting.

The good news had been spread.

Coker's idea was that the fellows were turning up in such numbers to be entertained and cheered by his gift of humour. Coker had a firm belief that he could beat the corner-man of a minstrel show hollow at his own game. He was simply going to let his brilliant humour flow unchecked in a series of sparkling witticisms which

would keep the audience in a roar. It was bound to have a cheering effect on them, and make them forget war troubles. At least, Coker thought so.

As a matter of fact, wild horses would not have dragged a single fellow to the Rag to hear Coker's witticisms. Fellows would have fled to the most sequestered spots to escape them. Fellows who could not escape them—like his unfortunate study-mates—groaned over them in deep anguish of spirit.

It was with quite another object that the Greyfriars juniors were pouring into the Rag.

The word had passed round that Coker of the Fifth was going to be ragged, and a rag on Coker was quite sufficient to attract the audience. The fact that Coker, all unsuspectingly, was coming there to be ragged gave an added zest to the joke. It was amazing that Coker should be ass enough to think that anybody wanted to hear him joking. It was excruciating that he was sublime duffer enough to think that a numerous audience would gather for that purpose. There was a surprise in store for Coker.

Temple of the Fourth came in with his friends, all smiling, and Hobson turned up with a crowd of the Shell. The news had spread to the fags, and an army of the Third and Second crowded into the room. The Removers were there almost to a man.

Harry Wharton & Co. were the masters of the ceremonies. A platform had been made for Coker. It was made of planks laid across from one table to another, and draped with several table-covers. On the platform a cane chair was placed. From this coign of vantage Coker was to survey an enthusiastic meeting gathered for that feast of humour.

Those were the preparations that met the eye. There were others that did not meet the eye—yet.

There was a buzz in the large and growing audience as Coker's heavy tread was heard without, and a general whisper:

"Here he comes!"

Coker entered.

The great Horace was looking his best. There was a cheerful smile on his face, and he wore a flower in his coat, to do justice to the occasion. He glanced over the crowded audience, and smiled genially.

"Bravo, Coker!" sang out Nugent minor of the Second.

"Hurrah for Coker the joker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way, Coker!" called out Peter Todd. "Here's your chair!"

"Right you are, kid!" said Coker pleasantly. "I hope that chair's safe?"

"Safe as houses!"

"Otherwise, I should be chary of taking it," explained Coker.

"Oh dear!"

"He's beginning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Coker!"

Coker came loftily up to the platform. Perhaps he was strutting a little. Undoubtedly it was very agreeable to receive a public recognition like this. In fact, it was distinctly gratifying. Coker felt that he was coming into his own at last.

"Hallo! What's that for?" asked Coker, glancing down at a length of rope that trailed from under the platform.

"Oh, that's fastened to—the platform," said Peter Todd hastily. "Never mind that, Coker. You get up here."

Coker stepped on the platform. He sat in the cane chair, and smiled at the audience. The audience smiled at him. Only Coker was unaware of the preparations concealed by the cloths covering the platform. But Coker had no sus-

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 528.

picions. It was fortunate that he was not a suspicious fellow—at least, from the practical jokers' point of view.

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped down, leaving the platform entirely to Horace Coker. The great man had it all to himself, in solitary state, looking, and feeling, monarch of all he surveyed.

The genial smile faded from his face, however, as he spotted Paget of the Third with a pea-shooter in his hand.

"Put that pea-shooter down!" rapped out Coker.

"Now, then, young Paget!" called out Bob Cherry warningly. "Not yet—I—I mean, put that away at once!"

"You must not waste peas in war-time," said Peter Todd severely.

"It ain't waste, in this case," grunted Paget.

Coker chimed in.

"In war-time," he said, "we must mind our peas and queues."

This was a joke; but, unfortunately, the audience did not recognise it as one.

"P's and Q's," added Coker, by way of explanation.

"Quite so—quite so," said Harry Wharton. "Now we're ready for you to begin, Coker."

Coker gave him a glare. He had already begun, only his splendid humour had been wasted upon these dense fags.

"Gentlemen," said Peter Todd, "allow me to present Coker the joker, the famous Greyfriars humorist. When suffering from war-worry, apply to Coker. Coker can banish black care. Coker has kindly consented to entertain you, gentlemen, with a first-rate comic turn—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Not exactly that," interrupted Coker. "Better shut up, young Todd! You talk rather too much."

Genial as he was, Coker was still Coker, and he had a short way with fags. Peter Todd coughed.

"Now, then, Coker—"

"Dry up, Wharton!"

"Ahem! All right."

"The all-rightfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "It is time to pull the esteemed rope, my worthy Peter."

"You bet!" answered Peter Todd.

"Gentlemen," said Coker, having silenced the cheeky fags, "I'm very glad to see you all here. In these sad and serious times I am glad to do my humble bit towards cheering fellows up, and helping them to bear their troubles with a light heart. Being a humorous fellow—

Oh, great Scott!"

Something happened before Coker could get any further.

It seemed to the Fifth-Former that it was an earthquake.

But it wasn't. It was simply Peter Todd pulling the rope.

When the rope was pulled the platform collapsed. The planks fell away on both sides, and Coker vanished from sight.

Splash!

Perhaps the Removites—humorists in their way as well as Coker—thought it would be too bad to let Coker fall on the hard floor, so they had placed an enormous bath in readiness for him to fall into.

The bath was not empty. Coker might have been hurt if it had been. Perhaps to prevent the possibility of Coker being hurt, the juniors had filled it to the brim—with water, soot, pyro, and tar, and several other ingredients. Most of it was water, but there was a good deal of the other ingredients.

Coker sat in the bath, with the weird mixture up to his neck, in a state of profound bewilderment. There was a howl of merriment in the Rag. It was,

after all, a comic turn, just as Peter Todd had said.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "What—what—who—which— Ooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd rushed to him. He extended a hand—a helping hand, Coker supposed for the moment. But Peter's helping hand only helped Coker's head under, and the great Horace completely disappeared.

Then the audience shrieked as his face came up again, with a hue upon it that would have been the envy and despair of a redskin on the war-path.

Coker was nearly black, with streaks of red and purple.

"Groogh!" he spluttered. "Groogh! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the audience. "Splendid! Do it again, Coker!"

"Grooooooch!"

"Do it again! Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker struggled up, streaming with the awful mixture. The audience were almost in hysterics. Coker had cheered them up beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Ow-ow!" gasped Coker. "What—what does this mean? Oooch! I'm nearly drowned! Groogh! I'm poisoned! Ow! You young rotters, this is a jape!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You did this on purpose!" shrieked Coker, as it dawned upon his mighty brain that it was not an accident.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," yelled Peter Todd, "Coker has done his comic turn, and the entertainment is over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience, yelling, streamed out of the Rag. The entertainment had been brief, but highly successful. The howls of laughter could be heard from one end of Greyfriars to the other.

Coker dragged himself out of the bath of mixture. He was spluttering, and wild with wrath. Gone was his humour. This was a joke he simply could not appreciate. He spluttered and gasped, and gasped and spluttered, scattering round him a sea of mixture.

"Yoooch! Oh, the young rotters! Groogh! Pulling my leg, of course. Ooooch! I'll spifficate them! Ow-ow! Oh, dear!"

Coker staggered out of the Rag.

"What the thunder—!" exclaimed Wingate, standing petrified as he met the weird-looking Fifth-Former in the passage.

"Groogh!" was Coker's answer.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from a distance. "It's Coker's comic turn. Wingate. Coker the joker, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate. "This may be funny, Coker, but I should think it must be jolly uncomfortable."

"Groogh!"

Coker made a furious rush at the fags, but they scattered, still yelling. They did not want to touch Coker in his present state. The unhappy Horace gave it up, and tramped away, snorting, to the nearest bath-room.

In an atmosphere of steam and soap he rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed, breathlessly and furiously. Potter and Greene looked in on him while he was thus engaged. Coker's speckled countenance made them yell.

Coker gave them a look like a wild Hun.

"You burbling idiots, there's nothing to laugh at!"

"Ha, ha!" yelled Potter. "I give in, Coker. You are funny, and no mistake!"

"You cackling chumps, get me a change of clothes from the dorm, and stop your silly cackling!" howled Coker.

Potter and Greene, almost weeping, brought him a change of clothes.

"Is it all off my face?" gasped Coker.
"Off!" yelled Potter. "Why, some of it's pyro, and some of it's tar. It won't wear off for weeks!"

"Weeks!" shrieked Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

Coker flew at his chums with a wet towel brandished, and they fled.

Then he resumed rubbing and scrubbing, and scrubbing and rubbing, in a state of mind only fit for a Prussian.

Coker was still looking a little mottled when he appeared in public again, much later.

He was met on all sides with smiles which ought to have been gratifying to a humorist. But Coker did not seem gratified.

He wore an expression all that evening which ought never to have been seen on any face but that of a Von Tirpitz.

And he did not make a single joke.

Whether the experience in the Rag had convinced him that there was no scope for a humorist at Greyfriars, or

whether the shock had dammed up his wonderful flow of wit, or whether he was afraid of getting a new experience of a similar sort, certain it is that Coker chucked it.

Greyfriars was left to bear its war troubles without any further cheering-up by Coker the Joker. And Greyfriars did not seem to mind.

(DON'T MISS "THE FIGHTING FIFTH!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 64.—BOLSOVER MINOR.

BOLSOVER minor is not at present a prominent character in the stories. He has settled down in the Third, and we hear of him when we hear of that Form, not at other times. Some day he may come into the limelight again; but he had his share of it when he first came to the school, and there is no recognised principle of rationing for limelight, as a few of our readers seem to think there should be. They ask for more about Trevor and Treluce, and less about the Famous Five.

It seems to me rather an unreasonable request. If Trevor and Treluce, or Glenn, or Elliott, or any of the other sitters in back seats would make as interesting stories as Harry Wharton & Co., I do not doubt that we should hear more about them. But they would not. Whatever may be said to the contrary by the people who preach absolute equality, it is nevertheless the truth that some people are far less interesting than others. Nothing much ever seems to happen to them, and you cannot make a story out of things not happening. There have been two or three novelists who got big reputations by writing stories of that sort; but none of you would care to read their work, I am sure.

Things did happen to Bolsover minor, and you were told about them. When—if ever—they start happening again, I dare say you will hear again.

There was something in the circumstances of Hubert Bolsover's coming to Greyfriars to remind one of Sir Jimmy Vivian's advent. But there were differences as well as likenesses. Vivian had a right to the name he bore—he was the son of a man who had gone under in life's struggle. Bolsover minor was anyone's son—nobody's son, for all that was known. He had been rescued from a London slum by Percy Bolsover's father, adopted, and sent to school.

Bolsover major did not like it a bit. He has his good points, and he may grow up a very tolerably decent man. But he will never be a particularly soft-hearted or sympathetic one, and quite certainly he will never follow in his father's footsteps as a philanthropist!

It was personal sorrow that had made Mr. Bolsover so ready to help lads down on their luck. His own younger son had disappeared when quite an infant—stolen, and never recovered. Perhaps something about the newsboy from the slums whom he sent to Greyfriars reminded him of what the lost boy might have been. If that was so, there was nothing strange about it, for the wail turned out in the long run to be Hubert Bolsover!

Bolsover bullied the youngster, and the Third were horribly down on him. They did not like the way he talked, the way he ate—in fact, they did not seem to like anything about him. But that was because they had not the eyes to see what a thoroughly decent little fellow the wail was. He is, indeed, more than decent. He is the best of the Third—the biggest-hearted, the most generous. Tubb and Paget are all right; and Jack Wingate has good stuff in him. But no one of them is Hubert Bolsover's equal in unselfishness and courage.

It did not make much difference to the burly Percy when he knew that the wail really was his brother. He had no use for a brother from the slums. And the revelation of the truth had no effect upon the

Third. Bolsover minor got fed up at length. If only he had been concerned he would have stayed on and fought his way. But every day his brother was wounding him to the quick by letting him see how the bad manners and rough speech, that could not be got rid of all at once, annoyed him.

So he made up his mind to bolt. He did bolt; but he came back—badly mauled as the result of a pincky attempt to rescue his brother from the attack of footpads. Then Bolsover major was repentant.

But it did not last. Bolsover major was not running straight at the time, and he made use of an old chum of his brother's as a scapegoat for himself. The youngster who came to see Hubert was not the sort of guest usually seen at Greyfriars; but he had come out of loyal affection for his friend, and it was a dastardly trick to



attempt to fasten upon him a crime of which he was quite guiltless. So Hubert told his brother, and relations between them again became strained.

Hubert found it more than he could bear. His Form persecuted him because he was different from them, which was not his fault. His brother, from whom at least he had a right to expect kindness and sympathy, was his enemy. It was not to be wondered at that he should decide that life in the slums from which he had come was to be preferred to this hostile place, where every day had its fresh miseries for him.

He went back. But he had made friends at Greyfriars, though they had not been able to do very much for him while he was there. The Famous Five may try to smooth the path of a youngster in the Third or Second; they have tried it in more than one case. But their chances of doing anything are limited. The lower Forms live their lives in their own quarters, coming less in contact with the Forms immediately above them than they do with the seniors, for whom they fag. And the lower Forms are quick to resent

interference, so that to interpose on the behalf of a fag may often have anything but good results for him. So Harry Wharton, or any other Removite who really wants a fag to find his level and get on well with his Form-mates, can only give help from afar, so to speak.

But it was the Famous Five who found Bolsover minor again in the slums he had returned to, and brought him back to Greyfriars. And when he was back there they did what they could to see that he got fair play.

It was not quite an easy road for Bolsover minor even after that, you may be sure. But his brother had become ashamed into treating him better, and bit by bit he won his way in the Third. He learned to behave in a more civilised fashion, and much of the roughness dropped from him as time went on. But it was not so much those things—which, after all, are mere externals, though they have their importance—as the discovery made by the rest that the youngster they had despised was more than their equal in pluck and resolution that inclined the Third towards him. When he had the backbone to stand up for Wingate minor against the threat of being put into Coventry with him, he showed them that he was to be reckoned with seriously. And to-day he is one of the leaders of the Form, and nobody cares that he came from a slum, or that he had had bad table-manners and an awful accent when Greyfriars first knew him.

NOTICES.

LEAGUES, Etc.

Members wanted for Exchange Club—companion papers, stamps, etc.—Paul Clynne, 19, Oldhill Street, Stoke Newington, N. 16.

Members wanted for correspondence club—stamped and addressed envelope, please.—W. E. Partridge, 10, Storer Road, Loughborough.

Wanted, members for "Gem" and MAGNET Correspondence League—stamped and addressed envelope, please.—J. Talbot, 22, Greaves Road, Masbro', Rotherham.

Miss Gladys Cooper, 12, Culmore Road, Balham, S.W. 12, wants more members for her "Gem" and MAGNET Club.

Small Heath MAGNET and "Gem" Club wants members—object, sending reading-matter to soldiers.—T. G. Evans, 12, Armoury Road, Small Heath, Birmingham.

Members wanted for the Blyth "Gem" and MAGNET Club.—C. Wordley, Cornard Road, Great Cornard, Sudbury, Suffolk.

More members wanted by London and District Branch of Pioneer Correspondence Club, Sheffield.—S. Stevens, 50, Warren Road, Croydon. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Members wanted for correspondence club publishing magazine—stamped and addressed envelope for particulars, please.—W. H. S., 8, Oakwell Terrace, Middlesbro'.

Will the members of the MAGNET and "Gem" Social Club, with Birmingham headquarters, who contributed to the R.C. Fund, write to Albert Fletcher, 65, Netherfield Road, Parkgate, Rotherham?

E. Pinchen, 2, Beecher Street, Manningham, Bradford, wants more members for club, open to readers anywhere—English and French conversation—stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Members wanted for "Gem" and MAGNET Club.—Jack O'Keefe, 6, Trestray Street, Maindee, Newport, Mon.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 528.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

SKINNER APOLOGISES!

By BOB CHERRY.

I.

"THAT'S the wheeze!"
And Skinner chuckled.
"It's not a bad idea!" said Snoop thoughtfully. "You can whip into the study—"

"I can?" Skinner seemed dubious.
"Well, it's your wheeze!" said Snoop. "You can whip into the study, wreck the topper, and meet me round the corner of the passage. I'll keep a look-out, and give you a whistle if anyone should come along."
"You're taking a big risk, aren't you?" asked Skinner, waxing sarcastic. "Still, don't worry yourself. I'll do it."

"Wharton will be going down to footer practice soon," Snoop reflected. "Then the coast will be clear. After all, it's not patriotic to buy new toppers in war-time."
Skinner smiled.

"I reckon Wharton will be sorry he got me bumped to-day!" he said spitefully.
"Ha, ha! Rather!"

And Sidney James Snoop and Harold Skinner moved off, still discussing their noble and patriotic plot in low tones.

"Jove!" I muttered, as I emerged from behind a sheltering elm in the quad. "I'm jolly glad I overheard that little conversation!"

Eavesdropping is not in my line, but I had heard that by accident, and I thought it fair enough to keep dark the fact.

It was Saturday afternoon, and after dinner I had gone out into the quad to look for a knife I thought I had dropped there the evening before. I was busy in the search when I heard Skinner and Snoop in earnest conversation close by. The mention of Wharton's name had been quite sufficient to put me on the alert, and now I forgot all about the knife, and made tracks for Study No. 1.

I burst in like a specially energetic cyclone. The remainder of our select circle were all there. As Nugent was standing by the door, there was a collision, and Nugent sat down hard, while I reeled.

Nugent said several things. Wharton said it was time to change for footer.

"Leave footer alone for the present!" I replied. "Skinner and Snoop are on the war-path. They mean doing in your giddy topper, Harry!"

"What! Let them try it on, that's all! The one I bought yesterday, do you mean?"

"The same!" I replied gravely. "But I've got a wheeze. Gather round, my infants, and I will a tale unfold!"

And I did.
And that the scheme mooted was a "corker" the four separate and distinct chuckles that followed amply proved.

"Now, let's look up Bunter," I suggested.

"Where is he?" Nugent inquired.

"Gazing into the tuckshop window like a Bee-feater out of a job!" I chuckled. "Come along!"

We found Billy Bunter still coveting the good things behind the tuckshop window. Mrs. Mimble's little establishment is an irresistible magnet to Bunter, and Bunter might be made of best Sheffield steel by the way he responds to its call.

"Now, Billy," I said, when our prize porpoise was comfortably seated within the little shop with a plate of cakes before him, "we all know you're a topping ventriloquist!"

"Oh, rather!" he smirked. "I'm glad to see you fellows are appreciating me at my full worth at last!"

"Just so!" I acknowledged, winking one eye at the rest. "Now, there's a little job we want you to do for us."

And I gave Bunter the details of the scheme.

"Now, you quite understand what you've got to do?" I said at last. And Billy Bunter, with his mouth full, replied that he did.

There was another item on the programme still to be attended to. This necessitated a visit to Skinner's study. It was accomplished without a hitch.

"We'd better get changed," counselled Harry Wharton, as we re-entered Study No. 1, "or Skinner will smell a rat."

So, garbed for the fray, we eventually made for the quad, to the evident satisfaction of Skinner and Snoop, who were lounging in the passage.

"This is where we right-about turn!" I chuckled, as we passed out of the big doorway into the quad.

We encountered Snoop at the angle of the passage. He promptly slunk away at the sight of us. He did not even wait to give his warning whistle, which was what we expected. Snoop is the very last word in funks. I'm sure he'd be a Conscientious Objector if he were old enough!

Skinner had just completed his foul deed by the time we arrived, and was making for the door. He grinned a sickly grin when he saw how neatly he had been caught out, and shrugged his shoulders resignedly. Really, Skinner is quite a philosopher at times!

"Great Scott, Skinner!" I gasped, as I sighted the wreck of what once had been a topper. "You've been and gone and done it this time, and no error!"

"Fairly put the lid on it!" said Harry Wharton, with a shocked air. "What on earth made you do it? The Head will be waxy when he knows!"

"The Head?"

Skinner's face went a curious green tint.

"D-do you mean to say that's the Head's topper?" he exclaimed, aghast.

"I bought it for the head!" said Harry, with a nod. Which was quite correct—in fact, every hat is bought for the head. But if Skinner chose to imagine that Wharton was referring to the Head of Greyfriars that was his own look-out.

"You better go and apologise!" I advised.

"I—I think perhaps I will!" stammered the unhappy humorist. "Oh, my hat!"

"You mean the Head's hat, don't you?" growled Johnny Bull.

II.

TAP!

"Come in!"

Dr. Locke glanced up in surprise as Skinner entered. He was even more surprised when his glance fell on the battered topper which Skinner held.

"Skinner," he rasped, "what is the meaning of this?"

"I—I'm awfully sus-sus-sorry!" stammered Harold Skinner humbly. "But I didn't know this was your hat when I smashed it!"

Dr. Locke stared at Skinner. He began to wonder whether that youth was quite in his right mind.

"My hat?" he asked. (But he didn't use the words as we do!) "Really, Skinner, if this is meant for a practical joke on your headmaster, you will be sorrier still!"

"N-no, sir!" Skinner blurted. He couldn't understand it at all. "It wasn't meant as a joke on you. But it is your hat, isn't it, sir?"

"It is not!" thundered the Head, reaching for his cane. "And I do not admire your taste in practical jokes, Skinner! I will endeavour to teach you better, my boy! Hold out your hand!"

Like one in a dream Skinner obeyed. He received a couple of stinging cuts; and he departed squeezing his hands.

He came back to us scowling like a Hun.

"You rotters!" he snarled. "I believe it was your topper after all, Wharton! If so, I'm jolly glad!"

"We'll have to deny you that pleasure,

then!" laughed Harry Wharton. "Because

—"

"Skinner!"

The owner of the name swung round as he heard what he took to be Mr. Quelch's voice. It seemed to come from the end of the passage.

"Ye-es, sir?" faltered Skinner, wondering why Mr. Quelch did not show himself. But, of course, there were reasons for that!

"Skinner! Come to my study at once! And bring my hat with you! You shall pay for this unparalleled impertinence!"

Skinner groaned dismally. It appeared that, after all, the topper was Quelch's.

"Oh, crumbs!" he groaned. "I—I suppose I'd better go!"

And he went with dragging footsteps.

He tapped on Mr. Quelch's door nervously. He had already had one caning, and he fully expected a second. He was not at all encouraged by the rasping tones which bade him enter. Mr. Quelch was ticking away at his wonderful work, "The History of Greyfriars from the Reign of King Nebuchadnezzar" (or King Somebody. How should I know?), and he did not like being interrupted. He gave Skinner a glare as he entered, carrying the battered hat in his hand.

"It was all a mistake, sir!" mumbled Skinner hastily. "I had no idea it was your hat!"

"What do you mean, Skinner?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Ah, I think I understand!" he added, his eyes gleaming. "I have noticed before, Skinner, that you have a weirdly humorous turn of mind. This is what you would term a practical joke, I presume? Very well, hold out your hand, sir!"

"B-but, sir—"

"Enough! Obey me!"

And Skinner did. He got it hot again. And he was almost blubbing when we saw him again.

"I—I can't understand it!" he almost moaned. "I could have sworn that was Quelch's voice! H-he seemed to think I was joking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It seemed rather heartless to laugh at Skinner, but we could not help it.

"You—you rotters!" roared Skinner desperately. "This—this must be your hat, Wharton! Well, you won't wear it again, I'll swear!"

And Skinner, in a fit of rage, fairly danced on the topper!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Almost weeping, Harry Wharton went to the cupboard, and produced his latest purchase, shining resplendently.

Skinner's face was a study.

"T-then whose is this?" he gasped, picking up the sad remains.

"Ha, ha! Don't you recognise it, Skinney?" I roared, wiping my eyes. "Oh, my aunt! You'll be the death of me yet!"

Skinner frantically turned to the lining of the wreck in his hand. Then he nearly exploded.

"You—you—you— Why, you cads, it's mine!" he howled. "You—you must have taken it out of my box, you rotters!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's the only topper I've got!" Skinner whined.

"Not really! Then it's all the more surprising that you should smash it!" laughed Harry.

Skinner could contain himself no longer. His temper got the better of his prudence, and he flung himself at Wharton. To his surprise, he was lifted up as if he had been a babe, and deposited gently on the linoleum outside, where he found himself making remarks to a locked door!

THE END.

FUN WITH A DOG!

Some Hints for the Daily Run. :: :: By GEORGE HERRIES.

TO the fellow who is not really keen on dogs, taking the dog for a run is not very interesting; but the real dog-lover finds it quite enjoyable. There is no reason why anyone should not get rather more fun out of it than they generally obtain from this daily duty.

To begin with, two dogs and two fellows make a good combination; dogs and fellows amuse each other. Arrange a race between the dogs. Measure out a hundred yards. One chap can hold the dogs on the starting-line, while the other runs up the course and goes some few yards beyond the winning-post. If you stand at the winning-post, you will find that the dogs will slacken their speed when they are getting near you, and thus the race will end tamely. By standing beyond the winning-post you make sure that the dogs will be going at their top speed when they are passing the winning-post.

You will find that the dogs soon acquire a liking for this sport. Then you can handicap the faster dog by slipping the slower one first, and letting it have a certain measured distance start before you release the other dog. With a little practice you ought to be able to arrange the handicap so well that nearly every race ends in a dead-heat.

If you have only one dog with you the race must be against time, and you will find that dogs are like boys in that they have their quick days and their slow days.

Whippets are the fastest dogs. Although the breed is a distinct one, the dogs are practically miniature greyhounds. A good whippet will cover a hundred yards in six

seconds. Pretty good going, sixteen yards in a second!

Then you can teach your dog to hunt you. A bloodhound differs from other dogs in this respect, because he will hunt an absolute stranger, but practically any dog will hunt his master.

Get another fellow to hold your dog while you go round the corner and hide yourself. If possible, arrange to have a little spy-hole in your hiding-place, so that you can see your dog at work. You will see him put his nose to the ground, and follow the exact line you have taken.

At first the hunt should not be for more than thirty or forty yards, but you can soon increase the distance to a quarter of a mile or more. The boy who has held the dog must encourage him in his quest of you, and if the dog has a fairly good "nose," and is intelligent, he will soon enter into the sport. A spaniel is usually very clever at this sport, but I have seen the most unlikely-looking dogs play it well.

Another good wheeze with a single dog consists in getting him to find some article which you have previously shown to him and then hidden. A young dog can be taught this game, because a dog just getting out of the puppy stage usually has a favourite ball or stick which he likes to gnaw. Take the thing away from him, hold him, and then throw it on the ground, and lead him away. When you have gone ten yards, release him, and tell him to "fetch it." The chances are considerably more than ten to one that he will run straight back to it. If he finds it and brings it back to you,

reward him. If he does not find it, lead him back to it.

Remember always to use the same words of command when you are training a dog, and never lose your temper with him. If he does not do what you want, it does not follow that he is disobedient or unintelligent; it is more likely that he does not understand. When he knows what you want him to do, he will enjoy doing it.

A game of this kind requires plenty of repetition before the dog learns it thoroughly; but when once he knows it he will play it marvellously well. The distance from the hidden article must be increased very gradually, and directly the dog shows signs of being tired or bored—for dogs get bored—you should hold up. I have known a dog to go back half a mile along a road and find a penny which had been hidden in some long grass.

You can teach your dog to jump over your outstretched arm. Begin by holding a stick close to the ground—so that he cannot get under it—and encourage him to get over it. When he jumps over it, make a fuss of him, and reward him with some tit-bit. Then gradually increase the height of the stick from the ground, and use a shorter stick. In a very little time you will be able to dispense with the stick, and you will find that the dog will jump over your arm.

Take care not to overdo this pastime. You yourself would not care to go on jumping all the time you were out for a walk. Be very patient when you are teaching the dog anything new, otherwise you will only fluster the dog, and spoil him.

A LESSON IN CAUTION!

By GEORGE WILKINS.

"GUNN!" We were doing our prep when Grundy sang out. Grundy often does that sort of thing. Gunn took no notice.

"You're very careless, Gunn!" pursued Grundy, after a suitable pause. "You're fairly asking for trouble."

"So are you!" snapped Gunn. "You'll get a thick ear if you don't shut up! I'm doing my prep."

Grundy snapped his fingers. "Carefulness should be a lifelong habit," he said. "It's more important than prep."

"Rats!" "Look here, Gunn," Grundy said solemnly, "I'm telling you this for your own good."

"Well, don't! Ring off, there's a good fellow!"

"Look here, I'll jolly well biff you!" gasped Grundy. "I'm not a pugnacious sort of fellow, but if you're asking for trouble you can have it."

"You told me just now that I was asking for trouble!" snapped Gunn. "For goodness' sake, say something new!"

Grundy breathed hard. He saw that he was making a bit of an ass of himself, so he cooled down. That was something marvellous for Grundy; but still, he did it.

"I'm trying to tell you of a fault of yours, Gunn," he said.

"Well, what is it?" "Carelessness, Gunn."

"Now I'll tell you of one, Grundy." "Eh? What's that?"

"Brainlessness!" said Gunn. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunn and I laughed, and scooted behind the table, as Grundy came at us. We dodged round the study for a couple of minutes, and then Grundy's eyes fell again on Gunn's silver watch, which was lying on the mantelpiece.

Grundy snatched it up, and stopped chasing us.

"This is what I was speaking about just now, Gunn," he said. "You left it lying on the mantelpiece, and anyone might have pinched it without your knowing anything about it."

"Oh, rats!" "I tell you anyone could have taken that watch as easily as winking if they had come into the study while we were not here."

"No, they couldn't!" snapped Gunn.

"Why not?" "Because I should have taken it with me."

Grundy frowned. "You might not have done!" he growled.

"Well, you could have started howling when I forgot, couldn't you?" snapped Gunn, turning back to his Euclid.

Grundy turned nearly purple, and made a sudden rush. Gunn dodged him just in time, and we caught the great George Alfred between us. He was getting a bit too noisy.

So to silence him we bumped him on the floor. The two of us can just do that, but it takes some doing.

We left Grundy still roaring, and made our way down to the junior common-room. Grundy is a bit of a nuisance in the study after he's been bumped. He's one of those fellows who never know when they've had enough.

We didn't think any more about Grundy just then. We had both finished our prep, and Grundy hadn't started his, so it didn't seem likely that we should be troubled by him for a bit.

I had quite forgotten the incident of the watch. It did occur to me the next day that I hadn't seen Gunn take it, and the next time I looked on the mantelpiece I saw that it was gone. But I forgot to say anything about it.

The next day Grundy was particularly patronising, and when we started prep in the evening I seemed to scent trouble. He was laying down the law in great style. Evidently our bumping of the night before had not been thorough enough.

However, we are used to ignoring the great George Alfred when he starts riding the high horse. It was not until he raised the subject of the watch that I pricked up my ears and listened.

"Got your watch, Gunn?" he asked suddenly.

Gunn grunted, and felt in his waistcoat-pocket.

"No," he said, "Isn't it on the mantelpiece?"

Grundy grinned. "Did you leave it there, after all?" he asked.

"Of course," said Gunn. Grundy got up and looked.

"It's not there now!" he said triumphantly.

Gunn grunted. "Then I suppose it's gone," he said resignedly.

Grundy snorted in righteous wrath. "Is that all you care for your uncle's present?" he demanded. "I thought you said that you valued that watch."

"Well, so I did."

"And you're not worried now it's missing?" "What's the use?" demanded Gunn. "I left it on the mantelpiece. If it's missing, someone must have taken it. Otherwise, it would still be there."

Grundy frowned heavily at William Cuthbert Gunn.

"I warned you that you'd lose it," he said reprovingly. "Why on earth didn't you look after it when I told you to?"

"Dunno," said Gunn. "I usually do mind my own business, don't I?"

"Yes."

"And that's more than I can say of some other fellows!" said Gunn pointedly.

Grundy flushed.

"If you're insinuating that I can't mind my own business, William Gunn," he snapped, "you're asking for a whopping! I warned you to use a common precaution, because it seemed to be my duty to look after such a thoughtless chap."

"Ahem!"

"And now I consider it to be my duty," continued Grundy calmly, "to point out the fruits of your carelessness. I shouldn't lose things that my uncle gave me!"

"No?" said Gunn sweetly.

Grundy blinked. Gunn's nonchalance was a thing he had not reckoned on.

"Then what are you going to do about it?" yawned Gunn.

I laughed. Grundy transfixed me with his glittering eye. So I subsided.

"If you'd looked the thing up," said Grundy at length, "this would not have happened."

"What wouldn't?" "Why, you wouldn't have lost your watch!"

"Watch? Oh, still harping on that thing?" yawned Gunn. "I thought you'd forgotten it. You've nagged me enough about that, haven't you?"

"No!" snapped Grundy. "I warned you about what would happen, and it was like casting pearls before—before walruses."

(Continued on page 16.)

"Ha, ha, ha!" Grundy flushed. "You've only got yourself to thank, Gunn!" he growled. Gunn smiled. "Right!" he said, clasping his two hands. "I'll shake hands with myself. I'm glad I'm not such a suspicious beast as you, Grundy. I didn't think there were thieves at St. Jim's. I don't now, as a matter of fact."

"Got any reason to think otherwise?" snapped Grundy.

"S'pose not," yawned Gunn. "Well, ring off now! I want to get on with my prep."

Grundy gave him a killing look, but Gunn had already turned to his books. There was silence in the study for a quarter of an hour. Grundy started working, too, but he kept looking across at Gunn. It was evident that he had something further to say, and he was searching for signs of penitence on Gunn's face. But none were visible.

The great George Alfred spoke again at last.

"About your watch, Gunn," he said. "I know you're upset about losing it, although you are trying to pass it off as a joke."

"Really?"

"Of course you are," said Grundy. "I know a bit about human nature. You're trying to swank it out that you don't care."

"Just as well to know that," said Gunn coolly.

"As a matter of fact, Gunn," said Grundy, "I've been looking after your watch myself. I knew you'd lose it if I didn't. So I took charge of it. See?"

Gunn turned round, and eyed the great George Alfred steadily.

"So you're owning up, are you?"

"Owning up!" shrieked Grundy. "Owning up to what?"

"Pinching it!" said William Cuthbert grimly.

"N-n-no!" stammered Grundy, going red.

"It was a joke to make you realise the importance of looking after things. I hope you've learnt a lesson."

"Doesn't sound very likely, does it, Wilkins?" asked Gunn, turning to me. "Still, I suppose we must believe him. Where's the watch?"

Grundy dived into his pocket, and fumbled for a second. His face went blank. He dived again. But his hand came out empty.

He searched the other pockets frantically,

but to no avail. Gunn grinned, and winked at me. I grinned, too.

Grundy had gone jolly red. He was looking as crestfallen as I have ever seen him look.

"Well, where's the watch?" demanded Gunn, after a pause.

"I—I—" stammered Grundy. "That is, I must have lost it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, George Wilkins!" snapped Gunn. "This is no laughing matter! My watch is lost. Evidently Grundy ain't half as smart as he thinks he is."

"I—I—I—it must be somewhere!" said Grundy helplessly.

"In fact, Grundy," said Gunn, "you're absolutely useless as a blessed detective."

"I—I—I—" commenced Grundy, and suddenly tailed off.

He had made an absolute ass of himself, and he saw it. Gunn and I were chortling.

Grundy had meant jolly well from the start, but results had certainly not justified his precautions.

"Look here, Gunn," he said suddenly. "I'll buy you another watch!"

"You'll have to," said Gunn solemnly.

"But it won't be the same as the one my uncle gave me."

"You said you didn't worry about that!" retorted Grundy, remembering what Gunn had said a few minutes previously.

"I know I did," said Gunn. "But you told me that I was only acting, so I suppose I must have worried. You're always right, we know."

Grundy said nothing.

"Perhaps you'll admit that you were mistaken the whole time, Grundy?" suggested Gunn.

"Yes, I dare say I was," said Grundy very humbly.

Gunn grinned a most expansive grin.

"I'm glad of that," he said, diving a hand into his pocket, and calmly producing his watch. "You see, I knew what you were going to do, so I chose my opportunity and got it back. Glad it's not lost after all, Grundy, ain't you?"

"Y-y-you t-took—" began Grundy.

"Oh, dry up!" said Gunn, turning back to his prep with a grin. "I'm busy!"

George Alfred Grundy glared, but he said not a word. He was still thinking things out!

GRUNDY, THE 'TEC!

By Monty Lowther.

George Alfred came into our study one day. And started to talk in his usual way. In tones most commanding he said: "Look at me! The truth's what I want, mind—now, what do you see?"

And Tom answered straightway: "A champion ass!"

A silly old chump who is too fond of gas!"

"A burbling gorilla!" I said, with a grin.

"An absolute jabberwock!" Manners chimed in.

"Eh? What?" Grundy roared. "I'll stand none of your cheek!"

I'm a peaceable chap—that's not saying I'm meek.

But never mind that! Now I do really think I'm a born crime-detector!" Tom tipped me a wink.

"So," went on the great Grundy, "I've thought it all out.

That's why I am here now. I'm going about just booking my clients beforehand, you see."

"For what?" Tommy asked. "Ass! A 'tec agency,

"Of course," said George Alfred, producing a book.

"Just write down your names here, then I'll overlook

Your crass cheek. Oh, hang it now, where is that pen?"

I've come straight from Blake's study—I know I'd it then!"

He searched all his pockets. The pen was not there!

Then our Tommy spoke out, with a bored kind of air.

"You're not a great sleuth-hound, old fellow, I fear.

The thing that you seek is behind your left ear!"

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

["THE FIGHTING FIFTH!"]

By Frank Richards.

It is seldom we have a story dealing chiefly with the Fifth Form; when we do, Coker is usually its central figure. The great Horace plays only a minor part in next week's yarn, however: Blundell, captain of the Form, and Hilton, of whom you have heard little thus far, are the chief actors. I am not going to give away the plot. But I feel sure you will all like the story.

A RECENT "MAGNET" STORY.

"A Very Gallant Gentleman" brought me more letters than any other yarn published in this paper for years past has done.

Most of them were couched in terms of the highest praise. Some of the writers confessed that they cried over the last chapter. Well, that is nothing to be ashamed of. Some said that they were sure Mr. Richards must have penned it with streaming eyes. I am not sure about that; I think not. But I can answer for it that he did not write that chapter with his tongue in his cheek; it would never have got home on those who read it as if undoubtedly did if he had done so. One does feel these things in writing them, or one could not make others feel.

But a few of the letters raised strong objections to the end, and some of my correspondents were quite abusive about it. Mr. Richards had no right to do it, they said. That is not for them to say. One, who knew so much about Arthur Courtney that he actually wrote about the death of Frank Courtenay, quite another person, said that he had persuaded six or seven of his chums to drop the paper. I take that with some of the contents of the salt-cellar. Others

thought death too grave a matter for introduction into a school story. But we have all to die. Out there, in France and Flanders, in Mesopotamia and the Balkans, fellows who have followed the fortunes of the Famous Five are dying even as I write. It does no one harm to think of these serious things once in a way. Let them try to realise what the vast majority did realise—that to die as Arthur Courtney died is worth while. As an American poet wrote:

"It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts.

It's only—how did you die?"

There is the true ring in that. It says so much that I think I need say no more—except that those who talk of a big gap left by Courtney's disappearance from the stories are guilty of exaggeration. Sometimes we heard nothing of Courtney for months together; and in only two or three stories did he ever play more than a minor part. That part was such as made his end fitting and consistent. But he cannot be missed as Harry Wharton or Peter Todd or Wingate would be missed!

NOTICES.

After this issue there will be no more footer notices until the next season draws near. Those hereunder have been inserted as early as possible; but even so they are really too late to be of much use. You must send in your notices well in advance if you are to get the full benefit possible from them.

Football.—Matches Wanted By:

SHAFTESBURY ATHLETIC—15-16—want matches in two-mile radius.—W. Oliver, 6, Heath Street, Barking.

St. STEPHEN'S—16—want matches.—C. Barnes, 57, Basinghall Street, E.C.2.

Other Footer Notices.

Leonard Johnson, 32, Barmouth Street, Openshaw, Manchester, wants a cheap pair of footer boots.

Goalkeeper and other players—17—wanted for North London team.—J. Clark, 857 Seven Siste Road, Tottenham, N. 15.

R. D. Young—17—wants to join team in S.W. as back or half. Address, 71, St. George's Square, S.W.

Your Editor

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

From Next Week the price of
THE MAGNET
will be
THREE-HALFPENCE.

We have delayed as long as possible making this increase. It is now forced upon us by causes over which we have no control—the rapidly rising cost of material and of labour chief among them.