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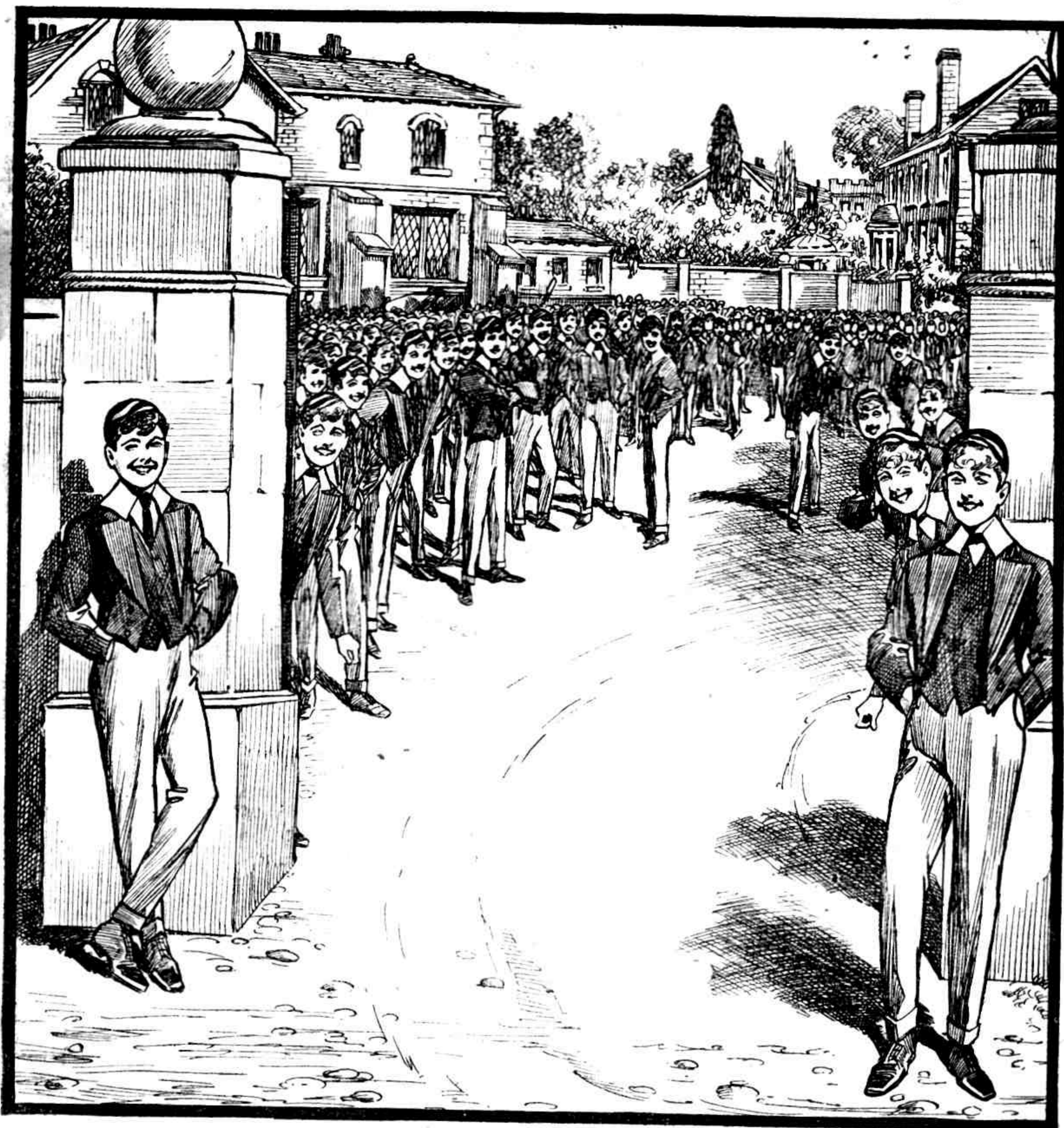
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## CATCHING COKER!



WAITING FOR COKER OF THE FIFTH!

(A Very Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.) 19-7 10





# Catching Coker!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. On His Neck!

**C**RASH!  
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"  
It was not an earthquake or a belated air-raid. It was simply Coker of the Fifth leaving Wingate's study in a hurry—a very great hurry!

Harry Wharton & Co. were coming along the passage, and they stopped just in time. Coker came whizzing through the study doorway and landed in the passage, crashing—and if he had dropped on the Famous Five they would certainly have felt a severe shock. Fortunately, they stopped short, and Horace Coker sprawled at their feet, damaging no one but himself—which did not matter.

"Ow!" spluttered Coker. "Yow! Oooop!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"What-ho, he bumps!" murmured Nugent.

"Yow-ow! Oh! Ah!"

The somewhat flushed face of George Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, appeared in the doorway after Coker.

"Now cut off, you silly ass!" was Wingate's remark.

"Yow-ow! Oh!"

Slam!

Wingate's door closed as Coker of the Fifth sat up and gasped. The Fifth-Former blinked dizzily at the five juniors, who were grinning. Coker of the Fifth was often the cause of smiles. Indeed, the manners and customs of Horace Coker added considerably to the gaiety of existence at Greyfriars at all times.

"Ow! Wow! Cheeky cad!" gasped Coker. "I—I—I've been chucked out! Me, you know! Chucked out! Ow!"

"The chuckfulness was terrific," murmured Hurree Singh. "The bumpfulness was also great!"

"Poor old Coker!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Wow!" mumbled Coker. "Chucked out, you know—me! Cheeky rotter! I was simply pointing out to him that I'd had enough of his cheek, and that he wasn't the slightest use as cricket captain. I merely mentioned that if he kept me out of the First Eleven this season every chap at Greyfriars would know that it was due to his silly jealousy. I felt bound to tell him the exact truth. Then he started on me—me, you know!"

"How surprising!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Coker staggered to his feet.

"But if Wingate thinks he can chuck me out of his study he's making a big mistake!" he gasped. "Why, I'll slaughter him! I'll mop up the study with him! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

Without waiting to specify further what he would do, Coker proceeded to do it—or, at least, to attempt to do it. He jumped at the study door, hurled it open, and rushed into the room.

"Gather round!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Gather round, my infants! We mustn't miss this!"

"Give him room to fall, though!" said Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove gathered round Wingate's doorway to watch. The sight of Horace Coker mopping up the study with the captain of Greyfriars was a sight much too good to miss. As Hurree Janset Ram Singh remarked, in the English he had learned in India, the mopfulness was likely to be a boot on the other leg.

Wingate had sat down at his table, apparently under the impression that he had finished with Coker of the Fifth. That mistaken impression was corrected when the burly Horace came in like a hurricane.

The Sixth-Former jumped up.

"You again!" he ejaculated.

"Me again—yes, rather!" roared Coker. "Do you think you can chuck me out of this study, George Wingate?"

"I think I've done it once," remarked Wingate; "and I certainly think I shall do it again if you don't clear off instanter!"

Coker put up a pair of big fists.

"You try it on!" he answered.

"Look here, Coker—"

"I've said before, and I say again, that you're no more fit to be captain of Greyfriars than a bunny-rabbit is!" roared Coker. "Cricket! What do you know about cricket? Here's one of the best cricketers in the school—me—kept out of the First Eleven, and matches lost in consequence, because you don't know a good man when you see one! Because you're jealous of a fellow's form. Because you don't want to be put in the shade by an all-round good man. I'm sorry to say it, but that's how the matter stands. What do you know about cricket? Yah!"

"Ain't he eloquent?" said Bob Cherry. "Go it, Coker! Do you want winding up?"

Wingate pointed to the door.

"Will you get out, Coker?" he asked.

"No, I won't!"

"You'll be put out, you know!"

"If you can put me out, George Wingate, you're welcome to do it!" answered Coker defiantly. "I'm your man! Yah!"

"Then I'll do it!" said the Greyfriars captain.

He came round the table at Coker.

"Now look out!" murmured Harry Wharton. "Stand clear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker stood up manfully to the big Sixth-Former. Coker might be an ass—he certainly was—but he had heaps of pluck. And Coker was so big and burly that a good many even of the Sixth would have hesitated to handle him.

But, big and burly as he was, he was no match for the athletic captain of Greyfriars.

His big fists were knocked away, and Wingate fastened a grip on him that made the unfortunate Coker "wilt" at once.

Struggling furiously, he was swept off his feet and bundled to the door, with his arms and legs flying wildly in the air.

"Yow-ow! Leggo!" roared Coker.

Crash!

The great man of the Fifth landed in the passage, Harry Wharton & Co. wisely giving him plenty of room to fall.

"Now clear off!" said Wingate, looking out after the sprawling Horace. "I'm fed up with this, Coker! If you don't clear off I shall bring my ashplant out to you!"

And the study door slammed again.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-wow!" said Coker.

He sat up dazedly.

Hefty as the great Coker was in a "scrap," he had to realise that the captain of Greyfriars was a good deal more hefty.

"Poor old Coker!" said Bob Cherry. "We can't allow him to be licked like a fag! We'd better see him home."

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar him!"

"You cheeky fags!" bellowed Coker, as the Famous Five seized him, getting grips on his burly person wherever they could. "Leggo! I'll smash you! I'll smash Wingate! I'll smash the lot of you! Ow! Oh!"



Coker never counted odds; but the odds were too much for him, all the same. He found himself quite powerless in the grasp of the chums of the Remove.

Harry Wharton & Co. jerked him up and rushed him along the passage.

Coker's voice was like unto that of the bull of Bashan as he was rushed away to the Fifth Form quarters.

Bob Cherry kicked open the door of Coker's study in the Fifth Form passage. Potter and Greene were in the study, and they jumped up in surprise.

"What the thump—" began Potter.

"What the dickens—" ejaculated Greene.

"Only Coker coming home!" explained Wharton breathlessly. "He's been cheeking Wingate, so we thought we'd better bring him home. Here he is!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Coker came whirling into the study, looking all arms and legs as he whirled.

Bump!

"Yarooop!"

Horace Coker was deposited on the hearthrug with a concussion that made the fender and fireirons dance.

"Good-bye-ee!" sang Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five streamed out of the study, leaving Coker of the Fifth sprawling on the hearthrug, regarding the ceiling with a dizzy gaze, and not quite aware whether he was on his head or his heels.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Fifth Are Not Taking Any!

"**C**HUCKED out!"

"On his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the Fifth were gathered in Blundell's study at tea-time. Blundell, the captain of the Greyfriars Fifth, presided over the festive board, assisted by his chum and study-mate, Bland. Fitzgerald, Hilton, and Tomlinson were the guests. And the five Fifth-Formers seemed excessively merry.

They were discussing the great Coker and his visit to Wingate to claim a place in the Greyfriars First Eleven. And the chortles in the study indicated that there was a plentiful lack of sympathy for the hapless Horace.

"Right on his neck!" continued Fitzgerald. "Some Remove kids were coming along, and they collared him, bedad, and marched him off to his study and pitched him in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth Form tea-party.

"Coker was left counting up his bruises," said Fitzgerald. "Pass the bloater-paste, Tomlinson, old top! Potter and Greene had to clear out; they were laughing so much. Coker couldn't see anythin' to laugh at, at all, at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently Blundell & Co. could see something to laugh at, for they roared.

"The curious thing is that Coker's such an ass!" remarked Blundell. "It's not against him that he can't play cricket. Some fellows can't! But why should he fancy that he can?"

"Echo answers why!" grinned Bland.

"There's no accountin' for Coker's fancies, intirely!" said Fitzgerald, with a shake of the head. "There's only one Coker, and he's in a class by himself. There isn't room in the wide worruld for two Cokers. A place in the Greyfriars First—when his cricket makes the fags of the Second Form cackle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Twice he looked in on Wingate, and twice he was dropped out! If the Remove kids hadn't taken him home there wouldn't be much left of him, at all, at all! Wingate was quite ratty! Bedad, if

he put Coker in the eleven he wouldn't be skipper of Greyfriars long!"

"No fear!"

"Poor old Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knock!

"Come in!" sang out Blundell, as a thump came at the study door. "Hallo! Coker!"

Horace Coker strode into the study.

The Fifth-Formers greeted him with smiles. If Coker had been a little more observant he might have guessed that he had been the subject under discussion.

"Just in time for tea, old top!" said Blundell hospitably. "You'll find a chair somewhere. I hear you've been rowing with Wingate."

"Wingate was cheeky!" said Coker.

"Oh! Was he?"

"He was! I never stand cheek, even from the captain of the school. Who's Wingate?" demanded Coker loftily.

"Who indade?" smiled Fitzgerald.

"Nobody!" said Coker, answering his own question. "Nobody in particular, at any rate! What does he know about cricket?"

"Not so much as we know in the Fifth!" said Hilton solemnly.

"I agree with you there, Hilton. Generally speaking, you're a bit of an ass; but you talk sense sometimes!"

"Oh!"

"I haven't come to tea, thanks!" said Coker. "I'm having tea in my quarters—Potter's changing a fiver for me at the tuckshop. Potter says—and it's quite right—that I've been treated very badly, and he's surprised at Wingate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker stared at the Fifth Form tea-party, unable to see any reason for that sudden yell.

Horace Coker's mighty brain did not discern any connection between the five-pound note and the opinion expressed by Potter.

"I'd like to know what you're cackling at!" said Coker warmly.

"At—at Wingate!" said Fitzgerald hastily.

"Oh!" Coker's brow cleared. "I see! Well, no wonder you think he's a silly ass—he is that, and no mistake! I offered my services for the First Eleven. I pointed out that with the St. Jim's senior match coming on it was up to him to make the very best selection possible. I don't want to brag of my form as a cricketer. Some fellows are born cricketers; it's really a gift, and I don't swank about it. But there's the fact."

"The—the fact!" murmured Tomlinson. "Oh! Oh, yes! The—the fact! D-d-d-didn't Wingate see the fact, Coker, when you pointed it out to him?"

"He didn't!"

"Awfully silly of him!" murmured Bland.

"Case of wilful blindness, bedad!" said Fitzgerald.

Coker nodded.

"Well, I don't want to run Wingate down," he said. "He's got his good points. He's not so sharp with the fags as I should be in his place—he's not what you'd call born to command, as some fellows are. But he's a good chap in the main. Still, I can't believe that he's such an ass as he makes himself out to be. He mayn't be able to pick out a good man; but he must know a really first-class player when he sees one. And he pretends he doesn't."

"Oh!"

"Will you try the cake, Coker?" asked Fitzgerald blandly.

"No; I'm having tea in my study, thanks!" said Coker, quite unconscious of Fitz's hidden satire. "I really looked in to speak to Blundell about the cricket."

"Oh, don't let's talk shop now!" said the captain of the Fifth hastily.

"It's rather important, Blundell. There's a Form match coming along this week—Fifth against Sixth."

"Ye-es. Pass the sugar, Bland! Sure you won't have a cup of tea, Coker?"

"No, thanks! I want—"

"You want some of the sardines?"

"No, no. I mean—"

"Try the nuts, then!"

"I want to speak to you about the cricket, Blundell. I've offered you my services before for the Fifth Form team. You've refused."

"Ahem!"

"Now, I specially want to play in the Form match," said Coker impressively.

"Oh dear!"

"You see, if you give me plenty of bowling I shall be able to mop up Wingate's wicket, and give him a lesson!" explained Coker. "Although I'm best as a bat, I'm strong on bowling. That's just the lesson Wingate wants to take some of the swank out of him. A couple of duck's eggs will do him good!"

"Great pip!"

"Is it a go?" asked Coker.

"Nunno! Not exactly! The—the Form team's made up!" gasped Blundell. "Sorry I can't make any changes now. But there you are!"

Coker's brow grew grim.

"You needn't beat about the bush, Blundell. You really mean that you're taking up the same attitude as Wingate, and deliberately leaving me out of the Form cricket!"

"Anybody present like to resign in Coker's favour?" asked Blundell, looking round.

"Oh, my hat! No!"

"Not much!"

"The answer is in the negative, Coker!" said Blundell. "Sorry—but there's nothing doing!"

"Something had better be doing, or there will be trouble!" said Horace Coker. "I haven't come here to be made a fool of!"

"That was done before you came here, and it was a permanent job!" murmured Fitzgerald.

"Eh! What did you say, Fitz?"

"N-n-nothing! Go on, old chap; you're quite entertaining!"

"As a member of the Form club—and a prominent member—I claim to be played in the Form match!" said Coker. "I've been set aside long enough—too long, in fact. I'm not standing it any longer! Can I take it, Blundell, that you're putting my name down?"

"Hardly!"

"Yes or no!" exclaimed Coker. "You refuse?"

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Blundell, losing patience and his politeness at the same time. "Don't be an ass, Coker!"

"What?"

"Ask the Shell or the Remove for a place in their fag teams, if you like. That's about your mark."

Coker squared his jaw.

"I was prepared for this," he said. "I've been patient with you, Blundell, and given you a chance to do the right thing. You can't deny that. But you're in the conspiracy to keep me out of the cricket. Have you finished your tea?"

"Just about. Why?"

"Then you'll oblige me by putting your hands up!" said Coker, rolling back his cuffs. "I won't stand cheek from Wingate, and I won't stand it from you. What you want is a thumping good hiding, Blundell!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And that's what you're going to get. When you've had it, you may think again



about backing up this conspiracy against the best cricketer at Greyfriars. Are you ready?"

Blundell sat and blinked at Horace Coker.

"Off your rocker?" he gasped at last.

"Put up your paws!"

"You silly ass!" roared Blundell, in indignant wrath. "Get out of my study before you're chucked!"

Tap!

"Yoop!" howled Blundell, as Coker's knuckles rapped on his nose, hinting that it was time to begin.

"Now come on!" roared Coker.

Coker, in his wrath, was prepared to make an example of the captain of the Fifth. It had not occurred to him that the Fifth might not care to see their Form captain made an example of by the great Coker. That fact did not dawn upon him till the whole tea-party rose from the table as one man and swooped upon him.

"Here, one at a time!" roared Coker. "Hands-off! Yooop! I'll lick the lot of you—yaroooh!—one at a time—two at a time, if you like! Yaroooh!"

Whether Horace Coker could have licked the Fifth-Formers two at a time was a doubtful question. But that he couldn't lick them five at a time wasn't doubtful at all.

The great Horace simply crumpled up in the grasp of five pairs of hands, and his brain swam as he was swept off the floor.

Bump!

"Yaroooh! Help! Leggo! I—I— Oh crikey!"

Fitzgerald dragged the door open.

Bump!

The second bump was in the passage. Fitzgerald smiled, and closed the door.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Chance for the Remove!

"**L** OVELY weather!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

It was the following day. A half-holiday at Greyfriars, and lessons were over for the day. Harry Wharton & Co. came out after dinner with cheery faces.

There was a junior match fixed for that afternoon—the Remove against the Shell. The Famous Five were all booked for that match; the rest of the team being composed of Vernon-Smith, Redwing, Lisle, Squiff, Penfold, and Peter Todd. Harry Wharton & Co. were looking forward to a good game, and a victory over Hobson's team, which they cheerfully regarded as next door to a certainty.

"Lovely weather, and a lovely pitch," agreed Harry Wharton. "Who says that life isn't worth living?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter, just in time!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Owl of the Remove rolled up. "We want you, Bunter."

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five, and grinned a fat grin.

"That's all very well!" he answered loftily. "I don't know that I care to play, asked at the last minute like this!"

"Eh?"

"Still, for the sake of the Form, I'll do it!" said Bunter generously. "I make it a condition that I'm put on to open the innings."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Unless I open the innings I shall decline to play for you, Wharton, and that's flat!"

"Well, you won't open the innings, that's flatter," said the captain of the Remove, laughing.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Still, I'll

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stretch a point, for the sake of the side. I'll play!"

"You jolly well won't!" said Harry. "No room for porpoises in a Form team, old barrel!"

"You don't catch on, Bunter!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "I didn't mean that we wanted you to play, old top. We want you to roll the pitch."

"Eh? Catch me rolling the pitch for you!" howled Bunter indignantly.

"Collar him!" said Bob.

The Famous Five playfully collared Bunter. As the Owl of the Remove realised Bob Cherry's little joke—that he was to be used to roll the pitch with—he gave a howl of wrath.

"Yow-ow! Leggo, you silly asses!"

"Now, don't be selfish, Bunter. You're better than a roller any day, being fatter and heavier—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow! You're a silly ass, Bob Cherry!" gasped Bunter, jerking himself away. "I won't play for you now! You needn't say a word, Wharton! I refuse—I refuse distinctly!"

"Unsay those cruel words!" murmured Nugent.

"I won't! I refuse to play for the Remove now! You can go ahead and lose the match, and I'll laugh at you!" said Bunter crushingly.

Bob Cherry sobbed.

"I've got a message for you, Wharton," went on Bunter, with a disdainful sniff at the weeping Bob. "Coker wants you."

"Let him want!"

"He says he wants you at once."

"Well, if he wants me, he can come here, I suppose?" said Harry.

"He says you're to go to him."

Harry Wharton laughed.

He was not likely to leave the cricket-field, where the stumps had been pitched, at the behest of the lofty Coker.

"Here come the Shell fellows," remarked Johnny Bull.

Wharton moved off to meet Hobson, the captain of the Shell. From the direction of the School House, Coker of the Fifth appeared in sight. There was a frown on Coker's brow. Apparently he was annoyed at his lofty command not having been promptly obeyed by the skipper of the Remove.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Horace James!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Looking for more trouble, I suppose!"

Johnny Bull chuckled.

"Coker's a regular hog for trouble," he remarked. "He was scrapping with the Sixth and Fifth yesterday. The Remove can give him another scrap, if he wants one."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Wharton had tossed for innings with Hobson when Coker of the Fifth arrived on the scene. For some reason, known only to himself, Coker had a bat under his arm.

"We bat first, you fellows," said Harry Wharton. "Pull up your socks, Smithy."

"I'm ready!" said the Bounder cheerily.

A heavy hand dropped on Wharton's shoulder, and spun him round. He stared in surprise at the frowning face of Horace Coker.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated.

"I sent Bunter to tell you I wanted you, Wharton!"

Wharton jerked his shoulder away.

"That's all right," he answered.

"Bunter told me."

"You didn't come!"

"Exactly! I didn't!"

"Well, I've come to you!" said Coker.

"If the esteemed mountain will not come to Mahomet, it is necessary for the

august Mahomet to seek the mountain," remarked Hurree Singh.

"Shut up, you!" said Coker. "I'm talking to Wharton! You've got a fag match or something on this afternoon, Wharton."

"We're playing the Shell," said Harry, "and as we're just going to begin, you'll oblige us by getting off the grass, Coker."

"I've decided to play cricket this afternoon," explained Coker.

"Easier to decide than to do, in your case," said Harry. "But we've no objection, I'm sure. Go and play it—or at it—and give us a rest, old top."

"The silly ass offered to play for us," said Hobson of the Shell, with a grin. "We weren't taking any."

Coker did not heed that remark.

"I'll explain to you, Wharton!" he began.

"Couldn't you explain some other time?"

"I'll explain now. You Remove kids don't play cricket badly—for fags. Not my style, of course."

"Ye gods! I hope not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But not bad, for fags," said Coker, with a glare at the hilarious juniors. "I've decided to play for you this afternoon—"

"Eh?"

"To see whether it's possible for me to play with a gang of fags. I don't know, but I'll try it. My idea is this—under my guidance, I don't see why you kids shouldn't play a senior team, and lick them. If I can lick you into sufficient shape, my idea is to play the Fifth. Blundell has been pleased to make insulting remarks about my cricket. He will sing to another tune when I mop him up with a team of Lower Fourth fags!" said Coker. "You see the idea?"

"Oh crikey!"

"I don't say I've finally decided on it—I'm going to see, this afternoon, how you shape," said Coker. "Do your best, and you can depend on me for guidance and instruction. I'll tell you where you're lacking, and put you right. You show some promise as cricketers, and with my gift of coaching I really think I can lick you into shape. See?"

The Removites simply blinked at Coker. The great Horace seemed quite unconscious of the colossal cheek of his remarks. His decision was a great honour to the fags—that was how Coker looked at it, and he did not think it worth while consulting their wishes.

That, however, was not how Harry Wharton & Co. looked at it. They took quite a different view—quite!

"Is he potty?" murmured Bob Cherry, at last.

"The pottiffulness must be terrific. The estimable Coker's proper place is in the pages of esteemed 'Chuckles,'" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Are you batting first?" asked Coker.

"Yes, we're batting!" gasped Wharton.

"Then I'll open the innings, with you at the other end, Wharton. Get to your wicket!"

"Eh?"

"Are you deaf, you young ass? Get to your wicket!"

"You silly chump!" roared Wharton. "We're not playing you! I'd rather play a bunny rabbit. Get off the grass!"

"Don't be cheeky, Wharton! Get to your wicket!"

And Horace Coker marched out to his wicket—the wicket he had calmly appropriated to himself, leaving Wharton to go to the bowler's end. Harry Wharton stared after him like a fellow in a dream. This really seemed the limit, even for the egregious Coker. Hobson of the Shell chuckled.





The whole tea-party rose from the table as one man and swooped upon Coker. "Here, one at a time!" he roared. "Hands off!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Are you playing him?" he asked.

"Playing him!" gasped Wharton.

"Playing that born idiot! Playing that cheeky chump! Coker! Get off the pitch at once, or you'll get chucked off!"

"Get to your wicket, Wharton!" was Coker's reply.

"Are you going off?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Now, then, Hobson, don't keep me waiting all day for the bowling!" called out Coker.

"He's not going!" gasped Wharton. "He's there to bat! Oh crumbs! This is where Coker gets talked to, I think. Come on!"

And there was a rush of the Removites to the wicket, where Horace Coker stood waiting for the bowling.

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## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Sat Upon!

"SHIFT him!"

"Collar him!"

"Mop him up!"

Horace Coker was waiting for the bowling; but it was not bowling that he received. Coker, apparently, expected the heroes of the Lower Fourth to take his egregious cheek lying down. But they didn't! It was Coker who took the affair lying down—and he lay down quite suddenly, with a bump that made him roar.

"Yooooop!"

"Kick him out!" shouted Vernon-Smith.

"Mop him up!"

Coker grasped his bat as a weapon of

defence, but, fortunately, he had no chance of using it. The angry Removites were swarming over him like a swarm of excited bees.

Hands almost innumerable were laid on the great man of the Fifth.

His hat was jerked away, and hands fastened on his collar, on his arms and legs, on his hair and his ears. The latter, being of a good size, gave a good hold. Coker had a vague feeling of being in the middle of a very active threshing-machine. He was swept off the turf, and whirled away, wriggling and struggling and yelling, but unable to help himself in the least.

"Leggo!" roared Coker. "Put me down! You cheeky young scoundrels—"

"Bump him!"

"Yow-ow-woooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker of the Fifth was borne off the field almost in hysterics. Far beyond the limits of Little Side the juniors bumped him down.

They bumped him down hard, and left him sprawling.

Coker sat up, as they marched off to the cricket-field again, and gasped for breath spasmodically.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" gasped Coker.

It was some minutes before Coker felt sufficiently recovered to get on his feet. When he was up again, he started for the junior cricket-ground.

He was no longer thinking of playing for the Remove. It had been made plain, even to Coker, that that scheme was not feasible. He was not going to be given a chance of licking a team of fags into shape, with his wonderful gift

of coaching, and using them to "mop up" the Fifth. That great chance was lost to him—owing to the perverse obstinacy of these cheeky juniors. What Coker was thinking of now was vengeance.

What he wanted was vengeance, and he wanted it bad.

The junior game had already commenced when Horace Coker loomed up on Little Side again. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were at the wickets, and Hoskins of the Shell was bowling to Wharton. There was a sudden roar from the juniors round the field as Coker rushed up.

"Here he comes!"

"Look out!"

Coker did not heed the fact that the game was in progress. He rushed on the field, directly at the captain of the Remove. From all the juniors on the ground there was a howl of wrath. The interruption of a game was a serious matter in their eyes, if not in Coker's.

"Stop him!" yelled Nugent.

"Collar him!" shouted Vernon-Smith.

"Bat him!"

The Remove batsmen, who were waiting in a group, rushed at Coker, and intercepted his advance on the pitch.

Half a dozen bats met the rushing Horace, and stopped him. The bats clumped on him unmercifully; the juniors were not disposed to stand upon ceremony with a fellow who interrupted a cricket match.

Coker had to stop.

He backed away, roaring.

"Down him!" said Vernon-Smith.

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"Coker's got to kept quiet! We'll get Bunter to sit on him!"

"Good! Down he goes!"

Coker was grabbing frantically at the bats that lunged at him, and poked and prodded. While five or six of the batsmen prodded, other fellows piled on Coker, and the great Horace was downed again. He was rushed off the field and dumped in the grass, and Smithy shouted for Bunter. Billy Bunter came rolling up with a grin on his fat face.

"Sit on him, Bunter!"

"He, he, he!"

Plump!

The Owl of the Remove descended on Horace Coker, and there was a gasp of anguish from Horace.

Bunter's weight was not a joke.

"Now some of you chaps stand on his arms and legs," said Vernon-Smith. "Keep on his chest, Bunter."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bunter.

"We'll look after him," said Russell.

"Leave him to us, Smithy. He won't interrupt the game again."

"Yooo-hoooh-hooop!" came from the hapless Coker. "Gerroff! I'll smash you! I'll wallop the lot of you! Yow-ow-ow!"

Heedless of Coker's boiling wrath, the juniors portioned him out, as it were—Russell and Ogilvy taking a leg each to stand upon, and Kipps and Hazeldene bagging an arm each. Thus, spread-eagled, and with William George Bunter firmly planted on his chest, Coker of the Fifth was done to a turn.

The feelings of the great Horace were too deep for words as he wriggled painfully under the grinning Removites. He gasped and gasped till he had no gasps left in him, and then he mumbled. Bunter's solid weight was gradually reducing him to a pancake. Meanwhile, the Remove-Shell match was going merrily.

It was not till the match had been going on some time that Potter and Greene, and some more of the Fifth, on their way to the senior ground, spotted the peculiar group on Little Side. They roared with laughter, but they kindly interposed on Coker's behalf, and the unfortunate Horace was rescued. Potter helped him to his feet.

"Take him away!" said Ogilvy, with a grin. "Mind, if he comes back here we'll pin him again. Take him away, and put him in an asylum!"

"Ow!" moaned Coker.

That was all he could say. Even the great Coker was fed up with scrapping for that afternoon. Potter led him unresistingly away. A howl of merry laughter from the Removites followed him, and Coker did not even turn his head.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Coker Makes Up His Mind!

"I" 'VE washed my hands of the whole bizney!"

Thus Coker of the Fifth, the following day at tea-time.

Potter and Greene had come in hungry to tea, in the hope of finding something good in the study. Instead, they found Coker.

Coker did not seem to be thinking of tea. He was leaning back in the arm-chair with a deeply-corrugated brow. His mighty brain was at work, but not on the subject of tea. Potter and Greene had been out, and they had come back from Friardale hungry. So they looked a little cross. Naturally, they were thinking of tea.

Coker made his remark as they came in. What it referred to his study-mates did not know. Neither did they care.

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Tea was what they cared about just then.

"Anything for tea?" asked Potter.

"I thought Coker would have got something in, as we've been out," said Greene, in an aggrieved tone.

"I've washed my hands——"

"I dare say they needed it," said Potter tartly. "What about tea?"

"Of the whole bizney——"

"Any methylated? The fire's out, of course!"

"And I shall refuse, in future, to take any interest in Greyfriars cricket," said Coker finally.

Potter and Greene did not seem interested.

This was really rather unfeeling, for their study-mate had evidently been giving the matter a great deal of thought. Still, Potter and Greene were hungry.

"I've been thinking——" went on Coker.

"You might have thought of tea, if you wanted to think, as it's past tea-time!" snapped Greene.

"Blow tea!" said Coker crossly. "I'm not always thinking about food, like you fellows. I despise a chap who's always thinking about his meals! Besides, I've had tea."

"Oh, you've had tea!" grunted Potter.

"Left anything for us?"

"I've had tea with Fitzgerald. I've been talking to Fitz. He's not half such a fool as he looks, you know. About the cricket——"

"No methylated," said Potter. "How are we going to boil the kettle? No wood here, excepting Coker's head!"

"I've got an idea——" said Coker.

"Good! We want the kettle to boil," said Potter. "What's your idea?"

"You silly ass, I'm not talking about the kettle! I'm talking about cricket."

"Coker, old man, don't talk about things you don't understand," said Potter, goaded at last into candour.

"What?"

"We want tea, not silly chinwag," explained Potter. "You don't know anything about cricket. There's nothing in the cupboard, Greeney. We shall have to go down to Hall."

Coker stared at his study-mates. Usually he had loyal admiration, if not support, from Potter and Greene. But it was not his own fault. Coker provided most of the good things in that study; and when he forgot to provide, naturally, his study-mates forgot to admire. It was a case of quid pro quo. Loyal admiration, like other commodities, was not to be had for nothing.

"So you don't want to hear what I've decided?" he asked.

"We don't want to miss tea in Hall, as there's nothing in the study."

"I wonder if you fellows ever think about anything but eating?" said Coker, with sarcastic scorn. "You call this chummy, I suppose?"

"We're hungry, ass!"

"My idea is this," said Coker, evidently determined that his study-mates should learn the weighty decision he had come to. "I shall refuse, in future, to play for the school."

"You'll refuse?" ejaculated Potter, with a stare.

Coker nodded.

"Yes. After the way I've been treated on all sides, I shall cut school cricket out!" he said loftily. "It will be useless for Wingate to offer me a place in the First Eleven after this; and equally useless for Blundell to come along asking me to play for the Fifth. I sha'n't do it!"

"You won't do it, that's a cert."

"I have thought the matter out. Out-

side Greyfriars I hope to find a wider scope for my powers."

"A which—for your what?"

"A wider scope for my powers. I've hid my light under a bushel too long," said Coker. "I told Fitz that, and he quite agreed with me. He's not half such an ass as I thought. Outside Greyfriars there are clubs that would jump at securing the services of a really first-class amateur. County cricket, in fact, isn't outside my powers. I don't see why I shouldn't play for Kent."

Potter and Greene blinked at Coker as if he mesmerised them.

At that astounding statement they forgot even that they were hungry.

"Pip-pip-play for Kent?" said Potter faintly.

"Why not?"

"Oh, my only Uncle Joseph!"

"Not at once, of course," explained Coker. "I don't expect to jump straight from this study into the County Eleven."

"Oh!" gasped Potter. "You don't?"

"Not at once," said Coker modestly. "Cricketers have to work their way up, you know. But playing for clubs outside Greyfriars, and making my mark, as I'm bound to do, sooner or later I shall catch the eyes of somebody looking for colts for the county, and then I shall get my chance."

"Ye gods!"

"All that's necessary is to get into touch with the outside clubs," said Coker. "I may play for several, and pick out the one that suits me best—one where there isn't a lot of jealousy about a player's form. The amount of jealousy in cricket is rather discouraging. Still, there are plenty of clubs where a fellow can distinguish himself without being generally sat upon and kept in the back-ground."

"Lots!" grinned Potter.

"That's the kind I'm looking for. Fitz thinks it's a good idea. That's why I'm going to advertise."

"Advertise?"

"That's it!" smiled Coker. "I'm sorry to have to do it—really sorry to have to deprive the school of its best man in this way. But I've got no other resource. You fellows see that? I can't give up cricket, for which I've got a special gift, on account of jealousy on the part of the captain of the school and my Form captain. It's not to be expected, is it?"

"Oh, ah! My hat!"

"So I've drawn up this advertisement," said Coker. "I'm going to send a fag down to the local paper office with it, so as to get it printed this week. Look at it."

Potter and Greene looked at it. This new departure of Horace Coker's quite interested them, though it was past tea-time. The advertisement, scrawled upon a sheet of impot paper, was quite worthy of Coker of the Fifth. It ran:

"FIRST-CLASS cricketer, thoroughly good all-round man, offers his services to any club within radius of ten miles of Greyfriars School. Could call for personal interview any day after lessons, or on Wednesday or Saturday afternoons. Write to H. J. Coker, Fifth Form, Greyfriars School, near Friardale."

"Fitz thinks that's drawn up rather well," said Coker. "What do you fellows think?"

"Oh!" said Potter.

"Ah!" gasped Greene.

"I may not see so much of you fellows for some time," said Coker. "I'm expecting to be rather busy, you see, I shall probably book up engage-



ments for every half-holiday for the whole season."

"Oh!"

"For whole-day matches some arrangement will have to be made with the Head. He will have to give me leave, and all that. I can't lose my chances of getting into county cricket for the sake of sticking here at lessons—can I?"

"Oh!" stuttered Potter. "Nunno! Certainly not!"

"I—I shouldn't!" murmured Greene.

"Well, I sha'n't! But the Head's a reasonable old fellow—he'll give me leave right enough, when I've booked up the engagements."

"When!" murmured Potter.

"What did you say, Potter?"

"Ahem! Nothing! So—so this advert. is going into the local paper, is it?"

"Yes; only a couple of bob for three insertions in the 'Friardale Gazette,'" said Coker. "One of you fellows can bike down with it, if you like."

"Thanks! We haven't had tea yet!"

"Just like you to be thinking of tea, George Potter. I never knew such a fellow. You beat Bunter!"

"You beat Banagher!" said Potter, with a grin. "I suppose you're expecting to get answers to that advertisement?"

"Naturally!"

"I'll eat them, if you like, when they come," said Potter. "I can see cricket captains jumping at the chance—I don't think, Coker! Let us know when you play for the county, won't you? And don't forget to mention when you play for All England, specially. And when they send you to Australia to mop them up down under, do ask the Head to let us go with you!"

And with that George Potter quitted the study in quest of tea, followed by Greene.

"You dummy!" roared Coker.

Potter and Greene chortled and disappeared. Coker, with a grunt, folded up his advertisement and put it into an envelope.

"They'll jolly well see, soon!" he murmured. "It's a bit sickening, a chap's own study-mates joining in the conspiracy against him! But I'll show 'em! Now I've got to find some dashed fag to go down with this letter!"

And Coker left his study in search of a dashed fag.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Fagging For Coker!

**H**ARRY WHARTON & CO. were chatting on the steps of the School House, after tea, when Coker of the Fifth appeared in the offing. Looking for a dashed fag, Coker had happened on the Famous Five; and, as they were all dashed fags, Coker stopped to address them.

"You'll do, Cherry!" he said.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob cheerily. "It's Coker! What's biting you now, Horace, old bean?"

Horace frowned. Bob's address could not be called respectful; but Coker often received disrespect from the young rascals of the Remove. They did not know a really great man when they saw one.

"Cut down to Friardale with this!" said Coker, holding out the envelope.

Bob Cherry stared at it, and at Coker.

"What?" he ejaculated.

Even the Sixth Form were not allowed to fag the Remove, without the consent of those independent youths. There had been sore trouble on that point once, and the Remove had gained the point. As for being fagged by the Fifth, that was unheard-of—undreamed-of! But that did not matter to Coker. Coker was a

very special personage, in his own estimation, at least. And he spoke as authoritatively as a Sixth Form prefect—if not a little more so.

"Take it to the office of the 'Friardale Gazette!'" he said.

"Eh?"

"Go on your bike, and you'll easily catch them before they close!"

"Oh!"

"Tell them I want the advertisement to appear in this week's issue. That's important!"

"Ah!"

"Here's a two-bob bit to pay for it!"

"My hat!"

Coker held out the envelope in one hand, and the two-shilling piece in the other. Bob Cherry kept his hands in his pockets.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed Coker.

"I'm not deaf, old top!"

"Well, take them!"

"Is this one of your funny turns, Coker?" inquired Bob. "Or do you really think you can fag the Remove?"

"I don't want any of your Lower Fourth cheek!" said Coker darkly.

"That advertisement has got to go in. Take it!"

"Bow-wow!"

"If you want a thrashing first, Cherry, I—" roared Coker.

"Go ahead, old nut!"

"Hold on, my esteemed Coker," interposed Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a glimmer in his dusky eyes. "If the excellent and ludicrous Coker insists—"

"I do!" snapped Coker.

"And if the thrashfulness is to be the outcome of the refusal, it will be better to obey orders of esteemed Coker."

"What!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You silly ass, Inky!" growled Johnny Bull. "Do you think we're going to fag for Coker?"

"The fagfulness for esteemed Coker is high honour and distinction," answered Hurree Janset Ram Singh calmly. "Besides, esteemed Coker will not take no for answer."

"That I jolly well won't!" said Coker emphatically. "I don't care which of you takes it, but it's got to be taken!"

"You hear the commands of august Coker," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Give me honourable advertisement, my esteemed and ridiculous Coker, and I will take it bikefully!"

"There you are, then!"

To the wrath and amazement of his chums, the dusky junior took the envelope and the two-shilling piece. With a satisfied grin, Horace Coker strode away. For once, at least, the disrespectful rascals of the Remove had been properly brought to heel, and he had quelled them with the terror of his frown.

Harry Wharton & Co. fixed their eyes upon the smiling face of the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Now, what's this game, Inky?" asked Frank Nugent.

"The gamefulness is terrific, my esteemed Franky."

"I suppose it's a stunt," said Bob Cherry. "If you're really thinking of fagging for Coker, Inky, you're going to be bumped till you're pink and blue. I suppose you know that?"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh smiled.

"Come to the study, and the explanation will be forthcoming," he said.

"Oh, all right!"

Considerably puzzled, the chums of the Remove followed the nabob up to the study. There Hurree Janset Ram Singh calmly jerked open the envelope, and took out Coker's advertisement.

"My hat! What are you up to?" exclaimed Nugent.

Hurree Singh gave a dusky grin.

"The esteemed Coker has ordered us to take advertisement to local paper," he said. "The lessonfulness is required by

esteemed Coker. The wheezy good idea occurred to me brainfully. Esteemed Coker is advertising for something—"

"I suppose so."

"The alterfulness of the advertisement will make esteemed Coker advertise for something else!"

"Oh!"

"Which will be lesson for esteemed Coker, my worthy chums. If he is advertising bike for sale, we will put in advertisement for selling esteemed bulldog—"

"Oh!"

"If he is advertising for foreign stamps, or so on, we will make him advertise to make loans of cash on note of hand alone—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar in Study No. 1.

"Jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "Coker's got to learn that he can't bullyrag the Remove! This will be better than rolling him down the steps on his silly neck!"

"Much better!" said Harry Wharton laughing. "But—"

"What on earth can the advertisement be about?" said Johnny Bull. "I suppose it isn't private, as it's going into a newspaper. We can read it."

"Oh, yes!"

The Famous Five looked at the advertisement. They read it, and gasped. They had wondered what it could be about; but they had not quite expected anything like this.

"First-class cricketer!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Thoroughly good, all-round man!" roared Johnny Bull. "Oh, my hat!"

"Offers his services—"

"Coker's services—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Could call for personal interview any—"

"He will have a lot of calls to make!"

"I don't think! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The don't-thinkfulness is terrific, as esteemed advertisement now stands!" remarked Hurree Singh. "But with some alterfulness worthy Coker may have some calls to make for personal interviews. It would be great disappointment to Coker to receive no answers. Let us make sure that esteemed Coker receives answers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh bent his dusky brows in thought.

His active brain was working, and the chums of the Remove watched him with grinning faces. Coker of the Fifth had asked for it, so to speak, and he was going to get it.

The dusky nabob took pencil and paper and began to scribble. Bob Cherry looked over his shoulder, and jerked the pencil away.

"We'll have it in common or garden English!" he remarked. "Your merry lingo is a little too flowery, old chap!"

"My esteemed Bob—"

"Dictate, and I will put it down," said Bob. "The floweryfulness of your esteemed English language is a little too terrific, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh proceeded to dictate, and Bob Cherry wrote it down in English that was more like Coker's. And the result was very interesting. The advertisement—second edition—ran:

"**STRONG** and active youth requires agricultural work. Attend to cows, horses, sheep, and make himself generally useful on farm. Can call any day after four o'clock.—H. J. Coker, Greyfriars, near Friardale."

"My only hat!" murmured Harry Wharton. "Coker will have plenty of answers to that; there's jobs going on



every farm round here at this season. I wonder how Coker will like the jobs, though?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I'll take that advertisement," said Bob. "I don't mind taking that one. And I'll see that it comes out this week in the local rag."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Five minutes later Bob Cherry was wheeling out his bicycle to ride down to the office of the local paper and obey Coker's lordly behest, though not exactly in the way Coker intended.

**THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.**

**Chummy!**

"**H**ERE, you black bounder!" That was Horace Coker's polite form of address to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

Hurree Singh's dark eyes glimmered a little. He was not black, and he was not a bounder, so the great Horace was wrong on both counts. But Coker had no civility to waste on Lower Form fags, black, white, or brown.

"Did you take it in?" demanded Coker.  
"My esteemed and ridiculous Coker, the—"

Coker dropped a heavy hand on the nabob's shoulder.

"Has that advertisement gone in?" he demanded.

"The answer is in the esteemed affirmative, my ludicrous Coker. Esteemed Bob Cherry has gone bike-fully to Friardale with advertisement."

"Oh, all right!" said Coker. "I don't care which blessed fag takes it so long as it's taken. Tell Cherry to come to my study when he comes in. I want to be sure that it's appearing this week."

"To hear is to obey!" said the nabob meekly.

Coker gave the dusky junior a suspicious look and turned away. To hear ought to have been to obey, certainly; but it seldom was.

The great man of the Fifth returned to his study, mentally promising Bob Cherry a stumping if he did not come there to report.

About a quarter of an hour later Bob wheeled his machine in at the gates, with a ruddy and smiling face. His chums were waiting for him in the quad.

"All serene?" asked Wharton.  
"As Inky would remark, the serenity is terrific!" answered Bob Cherry cheerily. "The ad. goes in this week."

"Good!"  
The Famous Five chortled in chorus.

"Esteemed Coker demands that you go to his study and report, my worthy chum," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Esteemed Coker can go and eat esteemed coke!" answered Bob.

"Better go, though," said Frank Nugent sagely. "While we're pulling esteemed Coker's esteemed leg, we must stroke him down the right way. He mustn't get suspicious."

"Oh, all right! I'll go."

And Bob Cherry repaired to the Fifth Form passage to report to the great Horace.

Coker & Co. were all there, beginning prep, when Bob arrived. They did not seem to be on the best of terms. Potter and Greene had done too much plain speaking for that, owing to their disappointment over tea. The candid friend  
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is not always popular, and Coker's friends had been altogether too candid.

It was Coker's own fault; he really ought not to have forgotten that remittances from Aunt Judy were expected to be followed by study spreads. As Potter had often remarked, it was an equal division of labour, if Coker stood the spreads, and they stood Coker. It was not so jolly easy to stand Coker, in Potter's opinion.

So there was silence as the three Fifth-Former's worked, and the brow of Horace James was lofty and haughty.

He frowned at Bob as the cheery Removeite looked in.

Bob Cherry had been fagging for him, as Coker supposed, but he had no graciousness to waste.

"Well?" he snapped.  
"Please, my lord, I've come to report!" said Bob meekly.

"You've been to the 'Gazette' office?"

"Yes."  
"Handed in the advert?"

"I've handed in the advertisement I went to hand in, of course," said Bob. "Charge eighteenpence. Sixpence change. Advert. comes out this week."

"You can keep the sixpence," said Coker loftily.

Bob looked at him.  
"Keep the sixpence?" he repeated.

"Yes, for yourself."  
"Oh, my hat! Are you sure you can spare it, Coker? You're not plunging

yourself into distress by this generosity?"

"Get out!" roared Coker, as Potter and Greene chuckled.

"Certainly, old top! But I won't keep the sixpence. I will take the will for the deed, but I won't rob you. Catch!"

Bob Cherry spun the sixpence across the study, and Horace caught it—with his nose. There was a roar from Coker, and he jumped up. Bob Cherry vanished down the passage.

"Cheeky young scoundrel!" growled Coker, gathering up the sixpence. "When I've got time I'll give those Remove fags a lesson. They've needed one for a long time. Well, that's done. My advert. comes out in the 'Gazette' to-morrow."

"And you'll get a lot of answers by to-morrow evening!" murmured Potter. Greene winked at the ceiling.

"I expect to," answered Coker. "I'm glad I caught this week's paper; it will save time. I was thinking of having a motor-car out on Saturday afternoon—"

Potter and Greene brightened up.  
"Not at all a bad idea," said Potter heartily.

"Jolly good, I think!"  
"I was going to ask you fellows if you'd care for a run—"

"Good, man!"  
"And a bit of a feed somewhere along the coast—"

"Tip-top!"  
"But now it will have to be off," continued Coker.

"Eh?"  
"I sha'n't order the car, after all."

"Coker, old chap," said Potter, with a mingling of dignity and cordial friendliness that was quite touching, and, at the same time, noble—"Coker, I hope you're not annoyed by a few careless remarks a fellow may have made at a time when he'd come in hungry for tea? I admit that I spoke rather crudely."

"Not in the best taste, your remarks, Potter," said Greene, shaking his head. "I thought so at the time."

"You backed him up!" exclaimed Coker warmly.  
"D-d-did I?"

"Yes, you did."  
"I—I was rather hungry, and—and I own up that I was cross," said Greene, with manly frankness. "I own up to that, Coker. A fellow can't say more."

Horace Coker's brow cleared. All was calm and bright once more in Coker's study.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you fellows own up in this manly way," he said. "A chap need never mind owning up when he's in the wrong. I should if I was ever in the wrong."

"You never are, old fellow!"  
"Yes, that's true; I'm speaking generally. I admit I was annoyed at what you said; but, after all, we're chums!" said Coker. "Let's forget all about it."

"Spoken like a real sportsman, Coker!" exclaimed Greene, with great admiration. "What I like about you, old fellow—what makes you so popular—is that sporting instinct of yours."

"Just what I was going to say!" remarked Potter.

Coker smiled genially.  
"Well, it's all right, then!" he said. And he sat down to his work again.

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance.  
"And—and on Saturday—" murmured Potter.

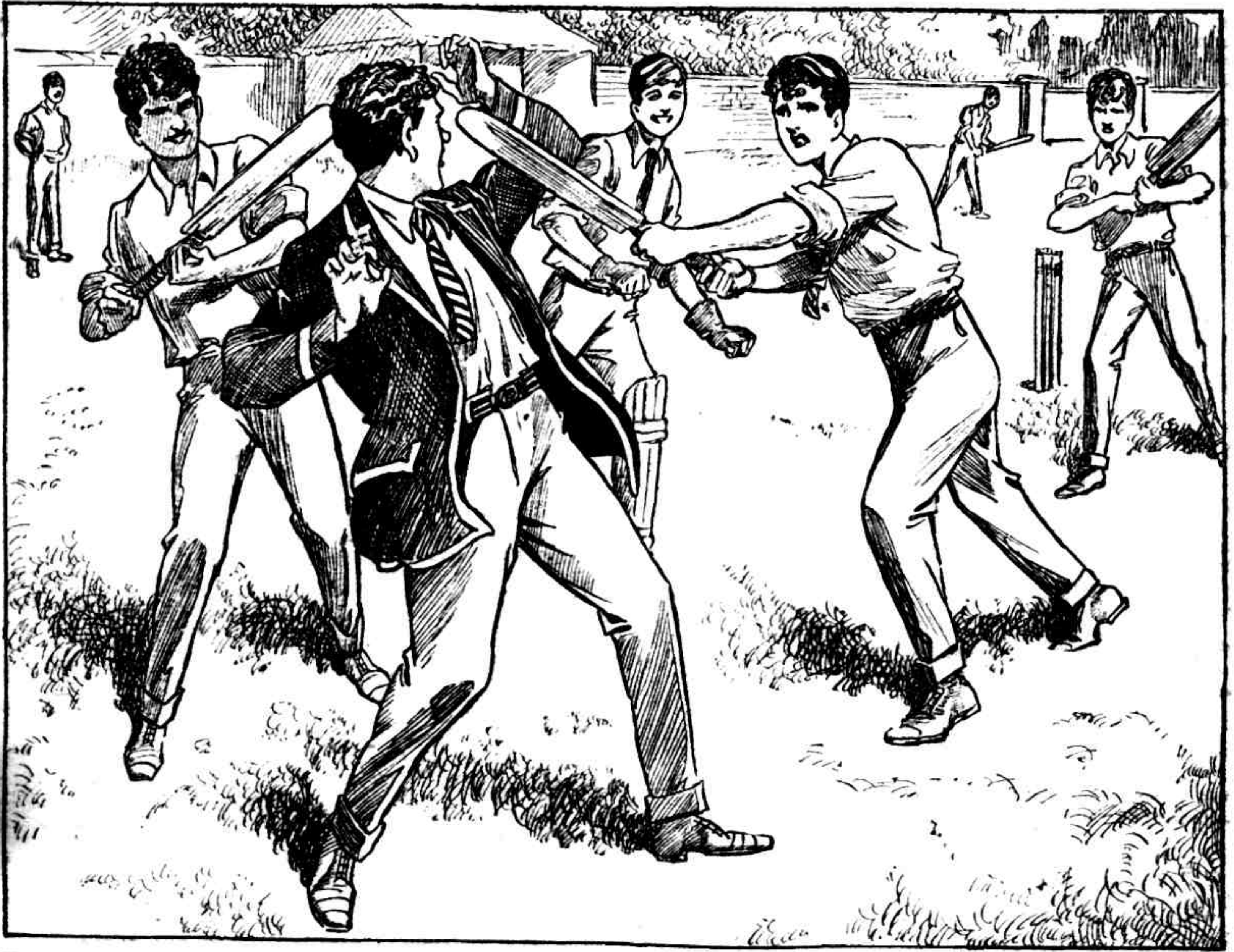
"The—the car—" remarked Greene.  
"Oh, that's off, as I said," replied Coker, without looking up.

"Eh?"  
"Off?"

Read  
**"ON THE KING'S HIGHWAY!"**  
A Wonderful Complete Story of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's,  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD,  
in  
**"THE GEM."**  
Out This Wednesday.







Half a dozen bats met the rushing Horace, and stopped him. The bats clumped on him unmercifully. The juniors were not disposed to stand upon ceremony with a fellow who interrupted a cricket-match. (See Chapter 4.)

"Yes; I expect to be busy on Saturday afternoon, you know, answering the chaps who will weigh in with replies to my advertisement."

"Wha-a-at?"

"That was what I was going to mention when you fellows interrupted me with your very frank and straightforward apology," said Coker. "I'm glad you did it—it makes me think better of you."

And Coker went on with his prep.

Potter and Greene looked at him.

Their expressions were rather extraordinary for a moment or two. Indeed, Coker—though he was far from suspecting it—was in danger just then of being seized by his incensed study-mates and bumped on his own carpet.

Fortunately, Potter and Greene restrained themselves. Coker went on with his prep without even knowing what a narrow escape he had had.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Services Required!

**T**HERE were several fellows in an expectant mood at Greyfriars on the following day.

Horace Coker was expectant, feeling that replies could not be long in coming in to his advertisement offering the services of a first-class cricketer, a good all-round player. And Harry Wharton & Co. were expectant, feeling that it was quite certain that a good many replies would come in to an advertisement offering the services of a strong and active youth for farm work.

What Coker would think of the replies, and what he would do when he got them, rather interested the Famous Five.

They intended to keep an eye on Coker, to see.

As the local paper was published early on Friday, it was quite probable that replies would come in by the evening, to bag the services of that strong and active youth who was seeking agricultural employment. There was plenty of employment of that kind going round Friardale. The demand for first-class cricketers was less keen. So really the chums of the Remove had done Coker a good turn—they had, at least, made it sure that he would get applications of some sort.

Horace Coker carried his head high that day.

He generally carried it high; but that day it was a little higher than usual. As soon as he was swamped with applications from good cricket clubs for his services, the hour of Coker's triumph would have struck. That would be a crushing answer to George Wingate, and to Blundell, and to all the fellows who failed to see what a great man Horace Coker really was—and their name was legion.

Indeed, Coker was so lofty that day that he quite surprised fellows who did not know about his advertisement—and immensely tickled those who did.

After lessons Coker hung about the doorway waiting for the postman. It was possible, as he confided to Potter and Greene, that there were would not be any answers that day. Potter agreed that it

was possible. Greene said it was extremely probable. Still, Coker hoped that one or two might come along. Not that it mattered much; for next day it was certain—according to Coker—that there would be a regular flood of them.

If Coker's original advertisement had gone in unchanged Coker would doubtless have interviewed the postman in vain. As it was, he was not to be disappointed.

As soon as he spotted Mr. Boggs in the distance Coker made a rush for him, and Potter and Greene, who were with Coker, grinned.

"Whole bagful, I expect!" murmured Potter sarcastically.

"Hundreds, I've no doubt!" said Greene, equally sarcastic.

They watched Coker with some amusement as he halted Mr. Boggs. To their surprise, the postman sorted out a letter for Coker.

"Letter from home, I expect!" said Potter.

"Sure to be!"

They watched Coker open the letter, and saw a satisfied smile dawn on his face. He came back to the School House with the letter in his hand.

"From home?" asked Potter, eyeing him.

"Eh? No! It's an answer to my advertisement."

"Eh?"

"What?"

Potter and Greene gasped simultaneously.

Five cheery juniors were hanging



round the steps, and they smiled at one another. They were quite as interested as Potter and Greene of the Fifth—in fact, more so.

"Nothing to be surprised at, is there?" asked Coker, staring at his chums. "I was expecting replies, wasn't I?"

"Ye-es, of course! Is it from a club?" exclaimed Potter.

"Whom could it be from, fathead?"

"Well, let's see it!" said the amazed Potter.

"Some club dashed hard up for a player, if they answer an advertisement so sharp as all that!" observed Greene.

"Not at all! They simply want to bag a good man while there's time. It's a case with this chap of coming early and avoiding the rush!" explained Coker.

"Oh, my hat!"

"But—but what does he say?" exclaimed Greene.

"I'll read it out."

Coker was not sorry to see several fellows gathering round. He did not want to hide his light under a bushel; far from that. In the hour of triumph he wanted all Greyfriars to know. He gave the Famous Five of the Remove quite a genial glance.

The letter seemed to Potter and Greene a little odd, coming, as it was supposed to do, from the secretary of a cricket club. It ran:

"Red Cow Farm,  
Courtfield.

"In reference to your advertisement in the 'Friardale Gazette' to-day, please call at above address as early as possible.  
"H. GILES."

"Looks like business—what?" asked Coker, with a smile.

"What's the name of the club?" asked Potter.

"He doesn't seem to give it."

"That's odd!"

"I suppose he dashed off to catch the afternoon local post—it's short and sweet!" said Coker.

"Red Cow Farm!" said Greene. "Is there a cricket club with its headquarters on a farm?"

"Why shouldn't there be?"

"Some farming johnnies' club, perhaps!" said the mystified Potter.

"Some farmers play jolly good cricket," said Coker. "I'd be quite willing to play for a farmers' club."

"They wouldn't be, when they know you!" murmured Potter.

"What?"

"Nothing, old chap! Are you going?"

"Of course I'm going!" answered Coker. "As Mr. Giles—I suppose he's their secretary—as he wants to see me as early as possible, I shall run over this evening. Prout will give me a pass out, in case I'm late. I don't know exactly where Red Cow Farm is, but I shall find it easily enough from Courtfield, I expect. I'm going after tea."

"Yes; let's go in to tea—"

"I shall have tea in Hall, as I'm in rather a hurry," said Coker. "You fellows please yourself."

"Oh!"

Horace Coker went into the House, looking extremely pleased with himself, and his chums strolled away in a puzzled mood. Harry Wharton & Co. were also feeling rather pleased with themselves.

"The silly ass is actually going!" murmured Bob Cherry. "He's going to see a farmer on a farm—to offer his services as a cricketer! I'd like to see Mr. Giles' face when Coker happens in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five roared.

They did not go in to tea just then;

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they waited round, to see Coker off. Bright and early Horace Coker came out of the School House, and wheeled his bicycle down to the gates. Armed with a pass from Mr. Prout, in case he was late back, Coker of the Fifth was prepared to track down the Red Cow Farm, wherever it was, and clinch matters with Mr. Giles—the club secretary, as he supposed.

"Good-bye-ee!" sang Bob Cherry, as Coker wheeled away.

And Coker frowned and started.

Harry Wharton & Co. went in to tea in great spirits. They would have given a week's pocket-money to accompany Coker on his journey, but that was not possible. Still, they had the pleasure to look forward to of seeing him return, and they were quite anxious to see his face when he came in. Bob Cherry declared that it would be worth a guinea a box.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### A Misunderstanding!

"I—I suppose this is the place!"

Coker looked round him rather dubiously.

The summer evening had set in. Stars twinkled in the sky, and a light glimmered from the farmhouse.

Coker had been some time finding the Red Cow Farm. It was some little distance from Courtfield, off the main road, and directions to it had been vague. One agricultural gentleman had told him it was "about a moile," but Coker had found it a very long mile.

However, he had arrived at last.

He stopped at the farm-gates, jumped off his machine, and looked over. Farm-work had long ceased; several weird-looking agricultural machines stood in the barton, and a dog came along and sniffed at Coker. Cattle lowed from the fields near at hand. The scene was truly rural, and Coker was perplexed.

Judging by his surroundings, he would have supposed that Mr. Giles was a farmer, merely that, and nothing more. Still, Mr. Giles had answered his advertisement, and that settled it. Coker pushed open the big timbered gate, and entered.

"Bow-ow-wooop!"

The dog made that remark.

"Shoo! Gerroff, you beast!" exclaimed Coker, brandishing a boot.

Coker's boots were of unusual size, and possibly the dog did not want to ascertain whether the weight equalled the size. He retreated towards the farmhouse, still barking.

Leaving his bicycle at the gate, Coker strode on towards the house. The barking and howling of the dog accompanied him on his progress.

There was a light in one window, showing that some of the farm folk were still up. Coker knocked at the door.

There was a heavy tread within, and a ponderous lock jerked, and the door was opened.

A burly man, with a red face and grey whiskers looked out at Coker. It was the farmer himself.

"Well?" he rapped out laconically.

"Mr. Giles?" asked Coker.

"That's my name."

"Good! I'm Coker!"

"Coker!" repeated the farmer.

"Yes. I've had your reply to my notice in the local paper—"

Mr. Giles blinked at him.

"Oh, Coker!" he said. "Bless my buttons! What the thump do you mean by butting in at this time of night?"

"Oh! Ah! You asked me to come as soon as possible—"

"Did I ask you to come to the front door?" asked Mr. Giles, apparently sarcastically.

"What the dickens door should I come to, then?" demanded Coker, rather warmly.

"My hands generally come to the back back door."

"Your hands!" stuttered Coker.

"Yes." Mr. Giles blinked at Coker peeringly in the starlight. "You don't look as if you'd be much good. Is this a lark?"

"I don't understand you," said Coker loftily. "The question is, do you want to engage my services? There's plenty of others, if you don't."

"Well, that's true," admitted Mr. Giles. "Labour's mortal scarce in these parts, as you know as well as I do, or you wouldn't be so cheeky, my lad!"

"Labour!" repeated Coker, wondering whether Mr. Giles had been drinking. "I don't quite follow."

"I believe I speak plain English!" said Mr. Giles tartly. "Howsumdever, you can come in, I s'pose."

He stepped back, and went into the parlour. Coker was following him in, supposing that he was to be asked into that room; but such was not Mr. Giles' intention. He reappeared with a lamp in his hand, and held it up to look at Coker more closely, much to the Greyfriars fellow's surprise.

"Well, you look strong and active enough," said Mr. Giles.

He was thinking of the advertisement, though Coker, of course, was not aware of that.

"I believe I'm strong and active," said Coker. "And, without bragging, I can say that I'm a good all-round man."

"You look like a schoolboy in them clothes."

"I am a schoolboy!"

"Eh?"

"A senior, in the Fifth Form of Greyfriars," explained Coker.

"Greyfriars! Is that a farm?"

Coker almost fell down.

"It—it—it's a school!" he stuttered.

"I don't quite foller," said Mr. Giles, eyeing him. "From your advertisement, I s'posed it was a farm. Is this one of your larks, young feller? If it's a school, how is it you're looking for a job from the place?"

"Hardly a job," said Coker. "You'd hardly call it a job, Mr. Giles."

"I shouldn't call it anything else."

Coker was getting restive. Mr. Giles had not even asked him to sit down. Coker felt that it was time to have an understanding.

"I'm not pressing my services upon you!" he said warmly. "You may as well understand that at the start!"

"Oh, I know all about that!" said Mr. Giles. "What with the scarcity of labour, and the Agricultural Labourers' Union, and the rest, I've had cheek enough from your sort."

"I don't see what the Agricultural Labourers' Union has to do with cricket!"

"With what?"

"Cricket!"

Mr. Giles eyed him.

"I s'pose," he said slowly, "that this is some sort of a schoolboy lark. You ain't the genuine article, young man."

"Try me, and see!" said Coker hotly.

"You haven't seen me play yet!"

"Seen you what?"

"Play!"

"So you're coming 'ere to play? I can tell you, young feller-me-lad, that you'll have to work, not play, if I take you on."

Coker smiled.

"You'll find me put my beef into it, if that's what you mean!" he answered.

"Rely on that!"

"Well, what can you do?" asked Mr. Giles, still eyeing him with growing suspicion. "I want a lad, and if you're any



good, I'll give you a trial, though appearances are agin you."

"You put it very queerly," said Coker. "I suppose there's no mistake. You are Mr. Giles, who answered my advertisement?"

"Course I am! You put a good bit into that advertisement," said Mr. Giles. "Now, what can you do?"

"Put me at the wicket, and you'll see. Where is your ground?"

"Eh?"

"Where's your ground?"

"My ground is outside the house," said Mr. Giles, staring. "Did you expect to find it indoors, young feller-me-lad?"

Coker laughed.

"No; but I didn't see it as I came along," he answered.

"You didn't see my ground?"

"No."

"You're not blind, I s'pose?"

"Blind! No!"

"Then I suppose this 'ere is a silly schoolboy lark? You're wasting my time for nothing!"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Coker hastily. "I must say that this reception is rather a queer one, and not at all what I expected, Mr. Giles."

"I dunno what you expected. I know what you're going to get, if you're trying to pull my leg!" answered the farmer gruffly. "Now, to come to business. What can you do? Can you milk cows?"

Coker jumped almost clear of the floor.

"M-m-milk cows!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"Of course I can't! I've never tried—at least, I dare say I could if I tried. I can generally do anything I turn my hand to. But why the thunder should I try?"

"Dang my buttons! You've never milked cows?"

"Certainly not."

"Have you ever attended horses?"

"No, I haven't."

"My word! Can you harness a horse in a cart?"

"I dare say I could; I've put the horse in the trap often enough at home."

"Can you manage a plough?"

"A plough?"

"Yes. Know what a plough is?" asked Mr. Giles, with crushing sarcasm.

"I know what it is, of course," said the bewildered Coker. "It's a thing farmers use for stirring up something, or something or other. I've never tried to handle one. Why should I?"

Mr. Giles set the lamp down, and picked up a big walking-stick that stood in the hall. Coker watched that proceeding in astonishment.

"So this is a joke, after all, as I s'posed from the beginning," said Mr. Giles.

"Not at all. But I don't understand—"

"Jest you tell me what you've come 'ere for, and what you can do?"

"I'll tell you what I can do fast enough, though I'm beginning to doubt whether I shall consent to have anything to do with you," said Coker warmly.

"I can play cricket—"

"Cricket!"

"Yes."

"Do you think I want you to come 'ere and play cricket?" roared the farmer.

"I—I suppose so."

"Hay?"

"I'm a thoroughly reliable batsman—"

"Batsman!" said Mr. Giles, dazedly.

"And an uncommonly good bowler—"

"Bowler!"

"And a very handy man in the field—"

"Handy in the field, when you can't milk cows or look arter a horse!"

"I suppose your club doesn't milk cows on the cricket-ground, does it?" snorted Coker. "My hat! Have I dropped into a lunatic asylum by mistake?"

"Cricket-ground!" repeated Mr. Giles, wrathfully. "I s'posed it was a joke at the start, and now I know it. Outside!"

"What?"

"Outside!" roared Mr. Giles, brandishing his stick.

Coker fairly bounded out; the stick looked dangerous, and Mr. Giles was evidently wrathful.

"Look here!" howled Coker.

"Cæsar! Cæsar!" shouted Mr. Giles, and there was a bark from the dog.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Fetch him, Cæsar! Fetch him!" roared the incensed farmer.

Coker did not stay to argue longer. Mr. Giles was evidently mad or drunk, and, in either case, argument was useless. Besides, Cæsar was not to be

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argued with; he was showing his teeth and snarling. Coker fled for the gate.

Behind him came Cæsar, growling horribly.

"Fetch him!" roared Mr. Giles from the doorway, justly exasperated with the supposed practical joker.

"Gr-r-rrrr!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Coker.

He reached the gate just ahead of the dog, and bounded over. He sprawled on hands and knees in the lane outside; while the dog ran up and down inside the gate, barking and growling. Coker grabbed his bike, jumped on it, and pedalled away in frantic haste. The interview was over.

#### THE TENTH CHAPTER.

##### Letters for Coker!

"**H**ERE he comes!"

"He looks happy!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had finished their prep, and they were looking out of the big doorway into the starlight in the quad when Coker arrived.

Coker looked rather dusty, and rather tired. He had had a rather fatiguing time. But he did not look happy.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" greeted Bob Cherry.

"Gerraway, you cheeky fags!" growled Coker.

"Wasn't it a success?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Shut up!"

"The politeness of the esteemed Coker is great. Is it possible that they have not jumped at his estimable services?" inquired the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"You cheeky nigger!"

Coker seemed to be in a bad temper. He shoved Nugent and Hurree Singh roughly aside as he strode in. But the chums of the Remove were not to be shoved with impunity.

Five pairs of hands were laid on Coker at once, and Coker went along the passage very quickly—in a whirl.

He landed on his hands and knees with a roar.

When he scrambled up, the cheery Co. were vanishing up the staircase, and Coker shook an enraged fist after them, and tramped away to his own quarters. He found his study empty; Potter and Greene had finished their prep and cleared off. But they came back as soon as the news reached them that Coker was in. They did not come alone, either. Fitzgerald and Bland and Hilton came along, too, very curious to know what had happened.

Coker's look was a sufficient indication that he had not prospered. What ever had happened, it was evident that no eager club secretary had booked up the services of that first-class cricketer and good all-round man.

"Had any luck?" asked Potter.

Coker snorted.

"I've had a jolly queer experience," he said. "It's very odd that the first answer to my advertisement came from a madman."

"A—a which?"

"Some sort of a lunatic," said Coker. "I thought, naturally, that he must be secretary, or skipper, of a cricket club. He wasn't anything of the kind. He may only have been drunk. But I think he was mad."

"What did he do?" ejaculated Hilton.

"Asked me if I could milk cows—"

"Eh?"

"And manage a plough—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And set a dog on me—"

"Great pip!"

"I just got clear!" said Coker, breathing hard. "I'd have gone back and mopped him up, only the poor fellow was plainly mad, so I thought I'd let him off. The dog was a bit savage, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at, George Potter. It's been a very unpleasant experience. I couldn't foresee that my advertisement would be answered by a lunatic."

"I don't see how you could expect it to be answered by anybody else."

"What?" roared Coker.

"I—I mean—"

"Sure, that explains the giddy mystery," chuckled Fitzgerald. "Faith, I wondered how anybody came to answer yer rot, Coker!"

"You Irish idiot!"

"That accounts for the milk in the cocoanut!" grinned Bland. "Coker may have an answer from every lunatic asylum in the county. They'll feel a sort of fellow-feeling, naturally, when they read his advertisement—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker made a jump for his bat, and another jump for the Fifth-Formers. They fled from the study, roaring with laughter.



Coker's interview with the supposed lunatic was the joke of Greyfriars before bed-time. Fellows had wondered how anybody came to answer his advertisement. Coker had accounted for it.

Harry Wharton & Co. alone knew the facts, and they did not reveal them, except to a few choice spirits in the Remove. They did not want to deprive Coker of the calls he would have to make the following day. But there was much chortling in the Remove dormitory that night.

In the Fifth Form dormitory, Horace Coker was sour and lofty. He told Potter and Greene that if they fancied that was the only answer he was going to get they were mistaken; he expected a whole sheath of letters in the morning.

"Impossible!" said Potter. "Not enough lunatics in the county."

At which the Fifth chuckled, and Coker snorted with contempt.

But in the morning Coker was triumphant. He was very anxious for the post to come in, as much to convince the doubting Thomases of the Fifth as for any more personal reason. And when the post came in Coker flourished a handful of letters under the astonished noses of Potter and Greene.

"Look at that lot!" he said.

"Wha-a-at are they?" stammered Potter.

"Answers to my advertisement."

"My only chapeau!"

"How many?" babbled Greene.

"Nine!"

"Great Columbus!"

"Nine answers!" said Coker triumphantly. "Looks as if my services as a cricketer are rather wanted—what? Every one of them wants me to call this afternoon. Well, what are you grinning at, Bob Cherry?" demanded Coker, turning upon that cheery Removeite.

"Was I grinning, my lord?" said Bob, grinning still more.

"You cheeky young rascal! By the way, Cherry, listen to me—"

"Go it!" said Bob, turning back.

"I want you to cut down to Friardale after lessons and get me a copy of the 'Gazette.'"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob. "You—you want to see your advertisement in it?"

"Yes; don't forget!"

"I won't forget!" grinned Bob.

Bob Cherry did not forget; but he did not turn up after lessons with a copy of the "Friardale Gazette." If Coker had seen the advertisement in the paper he certainly would not have planned to make nine successive calls that afternoon. And Bob, like a good-natured youth, did not want to deprive Coker of that pleasure.

#### THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

##### Another Misunderstanding!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. smiled when they saw Coker come out of the School House after dinner. Coker of the Fifth seemed to be walking on air.

He had cause for satisfaction.

Nine answers to his celebrated advertisement reposed in his pocket, and Coker had only to take his choice. Coker pictured nine cricket clubs all anxious and eager for his services. He did not know yet that nine short-handed farmers were applying for the services of a strong and active youth. He was to know that later.

True, the answers were a little odd in their wording. Not one of them mentioned cricket, or the name of a club. Nobody signed himself "Sec." And the addresses were all of farms. There seemed to be an astounding number of cricket clubs with their headquarters at farmhouses, from what Coker could see.

It was odd, to say the least.

Coker, on reflection, had wondered whether Mr. Giles had mixed up his advertisement in the paper—that of some fellow applying for a job, for instance. But it was impossible that nine individuals could have made such an error.

Unusually as the letters were worded, there could be no mistake about the matter. And there could certainly be no mistake about the fact that all his correspondents were anxious for him to call that day. That was unmistakable.

Coker frowned portentously at the Famous Five. Bob Cherry had not obeyed his lordly behest. Coker had been expecting Bob to come along with the local paper, up to dinner-time. Bob had not come along. Now it was time to start on his round of appointments.

"Cherry!" rapped out Coker.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old top!"

"You didn't get me that paper!"

"How did you guess that?" asked Bob.

"Eh? Because you haven't brought it to me!"

"Isn't he Sherlock Holmes over again?" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "Coker does these things in his head."

"You cheeky jag! I've a good mind to mop up the quad with you!" roared Coker.

"Go ahead, Coker!" said five voices in chorus.

Coker was on the point of going ahead; but he paused as the Famous Five lined up to receive his charge. Instead of charging, Coker gave a scornful snort and marched on.

"Coker's going to have a happy half-holiday!" remarked Harry Wharton. "We've nothing special on. Let's go for a walk with Coker."

"Good wheeze!"

The Famous Five marched out of the gates after Coker of the Fifth. They were really curious to see him make his various calls. Coker did not look back; he was sorting over his nine letters as he walked. There were plenty to choose from, and Coker was choosing.

"Willing to work!" murmured Coker. "I don't quite see what that means! It's a jolly queer way of speaking to an amateur cricketer! And here's a man asks whether I belong to the Union! What union does he mean? There isn't any cricket union that I know of. Most of these letters seem to be worded rather queerly. Still, that doesn't matter so long as I fix up with a good club. I think I'll try Mill House first—that's the nearest address—only half a mile. I always thought Mill House was simply a farm."

Coker walked on.

Five juniors walked on behind him, and they were still keeping Coker in sight when he arrived at Mill House.

It was a small farmstead, with a dingy little house and a few hungry-looking fields. A man in his shirtsleeves was mending the wheel of a cart in front of the house, smoking a pipe, and muttering emphatic remarks as he did so. He glanced round as Coker came through the gate.

"Hallo, there!" he snapped.

"Good afternoon!" said Coker politely.

"This isn't a public footpath! Get out!"

Coker coughed.

"I've called to see Mr. Snoggs!" he said, referring to one of his nine letters.

The man at the wheel rose and stared at him.

"Well, I'm Mr. Snoggs," he said.

"What's wanted?"

He stared at Coker, and Coker stared at him. He was a rough-looking man with a stubbly chin and a beetling brow. Coker stared at him, and at the dingy house and the fields with growing bewilderment. He was landed in a farm again, as before, and he was perplexed.

"Well!" snapped Mr. Snoggs. "Can't you speak?"

"I'm Coker!" gasped the Fifth-Former of Greyfriars.

"Oh; the feller what advertised?"

"Yes!"

"All right; you can come in. You ain't the sort of feller I expected to see. Ever worked on a farm before?"

"Worked on a farm? No!"

"Noo to the work, hay?" grunted Mr. Snoggs. "Well, a feller can be 'andy, even if he's noo to the work, if he's willing. Look 'ere, you don't belong to the Union, I suppose?"

"What union?"

"Agricultural Labourers' Union—ask-

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ing tenpence an hour overtime!" snorted Mr. Snoggs.

"You wouldn't get me doing farm work at tenpence an hour, if that was my line!" said Coker. "But I've called about the cricket!"

"Hay?"

"What's the name of your club?"

"Club?"

"I suppose it's got a name," said Coker testily.

"What?"

"Look here; I suppose you haven't brought me here for nothing!" exclaimed Coker, wondering whether he had to do with another lunatic. "I've called about playing for your club. Are you the secretary?"

The man stared at him, apparently dumbfounded.

"I'm not particular about the class of club, so long as there's good cricket," said Coker, reassuringly. "Put me among really good cricketers and I'm satisfied. But I want to know something about it, naturally. What the merry thump are you staring at? Do you take me for a ghost?"

Mr. Snoggs gasped.

"If you ain't mad, tell a man what you're driving at," he said. "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

"I'm Coker. I'm from Greyfriars, of course!" said the Fifth-Former in perplexity. "I put it in my advertisement."

"What job did you 'ave at Greyfriars?"

"Eh?"

"What have they sacked you for?"

"Sus-sus-sacked me?"

"I s'pose you're sacked, as you're looking for a job," said Mr. Snoggs impatiently.

"You—you don't seem to understand. I'm Coker!"

"I know that, as you've told me twice. What was you sacked for from your last job?"

"I—I haven't had a job. I—I'm in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars!" stammered Coker. "I don't understand you. I'm offering you my services as a cricketer, to—"

"What?"

"To play for your club."

Mr. Snoggs looked dazed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker looked round, to see five merry faces lining the top of the gate. He shook his fist at the Removites.

"Clear off, you cheeky young sweeps!" he roared.

"Look out!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Coker looked round at Mr. Snoggs again just in time. That gentleman was striding at him.

"Wasting a man's time!" said Mr. Snoggs, with concentrated indignation. "I'll l'arn you to come 'ere with your little jokes, wasting a man's time. When I get my 'ands on you—"

Coker made a rush for the gate. Mr. Snoggs made a rush for Coker. Coker scrambled over the gate in hot haste, good-naturedly helped by the Famous Five.

"Run for it!" yelled Bob Cherry. "He's coming out!"

Mr. Snoggs was dragging at the gate. Coker gave him one glance, and took Bob Cherry's advice. He ran for it.

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### An Engagement at Last!

"MUM-MUM-MY hat!" Coker gasped as he reached the end of the lane, and sank against a fence to rest. Fortunately, the angry Mr. Snoggs had not followed him far. He had returned to mending his wheel

Coker was so astonished that he could only gasp.

"Going on, old chap?" asked Bob Cherry.

"What are you cheeky fags doing here?" snapped Coker.

"We've come to see the fun, old top."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The funfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Coker."

"Clear off!" roared Coker.

"But you'll need us," grinned Bob Cherry. "We just got you away from the Snoggs-bird. The next man may catch you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker jumped up, and rushed at his tormentors. The Removites scattered, yelling with laughter, and Coker gave it up. When he tramped on again, the juniors followed—at a safe distance.

Coker was puzzled and perplexed.

Unless a whole army of lunatics were answering his advertisement he could not understand the strange affair in the least.

He scanned the eight remaining letters as he strode on.

"It's jolly queer!" he murmured. "Awfully queer! Redclyffe Farm is the next nearest—that's a farm, too. It's queer. If that turns out a blank, I'm blessed if I'll call at any of the others. It beats me hollow."

Coker turned into Redclyffe Lane.

Perplexed as he was at the mysterious outcome of his afternoon call, he was not willing to give in. He did not want to return to Greyfriars without being booked up for one of these clubs. But he was not feeling quite so jaunty as he arrived at Redclyffe Farm.

Redclyffe was a large and prosperous farm, very different from Mr. Snoggs' place. But it was a farm—there was no doubt about that. A stout, red-faced man was directing half a dozen farm-hands in a field close by the house as Coker came along. He called out to the Greyfriars fellow as the latter was going up to the farmhouse.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

Coker turned.

"I've called to see Mr. Higgins," he said.

"That's me. What's wanted?"

Coker came into the field. Harry Wharton & Co. halted outside the gate, looking on with smiling faces. Coker gave them an infuriated glance, to which they responded with broader smiles. But the great man of the Fifth had no leisure to deal with them just then, and he turned his back on them, and approached Mr. Higgins.

"I've called about your answer to my advertisement in the Friardale paper, Mr. Higgins," he began.

The farmer nodded.

"I see—you're Coker."

"That's it!"

"You look like a schoolboy."

"I am a schoolboy, of course," said Coker, puzzled again. "I'm from Greyfriars. You know that's a school, I suppose?"

"Yes, I've heard of it; but I supposed from your advertisement that you were employed there," said Mr. Higgins, with a stare. "Stable-boy, or something."

"I don't see why you should suppose anything of the kind!" said Coker tartly.

"Well, I did!" said Mr. Higgins shortly. "I don't see what else I could suppose. Still, a schoolboy can be useful if he chooses. You've got your head-master's consent?"

"There won't be any difficulty about that, of course. Naturally, I can only turn up after lessons, and on half-holidays."

"You didn't say anything about part-time in your advertisement. Still, I don't mind giving you a chance."

Coker brightened up. He did not understand the reference to part-time, but he understood the rest—or thought he did.

"That's all I want—a chance," he said. "You'll find me a good man—I can say that. A good all-round man."

"Well, you seem to have a good opinion of yourself," said Mr. Higgins. "I'll give you a trial, anyhow."

"Good! Where?" asked Coker.

"Here, of course."

"Oh!"

Coker glanced round. There was no sign of a cricket-pitch to be seen.

"When?" he asked.

"Now!"

"Good! You'll have to lend me a bat," Coker said.

"Eh?"

"I haven't brought my bat," Coker explained.

Mr. Higgins gazed at him.

"Your bat!" he repeated.

"Yes. I shall want a bat, if I'm to show you what I can do at cricket."

"Cricket!"

"Really, Mr. Higgins—"

"You ain't made a mistake?" asked Mr. Higgins, eyeing him. "You ain't escaped from the county asylum?"

"Eh?"

"I don't make head or tail of your palaver," said the farmer. "If you're joking, I may as well tell you that I don't take jokes from my hands."

"Hands!" stammered Coker.

"If I wasn't short of a boy I'd turn you out now!" said Mr. Higgins. "But I am, and as I said, I'll give you a trial. I want this heap of manure shovelled into the cart yonder—"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"There's a pitchfork. Set to!"

Coker's eyes bulged from his head. He had come there to join a club as a first-class cricketer; and this extraordinary man wanted to set him to shovelling manure into a cart. Coker felt his head turning round. Unless all Kent had gone suddenly insane, there was no accounting for this.

"Well, what are you star-gazing at?" demanded Mr. Higgins irritably. "Take the pitchfork and set to!"

"The—the pitchfork!" said Coker dazedly.

"Yes—sharp!"

"Do you think I've come here to work on your dashed farmyard?" roared Coker.

"Eh? I s'pose so! What else have you come for?"

"My hat! I'm a cricketer! Understand Cricketer! I've come here to offer my services to your club—"

"My club!" murmured Mr. Higgins.

"I advertised my services as a cricketer—"

"You're young to take to drinking," said Mr. Higgins severely. "But never mind;—take that pitchfork and get to work!"

"Hang your pitchfork, and blow your work! And blow you!" snorted Coker. "I think you're either mad or drunk or—"

Mr. Higgins' eyes glittered.

"You came here for a job," he said, "and, by hokey, you're going to work at the job! Take that pitchfork! If you wanted to change your mind you should have changed it before you'd wasted a busy man's time. Get to work!"

"I—I—"

"I've told you twice!" roared Mr. Higgins. "Here, George, bring me that cart-whip. Here's a practical joker come along pretending he wants a job. He's going to have a job, by hokey!"

Coker fairly staggered. He could scarcely believe his eyes, as George came up with the cart-whip and handed it to



Mr. Higgins. The angry farmer cracked it as a warning to Coker.

"Now begin!" he said. "If all that manure ain't in that cart in two hours, I'm sorry for you!"

"I—I—"

"Are you going to begin?"

"No!" yelled Coker. "I think you're mad. I'm certainly not! I— Yaroooh!"

The cart-whip curled round Coker's legs, and he jumped and roared.

"Now, then—"

"Why, you—you ruffian—"

"Start!"

"I—I won't! I—I—"

Whack!

It seemed like a dreadful dream to Coker. But Mr. Higgins, working hard short-handed, was hardly to be blamed for dealing drastically with a supposed practical joker who had wasted his valuable time. Anyhow, it was certain that he meant business. The cart-whip was rising again, when Coker decided suddenly to obey orders.

"That's better!" said Mr. Higgins, as the unhappy Horace seized the pitchfork and started. "Go it! There's a

shilling for you when you've done! But you laze—look out, that's all!"

And Coker did not laze!

Five juniors of the Remove tottered in at the gates of Greyfriars, almost in a state of hysterics. And when they had told their tale, half Greyfriars was in a state of hysterics, too. By that time a copy of the "Friardale Gazette" had been seen at the school, and all the fellows knew who were the answerers of Coker's famous advertisement. And the news that Coker of the Fifth, looking for an engagement as a first-class cricketer, had been bagged by an angry farmer for the job of shovelling manure, made the whole school shriek.

An army of Greyfriars fellows waited for Coker to come in. He came at dusk.

He looked tired. He was also rather dirty, and rather smelly. The expression on his face would have excited the envy of a Prussian Hun. His temper appeared to have suffered.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Did he give you the bob, Coker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you keeping the job?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker did not answer; he charged through the yelling crowd like a war-horse, and disappeared indoors. And he was not seen again for some time. When he was seen again, he was on his way to the Remove passage. Potter had shown him the "Friardale Gazette," and Coker understood at last. Now he was on the war-path, seeking vengeance. But his luck was still out. Five merry juniors rolled Coker down the Remove staircase—and even the solace of vengeance was denied to the incensed Horace. And for days and days afterwards, the great Horace had the pleasure—or otherwise—of hearing the Greyfriars fellows chortle over the way the Famous Five had succeeded in Catching Coker!

THE END.

(Don't miss "THE GREAT BUNTER MYSTERY!"—next Monday's Grand, Long, Complete Story of Greyfriars School—by FRANK RICHARDS.)



#### SYNOPSIS.

Johnny Goggs comes to Rylcombe Grammar School from Frankingham with his chums Trickett, Blount, and Waters.

Goggs is a jiu-jitsu expert, a clever impersonator, and the organiser of many brilliant japes. He leads an expedition of Grammarians to St. Jim's, and accomplishes one of the most daring night raids ever perpetrated.

Gerald Cutts of St. Jim's falls foul of Bingo the butcher, and after a scrap, in which Cutts is worsted, Bingo picks a quarrel with Goggs.

Goggs, with his knowledge of jiu-jitsu, surprises the village champion. He challenges the junior to a fight, which Goggs accepts, leaving all arrangements as to time and place in the hands of Bingo.

(Now read on.)

#### A Big Gathering.

"I DON'T see it," said Wagtail, puzzled. "Shall we say decorations?" said Goggs.

"You silly asses are talking in riddles," Gay said impatiently. "Look here, Goggles, are you coming on your spindle-shanks, or must we frog-march you?"

"On the whole, Joyful, considering everything, and with all due deference to your wishes in the matter, I would very much prefer to go upon my spindle-shanks," replied Goggs meekly.

Gay snorted.

"Come on, then, and do for my sake keep your clapper still! Don't open your giddy mouth again till you've something in front of you that wants putting into it!"

They went out, just as Frank Monk bailed them from below to ask whether they were under the delusion that the feed was a Christmas one.

Down in the quad they found the rest wait-

ing—Monk, the two Woottons, Lane, Carboy, Mont Blanc, O'Donnell, Morgan, Donaldson, Tadpole, Weird, Polgrean, Ward, Baines minor, and Buckley.

They formed fours, and marched out. But Goggs halted at the gate to ask the lodge-keeper to tell anyone who called to see him that he had gone to the village, and would be found at Mrs. Murphy's.

Bingo's messenger had come along during the period between morning classes and dinner, and had suggested Saturday afternoon for the fight. He had had to go back to his principal to report that Saturday afternoon was quite impossible, as the Grammar School juniors had a cricket match on. Goggs had suggested Friday, after classes, and the messenger—one Ted Robb—had gone back to see whether the autocratic Bingo would consent.

He had not yet returned, and Goggs naturally did not want to miss him. But Goggs had had no intention of missing the feed, and, in spite of his pretended indifference to food in such hot weather, he would do as much justice to it as most.

None but Goggs' three immediate chums and Larking and Snipe—with Carpenter, possibly—knew as yet of the fight pending. Goggs had warned the other three not to say anything about it to Gordon Gay & Co. Bugs and Tricks and Wagtail could not understand this at all, and Wagtail growled about it.

But, as usual, Goggs had his reasons.

He wanted to be quite sure whether Larking and Snipe had schemed to pit him against Bingo. If they had not they would be sure to talk about the affair. If they had, they might or might not keep silence concerning it. Thus far they had kept silence.

It was only a suspicion that he entertained; proof was almost impossible. His arrival upon

the village cricket-ground during the fight between Bingo and Cutts had been the merest accident; Larking and Snipe could not have engineered that. But there was something in the manner of both that had aroused his suspicion, and now he felt almost sure.

The twenty marched down to the village in column of fours. Near Mrs. Murphy's they met the St. Jim's juniors, strolling along by twos and threes.

"What-ho, St. Jim's bounders!" they roared.

"Why, here are all the naughty little kids from the Grammar School!" cried Monty Lowther. "Fie, fie! Why didn't you wash your noses and wipe your faces before you came to take tea with us?"

"Good old Goggles!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Vewy pleased to see you, Goggs! We oifah you our forgiveness for the occuwence of the othah night, an' we twust in the neah futchah to do the same unto you an' the west—and more also!"

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—were there, of course, with Talbot. The four from that celebrated apartment, Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—were of the company. Levison major, Clive, and Cardew; Roylance and Dur-rance and Lumley-Lumley; Julian, Kerruish, Reilly, and Hammond; and Noble and Dane made up the list. Glyn could not leave a very special job he had in hand, and the New House fellows were not in this affair.

"Mrs. Murphy won't find it the easiest thing in the world to crowd us all in," remarked Tom Merry.

And that chump Herries has brought Towser along," said Blake. "I like old Towser all right, but he does take up an awful lot of room, and when there's a giddy crowd someone's always tumbling over him."



"That's all very well," growled Herries; "but old Towey likes a feed as well as anyone else, and there's bound to be lots of scraps he can have."

"I've fixed up everything quite nicely for you, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Murphy, appearing at the door of the shop. "I'm sure that you would rather have your tea in the open air on a day like this, so I borrowed my neighbours' big garden next door—they're away at the seaside, but they won't mind—and I'm just getting everything set out nicely there."

"Good, Mrs. Murphy!" said Tom Merry heartily.

They filed in through the shop, and reached the garden next door by a gate from the lane beyond.

The garden was a big one, with a spacious lawn and well-grown shrubberies. The shrubberies did not interest the crowd of St. Jim's and Grammar School juniors, though they might have done had any of them guessed that enemies were lurking there. But the lawn interested them greatly.

Mrs. Murphy had really made great preparations. Long tables ran from end to end of the lawn, with chairs on both sides, the mixture of styles in the chairs showing that the good dame had had to collect them whence she could. Upon the tables were snowy cloths, and upon the cloths were many dishes of substantial viands—meat-pies, ham, tongue, and the like—with salads in great bowls. Cups and saucers were ready for those who wanted tea, and ginger-beer and lemonade bottles stood in tubs of iced water.

"Sure, an' this looks good enough for me!" said Nicky O'Donnell.

And the entire Grammar School crowd were in complete agreement with him.

The St. Jim's fellows were certainly doing the thing in style. They had lost the wager, and were bound to provide a spread; but such a spread as this had hardly been anticipated, and it was evident that quite a lot of fellows who had not been concerned originally had shared in this bountiful provision.

As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Ralph Reckness Cardew had borne between them more than half the expense. Both happened to be flush, and both were always generous. But even what they had done left room for a whip-round among the others, according to means; and if fellows like Lumley-Lumley and Julian and Talbot had contributed more than Herries and Reilly and Manners, whose pocket-money was less, no one minded.

"Where's Towsey?" asked Herries, as they were about to take their seats.

At that moment there came from the street the sound of furious barking.

"A dog-fight!" yelled someone.

And everyone poured out of the garden and through the shop again to see the sight. Herries, alarmed lest the dog population of Rylcombe should have made an attack en masse upon his cherished Towser, shoved and elbowed to get to the front, and passed Towser on the way without even seeing him.

The bulldog was under the shop counter. He had found a bone; and, though it might not be true to say that the sounds of combat from the street left him cold, they failed to draw him from his find.

A collie was at grips with a big wire-haired terrier, and Bingo and several other village youths were cheering them on. The juniors from the two schools stood to watch; a dog-fight always interests the unregenerate male human, man or boy.

"It ought to be stopped," said Tom Merry, who hated to see an animal hurt.

"Stop it, then!" growled Herries. "I'm not going to try. I might have done if old Towey had been in it; but this isn't any funeral of mine."

"Is there any necessity to stop it, Merry?" drawled Cardew. "The two seem to be quite enjoyin' themselves, an' they're pretty well matched, though the collie has the advantage in weight."

"Oh, let's get back to tea," said Talbot.

But they lingered for a few moments longer. Meanwhile, in the garden they had left things were being done.

The last of them had hardly crowded out before Larking, Carpenter, and Snipe stole from the shrubbery.

They had been hiding there, waiting a chance that they had begun to fear would never come.

But it had come now, and two of the three had no intention of missing it.

For the moment they had the garden to

(Continued on page 16.)

# The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE GEM. THE BOYS' FRIEND. CHUCKLES. THE PENNY POPULAR.  
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Monday:

"THE GREAT BUNTER MYSTERY!"

By Frank Richards.

I have persuaded Mr. Frank Richards to write an extra-long, complete story of Greyfriars School for our next issue. The central figure in the story will be Billy Bunter, concerning whom a most baffling mystery arises. I am not going to give away the plot—not even a whisper of it—but I will say this—that

"THE GREAT BUNTER MYSTERY!"

is a story which will worthily uphold the high traditions of the MAGNET Library.

"SUSSEX BY THE SEA!"

Such is the title of the magnificent long, complete story of school and sport which Frank Richards has written for the "Penny Popular," out next Friday.

There is certain to be a great demand for this splendid issue; and if you want to read a really rousing sports story, telling how Harry Wharton & Co. journey to Littlehampton to encounter the boys of Sussex on the playing-fields, you will hustle around at once and order a copy of the "Penny Popular," which also contains two other fine stories—one concerning Rookwood, and the other dealing with Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

FROM A SCOTTISH GIRL CHUM.

Somebody tried to tell me the other day that very few girls read the MAGNET. Throwing aside my Editorial dignity, I tersely replied, "Rats!"

My informant went on to say that girls don't like boys' papers, but prefer those publications which are produced expressly for girls.

Again I replied, "Rats!"

Girl readers of the MAGNET Library are as the stars of the sky in multitude. And their numbers are ever increasing.

Here is a loyal letter from one of my Scottish girl chums:

"Midlothian.

"Dear Editor,—I have just finished reading the MAGNET, and really must write and compliment you upon its general excellence.

"Whenever I read any of those letters from the grieved ones, it makes me feel like having a very severe talk with them, as I cannot understand why they buy your papers if they can see no good in them.

"I am a girl reader, and have bought your splendid papers for over a year now. I only wish I had known sooner about them, and I should certainly have had them long before.

"Some of my girl friends, who are great novel-readers, laugh when they see me walk into a shop to buy my MAGNET; but I am converting them one by one. When it comes to a duel between Frank Richards and Charles Garvice, the former is an easy winner.

"I really cannot express my enjoyment of your papers in these few lines. From my heart I wish you every success with your splendid work.—Yours sincerely,  
MARGARET."

Many thanks, Margaret! Your letter is a glowing testimonial to the fact that girls do read boys' papers, and thoroughly enjoy them, too! I can well understand why they prefer the MAGNET Library and its Companion Papers to those sentimental, mawkish, trashy publications which certain misguided persons produce for the edification of our girls.

A PROTEST FROM PAISLEY.

The following letter from a Paisley reader, concerning our "Correspondence Wanted" column, speaks for itself. I sincerely hope that my correspondent's experience is not general:—

"Dear Mr. Editor,—This letter may seem to you somewhat amusing, but I think the reason for it will strike you as being well founded.

"A short time ago I took a fancy to come into contact with some of your readers, and, having glanced over your advertisement column, came across a few would-be correspondents whom I thought would be intelligent writers and pleasant correspondents, so I forthwith wrote them. I expected replies, to say the least of it; but my genial 'correspondents' thought it more gentlemanly, or ladylike, as the case may be, to remain silent.

"Having unburdened my grievance to you, I would esteem it a favour if you would kindly insert this letter in your Chat. It will remind readers who make an attempt at correspondence through your 'Correspondence Wanted' column that they will stand precious little chance of receiving replies. To ignore letters in this way is, in my opinion, decidedly bad taste.—Yours very sincerely,  
FRANK C. SCOTT."

This is a matter which requires looking into. I shall be glad to learn the experiences of other readers who have endeavoured to get into touch with correspondents.

Without wishing to be unduly harsh, I might mention that if our Correspondence Column is abused I shall have no choice but to close it down.

H. A. H. (YOUR EDITOR.)

## NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

A. C. Drummond, 284, Crookston Street, Glasgow S.S.—with readers anywhere, 14-19.

Jack Cohen, High Street, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa—with readers anywhere; boys in Standard VII., or higher.

F. Bottomley, 48, Downhills Park Road, Philip Lane, Tottenham, N.15, offers recipes for chemical and magical tricks. Write for terms.

W. Stephenson, 42, Hardens' Manorway, New Charlton, London, S.E.7—with readers anywhere, 15-16.

S. Summers, 80, Bow Road, E.3, wants contributions for amateur magazine—completes, articles, serials. Prizes offered.

A. W. Oliver, 24, Alfred Road, Harrow Road, Paddington, W.2—with readers anywhere.

J. Hughes, 90, Victoria Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia—with readers anywhere interested in stamp-collecting.

Miss Minnie Hunt, 22, Hillside Gardens, Highgate, N.6—with readers anywhere, 18 or over.

R. G. Hobbs, 69, Stonelaw Drive, Ratherglen, near Glasgow, offers stamps for sale.

Joseph Grindlay, 92, Elles Road, Invercargill, New Zealand—with readers in U.K., 13.

W. E. Smith, 43, St. Hilda Street, Beverley Road, Hull, will hectograph notices for clubs.

Miss Sylvia Forman, 12, Mount Pleasant, Cheetham, Manchester—with readers anywhere, 15-16.

Clarence Scott, Glenfinlas, Cambridge Street, Grafton, N.S.W., Australia—with readers anywhere, 14-17.

Miss Vera McCaffery, Glen Grose, Rhodes Street, Ryde, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia—with readers anywhere, 18-21.

Charles Bamforth, 14, Ravenal Avenue, Runnymede Road, West Toronto, Ontario, Canada, would like to meet readers in his town to take up correspondence club.

Miss Agnes Rhynas, 8, Second Avenue, Walthamstow, Essex—with readers overseas, 15-18.

Bill Fitzwater, 22, Evandale Road, Malvern, Victoria, Australia—with readers anywhere, 13.

A. Weston, c/o J. W. Jagger & Co., P.O. Box 231, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—with readers anywhere.

Geo. White, 112, Pollock Road, New Kent Road, London, S.E.17—with readers in the Near East and in China.



themselves. Now that the crowd had arrived they were in no danger, even if Mrs. Murphy or one of her aides came along. Their Grammar School caps would lead to the assumption that they were among the guests.

"Now's our chance!" hissed Larking.

Snipe grinned maliciously, and took from his pocket a bottle of hair-oil.

"That's for the salad," he said. "I've something else as nice in the other pocket."

Carpenter rather hung back.

"I say, you fellows, is it worth while?" he asked doubtfully. "Of course, it's only a jape, and they'd think nothing of doing the same thing to us; but it does seem—well, a trifle off, you know."

"I never saw such a chap as you are, Carp!" sneered Larking. "You will, and you won't. You're keen, and then you jib. There's no dashed sense in it—not a scrap! But stand out if you like. Snipey and I are going through with it, anyway."

Snipe was already at it, putting hair-oil into the bowls of salad. Larking produced a bottle, uncorked it, and made a wry face as he sniffed at it.

"Shouldn't fancy any of that in mine," he said. "You can get something really worth giving the enemy out of the lab, though. I don't know much about some of the things I put in here, but the mixture has a rare bouquet of its own, I'll say that for it."

"I say, suppose you poisoned them?" objected Carpenter.

"Poison them be hanged for a tale! Why, even if this stuff is poison, it's so beastly nasty that they couldn't keep it down! Phew! Doesn't it niff!"

Snipe thrust a pepper-pot into Carpenter's hand.

"There you are!" he sneered. "There's nothing in pepper that need be so much against your high moral principles, anyway."

Still Carpenter did not half like it. But for Snipe and Larking he might have been among the guests at that feed, and he would much have preferred that to this sort of thing, though he had told Gordon Gay & Co. that he could not stand them at any price.

But he was as weak as water, and he gave way.

Larking and Snipe went about their wretched work with high glee. Carpenter, reluctant at the outset, warmed up to it after a minute or two. He remembered the many scores that he owed—or imagined he owed—to the fellows whose provender he was spoiling, and he chuckled as he peppered the pies liberally.

"Cave!" came from Snipe, and the three scuttled for cover.

They were only just in time. The crowd were coming back.

Now Mrs. Murphy and her aides also appeared, bearing tea-urns.

Towser came with his master, carrying the bone in his mouth.

As he reached the tables he dropped the bone, however, and began to wrinkle up his nose. Then he sneezed violently.

Carpenter had peppered not wisely, but too well.

"What's the matter, Towsy?" asked Herries.

"A-tishoo!" sneezed Arthur Augustus.

"A-tishoo! That's just like you, Gustavus setting everybody off—Atishoo!"

"I would beg to—Atishoo!"

"It's all very well to ask permission to sneeze, Gussy," said Lowther. "But I cannot help suspecting that the leave to sneeze will make little difference, in any case, for when one—Atishoo!"

"Quite right, Lowther!" said Cardew. "I have observed that when one—Atishoo!"

The sneezing was going round, as it generally does once it starts.

"I was only about to remark that Blake is not every—Atishoo!" said Gussy, with dignity, though the sneeze that prevented his completing the last word of his speech took something off the dignity.

"Look here, what's the matter with everyone?" asked Gordon Gay. "You fellows are all—Atishoo!"

"Some rotter's been slinging pepper about!" said Kerruish hotly. "I—Atishoo!"

"Let's get to work, and see if that won't stop the sneezing," Tom Merry suggested.

"A cup of tea each may help."

The tea was being passed round now, and whether it was due to its influence or to some other cause, the sneezing subsided.

"What's Towser after now?" asked Julian.

The bulldog was sniffing round the shrubbery.

"Oh, never mind him; he's all right," replied Towser's master. "Let's have a bit of that pie, Talbot—not a ladylike piece. It looks a thumping good pie."

The pies certainly did look attractive. Mrs. Murphy could make very good pastry, and she had done her best for this occasion.

It was light and-puffy and nicely browned at the top. Nearly everyone took pie, and nearly everyone who took pie had salad with it.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Scat!" growled Herries.

It was Baggy Trimble of the St. Jim's Fourth, who was thus politely interrupted.

Baggy had stolen in at the gate, his fat cheeks bulging, his eyes glistening with greed.

"It occurs to me, Baggibus—pardon my mentioning it—that you were not invited," remarked Cardew.

"I know that," said Baggy miserably, "and I think it's too beastly of you fellows! If I was giving a spread—"

"If!" snorted Blake.

"I shouldn't hesitate a moment about asking all of you. I—Oh, I say, if you'll let me join in I'll tell you something!"

Larking & Co. began to feel distinctly uncomfortable.

### Caught Out!

"LOOK here, Tom Merry, you'll be sorry if you don't let me tell you!" said Baggy earnestly.

"Tell away!" replied Tom. "I'm not hindering you, am I?"

"Bub-bub-but—"

"No butter, thank you!" put in Monty Lowther. "We have enough here."

"But I can't tell unless you let me have some tea, can I?" burred Baggy.

"Oh, kick him out!" growled Herries.

No one had started yet. Except for the tea, everything was cold, and they were waiting until Baggy had been dealt with.

Naturally, Baggy's words were not given much weight. The heir to the mythical glories of Trimble Hall never minded lying, and he would do anything for the sake of a gorge.

But Baggy really had something to tell. He had been hanging around, with watering mouth and longing mind, and had seen Larking & Co. at their foul work.

Baggy had not a very quick brain. It is doubtful whether he understood what the three were doing. For that matter, he had not seen much, having had to balance himself precariously by sticking the toes of

his boots into chinks in the wall so that he might look over.

But he guessed that it was something that was not exactly designed to please the rest. Larking & Co., not being guests, as their exit to plunge into the shrubbery showed, were presumably enemies.

There is an obvious difficulty in telling a tale that you only half know—especially when your reputation for truthfulness does not stand high. And there is an obvious danger in inventing when you may be found out at once.

"I—I—Oh, look here, you fellows—"

"The prospect is unpleasin', Baggibus, drawled Cardew. "Reminds me of the beautiful hymn about Greenland's icy breezes blowin' hot o'er Ceylon's isle, an' every prospect pleases, save Baggy, who is vile. You know the passage, of course, Baggibus?"

"You do talk rot, Cardew! I—"

"Yow! Yooooop! Yah! Yarooooop!" howled Herries, clapping his hand to his mouth.

"Oh, crumbs! I'm poisoned!" yelled Morgan.

"What on earth has Mother Murphy been doing to this pie?" shouted Wootton minor.

A dozen others joined in the chorus of surprise and disgust. Herries' start had served as a signal for more, and the pies had been sampled.

"It would really seem that some of your guests do not precisely approve of the provender, Merry," remarked Goggs mildly.

"Now, I wonder—"

He paused, and looked meaningfully at Baggy.

"I didn't! I never did!" howled Baggy in alarm. "I—You're a liar, Goggs!"

"That may be the case, though I hope it is not so—at least, beyond the amount of unvaracity that the weakness of human nature renders almost inevitable in anyone. That may be the case, stated as a general proposition, I say. But I deny that anything in what I said then justifies the assertion. I made a suggestion to Merry, and expressed—or half expressed—wonder as to who—"

"Oh, dry up, Goggles!" roared Wootton minor. "Your gas is more than I can stand after this awful pie! Phew! Mrs. Murphy ought to be made to eat it herself!"

"You looked at me!" said Baggy, in injured tones, to Goggs.

"My silly mistake—I'm always making them," replied Goggs sadly. "It was painful, and it was not even necessary."

"I never tasted anything in all my puff like this frightful stuff Mrs. Murphy has the cheek to call pie!" said Frank Monk.

"Try the salad, then," returned Kangaroo, looking down at his plate. "That's worse than the pie."

"It can't be!"

"Try it—that's all!"

Mrs. Murphy came bustling out, followed by one of the waitresses, who had heard the complaints, and had wisely gone to fetch the person best fitted to answer them.

"I told you so!" said Baggy.

But Baggy had done nothing of the sort.

"I feel stirred by generosity," Lowther said. "My heart yearns over the woes of Baggy. Baggy shall not go hungry. Baggy shall not go without pie and salad. He shall have mine!"

"Mine, too!" cried a score of voices.

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