

Grand Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co.
INSIDE.

The MAGNET 2^D



COKER'S CRICKET CRAZE!



By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bowled!

"**C**OKER!"
 "Go away, Coker!"
 "What does that ass want?"
 "Get out of the light, Coker!"

Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, certainly was not deaf. But he might have been stone deaf, for all the heed he gave to the voices that addressed him on all sides.

The scene was Big Side at Greyfriars; where a rather special games practice was going on.

Wingate, of the Sixth, was wielding the willow; and Mr. Lascelles, the games master, had taken the ball to send him down a few.

Wingate was a batsman of mighty powers; and was confidently expected to knock up centuries in the First Eleven match with Rookwood which was shortly due. Wingate, at the wicket, was always worth watching; and quite a crowd had gathered to watch him. Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove, had walked across from Little Side, to honour the First Eleven men with a look in.

And if Wingate was worth watching with the willow, Lascelles was worth watching with the leather. Mr. Lascelles was the youngest member on the staff. He was a tremendous cricketer. He was maths master as well as games master. In the mathematical line he was rather loathed; but in the cricketing line he was immensely popular. He had bowled for his county; and all Greyfriars believed that he would have played for his county if he had had time.

So when Lascelles took the ball to bowl to Wingate, it was time for all cricketers at Greyfriars to sit up and take notice. It was, as Potter of the Fifth put it neatly, a case of an irresistible force being brought to bear upon an immovable object!

Crowds of fellows watched keenly. Wingate stopped ball after ball. Several times he cut the leather away. It was first-class bowling. But it was magnificent batting. It was clear that the Greyfriars captain had nothing to fear from the Rookwood bowlers when they came.

And then Coker happened. Coker of the Fifth had been looking on, with a rather superior expression on his rugged face.

Coker was a keen cricketer. At least, he was keen. His keenness left nothing to be desired. His cricket left much.

Coker was not taking part in the practice. All Greyfriars knew that Coker was keen; but only Coker believed that he could play cricket. But it was fixed in Horace Coker's mind that he was not only a good man at the game, but a good all-round man. It was said of the great Lord Bacon that he had taken all knowledge to be his province. In the same way, Coker had taken all cricket to be his province. He was the finest batsman, the deadliest bowler, and the handiest man in the field, that the old school had ever turned out. Coker believed this; and enjoyed the belief all on his own.

So it was natural that Coker should smile in a superior way when Lascelles failed to knock Wingate's wicket over.

Coker fancied that he could have done it.

Not only did Coker smile in a superior way, but he sniffed. That sniff would

have told the fellows that Coker did not think much of what was going on on Big Side, had the fellows been giving Coker the attention that was due to so great a man. But they weren't! They were giving all their attention to the cricket, and did not even notice that Coker was there; till he detached himself from the crowd and walked on the pitch.

Then they had to notice him. Fifty voices, at least, addressed Coker. Not one of them used a flattering expression.

Mr. Lascelles was standing waiting for the ball to come in. In that momentary pause in the proceedings, Coker captured the spot-light.

With his hands in the pockets of his flannel bags, and a determined expression on his rugged face, Coker marched towards the games master.

Mr. Lascelles eyed him with lifted eyebrows.

He did not know what Coker was up to. Neither did anybody else. But nobody wanted to know what Coker was up to. They only wanted him to get out of the way.

"Get off, Coker!"
 "Buzz!"
 "Mizzle!"
 "What does that man want?"
 "Is that man mad?"
 "Get out of the light, Coker!"

Deaf to objurgations, Coker marched on. Coker, it was evident, was up to something! It remained to be discovered what!

"That howling ass must be off his rocker!" said Bob Cherry, in wonder. "What does he fancy he's up to?"

"Maybe going to tell Lascelles how to bowl!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go away, Coker!" yelled Frank Nugent.

"Must be potty!" said Harry Wharton.

"The pottiffulness seems to be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The ball whizzed in, and Mr. Lascelles caught it in his left. Coker reached him at the same moment. Half a dozen First Eleven men were making a converging movement towards Coker, with the obvious intention of assisting him off the field. Coker heeded not. Mr. Lascelles, though puzzled by Coker's unexpected antics, was a good-humoured young man. He spoke to Coker quite politely.

"Please stand back, Coker!"

Instead of standing back, Coker of the Fifth stood where he was. His feet were firmly planted; his whole aspect denoted iron resolution.

"One moment, sir!" said Coker firmly.

"Really, my boy—"

"You've sent down five to Wingate, sir," said Coker. "His sticks are still standing. Let me have a shot at it."

"What-a-t!"

"Let me have a shot at it!" repeated Coker. "You can't take Wingate's wicket! I fancy I can. Fellows make out that I can't bowl! I'll show 'em! Give a man a chance."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Lascelles.

The crowd had left off shouting at Coker, to hear what he had to say. They heard. A roar followed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was known now what Coker was up to. Mr. Lascelles was easily the best bowler in the School. He had failed, so far, to shift Wingate. So if Coker shifted him, after Lascelles had failed, it would, as Coker expressed it, "show 'em!"

It would demonstrate to the most dubious of doubting Thomases that Coker could bowl. It would be confirmation strong as proof of holy writ! All Coker had to do, was to handle the ball, to knock over the wicket that Lascelles couldn't touch, and there you were! That he was not likely to send the ball within a yard of the wicket did not occur to Coker. He was the only fellow at Greyfriars who did not know that.

Mr. Lascelles stared, and then smiled. At the other end of the pitch, Wingate was nearly doubled up over his bat. Yells of laughter awoke the echoes. Coker, by no means intentionally a humorist, had brought down the house!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Coker!"

"Good old fathad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go home, Coker!"

"Go back to Colney Hatch, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker did not heed. Derision was not new to Coker. He knew that the fellows did not believe that he could play cricket. That, indeed, was why he was so keen to "show 'em!"

"Give a man a chance, sir!" urged Coker. "I dare say you know that Wingate has refused me a place in the First Eleven. In fact, I've rather expected you, as games master, to back me up. I'm not the man to flatter anybody, so I won't say that I think much of your cricket, personally. Still, you know something about the game."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Lascelles.

"Seeing is believing," said Coker. "You can't touch that wicket! I can! If I knock that wicket over, after you've failed, that mob of cackling asses will have to own up that I can bowl! What?"

Several Sixth Form men reached Coker. Gwynne took his right arm, and North took his left arm, to walk him off. Loder stepped behind him, with the apparent intention of giving further assistance, applied to Coker's flannel bags. But Mr. Lascelles raised a hand.

His eyes were twinkling. As games master, no doubt he appreciated Coker's keenness, though Coker's cricket must have made him feel inclined to weep. No doubt he saw something touching in Coker's belief that he could bowl. Perhaps, too, he agreed with Coker that seeing was believing, and fancied that when Coker had delivered the ball to parts unknown, he would realise that he was not the misunderstood genius he supposed himself to be, but the clumsy ass that he actually was!

"I am afraid you are wasting time, Coker," said Mr. Lascelles. "But, never mind—you shall certainly have a shot at it. Take the ball."

Reluctantly the Sixth Form men released Coker and stepped back. The game master's word was law. They would have preferred to walk Coker off, and dump him out of the way, hard. But as Mr. Lascelles chose to give him his head, they gave him his head also.

"Catch!" said Mr. Lascelles.

He was hardly more than a yard from Coker when he tossed over the ball. But Coker missed it. It bumped on clumsy fingers, and dropped at Coker's

The one and only Horace Coker does his best to wangle a place in the Greyfriars cricket eleven to show what a good bowler he is. But the only one who gets bowled out in this amazing wangle is Horace Coker himself!

feet, and another ripple of laughter ran round the field.

Coker picked it up.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Coker's going to bowl! Mind your nappers!"

"Look out!"

"Duck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate grinned at the wicket. He did not seem to mind Coker introducing a little comic relief into that practice. Neither did he seem to think it was necessary to take a lot of care of his sticks. When Coker handled a cricket ball nobody knew where it was likely to go. But everybody knew where it was certain not to go. Nobody was really safe, but the batsman.

Mr. Lascelles, smiling, stepped away to give Coker room. Others stopped still farther away. Fellows were laughing, but they knew that matters might become serious when the ball left Coker's grip. Nobody wanted to be brained.

Coker gripped the round, red ball with a businesslike grip. He backed away for a run.

All eyes were on Coker. He had the spotlight. His eyes gleamed with resolve. He knew what a lot depended on this. The crash of Wingate's wicket would be followed by loud cheers—already he could hear, in his mind's ear, as it were, the roar, "Well bowled, sir!" After which, even Wingate, prejudiced as he was, could scarcely refuse to acknowledge Coker's claims to play for School. Coker would be able to sport

the First Eleven blazer—he would walk the quad as an acknowledged "blood," one of the great ones of the earth, observed of all observers! Quite a lot depended on that ball, and Coker took his time.

Suddenly he turned himself into a Catherine-wheel and charged. The ball left his hand like a bullet from a rifle.

Perhaps it left too soon. Perhaps Coker's calculations were a little out. Perhaps even Coker could not bowl! Perhaps he was, as all Greyfriars believed, a born idiot on the cricket ground. But how even Coker could bowl in an opposite direction to his intended direction was rather a mystery. Mysterious as it was, Coker did it.

Crack!

"Whoooo-hoooooop!"

Coker stared round.

He heard a roar—not a roar of cheering! It was nothing whatever like a roar of cheering. It was a roar of dismay and wrath.

Wingate's wicket was still intact. Coker seemed unaware where the ball had gone. He did not seem to know why Mr. Lascelles, the games master, was holding his hand to the side of his head. Coker simply stared.

"Lascelles—"

"That dangerous idiot—"

"Great pip!"

"Man down!" chuckled Vernon-Smith of the Remove.

Mr. Lascelles rubbed and rubbed. There was a bump on his head, and a dazed and dizzy expression on his face.

Coker blinked at him.

He had time for only one blink.

Even then, probably, Coker hardly realised that he had bowled the games master instead of Wingate—that he had landed the ball on Mr. Lascelles' unfortunate head, instead of on the stumps.

He was not given time to think out this remarkable occurrence.

Greyfriars men closed round him like waves round a wreck. How many hands were laid on Coker he never knew. How many feet crashed on him remained equally unknown. But the hands seemed innumerable, the feet multitudinous. Gurgles and gasps escaped from Coker as he was escorted off the field, writhing and wriggling. What was left of Coker was deposited in a gasping, gurgling, guggling heap, and—like the gentleman in the poem—the subsequent proceedings interested him no more.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Comfort for Coker!

BILLY BUNTER, the fat ornament of the Remove, grinned, a pleased and satisfied grin. Billy Bunter was pleased, and had reason to be pleased. He was standing at the corner of the Fifth Form passage, blinking into that passage—and his blink told him that the coast was clear. On that sunny May afternoon every man at Greyfriars seemed to be out of the House after class. The door of the games study, the usual resort of the Fifth, stood open, and Bunter could see that there was not a single fellow in the room. Neither was there a single fellow in the passage. The Fifth Form quarters were as uninhabited as the Sahara Desert. Whereat Billy Bunter smiled, rolled round the corner, and headed for Coker's study.

A Remove fellow had no business in the Fifth Form quarters—or was supposed not to have any. But Bunter had.

He had important and pressing business there. His business led him to the study that belonged to Coker, Potter, and Greene.

He had watched those three youths walk down to the cricket field. He was aware that cricket was going on. So it seemed probable that they would remain out of the house. A fellow would not walk down to the cricket and then walk back—like that ancient Duke of York, who, with ten thousand men, marched up a hill, and then marched down again! Not, at all events, unless something unexpected happened!

So Bunter felt safe!

Coker was safe—Bunter was safe—but a hamper that had recently arrived for Horace Coker was far from safe!

That hamper was in Coker's study. Bunter rolled in, shut the door, and fixed gloating eyes—and spectacles—on the hamper!

It was unopened—it was going to be opened for tea after games practice. Potter and Greene were going to help Coker unpack the good things that had arrived from his Aunt Judy—and to pack them away again! Coker was generous in these matters.

Bunter of the Remove was not habitually a fellow given to saving other fellows trouble. But he had come to that study specially to save Coker & Co. the trouble of unpacking that hamper, and the further trouble of disposing of the contents. How often Billy Bunter had been kicked for raiding other fellows' tuck he could not possibly have remembered. But kickings had not cured him. Ever since Bunter had nosed out that hamper he had thought of it, day-dreamed of it, and now it was at his mercy. In such matters Bunter was merciless.

With the help of a pocket-knife he unfastened the lid. He raised the lid, and blinked into the hamper.

His eyes shone behind his spectacles.

This was something like!

Puddings and pies, cakes and buns and tarts. All sorts of excellent things had been packed within by the loving care of Coker's Aunt Judy. And this gorgeous hamper was only one of many that came for the happy Horace. It was no wonder that Potter and Greene, in spite of many differences of opinion, remained faithfully and unalterably attached to Coker of the Fifth.

There had often been trouble in Coker's study—especially when Potter or Greene had inadvertently betrayed what they thought of Coker's cricket—but such rows had never lasted. Coker was forgiving—and Potter and Greene, so to speak, for taking!

Coker might be a headstrong, fat-headed, overbearing sort of an ass, and the biggest idiot ever, but there was something attractive about Coker—in the shape of Aunt Judy's hampers.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Fine!"

He gloated.

With Potter and Greene playing cricket along with the other seniors, and Coker looking on, making sarcastic comments on the play, in his usual style, there was absolutely no danger of interruption.

Bunter gobbled.

A pie vanished like a ghost at cock-crow! A pudding followed it at about sixty m.p.h. Bunter was enjoying himself.

And then—As the poet observes, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream!

There were heavy footsteps in the

passage! They were accompanied by a sound of gasping and gurgling.

It sounded as if a fellow who had been badly winded was staggering home.

Bunter gave a convulsive start.

Only an unexpected happening could have brought Horace Coker back to the study! But it was the unexpected that happened. Coker's antics with the ball had caused him to shake the dust of Big Side from his feet—in a hurry! What remained of Horace Coker, after the cricketers had handled him, lumped into the House and gasped its way to the study.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He jumped up from the hamper.

With a large section of a plum-pudding in either fat hand, and a smear of pie on his fat face, Billy Bunter turned startled eyes on the door.

It swung open.

"Urrrrgh!" Coker was saying as he came in. He did not seem to have quite got his second wind yet.

He did not for the moment observe Bunter. The fat Owl of the Remove stood frozen with terror, blinking at him. Coker, of course, did not expect to see a Remove junior in his study—any more than Bunter had expected to see Coker there.

Coker lumped in wearily. He had been through it. He had not intended to brain Mr. Lascelles—not in the least—but the fellows had treated him just as if he had!

"Urrgh! Rotters!" gurgled Coker. "Pitching into a man! Making out that a man can't play cricket! My own pals, too! I believe it was Greene had hold of my hair! I'm almost sure it was Potter bit me on the bags! I've a jolly good mind to—What the thump—"

Coker beheld Bunter.

He saw the open hamper, he saw Bunter standing by it, with a segment of pudding in each hand; and the expression that came over Coker's rugged face showed that Bunter's apprehensions were well founded.

Coker was damaged! Coker was wrathful! By a sheer accident, which might have happened to any fellow—any fellow like Coker, at least—he had barged a cricket ball at the head of the games master. Fellows had piled on him on all sides and handled him like a combined punch-ball and doormat. The injustice of it stung Coker. He would have been glad to "whop" every man on the cricket field. That, of course, was impracticable—indeed, so far from whopping the cricketers, he had been lucky to escape with his life! But he was yearning to whop somebody. Whopping somebody would make him feel better. He really was not particular as to the person. Almost anybody would have done! And in that ferocious mood, he found a cheeky Remove fag raiding his hamper!

The tiger in the jungle might have eyed its helpless prey as Horace Coker eyed William George Bunter of the Remove.

Bunter quaked.

"I—I say, Coker—I say, old chap—I—I say, I—I—I haven't touched your hamper, old fellow!"

Had Bunter's fat wits been less confused by terror, he would have known that that was not the way to placate Coker. The high and mighty Horace did not like "old chap" and "old fellow" from fags! If Coker's wrath had needed a finishing touch, that would have given it.

Coker did not speak. He glanced round, spotted a fives bat, picked it up,

and strode towards the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter jumped for the door. Coker jumped for Bunter! Coker got there first.

Whack!

"Whoooooop!"

"Bagging my tuck, what?" said Coker, as he grasped Bunter's collar with his left. "By gum! Take that—"

"Yaroooh!"

"And that—"

"Help!"

"And that—"

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

Coker seemed to fancy that he was beating carpet. Dust rose from Billy Bunter's trousers. Wild yells rose from Bunter.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

A fives bat in a hefty hand can do a lot of execution. Coker laid it on hard. He was finding comfort in this. Every mighty whack he gave Bunter made him feel better.

The effect on Bunter was quite different. He found no comfort in it whatever. Every whack made Bunter feel worse.

Bunter's frantic yells woke every echo of the Fifth Form passage, from the games study at one end, to the box-room at the other.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oh crikey! Yaroooh! Whooop!" roared Bunter. "I say, old chap—leave off, you beast—oh lor'! Oh, jiminy! Oh scissors! Whooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oooooooooooooo!"

Finally, Coker pitched the fat junior headlong out of the study, and slammed the door after him. He tossed the fives bat into a corner, feeling distinctly better. Really, it was rather fortunate that he had found Bunter in his study. But Billy Bunter, as he wriggled his anguished way down the passage, could not help feeling that it was unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

BACK UP!

"SMITHY!"

"Hallo!"

"I rot in!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, hesitated a moment or two.

He was coming up to the Remove passage to tea, and passing the open door of Study No. 1, when a cheery voice hailed him from within.

There were five juniors in that celebrated study—the famous Five of the Remove. It was Harry Wharton who called him.

Since Herbert Vernon-Smith had become captain of the Remove, in Wharton's place, relations had been extremely strained—in fact, the new term had been packed with trouble. But since the St. Jim's match, in which Wharton had backed up the new skipper and helped him to bring off a victory, there had been a change for the better.

The Bounder, in an unusually expansive mood, after the game, had suggested burying the hatchet and starting fresh. Wharton, also under the genial influence of cricket, had agreed. Since then, both the rivals of the Remove had done their best.

It was noted that the new captain of the Remove had not "thrown his weight about" so much as formerly. Wharton, on his side, washed out the memory of many offences.

If they were not exactly friends, they had at least ceased to be enemies; and

most fellows in the Remove hoped that it would last.

Still, they had not got so far as "tea-ing" together; and the Bounder paused in the doorway of Study No. 1, hesitating a little.

"We've rather a spread," said Harry. "Trot in, old bean, and help us get rid of it."

"Three kinds of jam!" said Frank Nugent solemnly.

"The jamfulness," said Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, "is terrific!"

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Thanks, I'll be glad," he said, banishing doubts. "Redwing's tea-ing with the Beak; and a fellow doesn't want to feed alone."

The Bounder came into the study.

Bob Cherry pulled out a chair for him. Smithy sat down to tea with the

study when the Bounder arrived, and now there was rather a pause. Fortunately, however, there was one topic in which all the juniors were interested; and a remark from Bob Cherry on the subject of the next match with Highcliffe, started the ball rolling; and "cricket jaw" was soon going strong.

Tea in Study No. 1 was proceeding very harmoniously, when a fat face and a large pair of spectacles loomed in at the doorway.

"I say, you fellows——"

"How did Bunter know we had a spread?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Shut the door after you, Bunter!"

"I haven't come to tea!" said Billy Bunter, with dignity. "I think it's rather rotten that a fellow can't look into a fellow's study at tea-time without

picked out Nugent for the St. Jim's match—not that he was ass enough to think you were any good, Franky, old chap, but just to get Wharton's back up——"

"Who's going to swat that blue-bottle?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'll try that cake, if you fellows don't mind! Look here, Smithy, as you make out that you're captain of the Remove, it's up to you to see that a Remove man isn't bullied by the Fifth, see? That beast Coker has been laying into me with a fives bat. He came in in a frightful temper—something must have happened to upset him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hear that he jolly nearly brained Lascelles with a cricket ball!" went on Bunter. "From what I hear, he threw



The ball left Coker's hand like a bullet from a rifle, but it did not go near Wingate's wicket. Crack! The ball landed on Mr. Lascelles' unfortunate head instead. "Whooooo-hooooop!" roared the games master.

cherry circle. His rather hard face was very good-tempered. The Bounder's restless nature rather enjoyed a "row"; still, it was agreeable to be on good terms again with the Co. As a matter of fact, the Bounder was feeling a good deal of compunction. While the "feud" had been on, his methods of warfare had not been conspicuous for fair play, and there were several little things that Smithy would have been glad to forget. If the other fellows were willing to forget them, Smithy was more than willing.

He could not quite believe that Wharton was willing to leave the captaincy in his hands, and play the part of a "common or garden" member of the Form. But he had resolved to curb his suspicious temper and avoid looking for trouble.

Cherry talk had been going on in the

a fellow thinking that a fellow has come scrounging after a tea! I see you've got Smithy here—and I should hardly care to tea with Smithy!"

"Same to you, old fat bean!" said the Bounder. "Take your face away!"

"Still, as far as that goes, I'm not the fellow to nurse a grudge!" said Bunter.

"Dash it all, if you men don't bar Smithy, I won't bar him!"

"You jolly well will!" said Smithy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fact is, I've got to speak to Smithy!" said Bunter, rolling into the study. "You call yourself captain of the Remove, Smithy! You've got the job till Wharton turns you out of it again!"

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I suppose you're going to turf Smithy out of it sooner or later, seeing what a rotten skipper he is. Look at the way he

it at his head, because Lascelles had given him extra maths——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Or something of the sort!" said Bunter. "Anyhow, he came in raging, and pitched into me for nothing! He made out that I was after his hamper, you know, because I was in his study——"

"And you weren't!" grinned Bob.

"Not at all, old chap! I hope I'm not the fellow to touch a fellow's hamper. Besides, I thought he was safe at the cricket! He whopped me with a fives bat—I shan't be able to sit down to prep to-night! I think Smithy ought to take it up, as captain of the Form! What about it, Smithy?"

"Fathead!" answered Smithy.

"I say, you fellows, this isn't a bad cake! I'll have some more, if you don't

mind! I say, I suppose you funk Coker—if there's anything I despise, it's funk! Look here, I've thought of a way of making Coker sit up! You know what a jolly good ventriloquist I am!"

"He's wound up!" sighed Bob Cherry. "I needn't tell you—you know!" pursued Bunter, with his mouth full. "I can imitate any man's voice, as you know! You know how I imitated old Vernon-Smith's voice on the telephone, and made Quelch send Smithy home for the day—he, he, he! You remember Smithy thought it was you, Wharton, and turfed you out of the cricket on the strength of it—"

"Are you going on your feet, or on your neck, Bunter?" inquired Harry Wharton.

"Eh! I'm not going yet, old chap! I haven't finished! Old Quelch was quite taken in, you know! He thought it was Smithy's pater barking on the phone! It's as easy as pie to a really clever ventriloquist, like me! Well, my idea is to imitate old Prout's voice—Coker's form master, you know—and call him out of his study! Then you fellows nip in—"

"We—we—whatter—?"

"Nip in and bag his hamper!" said Bunter. "That's the way to make him sit up, see? I'll clear off Coker with my wonderful ventriloquism, and you fellows bag the hamper. Easy as falling off a form! We whack out the hamper—fair play all round—what?"

Billy Bunter paused for a reply. He filled in the pause—and his capacious mouth—with cake. Apparently Bunter considered this remarkable wheeze assured of an enthusiastic reception.

Instead of which, the six Removites in the study gazed at the fat Owl. There was no sign of enthusiasm.

"I can tell you that's a ripping hamper!" said Bunter. "Simply packed with stuff! Of course, I'm not the fellow to raid a fellow's tuck—you know I don't care much for tuck. The idea is to punish Coker—make him sit up for batting a Remove man, you know! Bagging his hamper will make him rage, what? Rely on me to clear Coker off the scene—"

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I may as well say plainly," said Bunter, "that if you don't back me up in this, I shan't back you up when you start turbing Smithy out of the captaincy! One good turn deserves another! You back me up against Coker, and I'll back you up against Smithy—that's fair!"

Harry Wharton jumped up.

In the new state of amity that reigned between Smithy and the Co., Billy Bunter's fatuous remarks were awkward and superfluous.

"That's right, old fellow!" said Bunter. "Back me up against Coker, what?"

"I'm backing you up!" agreed Wharton. "But I'm not backing you up against Coker! I'm backing you up against the wall!"

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton grasped the Owl of the Remove by two fat shoulders and backed him up hard against the study wall.

Bang!

"Oooooooop!" roared Bunter. "Why—you beast—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Leggo, you rotter!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows—whoop!"

"Good egg!" roared Bob Cherry, jumping up. "Give a man a chance! I'm going to back Bunter up, too!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter tore himself away and jumped into the Remove passage. Apparently he did not want any more backing up. The study door slammed after the fat Owl, and "cricket jaw" was resumed round the tea-table, uninterrupted further by William George Bunter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Parted Pals!

POTTER of the Fifth coughed.

Greene of the Fifth echoed his cough.

Coming in after games practice, hungry, and more than ready for tea, the two Fifth-Formers were feeling a little uncertain as they approached the study that was honoured and adorned by the presence of Horace James Coker.

They looked in, and coughed.

Mr. Lascelles, the games master, was the object of great sympathy. He had a bump on his head, and a pain therein—the result of Coker's remarkable feat as a deadly bowler. Lascelles, damaged as he was, had taken it good-temperedly. The cricketers hadn't! And in the excitement of the moment, Potter and Greene had forgotten that they were Coker's bosom pals, and had joined in the ragging of the great Horace on Big Side. Every man there had been anxious and eager to get a hand, or a foot, on Coker, and Potter and Greene had been just as anxious and eager as the rest.

Greene had a distinct recollection of having grabbed Coker by his mop of hair. Potter had a guilty recollection of his foot having established contact with Coker's bags. Coker, of course, had deserved it all, and more; and had begged and prayed for it. Still, it was rather awkward, in view of tea-time and the hamper.

Now that the excitement was over, Potter and Greene rather wished that they had left Coker to the other fellows. There had been, after all, enough to deal with him adequately. Indeed, there had been too many. There had been a scramble for front places. Still, what was done, was done, and they could only hope that, in those moments of wild and whirling excitement, old Horace hadn't noticed who had grabbed his hair, and who had landed on his bags. He had had plenty to occupy his attention at the moment.

But they felt, rather uncertain as they looked into the study. Coker was there. The hamper was open. But Coker was not giving any attention to the hamper. He sat in the armchair, with a cricket bat across his knees. He seemed to have recovered a little from his hard usage, but he was still looking red and flustered, and there was a steely look in his eye that his friends did not quite like. And they wondered—uneasily—what he had that bat so handy for.

Horace Coker gave them a grim look as they coughed in the doorway. His look was not friendly.

"Oh, here you are!" said Coker.

"Here we are, old bean!" said Potter, with a rather ghastly geniality.

"Coming in?" asked Coker.

"Yes, we're coming in, old fellow," said Greene. "Tea, you know."

"You're tea-ing in this study?" asked Coker.

Potter and Greene cast surreptitious eyes on the hamper.

"Certainly, old fellow," said Potter.

"I think not," said Coker.

"My dear old chap—" murmured Greene.

"What I mean is, I don't think you'll fool like tea, when I've finished with you," explained Coker. "I've been waiting for you to come in. I've got this bat ready. Trot in."

Coker rose to his feet.

He took a grip on the cane handle of the bat.

Potter and Greene remained in the doorway.

Evidently their hopes had been ill-founded. Evidently Coker knew who had grabbed his hair, and who had landed on his bags.

On the cricket field Coker, with a bat in his hands was comic. But with a bat in his hands in the study he was rather tragic. A cricket ball, on the pitch, had nothing to fear from Coker's bat. But it was quite a different matter for Potter and Greene in the study.

"I—I—I say, old fellow, wha-a-at are you going to do with that bat?" asked Potter haltingly.

"Come in and see!" answered Coker.

Potter did not rise to that bait. He preferred to ascertain before he came in.

"Look here, old chap, if you're shirty about something—" he began.

"Oh, no!" Coker's tone was sarcastic, indeed sardonic. "Not at all! Shirty! Not a bit! Grabbing a fellow's hair doesn't make him shirty, does it? Kicking a man on his bags doesn't make him shirty. Oh, no!"

This was crushing sarcasm.

Potter and Greene did not mind the sarcasm very much. But they minded the bat. They kept a wary eye on the bat.

"Not a bit!" went on Coker, in the same sardonic vein. "Shirty! Who's shirty? Oh, no! When a fellow's friends turn on him, and grab his hair, and turf him on the trucks, it makes him feel nice and friendly. That's how I feel now. That's why I've got hold of this bat. Why don't you come in?"

Potter and Greene did not come in.

The hamper was inviting. The bat was not. And it was clear that if they came in, they were going to get the bat, not the hamper.

"Better go along and tea with Fitz!" murmured Potter, and Greene nodded.

They turned from the doorway.

"Aren't you coming in?" cooed Coker.

Evidently they were not. Coker kicked the door shut.

Coker sat down again. Coker was a hefty fellow, but he was feeling the need of a rest after his strenuous experiences on Big Side.

He was not thinking of tea. He was thinking of his wrongs and grievances, and the absolute certainty that, after that unfortunate accident on Big Side, Wingate of the Sixth would not pick him out for the Rookwood match. He felt that it was hard.

Had matters gone according to plan, it would have been all right. Had Coker taken Wingate's wicket, all would have been calm and bright. Wingate might have persisted in acting like the obstinate, dense ass that Coker had always known him to be—Coker knew that the idea was firmly fixed in Wingate's mind that he, Horace James Coker, could not play cricket. But there would have been Lascelles to deal with.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

Lascelles, as games master, would have intervened, not only with advice, but with authority. Lascelles would have pointed out that a bowler like Coker could not be left out of the team, and he would have insisted on the Greyfriars captain giving Coker a chance. Wingate was a tremendous big gun, but he could not have stood up against the considered opinion of the games master. He would have had to give in and play Coker. That, indeed, was what Coker had counted on. All that had been needed, was for that ball to knock over Wingate's wicket. It was frightfully unfortunate, in these circumstances, that it had knocked over Lascelles instead!

Coker had a hopeful nature. But even Coker could not hope that Lascelles would be convinced of his quality as a bowler, after that ball. It was more likely, Coker reflected bitterly, to make him think that Coker couldn't bowl—that he was, as the fellows often said, a dangerous maniac with a ball in his hand.

Instead of improving matters by that

feat on the field, Coker had made matters worse; he realised that. Lascelles, more likely than not, would be against him now. The cricket ball crashing on the side of his head might have prejudiced him against Coker, as a bowler. It was quite likely.

Deep in these gloomy reflections, Coker forgot tea.

He was aroused from his gloomy meditations by a tap on the door of the study.

"Oh, come in, ass!" snapped Coker irritably.

The door did not open. But from the other side of it came a voice—a deep and fruity voice—a voice that could only have been that of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, or of a ventriloquist, who had a remarkable gift for imitating voices.

"What! What! Coker! You forget yourself! Coker, follow me to my study this instant!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Coker. He stared at the door.

What the thump Prout had come to his study for was a mystery. Why he

hooted at a fellow through a door, without opening it, was another mystery. It was altogether too thick! Coker had enough trouble on his hands, without more trouble from old Prout. Blow old Prout!

Coker rose slowly and unwillingly from the armchair. It was rather sickening, but Coker, great man as he was, had to say "Yes, sir!" and "No, sir!" just like a common mortal when he was dealing with a Form master. Coker had no time to waste on Prout; but there was no help for it; the fruity voice had ordered him to Prout's study, and he had to go.

He went. Coker's study was left unoccupied. But it was not unoccupied for long.

A fat figure whipped in at the door. The door was hurriedly closed and locked. A large pair of spectacles gleamed at the hamper. While Coker interviewed his Form master in Prout's study, Billy Bunter interviewed the hamper in Coker's study. Bunter's interview was no doubt the more enjoyable of the two.

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Very Peculiar of Prout!

"**M**AIS je crois—" murmured Monsieur Charpentier. "That shot, sir, saved my life!" said Mr. Prout.

"Mais je crois—"

"Had that bullet missed, sir, I should not be here now!" said Prout.

Prout, the master of the Fifth, was filling his armchair with his partly form. He was filling his study with his fruity voice.

Henri Charpentier, the French master of Greyfriars, was sitting on the edge of a chair, listening to Prout.

Prout, like Nimrod of old, had been a mighty hunter. Prout liked telling hunting stories. It was said at Greyfriars that the other beaks, when they had to pass Prout's study, passed it on tiptoe, lest the door should open, and a fruity voice invite them in for a chat.

Prout's chats were long. They were one-sided. He never gave the other fellow a chance. He had one inexhaustible topic—Prout!

Now he was telling Mossoo how he had shot that grizzly in the Rocky Mountains, once in the dear dead days beyond recall.

How often Prout had told that story, nobody knew. If any man had ever kept count, he had had to give it up when he got into the thousands.

Mossoo, like every other man on the Greyfriars staff, knew it by heart. Now he was getting it over again. Mossoo was a polite little gentleman. But his politeness was costing him dear. Other masters, when Prout got going, would suddenly remember that they had a class, or an extra prep, or a summons from the Head. Mossoo was trying timidly to say that he believed he was expected in Common-room. But he did not get it

out. Prout, shooting his grizzly over again for the umpteenth time, was merciless.

"Yes, sir!" said Prout. "Yes! Had that bullet missed—had it gone a hairsbreadth, sir, to the right or the left, I should not be sitting here now, sir, talking to you! No."

Monsieur Charpentier was conscious of a wish that the bullet had gone a hairsbreadth either to the right or the left. In that case Prout would not have been talking.

"And that reminds me," said Prout, "of another incident—"

Tap!

Silently Monsieur Charpentier called down blessings on the head of whomsoever it was that tapped at Prout's door at that moment. Seldom, or never, had Coker of the Fifth been so fervently blessed.

The door opened. Horace Coker's rugged features adorned the doorway. Prout gave him a cross look. Prout did not want to be interrupted.

"Coker! What do you want, Coker?" he rapped.

Coker stared.

"You told me to come here, sir," he answered.

"I do not recall telling you to come here, Coker. I— Pray do not disturb yourself, Monsieur Charpentier!"

But Monsieur Charpentier had already disturbed himself. This was an opportunity too good to be lost. Monsieur Charpentier jumped up almost like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Mais je crois—zat good Capper—he will be waiting for me," he said. "In zis talk so verree interesting, I almost forget zat good Capper. Mais vous excusez, isn't it?"

"My dear sir—"

But Mossoo was gone. Prout grunted.

He fixed a far from amicable look on Coker. This boy was a backward pupil, dense and obtuse, troublesome in form—troublesome at all times. Now he had barged in and interrupted a pleasant chat—a very pleasant chat. It was rather irritating.

"Coker, what do you mean? I have no recollection of telling you to come here. Explain yourself."

"You said I was to follow you to your study, sir," said the amazed Coker.

Prout was getting old, and Coker wondered whether his memory was failing. He did not seem to forget what had happened, perhaps, in the Rocky Mountains towards the close of the nineteenth century. But he seemed to have forgotten telling Coker to follow him to his study.

"I told you to follow me to my study?" ejaculated Prout.

"Yes, sir."

"Upon my word! When did I tell you this?"

Perhaps Prout, too, wondered whether his memory was failing.

"Not five minutes ago, sir," said the bewildered Coker.

"What!" boomed Prout.

"Four or five minutes ago, sir, in the Fifth Form passage."

"Are you out of your senses, Coker?"

"Eh?"

"Or is this a jest—an impudent jest?"

"Wha-a-t?"

"For the last half-hour, sir, I have not left this study!" roared Prout. "Monsieur Charpentier has been here with me for half an hour. What do you mean by saying that I spoke to you in the Fifth Form passage? I repeat, sir—what do you mean?"

Coker blinked at him.

"B-b-but you did, sir!" he gasped. "You—you tapped at my door, sir, and—and told me to follow you to your study."

"This is too much," said Prout, addressing space.

"I—I came at once, sir!" gasped Coker. "You must have got back to your study rather quick, or—"

"I have not left my study!" thundered Prout.

"Really, sir—"

It was not for a fellow to argue with his Form master, but, really, this was too thick. Coker could not help thinking that it was too thick, and he was indignant. Prout—or, at least, Prout's voice—had ordered him to his Form master's study. He had come at once, or almost at once, and this was the reception he got.

Prout rose to his feet.

"Coker, you are the most backward boy in my Form! You are the stupidest boy at Greyfriars! With backwardness, with stupidity, I can be patient. I trust I have been patient. But if, sir, you are adding a misdirected sense of humour to your backwardness, to your stupidity, I shall deal with you very drastically, Coker. This is too much."

"B-b-but, sir—" babbled Coker.

"You have come here," said Prout.

"You have interrupted me—"

"But you told me—"

"I told you nothing, sir!" roared Prout. "You find it amusing, I conclude, to interrupt your Form master, and waste his time. It is what, I suppose, Lower boys would call a 'rag.' It is what I, sir, call an impudent jest. It is what I call rank disrespect. It is what I, sir, call brazen effrontery!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Coker. "But I—"

"If you were not a senior boy," boomed Prout, "I should cane you! I



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"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. With a large section of a plum-pudding in either fat hand, he turned startled eyes on the door. It swung open and Coker limped into the study. "You fat rotter!" gasped the infuriated Fifth-Former. "Bagging my tuck! By gum!"

regret, sir, that you are a senior boy, and that a due regard, sir, for my own dignity, prevents me from chastising you as you deserve for your impudence. You will take five hundred lines, Coker."

"Oh jiminy!"

"Leave my study!"

Coker almost staggered. He blinked dazedly at his Form master. Unless Prout was mad, Coker could not account for this.

"Leave my study!" repeated Prout.

"B-b-but, sir," burred Coker, "you—you—you told me to come—"

"Boy!"

"Five minutes ago—"

"Bless my scul! Are you venturing to repeat your impudent statement, Coker? Upon my word! Another word, Coker, and I shall cane you!"

Coker did not utter another word. Even Coker realised that silence was golden. He backed out of the study. Feeling as if his bewildered head was turning round, Coker backed into the passage.

Mr. Prout slammed the door after him.

He plumped his portly person into the armchair again. He snorted. He was intensely irritated. *Monsieur Charpentier* was gone—vanished—escaped! Prout's flood of reminiscences was bottled up. Fond as he was of the sound of his own voice, even Prout could not talk to himself, and tell himself long stories of his deeds of derring-do. Prout was still chatty, and there was nobody to listen-in. It was like the gas being suddenly cut off. And it was all the fault of that thick-headed boy, Coker. Prout, as he snorted, rather

wished that he had, after all, forgotten what was due to his dignity as master of a senior Form, and chastised Coker as he deserved.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Something Like Strategy I

BILLY BUNTER paused with a juicy, flaky jam-tart half-way to his mouth, and listened. Footsteps approached the door of Coker's study, where Bunter was busy. But those footsteps—though they were obviously the heavy footsteps of Horace James Coker—brought no alarm to the fat heart of the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter merely winked—a fat wink—at the jam tart in his hand.

Bunter's plans were laid—they were cut and dried. Bunter's fat intellect was not ordinarily very active. But if anything could have spurred it into activity, it would have been the idea of annexing the hamper from Coker's Aunt Judy. And Billy Bunter had given that matter his deepest consideration, and plotted a plot that might have done credit to *Nicolo Machiavelli* at his best.

By imitating Prout's voice outside the closed door, Bunter had sent Coker on a fool's errand. That was the beginning. But Coker, of course, would not stay long with Prout. He would come back. Bunter had to be prepared for that—and he was prepared.

There was neither time nor opportunity to carry off the hamper in bulk. It was, indeed, rather too heavy for the fat junior to negotiate on his own. Neither could he stack his fat arms

with parcels and packages of purloined tuck to carry off, at the risk of meeting Fifth Form men all along the passage. Coker's hamper had to be disposed of on the spot, if at all. That it had to be disposed of, by Bunter, was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Bunter, therefore, had to remain in possession of Coker's study for a good half-hour. And Bunter knew how.

He had locked the door. That was the first indispensable preliminary. Coker could not see through a solid oak door.

But he could hear through it. And he was going to hear. Having heard Mr. Prout's voice outside the study, from one side of the door, he was going to hear Mr. Lascelles' voice inside the study, from the other side of the door. The fat ventriloquist was equal to it. The things that Bunter could not do, and the things that he could do badly, were innumerable as the sands on the seashore. But there was one thing that he could do well—and that was ventriloquism. His gift for the imitation of voices was weird and odd, and really quite startling. Recently Bunter had been severely whopped for playing just such a trick on his own Form master, Mr. Quelch, over the telephone. Imitating Prout's fruity old voice was easy as pie. Imitating Mr. Lascelles' rather pleasant voice was not so easy, but Bunter could do it, and he knew that he could do it.

And that was the game.

As the footsteps of the returning Horace approached the study, therefore, Bunter did not feel alarmed. Not

in the least. He only refrained from jamming the tart into his mouth. The tart had to wait till Bunter had got rid of Coker.

The door handle turned.

Bump!

"Ooooh!"

Bunter suppressed a chuckle.

A fellow coming into his own study did not, of course, expect to find the door locked against him.

Coker turned the handle, pushed the door, and strode on at the same moment, as a fellow is liable to do in opening a door.

But as the door did not open, Coker naturally brought up against it, and his nose and chin established contact with the hard oak.

The sudden yelp that emanated from Coker showed that he was surprised—and hinted that he was hurt.

"Ooooh! What—What—who—by gum!"

Coker wrenched at the handle and shoved at the door savagely. He was not in a good temper. The events of that eventful afternoon would not have put any fellow into a good temper.

"By gum! It's locked!"

This dawned on Coker. Coker's powerful brain was not quick on the uptake; but, given time, it could assimilate the absolutely obvious! Coker realised that his study door was locked on the inside.

He thumped.

"Here, what's this game?" roared Coker. "Who's in this study? What? Looking a man out of his study! What? Who the thump—"

"Kindly do not disturb me, Coker!" came a voice from inside the locked study.

Coker jumped.

He knew the voice—or, at least, he had no doubt that he knew it!

"Mr. Lascelles!" he ejaculated.

Coker did not thump at the door again. He goggled at it in blank astonishment. Why on earth Lascelles had locked himself in Coker's study was a mystery. The mathematics master might have called at the study—he was never really satisfied with Coker's maths. The games master might have called—to speak about cricket. But why Lascelles, either as maths master or as games master, should lock himself in beat Coker!

"Coker!" came the voice that, if not Lascelles' own voice, was undoubtedly twin-brother to it.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Coker.

"I came here to speak to you about the cricket, Coker! I have had my eye on you for some time, and have noticed your play."

"Oh, you're very good, sir!" said Coker.

This was pleasant hearing for Coker. He had often hoped that the games master would notice what a first-class cricketer he was. Lascelles, hitherto, had never revealed a sign of having noticed that.

Billy Bunter grinned. It was only judicious, if possible, to put Coker into a good temper. And it was easy!

"I desired to discuss the matter with you, Coker, with a view to placing your claims before Wingate," said the voice within.

Coker beamed at the oak door.

He had no doubt that it was Lascelles speaking. And this was gratifying. It was very unexpected, after what had happened that day. But it was all the more gratifying because it was so unexpected.

But it was not surprising, indeed

amazing, that the games master should be saying these nice things from the other side of a locked door. Coker failed to understand the reason for that. He was not likely to guess. If he had ever heard that Billy Bunter of the Remove was a ventriloquist, he had long ago forgotten it.

"But the fact is, Coker," went on the voice, "I have been overcome by a slight dizziness—you will remember that the ball struck me on the head—"

"I'm awfully sorry for that, sir," said Coker, through the door, sincerely enough. "I—I can't imagine how the ball came to hit you, sir. Such an accident—"

"Accidents will happen, Coker."

"Oh, quite, sir! But it was so very unexpected, and—"

"As I said, I became a little dizzy, and I have taken the liberty, Coker, of resting in your armchair for a time. I shall feel better shortly—perhaps in half an hour. You do not object—"

"Not in the least, sir. Only too pleased—"

"I locked the door to—to prevent anyone coming in and disturbing me. Absolute quiet is necessary, so long as this—this dizziness lasts." Bunter very nearly said "hamper," but, fortunately, he changed it to "dizziness" in time. "I fear, Coker, that I am taking rather a liberty in your quarters, but in the circumstances—"

"Not at all, sir," said Coker in high good-humour now.

As a matter of fact, he did think it rather cool of Lascelles to lock himself in a fellow's study to take a rest, even if that "cosh" with the cricket ball had made a sudden dizziness come on.

But he was more than willing to give the games master his head, in that or anything else.

If Lascelles, at long last, had spotted Coker's quality as a cricketer, and was going to make Wingate see reason. Lascelles was a man whom Horace Coker delighted to honour.

"Thank you, Coker! I take it," went on the voice, "that you will be willing to play in the Rookwood match on Wednesday?"

Coker's eyes danced.

"Oh, certainly, sir! Delighted!" he gasped.

"Very well, Coker! Perhaps you will come back in, say, an hour, and we can discuss the matter."

"With pleasure, sir."

"If you will have the great kindness to allow me to rest undisturbed in your study till then—owing to this dizziness—"

"Of course, sir! Make yourself at home!" said Coker heartily. "Only too jolly glad, sir!"

"Thank you, Coker—in an hour's time, then."

"Yes, sir."

Coker walked away, feeling as if he was walking on air. He grinned with glee as he departed.

In the study Billy Bunter also grinned with glee.

But he did not waste much time grinning. Coker was safe for an hour; but the sooner Bunter got through and departed, the better—that was obvious! It was really rather a dangerous spot for Bunter—though the hamper, of course, was worth it.

Bunter wasted no time. He sat down beside the hamper, and got down to business.

Had Coker come back to his study door he might have been surprised to hear a sound of steady champing within, and might have wondered what Mr. Lascelles was up to.

Billy Bunter's jaws, always the most

active part of him, and well-developed by constant exercise, were going strong. Hardly pausing to take breath, happy and jammy and sticky, Billy Bunter travelled through the contents of Coker's hamper, and he travelled fast.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker in All His Glory!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Coker looks bucked!"

"The buckfulness is terrific!"

"Well, he's paid out Lascelles for his maths!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co., walking in the quad after tea, came on Coker, and they could not help noticing that he looked bucked.

It leaped to the eye, as it were.

Coker of the Fifth was always a fellow of importance, with a manner that indicated a full realisation, on his own part, of that importance. Like the gentlemen in the poem, he often had "pride in his port, defiance in his eye." Often Coker walked the quad as if the quad, and the rest of Greyfriars thrown in, belonged to him.

But now there was a new and striking self-satisfaction about Coker. He was not walking—he was strutting. He walked with both hands in the pockets of his flannel trousers. This, at Greyfriars, was "side" in any but a member of the First Eleven. His chin was held well up. He hardly seemed to see the common earth he distinguished by treading on it. Coker, in fact, was "putting on roll." Something, it was clear, had happened to increase Coker's satisfaction with himself—never slight.

Like the classic gentleman of old, he seemed to strike the stars with his sublime head!

The Famous Five eyed him quite curiously. So far as they were aware, Coker had only distinguished himself, of late, by nearly braining the games master on the cricket field. That, certainly, was a unique performance, and had given Coker the spotlight for a time. Still, even Coker could hardly have "put on roll" for that reason. Braining a games master was not, after all, the sort of thing that bucked a man.

Coker glanced at the chums of the Remove. Lower boys were merely microbes in Coker's lofty eyes. He fancied, too, that some of the feet that had thudded on him a few hours ago belonged to these cheeky juniors. But Coker was in an expansive mood. Coker was in a mood of charity with all men. Coker was going to get his colours, if what Lascelles had said in his study amounted to anything. If he did not get them immediately, Wingate would have to hand them over after the Rookwood match, when Coker had played gloriously for his school.

Hitherto Coker had been an unacknowledged great man. After he got his colours he would be an acknowledged great man! Naturally, it was pleasant to think of, and it made Coker—never really reticent about himself—feel inclined to tell the world.

"Hallo, you kids!" said Coker genially. With his colours in prospect, Coker could be genial, even to Lower School microbes. "Roll up to see the the Rookwood game on Wednesday. It will be worth seeing."

Coker's manner was quite pleasant.

The Famous Five were more and more surprised. Pleasant manners from Coker of the Fifth were now quite a novelty. Also, it was surprising that he

should think the Rookwood game worth watching, when he was not a member of the Greyfriars eleven.

"I shall be playing!" added Coker, with studied carelessness.

Five Remove fellows jumped almost clear of the quad.

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Y-you—playing!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"In that case, my esteemed Coker, the playfulness will be terrific!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Mean to say Wingate's putting you in, Coker?" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Gammon!" said Frank Nugent.

"I shall be playing!" said Coker calmly. "Wingate's rather an ass, but luckily we've got a games master here who knows something. Lascelles has had an eye on me for some time."

"Has he?" gasped Wharton.

"He has," said Coker.

"He hadn't to-day, when you nearly knocked his brains out—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be cheeky," said Coker, frowning. But his frown passed off at once. In the present happy circumstances Coker simply could not be wrathful. "I'm only sorry Lascelles won't be here on Wednesday, to see me play, himself. I hear that he's away for the day, playing for his county. It's rather unfortunate. I'd have liked him to see me taking the wickets."

"You—you—you think he would see you taking Rookwood wickets if he was here on Wednesday?" gurgled Bob.

"I fancy so," said Coker complacently.

"Ye gods!" murmured Wharton.

"But—but—but has Lascelles said anything?" stuttered Wharton.

"Yes, he's told me," said Coker.

"He's putting it to Wingate."

"Great pip!"

Coker walked on—or rather, strutted on. Harry Wharton & Co. gazed after him in stupefaction.

"Is that man mad, or dreaming?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Either the madfulness or the dreamfulness must be preposterous!"

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harry. "Somebody must have been pulling Coker's leg. But—he says Lascelles told him! He must know whether Lascelles told him anything or not! Has Lascelles gone off his rocker? That knock on the head—"

"The knockfulness was terrific," agreed Hurree Singh. "But—"

"He thinks he's going to play Rookwood!" said Nugent, in wonder. "If Lascelles has really told him so he must be potty. Wingate wouldn't stand it, even from Lascelles."

"Well, if Lascelles backed up a man Wingate wouldn't really have a lot of choice," said Harry slowly. "But—it's impossible, unless—"

He whistled.

Since Coker's exploit on Big Side, Mr. Lascelles had gone to his room to lie down. He had not been seen since. Everybody knew that he had a bump on his head and was feeling rather severely the effects of Horace Coker's deadly bowling. But if Lascelles had told Coker that he was to play in the First Eleven, as Coker evidently believed, it seemed that the damage to Lascelles' napper must be greater than anyone had supposed. Obviously, the crack of the cricket ball must have disordered his intellect. Nothing else could account for his supposing that Coker could play cricket.

Leaving five astounded juniors behind

him, Horace Coker rolled on his lofty way. Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, eyed him warily. But Coker was in a mood even to forgive these faultless friends. Grabbing his topknot, barging a foot at his bags, were trifles light as air to a fellow who was just going to get his colours. Coker re-admitted them to his friendship on the spot.

"Hallo, you men!" said Coker. "Heard?"

"Eh, what?" asked Potter.

What had bucked Coker and put him into this amicable frame of mind Potter and Greene did not know. But they were glad to see it. A shattered friendship, perhaps, they could have borne with fortitude. But their thoughts lingered on the hamper in Coker's study. They were not, of course, aware of what was happening to that hamper.

"I'm playing on Wednesday!" drawled Coker.

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He let out the startling news with calculated casualness.

Really, it would have been wiser of Coker to keep the great and glorious news to himself, for a time. Lascelles had told him—at least, so he supposed. But it was not yet officially confirmed. Wingate, after all, was captain of Greyfriars, and Wingate's prejudice against Coker, as a cricketer, was strong. No doubt it would be a difficult matter for the cricket captain to stand out against the games master. In the ordinary way he would have taken Lascelles' opinion of a man's form as oracular. But in the case of Horace Coker there might be a doubt. It would have been only judicious of Coker to say nothing till the thing was confirmed.

But Coker simply could not keep the glad tidings to himself. It was difficult for Coker to keep anything to himself, at the best of times, and this bit of news was so great, so glorious, so

gorgeous, that it fairly burst from Coker. Had nobody else been available he would have stopped fags of the Second Form to tell them that he was playing in the Rookwood match on Wednesday. He would have told Gosling, the porter, or Mr. Mumble, the gardener, or Mrs. Mumble, at the tuckshop, or Trotter, the House page. He would have stopped Mr. Bloggs, the postman, on his round, or Police-constable Tozer, on his beat, to impart the staggering tidings that he was going to get his colours. Coker had no doubt about it, and he simply could not keep it in.

If it was Coker's desire to make fellows jump he had his wish. Potter and Greene fairly bounded.

"Pip-pip-pip-playing!" stuttered Potter.

"Not kik-kik-kik-cricket!" gurgled Greene.

"I'm going down for the Rookwood match," said Coker, in the same careless sort of way. "Lascelles says so, and I suppose he knows."

"Lascelles says so!" repeated Potter, like a man in a dream.

"Yes; he's told me."

"D-d-does Wingate say so?" babbled Greene.

"I haven't heard about it from Wingate—yet. I suppose he will hardly argue with the games master! He's a fool, I admit—a dashed fool!—but I don't know that he's a cheeky fool."

"You didn't dream it?" gasped Potter.

"Don't be an ass, Potter! It's natural enough, I suppose," said Coker.

"Nun-nun-natural?"

"Yes; if a lot of fools pick out the biggest fool of the lot to captain the side it's the duty of a games master to weigh in and see that the silly ass doesn't leave out the best man available for a match."

"Oh crikey!"

"This means that I get my colours, of course!" said Coker.

"Kik-kik-kik-colours!" stuttered Greene.

"Yes; Wingate can hardly refuse me my colours, after the match."

Potter and Greene looked at Coker. If he was not dreaming, and they were not dreaming, they could not understand this.

"You—you've seen Lascelles?" exclaimed Potter, at last.

"Well, no, as a matter of fact, I haven't seen him," said Coker. "He spoke to me from a study, but I'm to see him shortly to discuss it. Rather decent news—what?"

Coker walked on, leaving Potter and Greene, almost gibbering.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Poor Old Lascelles!

MR. LASCELLES was surprised. For some time—ever since Coker's exploits as a deadly bowler, in fact—the games master had retired from public view.

That bump on his head had required attention.

On Wednesday, when the Greyfriars First Eleven were to meet Rookwood seniors, Lascelles was booked to play in a county match, long miles away from Greyfriars, and he was particularly anxious to be fit and well. It was rather unfortunate, therefore, that Coker had chosen this especial time to display his powers as a bowler. A crack on the head from a cricket ball was not a trifling matter.

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Fortunately, no great damage had been done. There was a big bruise, which Mr. Lascelles had treated with great care. He had rather a headache, but that was already beginning to pass off. It was only Monday now, and there was time to pull completely round by Wednesday. So Mr. Lascelles was feeling fairly cheerful, and no longer feeling a desire to strew Horace Coker in small pieces all over Greyfriars. Had he been knocked out for Wednesday, probably even Mr. Lascelles' well-known good temper might not have stood the strain. As it was, he could forgive Coker.

That the sad accident had made him an object of sympathy he was aware. But he was surprised now. It was not remarkable that he should receive some attention when he came down from his room. But the attention he received was rather remarkable.

Fellows looked at him queerly.

Fellows asked him, with obvious solicitude, how he felt.

Fellows seemed deeply concerned—much more deeply concerned than the incident seemed to warrant.

Mr. Lascelles, of course, knew nothing of the proceedings of the fat ventriloquist in Coker's study. Probably he hardly remembered the existence of Billy Bunter, if he remembered it at all. And having been in his room, doctoring his damages, he had heard nothing of the topic that was spreading through the school like wildfire. He was blissfully and totally ignorant of the fact that he was supposed to have told Coker that he would be wanted for the Rookwood match.

That news had spread fast.

Coker had never been the man to hide his light under a bushel. And Coker was so exhilarated at getting justice at last that he fairly shouted it from the house-tops. Coker told every fellow he met—and every fellow who heard it told other fellows. It ran through Greyfriars like a prairie fire on a dry day.

Wingate of the Sixth heard it with convulsive amazement. Blundell of the Fifth heard it and gasped. Sixth Form men, Fifth Form men, juniors of the Shell, the Fourth, the Remove; fags of the Third and the Second heard it, repeated it to one another, gasped over it. All Greyfriars School was amazed, alarmed, flabbergasted.

Coker had his faults—indeed, their name was legion. But Coker was as straight as a string. Like—or perhaps unlike—Mr. Washington, Coker could not tell a lie. Coker's word was as good as gold. Fellows might doubt whether Coker was quite sane, but nobody doubted whether Coker was veracious. Coker would have disdained to lie. Besides, what would have been the use of telling a lie that would be so soon found out?

And Coker had told fifty fellows at least that Lascelles had told him he was to play Rookwood. Coker's statement was not to be doubted. There was, therefore, only one explanation. Poor old Lascelles was balmy.

Coker play Rookwood! Had the Sixth ever played the Second, Wingate would not have put Coker in. The fags might have won. And Rookwood! Harry Wharton & Co. played Rookwood juniors, and it was one of their toughest fixtures. The First Eleven played the Rookwood First Eleven, and that fixture was still tougher. With the best team that Greyfriars could put into the field the match would be touch-and-go—the result on the knees of the gods.

The selection of the team that was to

play Rookwood gave Wingate much anxious thought, and caused many consultations with the games master, for whose judgment the Greyfriars captain had the deepest respect. And Coker was not only the worst cricketer at Greyfriars; he was the worst cricketer that ever was. When Coker played the winter game fellows wondered whether he could ever look a bigger idiot than he did on the football field. When the summer came they knew that he could. His football was a scream. But his cricket was a shriek.

Coker's word was not to be doubted. What he said Lascelles had said, Lascelles must have said. Hence the anxious, searching, deeply concerned looks that were cast on the young games master when, once more, he put in an appearance in public. Evidently—to all the Greyfriars fellows—serious damage had been done by that crack on the nut!

Mr. Lascelles was more and more surprised. He could not make it out. All this deep sympathy, this friendly and anxious concern, was gratifying in a way. But it was rather puzzling. After all, men had been cracked on the nut by a cricket ball before. It was painful; but it was, after all, only an incident—not a thing to make the skies fall, or the stars stop in their courses.

"Feeling better, sir, I hope?" said Wingate, when he came on Lascelles. He was about the twentieth.

"Oh, quite all right!" said Mr. Lascelles.

"You don't—don't think you ought to see a doctor, sir?"

"Hardly," said Mr. Lascelles, with a laugh.

"Dr. Pillbury's a jolly good man, sir," said Wingate.

"My dear fellow, there really is no harm done," said Mr. Lascelles, and he walked on, leaving a very anxious and perturbed captain of Greyfriars staring uneasily after him.

Blundell of the Fifth came up to him.

"All right again, sir?"

"Oh, quite, thanks!"

"You—you don't feel at all queer in the head, sir?" ventured the captain of the Fifth.

"A slight ache," said Mr. Lascelles.

"It is passing off."

"If you'd care to see the doctor, sir, I'd go and telephone like a shot," said Blundell.

"Not at all, Blundell!"

More and more fellows drifted along, asking Mr. Lascelles how he felt, whether he felt better, and, above all, whether he thought he had better see the school doctor. Lots of them seemed to think that he really ought to see a doctor.

The games master was puzzled, and he was growing a little annoyed. When the umpteenth fellow asked him about seeing a doctor he answered quite tartly:

"My dear Potter, I am not made of putty. I have had a knock with a cricket ball before, more than once. There is really nothing the matter—nothing the matter at all!"

"You—you don't feel—well, dizzy, sir?" asked Potter.

"Not at all."

"Or—or—or sort of queer or—or anything?"

"What do you mean, Potter?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!" stammered Potter.

Blundell came up again.

"I've got my motor-bike ready for a run, sir. If you'd like to borrow it and cut along to see the doctor—"

"Really, Blundell, I am getting a little tired of the subject," said Mr.

Lascelles. "There is no occasion whatever for seeing a doctor, and I have no intention of doing so. It is really quite a slight bruise."

"But—but suppose internal injury or something—" stammered Blundell. "It was rather a crack, sir! Internal damage—"

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Lascelles.

He walked down to the gates. Many anxious eyes followed him. Mr. Lascelles was going for a walk to soothe the headache caused by Coker's bowling. The fellows hoped against hope that he would pass the doctor's and call in. If ever a man needed to see a doctor, it was the man who had picked out Coker of the Fifth to play cricket. Greene had even suggested putting it to the Head and asking him to telephone for a specialist from Harley Street.

Coker spotted Mr. Lascelles, and cut across to intercept him as he was going out. Coker gave him a bright smile.

"Oh, here you are, sir!" said Coker.

Mr. Lascelles stopped. He supposed that Coker was going to ask him about that little accident, and express his regret for the same. Coker, however, had forgotten the trifling incident on Big Side. He was thinking of far more important matters.

"It's hardly an hour yet, sir, or I should have come back to the study," said Coker.

This was Greek—if not double-Dutch—to Mr. Lascelles.

"Eh? I don't quite follow you, Coker," he said.

"You told me to come back to the study in an hour, you remember, sir."

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Lascelles testily. "I have not spoken to you, or seen you, since you so stupidly and clumsily throw the ball at my head on Big Side."

Coker stared.

"But you remember, sir, you spoke to me in my study—you told me to come back in an hour—to—"

"I have not been in your study, Coker!"

"Eh?"

"I should be glad to know what you mean, if you mean anything!" snapped Mr. Lascelles. "You are the stupidest boy at Greyfriars, Coker. But this seems to me more like idiocy than stupidity. What do you mean?"

"I—I mean what I say!" gasped the amazed Coker. "You told me to see you in my study—to discuss playing me in the Rookwood match."

"Are you mad, Coker?"

"Eh?"

"Or is this some absurd jest?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Or has someone been leg-pulling?" asked Mr. Lascelles, more good-humouredly. "If anyone has told you such an absurd thing, Coker, you should really have known better than to believe it."

Coker gaped.

"Ain't—ain't—ain't you going to tell Wingate to put me in the team on Wednesday, sir?" he gasped.

"Certainly not!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Come, come, Coker," said Mr. Lascelles, quite kindly. "You are a stupid boy—a very stupid boy—but you cannot be so stupid as to suppose that you can play for Greyfriars! Do not be absurd, Coker."

Mr. Lascelles walked on, and went out of gates. He left Coker of the Fifth staring after him blankly, bereft of speech.



Coker turned the handle of his study door and pushed. The door, however, did not open, and Coker's nose and chin established painful contact with the hard oak. "Ooooh! What—What—who—by gum!" roared Coker.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Coker Sees It All!

"PRIME!" said Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter sat and blinked at the hamper.

It was a large hamper; and it had been well filled. It was not empty yet; even Billy Bunter was not capable of that. But it was nearly empty.

Bunter was naturally unwilling to leave anything uneaten. But even Bunter could not perform impossibilities. There was no more room inside Bunter.

For three quarters of an hour Bunter had hardly paused. But he had to pause at last.

He had packed away huge quantities of foodstuffs. Where he had packed it all was rather a mystery. Never, in all his fat career, had Bunter surrounded so much tuck at once.

He was feeling the effects of his exertions. He had done well—perhaps rather too well! It was barely possible to have too much of a good thing!

Bunter sat in Coker's armchair, short of breath, breathing hard, jammy and sticky, with glassy eyes behind his big spectacles. He was feeling disinclined to move.

Still, he realised that he had better move. He had told Coker—in Mr. Lascelles' voice—to come back in an hour. Three quarters of the hour had elapsed. Coker was not likely to come back sooner; still, it was as well to be on the safe side.

Bunter had no suspicion of the wild excitement that was reigning in the school. As for Mr. Lascelles, he knew that that young gentleman had gone to his room to nurse his damages, and supposed that he was still there. That

Coker had told all Greyfriars that Lascelles had said that he was to play in the Rookwood match; that this had led to a suspicion of Lascelles' sanity. Bunter did not dream. Bunter could not possibly have guessed all that, even had not his fat thoughts been concentrated on the hamper. Neither did it occur to his fat brain that if Lascelles came down from his room and Coker saw him before the hour was up, it might cause Coker's return to the study earlier than planned. A fellow could not think of everything.

Slowly, and with an effort, Bunter rose to take his departure. He gave one last blink at the hamper. Good things were still in there, and it cost Bunter an effort to abandon them. But it had to be! He was loaded far beyond the Plimsoll line. He cast one longing, lingering look behind, and rolled to the door. Second thoughts—proverbially the best—supervened. He turned back to the hamper. There was not an inch of available space left inside Bunter. But—thoughtfully, and with great foresight—he crammed many good things into his pockets as his pockets would hold. He could not march out of the Fifth Form passage with his arms full of plunder. But he could take his pockets full—and the tuck would come in very useful later, when Bunter was hungry again.

Once more Bunter rolled to the door. At the same time footsteps came along and stopped at the outside of that door. Bunter halted.

Only five extra minutes had been spent in cramming his pockets. But that short space of time had spoiled everything.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

He knew Coker's heavy tread.

The door handle turned. Bunter was thankful, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had not yet unlocked the door. He was still safe.

"By gum!" It was Coker's voice. "It's still locked! What—"

Billy Bunter grinned. Coker had come back before Bunter had expected him. But it was easy to "shop" him off while Bunter escaped. At least, Bunter supposed that it was easy.

"Ah! Is that you, Coker?" He assumed Mr. Lascelles' voice to the life. "I am sorry, Coker, that I cannot see you just yet—my head is still very dizzy! It is, in fact, very painful. Please leave me to rest for a time, Coker."

Coker did not answer.

He was too astounded to answer.

He stood in the passage staring at the oak door—goggling at it, in fact, in his flabbergasted astonishment.

He wondered dizzily whether he was dreaming.

Five minutes since, he had seen Mr. Lascelles walking out of the school gates. Now Mr. Lascelles was talking to him from his locked study!

Coker was already in a surprised state when he arrived there. The games master's denial of having said what Coker knew he had said, had dumfounded Coker. If Lascelles had changed his mind, and was prepared to deny having said what he had said, it was not only frightfully dishonourable, but it placed Coker in an awful position—after what he had told all the fellows. Coker had come up to seek seclusion

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(Continued from page 15.)

in his study to think over this strange, startling, amazing state of affairs. Naturally, he had expected to find the study vacant, as Mr. Lascelles had gone out. And when Mr. Lascelles' voice spoke within the study, Coker almost fell down.

He gazed at the door. He blinked at it. He almost gibbered at it. Life is full of surprises; but Horace Coker had never before struck such a surprise as this!

A long minute passed.

Coker did not speak. He couldn't! He realised that he was not dreaming. But if he was not dreaming, what did it all mean?

There was only one Lascelles! There couldn't be two! Lascelles had gone out of gates! He couldn't have left only his voice in Coker's study. He was not there—so his voice could not be there! Yet it was there! This was more than enough to astonish Coker.

Someone was in his study. He could hear a movement, as well as the voice he had heard. It wasn't Lascelles, because it couldn't be! No man could be in two places at once.

Dumb with amazement, Coker stared at the door.

Slowly—for Coker's brain was not one of those quick-action, rapid-fire brains—slowly it dawned on Coker that, somehow, his leg was being pulled. Lascelles was not there because he couldn't be there. Lascelles' voice was not there because Lascelles was not there! Therefore, someone else was there, speaking in a voice exactly like Lascelles'—so like, that Coker would certainly have taken it for the games master's voice had he not, with his own eyes, seen the games master walking out of the gates.

"Oh!" breathed Coker.

Coker's powerful intellect, having progressed thus far, progressed farther. A trickster in the study was imitating Lascelles' voice. It was amazing, but certain. Now the games master's words at the gate, which had so surprised Coker, were explained. Lascelles hadn't said what he had said—that is, what Coker had supposed that he had said—in the study! It was this same trickster who had been there all the time! Lascelles had never been there at all!

Lascelles had never, after all, told him that he would be wanted for the Rookwood match! It was this unknown scoundrel who was hiding behind a locked door, pulling Coker's leg. Coker, in good faith, had told the world so—but it wasn't so!

"Oh!" breathed Coker again.

Coker's brain, unaccustomed to pressure, was working hard now. Back to his mind came the incident of Prout's voice outside his study—and Prout's angry statement that he had never called him! The same trickster, of course imitating first Prout's voice, and

then Lascelles'; the first trick to get Coker out of the study, the second to keep him out!

Coker breathed fire and sulphur.

He did not speak. He stooped and applied his eye to the keyhole to ascertain whether he could spot the scoundrel in the study.

He spotted him in once, so to speak.

Only a yard from the door within, stood a fat figure with a broad grin on its fat face, and little round eyes twinkling behind big, round spectacles!

Coker gurgled.

"Bunter!"

Coker knew all now! Bunter had been after his hamper once that day, and Coker had made an example of him. This time Bunter had got away with it! The traces of jam and cream and flaky crust, splashed round his capacious mouth, told that much. And Coker remembered, what he had long forgotten, the ventriloquial tricks of that fat villain. All was explained now.

Coker had told all Greyfriars that Lascelles had picked him out for the First Eleven. Lascelles hadn't. Bunter had pulled his leg, simply to get shut of him while he scoffed the hamper. Coker was not, after all, going to play for School. He was only going to look a bigger idiot than ever to all Greyfriars.

"Bunter!"

Coker hissed that name through the keyhole in blundering accents.

"Bunter!"

The fat Owl jumped.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"You fat scoundrel!"

"Oh, really, Coker! I—I'm not here—I—I mean—"

Bunter forgot to ventriloquise in his alarm.

"You!" hissed Coker. "You, all the time! You!"

Bunter remembered that he was a ventriloquist. He did not realise that it was now rather too late for such stunts.

"Ah, Coker! Please leave me to rest for a while!" he said, in Mr. Lascelles' voice. "I am quite—er—dizzy!"

Coker started. The voice was amazingly lifelike. Still, Coker was not likely to believe that it was Mr. Lascelles speaking, in the circumstances. Not only had he seen Mr. Lascelles walk out of gates, but he could now see Bunter through the keyhole, and see his podgy legs moving as he spoke.

"You born idiot!" hissed Coker. "Do you think you can take me in again?"

He fairly snarled through the keyhole.

Apparently Bunter thought he could. Anyhow, he tried.

"Really, Coker!" It was Mr. Lascelles' voice to the life again. "That isn't the way to speak to a master, Coker!"

"You fat frump!" yelled Coker. "I know it's you! Lascelles has gone out, and I'm watching you through the keyhole!"

"Oh crikey!" It was Bunter's own voice this time. "Oh lor'!"

"Open this door!"

"Beast!"

"I'm going to smash you!"

"I—I say—"

"I'm going to slaughter you!"

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"I'm going to break a fives bat on your fat carcase—"

"Oooogh!"

"Open this door at once, so that I can get at you!" hissed Coker.

If Coker supposed that that was the way to make Bunter unlock the door, Coker was labouring under a misapprehension.

Bunter did not open the door.

Wild horses would not have dragged him to the door to open it, with Coker lurking outside like a tiger.

Bunter was cornered. But so long as the door remained locked he was still in one piece. If Coker had got at him just then it was really probable that Bunter would have been strewn about the study in several pieces. Bunter did not want to be scattered over Coker's carpet in a detached or semi-detached state. He kept away from the door.

"Will you let me in?" hissed Coker.

"Oh crikey!"

"Will you unlock this door?"

"Oh lor'!"

"All right!" said Coker. "I'll wait! All right! Wait till you come out! You'll find me here! I'll wait!"

Coker leaned on the door, to wait. Bunter, in the study, quaked. Billy Bunter generally followed his nose when it led him in the direction of tuck, and often it had landed him in scrapes. But never had it landed him in such an awful scrape as this. He was a prisoner in the study—with Coker waiting outside! Sooner or later he had to emerge. And then—

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

To the Rescue!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. jumped.

The Famous Five were strolling in the quad, in the May sunset, discussing the topic that was just then the sole topic at Greyfriars—the amazing claim of Coker of the Fifth that the games master had picked him out to play for School. The chums of the Remove, like all other Greyfriars fellows, were deeply interested. First Eleven fixtures were important affairs. Junior fixtures, of course, concerned the juniors more closely, but they took a keen interest in the First Eleven, and the Greyfriars-Rookwood match, due on Wednesday, filled most thoughts at Greyfriars.

In the Rag the Remove fellows discussed the First Eleven, and criticised Wingate's selection of his men almost as keenly as if it had been a Remove match with Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. So Coker's announcement of the games master's amazing decision thrilled every fellow in the school with excitement, amazement, and consternation.

Discussing that absorbing topic, Harry Wharton & Co. strolled along by the windows of the Fifth Form studies, and all of a sudden they jumped and forgot even the Rookwood match as a sudden squeak was heard above their heads.

"I say, you fellows!"

The juniors stared round.

Billy Bunter's well-known squeak was familiar to their ears. But Billy Bunter was not in sight. His voice seemed to come from space.

"I say!"

Harry Wharton, realising that the squeak came from above, looked up. From the window of a Fifth Form study—Coker's study—a fat head and shoulders leaned out, and a fat hand was waved.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

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

"I say, you fellows! Help! Rescue!" squeaked Bunter.

"What?"

The five juniors stood in a surprised row, staring up at the fat face at the window. Bunter blinked down at them through his big spectacles, with almost tearful entreaty.

"I say, you fellows—" he squeaked.
 "What the thump are you doing in that study?" called out Harry Wharton.
 The window was twenty feet up, and he had to raise his voice.
 "I—I— Nothing, old chap! That beast Coker thinks I'm after his hamper! I haven't touched it, of course!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, I've locked the door, and that awful brute is waiting for me outside."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the five.
 "I—I can't stay here for ever, you fellows!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Beasts! Will you leave off cackling?" shrieked Bunter.
 "After the jolly old feast comes the jolly old reckoning!" chortled Bob Cherry. "You've asked for it, old fat man!"
 "The askfulness was terrific!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.
 "I say, you fellows, it's all your fault, you know. If you'd done as I asked you, it would have been all right. Now I'm cornered."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You haven't touched the hamper, Bunter!" called out Johnny Bull.
 "No, old chap! I—I wouldn't, you know."
 "It's all right, then! Let Coker in, and when he sees you haven't touched the hamper it will be all right."
 "Oh! The fact is, some of the things are gone—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I say, you fellows, be sports!" wailed

Bunter. "That awful beast is going to scalp me. Get me out of this, you fellows! After all I've done for you, you know—"
 "You've done for yourself this time, old fat bean!" grinned Nugent.
 "I say, old chaps—dear old fellows—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Beasts! I mean, dear old pals—"
 Billy Bunter's voice was beseeching. The Famous Five looked up at him, with grinning faces. They saw no reason why the fat grub-raider should not suffer for his sins. Many a time and oft had Bunter been kicked for grub-raiding in the Remove passage. There was no reason why Coker of the Fifth should not kick him also.
 "Better let Coker in, and get it over!" advised Johnny Bull.
 "Beast! I say, you fellows, cut in and tell Coker the Head wants him! That will give me time," urged Bunter.
 "Or tell him Wingate wants him! Or—or say he's wanted on the telephone. Get him away from the door while I cut—see?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Tell him: Wingate wants to see him about the cricket—that will shift him!" urged Bunter. "Tell him anything you like, so long as you shift him. That's the important point!"
 "Good-bye, Bunter!"
 "I say, you fellows! Help! I say, don't turn a chap down! Rescue!" howled Bunter from the window.
 The Famous Five were not proof against that beseeching appeal. No doubt Bunter deserved to be kicked. Still, as Shakespeare has remarked, if

every man were given his deserts, who would escape whipping?
 "Let's help the fat idiot out," said Bob Cherry. He waved his hand to the anxious Owl. "Look out, Bunter! Cut as soon as you get a chance. I'm going to shift Coker."
 "Buck up, old chap!" gasped Bunter.
 Bob Cherry left his chums and went into the House. In a couple of minutes he was glancing along the Fifth Form passage from the landing. There he beheld Horace Coker, leaning on his study door, with an air of grim and patient determination. Coker had been waiting some time. He was still waiting. Coker was not generally of a patient nature. Now he seemed as patient as a tiger watching and waiting for its prey in a jungle path.
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called out Bob Cherry.
 Coker stared round.
 "Where did you get that face, Coker?"
 "What?"
 "That is, if you call it a face!"
 Coker glared.
 "You cheeky fag!" bellowed Coker.
 "What—"
 "Is it a face?" continued Bob Cherry. "Are those weird things on it features?"
 Coker of the Fifth was not the man to be talked to like this! He was about the last man at Greyfriars to stand it. Forgetting Bunter for the moment, Coker rushed along the passage to Bob Cherry to execute summary justice.
 It did not occur to Coker that that
 (Continued on next page.)



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WRIGLEY'S

MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM



E.M. 32

was what Bob wanted; indeed, what he was there for.

Bob watched him coming, with a grin. Coker was only six feet away when Bob retreated. He dodged back, and Coker rushed after him. Horace's angry clutch barely missed him as he dodged into the Remove passage.

After him rushed Coker.

The door of Coker's study opened. Bunter had heard Horace's heavy footsteps pounding away. The fat Owl blinked out into the passage, saw the coast clear, and fled.

Meanwhile, Coker was close behind Bob as he raced up the Remove passage. Bob roared as he raced.

"Back up, you fellows! Rescue, Remove!"

Six or seven Remove men turned out of the studies. They did not stop to ask questions. The sight of a Fifth-Former chasing a Removeite up the Remove passage was enough. They rushed at Coker.

For two or three strenuous minutes Coker of the Fifth was mixed up with a swarm of juniors. When he sorted himself out he found that he was lying on his back at the foot of the Remove staircase. In a breathless state Coker tottered back to his own quarters. He found his study door open. His study was empty, Bunter was gone. And so the poor dog had none, as it were!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Big Idea!

"GOT your colours yet, Coker?" Vernon-Smith of the Remove asked that question, in break, the following morning.

Having asked it, the Bouncer retired rather hastily without waiting for an answer.

Coker looked dangerous.

That morning Horace Coker of the Fifth Form was in a sombre mood.

His brow was knitted.

Mr. Lascelles, passing him in the quad, gave him a smile. The games master was feeling much better, and though the bump on his head was not gone, and not likely to go yet, he had quite forgiven Coker. Coker, however, did not smile. He gave Lascelles a gloomy look and strode on.

His hopes, founded on Lascelles, had vanished. He knew now that he had been the victim of a fat trickster; Lascelles had never told him he was to play for school, and was never likely to tell him so.

It was awfully awkward for Coker.

In his happy satisfaction he had told the world all about it. Now it turned out that there was nothing in it! Coker could not help feeling that it made him look rather a fool! He was unconscious of the fact that that was how he generally looked.

Plenty of fellows smiled at the sight of Horace's sombre brow. They all knew, now, that there was nothing in it.

Coker's word being as good as gold, his statement had been taken as gospel, with the natural inference that that crack on the head had—to put it mildly—deprived Mr. Lascelles of his usual good judgment.

But it was known now that, whatever Lascelles might or might not have said to Coker, he had no intention of recommending Horace to the captain of the school as a recruit for the Rookwood match.

That was a relief to all Greyfriars—excepting Coker.

Coker had not explained. He had no desire to explain that he had been "spoofed" by a cheeky, fat junior who had imitated Lascelles' voice behind a locked door, and taken him completely in. That would not have made matters any better. It would only have set all the fellows yelling.

The fellows were, therefore, rather perplexed. They did not quite know what to make of the strange affair.

Wingate was very puzzled.

He had been unwilling to mention the matter to Lascelles, but he felt that he had to know where he stood; and so, at last, he had referred to the matter to the games master. He put it tactfully and delicately.

"You've looked through the list for the Rookwood game, sir?" Wingate asked. "Did—did—did you think of suggesting any change?"

"None!" answered Mr. Lascelles.

That settled it.

The list was already complete and posted on the board. Coker's name, of course, was not in it. If Mr. Lascelles had no change to suggest, obviously he was not going to suggest Coker.

Evidently Coker had made some strange and egregious mistake, or else that crack on the head had caused Lascelles a temporary aberration, which was now happily over and done with.

If the latter was the case, it was rather a delicate matter, and the less said about it the better.

Satisfied to know that Lascelles had now, at all events, no intention whatever of backing up Coker's claims, Wingate and his friends were only too willing to let the matter drop.

It was undoubtedly a relief. Had the games master insisted, Wingate would have been placed in an extremely awkward position. Fortunately there was nothing in it.

Only Coker did not regard it as fortunate.

It was awful for Coker.

In the fullness of his heart Coker had announced that he was to play for Greyfriars, with the natural consequence that he was to get his cricket colours after the tremendous game that he was sure of putting up for his school. And there was nothing—absolutely nothing—in it! Coker and his colours were still as far as the Poles asunder.

He looked a fool to all Greyfriars—he could not help feeling that! Fellows concluded that he must have mistaken something Lascelles had said—Coker, after all, was the man to make mistakes. Indeed, he was not the man to understand anything correctly, if there was any room for possible misunderstanding. So that was that!

Fellows laughed! That was natural! The idea of Coker, in association with school colours, struck them as a great jest. The idea of Coker handling the ball in the Rookwood match was comic—though the actual fact might have been tragic. Who, Potter asked in the games study, was to bury the dead?

The comic aspect of the matter was entirely lost on Coker. He paced the quad in break with a gloomy brow.

It was bitter!

If only Lascelles had had the sense of a bunny rabbit—if only Wingate had known a first-class cricketer when he saw one—it would have been all right! If only Coker somehow, anyhow, could wedge into that match—his wonderful cricket would do the rest. Fellows could laugh now; but laughter would turn into thunderous cheering when Coker took wicket after wicket—hat tricks while you wait!—and followed up his deadly bowling with mighty batting, accumulating fours and sixes, sending

the Greyfriars score up by leaps and bounds. That was the way Coker looked at it—the only fellow who did!

Not merely to set himself right with the school—though that was desirable—did Coker long to play in the Rookwood match. There were more important considerations. Greyfriars—if they had only known it—could not spare Coker! He was not a man really that they could leave out—if they had only known it!

Even the most confident cricketer admitted that the match was tough—that victory was on the knees of the gods. But with Coker in the team it would have been something in the nature of a walk-over—so Coker considered.

There was, perhaps, something touching in the worst cricketer that ever was firmly believing that he was the best cricketer that ever was! But, anyhow, Coker had no doubts.

All he needed was a chance to show what he could do. He would have jumped at it, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the school.

"He, he, he!"

Coker's gloomy meditations were interrupted by a fat chortle.

He looked round.

Before he had time to do more than look, Billy Bunter ceased to chortle, set his fat little legs into rapid motion, and vanished into the House.

Coker glared after him.

Owing to Bob Cherry, Bunter had escaped the previous day. Since then he had carefully avoided Coker. Coker had plenty of other matters to think of, but he had not forgotten Bunter.

He made a stride after the fleeing fat Owl, but stopped. It was altogether too undignified to pursue a scudding fag all over the place. Bunter would keep.

But as he gazed after the fat figure vanishing into the House, Coker's expression changed.

The frown disappeared from his manly brow.

A thoughtful look replaced it.

"By gum!" ejaculated Coker.

No doubt it was the sight of Billy Bunter, the fat scoundrel who had pulled his leg by imitating Lascelles' voice, that had set Coker's powerful intellect going.

There were fellows at Greyfriars who did not believe that Coker's intellect worked at all. But that was a mistake. It worked slowly, laboriously, and with little result as a rule. But it worked.

It was working now!

It was, in fact, working at double pressure.

"By gum!" repeated Coker breathlessly.

It was the idea at last—the Big Idea! Like a flash it irradiated the gloom. Coker smiled. Then he grinned. Then he laughed. Coker had got it!

"By gum!" said Coker, for the third time.

Grinning over the Big Idea—whatever it was—Coker did not even hear the bell for third school. He stood, as it were, in a trance.

The Famous Five passed him on their way to class, and Bob Cherry good-naturedly gave him a yell.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Don't you hear the bell, Coker?"

Coker started from a day-dream.

"Eh—what?" he ejaculated.

Harry Wharton & Co looked at him curiously. Coker had been plunged in a deep reverie—apparently, a pleasant reverie—lost to his surroundings. He gave the juniors the impression of having gone to sleep standing up, like a horse.

"Wake up, old bean!" said Harry Wharton. "Third school, you know!"



"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. "Help! Rescue!" The Famous Five stared up at the fat face at the window. "What's up, Bunter?" called out Wharton. "Coker thinks I'm after his hamper," said Bunter appealingly. "I've looked the door, and the awful brute is waiting for me outside!"

"Oh, yes!" said Coker. "Dreaming, old man?" asked Bob. "Dreaming over again that you're going to play for Greyfriars to-morrow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker did not glare. He smiled.

"Well, I rather fancy I shall be playing for Greyfriars to-morrow," he said. "You fags roll up and see the game, and you'll see what you'll see!"

With that Coker walked away, still smiling. The chums of the Remove stared after him.

"Poor old Coker!" said Bob. "Quite mad!"

"The madfulness is terrific!"

And the Famous Five scudded on to their Form-room, really rather disposed to believe that Coker, never quite safe on his rocker, was off it at last. They little dreamed of what was passing in the powerful intellect of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Mouse and the Lion!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Tea in Hall to-day!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

It was tea-time, and as Billy Bunter rolled up to the Famous Five they naturally supposed that he was thinking of honouring them with his distinguished company for tea. For once, however, the fat Owl was not bent on scrounging a tea in the Remove.

"I'm asked to tea!" said Bunter, with dignity. "If you fellows think I want one of your measly spreads in a fag study, you're jolly well mistaken—see?"

A man in the Fifth has asked me to tea."

"Gratters, old fat bean?"

"But, I say"—Bunter seemed dubious—"I say, you fellows, d-d-do you think it's fair and square? Coker was after me yesterday like—like a tiger! Now he's asked me to tea."

"Coker?" yelled the Famous Five, in astonishment.

"Yes. Coker of the Fifth."

"Well, my only hat!"

"Of course, I'd like to tea with Coker," said Billy Bunter. "He always has something pretty decent. I don't think there's much left out of that hamper—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's got tons of money, and he always does himself well. But—but, I say, you fellows, Coker was quite savage yesterday. It's rather queer his asking me to tea to-day, ain't it?"

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows, you—you don't think it's a dodge to get a fellow into his study to whop a fellow, do you?" asked Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five anxiously through his big spectacles.

Evidently Bunter was in doubt. Of course, there was no reason why a senior man should not ask a really pleasant, attractive, fascinating sort of fellow in the Lower Fourth to tea in his study. But, in the circumstances, Bunter had some misgivings.

Coker had been frightfully wrathful. Coker had a short way with fags. Coker had been looking for Bunter, with the unconcealed intention of strewing the hungry churchyard with his bones. Now he had asked him to tea—which was indubitably unexpected and surprising. Bunter's fat heart yearned

for a lavish spread in Coker's study. But, at the same time, his fat heart misgave him.

"Sure you've got it right, fatty?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, yes! He sent me a note by a Second Form fag," said Bunter. "But—but I—I don't fancy Coker really likes me, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it's fair and square, of course a fellow wants to go," said Bunter. "But—but if it's a dodge to get a fellow there to be whopped—"

Harry Wharton shook his head. He was astonished, but he was sure that Coker was not capable of such trickery as that.

"If he's really asked you, it's fair and square, old fat bean!" he said. "Coker's a born idiot, but he's not a rotter. Safe as houses!"

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, evidently much relieved in his fat mind by that assurance.

And as the Famous Five took their way to Hall, Billy Bunter took his way to the Fifth Form passage.

Hopes and fears alternated in his fat breast. He approached Coker's study cautiously, prepared to cut and run if it turned out a "dodge."

The sound of voices greeted his fat ears as he approached. Two voices—those of Potter and Greene—were speaking simultaneously, and in angry tones.

"Jolly thick, I call it, Coker, asking a Remove fag to tea—"

"Telling your own pals that they're not wanted—"

"Look here, Coker—"

"I jolly well think—"

"That's enough!" said Coker. "I've asked a kid to tea. I've told you you're

not wanted! If you want me to take my bat to you, I'm ready to do it! Fellows who grab a fellow's hair and barge him on the bags—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Potter and Greene, apparently, had gone to their study for tea. But there was, it seemed, no tea for Potter and Greene. They came out of the study looking very cross.

They glared at Bunter in the passage.

"Oh, here's Coker's new fag pal!" said Potter.

"Kick him!" said Greene.

What he had heard had reassured Bunter on the subject of Coker. He was safe from Coker. He did not appear quite safe from the disgruntled Potter and Greene. Both of them kicked him, and Bunter flew into Coker's study, with a wild howl.

Potter and Greene tramped away in wrath.

"Oh, come in, kid!" said Coker, quite genially. "Shut the door!"

Quite reassured now, so far as Coker was concerned, Bunter shut the door. Coker was very genial. He gave Bunter a nod and a smile. He was quite a different Coker from the Coker who had batted Bunter the day before, and waited outside the study for him like a lurking tiger. The difference was amazing.

"Sit down, kid!" Coker pulled a chair to the table for his guest.

Bunter sat down! He wriggled a little as he sat. Potter and Greene had kicked rather hard.

But he forgot it as he gazed at the tea-table. Coker always "did himself" well. This time he was doing himself—and Bunter—uncommonly well. Good things galore adorned the table. Bunter had had a tremendous feed in that study the previous day, and barely escaped with his life afterwards. Now he was going to have another tremendous feed—as an invited and honoured guest. It was amazing—so amazing as to be fairly flabbergasting! But there it was!

"Tuck in, Bunter!"

Bunter did not need telling twice.

Amazed as he was, amazement did not affect his appetite.

He tucked in.

Coker made a good tea. He had a healthy appetite himself. But Coker's tea, compared with Bunter's, was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. Coker ate hardly enough for two. Bunter surrounded enough for three or four, and was still going strong when Coker was finished.

Little was said over tea. Bunter's jaws were too busy for conversation. He could not help fearing that Coker, genial as he looked, might show the cloven hoof at any moment, and turn into the old familiar Coker again. Obviously, it was wise to lose no time.

So Bunter said hardly a word. Coker said little except to press good things on Bunter. His remarks were limited to: "Try this cake"; "Sample the tarts, kid!" "Like the ham?" "Have some pie," and so on. These remarks fell pleasantly on Bunter's ears. Coker was not generally considered a brilliant conversationalist. But his chat over the tea-table was quite interesting to Bunter.

Coker's short way with fags was conspicuous by its absence. He seemed pleased to see Bunter, pleased to see him tuck away the tuck, pleased with him altogether. It was amazing—almost unnerving! Bunter wondered whether Coker was mad. If so, he

acknowledged that his insanity had taken a very agreeable form. Indeed, he preferred Coker mad to Coker sane.

Even Bunter had to slack down at last. The time came when he merely toyed with fruity biscuits, eating hardly one a second.

"And now—" said Coker.

Bunter blinked at him warily. If Coker was going to show the cloven hoof he—

But Coker wasn't! His manner had become more serious; but it was still genial, almost pally.

"You played a trick on me in this study yesterday, Bunter," said Coker.

Bunter rose rather hurriedly.

"I—I've got to—to see a chap—" he stammered.

"It was rather clever," said Coker, unheeding.

"Eh?"

"The way you imitated Lascelles' voice was very clever, Bunter."

Bunter blinked at him. He goggled at him. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

Coker was not showing the cloven hoof. He was not displaying any signs of wrath when he alluded to the trick Bunter had played on him. He was praising Bunter for his cleverness in playing that trick! Amazement could go no further. Bunter could only goggle.

"You could do it again, kid!" said Coker, in a honeyed voice.

"Eh? Oh! Ah! Eh? Oh!" Bunter hardly knew what he was stuttering.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Um!"

"I want you to."

"Wha-a-at?"

Bunter could have no further doubt that Coker had gone mad. Agreeable as was the form Coker's madness had hitherto taken, he was rather anxious to get out of the study. With a lunatic you never could tell!

"I—I—I've got to see Quelch—" stammered Bunter.

"Sit down, kid! You've had a good feed, haven't you?" asked Coker.

"Oh! Yes! Fine! But—"

"Like the same again every day this week?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! Rather!"

"Well, it's a go, if you do what I want," said Coker. "All you've got to do is to imitate Lascelles' voice again, same as you did in this study. You took me in. So it stands to reason you could take in a fool like Wingate."

"W-W-Wingate!" stammered Bunter. Apparently it was upon the captain of Greyfriars that Coker desired him to play a ventriloquial trick.

"Yes. I'll tell you exactly what to say—and you'll get Wingate on the telephone, and make him think it is Lascelles speaking."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"To-morrow morning, in break," said Coker. "See?"

Bunter nodded, though he was far from seeing.

"Lascelles will be away—he leaves by the first train in the morning," said Coker. "Wingate will think he has rung him up from where he's going."

"B-b-but—"

"Wingate will think it is Lascelles—telling him to play me in the Rookwood match—"

Bunter jumped.

"Wingate couldn't refuse! It will come out later when Lascelles gets home, that he never phoned!—But that will be all right! By that time, the match will have been played and won."

Bunter goggled.

"The fellows will have seen what my cricket's like—and it will be all serene! Hat tricks and centuries will convince them—seeing is believing, you know! What are you grinning at?"

"Oh, nothing! I—"

"Everybody will be pleased—results are results!" said Coker. "Nothing succeeds like success, you know! Rather a neat idea, what?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He understood now.

"Once I've played in the eleven all will be O.K.," Coker condescended to explain. "This is a bit irregular, of course—not a thing I could do if I wasn't sure of my value to the team."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oddly enough, a fat little shrimp like you can help to bring about the biggest success of the cricket season for Greyfriars," said Coker genially. "A case of the mouse and the lion over again, you know."

"Oh scissors!"

"I shall take it as a favour, too, Bunter," added Coker, with ineffable condescension. "I shall feel obliged to you. If it's a winner, you can come to tea in this study any time you like afterwards."

"Oh!"

Bunter blinked at Coker of the Fifth. He saw it all now.

It was easy enough, simple as pie to the fat ventriloquist of the Remove. He could only wonder how Coker had thought of such a remarkable stunt. Evidently Horace Coker's intellect had been putting in some unusually hard work. Bunter realised that Coker was taking it for granted that he was going to do this thing. He realised that if he refused the whopping he had so narrowly escaped would come his way, after all. If he was going to refuse it was obviously best to get out of the study first.

But was he?

Bunter was no cricketer. But he had some regard for the Greyfriars record in games. He was unwilling to be the means of landing the Greyfriars First Eleven with a hopeless dud. Still, that, to Bunter, was not a matter of the first importance. Coker had stood him a ripping spread, and one good turn deserved another. Still more important, Coker had told him he could tea in the study when he liked, if the idea was a success. A series of gorgeous feeds opened like a dazzling vista before Billy Bunter's eyes.

After all, why shouldn't old Coker have his chance? Perhaps, after all, he could play cricket. He might keep his wicket up against Rookwood. Miracles had happened before, and might again. Bunter was prepared to hope for the best—in the circumstances. What was a First Eleven match, after all, compared with a spread in Coker's study every day for the rest of the term? A trifle light as air!

Billy Bunter did not take long to make up his fat mind. The choice lay between a whopping and free admission to a land flowing with milk and honey! Bunter's choice was not likely to be long delayed.

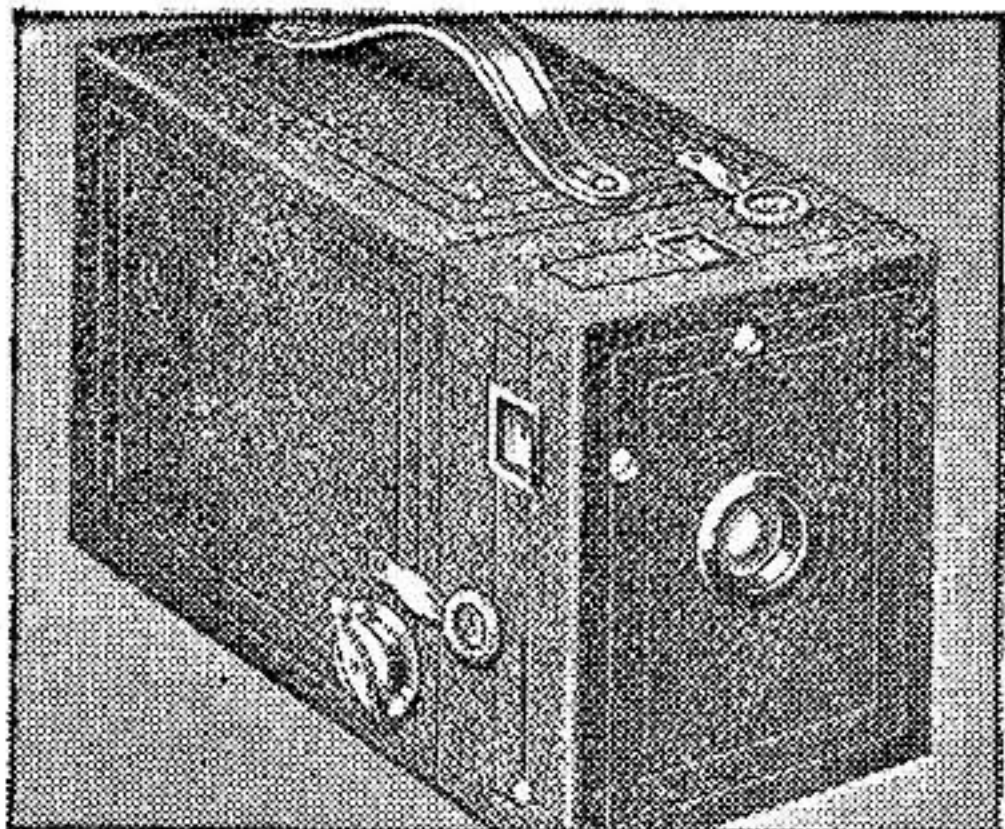
"Have some of those grapes, kid!" said Coker.

Bunter helped himself to the whole bunch.

"Well, what about it, kid?"

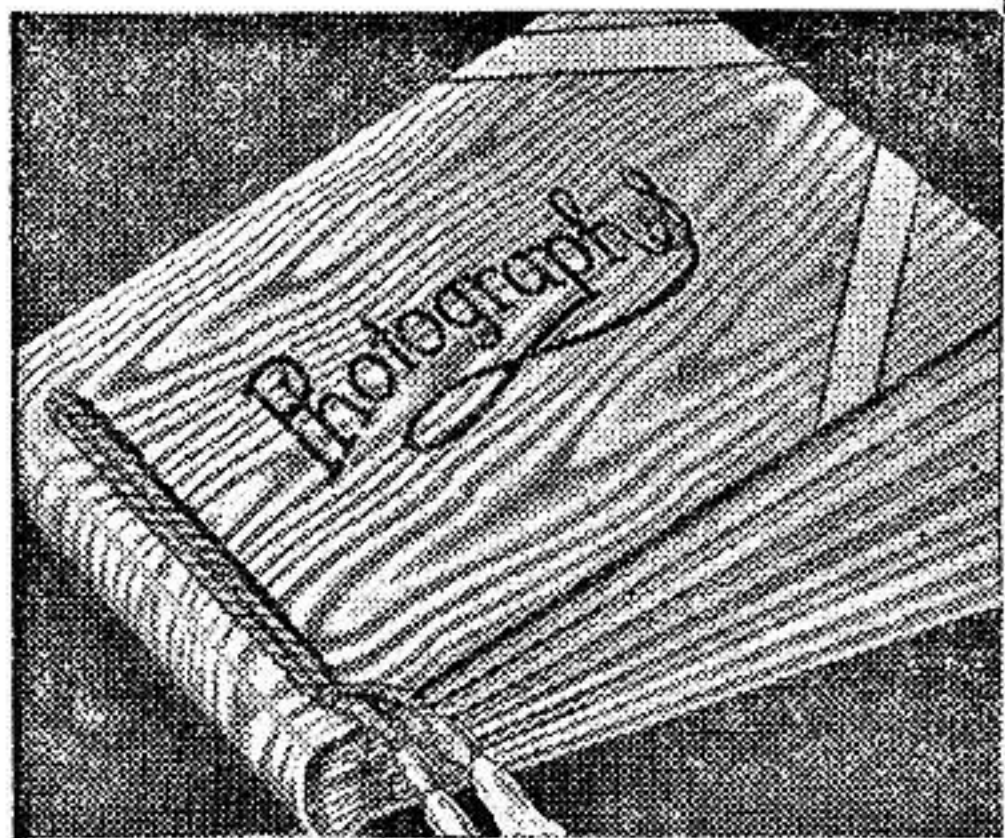
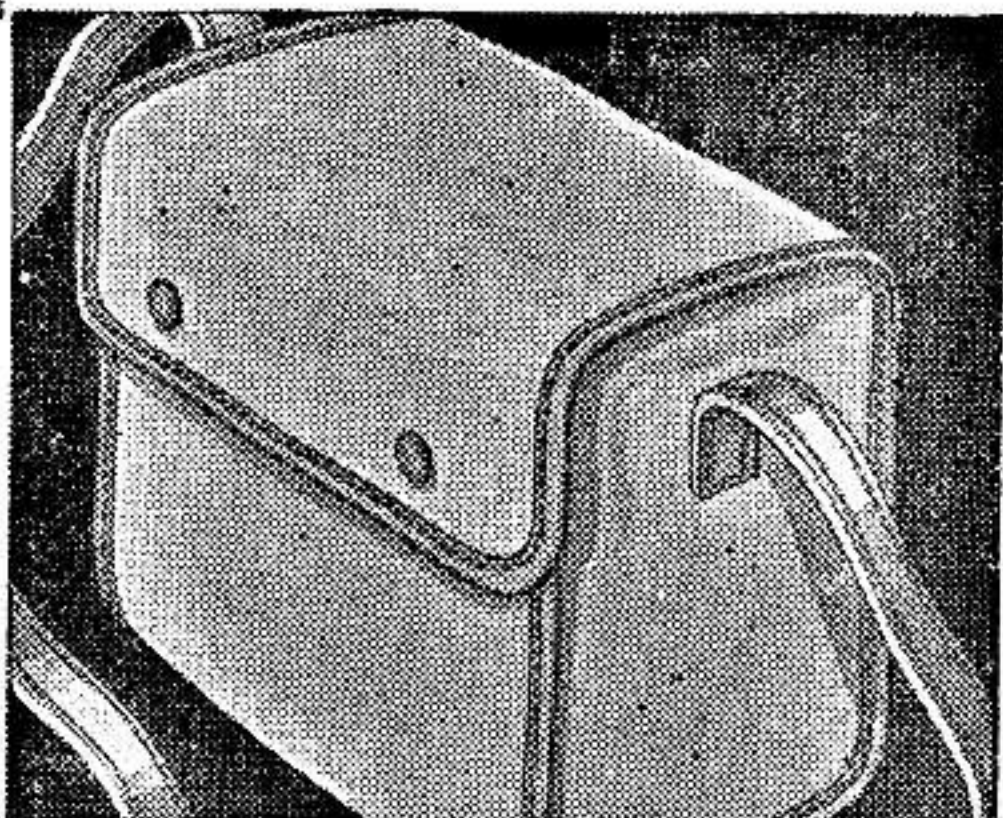
"It's a go," said Bunter. "After all, most of the First Eleven are prefects, and prefects whop a fellow! Serve 'em right!"

(Continued on page 22.)



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COKER'S CRICKET CRAZE!

(Continued from page 20.)

"What?" roared Coker.

"I—I—I mean"—Bunter realised that he had not put it tactfully—"I—I mean I'll come along to see you make hats and century tricks—I—I mean centuries and hat tricks—"

"Keep it dark, you know," said Coker.

Billy Bunter grinned. Really, he hardly needed that caution. Even Bunter realised that a stunt like this had to be kept dark—that it could not be kept too dark.

"What-ho!" said Bunter.

"I'll see you after prayers in the morning, and give you final instructions," said Coker. "Not a word to anybody else."

"I'll watch it!" grinned Bunter.

"Like to take the cake with you?" asked Coker.

It was time for Bunter to go. The spread had been so lavish, that a large cake remained still uncut. Bunter did like to take it with him. He took it under his arm.

He rolled away from Coker's study, feeling that he quite liked Coker. It was a big cake. After all, why shouldn't the chap play for Greyfriars if he wanted to? It was a scrumptious cake!

Coker, left alone, lay back in his chair, with a pleasant smile on his face. He was day-dreaming—of hat tricks and centuries—of a roaring, cheering crowd carrying him shoulder-high back to the pavilion after a tremendous innings, first in and not out. It was a pleasant dream. It was to be hoped that the dream would come true!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Terrible Catastrophe!

MR. LASCELLES was seen at prayers the following morning; and he was not seen again. He departed at an early hour, to catch the earliest train at Courtfield Station. Greyfriars fellows were proud to know that their games master was playing for his county that day. They were pleased to see that he seemed to show no ill-effects from Coker's deadly bowling of a couple of days ago. They wished him good luck and good cricket; but after he was gone, their thoughts turned chiefly to the Rookwood match. Bulkeley and his merry men were coming over early from Rookwood; stumps were to be pitched in morning break, and all the fellows would be able to see the first shot fired, as it were, before they went in to third school.

That morning, very nearly every man at Greyfriars was thinking cricket. Harry Wharton & Co. were almost as keen as if it had been one of their own junior matches with Rookwood. Masters were almost as keen as boys. Prout, master of the Fifth, was seen talking cricket to Blundell, the latter in his First Eleven blazer; and it was generally considered a distinction for Prout. Prout did not take his usual walk in morning break. He rolled down to Big Side, with some of the cricketers. Everybody thought that it was pretty decent of them to let him.

Prout, probably, knew that there was such a person as Billy Bunter at Greyfriars School. But certainly he did not remember his existence that morning. Certainly he never dreamed that that

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inconsiderable junior watched him rather anxiously, through a pair of big spectacles, and grinned when he was safely out of the House. Still less did he dream that the fat Owl, as soon as the coast was safely clear, rolled into his study—Prout's study—to use the telephone there.

Nobody at Greyfriars gave Billy Bunter a thought that morning—except Coker. Coker of the Fifth had his reasons.

Potter, who was in the First Eleven, passed Coker in the quad without a glance. Hampers or no hampers, Potter was a First Eleven man, and Coker was nobody. On that day, of all days, if Coker wanted Potter to know him, he had to be jolly civil. Potter forgotten with the cricket men, unconscious of Coker's existence.

But Coker smiled.

Had anybody noticed Coker that morning—which hardly anybody did—his smiling good-humour must have drawn attention.

Coker seemed pleased about something. The Famous Five happened on him when they came out in break.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old bean?" bawled Bob Cherry.

Coker glanced at him—still good-humoured. Coker's smile, that sunny May morning, seemed to be one of those smiles which would not come off. A cheeky greeting from a cheeky fag could not disturb Coker's cheery equanimity.

"You're going to help Greyfriars win, Coker!" said Harry Wharton.

Coker started.

"Eh! What do you know about it?" he ejaculated. For a moment, he feared that Bunter must have been chattering.

But that was a misapprehension.

"I mean, by standing out of the match, old tulip!" explained Wharton. "That's the way to help 'em win, what?"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" agreed Bob Cherry heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five cleared off before Coker could grasp it—or them!

"Coker looks frightfully bucked about something!" remarked Frank Nugent. "He can't be thinking that Wingate might play him after all, surely?"

"Goodness knows what he might think, with a brain like his!" said Johnny Bull.

And the Removites chuckled.

A group of First Eleven men in flannels and blazers, were the cynosuro of all eyes in the quad. Wingate, Gwynno, Tom North, Bancroft, Sykes, the great bowler, and some others, stood together, quite conscious that they were the salt of the earth, and the observed of all observers. Admiring glances were cast on them from all sides. Fellows edged near, to catch their remarks, as if pearls of wisdom were falling from their lips. When Hobson of the Shell edged a little too near, and Sykes genially kicked him, as a hint to keep a more respectful distance, Hobby retired, rubbing the place, but obviously bucked at having had his existence noticed by a First Eleven man!

"Mr. Wingate, sir!"

Trotter, the House page, penetrated the magic circle unrebuked.

"Please, it's the telephone in the prefects' room, sir!" said Trotter. "Mr. Lascelles askin' for you, sir!"

"Lascelles!" exclaimed Wingate, in surprise.

He left the group, and went into the House.

Twenty fellows at least had heard Trotter's message, and wondered why

Lascelles was phoning Wingate. Lascelles was playing in a county match fifty miles from Greyfriars; and it was rather odd that he should ring up the Greyfriars captain.

There was nobody in the prefects' room when Wingate entered it. Hardly a man was in the House at all, in fact. Wingate picked up the receiver.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Lascelles?"

"Speaking—" came back the voice that Wingate knew so well; or which, at least, he thought he knew so well.

"Had a good journey, sir?" asked Wingate, wondering what on earth the games master could have to say to him.

"Oh, quite, thanks!" It was Lascelles' voice, tone for tone; and the Greyfriars captain little dreamed who his interlocutor really was. "But I left in rather a hurry this morning, Wingate, to catch my train—hem!—and forgot something that I had intended to say to you."

"Oh, I see," said Wingate, though he did not quite see.

"About the Rookwood match, Wingate! Have the Rookwood men arrived yet?"

"No, sir—but we're expecting them pretty soon."

"Good! There's still time, then."

"Time?" repeated Wingate. He wondered for what.

"It is about Coker that I desire to speak, Wingate."

"Coker!" repeated Wingate blankly.

"Coker of the Fifth Form."

"Oh! Yes! What about Coker, sir?"

asked Wingate, in utter wonder.

"Play him!"

"Eh?"

"Play Coker!"

"What?"

"You will have to leave out a man to make room for him. I suggest leaving out Blundell."

"Bub-bub-Blundell?"

"Yes, Blundell of the Fifth! But suit yourself whom you leave out, so long as you play Coker."

"Pip-pip-play Kik-Kik-Coker!" Wingate was afflicted with stuttering. "Did-did-did you say pip-pip-pip-play Kik-Kik-Coker?"

"Exactly."

"B-b-b-but—"

"I have good reasons for this, Wingate! I regret that I did not go into the matter before I left the school; but, as you are aware, time pressed. I had to catch my—hem—train! Did you speak?"

"Yes—hem—"

"I may say, Wingate, that I have had my eye on Coker for some time. He is no common cricketer."

"By gum, he isn't!"

"Play him! Give him all the bowling you can—"

"The bub-bub-bowling—"

"And let him open the innings each time—"

"This," said Wingate, to the telephone, "is a dream—a horrid dream! I shall wake up presently."

"Did you speak, Wingate?"

Wingate gasped.

"Mr. Lascelles—sir—are you serious?"

"What? What? What do you mean, Wingate?" Mr. Lascelles' voice—if it was Mr. Lascelles' voice—had a testy tone.

"I—I mean—I—I—you can't be serious, sir! A fool like Coker—a dud like Coker—a born idiot like Coker—it's throwing the game away, sir," babbled Wingate. "It means a wicket chucked away in each innings; and if the idiot



“Stop!” gasped Blundell, grasping Wingate’s arm just as the match was about to start. “Don’t let Coker bowl! That crack on the head Lascelles got—it’s made him potty! That’s why he’s phoned you to play Coker!”

bowls, it means heaps of runs for Rookwood—stacks of runs—piles of runs—even if he doesn’t kill anybody. You can’t be serious, sir.”

“Do you think I have taken the trouble to ring you up, Wingate, from this—hem—distance—without intending to speak seriously?”

“No! Nunno! But—”

“Are you setting up your judgment of a man’s form at cricket as superior to mine, Wingate?”

“Oh! No! But—”

“I am aware that you think little of Coker as a cricketer. You must rely on my judgment and judge by results. Have you ever had reason to doubt my judgment in such matters?”

“No! Never! But—”

“I repeat, Coker is the man you want! I stake my—my reputation as a cricketer on it!”

“Holy smoke!”

“You will play Coker?”

“I—I can’t!” gasped Wingate desperately. “The men would lynch me if I did! I—I—I can’t play Coker.”

“Let us have this plain, Wingate!” There was a stern note in the voice on the telephone. “I advise you, as games master, to play Coker in the match to-day. If you reject my advice—”

“Oh! No, sir! But—”

“Will you play Coker, then?”

“I—I daren’t—”

“You reject my advice! This is not what I have expected of you, Wingate. I am unwilling to exercise my authority as games master. But if you refuse to act on my advice—my urgent advice and counsel—you leave me no alternative.”

“Mr. Lascelles—”

“I am absolutely resolved on this, Wingate! If you refuse, I shall take it as a personal insult.”

“Oh, sir! But—”

“I shall, on my return, place the matter before Dr. Locke. My desire,

as you know, is to work in harmony with the captain of the school. But if you flout me in this manner, either you must cease to be captain of Greyfriars, or I must cease to be games master. I shall place my resignation in Dr. Locke’s hands and leave the decision to him.”

“Oh, sir! Don’t think of such a thing, for one moment!” gasped Wingate. “If you put it like that, sir, you know very well that I’ve no choice in the matter. I’ll play anybody you like.”

“Very good! Then it is settled, Wingate!”

Wingate groaned.

“Yes, sir!”

“Thank you, Wingate! Good-bye!”

“Oh crikey! Good-bye, sir!”

Wingate put up the receiver. He stared at the telephone for a moment or two blankly, dazedly. Then he tottered away.

He tottered from the prefects’-room. Outside, he passed a Fifth Form man, who looked at him with a smiling face. Coker of the Fifth had been very near the door. But Wingate did not even see Coker as he passed him. Looking as if the sun had ceased to shine for him for ever, the Greyfriars captain tottered out of the House with the ghastly news. And a fat young rascal dodged out of Prout’s study in Masters’ passage and grinned as he made himself scarce.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Awful!

“ROT!”

“Rubbish!”
“Play Coker!”
“Bosh!”

“The man’s mad!”
“Rot!”

Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, wore a sunny smile. He wore other things, of course. But his sunny smile

was the most noticeable thing about him.

It had worked!

It had worked like a charm!

Wingate of the Sixth was telling the cricket men. He was telling them dismally, sadly, dolefully, lugubriously. He was evoking a chorus of astonishment, rage, consternation. Coker was the only man who listened with satisfaction.

The Big Idea was a success! The Mouse had helped the Lion, as in the ancient fable of Aesop. The fat ventriloquist of the Remove had done the trick. Wingate had not the remotest suspicion. The previous day’s alarming rumour that Lascelles had thought of Coker as a First Eleven man was now confirmed. It had come straight from the lips of the oracle, at it were. The games master had said the word. The fiat had gone forth! Practically, Wingate was left with no choice in the matter. Indeed, so great was his respect for Mr. Lascelles, that he wondered dizzily whether, after all, he could possibly have been mistaken about Coker—whether Horace was, after all, not quite the utter, absolute, outside edge in idiots that he had always thought him.

Coker smiled sunnily as he heard.

Coker was happy and satisfied.

Coker was bucked.

Coker was rejoiced.

But in the rest of Greyfriars, as by the yellow Tiber in days of old, was tumult and affright.

Seniors and juniors, First Eleven men and rabbits, everybody, in fact, buzzed with excitement and dismay.

Had Rookwood arrived just then, they might have thought that some fearful disaster had smitten Greyfriars. As a matter of fact, they would have been right. If playing Coker in a First Eleven match was not a disaster, there

never had been a disaster. It was chucking the game away. But even that was not the worst. It was holding the school up to ridicule, by putting up such a hopeless dud, such a guy, to the public view. Rookwood would not only win the match. They would go home laughing. That was the unkindest out of all.

"Get into your flannels, Coker!"

Wingate had uttered the fatal words!

They brought joy to Coker! Coker had fairly jumped into his flannels—bounced into them.

He looked like a cricketer, in flannels, with his bat under his arm. Appearances were deceptive.

"But—but—you can't play Coker, old man!" said Blundell of the Fifth, almost tearfully. "You can't, you know! Are you sure you heard Lascelles right?"

Wingate snorted.

"But you'll have to leave out a cricketer to make room for that dud!" said Blundell. "Who are you leaving out?"

"Lascelles suggested you—"

Blundell jumped,

"Me?"

"You!"

"The man's mad!" gasped Blundell.

"I'm roady, Wingate," said Coker of the Fifth breezily. "Don't you worry, you men! Judge by results! The proof of the pudding's in the eating, you know! The results will be all right! What more do you want?"

The cricketers looked at Coker of the Fifth as if they could have bitton him. Only Coker believed that the results would be all right.

"I'm sorry, you men," said Wingate drearily. "I feel bound to give Lascelles his head. I can't do anything else. He makes a personal matter of it. What can I do?"

"You can play the best man you've got!" said Coker. "Here he is—all ready!"

"Oh, shut up, you idiot!" said Blundell.

"Look here—"

"Shut up, dummy!" shrieked the cricketers. If they had to stand Lascelles, they did not have to stand Coker; and they weren't going to.

Coker realised, at that moment, that he was not popular.

He comforted himself with the reflection that it would be all right after the game—after those hat tricks, and centuries. He would jump into popularity then at a bound. Unfortunately, nobody but Coker believed in those hat tricks and centuries. Nobody expected miracles to happen on Big Side at Greyfriars that day.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Here comes Rookwood!"

Wingate, trying to compose his features to a less dismal and dismayed expression, went to greet the visitors. But Bulkeley, the Rookwood captain, had an impression that Wingate must recently have lost a near and dear relative when he shook hands with him. He looked it.

The Greyfriars cricketers had been looking forward keenly to that match. Now they looked rather as if they were going to execution. The Rookwood seniors could not help being struck by it, and wondered what was up. They saw only one happy face in the Greyfriars crowd. It was Horace Coker's.

Some of them noticed Blundell, and wondered what was the matter with the fellow, who seemed to be trying to look like a demon in a pantomime.

Blundell of the Fifth could hardly believe it yet. He was left out to make room for Coker—Horace Coker! He would as soon have been left out to make room for Bunter of the Remove, or Tubb of the Third. It was very hard for George Blundell to digest this.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton. "This tears it, you men! Coker's in the team—he said he would be! It seems that Lascelles must really have given him the tip yesterday, after all."

"Why doesn't some man brain him with a bat?" murmured Johnny Bull.

"The brainfulness is the proper caper—if the esteemed Coker had any brains for the brainfulness!" remarked Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"They're tossing for innings," said Nugent. "Poor old Wingate looks as if he's going to be hanged."

"He ought to be, if he plays Coker!"

said Bob. "They've left out Blundell—look at his chivvy!"

Bulkeley won the toss, and elected to bat. Slowly, as if on leaden feet, the Greyfriars men went into the field.

Bob Cherry gave a gasp.

"They're giving Coker the ball!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Look out for casualties!"

"Mind your nappers!"

"Is Wingate potty, or did Lascelles tell him to let Coker bowl? If he did, he's as mad as a hatter."

"I say, let's cut this and go to a funeral. It would be more bracing."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's a Blundell up to?"

Blundell had been standing rather like a man in a trance, staring on. But when the ball was handed to Coker, to bowl the first over, Blundell seemed to wake up. It was the last straw. He rushed on the cricket field. Coker had taken the ball. He had, of course, dropped it, and was plunging clumsily after it. Blundell grabbed Wingate by the arm.

"Stop!" he gasped.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Saved!

"STOP!" Blundell gasped. Wingate stared. The whole crowd buzzed. Two Rookwood men who were coming out to the wickets stopped and stared.

Coker rose, ball in hand. Blundell, with masterful rapidity, grabbed it from his fingers and flung it away towards the pavilion. On the very verge of starting there had to be a pause.

"What the thump—" stuttered Coker. He glared at Blundell.

Blundell did not heed him. He grasped Wingate's arm.

"Stop! Stop this! You can't do it!"

"Don't be an ass! Get off the field!"

"I tell you, stop! Look here! I know what it means! That crack on the head—that did it!"

"What?"

"You know what all the men thought yesterday!" gasped Blundell. "Well, that is it! That's the explanation! Lascelles is potty! That's why he phoned you to play Coker."

"Oh!" gasped Wingate.

The fieldsmen had been taking their places. Now they gathered round in a crowd. Rookwood men, at the pavilion, stared. Two Rookwooders, at the wickets, waited. They had to wait! The game was not beginning yet.

"Don't you see?" Blundell spoke with conviction. "Poor old Lascelles is off his rocker! We all thought so yesterday. That crack on the head that Coker gave him—"

"My hat! That's it!" said Potter.

"That's it!" said Gwynne.

"We all wanted him to see a doctor—and he wouldn't! If he'd seen a doctor," said Blundell, "he would never have done this! See?"

Wingate saw.

Indeed, but for his worry and distress of mind, he would have seen before this! Could a man in the possession of his seven senses recommend Coker of the Fifth as a cricketer? He couldn't! That crack on the head accounted for the whole thing!

Wingate saw it all!

"You can't refuse Lascelles," said Blundell. "I know that. But if the poor chap's mad—"

"Temporary aberration!" said Sykes.

Look for this Picture on this week's

GEM!



POOR old St. Jim's! Somebody certainly seems to be getting one up on Tom Merry & Co. in the picture here. It is the cover in miniature of this week's grand issue of the GEM. Who do you reckon is at the other end of the kite line? Maybe it is Frank Monk & Co., of the Grammar School, who are the sworn rivals of St. Jim's boys. If you want to know more about it spend twopence on the GEM, and read "The Kidnapped Cricketers!" a long, complete yarn of schoolboy fun and adventure starring Tom Merry & Co. Ask for our companion school story paper—The

GEM

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"That's it—just a little off his rocker! It was a frightful crack Coker gave him, you know! And we all thought—yesterday—"

"When he gets well," said Gwynne, "he will be thankful if you never played Coker, Wingate. When he recovers, he—"

"But—but—but he seemed all right—on the telephone," stammered Wingate. "Still, as you say—"

"Potty—only temporary, I dare say—but potty—"

"That crack on the head, you know." "That did it!"

"Stands to reason that did it!" said Gwynne. "Can't take a man's tip when the poor chap's balmy, Wingate! He will be glad afterwards."

Wingate breathed hard and deep. That was it, of course! He wondered that he had not thought of it earlier! He saw an avenue of escape! If poor old Lascelles was wandering in his mind owing to that awful crack on the head Coker had given him on Monday—

Coker's deadly bowling was rising in judgment against him!

"You play, Blundell!"

Wingate was not long in making up his mind—now that he saw it all!

There was a roar from Coker.

"What about me?" roared Coker.

"You? Nothing about you! Get off the field!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Get out of the light, Coker!"

"You silly fathead!" roared Coker.

"Turn that man off!" said Wingate.

Wingate's orders to his team were always promptly obeyed. But never had an order been obeyed so swiftly, so promptly, so eagerly, so joyously.

Every man in the team played a part in helping Coker off the scene. After that he was unheeded. Coker had ceased to matter.

"Play up, Greyfriars!" yelled Bob Cherry, in great exuberance.

"Hurrah!"

The bell for third school was ringing unheeded. Nobody even heard the bell. Wingate and his merry men had taken their places in the field. Sykes had gone on to bowl. The great match had begun, minus Coker. Harry Wharton & Co. were ten minutes late for third school, and received lines from their Form master. But little they cared.

The Big Idea—Coker's latest and greatest—had worked to the very verge of success. There, unfortunately for Coker, fortunately for everybody else, it had fizzled out. Coker's deadly bowling had, in a way, saved the match—for had he not cracked Mr. Lascelles' head with the cricket ball, the theory would never have been started that the games master was "off his rocker"—and Coker would have played Rookwood. Coker had saved the game, though not in the way he had planned and intended.

It was a great game.

When school was dismissed after third lesson, Harry Wharton & Co. rushed down to Big Side, and found the First Eleven going strong.

Coker looked on gloomily, like a dismal Peri at the gate of the Paradise he might not share.

He expected, of course, to see the game go to pot. Without Coker, what else could it do? Surprisingly enough to Coker, it did not go to pot.

It was a great game, and a hard-fought game. The Rookwooders were all good men and true. But the Greyfriars men were in tremendous form, bucked and exhilarated by the fact that Coker was missing from their ranks. When the May sun was sinking to the

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, "The Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! Your Editor calling!

I expect by now most of you have read the short complete yarn of Dr. Birchmall in our supplement. What do you think of it? Just grand, what? I thought so. Well, stand by for another treat next week—Dicky Nugent, our youthful author, is funnier than ever in his second masterpiece. As I feel confident that these yarns will prove vastly popular with my readers I intend to devote our two centre pages to them in the near future. Does that please you? Good!

Now for

ANOTHER SPECIAL ITEM OF NEWS!

Of course, you're entering our coupon-collecting contest, aren't you? That's the spirit! Well, listen, next week I am going to give you a special bonus coupon worth 250 points to swell your total. No reader participating in our gigantic gift scheme should miss this bumper coupon. In addition, you will find the usual coupon—value 50 points.

By the way, have you sampled our splendid companion paper—the "Gem"? You'll thoroughly enjoy reading about the rollicking adventures of

TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

These popular characters appear every week in the grand extra-long stories written by that popular author Martin Clifford. Give the "Gem" a trial—you won't be disappointed, I can vouch for that!

NOW I'd better hand out a few RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various queries which have been sent in by readers.

Are There More Yellow Men Than White Men in the World? (Tom Evans, of Cardiff): No. The white races outnumber the yellow by 725 millions to 680 millions. Next come the black with 210 millions; then the brown, with 104 millions; the Arabs, with 100 million; and, last of all, the Red Indian race, with a mere 30 millions.

west they came on the held winners of that great game, with a wicket in hand.

Greyfriars cheered them to the echo. Bob Cherry hurled his cap into the air, careless where it came down, or whether it ever came down at all. Even Coker was glad to see the win, though it came as a great surprise to him. But, as he told Letter and Greene afterwards in the study, it had been a near thing, while, if he had played, there would not merely have been a wicket in hand, but a whole innings in hand. It would have been practically a one-man game. Coker first, and the rest nowhere. Potter and Greene did not deny it. They let Coker rip. Coker was standing supper in the study, and as Coker was standing supper, it was only fair that they should stand Coker.

Harry Wharton & Co. eyed Mr. Lascelles very curiously when he returned to Greyfriars.

What is the Length of a Cable? (J. H., of South Shields): A cable is generally reckoned to be 100 fathoms in length—a fathom being six feet. Ten cables equal a nautical mile, which is the same as a minute of latitude. Actually, however, a cable is 608.97 feet—and a minute of latitude varies according to its position on the surface of the globe!

Which is Longer—the Suez or the Panama Canal? ("Inquirer"): The Suez—easily! It is 100 miles long, which is exactly twice the length of the Panama.

What do the Stars and Stripes on the United States Flag Represent? ("Magnetite," of Worthing): The thirteen red and white stripes represent the original thirteen states which formed the Union. At first there were only thirteen stars on the flag, but as new states were added, a new star was put on the flag for each one. There are now forty-eight.

Who First Discovered Australia? (G. F., of Nottingham): No one knows for sure. It is said that the Portuguese were the first to sight it in 1521. The first Englishman to go to Australia was Dampier, in 1688. Captain Cook did not go there until eighty-four years later, and the first colonising party from England landed sixteen years after that—in the year 1788.

I THINK that is all the space I have at my disposal this week, chums, so further questions will have to wait. But I'll be "in the office" as usual next Saturday, waiting to have a chat with you—and waiting, too, to introduce to you Frank Richards' latest Greyfriars yarn:

"THE SECRET OF THE PRIORY!"

It's as full of fun and thrills as an egg is of meat—so don't miss it, or you'll miss something good!

Of course, there will be another fine instalment of "Wings of War!" the usual shorter features, and a **BIG BONUS COUPON** worth 250 points, in addition to the usual coupon for 50 points. That makes an issue worth having, doesn't it? See you next week, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

So did everybody else.

For a second time the games master found himself the object of a deep and concerned solicitude which surprised him.

Wingate felt rather diffident about meeting him, in the circumstances. It was rather a delicate matter.

But the thing had to come out, and it came out. Then there was a surprise. It appeared that Lascelles had not telephoned on Wednesday at all.

This was the climax.

Some fellows rather thought that this was a new aberration, but on comparing notes, it proved that Lascelles had actually been batting in the county match at the very moment that Wingate was taking the call in the prefects' room at Greyfriars. Obviously, therefore, it was impossible that Lascelles could have phoned.

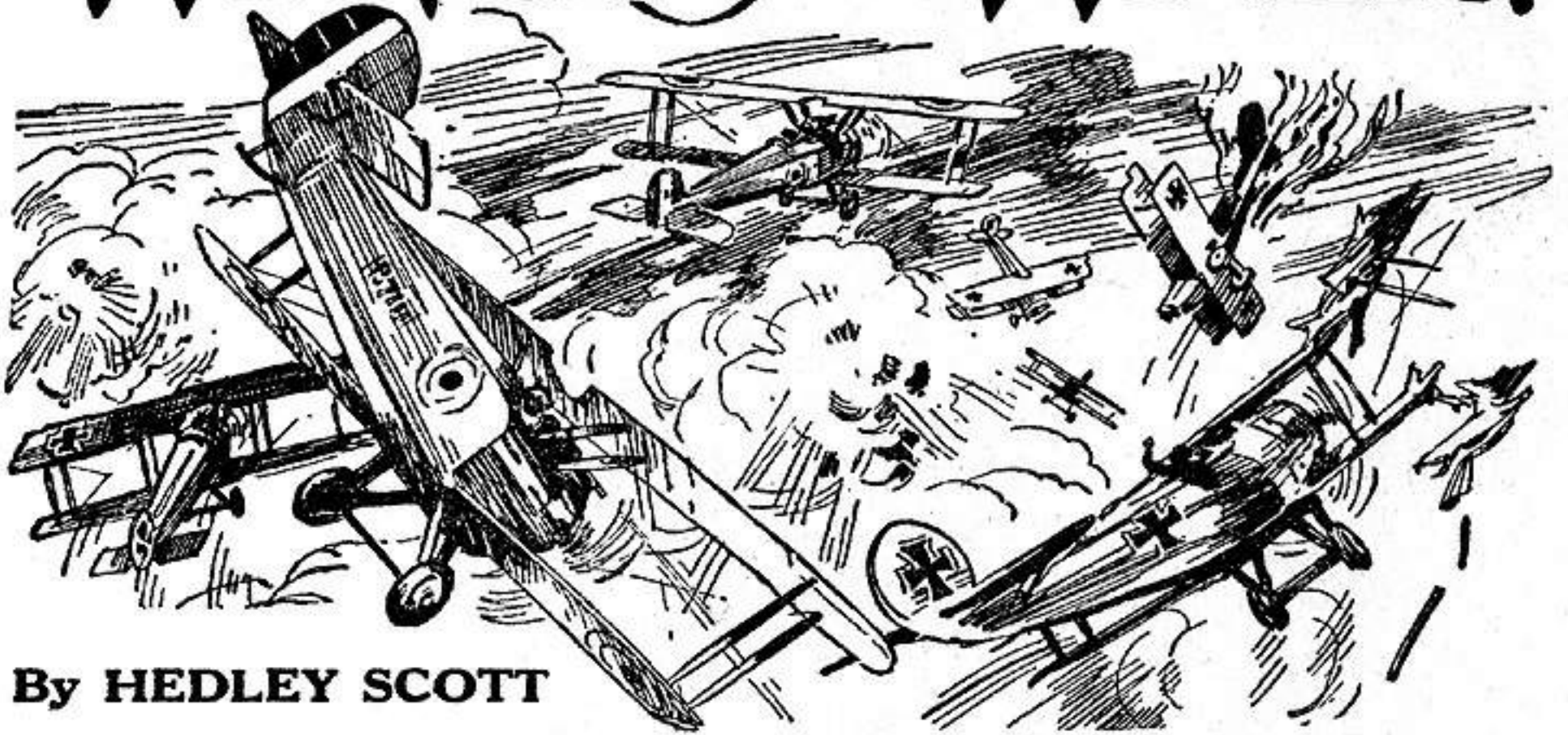
Obviously, some rascally practical

(Continued on page 28.)

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OUR GREAT THRILL-A-MINUTE WAR STORY!

WINGS OF WAR!



By HEDLEY SCOTT

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

MAJOR FERRERS LOCKE—A SECRET SERVICE AGENT—IS PUT IN CHARGE OF 256 SQUADRON, R.F.C., STATIONED "SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE." JIM DANIELS, RON GLYNN, AND BRUCE THORBURN, THREE STAUNCH CHUMS, ARE FLYING OFFICERS. LOCKE'S SUSPICIONS ARE SOON AROUSED BY THE STRANGE CONDUCT OF SERGEANT WILKINS, WHO IS, IN REALITY, "R. ONE," ONE OF THE SMARTEST SPIES IN THE SERVICE OF GERMANY. LATER, LOCKE LEARNS OF WILKINS' DASTARDLY PLOT TO BLOW UP THE SQUADRON. LEAVING THORBURN TO WARN THE MEN, THE MAJOR RUSHES OFF TO INTERCEPT WILKINS, WHO IS AT THAT MOMENT CONNECTING VARIOUS WIRES TO A BATTERY. WITH A CRASHING BLOW LOCKE FELS THE SERGEANT, WHOSE GRIPPING HANDS JAB HARD AT THE SWITCH OF THE BATTERY BOX. NEXT MOMENT THERE IS A DRAFFENING ROAR AS A STICK OF DYNAMITE EXPLODES NEAR BY.

Black Treachery!

INSTINCTIVELY, Locke threw himself down to a prone position. Next second he felt as if he had been placed at the muzzle of a cannon which had exploded. Blinded by dust and flying earth, his eyes scared with the glare of red and yellow flames, he found himself hurtling through space. While the earth rocked and shook about him, he landed again, flat as a pancake, but unhurt.

In one wild gaze he saw that 256 aerodrome, with the exception of one hangar, was still intact. Next he saw the form of R. One, ten yards distant, struggling to an upright position.

Locke struggled to his feet, too, dazed and breathless. In the darkness he saw his quarry break into a run, and, pulling out his remaining energy, Locke gave chase. Ahead of him gleamed a light, which flickered with such regularity that the major told himself it was a signal. He was correct in his surmise, for the flickering light was intended to guide R. One to Pierre Marmot, who waited in an Army Crossley car for his confederate, with engine running.

R. One, equally as dazed as his pursuer, stumbled forward in the direction of the light. Not five yards behind him sped Major Locke. Yard by yard they forged ahead, but the major was gaining.

"All out, R. One literally fell into the waiting car, and with commendable precision Marmot thrust in his gears and accelerated. With a superhuman

effort, Major Locke flung himself forward in an almost blind leap. He landed in the rear of the open touring car—that much he knew. Then something cracked against his skull, and he pitched forward in the oblivion of unconsciousness, his forehead striking hard against the framework of the front seat.

"Good for you!" gasped R. One, in commendation of his confederate's action, for Pierre Marmot—it was he who had smashed home with the business-like end of a spanner. "Full speed!"

The man at the wheel needed no second bidding. He knew something had gone astray with R. One's plans, by reason of that one explosion, of his confederate's flight, and the pursuit of somebody he did not know then as being Major Locke. Also he did not know of the strange thoughts that were working in R. One's mind as every second took him nearer to the waiting Schloss.

The searchlight, operated by Thorburn, flickered across the drome, focused on the crossroad, and steadied on the rapid retreat of the car. But R. One cared nothing about it. He felt safe from pursuit, from that direction, anyway.

But R. One underestimated the resource of 256 Squadron, for even as the car sped off into the night Jim Daniels and Ron Glynn, who had learned something of Sergeant Wilkins' villainy from Thorburn's breathless statement, were bustling out of the trench.

"After the blighter!" gasped Jim. He had a wild idea of nipping into a plane and following the road which the car must take. Dark as it was, by

flying low he would be able to keep track of it. Thorburn yelled after him. Something told him that each hangar would contain a similar charge of high-explosive as had already blown the far hangar sky-high.

Yelling instructions to his fellow-officers to beware, he chased after Jim and Ron as they pelted for the nearest hangar.

But the two pals were yards ahead of Thorburn by this time. Jim leaped into the cockpit of a Bristol, whilst Ron climbed into the back seat. The engine roared into a mighty song, and long before it was safely "warmed" Jim was racing it across the drome for a lightning take-off.

Unknown to either of the youngsters in the Bristol, the undercarriage wheels got caught up with the trailing wire from one of the dynamite sticks. Even as the Bristol hurtled into the air there was an ear-splitting crash, and, for the second time that night, a stick of dynamite reduced to shattering fragments what had once been a perfectly good hangar containing a perfectly good aeroplane. Jim and Ron felt the draught of the explosion, for the plane was lifted a good ten feet in the air. But Jim quickly righted her; and then, hardly aware of the damage his sudden take-off had brought about, he headed the machine for the road along which the car containing R. One had disappeared.

Flying no higher than eighty feet above the ground, he searched the darkness for sign of it. Then he grunted in triumph, for about half a mile ahead

as the crow flies he glimpsed the staccato stabbing of a red exhaust-pipe.

Giving the Bristol full acceleration, he roared in pursuit. But within two minutes he had lost sight of his quarry, for the main road was pitted with branch roads and lanes, along any of which R. One might have gone.

But it was due to R. One's villainy that Jim and Ron caught up with the trail afresh, for by this time the agreed-upon rendezvous had been reached. Blangy meadows—desolate, peaceful under the cloak of darkness—hid the presence of an Albatross two-seater.

The good friend Schloss, punctual to the minute, was waiting. Under cover of night he had droned his way across the lines to the appointed place without any hitch. No one had heard him plane down, with engine shut off, to the Blangy meadows; no one had seen him land. He hoped fervently that R. One would be on time, for this was a nightmarish job that was anything but palatable to the highly strung Schloss. His engine was ticking over gently as he searched the road along which his countryman must come. His keen ears soon detected the approaching motor-car engine, and the good Schloss made ready for an instantaneous take-off.

Dimly through his goggles he saw a burly form rise up out of the front seat of the car as the brakes were jammed on. That would be his friend R. One.

Crack!

The good Schloss was not prepared for what followed next. There was a sudden flash and a loud report of a revolver. Peering through the gloom, Schloss saw the figure at the wheel of the car crumple and fall over the steering-column.

That was Pierre Marmot's reward for his services—a bullet that sped him to an early grave, when his thoughts had been dwelling on a speedy getaway to the Fatherland!

"Ach! Dog!" growled R. One, pocketing his still smoking revolver. "He was a poor fool to think that I would take him with me."

He laughed, and his eyes dwelt gloatingly on the unconscious form of Major Locke sprawled in the back seat of the Crossley.

"A much better passenger to take with me, my poor Marmot—if, indeed, I must take a passenger."

He grunted, stooped, and slung Locke's inert form over his shoulders as if he were a sack of potatoes, and ran for the waiting plane.

"Greetings, Schloss!" he breathed, "Got a passenger with me—valuable one, at that! Can we do it with two aboard in the rear seat?"

"Ja!" grunted Schloss grudgingly. "It will take speed off our journey, but if you say he is valuable—"

His words ended with a shrug, and he immediately accelerated the Albatross and began to move off. In the noise of his own engine he failed to hear the rhythmic note of the British Bristol not very far behind him. Certainly there was no thought of immediate pursuit in his mind as he rocketed into the air and headed the Albatross for the German lines.

But that flash which had accompanied the report of R. One's treacherous action, when he had shot Pierre Marmot, brought Jim and Ron to a useful knowledge of what had happened.

Coursing towards the position of the gun-flash, they had seen the shadowy outlines of the waiting Albatross even as it took off into the air, its red-hot exhaust coming and going in crimson flashes which were unmistakable.

"He's been picked up by a Jerry!" bawled Jim through the telephone.

"Shall we get after him, Ron?" "You bet!" replied Ron. "That blighter Wilkins is not going to get away with it, Jim!"

Missing!

EVEN as the notes of the departing Albatross containing Pilot-Officer Schloss and the treacherous R. One died away into the night a huddled figure at the wheel of the car close to Blangy meadows stirred and groaned.

Pierre Marmot was not dead, though his minutes of life could be numbered on the fingers of one hand. Bitterly did he curse his folly for having worked for the Fatherland; still more bitterly did he curse the treacherous companion who had shot him in cold blood.

With superhuman effort the mortally wounded spy dragged himself upright. His reeling senses suggested to him that he should make his presence known to someone; those same senses eventually drew his hand to the Klaxon horn of the car. With nerveless fingers he pressed the switch, making the night air hideous with a penetrating, jarring noise which would rouse anyone within

HOW'S THIS FOR A CLEVER GREYFRIARS LIMERICK, CHUM?

Cecil Temple, in new suit so gay,
Was strutting through Courtfield
one day
When he stepped on some peel
With an unwary heel
"Since you press," said the peel,
"I'll give way!"

A pocket wallet has been forwarded to: A. Coveney, of 29, Mayhill Road, Charlton, S.E.7, for the above winning effort.

call—for a quarter of a mile radius, at least. The stricken spy's insistent efforts met with reward at last.

Along the winding ribbon of road came the staccato hum of a motor-bike engine. A screened headlight picked out the shape of the stationary car, and a few moments later a youngster, covered in dust and looking a picture of anxiety, jumped from the saddle of the bike and hastened towards the car. From a right-hand pocket he produced a torch. As its bright beam cut the darkness and focused on that huddled figure at the wheel a gasp of amazement left the lips of the youngster.

"Marmot—Pierre Marmot!"

The dying estaminet keeper looked up at the youngster through dimmed eyes, but they quickened with unnatural light as he recognised the dishevelled figure of Lieutenant Thorburn—the major's companion, whom he had left to drown in the underground cellar.

Thorburn's face was strained and stern, for the exciting events of the last hour had left ample traces upon him. Where was Major Locke? He had asked himself the question a score of times. Where were Jim and Ron?

It was barely a quarter of an hour since his two chums had parted from him in that wild dash for the Bristol—fifteen minutes of ghastliness. The trailing wire of the stick of dynamite which they had fouled in their hurried take-off had led directly to a hangar which

sheltered a brand-new Bristol Fighter plane. That plane and the camouflaged hangar had been scattered to all points of the aerodrome in fragments of flying metal and torn woodwork. Only by flinging himself flat on the ground and digging his toes and hands into the soft soil had Thorburn escaped serious injury, for he had been within five yards of that deadly stick of explosive. As it was a stream of crimson now spurting from a flesh wound in his forehead, which told that he had not escaped entirely. Thorburn had paid scant heed to that, however; there were three men caught up in that devastating explosion who were in more need of assistance than he if they were to cheat the grim reaper.

Quickly Thorburn had summoned Captain Wilterton, the second in command, and offered his advice. Each hangar ought to be examined carefully for hidden sticks of dynamite. The search should be carried out by one man at a time, in order to save unnecessary loss of life. And the searcher should tread warily and light up every step he took with the aid of a powerful torch. It was well that Captain Wilterton had acted on the youngster's advice, for in each hangar was found a stick of dynamite and the inevitable trail of wire. The search eventually led the trail to the battery-box over which Major Locke had caught Sergeant Wilkins, alias R. One.

Each stick of dynamite was treated with great respect, and the immediate danger of 256 Squadron being blown to atoms was thus averted. Yet of Major Locke there was no sign.

Thorburn thereafter had wasted no time. He had helped himself to a motor-bike and set out blindly, calling and looking for the major. Then it was that Pierre Marmot's dying efforts drew his attention to the region of Blangy meadows.

"Monsieur," began Pierre Marmot weakly, "a drink—I crave a drink—"

The outburst of anger and rage that trembled on Thorburn's lips at coming face to face with the traitorous estaminet keeper faded, for a glance at the white-faced man huddled over the steering-wheel told him plainly enough that Marmot was badly wounded.

Thorburn clapped his hands to his pockets, wondering whether his small flask which he sometimes carried was there. Pierre Marmot, breathing stertorously, watched him and shook his head.

"Monsieur," he muttered, "do not trouble. This is the end."

He reached out and stretched a scraggy hand on the youngster's arm.

"R. One—the pig-dog! The thrice-accursed son of Satan shot me—"

A fit of coughing racked his frame, and Thorburn gave him what support he could.

"R. One!" Pierre Marmot was talking again, albeit faintly—so faintly that Thorburn had to bend his head to catch what was said. "He is your Sergeant Wilkins. R. One—Captain von Wolfen, of the Imperial Secret Service—"

Thorburn nodded.

"He shot me in cold blood—left me to die." A quivering finger pointed into the darkness where Schloss and the Albatross had waited. "He flies back—back to the Fatherland."

"And Major Locke?" Thorburn put the question anxiously.

"Gone—gone with the pig-dog in the plane."

Thorburn started. What devilish

business did this mean? Sergeant Wilkins returning to the Fatherland with Major Ferrers Locke as his prisoner?

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Speak—speak up, man!"

But Pierre Marmot's head sank lower, and no further words came.

Thorburn recoiled as he realised that the estaminet keeper was beyond mortal aid. Picking up a loose rug which lay to hand in the back of the car, he covered that grim, still figure and trod quietly away. His steps took him in the direction of the spot Marmot had indicated when he had referred to the plane that had taken R. One back to his own country. Flashing his pocket-torch around, Thorburn was able easily enough to read the trail of the under-carriage wheels that the Albatross had left in the soft, spongy earth. The double track was clearly defined and deep—so deep as to bear out what Pierre Marmot had said. Major Ferrers Locke was even now accompanying R. One to Germany.

While Thorburn gazed at the tell-tale wheel-marks his thoughts were switching to Ron and Jim. Where were they? Had they picked up the Albatross? And were they attempting to follow it and bring it down? Were they alive?

Question upon question raced wildly through Thorburn's brain, but he could not satisfy himself as to the probable correctness of any answer. His ears, now thoroughly attuned to catch the slightest sounds, did not pick up the familiar throb of the Bristolplane.

With something like a feeling of despair gnawing at his heart, Thorburn retraced his steps. Once astride the motor-cycle again, he roared, under full throttle, for the aerodrome.

The officers were talking in excited groups in the mess when Thorburn appeared in their midst. Captain Wilterton looked pale and drawn. He was hardly yet aware of the full extent of that night's work, for beyond Ron and Jim—who were now absent—the treachery of Sergeant Wilkins was unknown.

When Thorburn was called upon by the temporary commanding officer to give a full account of what he knew, 256 Squadron listened to one of the most

amazing stories of the Great War, and it said much for the consummate acting of the notorious R. One that many of Thorburn's listeners believed Sergeant Wilkins to be a very much maligned person. Further investigation, however, satisfied the most sceptical member of 256 Squadron; for, of course, Sergeant Wilkins was missing.

So, too, were Ron Glynn and Jim Daniels; so, too, was Major Ferrers Locke, D.S.O.

There was little sleep for 256 Squadron that night. The whole camp seemed to be in a turmoil, with "Brass hats"

ANOTHER POCKET WALLET WON!

Here's another clever Greysfriars limerick for which Leonard Edwards, of 69, Stryt Issa, Pen-y-cae, near Wrexham, has been awarded a useful leather pocket wallet.

Horace Coker once went to Marseilles,
Where he wanted a fish without scales,
He was given a book
And a line and a hook
And a jam-jar to go and catch whales!

Now, what about it, you other fellows? Fill in your odd moments writing Greysfriars limericks and win these prizes.

coming and going on rounds of inspection, and the squadron office telephone bell ringing at frequent intervals.

It was four o'clock in the morning before the chaos was straightened out, and tired young flying officers found solace in sleep. But one member, at least, of the celebrated squadron courted sleep in vain.

Thorburn was thinking of Ron and Jim and Major Locke. What had happened to them all?

(Look out for further thrilling chapters of this popular flying story in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET.)

COKER'S CRICKET CRAZE!

(Continued from page 25.)

joker, with a strange gift for imitating voices, had deluded Wingate on the phone—nearly, but fortunately not quite—with disastrous results.

Mr. Lascelles was not, perhaps, pleased or flattered, when he learned why that telephone message had been disregarded.

Still he was glad that it had been disregarded.

The unknown practical joker had not got away with it.

The First Eleven men were very anxious to discover who that mysterious joker was. But they never did.

In that respect, however, Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove were more fortunate than the First Eleven men. They happened to know a young rascal who had a weird gift for imitating voices. They happened to know that that young rascal had played a similar trick a week or two ago in connection with a Remove match. They did not give Bunter away. But they dealt with him faithfully with their own hands. Billy Bunter denied most emphatically knowing anything about it. That was taken as conclusive proof that he had done it. And the ragging that was administered to the fat Owl of the Remove was a record in raggings.

Bunter had only one consolation, and even that did not last. Having played up to Coker, it was, Bunter considered, up to Coker to stand by that compact about the spreads in the study. But, alas! for Bunter. He found quite a changed Coker in Horace's study when he rolled in. There was no feed. There was a lives bat! And the last state of William George Bunter was worse than his first. Which was exactly what Billy Bunter deserved.

THE END.

(Next week's issue of the MAGNET will be an extra-special one. It will contain a topping yarn of Greysfriars, entitled: "THE SECRET OF THE PRIORY!" and a BIG BONUS COUPON VALUE 250 points to swell your collection. Order your copy early and be on the safe side.)

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FISHING IS MY NEW HOBBY!

I wish it to be clearly understood that I shall not spare the "rod" and that I shall distribute plenty of "lines."
(Signed) H. S. QUELCH,
Form master.

Dr. BIRCHEMALL'S TUCK HAMPER

By DICKY NUGENT

(Author's Note: You can laugh as you like over this yarn, but don't criticise the spelling—it's all done to sitting with a crock tub.—Richard Nugent.)

Dr. Birchmull, the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's, galloped along. Masters' passage, washing cheerfully. Arriving at the end, he kicked open the door of Mr. Lichham's study.

"Good afternoon, Lichham!" he said as he trotted in. "Pray don't ruse, my good fellow! I have a plezant scribble for you!"

"Indeed, sir!" grinned Mr. Lichham, resuming his seat. "Has some unknown admirer of mine dyed and left me in his will? Or have you decided to pay up my arrears of salary?"

"Wither, my dear Lichham! But I won't keep you guessing. The fact is, I have decided to honour you by inviting myself to tea!"



Greyfriars Herald

LAUGH AND GROW FAT.

May 28th, 1932.

Edited by HARRY WHARTON, F.C.R.

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SIR HILTON POPPER STAGGERED

NO LONGER THINKS GREYFRIARS JUNIORS LAZY

both for not having it!" grinned the Head. "You will each take fifty lines for being greedy!"

"But surely, sir, you won't descend to tuck-reading in the boys' studies?" cried Mr. Lichham, agast.

"Certainly not! I shall assign to it, as the studies are on the next floor!" retorted Dr. Birchmull, with a grin.

"But you're doing it yourself!" exclaimed Tubby Barrall.

"Mmmmmmmmm!" he said, his mouth filled with unmeasured pastry.

Sir Hilton Popper, who recently caused a sensation by describing Greyfriars juniors as "lazy and ill-mannered," has completely changed his opinion.

This gratifying state of affairs (Continued from previous col.)

confiscated it for my own purposes!" said the Head, sharply.

"Call your Form-bellows immediately and dish out the merry tuck!"

"But, sir—" thurdered the Head.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Jack Jolly.

"Working hard?" Sir Hilton asked. Vernon-Smith and his colleagues paused for a moment to touch the ground with their foreheads.

"Yes, sir. We love hard work!" Vernon-Smith replied.

"Hah! Carry on. I have nothing more to say," Sir Hilton smiled.

"Rolling the lawn, I see?" he remarked a little later to another group.

The juniors paused to make a respectful obeisance, then resumed their labours.

"I doesn't need it, sir," Bob Cherry explained. "But we feel we simply must work!"



"I can only conclude that I was mistaken. I withdrew everything I previously said."

"There's only one thing: we hope Sir Hilton won't walk in on another occasion without giving us previous warning. This Hard Work and Politeness bizny takes quite a lot of organising, you know!"

PULLING PONSONBY'S LEG

HIGHCLIFFE LEADER ARRESTED

Following a scrap in Friarclade Lane between Ponsonby of Highcliffe and Wharton of the Remove, a startling incident occurred in Courtyard High Street.

Pon, who had got considerably the worst of the encounter, was tearing down the High Street on his motor-bike at about forty when he happened to spot Wharton standing by the doorway of an outfitter's shop.

The Highcliffe leader, deciding that as Wharton had his back half-turned to him the time was propitious for an attack, jammed on his brakes and jumped off the bike.

Stopping only to rest the machine against the kerb, he made a rush for the outfitter's shop and took a flying kick at the figure in the doorway.

People always do speak hoarsely in such circumstances. "Know any more funny stories?" asked the officer, apparently sceptical.

"Name and address, please!" "I—I'm innocent—I swear I am!" moaned Pon.

THE MAGNET—EVERY SATURDAY