

MEET HORACE COKER—GREYFRIARS PRIZE CHUMP—IN "FOOL'S LUCK!" Inside

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*

STUDY N°1

All Rotten Phunks





**THIS WEEK BY
HORACE HACKER, B.A.,
Master of the Shell Form, and
THE EDITOR.**

IT was with some misgivings that I approached Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, with a request to write us a page of copy.

Mr. Hacker is a learned and capable master, but he is afflicted with a liver which makes him rather short-tempered. My misgivings would seem to be justified by the reply he sent to my letter.

Greyfriars School,
Kent.

Dear Sir,—I regret I have neither the time nor the inclination to accede to your request.

Yours faithfully,
HORACE HACKER.

Which ought to have settled the matter. But there was something about the tone of his letter which stirred my wrath. It was a most snappish and uncivil reply, and I vowed I would get some copy from him if it were the last thing I did. So I wrote as follows:

Dear Mr. Hacker.—When I first arranged for the feature called "My Own Page," I found everyone at Greyfriars most helpful. To my great pleasure, even Dr. Locke, the headmaster, expressed himself willing to write a page of reminiscences when called upon. Surely, therefore, you will think it no indignity to follow the headmaster's example and comply with what some people have thought an honour.

May I look forward to the pleasure of your assistance?

Yours faithfully,
THE EDITOR.

You will agree that this was a polite and even unctuous letter. I had decided to drop a little of the sweet oil of flattery on Hacker's liver, just to see the effect. I duly saw it. He was quite oil-proof. Here is his reply.

Dear Sir,—The views of Dr. Locke will always command the respect and attention of his staff, but it does not follow that those views are necessarily right. It has sometimes been my misfortune to disagree with them. I do so again.

I repeat that I have no desire whatever to be "honoured" by your journal, especially as the "honour" is accompanied by an impudent caricature drawn by a Lower School boy.

Yours faithfully,
HORACE HACKER.

Consumed with wrath, I grabbed a pen and wrote again to this human snapping-turtle.

Dear Mr. Hacker.—It is not my custom to publish anything which would give offence to responsible persons. I have already made it clear to Skinner that his cartoons of Greyfriars masters must not be ill-natured or ridiculous, or I should refuse to publish them. The case of a boy is different, as he loses no prestige by being cartooned. The matter can safely be left to my own discretion. Even an Editor may have a little wisdom.

May I press you to reconsider your decision?

Yours faithfully,
THE EDITOR.

This brought me the following love-letter:

by this, but I was merely made stubborn. I could see now why Hacker was nicknamed the Acid Drop, and I vowed that his acid shouldn't finish ME. I meant to have that copy now if I had to stand over him with a life-preserver and force him to write.

So I put on my hat, called for my car, and in two hours was kicking up the dust of Friardale Lane. I arrived at the school about tea-time. Gosling was very polite, but I had no money to waste on menials, so he soon grew crusty again.

"Which is Mr. Hacker's study?" I inquired.

Gosling merely jerked his thumb and went back to his lodge.

I went in the direction of the jerk and found Hacker at tea. He raised his eyebrows when I entered, but lowered them into a frown when he found who I was.

"Really, sir—" he began stiffly.

"Mr. Hacker," I interrupted heatedly, "I have come down here, at great inconvenience to myself, to ask whether your objection to writing for me is due to a dislike of me personally, or of my paper, or of my readers, or of your own powers of composition? And I may mention," I added, with a swift side glance at Hacker's loaded table, "that I have not yet had my tea."

"In that case," said Hacker, "I recommend you to have it at once. Pray don't let me detain you."

"Thank you very much," I said, drawing a chair to the table and pouring myself out a cup of tea.

Hacker sprang to his feet.

"I must ask you, sir—really, now, as a personal matter—to leave my study."

"I must wait until you promise to write me an article for my paper. That's what I'm here for."

"Then you have had a wasted journey, sir!" rapped Hacker, making a sudden grab at an oatcake I was trying to reach. "Nothing will induce me to commit any such foolery, and the sooner you realise that, the better. Now, sir, will you go?"

Dear Sir,—I am a busy man, and have no time to indulge in a correspondence which is both useless and irritating. I would therefore point out that an Editor is not the only one whose decision is final. My decision is the same.

May I hope that you will endeavour to assimilate this fact and cease a correspondence which must be irksome to us both?

Yours faithfully,
HORACE HACKER.

Some men would have been choked off

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"I will," I replied sternly. "I will go elsewhere for my article."

"Excellent!"
"But," I added sternly, "if I can't have a page written BY you, I'll have one written ABOUT you! I shall now go and ask a few selected boys and masters to write me some short articles on the subject of Horace Hacker. They should be most entertaining, I think."

"Stop!" cried Hacker, as I opened the door. "I forbid you to do any such thing."

"I'm sorry, but my decision is final. Can you direct me to the Shell studies?"

"This is monstrous!" fumed Hacker. "Wait, sir, wait! Since you insist, I



No great artist was lost when I became an Editor; but here's my impression of tea with Hacker.

will write the page of copy for you. I will send it by post."

"Splendid!" I chuckled. "I shall need about a thousand words. Write anything you like, and I am sure you will enjoy writing it as much as we shall enjoy reading it."

"I think that probable," agreed Hacker sourly, as I pinched the last scone and went. Alas! My jubilation was short lived. Two days later I had a bulky envelope from Greyfriars. Inside I found:

**A TREATISE ON THE ORATIO OBLIQUA
OF THE LATIN TONGUE,
by
HORACE HACKER.**

"The transposition of the subjunctive for the infinitive mood in all oratio obliqua subordinate clauses has been a frequent source of confusion to Latin scholars—"

(And so on, for 1,000 words.)
Well, I must admit that Hacker had scored. He knew jolly well I shouldn't print that dry rot. But I had my little "come-back" at the finish, for I sent the MS. back to him with a printed slip:

"The Editor regrets he is unable to use the enclosed, which is not quite up to the standard demanded by this paper."

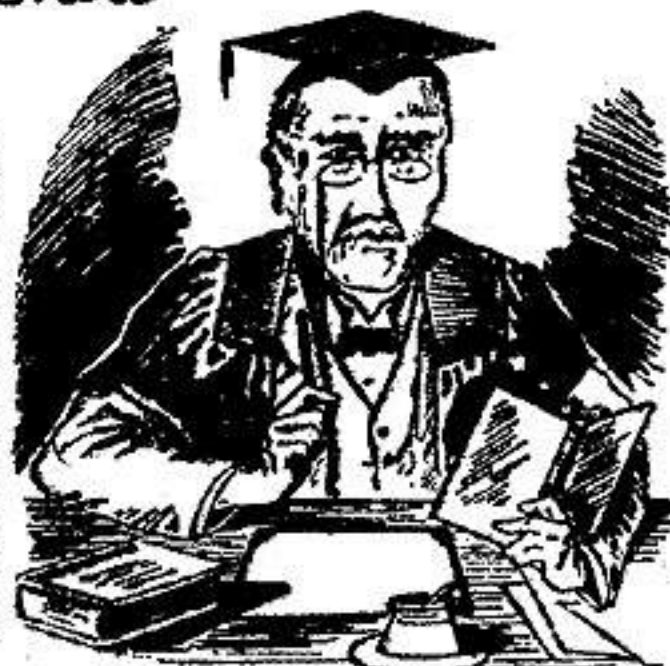
Let him pick the bones out of that, eh!
Yours cheerily,
THE EDITOR.

Horace Hacker

HORACE HACKER B.A.

Master of the Shell

The master of the Shell has the well-earned reputation of being "a blister." He is nicknamed the Acid Drop from his sour and sarcastic remarks. Mr. Hacker is, in fact, troubled with a red-hot liver, which makes him frequently snappish, ill-tempered, and cutting. Moreover, he wears rubber-soled shoes and moves about so quietly that he is sometimes suspected of eavesdropping. This is not true, however; Hacker is not sly or stealthy. His chief trouble is a sour view of life which makes him always believe the worst. Apart from his temper, he is a very capable master and has a wide knowledge of the classics.

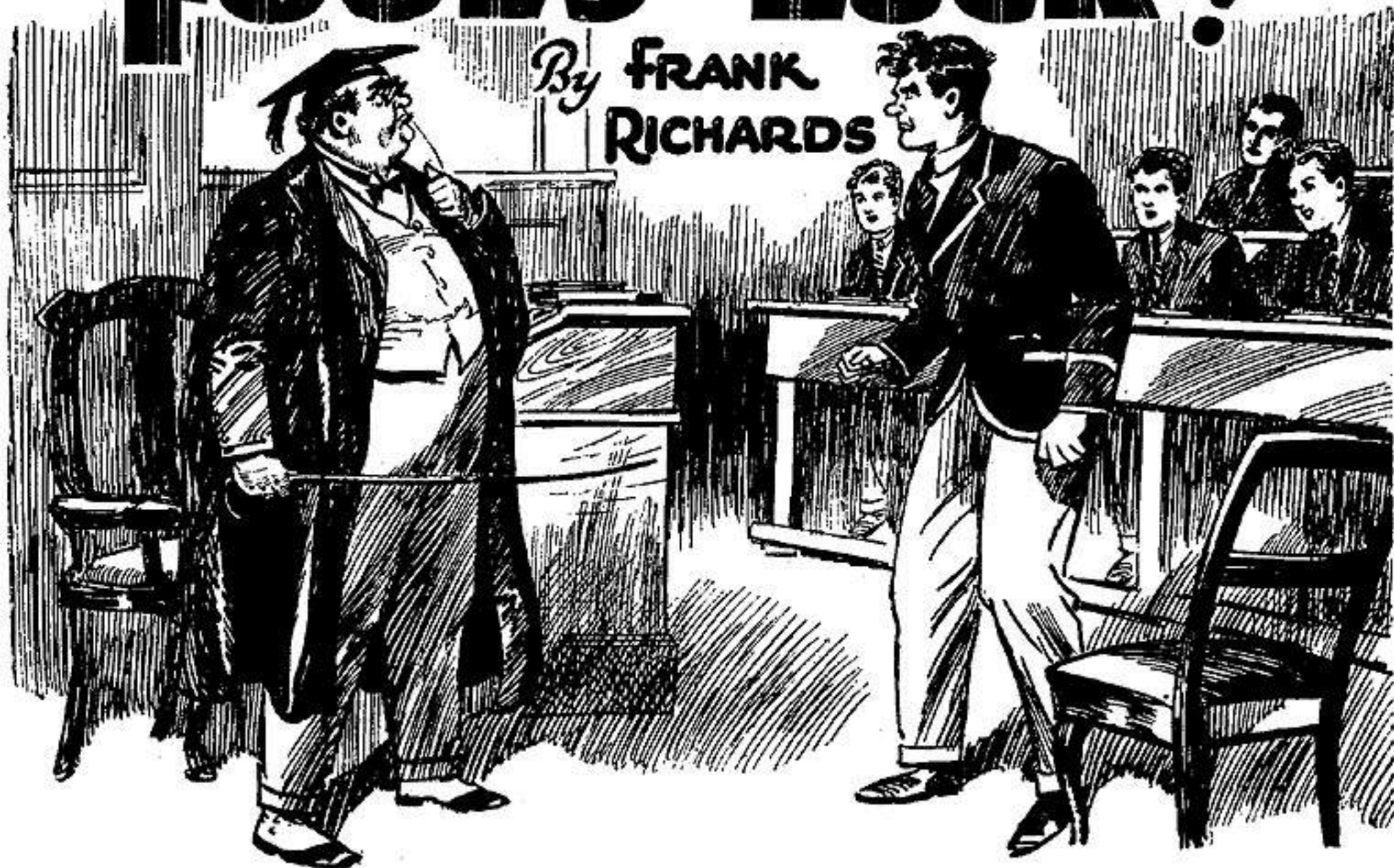


(Cartoon by HAROLD SKINNER.)

TIT FOR TAT! Made to "bend over" and take "six" before all the fellows like a rag in the Third Form! To Horace Coker it is an ignominious insult that has to be avenged. And avenge it, the great Horace determines to do!

FOOL'S LUCK!

By FRANK RICHARDS



"Understand me, Coker," said Mr. Prout, "you have been guilty of insubordination. Do you wish to be caned or expelled? Take your choice!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Blow Prout!

"HERE you are!" said Coker of the Fifth.

Coker's friends, Potter and Greene, looked dubious.

Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove, looked warlike.

Lantham Junction, on the first day of term, was rather crowded. Greyfriars fellows were going up and down the train, looking for seats. Nobody wanted to wait for the second train.

It was a case of first come, first served. Later comers had to wait. Coker of the Fifth was a late-comer. But he had spotted three empty seats, so Coker halted at that carriage door.

Three Remove fellows stood at that carriage door—Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Bob Cherry.

Inside the carriage were the two other members of the Famous Five—Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. With them was Billy Bunter. Also there were Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, Peter Todd, and Tom Dutton—some of them sitting, some of them standing. The carriage was rather full.

But three seats undoubtedly were unoccupied. On those three seats fell the eagle eye of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form.

True, each of them had some article placed on it, to show that it was already taken. The seats, in fact, belonged to the three juniors standing outside the door. But Coker of the Fifth did not heed such trifles as that.

He passed them by like the idle wind which he regarded not. Coker wanted three seats—for self and friends. He was going to have them.

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So Coker halted, and Potter and Greene, rather dubiously, halted, too. All three Fifth Form men agreed that a mob of juniors should have made way for Fifth Form seniors. But Potter and Greene doubted whether they would.

"Sorry; seats taken, Coker," said Harry Wharton politely. "Better go farther up the train."

Coker gave the captain of the Remove a stare.

"What do you mean, you cheeky young ass?" he inquired, not at all politely. "There's three empty seats."

"Ours!" explained Frank Nugent.

Rousing Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, with Horace Coker, the chump of the Fifth, taking the leading role.

"You're not sitting in them," pointed out Coker.

"Observant chap, Coker," remarked Bob Cherry. "He's spotted at a glance that we're not sitting in them. Coker ought to be a detective."

"I don't want any cheek!" said Horace Coker. "I want those seats! Are you fags getting out of the way, or are you waiting to be barged out?"

"I say, you fellows!" came a fat squeak from Billy Bunter within. "Don't let Coker butt in here! We're

too crowded already. There ain't room for Bob's feet as it is."

"Coker's not getting in," remarked Vernon-Smith. "If he does, he will go out again pretty quick."

"The quickfulness will be terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent bunched at the doorway—packing their goal, as it were. Evidently they were prepared to resist invasion. Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh stood just within the carriage, prepared to give them vigorous support. All the other fellows were ready to lend them a hand. It really looked as if Coker of the Fifth would find some difficulty in bagging those three seats, for self and friends.

But difficulties were only made to be overcome. Coker was the man to overcome them. He was, at least, the man to do his best. As for passing farther along the train, because these cheeky fags claimed the seats, that was hardly good enough for Coker of the Fifth. Coker had a short way with fags.

"Come on, Potter! Come on, Greene!" said Coker briskly. "The train will be starting in a minute or two. If those fags don't shift, shift them!"

"Go it!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Get on with the shifting! There will be quite a lot wanted."

Potter of the Fifth grabbed Coker by an elbow as he was advancing.

Coker shook him off, and stared round at him irritably.

"Look here, come along the train!" said Potter. "Those seats are taken—you can see they've got bags and things on them—"

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"Don't be an ass, Potter!"
 "Can't bag the seats when they're taken, old chap!" urged Greene. "Do come along, before every other blessed seat on the train is bagged."
 "Don't be a dummy, Greene!"
 "Look here!" hooted Potter and Greene together.
 Potter and Greene wanted seats, but they did not want a battle-royal with a mob of Removites.
 "Don't jaw!" said Coker.
 "Prout's in this train," said Potter.
 "Don't let Prout spot you in a shindy the first day of term, Coker, old man."
 "Who cares for Prout?" asked Coker calmly.

As Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth, was Coker's Form-master, Horace might have been expected to care a little. Apparently he didn't. Potter and Greene did.

"We're taking those three seats," said Coker. "Come on! I suppose we haven't come back this term to be cheeked by a parcel of fags! We'll shift those cheeky young sweeps fast enough! Come on!"

And the big and burly Horace advanced to the attack.

Potter and Greene, however, did not advance. They stepped back and looked on, doubtless waiting to pick up what was left of Coker after he had finished shifting the Remove follows.

Coker barged at the three at the doorway.

Coker was big, he was burly, he was muscular, and he was heavy. A charge from Coker was rather like a charge from a bull. Wharton, Nugent, and Bob stood up to it, and grasped Coker; but all three of them went staggering, holding on to Coker as they staggered.

"By gum!" gasped Coker.
 Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh jumped out. Two more pairs of hands grasped Horace.

Big and burly and muscular as he was, Horace had no chance in the grasp of the whole Co. The Famous Five whirled him over, and hurled him away—and Coker smote the platform with a mighty smite.

Bump!
 "Oh!" gasped Coker.

He sprawled on his back. His hat flew off, and Bob Cherry neatly caught it with his toe, and sent it spinning up the platform. It dropped in a group of Fourth Form fellows, who proceeded to play Soccer with it.

But Coker had no leisure to worry about his hat. On his back, in a winded state, Coker gasped and gurgled for breath. He sat up still gasping and gurgling.

The Famous Five, smiling, packed their goal again. Five fellows grinned from the carriage behind them. Fellows on the platform gathered round to look on. Nobody was surprised to see Coker in a shindy on the first day of term. Coker of the Fifth was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Coker was often in a shindy. He was, indeed, seldom out of a shindy of some sort.

From a distance a portly figure came rolling—that of Prout, master of the Fifth.

Prout had spotted the shindy from a distance, and was rolling up.

Coker gasped; Coker gurgled; he staggered to his feet. His hat was gone, his tie streamed out, his collar hung by one stud. His face was crimson. Dusty, dishevelled, and dilapidated, Coker was still full of beans. Evidently he was going to carry on.

"Back me up!" he gasped. "Potter—Greene—"

"For goodness' sake, chuck it, Coker!" exclaimed Potter, who had spotted the portly figure in the offing.

"Prout—"

"Blow Prout!" roared Coker.

"Coker—" gasped Greene, in horror. "Prout—"

"Don't talk to me about Prout! Lend me a hand to shift those fags!" roared Coker. "Prout can go and eat coke! Blow Prout! Blow—"

"Coker!"

"Oh!" gasped Coker.
 Sudden silence fell.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Coker Carries On!

MR. PROUT gazed at Coker of his Form.

Coker gazed at Mr. Prout. Prout's plump face was almost purple. Not only did he behold a member of his Form—a senior Form—looking like a hooligan after a row on a Saturday night. That was bad enough. But, as Shakespeare has remarked, thus bad begins, but worse remains behind. He had heard Coker say "Blow Prout!"

Probably it had never occurred to Mr. Prout before that any member of his Form could or would venture to blow him. He was not, at all events, to be blown with impunity.

"Coker!" said Mr. Prout, in a deep voice. "Coker! I heard your words, Coker! I heard your disrespectful words!"

"Oh!" gasped Coker again.

A few minutes ago Coker had asked who cared for Prout. Now it dawned on him that he, Horace James Coker, did. Prout, after all, was his beak. Coker did not think much of him as a beak. Still, beaks were beaks, and Coker had to realise it.

"I find you," said Prout, "engaged in a scuffle—a disgraceful scuffle in a public place—on the first day of term, Coker! I find you endeavouring to force a way into a carriage already full—more than full! And I hear you allude to your Form-master in terms of utter disrespect."

"I never saw you, sir—" gasped Coker.

"That makes no difference—"

"I—I mean, I never knew you were listening—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—" stammered the unfortunate Coker, realising that he was making matters worse, "I—I—I mean—"

"Enough!" said Prout. "I shall deal with you, Coker, when we reach Greyfriars. I shall deal with you severely. Now go to the waiting-room and make yourself tidy! I will not allow any boy of my Form to travel in that disgracefully untidy state! You are not to travel by this train, Coker!"

"I—"

"You are a disgrace to your Form, Coker, and a disgrace to your school! Say no more!"

Prout revolved on his axis and rolled majestically away.

Coker stood blinking after him. Coker was dismayed. Coker was always ready for a row; but even Coker did not really want to begin the new term with a row with his Form-master. But he was more exasperated than dismayed.

"Isn't that just like Prout?" he said bitterly. "You fellows can see that he's going to make out that I'm to blame. He always does."

"And you're not?" gasped Potter.
 "Don't be a silly ass, Potter!"

"Oh dear! Come away, old man, and put yourself to rights! I'll give you a brush down."

Coker did not stir. He stood where he was, watching the portly figure of Prout fading out of the picture.

Prout stepped into a carriage and disappeared. Prout, of course, had no spot of doubt that his commands to Coker would be immediately obeyed. He did not quite know his Coker!

Prout sat in his carriage, snorted, and opened a newspaper, and dismissed Coker, at present, from his mind. And Coker, having seen him safely out of sight, dismissed Prout from mind!

"That old ass is safe now!" said Coker, Prout having done the vanishing act. "Now come on, you fellows."

Potter and Greene fairly goggled at him. Well as they knew old Horace, they had not expected him to carry on—not after that scene with Prout! But Coker, it seemed, was going to carry on—he had only waited for Prout to get out of the offing before he carried on!

"Stop—" gasped Potter.

"Chuck it!" gasped Greene. "Prout may look out—"

"We're going in this carriage!" said Coker. "I think I've said so already. Come on."

"But Prout—"

"Blow Prout!"

"If he looks out of the window—" shrieked Greene.

Coker did not wait for Greene to finish! He had recovered his wind by this time! Prout had said that he was not to travel by that train! Coker, on the other hand, had said that he was going to bag those seats—and what Coker had said, he had said.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Is that mad ass mad enough—"

"Coker, you idiot—" exclaimed Nugent.

The Famous Five were quite ready to handle Coker. They were ready to handle him as long and as often as he wanted to be handled. But they were alarmed for Coker! A fellow could not—he simply could not—directly disobey an order given by his beak! Coker seemed to fancy that he could—but really and truly he couldn't!

But whether Coker could or not, he was going to! He charged, and the next moment he was mixed up with the Famous Five again.

Coker, no doubt, expected to go through those juniors like a knife through cheese, and barge into the carriage. There he would be unseen by Prout, if Prout looked out of the window. Even Coker did not want Prout to spot him carrying on with that shindy.

But Coker did not go through Harry Wharton & Co. like a knife through cheese. Far from it! He rolled over headlong in the grasp of their hands, and bumped on the platform again. Potter and Greene gazed on, in horror—in momentary dread of seeing Prout's portly face projected from a window up the train.

"Urrgh!" gurgled Coker, as he bumped. He struggled wildly. "You cheeky young sweeps, I'll smash you! I'll—gurrh!"

"Will you chuck it, you gibbering goat!" panted Harry Wharton. "If Prout sees you—"

"I'll spifficate you!"

"If Prout—" howled Bob Cherry.

"I'll pulverise you!"

Coker was deaf to reason! He struggled, wrenched, and roared. But if Coker was blind to his danger, the



"Back me up!" gasped Coker. "Potter—Greene——" Dusty, dishevelled and dilapidated, Coker was full of beans. "For goodness' sake, chuck it, Coker!" exclaimed Potter. "Here comes Prout!" "Prout can go and eat coke!" roared Coker. "COKER!" "Oh!" gasped the Fifth Former.

Famous Five were rather more concerned for him than he was for himself! Coker was a goat, an ass, an obstreperous and high-handed fathead, but they did not want him to land in fearful trouble with his beak.

"Let him get in!" gasped Harry. "The blithering idiot's asking for the sack! Let him get in!" "Look here——" bawled Johnny Bull.

"If Prout looks out——"
"Oh! All right!"

The Famous Five yielded the point. They relaxed their grasp on Coker, and Coker, barging through, landed in the carriage.

He landed on all fours, sprawling and spluttering. But he was in the carriage. He sprawled among many legs, and gurgled.

"Look here, shove that bargee out!" shouted Vernon-Smith.

"It's all right, Smithy—let him rip! Get in, you fellows, the train will be off in a minute!"

Coker scrambled up! He had gained his point! He was far from realising that the chums of the Remove had let him gain it, to keep him clear of a row with his Form-master. Coker was, he fancied, victor.

"Keep out of this, you cheeky fags!" gasped Coker. "No room for you here!"

"What?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Keep out! Here, Potter—here, Greene—why the thump don't you get in and bag your seats?" hooted Coker.

That was really too much! The Famous Five had let Coker into a crowded carriage, to keep him out of a row with Prout! But that was the limit! They had no more patience to waste on Coker. They grasped him, and the other fellows grasped him, even Billy Bunter lending a fat paw, and

Coker went down on the floor of the carriage, crashing.

Harry Wharton closed the door.

Coker made a frantic effort to rise. Bob Cherry planted an extensive foot on his waistcoat, and pinned him down. Nugent and Hurree Singh stood on his legs. And the train rolled out of Lantham, with Horace Coker in that extremely uncomfortable position.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Taking Care Of Coker!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. sat down.

They rested their feet on Coker.

Coker, sprawling at full length, filled most of the available space between the seats. Feet had to rest on something, and old Horace came in handy as a foot-rest. Besides, he was so wildly excited and so fearfully keen on carrying on hostilities that he had to be kept pinned.

There were ten fellows in that carriage beside Coker. It was rather a squeeze for so many. Billy Bunter complained loudly that he was being squashed. Smithy suggested that Bob Cherry should hang his feet out of the window, and thus double the available space. But Bob's feet remained at rest on Coker's waistcoat. Eighteen other feet rested somewhere or other on Coker. Little more than his face was to be seen—crimson with fury.

"If you cheeky fags don't lemme gerrup——" came Coker's suffocated voice.

"Shut up, Coker!"

"I'll smash the lot of you!"

Coker heaved! He heaved like the stormy ocean! Twenty feet squashed him down again, and he gurgled.

"You howling ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Shut up and keep quiet!" "I'll spifficate you!"

"That's how Coker says 'thank you for a good turn!'" remarked Bob Cherry. "If Prout knew that he was on this train, after what he said, he would go off at the deep end."

"Mind he doesn't spot you getting out at Courtfield!" advised Frank Nugent.

"Lemme gerrup!" gurgled Coker.

"Oh, keep quiet, you fathead!" snapped the Bounder. "It was rot to let him in! If he wants trouble with Prout, why shouldn't he have trouble with Prout?"

"Well, he's such a fathead——" said Harry.

"I'll smash you!" roared Coker. "You wait till we get out at Courtfield! I'll mop up the station with you!"

"With Prout looking on?" grinned Bob.

"Blow Prout!"

"You burbling idiot!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "If Prout had seen you barging on this train, after what he told you, you'd be for it! We let you in to save your bacon, you blithering fathead! Now keep quiet!"

"I'll smash you!" yelled Coker.

"You're repeating yourself, old bean!" said Bob Cherry. "We've heard that one."

"Will you lemme gerrup?"

"You've got all the floor!" answered Bob. "Don't be greedy, Coker!"

Coker heaved again. If Coker had got up in his present state of fury, it was clear that Coker would have had to be got down again. So the juniors decided to keep him where he was, and save trouble.

"Ow!" roared Billy Bunter suddenly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with that porpoise?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"That beast is pinching my leg!" yelled Billy Bunter.

"Oooh!" gasped Peter Todd. "Let go, Coker, you mad ass! If you pinch my leg, I'll— Yoo-hoop!"

Two feet were lifted from Coker—Bunter's and Toddy's. Coker pinched hard. The next moment the Bounder gave a howl as he got a nip that seemed to come from a pair of pincers!

"Here, look out—"

"Chuck that, Coker—"

"I say, you fellows— Wow-wow!"

Coker heaved again, and this time—with fewer feet on him—he heaved up.

He was almost on his feet when a forest of hands grasped him, and bumped him down again.

"Now are you going to keep quiet?" roared Bob Cherry.

"I'll smash you!" Coker heaved again.

"Sit on his head, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! The beast has taken a lump out of my leg!" howled Bunter. "I've got a fearful pain! I say, you fellows, jump on him!"

"Sit on his head and keep him quiet!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Coker heaved, and heaved, and heaved again.

Billy Bunter gave him a vengeful blink through his big spectacles, and sat on his head.

Coker's arms and legs were pinned down by many feet; and with the fat Owl of the Remove sitting on his head, it really looked as if the hefty and irrepressible Horace would have to keep quiet at last.

"I say, you fellows, I'll sit on the beast till we get to Courtfield," said Billy Bunter cheerfully. "More room here, really, than squeezed up between Toddy and Dutton. Mind you don't let him pinch me, though."

"We've got him!"

"The gotfulness is terrific."

"Urrrrggh!" came a suffocated gurgle from under Bunter. "Gerroff! You're chick-chock-chooking—choking me— Gurrgh!"

"Will you be a good little boy if we let you get up, Horace?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, don't let the beast get up! He's taken a lump out of my leg. I say— Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter made a sudden bound. The bellow that he gave as he bounded might have excited the envy of the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

"What on earth's the matter now?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yow-wow-ooogh! I'm bitten— Yoo-hooo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Ow! The beast's bitten me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I'm not going to sit on his head any more!" yelled Bunter. "You can sit on his head if you like being bitten! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter scrambled back to his seat, yelling on his top note.

Coker heaved again. Again he was squashed down, and the Bounder, taking hold of his ears, banged his head on the floor.

Coker roared.

"Now will you keep quiet?" demanded Smithy.

"I—I—I'll spificate you—"

Bang!

"Oh! Ow! Oooh! Stoppit!"

Coker kept quiet at last. His head

was hard; but the carriage floor was harder; and Coker got the worst of the contact. Coker lay breathing fury and dust while the train buzzed on to Courtfield. But he was only biding his time!

When they got to Courtfield, they had to let him get up! Then Coker's leg-of-mutton fists were going to swipe!

Coker was glad when the train at length slowed down into Courtfield Station.

Porters' voices came along the platform.

"Courtfield! Change 'ere for Friar-dale and Greyfriars School."

The train came to a standstill.

Harry Wharton threw the carriage door open. All along the train, Greyfriars fellows were pouring out.

"Wait till I gerrup!" gasped Coker. "Only you just wait till I gerrup! That's all! Just wait!"

"Hoof him out!" said the Bounder.

"But Prout—"

"What does it matter to us if Prout spots him?" roared Smithy. "Don't be a soft ass! Roll him out under Prout's nose."

"I say, you fellows, serve him right if Prout whops him!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I've been bitten—"

"Keep him there!" said Harry. "He's not getting out till Prout's cleared. Wait till Prout's rolled off. Coker might get a flogging for coming on this train after his beak told him not to."

"Let him!" snapped Smithy. "A flogging would do the silly ass good!"

"Oh rats!"

"Well, I'm getting out!" grunted Vernon-Smith. "You can mind that howling ass if you like. Come on, Reddy."

The Bounder jumped out, and Billy Bunter rolled after him. But Redwing did not follow. Smithy stalked away for the local train. But the other fellows remained behind to take care of Coker!

It was only too clear that, in his present mood, Horace was utterly regardless of Prout. But what the master of the Fifth would think and say and do if he discovered that Coker was on that train after all, was quite alarming. Harry Wharton & Co. were fed-up with Horace—but they were not going to let him ask for that! They were all Scouts—and this was their good turn for the day!

Coker, spluttering and heaving, remained pinned on the floor; while Harry Wharton looked along the train, watching for Prout. Not till Prout was off the scene was it safe for Coker to emerge.

"There he is—getting out!" said Harry. "Hold on! Keep that dangerous maniac out of sight!"

Prout's portly figure emerged, and stood on the platform. But he did not immediately go. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, had also come down by that train; and Prout joined him, and began to converse.

"Is he gone?" inquired Bob, from within.

"No; chin-wagging with Quelch!"

"Keep quiet, Coker!"

"I—I—I'll spificate you— I—I—I'll—" Coker gurgled breathlessly.

"Wait till I gerrup! Just wait!"

"Jevver hear such a burbling idiot?" asked Bob.

"Hardly ever!" grinned Redwing.

"If Prout spots him—has he cleared yet, Harry?" asked Nugent.

"Just going!"

Prout's portly figure in the distance got into motion again by the side of the tall and angular form of the Remove master. Both the beaks disappeared at last. The local train for

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Friardale and the school was waiting at the other platform, and Prout and Quelch disappeared over the bridge.

"All clear!" said Harry. "Come on!"

The juniors crowded out of the carriage.

Released at once, Horace Coker bounced up like an indiarubber ball. He hurtled from the carriage after the Removites.

Had Prout been still there he would have been spotted. The consequences would have been awfully serious; though Coker was too wildly excited to think or care about consequences. Fortunately Prout was now safely off the scene.

"Now——" gasped Coker, as he hurtled.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

"Give him all he wants—and some more!"

Coker got in two—sending Peter Todd spinning with his right, and Johnny Bull with his left. Then Coker went over, in the grasp of many hands and smote the platform. He was swept off it again, and bumped on it again, hard.

Bump!

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Coker.

Bump!

"Oh! Owl! Stop it!"

Bump!

"Woooooogh!"

Harry Wharton & Co headed for the bridge over the line. Coker of the Fifth did not follow. Coker, sitting on the platform in a dazed and dizzy state struggled spasmodically for his second wind.

The local train was gone before Coker was in a state for action again. Coker lost that train! As Prout was on it, it was rather fortunate for Coker that he lost it! Really he ought to have been glad! But Coker was not feeling glad as he tramped in a dusty, dishevelled, hatless state out of Courtfield Station, to take a taxi to the school. Coker was in the very worst temper ever.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Back Up!

"**W**OW!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Yow!"

"Oh, listen to the band!"

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

"Sing it over again to us!"

"Ow! I say, you fellows—— Wow! Ooogh! Ow! Wow!" wailed Billy Bunter.

The Famous Five were in Study No. 1. Wharton and Nugent, to whom that celebrated apartment belonged, had been unpacking. Among other things they had unpacked a tin of toffees. For which reason the other members of the Co.—Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and the Nabob of Bhani-pur—had foregathered in Study No. 1, where they discussed toffees and the prospects of the new term at the same time.

There were lots of things to discuss, of course, at the beginning of the term—changes in the time-tables, cricket prospects, whether there were new pre's, whether Loder of the Sixth would be a prefect again this term, what men old Wingate would play in the first eleven, and—still more important—what Remove men Wharton would play in the Remove eleven, whether Angel of the Fourth or Price of the Fifth would be sacked this term—as they ought to have been last—whether there were any new kids and, if so,

what sort of a crew they were, and so on and so forth.

The Famous Five came to the end of the toffees before they came to the end of the discussion. But the discussion was interrupted by sounds of woe that floated in from the Remove passage, and the sounds of woe were followed by the picture of woe—in the person of William George Bunter.

"Anything happened?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I've been kicked!" howled Bunter.

"Whose tuck were you snooping?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wasn't snooping Coker's tuck, you beast! He kicked me because I sat on his head in the train! Hard, too!"

"Oh!" said Bob Cherry, with a warlike look. "If old Horace hasn't had enough, we've got some more he can have—and welcome!"

"The morefulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I dare say Coker feels like booting us all round," remarked Johnny Bull. "If he's beginning with Bunter we'll give him something to cure him."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Frank Nugent.

"Hold on, though!" said Harry Wharton. "We know Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, if you think I'm not telling the truth——" roared Bunter indignantly.

"Well, if you're going to break records this term, old fat man, more power to your elbow. But I know that Coker brought a hamper back with him, and I jolly well know what would happen to it if you got near it——"

"If you think I'd snoop a fellow's tuck——"

"Well, I'd rather know first where you were when Coker kicked you," said the captain of the Remove, shaking his head.

"Oh!" said Bob. "Where did Coker kick you, Bunter?"

"On the trousers."

"You howling ass, I mean where were you when he kicked you?" hooted Bob, while his comrades chuckled.

"Oh! In the—the passage——"

"Anywhere near Coker's study?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Nowhere near it! The beast said 'I'll give you sitting on a fellow's head!' and landed his boot on me—— Wow!"

"Look here," exclaimed Bob, "that won't do! We'll all jolly well go along to Coker's study and boot him."

"That's right, old chap!" said Billy Bunter encouragingly. "Stick to a pal! Back me up! I'll help, of course. I—I'll watch in the passage and see if any other Fifth Form beasts come to! That beast Toddy only laughed when I told him—after all I've done for him, you know! Just laughed—though I told him Coker kicked me right across his study——"

"Across his study!" roared Bob Cherry.

"The study you were nowhere near!" bawled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, I—I—I mean——" stammered Bunter.

"What were you doing in Coker's study?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "Anything remotely connected with a hamper?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "I wasn't in his study! I've said so! It's pretty foul to doubt a fellow's word, I think! When I said study I meant passage. He kicked me right across the passage—just because I sat on his silly head, when you fellows asked me to. As for his hamper, I never knew he had one; I never saw him getting it from the

House dame, and I never watched him go into the games study. Why should I? Besides, how was I to know that the beast was just coming back to his study?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You call yourself captain of the Remove, Wharton, and you stick there doing nothing while a Fifth Form cad boots a Remove man! I came down bump in the doorway——"

"The doorway of the passage?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, not in the doorway—I mean——"

"Yes, we know what you mean, old fat fraud," said Frank Nugent, "and if you were after Coker's tuck you asked for it—and serve you jolly well right!"

"Chap who scoffs a man's tuck ought to be booted!" said Johnny Bull.

"I wasn't scoffing it!" yelled Bunter. "I'd hardly touched the cake when Coker came in—I mean, I wasn't there at all; nowhere near the room. Coker's in a fearful temper because Prout's going to comb his hair for him, and he took it out of me, the beast—making out a chap was after his tuck! He just jumped at the chance, that was all."

"Very likely," agreed Harry Wharton. "I dare say Coker was feeling like booting somebody. Thoughtful of you to ask for it really when the old bean was feeling like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter concentrated the glare of his spectacles on the Famous Five; he concentrated wrath and scorn in that glare.

Evidently Bunter did not like that booting from Horace Coker. He wanted vengeance for that booting.

Had that booting been bestowed simply because the fat Owl had sat on Coker's head in the train, undoubtedly the Famous Five would have been prepared to go on the warpath at once. But as it obviously had been bestowed because the fat grub-raider of the Remove had been at his old game, they were not so prepared. The Owl of the Remove had asked for it, got it—and that was that!

"Are you fellows going to rag that cad Coker or not?" demanded Bunter.

"Not!" answered the Famous Five.

"Well, of all the rotten funks——"

"The funkfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, mildly.

"Yah! Afraid of Coker!" jeered Bunter. "I suppose he will be kicking you next. Serve you right if he does! I can jolly well tell you that if Coker starts booting you, I jolly well shan't stop him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" hooted Bunter. "Funks! Sneaking funks! Yah!"

Johnny Bull rose.

"I'm not going to boot Coker, for one," he said, "but I'm going to boot you, you frabjous fat freak! Turn round!"

"Beast!"

Bunter backed out of the study. He seemed to have had enough in the way of bootings, and did not want any more.

"Yah! Funks!" he hooted, and slammed the door and fled.

The discussion in Study No. 1 was resumed, both Bunter and Coker being dismissed from mind, like the trifling things they were. But a minute or two

later the Famous Five were reminded of Bunter, if not of Coker.

The study door opened about a foot, and a fat head, a fat face, and a big pair of spectacles appeared round it.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"Scoot, you fat slug!" growled Johnny Bull.

"But there's something I want to tell you fellows!" said Bunter.

"Well, what is it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"You're all funks in this study!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Funks!"

Slam!

Bunter was gone!

The Famous Five glared at the door. They did not like this! Bunter, of course, was nobody—less than nobody, if possible! Still, even from so inconsiderable a microbe as the Owl of the Remove it was not pleasant.

"If that fat freak looks in again—" breathed Johnny Bull.

Tap! came a minute later.

"Oh, come in!" called out Harry Wharton.

The door opened about an inch. Through that narrow aperture came a fat squeak.

"Yah! Funks!"

Slam!

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry. "I'm getting fed up with Bunter's antics. Let him jolly well tap at that door again, that's all!"

Bob Cherry stepped softly towards the door. He took up his post just inside. His friends watched him with grinning faces. If Billy Bunter tapped again, he would not have time to bolt before he was grabbed. This time Bunter was going to hear something drop.

A long minute passed—then another. Then—

Tap!

Hardly had that tap tapped when Bob tore the door open and charged. He charged right into the figure outside the doorway and sent it spinning.

There was a yell and a crash on the opposite side of the passage—then a bump!

"Got you this time, you fat freak!" roared Bob. "You— Oh, my hat! Is—is—is—is that you, Smithy?"

"Smithy!" yelled the fellows in the study.

"Oh crikey! Smithy—" gasped Bob.

The Bounder of Greyfriars, sitting at the foot of the opposite wall, glared at him, gasping.

"You mad ass!" he stuttered. "You potty hippopotamus—you blithering, blinking blockhead—you piffing, pie-faced perisher! What do you mean, knocking a fellow over when he comes to ask you to a study supper?"

"Oh crumbs! I thought it was Bunter!" gasped Bob. "I—I thought it—"

"You thought!" hooted the Bounder, scrambling up. "I'd like to know what you did it with, you footling fathead! Go and eat coke!"

"But I say—"

"Idiot!"

The Bounder stalked on up the Remove passage, apparently having changed his mind about that invitation to a study supper. He went into Study No. 4, and slammed the door.

Bob shut the door of Study No. 1 and turned back to his friends, who were yelling.

"Nothing to cackle at!" he grunted.

"I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Look here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.

Tap!

"Yah! Funks!" came a fat squeak through the keyhole, followed by a rapid patter of retreating footsteps.

Bob Cherry tore open the door again. But the passage was vacant. Only a few seconds had elapsed since that fat squeak, but in those few seconds Billy Bunter had elapsed, too.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Keeping The Peace!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. smiled in break next morning. It was a sunny spring morning, and all Nature seemed to smile, so there was no reason why the Famous Five of the Remove should not smile also.

But that special smile was specially evoked by the sight of Horace James Coker of the Fifth Form—who was not smiling at all.

Gloom sat on the brow of Coker of the Fifth.

He was frowning—a frown that almost put in the shade the "frightful, fearful, frantic frown" of the Lord High Executioner.

"Poor old Coker!" remarked Bob Cherry. "I suppose Prout's been scalping him!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, Quelch would scalp us if he heard us blowing him!" he remarked.

"Coker asks for these things!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here he comes!" murmured Bob. "Don't damage him if we can help it—he looks as if he's getting enough from Prout!"

The Famous Five suppressed their smiles, as Horace Coker, spotting them, bore down on them.

If Coker was going to renew the little trouble of the previous day, they had no choice, of course, about dealing with him faithfully. In that case, they were prepared to strew Horace all over the quadrangle. But, really, they hoped that they weren't going to be driven into giving old Horace any more. Really, he looked as if he was getting enough from his Form-master.

"Oh! I've been going to speak to you kids," said Coker, with unexpected calm. And the Famous Five, desirous of peace on Coker's account, generously allowed the word kids to pass, instead of telling Coker what they thought of him.

"Carry on!" said Bob cheerily.

"I was going to thrash the lot of you for your dashed cheek on the train yesterday," said Coker, "but I won't!"

"Oh, thanks!" said the Famous Five with one voice, still on the peaceful tack. And Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh remarked that the thankfulness was terrific.

Coker gave them rather a suspicious look. But he nodded.

"Well, you asked for it," he said, "checking a senior man and kicking up a shindy in public!"

Coker seemed to take the view that the Removites had kicked up that shindy. But they let it pass. They could see signs of worry in old Horace's face. It looked as if Coker had been thinking. If so, it showed that Coker was not his usual self!

"I've got a book!" said Coker gloomily.

"Rough luck!" said the Famous Five with unanimous sympathy. They could have sympathised even with Loder of the Sixth, if Loder had got a book. A book was awful.

A fellow might have a hundred lines,

or even two hundred lines, and it was all in the day's work. He might even have five hundred lines, and live to tell the tale, as it were. But a whole book was a terrific imposition. There were more than five hundred lines in a book. In the first book of Virgil there were seven hundred and fifty-six.

A hapless victim landed with seven hundred and fifty-six lines of Latin to write might well look as if most of the troubles of the universe had descended on his shoulders and bowed them down.

After hearing that Coker had a book, Coker might have called the Famous Five kids, or even fags, and they would not have arisen and smitten him. A fellow who had a book had enough, without anything more being added thereto.

"You know Prout!" said Coker bitterly. "I knew at the time that he would make out that I was to blame. Well, he did!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were tactfully silent.

Really, they could not quite see what else Mr. Prout was to make out, in the circumstances. But it would have been no comfort to Coker to tell him so.

"And I've got a book!" said Coker. "Nice way to begin the term!"

"Horrid!" said Bob. Bob, in his mind's eye, could see the hapless Horace grinding away at Latin lines for days, and days, and days, to come!

"But," went on Coker unexpectedly again, "if Prout knew I'd come on that train, it would be worse. I've been thinking that over, and that's what I was going to speak to you about. I don't want it to come out that I was on that train. You know Prout! He ordered me not to come on that train. I took no notice. But you know him. He would call it disobedience—in-subordination—mutiny—any old thing! You know him!"

Again the juniors wondered what else Prout could call it. Again they tactfully refrained from remarks.

"The man's not bad," said Coker. "I'll do him that justice! He's not bad—not an acid drop like Hacker, for instance. He's a fool! He thinks I'm a fool! That shows the sort of old ass he is!"

Plenty of Greyfriars men thought Prout an old ass. But his belief that Horace Coker was a fool would not have been considered evidence that he was!

"In fact, when he gave me that book, he said he was lenient because he knew that I was stupid!" said Coker. "That's the sort of thing I have to stand from Prout. He hasn't the faintest idea of my standing in the Form, or in the school. Just doesn't understand. I might be a fellow like Potter, or Greene, or Blundell—a nobody—from the way Prout talks! The man simply hasn't sense!"

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You kids were a set of young hooligans yesterday," went on Coker, "but since I've thought it over, I'm jolly glad you kept me out of Prout's sight on that train! If he'd seen me on it, he would have gone off at the deep end—might even think of whopping me! He's fool enough! And it would be pretty serious if I was driven to hitting Prout!"

"To—to—to whatting him?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Frank Nugent. "I—I—I shouldn't think of hitting Prout, if I were you, Coker!"

The Famous Five gazed at Coker. That any fellow outside a homo for idiots could think of hitting his Form-master was really rather unnerving. Coker seemed to be toying with that



The Famous Five had no more time to waste on Coker. The Fifth Former went down on the floor of the carriage, crashing. Feet were planted on his waistcoat, pinning him down, while Nugent and Vernon-Smith stood on his legs!

remarkable idea. Coker had his own mental processes, unlike those of common mortals.

"Well, he doesn't know, and you kids can see that he'd better not know," said Coker. "I don't want trouble with him—more than I can help! Prout's not likely to speak to you, of course—or to take any notice of scrubby fags at all, if you come to that. But don't jaw about it, see!"

Coker had his own inimitable way of asking favours.

"Don't chatter and gabble up and down the school and all that! You see what I mean," explained Coker. "You silly fags can't help chattering and babbling. I dare say—but don't chatter and babble about that!"

"You put it so nicely!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The niceness is terrific, my esteemed Coker."

"What I like about Coker," remarked Nugent, "is that pleasant, polished, polite way he has of putting things—nobody like him!"

"Don't be cheeky!" said Coker darkly. "I'm letting you off for what you did yesterday, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to stand any more cheek from you! I've a short way with fags when they're cheeky."

"You silly chump—" began Johnny Bull.

"Chuck it, Johnny!" said Harry Wharton hastily. "Let Coker rip. What does it matter if he talks out of his hat?"

"What?" roared Coker.

"Oh! I—I mean—"

"Yes, I know what you mean!" snorted Coker. "You mean that you're going to be as cheeky this term as you were last. And I'll tell you what I mean. I mean to pull your ear when you're cheeky—like that!"

Coker reached out with a large hand to demonstrate.

The Famous Five were peaceful. They compassionated poor old Coker, and did not want to damage him! But there was a limit—and that was the limit.

Coker did not grip Harry Wharton's ear. Before he could grip that ear five pairs of hands gripped Coker!

Earth and sky floated wildly before Coker's dizzy eyes as he was suddenly swept off his feet, his arms and legs frantically thrashing the air.

Bump!

Coker landed on the quad.

He roared as he landed.

"Hook it!" said Bob. "We shall have to wallop him, and we don't want to wallop the old ass! Hook it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yarooop!" roared Coker. "Oh, my hat! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

The Famous Five, laughing, hooked it. They were gone before Horace Coker was on his feet again. And Coker, having glared round for them in vain, resumed his moody pacing in the quad, his frowning brow looking still more like the "frightful, fearful, frantic frown" of the Lord High Executioner.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Mr. Quelch glanced at that member of his Form, and did not grin.

It was only the second day of term, and Greyfriars fellows had not quite settled down to the collar yet. Still, Mr. Quelch was the man to make the Remove realise that the holidays were over and that school was school and that lessons were lessons.

In the Remove Form Room Quelch had no use for anything but work. Billy Bunter, in Form or out of Form, had no use for work when he could dodge the same. At the present moment Quelch had a strong suspicion that Bunter was not thinking of the subject in hand, as, of course, Bunter ought to have been doing.

Quelch was giving his Form a spot of English literature. They were acquiring knowledge of the beauties of the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." There was nothing in that to make Billy Bunter grin.

It was a sad poem. It was sadder still to have to work at it. The combined effect of the poem, and of having to give it attention, ought to have made Bunter very serious. Instead of which, he was grinning.

While Quelch expounded, the juniors were making notes. Quelch wondered whether Bunter really was making notes or whether he was scribbling something else. Fellows sometimes did. Skinner had been caught making a comic caricature of his Form-master instead of making notes of his Form-master's sage utterances once or twice. Fellows had been spotted passing missives along the desks many times. Quelch was a downy bird and wise to all the ways of a junior Form.

"Bunter!" came Quelch's deep voice.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Bunter ceased to grin instantly. He blinked uneasily at Quelch through his big spectacles. If Billy Bunter was enjoying some joke, he did not want to share it with his Form-master.

"Are you giving me your attention, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I heard everything you were saying!"

"I am glad to hear that, Bunter. What was I saying?"

"Oh!"

"Answer me, Bunter!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, sir! Oh crikey! I—I mean to say— Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. His fat mind was a perfect blank, and he wondered wildly what Quelch might have been saying. Some rot, of course, but what rot?

"You have not been listening, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I was listening very carefully, sir. I," stammered the fat Owl—"I—I wasn't thinking of anything else, sir."

"I warn you, Bunter, not to think of anything else while you are in class!" said Mr. Quelch in a very deep voice. And with that, to Bunter's great relief, he let the matter drop.

For a good five minutes after that Bunter absorbed knowledge of Gray's poetry as expounded by Henry Samuel Quelch.

It was, of course, annoying to Bunter. He had no personal taste for English literature. He would willingly have swapped the whole range of English literature, from Chaucer down, for a bag of bullseyes—even for one single, solitary bullseye!

As for Gray's Elegy, it bored Bunter stiff. And he had another matter in mind—a rag on those beasts. Harry Wharton & Co., who had refused to back him up against that other beast, Coker of the Fifth.

Bunter's back was still up. If those cads were funky of Coker, Bunter was going to rub it in.

So after the lapse of five or six minutes, the fat Owl's attention wandered from Gray again, and the curfew tolled the knell of parting day, the lowing herd wound slowly o'er the lea, unheeded by Billy Bunter.

Bunter folded up a section of paper, on which something was written, and nudged the next fellow.

"Pass that along to Wharton," he whispered.

The folded paper was passed along from fellow to fellow under the desks.

"Todd!" came a rap like a bullet from Mr. Quelch.

Peter Todd had that missive in hand.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Peter.

"Stand up!"

Peter stood up.

"What is that in your hand, Todd?"

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter.

Quelch had spotted the missive. The beast always seemed to spot everything that went on in the Remove.

Bunter was thankful that the missive had not been spotted in his own fat hand. He was sorry that 'Toddy had been copped, of course. But it was not so bad as if Bunter himself had been copped.

"A—a—a paper, sir," stammered Peter.

"Hand it to me."

There was no help for it. Peter Todd handed over the folded paper.

"Take fifty lines, Todd, for passing notes along in class," rumbled Mr. Quelch. "You may sit down. What is this?"

Mr. Quelch unfolded the paper. He looked at it. He stared at it. It was really a surprising note. Some of the juniors could see it, and they were as surprised as Quelch. Whatever Quelch might have expected to see, he certainly had not expected to see what he saw.

"Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Bull, Inky. A.R.P."

That was what the missive contained in the unmistakable scrawl of Billy Bunter, accompanied by the blots. THE MAGNET LIBRARY, No. 1,630

smudges, and smears that always accompanied Bunter's calligraphy.

It did not contain, as perhaps Quelch suspected, any disrespectful or derisive allusion to himself. It contained the names of five members of his Form and the well-known initials, A.R.P. What it could possibly mean was a mystery known only to the fat brain that had devised it.

"Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh crikey! I mean, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter in dismay. He wondered whether Quelch was going to pick on him. It would be like the beast.

"What do you mean by this, Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I've never seen it before. Wha-a-at is it, sir?" stammered Bunter.

"This was written by you, Bunter. It is in your hand."

"Oh! No! Handwritings are—are very much alike, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I—I never wrote it, sir, and—and I never asked the fellows to pass it along to Wharton, sir."

Harry Wharton looked round. He apparently was to have been the recipient of the intercepted note.

"Silence, Bunter, you foolish and untruthful boy! Wharton, what does this nonsense mean?"

The captain of the Remove stared at the paper. Its meaning, if any, was quite beyond his comprehension.

"I don't know, sir!" he answered blankly.

All the Removites, of course, were familiar with A.R.P. There were regular A.R.P. drills at the school. Air Raid Precautions had come to stay. But what Bunter could possibly have meant by scribbling five names, followed by A.R.P., was a very deep mystery.

"I will not permit surreptitious communications to pass along the Form," said Mr. Quelch severely. "Cherry, your name is here? What does it mean?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Bob as blankly as Wharton.

"Bull, what—"

"Can't make it out, sir!" said Johnny Bull.

"Nugent—"

"Beats me, sir!" said Frank. "I—I mean, I can't make it out."

"Hurreo Singh—"

"The understandfulness is not terrific, esteemed sahib!" answered the nabob of Bhanpur, with a shake of his dusky head.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. He scented a rag, though he could not make out what it was, or indeed make head or tail of it. He frowned at the Famous Five, and he frowned at Bunter. Obviously it was a jest of some sort, though if so, it was a very deep one.

However, after a searching stare at the Famous Five, Quelch passed them over and concentrated on Billy Bunter.

That fat and fatuous youth quaked as the gimlet eyes were fixed on him.

"Bunter!"

"It—it wasn't me, sir—"

"You have wasted the time of the class by this absurdity!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You will remain in when the Form is dismissed, Bunter, and write out the whole of Gray's Elegy, from beginning to end, before you leave the Form-room."

"Oh crikey!"

"We shall now resume!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

And they resumed, the Remove once more revelling in the beauties of the celebrated Elegy.

Billy Bunter had been grinning. He

was not grinning now! Whatever the fat Owl had meant by that mysterious missive, he had regarded it as a tremendous joke! But the joke no longer amused him! The prospect of sitting in the Form-room and writing out Gray's Elegy from end to end would have spoiled the best joke ever!

Bunter sat lugubrious! So far from smiling, the Owl of the Remove looked as if he would never smile again! When the Remove went out, Bunter sat on—dipped his pen in the ink, and started "The kerfew toles the nell of parting day, the lowing herd wynds sloely ore the lea"—and groaned over every line.

Hitherto, Billy Bunter had merely disliked Thomas Gray. But by the time he had written out that beautiful Elegy to the end, he hated him with a deadly hatred.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Is Too Funny!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump—"

"What the dickens—"

The Famous Five, after a spot of cricket practice following class, had come up to the Remove passage to tea in a cheery bunch. They found a number of fellows gathered round the door of Study No. 1, staring at it, and grinning.

On that study door, in large chalked capital letters, appeared the initials:

"A.R.P."

Fellows were grinning as they looked at it. Nobody understood what it meant, or why it was chalked there. But after what had happened in the Remove Form Room that afternoon, they could guess that it was the handiwork of William George Bunter.

Bunter, plainly, meant something by this! It was some sort of a scorching jest on the Famous Five! But where the jest came in, wanted a lot of guessing.

"That's Bunter, I suppose!" said Harry Wharton, staring at the inscription. "Anybody know what it means?"

"The meanfulness is not terrifically conspicuous!" remarked Hurreo Jamsset Ram Singh.

"He, he, he!" Billy Bunter, looking out of Study No. 7, contributed an unmusical cachinnation.

"Bunter, you howling ass—"

"He, he, he!"

"What have you done this for, you burbling bloater?" demanded Nugent.

"What does it mean, you fathead?"

"Guess?" chuckled Bunter. "What does it stand for?"

"Is that podgy porpoise potty?" asked Bob Cherry. "A.R.P. stands for Air Raid Precautions, you footling frump!"

"Nothing else?" grinned Bunter.

"Well, what else, you blitherer?"

"Guess!" chortled Bunter. "He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton & Co. and the other Remove fellows stared at Bunter, and stared at the study door.

Everybody knew what A.R.P. stood for—but it seemed that Bunter's powerful brain had worked out another phrase for which those familiar letters could stand! Some hidden message, some masterly gibe, some sardonic taunt, was hidden under the initials A.R.P.

"What the dooce else can it stand for, except Air Raid Precautions?"

asked Lord Mauleverer, quite puzzled.

"He, he, he!"

"Might be a description of the nice, high-minded fellows who use that study," suggested Skinner. "All Really Perfect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that it, Bunter?" asked the Bounder with a chuckle.

"He, he, he! No, that ain't it! He, he, he! If you fellows don't like it, you can lump it! You refused to back me up against Coker, like the measly funky crowd you are! So that's what you get."

"What on earth has that got to do with this?" hooted Bob.

"He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton frowned. Billy Bunter was a howling ass, and his asinine absurdities did not matter very much. At the same time, Study No. 1 was Study No. 1, and was not to be gayed by a fatuous fat Owl, whatever mysterious meaning might be attached to the initials chalked on the door.

Apparently it had something to do with the fact that the Famous Five had declined to avenge the fat Owl's wrongs on Coker of the Fifth—though the connection was known only to Bunter's mighty brain.

"Well, don't play the goat like this again, Bunter, or I shall use your face to rub it out with," said the captain of the Remove.

"Yah! You rub that out and I'll jolly well paint it on next time. I'm jolly well going to show you up! Yah! Who's funky of Coker of the Fifth?"

"What has this got to do with Coker of the Fifth, you potty porpoise?"

"He, he, he!"

"Well, if that were my study door, I'd jolly well boot him, whatever it means!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Skinner.

"You've guessed it?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I think so!" said Skinner blandly. "Not a bad description of the fellows in the study really!"

"Well, what is it?" asked Harry Wharton, with a rather suspicious look at Skinner. He did not want to boot a fathead like Bunter, but he was quite prepared to boot Skinner, if required.

"Go it, Skinner!" grinned the Bounder. He could see that one of Skinner's malicious jests was coming.

"Cough it up!" said Bob. All the fellows were a little curious to know what the fat Owl could possibly mean to imply by that mysterious inscription, and if Skinner had guessed, they wanted to hear.

"I think I've got it right," said Skinner, in the same bland tone. "I'll leave it to you fellows to say whether the description's good! Seems good to me! 'Awfully Respectable Prigs!' What about that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed along the Remove passage.

Skinner's guess, whether accurate or not, seemed to entertain the Removites. But there were five members of the Remove whom it did not entertain. Harry Wharton & Co. were not entertained at all.

If Harold Skinner liked to consider them prigs because they did not smoke cigarettes in the study, or sneak in at the back gate of the Three Fishers, or keep a sporting paper hidden under a cushion, Harold Skinner was welcome to his opinion. But he was not welcome to state it in their hearing. Skinner could not do that without being called to account.

Bob Cherry made a grab at Skinner's collar. He looked him towards the study door.

"Let go, you fool!" roared Skinner.

"What do you think you are up to, you ruffian?"

"I'm going to rub out Bunter's rot," explained Bob. "Mind if I do it with your mop, Skinner?"

"Leggo! I'll punch you!" yelled Skinner, wriggling in vain in Bob's powerful grip. "Let go, you rotter, or I'll punch you!"

"Go ahead!" said Bob cheerfully. "A sporting bloke like you ought to be able to handle an awfully respectable prig! Pile in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner doubled his fist as he was jerked to the door. But he undoubled it again.

Skinner was not so good at punching as at puffing the wild and woolly woodbine. He wriggled and struggled.

"You silly ass, can't you take a joke?" he howled.

"Yes, rather! I can take the joker, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fathead, I was only joking!" roared Skinner.

"So am I," answered Bob. "Think you're the only joker in the Remove?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind if I hold your ears, Skinner? I shall have to hold to something, to use your mop as a duster?"

"Yaroooh!" roared Skinner.

Apparently he did mind. He roared and wriggled and wrenched and raved.

But it booted not. With a grip on Skinner's ears, Bob Cherry rubbed the chalk off the study door with Skinner's hair—amid yells of laughter from the fellows in the Remove passage, and yells, not of laughter from Skinner.

Skinner's face was crimson, his mop chalky, when Bob had finished.

He wrenched himself loose at last, and tottered, gasping.

"You—you—you—" he gasped.

"Me—me—me!" agreed Bob. "Roll up again if Bunter does any more of his stunts, old bean! Your mop makes a pretty good duster."

And the Famous Five, laughing, went into Study No. 1 to tea, leaving Skinner gurgling with rage and breathlessness.

Skinner was often funny, and sometimes he was too funny, and, like most people, he did not like getting that for which he had asked. With a crimson and furious face, he stamped away up the passage towards his own study.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Billy Bunter, as he passed Study No. 7. "I say, Skinner, your head looks like a bath broom. He, he, he!"

Skinner stopped; Bunter seemed amused. But the amusement was brief. Skinner did not speak. He smote.

Thump!

"Yooo-hoop!" roared Bunter, as he went over backwards into his study. He sat down in that study and roared, and roared again.

Skinner marched on to Study No. 11, feeling better.

Billy Bunter was left in Study No. 7, feeling, to judge by his roaring, considerably worse.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Cat Out Of The Bag!

"YAH!"

Billy Bunter made that remark, addressed to Horace Coker of the Fifth Form, in a tone of reckless defiance, and accompanied by a blink expressive of the utter disdain that Bunter felt for Horace Coker of the Fifth Form.

Which naturally surprised Coker.

After class that day Coker was walking in the quad, thinking of that book which he had to write—that interminable task which was to keep him busy through all his leisure hours for days and days to come.

He had not yet started on that book. He had had time, really, to get a chunk of it bitten off, so to speak. But he had spent that time in explaining to Potter and Greene that it was up to them, as loyal pals, to take on some of that hefty job of work.

Potter and Greene did not seem to see it, somehow.

Perhaps they thought that if Coker asked for a book, it was up to Coker to handle the book when it accrued. If Coker did not want a book, he should not have blowed Prout, at all events, when Prout could hear him. Finally they had joined Blundell and other Fifth Form men at games practice, leaving Coker meditating bitterly on the uncertainty of friendship, as well as on that awful book.

In that frame of mind, Coker was not a safe man to cheek. Checking Coker just then was an amusement rather like twisting the tail of a tiger in the jungle.

And that was what Bunter did.

He walked calmly up to Coker of the Fifth, gave him a blink of ineffable disdain, and said "Yah!" right in Coker's astonished face.

But Bunter had his wits—such as they were—about him. Bunter would no more have yahed Coker, had Coker been free to deal with him, than he would have yahed the Head. But Prout was in the offing.

The portly and majestic Prout was walking in the quad after class, and he was quite close at hand. With his Form-master in the offing, obviously a Fifth-Form man could not wallop a junior—especially as Coker had started the term with a row with his beak, and could hardly want to have Prout's wrathful attention concentrated on him afresh.

Thus did Bunter calculate.

Safe under the lee of Prout, as it were, he yahed Coker, at the same time turning up his little fat nose at him.

But Bunter's calculations were a little out. As the portly Prout was hardly a dozen feet distant, Bunter took it for granted that Coker saw him. As a matter of fact, Coker did not.

Coker had been pacing with his eyes on the ground, in deep and gloomy thought, and had not seen Prout, or anybody else, till he saw Bunter. And as Coker was unaware of Prout's proximity, Coker was naturally not restrained by that proximity.

He gave Bunter a surprised stare. He followed it up with a smack that rang like a pistol-shot on Bunter's fat head. Louder still rang the roar of Billy Bunter as he got the smack.

"Oh crikey! Yarooop! Whooop!" roared Bunter.

Prout looked round. He frowned as he looked. Coker, however, still unaware of Prout, grasped Bunter by the collar. He swung Bunter round by that collar, with the obvious intention of planting a boot on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School. Coker of the Fifth was not to be yahed with impunity.

"You sat on my head yesterday," said Coker grimly. "I was going to let you off, like the other young sweeps! But if you come along and ask for it—"

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Ow! Leggo!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,630.

roared Bunter. His only hope was in Prout. "Beast! Leggo! Oh crikey!" Thud!
 "Yarooop!"
 Bunter flew.
 "Now if you want another—" grinned Coker.
 "Coker!"
 "Oh!" gasped the unfortunate Horace.

He spun round, and stared at Prout, advancing majestically to the spot.

It was tough luck. He could see that Prout was going to blame him for this. He could read that in Prout's face. It was not much use being an absolutely blameless character, with Prout for a beak.

"Coker, how dare you?" boomed Prout. "Yesterday I found you engaged in a disgraceful disturbance with Remove boys, now I find you engaged in another ruffianly disturbance with a Remove boy. Have you no sense of propriety, Coker? Have you no sense at all?"

"Well, look here, sir, if a cheeky fag comes up and cheeks a Fifth Form man—" exclaimed Coker indignantly.

"Ow! Beast! Wharton told me to sit on your head in the train, you beast!" roared Billy Bunter. "Why don't you pitch into Wharton, you swab?"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "Bunter, what do I hear?"

"Oh gum!" murmured Coker, in dismay.

"What do I hear?" repeated Mr. Prout. "I shall report this to your Form-master, Bunter. Upon my word! You had the impudence, the audacity to—to—to sit on the head of a senior boy in the train! Upon my word!"

"It—it—it's all right, sir!" gasped Coker, in deadly dread of what might come out next. "I—I don't mind what he did, sir—"

"Silence, Coker! Bunter, stand up at once! Answer me! You sat—upon my word—I mean, you sat upon Coker's head— Bless my soul—"

"The beast—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, Coker barged into our carriage!" howled Bunter. "The fellows shoved him on the floor, and I sat on his head, and serve him jolly well right, too! Besides, Wharton said sit on his head. If he wants to boot somebody, let him go and boot Wharton. Wharton said sit on his head, and Coker jolly well knows— He heard him—"

"Wha-a-t!" Prout's plump brain grasped it now. "I remember now, I saw you in that carriage with Wharton and other Remove boys. Is it possible—is it barely possible—that you travelled in that train, after all, Coker, after I had expressly forbidden you to do so?"

Coker stood dumb.

The cat was out of the bag now.

Prout looked at him. His face grew purple. He had let Coker off with a book for having blowed him. It was a heavy impot, but a light punishment in comparison with the offence. Now he learned that that offence, great as it was, was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with Coker's subsequent proceedings.

He had ordered Coker not to travel by that train. It was, therefore, unthinkable that Coker had travelled by that train. Yet Coker had travelled by that train. Obviously he had, if Billy Bunter had sat on his head in that train.

Prout purpled. His wrath grow and grew as he realised it.

The wrath of Achilles to Greece the direful spring of woes outnumbered, was a mere passing breeze, compared with the wrath of Mr Prout at this moment. He stood almost speechless.

"Coker!" he gasped at last.

"You—you see, sir—" gasped Coker; but he broke off.

How could he explain to his Form-master that he was an old donkey, whom a fellow like Coker was entitled to disregard? Coker was not bright, but he was bright enough to know that such an explanation as that would not improve matters.

"You travelled by that train!" thundered Prout.

"Oh, yes!"

"You forced your way into the juniors' carriage, after I had expressly forbidden you to do so?"

"I—I—I—" mumbled Coker. Put like that it seemed rather serious, even to Coker.

"Yes or no?" thundered Prout.

"Oh! Yes. I—I—"

"Enough!" said Prout. His voice trembled with indignation. "I have been a schoolmaster for thirty years! I have never been so flouted or insulted! I must consider this. I must consider this matter carefully! Whether to take you to Dr. Locke and request him to expel you from Greyfriars—"

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

"Or to administer a flogging, or whether to administer chastisement myself—I must consider! I shall consider, Coker!"

"I—I—"

"Not another word! I decline to hear one more word from you, Coker! Silence!"

Prout, gasping with indignant wrath, turned away. He rolled off to the House, purple.

Coker gazed after him in dismay. A dozen fellows were staring at Coker, some of them grinning. Coker did not heed them. He did not see them! His gaze was fixed on Prout's portly, disappearing back.

Billy Bunter executed a strategic retreat. Really, the fat Owl had not meant to give Coker away to his beak. Had Bunter thought about the matter he would have realised that it would be pretty serious for Coker if it came out that he had travelled on that train. But Bunter, of course, had not thought about it. Thinking was not much in his line, anyhow.

But he realised that now Prout was gone the sooner he was gone, too, the better. And he faded out of the picture. Unfortunately, he did not fade fast enough. Coker, having watched Prout's portly back to a distance, in a mesmerised sort of way, remembered Bunter, and looked round for him.

Bunter was cutting off—but he was still in sight! Coker, now, was booked for an awful row with Prout! He had one consolation—and he availed himself of it at once. He rushed after Bunter!

Bunter had been going fairly fast. He went faster when Coker reached him, and landed with a boot! He roared, and accelerated.

"Yaroooh! Owl! Wow! Stoppit!" wailed the fat Removite, as Coker's boot landed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars.

Coker, evidently finding solace in it, followed him up, still booting.

How many times Coker's boot landed on him before he escaped Bunter did not know. It seemed at least a million.

He escaped at last, yelling, and Coker stalked away to the House, wondering what on earth Prout was going to do, and whether even an old ass like Prout really fancied that he could whop a Fifth Form man!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A.R.P.

"CHUCK it!" advised Peter Todd. "Shan't!"
 "What the thump do you meant by it, anyhow?" asked Bolsover major.

"You'll see soon!" grinned Billy Bunter.

Prep was over in the Remove studies. Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh had gone along to Study No. 1, and were there with Wharton and Nugent, probably indulging in a cricket jaw. There was a murmuring of voices from the study.

The Famous Five, probably, had forgotten Bunter. Bunter had not forgotten them. Since that booting in the quad Bunter's fat back was up more than ever. If they did not choose to give that beast Coker what he so richly deserved for booting Bunter, they could take what was coming to them—and take it from Bunter!

The fat Owl had borrowed a small can of paint and a brush from the study of some fellow who had gone down to the Rag. Now he was approaching the door of Study No. 1, evidently with the intention of repeating his former performance, and, the chalk having been rubbed off, he was going to replace that inscription with paint—not so easily rubbed off!

A dozen fellows gathered to watch him.

Bunter's stunt was exciting great interest in the Remove, and considerable hilarity. Everybody, by this time, had heard of A.R.P. in connection with the Famous Five—though nobody knew the new and mysterious meaning that Bunter attached to those initials.

Bunter's powerful brain had evolved some phrase of three words, beginning with A, and R, and P. What that phrase was, only Bunter knew, so far. No doubt it was something fearfully insulting! Fellows were getting quite curious to learn what the fat Owl was driving at.

Peter Todd sagely advised Bunter to chuck it. But Bunter gave Toddy no heed. He was going to rub this in!

He dipped the brush in the paint, and painted a large "A" on the left side of the door. In the middle of the door he painted a large "R." Then, on the right-hand side, he painted a large "P." Considerable space was left between the letters—which, it seemed, Bunter was going to fill in with the remainder of the words, and the deadly secret would be out at last.

Within the study the Famous Five talked cricket, unconscious of what was going on without. But more and more of the Remove gathered to watch the fat Owl, hardly a fellow going down.

It was getting fearfully interesting—indeed, exciting—as Bunter proceeded to trace the small letters between the big capitals.

"L," said Vernon-Smith, as the first letter slid off the brush, following the capital "A." "What the dickens word begins with 'Al'?"

"L' again!" remarked Ogilvy, as another letter was completed.

"Oh! 'All'!" said Smithy. "That the lot, Bunter?"

"That's the first word!" grinned Bunter.

And he carried on with the brush, following up the capital letter "R" with five small letters—"o-t-t-e-n."

"Rotten!" said Russell. "All rotten—my hat! 'All rotten' what?"

"You'll see!" grinned Bunter.

"H!" ejaculated the Bounder blankly, as "h" was painted after the



Bob Cherry tore the door open and charged into the figure outside, sending it spinning. "Got you this time, you fat freak!" roared Bob. "You—oh—my hat! Is that you, Smithy? I—I thought it was Bunter!"

capital "P." "Anybody guess that one?"

"Can't be philosophers, I suppose?" remarked Lord Mauleverer.

"Or philanthropists!" said Squiff.

"Or philatelists!" said Newland.

"Or phrenologists!" remarked Tom Brown.

"This is getting curiouser and curiouser as Alice said in Wonderland," remarked Peter Todd. "That's a 'U' next."

"Phu!" read the Bounder. "In the name of wonder, what blessed word begins with 'Phu'?"

Bunter carried on. He had all the crowd of juniors guessing. Not one of them could think of a word beginning "phu."

"N," said Peter, as the next letter appeared. "If there's a word in the language beginning with 'Phun,' Quelch had never told us about it."

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Well, what is the word, then?" demanded Bolsover major.

"You'll see in a minute!"

Bunter painted on. The next letter that came off his brush was "k." The juniors stared at it.

"Deeper and deeper!" said Smithy. "If there's a word beginning 'phunk,' I've never heard of it. Oh, my hat!" The Bounder caught on suddenly, and gave a howl. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, don't make a row and fetch them out before I've finished!" squeaked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's only one more letter to do—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter painted in the last letter, an "s." The whole inscription was clear now. The Removites were enlightened as to what Bunter meant by A.R.P.

Billy Bunter's spelling was his very own—and that elucidated the mystery.

All Rotten Phunks!

That was it!

The Remove fellows gazed at it and yelled!

Billy Bunter stepped back with a satisfied grin on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows, that will make them sit up—what?" he remarked complacently. "If they jolly well funk Coker, they can jolly well expect to hear about it! I'm jolly well going to rub it in—see? Make them wild—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar.

That deadly taunt seemed to throw the Remove fellows almost into hysterics.

Bunter, evidently, did not know that there was anything amiss with the spelling! His powerful brain had evolved a new phrase to fit the letters A.R.P. This was it!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

The door of Study No. 1 opened. Five fellows looked out. That roar in the passage had drawn the attention of the Famous Five at last.

"What—?" began Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why—what—look!" howled Bob Cherry.

He pointed to the door. The Famous Five looked. Then they joined in the roar. "All Rotten Phunks" did not seem to make them wild. It seemed to make them hysterical!

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

Billy Bunter blinked at them in surprise. He had expected the Famous Five to be made fearfully wild by this! Instead of which, they howled with laughter. The word phunks really seemed to be too much for them. They almost wept!

"Well, Bunter's the funny man, and no mistake!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The funnifulness is terrific!"

"Eh? Nothing funny about that, is there?" demanded Bunter. "What is there funny about it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows jolly well funk Coker!" hooted Bunter. "And I'm jolly well going to rub it in—see?"

"Well, now you've rubbed it in, old fat man, rub it out!" suggested Harry Wharton.

"Shan't!"

"Not if we ask you nicely?" gasped the captain of the Remove.

"No!" said Bunter firmly. "I'm leaving it there. I'm jolly well showing you up for funking Coker!"

"You won't rub it out if I ask you nicely?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I won't ask you nicely—I'll rub it out with your nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say, leggo! I say, Toddy, make him leggo! I say—varoooh! Urrgh! Oh, my boko! Ow! Ooogh!"

Billy Bunter wriggled in a grip of iron on the back of his fat neck. He blinked in horror at the wet paint as his fat little nose approached it. That fat little nose squashed into the paint. Bunter gurgled horribly.

"Urrgh! Gurrgh! Leggo! I say—ooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooooogh!"

Bunter's nose was pushed to and fro on the door. His A.R.P. inscription was smudged across and across, transferring most of the red paint to Bunter's nose. He gasped and gurgled and guggled.

"Urrrrgh! Wurrgh! Yurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There," said Harry. "We'll finish

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1.630.



(Continued from page 13.)

it with a duster. Sort out a duster, Franky. Had enough, Bunter?"

"Oooooooooogh!"

"A little more, if you like——"

"Yooooooooogh!"

Billy Bunter did not want any more. His fat little nose was flaming with red paint as he tottered away.

Bunter did not seem to have expected this. Really, he might have—but he hadn't. He tottered along to the sink at the end of the passage to rub and scrub paint off his nose—and by the time he had finished, his nose was as red with rubbing and scrubbing as it had been with paint.

Bunter's back was still up—more so than ever; but that was probably the last A.R.P. inscription he would ever inscribe on the door of Study No. 1.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Suspended Sword!

"LIKE the sword of Themistocles," said Coker of the Fifth. "The what?" asked Potter.

"The which?" inquired Greene.

In the morning, Coker wore a worried look.

He wore, of course, other things, but his worried look was the most noticeable.

Prout had said the previous afternoon that he would consider how to deal with Coker! Apparently Prout was still considering. He had not, at any rate, dealt with Coker yet.

That state of suspense was very worrying. Whatever Prout was going to do, Coker would have preferred him to get on with it, and get it over. It was too thick to have it hanging over a fellow's head like this.

"The sword of Themistocles," said Coker, and he explained in condescension to the ignorance of his chums. "Themistocles was a bloke who had a sword suspended over his head by a single hair."

"Oh! The sword of Damocles," said Potter.

"I said Themistocles!" said Coker.

"But it was Damocles, old chap!" urged Greene.

"If you think you know more about classical history than I do, Greene, it only shows what an ignoramus you are!" said Coker. "It was Themistocles who had the sword suspended over his head by a single hair—I mean over his head by a single hair! Don't argue about it!"

"Oh, all right!" said Greene. "Any old thing! Make it Pericles if you like—or Pontius Pilate—I don't mind!"

"No sense in getting shirty when a fellow puts you right, Greene. You ought to be glad of it! You're at school to learn, I suppose!"

"Oh crikey!"

"But never mind that," resumed Coker. "I've no time to teach you

classical history now, Greene. As I said, it's like the sword of Themistocles—Prout keeping this hanging over a fellow's head! He hasn't said a word to me since he blew up in the quad yesterday. I wonder if he's decided to let it drop?"

Coker looked inquiringly at his chums. They seemed doubtful.

"The trouble with Prout is that he can't see sense!" sighed Coker. "He was talking some meaningless piffle about going to the Head to be expelled. That's the sort of goat he is!"

"Let's hope it won't come to that!" said Potter.

"It could hardly come to that, Potter. Prout may be a fool—but Dr. Locke's no fool! Locke knows, if Prout doesn't, that there are some fellows who can't be spared from a school—fellows who give a school a certain tone! It would hurt the school more than it would hurt me if I was bunked! The Head's not likely to do a silly thing like that!"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"That's not worrying me," said Coker. "That's rot! I'm quite satisfied about that. But Prout might get me a flogging if he put it to the Head! I hardly think so—the Head knows that Fifth Form men can't be whopped. I mean, it isn't as if it was any commonplace sort of chap like you, Potter, Prinstance——"

"Eh?"

"Or like you, Greeney——"

"Oh!"

"In my case, the Head could hardly think of anything of the kind!" said Coker thoughtfully. "As for Prout whopping me himself, I should not allow that!"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene together.

"So I really can't make out what the old ass is thinking of!" said Coker. "He can't very well give me more lines when I've a book already and haven't touched it yet! Detentions, perhaps! If he gives me extra French, I will put up with it, for the sake of peace!"

"I—I—I should!" gurgled Potter.

"I—I think I—I should, Coker!"

"Well, I mean to say, a fellow has to toe the line at school!" said Coker.

"Prout's an ass, and a jolly exasperating one, but he's a beak—if he puts me in Extra, I shall say nothing. I shall let him get by with that without a word. Quiet dignity and that sort of thing, you know! A fellow doesn't want to be always howling out about injustice. Fellow ought to take what comes! If he puts me in Extra School, I shall simply say 'Yes, sir!'—in a quiet and dignified way. It may have its effect. I mean, he may be ashamed of it later!"

"Oh!" moaned Potter and Greene.

"But a fellow would like to know!" grunted Coker. "Prout's got no right to keep the sword of Themistocles over a fellow's head like this!"

"There's the bell!" said Potter. "You'll know soon, Coker, old man! And, for goodness' sake, don't check Prout!"

Coker gave him a cold look.

"I hope I'm not the fellow to check a beak!" he answered freezingly.

"That sort of thing is bad form, Potter! I shall never tell Prout what I think of him—it isn't done! Pretty state of affairs, by gum, if fellows started telling their beaks what they thought of them!"

"I mean, if Prout whops you——"

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

"Better than a flogging from the Big Beak!" urged Greene.

"Don't be a dummy, Greene! If

Prout should so far forget himself as to think of whopping me, I hardly know what I should do. He's not likely to make such a fool of himself, I hope!"

Coker stalked away with dignified gait to the Fifth Form Room, followed by his anxious friends.

Often and often, Potter and Greene felt that the only way of dealing with Coker was to ram his fat head into the coal-locker in the study. That was the effect Coker had on his friends. But they were deeply concerned about him now.

Coker had—though he did not seem to understand it—done an awfully serious thing. He was fearfully lucky if he got off with six. Indeed no Form-master would have let him off so lightly as that, except from a consideration of what a hopeless ass Coker was! Potter and Greene hoped that it would be nothing worse than six on the bags.

But if Coker, instead of thanking his lucky stars, kicked up a shindy—He was capable of it! He was, indeed, capable of anything! Potter and Greene had cause to be anxious.

Fellows of other Forms going to the Form-rooms glanced curiously at Coker. Everybody knew that he was up for a row.

Even Coker had realised that it would be a serious matter if it came out that he had directly disregarded a direct command from his Form-master. Now it had come out! Prout had taken time to consider the matter—plenty of time. Only Coker thought it possible that he had decided to let the matter drop.

"Sorry, old bean!" said Bob Cherry, passing Coker on his way to the Remove Form Room.

Coker stared at him.

"Did you call me old bean?" he asked.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Well, don't!"

Bob refrained from banging a school book on Coker's features. He thought that old Horace probably had enough waiting for him in the Fifth Form Room.

Mr. Prout, portly, majestic, and plainly in a stern mood, let his Form into the Fifth Form Room.

All the Fifth knew that something was going to happen before class—except Coker! Coker was still considering the happy possibility that Prout had decided to let it drop.

The Fifth Form having taken their places, Mr. Prout stood regarding his Form with a severe frown on his plump features. His stern eyes singled out Horace Coker.

The Fifth waited for the thunder-storm.

"Coker!"

Prout's fruity voice was very deep.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Coker realised then that Prout wasn't going to let it drop! So now he could only wonder what sort of fool Prout was going to make of himself.

"I have considered your case very carefully, Coker. I shall not take you to your headmaster."

That was a relief to Potter and Greene, and other fellows in the Fifth who wished Coker well.

"I shall deal with you personally in this Form-room," resumed Prout. "Seldom, I may say almost never, have I been called upon to administer corporal punishment in this Form-room. My Form is a senior Form. My boys are beyond the stage when boys are junior boys, and act like junior boys, and require correction like

junior boys. This is a painful moment to me!"

Prout paused.

"But I have no choice," he continued. "If a senior boy persists in acting like an unthinking, unrestrained Lower boy, he must be dealt with like a Lower boy. There is no choice in the matter. Coker, stand out before the Form! I shall give you six strokes with a cane, Coker, and shall hope and trust that it will lead to reflection and amendment on your part. Stand out!"

Horace Coker remained where he was!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Six On The Bags!

"STAND out, Coker!" repeated Mr. Prout.

He supposed that Coker had not heard him, as Coker did not stand out.

But Coker heard all right! The trouble was that he did not heed! Coker remained where he was, his ears burning, his eyes gleaming.

It had come to this! Prout fancied that he was going to cane him—like Quelch caned a kid in the Remove room, or Twigg a small fag in the Second! The cane existed in the Fifth Form Room, but it was never used there. Fifth Form men were not caned.

Fellows would have laughed at the idea of Blundell, captain of the Fifth, getting caned. Such an idea was absurd. But that—from Coker's point of view—would have been less idiotic than the idea of caning Coker.

Coker was very far from realising that he was nobody in particular. His view was that he was somebody—and the most important somebody going!

"Do you hear me, Coker?" asked Prout, staring at Horace, and slowly realising that this was not deafness but disobedience.

"I hear you, sir!" admitted Coker.

"Get going, you crass ass!" whispered Potter, almost in anguish.

"Don't bother me now, Potter!"

"Coker, old chap—" Greene almost groaned.

"Shut up, Greene!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a hopeless look. Arguments and urgings were wasted on Coker. He had to be left to rush on to destruction.

"Stand out before the Form, Coker!" boomed Prout.

"May I point out, sir—" began Coker, with as much respect as he could possibly show towards a Form-master who was ass enough to think of caning Horace James Coker.

"You may stand out before the Form, Coker, without saying another word, or you will be expelled from Greyfriars within the hour!" said Prout.

Prout, evidently, was getting fierce.

Coker reflected a moment. He could not be whopped on the bags like a fag! That was ridiculous! But Prout had a right to order a fellow to stand out! Coker admitted that much. So he decided to step out. Even in Coker's solid brain there was, perhaps, some lingering spot of common sense.

He stepped out before the Form.

Prout took a cane from his desk.

With that cane he pointed to a chair.

"Bend over that chair, Coker!" he boomed.

Coker stood upright. It was difficult for him to believe that Prout was

serious. But Prout evidently was. The man was such an ass—such a crass ass—that he really thought that he was going to cane Coker of the Fifth—whack him on his trousers!

"I think, sir—" began Coker.

Prout breathed hard. He breathed deep. Prout was fed-up to the very chin with that troublesome member of his Form!

He often made allowances for Coker. There was a certain rugged honesty in Coker, along with his impenetrable stupidity. Troublesome and exasperating as he was, Prout never had any disagreeable doubts and suspicions about him, as he sometimes had about fellows like Price and Hilton. Coker's heart was all right, whatever might be said of his head. Really and truly, Prout wanted to go as easy as he could with the fathead of his Form.

But this was the limit! Prout was at the end of his patience.

"Say no more, Coker!" boomed Prout. "I have decided to cane you myself. I regret the necessity—and my Form, I am sure, will understand how deep is my regret that such a scene should be enacted in this Form-room."

The Fifth Form looked as sympathetically understanding as they could.

"But," said Prout, "you have left me no choice. Understand me, Coker! You have been guilty of insubordination; of direct disobedience and contumely! If I report this to your headmaster, you will be expelled from the school! One word of rebellion now, Coker, one hint of further defiance on your part, and I shall lay down this cane and place the matter in Dr. Locke's hands! You will then leave Greyfriars within the hour! Take your choice!"

Dead silence followed those bodiful words.

Coker looked at Prout.

He drew a deep, deep breath.

Prout meant it! Even into Coker's solid, too solid, brain trickled the comprehension that he stood on the very brink! He was going to be whopped, or he was going to be turfed out of Greyfriars School!

Undoubtedly there was a saving spot of common sense under the mass of Coker's fatheadedness. In these circumstances, if it came to this, he had thought that he might be driven to hit Prout! Now—fortunately—he did not think of hitting Prout! Wisdom came late to Coker—but it came! He bent over the chair.

The Fifth Form breathed more freely. Potter and Greene gasped with relief. Prout was relieved, too! He did not want an expulsion in his Form, if he could help it—if only Coker would let him help it!

He raised the cane.

Whop!

"Ooogh!" gasped Coker.

Right up to that point Coker had thought only of the indignity of a whopping. He had given no thought whatever to the whopping itself.

Now that it was taking place, however, he thought rather less of the indignity than of the actual whopping. Prout had said that it was painful to him. No doubt it was! It was certainly painful to Coker!

Whop!

There was no doubt about it. It was fearfully painful!

Whop!

"Ooogh!" spluttered Coker.

Whop!

Prout laid it on hard! The more painful it was to Prout the more he felt it his duty to make it painful to

Coker! He succeeded. The cane came down in awful swipes! Prout seemed to fancy that he was beating carpet. He put all the muscle of his plump arm into it. The cane fairly rang.

Whop!

"Yaroo!" roared Coker.

Rather late it occurred to Coker that if he was going through this, if he had to go through this, dignified silence was his cue! Shutting his teeth, enduring the infliction without a sound, was the only way of saving his dignity—such dignity as could be saved!

But that reflection came too late—Coker had already yelled and roared. He shut his teeth, however, to take the last whop in grim, Spartan silence.

Whop!

It came down rather like a flail!

Involuntarily, Coker's shut teeth opened and his Spartan silence changed into a fearful howl that woke all the echoes of the Form-room and echoed in other Form-rooms, and made fellows start.

"Whoooooooooooooh!" howled Coker.

It was a full six!

Prout, breathing hard after his exertions, laid down the cane.

Coker rose from the place of punishment, wriggling. He wriggled and wriggled. It was undignified! It was just like a fag in a junior Form-room! But it could not be helped! Coker wriggled, and wriggled, and wriggled!

"You may go to your place, Coker!" boomed Prout.

Coker's cue was to stride to his place, "pride in his port, defiance in his eye," as the poet expresses it; head erect and chin up! But again he thought of this too late! He wriggled to his place, gasping. He sat down—and immediately bounded up again with a squeak that might have been uttered by Billy Bunter in the Remove Room.

"Be silent, Coker!" boomed Prout.

Coker gasped.

"Sit down at once!"

Coker sat down again, much more cautiously; in a very gingerly manner. He gave a squealing gasp.

"Shut it, for goodness' sake!" grunted Blundell. "Can't you stand a whopping, Coker?"

That was the last straw.

Not only had Coker been whopped, but he had given his Form the impression that he was a fellow who could not stand a whopping!

Coker's feelings were too deep for words! They could not have been expressed in any words in any known language.

During that school in the Fifth Form Room, Horace Coker sat—wriggling every now and then—with inexpressible, unutterable feelings locked up within him.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Asking For The Sack!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Hook it!"

"I haven't come to tea!" said Billy Bunter disdainfully. "I'm going to tea with Mauly! If you think I want any of that beastly spread—"

"Shut the door after you!"

"I say, Coker's coming up—"

"Coker!" repeated all the Famous Five.

"Yes! I expect he's coming up for a row," said Bunter, blinking eagerly into Study No. 1. "You know, he was whopped to-day in the Fifth—he's been

scowling ever since—awfully shirty! Look here, you fellows, you cop him in the passage, and wallop him—”

“Scat!”
 “See what a chance it is!” urged Bunter. “Right away from all the other Fifth Form beasts—wallop him right and left, you know! He’s coming up this passage—and look here, if you’ll wallop him for booting me, I’ll let you off! I won’t rub it in any more about you funking Coker!”

“You burbling, blithering, bloated bloater—”

“Look here, I tell you this is a chance to mop up that beast Coker—and I can jolly well say—Wow!”

Coker had arrived! Probably he was not in a good temper. He kicked Bunter as he arrived, and Bunter roared. He kicked him again, and Bunter bolted.

Harry Wharton & Co. were sitting down to tea in Study No. 1. They rose as one man, and faced round as the burly figure of Horace Coker was framed in the study doorway.

Really they hoped that he had not come for trouble. They thought that old Horace had enough on hand! Still, if he had come to ask for more, they were ready to oblige.

Coker certainly looked shirty. His brow was dark and gloomy. His look was bitter. His brow had been dark and gloomy and his look bitter since that six in the Fifth Form Room.

The effects of the whopping were wearing off. He no longer wriggled. But the wound to his dignity, the jolt to his self-esteem, wore as painful as ever—indeed, more so. To put it poetically, the iron had entered into his soul! Coker had been whopped—like a fag! He had been humbled to the dust! This did not matter to anybody but Coker—but to Coker it mattered fearfully! Many fellows, indeed, grinned over it! Far, far indeed was Coker from grinning!

For the present, at least, the spring sunshine was blotted out for Coker! No doubt there was a patch of blue sky round the corner! For the present it was invisible to Coker.

“Trickle in, old chap!” said Harry Wharton politely.

Kindly and tactfully, the juniors suppressed a desire to smile.

Coker trickled in. He had not, it appeared, come on the warpath. Shindies with fags were not in Coker’s thoughts now. Weightier matters occupied his powerful brain.

“Squat down to tea, Coker!” said Frank Nugent.

Coker was not really wanted to tea! But it was a polite study.

“Don’t be cheeky!” said Coker.

“Oh!”
 It was cheek, of course, for Remove fags to ask a Fifth Form man to tea! Coker was down on his luck, but he was not to be checked!

“Well, do you want anything?” asked Harry Wharton restively. He wanted to be civil to poor old Horace in the painful circumstances. But a little of Coker went a long way.

“Yes! I wanted to ask you kids something! I dare say you were the gang of young sweeps who headed up Hacker in a sack last term.”

“Not guilty!” said Bob, laughing.

“Oh!” said Coker. “You remember it, I suppose—the Acid Drop was bagged, in his room, and headed up in a sack. It was pretty well known that it was a rag. You kids being such cheeky little swabs, I thought very likely you’d done it.”

“Better inquire in the Shell if you

want to know!” said Harry Wharton. “We were rather ragging Hacker last term, but we never bagged him.”

“Oh!” said Coker. He seemed disappointed. “What I wanted to know was, where you got the sack?”

The Famous Five gave Coker their particular attention at that.

It was a fact that last term Hacker, the master of the Shell, had been bagged in a sack. Harry Wharton & Co. had a suspicion that Hobson of the Shell could have named the baggers—if so disposed; a suspicion that they very carefully kept to themselves.

Now, it appeared, Coker suspected the Famous Five of having been those baggers. That did not matter in the least! What mattered was that Coker’s inquiry on the subject indicated that some similar scheme was working in Coker’s mind. That was alarming.

“You see, I want a sack like that!” explained Coker. “I needn’t mention what I want it for—that doesn’t matter. I just want it!”

“Oh, holy smoke!” murmured Bob Cherry.

“I think we can guess!” said Harry. Really, it did not require a lot of guessing. “Coker, old man, wash it out, for goodness’ sake! If you played any mad trick like that on Prout—”

“I didn’t come here to ask advice from fags!” Coker pointed out. “I just wanted to know where you got the sack, that’s all!”

“If you want to know where you’ll get the sack, it will be in the Head’s study if you lark with Prout!” said Johnny Bull.

“The sackfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Coker!” murmured Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

“Don’t jaw!” said Coker. “I’m not going to tell you what I’m going to do. I’m not likely to take a mob of gabbling fags into my confidence. It’s a thing I’ve got to be rather careful about! If it wasn’t you lot that bagged the Acid Drop that time—”

“It wasn’t!”

“Well, I dare say you know who did—so tell me where they got the sack from, if you know.”

The Famous Five could guess that the sack that had bagged the Acid Drop had been borrowed from Gosling’s shed. They had seen a pile of similar sacks there. But they were not likely to tell Coker! If Coker was thinking of bagging Prout, as only too evidently he was, they were not going to give him any assistance on the way to getting expelled.

“Do you know?” snapped Coker impatiently.

“We can guess—”

“Well, where?”

“For goodness’ sake, Coker—”

“I said, don’t jaw!” said Coker testily. “I want a sack like that, if there’s one to be found in the school, that will do! Where did they get that sack?”

Two or three Remove fellows passing in the passage stopped to turn grinning glances into the study.

Vernon-Smith chuckled, and Skinner laughed; Tom Brown and Squiff stared. If Coker of the Fifth, recently whopped by Prout, was inquiring where he could get a sack, it did not need a Sherlock Holmes or a Ferrers Locke to deduce the rest.

“Nobody here is going to help you get the sack, Coker!” said the captain of the Remove, shaking his head.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Coker gave the Famous Five a grim look. Then he turned to the grinning bunch at the doorway.

“Here, you kids,” he said, “you

remember about the Acid Drop being bagged last term. Any of you know where they got the sack?”

“Might have been in Gosling’s shed!” said Skinner.

“Shut up, Skinner!” roared the Famous Five, from the study.

“Eh? Can’t a fellow answer a civil question?” asked Skinner, in innocent surprise. “Why shouldn’t I tell Coker, if he wants to know?”

“You worm!” roared Bob Cherry. “I suppose you would think it funny if that howling ass got bunked!”

“My dear chap, I should weep briny tears!” assured Skinner.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Mr. Gosling’s shed!” repeated Coker. “Oh, all right! Thanks!”

“Not at all!” said Skinner blandly.

Coker walked down the passage and disappeared down the Remove staircase. He had got the information he wanted! Evidently he was going to Gosling’s shed to look for a sack—the sack in the Head’s study to follow, as night followed day, if he bagged Prout with it.

“Well, my solitary chapeau!” said the Bounder. “Coker’s the man to ask for it! He’s the man to sit up and beg for it! If I were going to bag my beak, I don’t think I should tell half the school about it first!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“The awful ass!” said Squiff. “His friends ought to stop him! Why did you want to tell him where to get the sack, Skinner, you worm?”

“Can’t help being an obliging chap,” answered Skinner. “It’s my nice nature. If a fellow asks for the boot, why shouldn’t a fellow have what he asks for?”

“Why not?” agreed Bob Cherry.

“Here you are, Skinner!”

“Yaroo!” roared Skinner, as the largest foot in the Remove shot out of the doorway of Study No. 1. “Ow! Keep your hoofs to yourself, you hooligan!”

“Can’t help being an obliging chap,” answered Bob. “It’s my nice nature.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Have another?”

Skinner went hastily up the passage. There was a sound of chuckling up and down that passage, where the news of Horace Coker’s enterprise was not long in spreading.

Coker was asking for the sack—in a double sense of that word—and if he got the sack from Gosling, there was no doubt that he would get the sack from the Head.

Such an enterprise, if it was not to be followed by the most direful consequences, required to be kept most awfully dark. This was the way Coker was keeping it dark!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Let Him Wait!

“WHAT the dickens—” asked Potter.

“What the thump—” asked Greene.

They were puzzled.

They had come into the study to tea. That was all right. There were ample supplies in the study for tea. Coker’s hamper, which he had brought back after the holidays, was far from exhausted.

Coker’s Aunt Judy did Horace well in hampers. So exceedingly well had Aunt Judy done her beloved Horace this time that that hamper had only with very great difficulty passed the House dame. The fellows were allowed to bring back hampers, but there was a limit; they were not expected to lay



Billy Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the sight of Mr. Prout carrying an enormous cake along Masters' Passage. "Oh crikey!" breathed the fat Removite. But the portly Form-master did not heed Bunter.

in supplies sufficient for the next war.

However, Mrs. Kebble was a kindly soul, and that hamper had got through.

Coker's study table at the moment resembled a land flowing with milk and honey. There were cakes, pies, ham, jellies, jam tarts, and cream puffs—all sorts of excellent things that would have made Billy Bunter's mouth water merely to think of them. Above all, there was an immense cake—a mountain of a cake—rich with plums, thick with marzipan.

Potter and Greene looked at that cake with approval. There were times when they felt that Coker was bound, sooner or later, to drive them into ramming his head into the coal-locker. But this was not one of those times. At times like this they loved Coker like a brother.

But they were puzzled—and a little uneasy. Coker's occupation as they entered the study was unusual—singular—alarming.

He was stuffing a sack out of sight into the study cupboard.

It was a large sack. Probably it had contained potatoes at one time. It was large, it was rough, and it was grubby. Round its neck was a cord for tying it up when packed.

Potter and Greene—and about fifty other fellows—had seen Coker carrying a large bundle wrapped in newspapers into the House.

Fellows did not as a rule carry large bundles wrapped in newspapers about Greyfriars. There was no law against it exactly; still, if a fellow did it he could not fail to get a lot of attention centred on him.

They had wondered what Coker had in that big bundle. Now they knew; it was this big sack. On the floor lay the newspapers in which Coker had wrapped it—cunningly concealed from sight; the fact that it was a sack. The

sack itself he was shoving into the lower part of the study cupboard.

"Oh!" ejaculated Coker, with a start, as they came in. It seemed that he did not want to be spotted with that sack.

He gave it a final kick, and it disappeared into the cupboard, and Coker shut the door on it.

Then he faced his puzzled and perturbed friends.

"What the dickens have you got that sack here for, Coker?" asked Greene.

"Better not ask questions," said Coker briefly.

"But what——" asked Potter.

"I'm leaving you fellows out of this," said Coker. "I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to do it entirely on my own. It's a bit risky, and you fellows wouldn't have the nerve."

"You're not thinking of Prout?" asked Potter in dismay.

"Never mind what I'm thinking of," answered Coker. "A beak was bagged last term and left in a sack. Perhaps something of the same kind is going to happen over again this term. Perhaps an old ass who thinks he can whop a Fifth Form man is going to be made jolly sorry for himself. Perhaps!"

"Coker, old man——" groaned Greene.

"I'm saying absolutely nothing about it even to you fellows," said Coker stubbornly. "A thing like this can't be kept too dark. It's bunking if it comes out. Even a fellow like me—a fellow that the school can hardly do without—would be bunked if it came out that he had bagged his beak in a sack and left him to squirm."

"Oh dear!" moaned Potter.

"Safer for you fellows to know nothing," said Coker. "You don't want to have a hand in it."

"Oh crikey! No fear!"

"I've been whopped," said Coker. "Made to bend over before all the fellows, like a fag in the Third Form! Six on the bags—my bags! Ha, ha!" Coker laughed—one of those bitter, sardonic laughs. "Well, perhaps an old ass will like being bagged as much as I liked being whopped! We shall see!"

"You can't do it, Coker!" almost wailed Greene.

"Can't I?" said Coker grimly. "Wait and see! Not that I like the idea," he explained further. "I'd rather walk up to Prout and pull his cheeky nose before all the Form. That's what I should prefer. That's what he's asked for really. But can I do it?"

Potter and Greene gazed at him.

Even Coker, it seemed, realised that he could not do that.

"No," said Coker bitterly, "I can't do that. I should be bunked on the spot if I did. Prout's got me there. A beak has always got a fellow there. What would have happened if I'd tapped him in the bread-basket this morning, as I was jolly well inclined to do? Marched off to the Head and bunked. Well, I'm not going to be bunked."

Potter and Greene, glancing at the cupboard that hid the sack, seemed to doubt that.

"No!" said Coker. "I've got to think of my people, and I've got to think of the school. As I said, Prout's got me there. But is he getting by with this? I fancy not!"

"Coker, old man——" moaned Potter.

"Tit for tat!" said Coker grimly. "A Bowman for a Gulliver." Coker probably meant a Roland for an Oliver. "Prout whops me—I bag Prout! Where the shoe pinches is that

I've got to keep it fearfully dark. Prout would get me bunked for it like a shot if he knew! He's capable of it!"

"Oh!"

"I'd like to let him know all right," said Coker. "But can I? No! Prout's not going to have the satisfaction of getting me bunked. Hardly! Prout won't know who bagged him. But I shall know. I shall laugh!"

"Coker, old fellow—" moaned Potter.

"Now let's have tea," said Coker briskly. "Lots of time yet; it will have to be done after dark, of course. I've got it all cut and dried. But the less I say about it the better. You fellows had better steer clear. In fact, it will be safer for you to know absolutely nothing about it, so don't ask questions."

Coker sat down to tea.

"Old chap—" murmured Potter.

"Old fellow—" moaned Greene.

It was much to their credit that Potter and Greene almost forgot tea, even that mountain of a cake, in their deep anxiety for Coker.

"Don't jaw!" said Coker. "That old ass Prout has got to have it! That's as settled as the laws of the Swedes and Nasturtiums! That old goat—"

"Shush!" breathed Potter and Greene, almost in agony, as a heavy, elephantine tread was heard in the Fifth Form passage.

Prout was coming!

Coker shrugged his shoulders. But he shushed. He had had enough of Prout overhearing what he thought of him. One book was enough to go on with.

The portly form stopped at Coker's study.

Coker, Potter, and Greene stood at attention. Coker only wondered what the old ass wanted, and whether he was after that book already. Potter and Greene wondered, in deep anxiety, whether he had got wind of that sack.

"Coker!" boomed Prout.

"Yes, sir?"

"Some few minutes ago," boomed Prout, "I saw you, from a distance, in the quadrangle; you were carrying a parcel—a huge parcel—wrapped in newspapers. I have long given up expecting you, Coker, to have any sense—any sense whatever—of the fitness of things. But even you, Coker, might understand that Greyfriars boys—senior boys—are not expected to carry large bundles wrapped in newspapers about the school. There is a certain propriety of conduct, Coker, expected of boys in a senior Form."

Prout had seen that bundle! Fortunately, he did not know what was in it. He was going to find fault with Coker, as per usual, for carrying that big bundle about.

It was true that it had been a big bundle—a very big bundle—and that it had been wrapped in newspapers—the only wrappings available at the time. It was true that two or three fellows, seeing Coker with it, had asked him whether he was taking home the family washing.

Still, a fellow could carry a bundle if he liked. This was Prout all over.

"A certain propriety—a certain regard for appearances—" Prout went on booming. He paused as his eyes fell on the mountainous cake on the study table. He gazed at that enormous cake, and snorted. "I need not ask you, Coker, what was in that bundle; I see it before my eyes."

It was a natural mistake, the sack

being out of sight, and the cake in full view.

Coker was only too thankful that Prout had no suspicion of the sack in the cupboard. He was welcome to suppose that Coker had had that big cake in the bundle if he liked.

Prout snorted again.

"This," he said, "is disgusting, Coker! I see upon this table an enormous quantity of foodstuffs—more, much more, than any boy should have in his study. Not content with that, you must add that enormous cake to an already over-ample supply of comestibles. Such greediness—such voracity I—Coker, this is disgusting!"

Coker breathed hard.

He had to stand this—being talked to like some greedy fag. He had only the comfort of thinking of Prout—later—squirming in the sack!

"I shall not permit this!" said Prout.

"I told you in the Form-room this morning, Coker, that if you act like an unthinking junior you must expect to be treated like an unthinking junior! I shall confiscate this cake, Coker!"

"Will you?" breathed Coker.

Potter and Greene looked on in dismay. Their thoughts had dwelt happily on that cake. They could have groaned as Prout stretched out a plump hand to it.

"I will leave you the rest," said Prout—"more, much more, than I can approve of! Gluttony, Coker, is bad enough in a junior boy; in a senior boy it is very reprehensible! However, I will leave the rest. I shall confiscate this cake, Coker, as a warning to you not to indulge in gluttony!"

Prout lifted the cake from the table.

Three pairs of eyes watched him as he walked out of the study with it—Coker's in suppressed fury; Potter's and Greene's in sorrow.

The elephantine tread died away down the passage.

Prout was gone. The cake was gone.

"Oh crumbs!" said Potter.

"Oh crikey!" said Greene.

"He didn't spot the sack," breathed Coker. "Never mind the cake. Blow the cake! Prout will pay for this along with the rest. Let him wait!"

And several times during tea in the study Coker repeated darkly:

"Let him wait!"

The cup of Prout's iniquity was full. Prout was for it! He had only to wait!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

So Near, Yet So Far!

BILLY BUNTER jumped.

His eyes for a moment looked like popping through his spectacles.

Bunter was astonished.

Any fellow would have been astonished at the sight of a portly Form-master carrying an enormous cake along Masters' Passage.

Really, it was an unusual sort of thing.

Bunter had just come out of Mr. Quelch's study. He almost barged into Prout as he came out.

Prout passed him, bearing the cake. Bunter gazed at it in wonder. His eyes devoured it; he sniffed a luscious scent from it as it passed hardly a yard from his fat little nose.

Prout did not heed Bunter. He walked on, majestic, with the cake. Bunter's eyes and spectacles followed him.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He gazed after that cake as if fascinated.

His first thought, on seeing the master of the Fifth carrying that cake to his study, was that Prout was going to have it for tea. But even Bunter realised that a gentleman of Prout's ripe years was not likely to revel in cake for tea.

Prout had bagged that cake from somewhere—confiscated it, of course; and, as Prout was master of the Fifth, it could only be from a Fifth Former that he had annexed it.

That enlightened Bunter. He remembered now that he had seen a big cake like that before. He had seen it on the first day of the term, when he had been investigating the contents of Coker's hamper, and Coker's boot had suddenly and painfully interrupted his investigations.

Prout had got that cake off Coker. He had confiscated Coker's cake. It was surprising, for such things never happened, or hardly ever, in a senior Form. But that was it. For it was certainly Coker's cake, and Prout had got it.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter again.

Juniors were not allowed to linger in that passage. But Bunter lingered. He could not help it. That cake fascinated him.

Mr. Hacker, looking out of his doorway, looked expressively at Bunter.

Bunter did not heed the Acid Drop. He was thinking. If Prout went out again, after landing the cake in his study—

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

If Billy Bunter had a chance at that cake, any fellow who knew Billy Bunter could foretell what would happen.

But it did not look hopeful. Prout was not likely to keep that cake in his study long.

He could not eat it. He couldn't keep it till the end of the term, to be handed back to the owner, as was done with articles of a less perishable nature. What happened in such cases was that confiscated tuck was handed over to the house dame, to be used up in one way or another.

Billy Bunter longed to get at that cake. He yearned to get at that cake. He was prepared to run risks to get at that cake. But he had to realise that prospects were not healthy.

Prout had gone into his study, but he had not closed the door. In a minute or two he reappeared, minus the cake.

Majestically Prout came rolling down the passage. This time he took heed of Bunter, Bunter being still there.

"Ah, Bunter!" said Prout. "You should not be loitering about here, Bunter! However, as you are here, you may take a message to the house dame and save me the trouble."

Bunter blinked at him. He had not the slightest desire to save Prout trouble. Perhaps Prout did not know; perhaps he did not care. He rumbled on:

"Go to Mrs. Kebble, Bunter, and request her to send to my study to remove a cake which has been confiscated!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes, sir!"

"Go at once!" boomed Prout.

"Certainly, sir!"

Bunter cut off. Having seen him started, Prout rolled majestically on, and went out into the quad, to resume the saunter which had been interrupted by the sight of that extraordinary parcel carried into the House by Coker of his Form.

Billy Bunter—from a safe distance—watched him go.

Prout having rolled off like an old Spanish galleon under full sail, Billy Bunter retraced his steps.

Bunter was not going to convey that message to Mrs. Kebble. He was going to forget to do so. If questioned afterwards, Bunter, who had an absolute disregard for the truth—indeed, seemed to dislike it—could say that he had gone to the house dame's room, but Mrs. Kebble wasn't there.

The longer Mrs. Kebble was in hearing about that confiscated cake, the more chance there was of Bunter snooping it.

Prout, satisfied that the house dame would take charge of the cake, would dismiss it from mind. Finding it gone when he came in, he could only conclude that his instructions had been carried out. It was all right at Prout's end. At Bunter's end, all that was needed was to get his clutches on the cake.

Up the passage rolled Bunter. His capacious mouth was already watering at the prospect of getting busy on that cake.

Mr. Hacker looked out of his study with another expressive look.

"What are you doing here, Bunter?" asked the Acid Drop, in his unpleasant way.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"You are perfectly well aware, Bunter, that juniors are not allowed in this corridor unless sent for."

"I—I mean, I—I've got to see my Form-master, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Hacker sourly. "In that case, Bunter, why have you passed Mr. Quelch's door and come up the passage?"

Bunter did not know the answer to that one. He was silent.

"You will go away immediately, Bunter; and if I find you loitering in this passage again I shall mention the matter to your Form-master!" said the Acid Drop.

There was no help for it. That cake was worth some risk; but, obviously, Bunter could not roll into Prout's study and scoff it under Hacker's eyes.

With deep feelings, the Owl of the Remove rolled away.

Hacker, with a sniff, stepped back into his study.

At the corner Billy Bunter ventured to blink back over a fat shoulder.

Hacker had disappeared into his study, but he had left the door open.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

He rolled disconsolately on. He could not pass Hacker's open door. But Bunter was not beaten yet. A fellow could double round, by way of the Head's corridor, and get into Masters' Passage again, beyond the Acid Drop's door. Bunter had to get at that cake, if it was, so to speak, getatable.

Five minutes later, Bunter was tiptoeing past the Head's study. From Head's corridor he merged into Masters' Passage again—past Hacker's door. Then it was hardly more than a step to Prout's study.

"Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter bounded at that sharp voice. He spun round. There was Hacker, looking out of his doorway again.

Bunter blinked at him in dismay.

Hacker was suspicious. He did not know anything about the cake. He did not know that Prout's study was the fat Owl's objective. But he was suspicious.

"What are you doing here, Bunter, again?" inquired the Acid Drop, in his most acid tones, and with his most acid look.

"N-n-nothing, sir," stammered Billy Bunter.

"I shall report this to your Form-master, Bunter. Remove boys will not be allowed to disregard the rules of the House in this manner," said Mr. Hacker. "I shall certainly mention this to Mr. Quelch."

Billy Bunter faded dismally out of the picture again.

That splendid cake, so near, yet so far, reposed on Prout's table in Prout's study—going begging, as it were. Bunter's only consolation was that Mrs. Kebble was not likely to send for it, as she did not know anything about it. If that unspeakable beast, Hacker, shut his door, or went out, there was a chance yet.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Ambush!

"DON'T!" urged Potter, almost with tears in his eyes.

Coker of the Fifth did not take the trouble to reply.

"Don't, old chap!" moaned Greene. In stern silence, Coker sorted the sack out of the study cupboard.

He had no use for arguments. No use for remonstrances. Coker's mind, such as it was, was made up. His plans were as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. The time had come for action. Coker was ready for action. Eager for it, in fact.

He folded up that big sack, to make it as small as possible.

He could not make it very small—it was such a big sack. A fellow could only do his best. Then he proceeded to wrap it in a large sheet of brown paper, procured specially for the purpose, as less noticeable than the newspapers in which it had been formerly wrapped.

Potter and Greene watched him in anguish.

They did not want old Horace to be bunked. Even apart from the consideration of Aunt Judy's hampers—an important consideration—they did not want him bunked. They would have saved him from himself, if they could have.

But it was said of old, though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him. Coker was impervious to argument. Remonstrances rolled off him like water from a duck. Really, there was no way of stopping Coker, unless by up-ending him on the study floor, and sitting on his head, as Billy Bunter had sat on it in the train.

Even had Potter and Greene adopted that desperate resource, they could not have set on Coker's head for ever.

"Do chuck it!" implored Greene. He knew it was futile to talk sense to Horace Coker, but he tried it. "It's the sack; it's the long jump; it's bunking, old fellow. Next train for home, old scout!"

"Don't be a fool, Greene!"

He put the bundle under his arm.

"It's the long jump, old chap!" pleaded Potter.

"Don't be a dummy, Potter!"

"Bagging a beak, you know—"

"Think I'm going to mention to Prout that I did it?" inquired Coker, with sarcasm. "I'm not going to let him know I've been within a mile of his study. I'm not a fool, am I?"

"Not?" gasped Potter.

"Oh crikey!" said Greene.

Coker, favouring his friends with a contemptuous sniff, walked out of the

study, the bundle under his brawny arm.

Potter and Greene exchanged hopeless looks. They gave it up at that.

Coker walked down the Fifth Form passage.

At the door of the games study, several Fifth Form men looked at him as he passed.

"What have you got there, Coker?" asked Blundell.

"Oh, nothing special!" answered Coker carelessly.

"Taking home the washing again?" asked Price.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker walked on regardless, leaving the Fifth Form men laughing. He came across the landing, and several juniors on the Remove staircase glanced at him.

Some of them grinned, some looked rather alarmed. The Famous Five were among them and they had not forgotten Coker's inquiries after a sack.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What have you got there, Coker?" bawled Bob Cherry.

Coker disdained to answer.

"Coker, old man—" called out Harry Wharton.

"Shut up, you cheeky fag!" answered Coker, in passing.

He tramped on down the stairs. At the foot of the staircase he came on Wingate of the Sixth, who glanced rather curiously at that bundle.

"What are you up to now, Coker?" asked the captain of Greyfriars. "You seem to have a fancy to-day for carrying bundles about. What have you got there?"

"Oh, only something, you know!" answered Coker vaguely. And he walked on, leaving Wingate staring.

All this was very irritating to Coker.

It was not Coker's way to be cautious or stealthy; but he understood the need of caution, indeed stealth, in such an enterprise as this. He did not want all Greyfriars to notice that bundle.

Still, a fellow could not carry a big bundle about a crowded House, without other fellows noticing it. It could not be helped. Anyhow, nobody knew there was a sack in that bundle.

Coker progressed towards Masters' Passage.

He had chosen his time well.

It was getting dusk. Prout had gone out. Coker, with a watchful eye, had seen Prout roll out with Hacker. No doubt they would come in by dark. The interval was Coker's.

Prout was out, and Hacker was out, but he had to run the gauntlet of any other beaks that might be browsing about Masters' Passage. As it happened, he nearly ran into Mr. Quelch coming out of his study. He stopped so suddenly that the bundle dropped from his arm and bumped on the floor.

Coker, with suppressed exasperation, picked it up again.

Quelch glanced at him inquiringly.

"What is that, Coker?" he asked.

It was unusual, to say the least, for any fellow to walk up Masters' Passage with a big bundle under his arm.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "Only—only something I—I have to take to my Form-master's study, sir."

Coker thought that was rather neat. Certainly it was only something that he had to take to his Form-master's study. Any fellow might have had to take something to his Form-master's study. Nothing suspicious in that.

Anyhow, Quelch was satisfied, and he nodded and walked on.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Big Surprise For Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"That ass!"

"That chump!"

"You frabjous fathead!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were discussing Coker when Billy Bunter rolled up to them on the Remove landing.

It was not exactly the business of the Famous Five what happened to Coker, but they could not help feeling concerned about him.

Half the Remove knew that he had some scheme on for bagging Prout, as the Acid Drop had been bagged in a sack last term. The bagger of Hacker had got away with it; but nobody supposed for a moment that Horace Coker would get away with the bagging of Prout.

Even if he got Prout in the sack, which was doubtful, considering what a clumsy, cack-handed ass Coker was, he could never escape detection. Really there was not a spot of a chance of that.

Only the deepest, darkest secrecy could have saved the perpetrator of such a deed from discovery, in view of the fearfully strict investigation that was bound to follow. And a crowd of Remove fellows knew, and plenty of other fellows had heard. Plenty of fellows who had seen Coker with his bundle had guessed what was in that bundle. Instead of deep, dark secrecy, Coker was almost shouting his intentions from the house-tops.

It was rumoured that Prout himself had seen him bringing that huge bundle into the House at tea-time, and had jawed him for it! Was not Prout—after the bagging—certain to remember that big bundle, and put two and two together? He was!

Fifth Form men, Fourth Formers, Shell fellows, Removites, had seen Coker going down with his brown-paper parcel—some had noticed that he had run right into a prefect at the foot of the stairs, and that Wingate had spoken to him! It really was shouting it out.

"The ass!" said Harry Wharton. "He ought to be stopped! It's rotten, anyhow—a rotten trick! Prout's not a bad old bean! He has enough to stand from that howling ass Coker!"

"I say you fellows—"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "It is not like the case of the esteemed and execrable Acid Drop—"

"I say—" squeaked Bunter.

"Hacker asks for it—Prout doesn't!" said Bob Cherry. "Old Don Pomposo isn't a bad sort! He let Coker off light with six, if the fathead only knew it. Not that Coker will get by with it—he's too fatheaded. Goodness knows what will happen if he tries it on—but he will never get Prout."

"No!" Harry Wharton nodded. "It wants some doing—bagging a beak! Coker couldn't bag a bunny rabbit!"

"The fathead—"

"I say, you fellows, will you listen to a chap?" howled Bunter. "I say, do you know where Hacker is?"

"Blow Hacker!"

"Well, I want to know!" snorted Bunter. "His study door's shut now! I can't go to his study to see whether he's there! Has anybody seen him?"

"What the thump do you want with Hacker, you fat ass?" asked Bob. "You'd better give the Acid Drop a wide berth. He bites."

"I only want to know whether the beast is in his study," yapped Bunter,

"I don't want him opening his door suddenly and pouncing on me like he did before. Have you seen Hacker?"

"If you're thinking of larking in Hacker's study, you frumptions chump, you'd better think again!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I ain't!" hooted Bunter.

"Then why do you want to know whether Hacker's there or not?"

"Well, the beast was watching me like a cat!" snapped Bunter. "He said he would speak to Quelch about it! I don't want him jumping on me again! His door's shut now—I looked! Anybody know where he is?"

"Look here, fathead—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" snapped Bunter. "What I want to know is, where's that beast Hacker? Prout's gone out—I saw him with his hat and overcoat on—but if Hacker's spying on a chap—"

"Hacker went out with Prout!" said Vernon-Smith. "I heard that they're gone to lecture or something, but if you're thinking of larking in Hacker's study, chuck it, you fat chump!"

"Sure he went out with Prout?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Yes; I saw them together."

"That's all right then!" said Bunter in great relief, and he rolled away down the staircase.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced after him as he went.

"What is that blithering idiot up to?" asked Bob.

"Something in Hacker's study, I suppose!" said Harry. "I wonder where that ass Coker is! He can't be bagging Prout, if Prout's gone out; that's one comfort."

"Waiting for him to come in, perhaps—with that sack!" grinned the Bounder.

"The ass!"

"The fathead!"

"The chump!"

Billy Bunter, quite uninterested in the discussion going on, on the Remove landing, disappeared down the staircase.

This was Bunter's chance, at last.

Half a dozen times at least, during the past hour, Billy Bunter had revisited the corner of Masters' Passage, like a fat ghost revisiting the glimpses of the moon. Every time—till the last—Hacker's door had still been open.

But when, at last, Bunter saw that it was shut, he dreaded that it might open again if he passed!

All was clear now!

Prout had gone out, he knew that already; and now he had learned that Hacker had gone out with Prout!

The cake, it was certain, was still in Prout's study; Mrs. Kebble had not even heard of its existence, so far.

No longer in danger of being pounced upon by the suspicious Acid Drop, Billy Bunter rolled into Masters' Passage. Quelch, he knew, was in the Common-room—he had seen him go there. He had to take the chance of other beaks.

All the doors in that passage were closed—except one, which was just opening. From that one, emerged the dapper figure of Monsieur Charpentier, the French master.

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose.

But Mossoo was not a suspicious and watchful beast like Hacker!

Bunter slowed down and stopped at his own Form-master's study.

Monsieur Charpentier passed him, no doubt concluding that the Remove boy was going to see the Remove master. Anyhow, he passed on without bothering Bunter.

Coker, breathing hard, progressed up the passage to Prout's study.

Fortunately, he met no more beaks. He whipped into Prout's study, and shut the door after him. He gave the cake on the table one scowl.

It was growing dusky in the quad. It was almost dark in the study. But it was not dark enough for Coker. What he was going to do was a deed of darkness. It could not be too dark for that deed.

First of all he took the electric lamp out of its socket. That prevented a light from being switched on when Prout entered. He laid it on the table beside the cake.

Then he drew the blinds, shutting out the glimmer of sunset. It was now quite dark in Prout's study.

Coker unwrapped the sack in the dark, and crammed the brown paper into the wastepaper-basket out of the way. Then he opened the wide neck of the sack, and tested the cord threaded round it, to make sure that it would tighten at a single pull.

All was in order. It needed to be in order. Coker could not afford to waste time once Prout was in that sack. When he had bagged Prout, prompt retreat was Coker's cue. Retreat could not be too prompt when once he had bagged Prout.

Coker, in the dark, groped to the door. He drew out the key, and slipped it into his pocket. That would be wanted later, when he shut the door on Prout, squirming in the sack.

Prout, once bagged, was not going to get out of the bag in a hurry. Probably he would bellow. He could bellow as much as he liked, with the study door locked, and the key dropped out of the nearest window. Coker had been doing quite a lot of thinking over this enterprise. He had it all cut and dried.

All was ready now—all but Prout. Prout, essential in the last act, had not yet come in.

Coker planted himself behind the door. The open sack was in his hands. The moment that door opened, Coker was prepared to act. In the twinkling of an eye, if not in a still shorter space of time, that sack would be whipped down over Prout's head. It would reach to his feet. Prout was not tall. The cord would be jerked tight, and knotted. There would be no escape for Prout. He would be ruthlessly bagged, and he would remain bagged till he was rescued. And rescue would not reach him in a hurry—through a locked door, with the key gone.

The best of it was that Coker would be perfectly safe!

Potter and Greene knew more than he had really intended to let them know, but they, of course, would not give a man away! Nobody else knew anything! At least, Coker did not realise that anybody else knew anything! It was safe as houses!

Waiting there in the dark, sack in his grip, Coker wondered grimly how Prout would like it! As much as Coker had liked bending over in the Form-room that morning, no doubt! He would bellow, and wriggle, and squirm! Coker had bellowed, and wriggled, and squirmed, in the Form-room that morning! Now it was Prout's turn!

Coker waited! And at the sound of a footstep, and the door-handle turning, he lifted the sack to whip down over the entering head in the dark! Prout had begged for this—and now he was going to get it!



Mr. Quelch sawed through the knotted cord at the end of the sack. It came open at last, and a foot thrashed out. "Ooooh!" There was a fearful yell from the master of the Remove as that foot landed on his nose!

Bunter was glad to see him turn the corner.

The coast was quite clear now! How long it would remain clear, Bunter could not tell, and he wasted no time.

He cut up the passage breathlessly, passing Hacker's door. He reached Prout's door, gasping for breath.

But he did not pause there! Swiftly, he turned the door-handle, pushed the door open, and stepped into the study!

What happened next made Bunter's fat brain spin!

His programme was mapped. He was going to scoff that cake on the spot, to make sure of it; and all that he was unable to scoff on the spot he was going to park in his pockets and carry off to scoff later! That was the programme—never, alas, to be carried out!

Bunter knew that Prout was not in that study! Naturally it never occurred to him that anybody else was—in the dark, too!

But somebody evidently was!

For, even as Bunter stepped in, an up-ended sack descended over his head and shoulders and enveloped him from head to foot!

In less than the twinkling of an eye Billy Bunter was right inside that sack.

Bemused and bewildered, Bunter could only gasp.

He hardly felt a groping hand that clutched a cord and drew the neck of the sack tight round his fat ankles. But he felt something knotted round those podgy ankles, tripped over, and bumped on the floor.

It was no good trying to understand it! Bunter was too utterly bewildered and confounded, even to try to understand it.

With his fat brain spinning, Bunter rolled on the floor of Prout's study, inside the sack, and gurgled and gurgled and gurgled!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Done It!

COKER gave a breathless chuckle. He had done it!

There were fellows—plenty of them—who thought Coker clumsy, cack-handed, warranted to bungle and make mistakes!

But he had done it all right!

Swift as the eagle in its swoop, or the tiger in its spring, Coker had whipped that sack over the entering head, bagging the newcomer from top to toe.

Before that astounded newcomer had time to emit a single gurgle, Coker had him—right in the sack!

The cord round the neck of that sack was twisted tight round plump ankles, and instantly knotted. It was masterly work.

Safe as houses, too. The bagged victim, most certainly, had not seen Coker. Coker had not seen him, and he had not seen Coker. Considering that it was done in the dark, Coker felt, justly, that it was masterly work—that he had made a neat, effective, efficient job of it.

He chuckled, as the podgy figure in the sack rolled, and gurgled feebly at his feet.

But he stayed only for one chuckle.

Time pressed.

Prout certainly did not know who had bagged him—couldn't know. But if Coker was caught there—His victim was gurgling breathlessly—soon he would be roaring for release. Coker had to cut—promptly.

And he did.

He whipped the key into the outside of the lock, and put his head out of the study, to survey the surroundings.

The light not yet being on in the passage, it was dusky—not dark like the study, but quite dusky. That was all the better for Coker. It really seemed as if the stars in their courses were fight-

ing for Coker, as for Sisera of old. Everything was going Coker's way.

Coker stopped swiftly out, drew the door shut, locked it, and slipped the key into his pocket again. Faintly, from the dark interior a gurgle followed him.

Coker walked away.

At the corner of the passage he passed Mr. Quelch coming to his study.

Quelch did not heed him. Quelch could not possibly have noticed that Coker had been at Prout's door, in the unlighted passage. That was all right.

Coker walked on—safe as houses.

Dusk was falling, but the sunset still gleamed on the quad, and it was not yet lock-up.

Coker strolled out of the House.

There was a faint splash as he passed the fountain in the quadrangle. It was caused by the key of Prout's study dropping into the water in the granite basin.

That was done with. Prout could boom and bawl and bellow in that sack, but he would not get released in a hurry.

Coker laughed. Revenge is sweet. Coker was far from being a revengeful fellow by nature. But he was a Fifth Form man—he had had to bend over like a fag, and take six on the bags, and that ineradicable insult had to be avenged. It was avenged now.

Even Coker understood that he would be expelled, like a shot, if it was discovered that he had bagged his beak. But that was all right. Owing to his extreme caution and astuteness, nothing was going to be discovered. Who had bagged the beak was going to be one of those insoluble mysteries.

Smiling, Coker strolled back into the House. In quite a gay mood, he went up to his study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Coker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he appeared on the landing.

A dozen fellows stared at Coker. All of them noticed, of course, that he came back without the bundle he had taken downstairs. So they wondered what he had done with it.

They knew that Prout had gone out, and, so far as they knew, had not come in yet. Coker clearly had intended to do something with that sack. But he could not—so far as the Romovites could see—have done it yet.

"What have you done with that sack, Coker?" called out the Bounder.

Coker gave a start, and stared at him. "That what?" he ejaculated. It was news to Coker that anyone knew that he had had a sack outside his own study.

"The sack you had in that bundle—"

"You cheeky young ass, what do you mean?" snapped Coker, annoyed and a little alarmed. "What the dickens has put it into your head that I had a sack in that parcel?"

"Hadn't you?" chortled Smithy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker knitted his brows.

"Never you mind what I had in that bundle," he snapped. "You mind your own business, you cheeky fag, and don't jaw! You may do a lot of harm if you get gabbling about a sack."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob. "Has he done it?"

"He can't have!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Prout's out—"

"If he's come in—" murmured Nugent.

"Has Prout come in, Coker?" exclaimed Bob.

"How should I know?" asked Coker aisyly. "You needn't ask me questions about Prout. If he's come in, I dare say he's gone to his study. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh jiminy!" gurgled Bob. "He's done it!"

"Coker, you awful ass—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Have you bagged Prout?" shrieked the Bounder. "Oh, holy smoke! Have you bagged old Pompous?"

"Shut up!" roared Coker. "You may get a fellow into a fearful row by talking rot like that! Suppose a beak heard you, you young idiot?"

"Then you've done it!" stuttered Harry.

"Shut up! What do you Remove kids know about it, anyhow?" exclaimed Coker angrily.

"The whatfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurreo Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Coker, you ass—"

"Coker, you mad fathead—"

"I said shut up!" hooted Coker. And he stalked away into the Fifth Form passage, leaving the juniors in a buzz of excitement.

Coker had done it. Prout must have come in, and Coker had done it. Coker had bagged his beak! Having let nearly all Greyfriars know what he was going to do, he had done it.

"Well," gasped Bob Cherry, "Coker takes the cake. He takes all the biscuits! He prances off with the whole factory."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder. "He doesn't know that half the school knew what he had in that bundle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Coker!" said Harry. "Why, I've heard that Prout himself spotted the mad ass getting the sack into the House in a parcel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled. It was a serious matter—for Coker, at least—but Coker on the warpath, bagging his beak, was really too much for them. They howled.

Coker, annoyed, stalked on to his study.

In that apartment he found Potter and Greene, in a state of considerable jitters.

They gazed at Coker, in eloquent silence, as he came in.

"Have you fellows been gabbling?" demanded Coker accusingly.

"Us?" said Greene. "What—"

"Well, it seems to have got out about that sack!" said Coker crossly. "A lot of fags seem to have got hold of it."

"You mad chump!" said Potter. "We've said nothing! I dare say half Greyfriars saw you lugging that bundle about—"

"A fellow can carry a bundle," snorted Coker. "Looks to me as if you fellows must have let out that I had a sack—"

"Perhaps about fifty fellows saw you sneaking it from Gosling's shed," suggested Potter sarcastically.

"Or a hundred!" said Greene.

"They seem to know, somehow," grunted Coker, "I've not said a word myself, of course, excepting that I asked some of those fags this afternoon if they knew where a fellow could get a sack—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Of course, I never let anything out—I'm pretty cautious—"

"Oh scissors!"

"It's pretty rotten if you fellows have been gabbling—"

"We haven't!" yelled Potter. "You have!"

"Look here, Potter—"

"Thank goodness Prout's gone out!" said Greene. "Thank goodness that mad ass hasn't had a chance to play the goat! What have you done with the sack, Coker? The sooner it goes back to Gosling's shed the better."

"Don't be an ass, Greene!"

"Coker, old man, get shut of it before Prout comes in!" pleaded Potter. "He may come in any minute—"

"Don't be a fool, Potter!"

"It was sheer luck Prout thinking that it was that cake you had in the bundle. But if anything happened—with a sack—he would tumble at once!"

"Rot!" said Coker.

Something in Coker's speaking countenance made his friends look at him harder.

Potter turned quite pale.

"Coker, old man!" He hardly breathed. "Don't say you've done it!"

Coker shrugged his shoulders.

"He's done it!" articulated Greene.

"Oh, holy smoke! He—he—he's done it! Has—has Prout come in, then?"

"Ten minutes ago!" answered Coker calmly.

"Prout came in ten minutes ago," moaned Potter, "and you—you—you—"

He gazed at Coker in horror.

"He came straight to his study," said Coker. "He's there now. Ha, ha!" Coker laughed. "Ha, ha, ha!"

They gazed at him.

Coker could laugh! Evidently he had done this awful thing, and he could laugh! He did not know that he was going to be bunked—that he would be sitting in an evening train for home, instead of sitting in the study at prep an hour hence! Plainly, no such apprehension was in Coker's mind! Coker was merry and bright!

"He went to his study?" asked Potter, in a hollow voice.

"That's it!" assented Coker.

"Were—were—were you there?"

"What do you think?" smiled Coker.

"Then—then he saw you—"

"Prout isn't a cat, to see in the dark! He saw me no more than I saw him. He hasn't the faintest idea who bagged him—not the foggiest!"

"Bagged him!" groaned Greene. "Then you really, truly, actually have bagged Prout?"

"What do you think?" repeated Coker cheerfully. "I don't know what Hacker felt like that time last term. But Prout knows by this time—he's going through the same thing! May think twice before he tells a Fifth Form man to bend over like a fag again—what?"

"Bagged him—in his study!" breathed Potter. "Oh gum! You—you—you've left him there—in that sack?"

"Tied up in it!" smiled Coker. "He can't get loose! Ha, ha, ha! He's all right in that sack—"

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the end so that he wouldn't suffocate—don't want to suffocate the old goat! Only to teach him a lesson—a lesson he's wanted for a long time! Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter and Greene made a converging movement towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Coker.

"You mad ass!" hissed Potter. "The sooner Prout is out of that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Coker. "Can you get through a keyhole, Potter?"

"Wha-a-t?"

"You see, I've locked the door on him—"

"Give me the key, then, you potty chump!" hissed Potter.

"I've clucked it away!"

"Oh, jiniiny!"

Potter and Greene gave it up. If Prout was bagged, Prout had to stay bagged. The minute that Prout, like a cat, was let out of the bag, Coker would be bunked! That was a matter of course! Coker, happily unaware of that dead certainty, laughed!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Poor Old Coker!

"**B**UNTER!" squeaked Mr. Capper.

No reply. There was no answering "Adsum!"

Mr. Capper, master of the Fourth, was taking the roll in Hall. One member of the Remove did not answer to his name and was marked absent.

But the absence of that extremely unimportant member of Quelch's Form excited little attention and no interest.

It was the absence of another member of the Greyfriars community that excited deep attention and deep interest—the absence of Mr. Prout! All the masters, if they were within gates, turned up for roll. Prout had not turned up for roll.

Neither had Hacker, for that matter. But nobody was interested in Hacker. The Acid Drop mattered to nobody. Hardly a fellow noticed whether Hacker was there or not. But very many fellows noticed that Prout was not!

All the Remove were keenly interested. Generally they took little interest in the beak of another Form. Now Prout was in every mind. They all knew about Coker's inquiries after a sack that afternoon, and hardly needed telling what he wanted that sack for. Coker, indeed, had as good as told some of them.

But it was not merely surmise on their part. Skinner had tiptoed down Masters' Passage just before roll, and listened at Prout's door.

That door was locked, the study within dark. But dark as it was, it was undoubtedly occupied; for Skinner had heard sounds of wriggling, scuffling, and numbling from within.

He had retired—with news!

All the Remove knew that locked in Prout's study was a hapless prisoner tied up in a sack!

Remove fellows who glanced across at the Fifth—at Coker—could hardly believe their eyes. Coker was smiling!

He had bagged his beak, left him tied up in a bag—and was smiling, like a fellow satisfied with a good job of work!

Everybody knew that Horace Coker was every imaginable kind of an ass! In that line he had no equal, no second, no third! It was Coker first—and the rest nowhere. But even

Coker had been supposed to have some sort of a limit.

That supposition was an error! Coker had no limit! Coker had done this, and was smiling with satisfaction!

All the Remove knew! Fellows in other Forms had heard rumours! Potter and Greene, only too clearly, knew—it was only necessary to look at their faces.

How long would it be before the prefects and the beaks knew?

Prout himself was fairly sure to guess, even if he had not seen Coker at his deadly work! How could Prout, bagged in a sack, fail to remember the big bundle he had seen Coker carting into the House—almost under his nose? Coker, whom he had whopped in the Fifth Form Room that morning?

No such apprehension was in Coker's mind. Coker was satisfied that he had covered up all his tracks.

Coker smiled!

The beaks, obviously, would know all about it before long. That that was the case was made only too fatally clear, after calling-over came to an end.

Mr. Capper, having finished the roll, called to Coker of the Fifth:

"Coker!"

Coker stared at Capper. He did not see what the master of the Fourth Form wanted him for. About a hundred other fellows, however, wondered whether Capper had got wind of anything.

"Yes, sir," said Coker.

"Mr. Prout asked me to speak to you, Coker, about the sack—" said Mr. Capper, in his squeaky voice.

Coker almost jumped clear of the floor in Hall.

"The—the what, sir?" he stammered.

"The sack!" said Mr. Capper. "The sack you took from Gosling's shed this afternoon, Coker."

Coker stood transfixed.

A whole swarm of fellows listened in breathlessly.

Mr. Capper gazed at Coker over his glasses.

"Gosling spoke to your Form-master about it, Coker," he said mildly. "As Mr. Prout was going out, he asked me to mention it to you at calling-over."

"Did—did he, sir?" gasped Coker.

"Yes, Coker! The sack must be returned to Gosling's shed. I cannot imagine, Coker, for what purpose you have borrowed an old potato-sack from the porter's shed; but you must be aware that you should not have done so without asking permission from Gosling. No harm is done, however, if you return the sack to its place."

"Oh!" gasped Coker. Even Coker realised that this was awkward. "I—I say—what—what makes Gosling think I—I borrowed a sack from his shed, sir?"

"From what he said to Mr. Prout, Coker, he saw you making off with it when he was going to his shed."

"Oh!"

"No harm is done, my boy, if you return the sack," said Mr. Capper kindly.

Coker's face was crimson.

"Gosling naturally mentioned it to Mr. Prout; but probably no more will be heard of the matter if the article is returned at once. That is all, Coker."

Mr. Capper whisked away, leaving Coker rooted.

"Was that what you had in that bundle, Coker?" asked Blundell of the Fifth. "It wasn't the family washing, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch, in passing, gave Coker a curious look. No doubt he remembered the brown-paper parcel under Coker's arm.

Coker stood speechless.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. They knew what Coker had done with that sack—all the Remove knew! They had no doubt that Prout knew!

Prout would not have to guess! Going out, Prout had heard a complaint from Gosling that Coker had snaffled a sack from his shed. Coming in, he had been bagged in a sack! Having as good as told half the school what he was going to do, Coker had let Gosling see him snaffling the sack! It was Coker all over!

"Oh, my only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Gosling saw him—"

"And Prout knows—" breathed Wharton.

"And Prout's inside the sack this blessed minute!" gurgled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites yelled. It was awful for Coker, but they could not help it. This was so exactly like old Horace!

At every step, at every stage, of his remarkable proceedings, Coker seemed to have done his very best to give himself away, all the time. Not in a single point had Coker failed to make it quite clear that it was he—Horace James Coker—who had done the bagging in Prout's study.

Several Fifth Form men were asking Coker what the dickens he had snooped Gosling's sack for. Potter and Greene did not need to ask.

Coker did not answer. He almost tottered away—no longer smiling!

Coker had not seen, so far, what a hundred other fellows had seen quite clearly. But he saw it now. It was not necessary for the bagger of Prout to be discovered. Prout could not have failed to know who the bagger was the moment the sack descended over his head!

Coker limped out of Hall. He left a crowd of fellows yelling behind him. Plenty of them were sorry for old Horace, knowing what was coming to him. But Coker was too much for them, and they roared, and roared, and almost wept.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Is Wanted!

MR. QUELCH knitted his brows. He was puzzled.

"Very odd!" he said.

"Very odd indeed!" agreed

Mr. Capper.

"Some animal, perhaps—"

"It does not sound like an animal, Quelch!"

"True! It does not."

Undoubtedly it was puzzling. The two masters were standing outside Prout's study door. From within that study came strange sounds.

There was a sound of rolling, scuffling, and wriggling, as if some almost helpless person was rolling about the room. Accompanying it came faint, feeble, breathless gasps, gurgles, and squeaks.

"Someone is there!" said Mr. Capper. "Can it be Prout?"

"I understood that Prout was going to the lecture at the Courtfield Institute this evening with Hacker."

"He may have returned. Hacker is certainly out, but Prout may have come in—"

"I fail to see why he should have locked himself in his study."

"I agree. But—listen!"

"Urrrrgh!" came from within the study. "Oooooogh! Wooooogh!"

"That is a human voice," said Mr. Quelch decidedly. "It sounds like someone being suffocated—or perhaps in a fit! Can Prout—"

"He is not subject to fits, that I have heard of. Apoplexy, perhaps. He is stout—extremely stout—"

"Oooooogh!"

"This must be investigated, at all events," said Mr. Quelch, and he tapped on the door. "Mr. Prout! Are you there, Mr. Prout?"

"Help!"

The voice was faint—evidently muffled by something. It had a suffocated sound, and was quite unrecognisable. But it was a human voice—there was no doubt of that! It was not some animal that had wandered into Prout's study. It was a human being, who had heard the tap on the door.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Capper. "You heard that, Quelch?"

"I heard it. It's amazing!"

"Astounding! It can only be Prout, I suppose?"

"It could hardly be anyone else, in Prout's study. An apoplectic fit, perhaps—Prout is, as you say, somewhat stout. Prout! Please unlock the door, Mr. Prout, if you are able to do so."

"Groooooogh!"

"My dear Prout—"

"Gurrgh!"

"Dear me, it sounds as if the poor fellow is choking, or suffocating," murmured the sympathetic Capper.

Quelch knocked again.

"Cannot you open the door, Prout?" he called.

"Urrrrgh! Help! I'm chook-chook-chick-choking in this sack!" came a faint, suffocated squeak.

Quelch jumped.

"In what?" he stuttered. "What did you say, Prout? Did you say a s-s-sack?"

"Urrgh! Help!"

"My dear fellow—"

"Get me out of this sack! Urrgh! Help!"

"He—he says a sack!" breathed Mr. Capper. "He says that he is in a sack. How can he be in a sack, Quelch?"

Quelch's eyes gleamed.

"This is not an apoplectic fit, Capper! This is an outrage, such as happened to Hacker last term—"

"Bless my soul! But who—"

"I do not think we need search very far for the perpetrator, as a boy of Prout's Form is known to have obtained a sack from the porter's shed!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "But the first step is to release Prout! He cannot have locked the door—if he is in a sack! Coker—that incredibly stupid boy, Coker—must have locked it on him and taken away the key."

"Coker! Bless my soul! He must be sent for—"

"Is anything the matter, sir?"

Wingate of the Sixth came down the passage. A good many fellows had been glancing curiously along that passage.

"Yes, Wingate," said Mr. Quelch. "Something is very much the matter! I greatly fear that Mr. Prout has been the victim of an extraordinary outrage—"

"Gooooogh!" came mumbling from the study. "Oooooogh! Help me out of this sack! Oooooogh!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wingate. "Is—is—is that—is that somebody in a sack? In Mr. Prout's study—"

"Coker, of Prout's Form, is known to have taken a sack from Gosling's

shed," said Mr. Quelch. "Indeed, I remember seeing him pass in this passage with a large parcel, which he explained was something he had to take to his Form-master's study."

"Oh! I remember—I saw him!" gasped the Greyfriars captain.

"Please find Coker at once, Wingate. The boys have not yet gone to preparation. Probably he is in Hall—"

Wingate hurried away.

Quelch and Capper remained, joined by several other masters. All of them listened in horror to the feeble moans, and mumbles, and gasps that came from Prout's study.

But it was impossible to go to the victim's aid till the key was obtained. They had to wait!

Wingate lost no time. Coker was not in Hall, and he ran up the stairs.

"Seen Coker?" he called out to a crowd on the landing.

"Coker wanted?" grinned the Bounder.

"Yes, yes. Seen him?"

"Not since roll!"

Wingate hurried on to the Fifth Form passage. He left a crowd in a buzz behind him. Coker was wanted; everybody could guess why!

"They've found Prout, and sent for Coker!" remarked Vernon-Smith. "I wonder what he expected them to do?"

"Poor old Coker!" said Harry Wharton. "Poor old silly ass!"

"All U.P. now!" said Bob Cherry.

"No doubt about that!"

"Oh, here you are!" Wingate's voice was heard from the Fifth Form games study. He had found Horace Coker there. "Coker! You're wanted!"

"Am I?" came a grunt from Coker.

"Yes; come down at once. If you've got the key of Prout's study bring it with you."

"I don't see why you should suppose that I've got the key of Prout's study, Wingate."

"Have you, or have you not?" hooted Wingate.

"No, I haven't."

"Well, come down, anyhow."

"What's up, Wingate?" asked a dozen Fifth Form voices from the games study.

"Someone's bagged Prout in a sack, in his study!" answered Wingate.

"They can't get at him, as the door's locked."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Coker, you ass—"

"Coker, you frightful fathead—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Coker. "You're helping them to put it on me! That what you call pally?"

"Lot of putting on you it wants, after you paraded round the school with the sack under your arm!" roared Blundell.

"Look here, you ass, shut up—"

"Come on, Coker!" exclaimed Wingate. "They're waiting!"

"Oh, I'll come!" said Coker.

And he came!

A crowd of the Fifth followed him out of the games study.

Outside, a crowd of juniors stared at him. Potter and Greene came with him, sticking to their helpless chum, though there was, of course, nothing that they could do for him now. Coker's number was up—a fact that had dawned even on Coker's limited intelligence.

Still, Coker was dogged; he wasn't going to admit anything. If they could prove it, let them prove it, and be blowed. Coker wasn't going to help them, at any rate.

"Follow on, my infants!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We're not missing this!"

"No fear!" chuckled the Bounder.

Quite an army followed Wingate

and Coker down the staircase. More and more fellows joined them on the way.

Coker, with a grim brow, marched on with Wingate to Masters' Passage. The army followed at his heels.

Every eye was on Coker. Few doubted that they were looking their last on old Horace.

For if Prout really was bagged in a sack in his study by the hand of that extraordinary member of his Form, Coker was going to be sacked so quick that it would make his head swim! And everybody—including Coker—believed that Prout was!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"O OOOOOOGH!" That suffocated gurgle came from Prout's study. It was accompanied by a sound of rolling and bumping!

Evidently the prisoner of the sack was making frantic efforts to get loose. Equally evidently, he was making those efforts in vain!

The passage was crowded. Fellows were not supposed to loiter there, much less to gather there in crowds. But in the present state of excitement, they did, unregarded.

Harry Wharton & Co. were near enough to hear the suffocated gurgles that came through the study door, and the jolting and bumping and scuffling of a figure imprisoned in a sack. Skinner had heard it before roll; now dozens of other fellows heard it.

There was no doubt on the subject. Coker had done it, and, quite contrary to his happy expectations, was perfectly well known to have done it! Not a ghost of a smile was visible on Coker's rugged countenance now.

At long last, it had penetrated Coker's solid brain that there was nothing to smile about!

Mr. Quelch fixed his gimlet eyes on Coker!

"Give me the key of this study at once!" he rapped.

"The key of that study?" repeated Coker, to gain time.

"Yes; immediately!"

"I don't see why you should suppose that I have the key of my Form-master's study!" Coker pointed out.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Do you deny that the key is in your possession, Coker?" he demanded.

"Certainly, sir!" answered Coker. That key, certainly, was not in Coker's possession; not since he had dropped it into the fountain in the quad.

"What have you done with it?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Done with it?" repeated Coker, again to gain time.

"Coker! Your victim, Mr. Prout, must be immediately released! It is obvious that you locked this door after what you did in the study! You must have taken away the key, as it is no longer here. Do you deny this?"

Coker was not the man to deny it. It never even occurred to Coker to tell untruths. He did not answer.

"Do you hear me, Coker?" asked Mr. Quelch, breathing hard.

"I'm not deaf, sir!" answered Coker. "I haven't got the key! If I had it, I'd hand it over! That's all I've got to say."

"Oooooogh!" came mumbling from the study. "I'm chick-chock-choking in this sack! I can't get out! Oooooogh!"

"By gum, is that Prout?" murmured Bob Cherry. It was quite startling to hear Prout's fruity boom

reduced to that pitiful mumbling squeak.

"Wurrrgggh!"
"You utterly foolish and obstinate boy, Coker!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Cannot you see that it is perfectly well known what you have done? Gosling complained to Mr. Prout that you had taken a sack from his shed. I myself saw you going to this study with a large parcel under your arm! Cannot you see that it is perfectly clear that you committed this outrage?"

"Hand over the key, Coker, you ass!" muttered Wingate.

"I haven't got it!"
"Possibly this incredibly stupid boy has thrown away the key!" said Mr. Quelch. "There cannot be the slightest doubt that he locked the door and took the key away, after enveloping Mr. Prout in the sack. A duplicate key can be obtained from the House dame. Wingate, will you oblige me by going to Mrs. Kebble?"

"Certainly, sir!" Wingate hurried away.

There was a breathless silence while he was gone for a key.

Coker stood with a grim, rugged brow. Potter and Greene exchanged hopeless looks.

From the locked study came sounds of struggling, rumpling, rustling, gasping, and gurgling, as the unseen prisoner wrestled in the close embrace of the sack.

"Urrrrggh! Oooooogh! Help! Groogh!"

Bump, bump! Rustle! Bump!

Evidently the inhabitant of the sack was tired of his close quarters, and making incessant efforts to get out—in vain!

Coker knew how unavailing those efforts would be. He had taken care of that! The neck of that sack was tied fast round podgy ankles, and there was no escape for the prisoner until it was untied.

Such sounds, from a master's study, had a horrifying effect on most of the fellows. It was scarcely credible that any fellow could be such a benighted ass as to head up his Form-master in a sack and leave him to squirm! Even Coker realised, now, how awfully serious it was!

Even Coker realised that that deed of darkness would have been much better left undone!

True, he had not expected to be found out! He did not see, even now, why they should jump to the conclusion that he had done it, simply because he had had a sack, and Prout was headed up in a sack! But it was clear that everybody had jumped to exactly that conclusion.

Coker was for it—as soon as the study door was opened, and Prout released from the sack! Prout's first step would be to walk him off to the Head—to be bunked! Coker got that into his brain. The remainder of his school career could now be counted in minutes! He was Coker of the Fifth still—until Prout emerged from that sack! After that, he would be a passenger in a train, homeward bound!

Coker braced himself to face it!

Wingate came back with the key. Innumerable eyes were on Mr. Quelch as he inserted the key in the lock, turned it, and threw open the door.

Stepping into the doorway, Quelch reached for the switch to turn on the light.

There was a click—but no light came. The lamp was lying on the table where Coker had left it.

The Remove master uttered an im-

patient exclamation. The interior of the study was quite dark.

But in the dark, something could be dimly discerned, rolling and wriggling on the floor. It was a large sack—evidently occupied!

"Oooooogh!" came from the sack. "Woogh! Ow!"

"Prout!" exclaimed Mr. Capper. "A light—"

"Here's a torch, sir!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. The Bouncer had a flashlamp in his pocket.

Mr. Quelch took it from him, flashed on the light, and stepped into the study.

The light gleamed on the sack—struggling, wriggling, as if endued with life!

Round the study doorway, behind Quelch, a crowd crammed, all gazing. Masters, prefects, seniors, and juniors crammed there, breathless.

Mr. Quelch gazed at the sack for a moment. Only a pair of feet exuded

NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAMME.

Our recent series of yarns featuring Vernon-Smith proved so popular that I have persuaded Mr. Frank Richards to write another series starring the Bouncer of Greyfriars. The opening story will appear in next Saturday's MAGNET, under the title of

"THE MYSTERY OF VERNON-SMITH!"

Smithy, the most troublesome member of the Remove, is accused by his Form-master of breaking detention. But the Bouncer denies the accusation. Who's telling the truth? Tom Redwing, ever ready to stand by his chum, is convinced that Smithy never left the Form-room; while, on the other hand, the Famous Five claim to have seen him at Lantham. It is a complex situation indeed. Get ready to read all about it in next week's smashing Greyfriars yarn. Other interesting features in this tip-top issue are the "Greyfriars Herald," telling of the week's happenings at the school, in addition to which is another "shocker," featuring Dr. Birchmall and the boys of St. Sam's, written by the prince of storytellers, Dicky Nugent. Last, but by no means least, is "My Own Page," compiled by—well, I'll leave you to find out for yourself next Saturday. If you miss this issue, chums, you'll be missing the treat of the week!

YOUR EDITOR

from the end of it. It wriggled and wriggled.

"Here is the lamp, sir!" said Wingate. He spotted it on the table, lying beside an enormous cake, which, at any other time, it would have surprised him to see in Prout's study. Now he did not heed it. He picked up the electric bulb. "It's been taken out, sir—I'll put it in—"

The next moment the study was brilliantly illuminated. The struggling, wriggling sack was clear to the view of the breathless crowd packing the doorway.

Quelch laid down the flashlamp and bent over it.

He wrestled with knotted cords.

But Coker had tied those knots good and hard.

"Oooooogh!" came a breathless gurgle from slits in the sack, which Coker had so kindly provided to permit his victim to breathe. "Wurrrgh! Gurrgh! Help! Ooooooch! I'm suffocating! Yurrrggh!"

"One moment, my dear Prout!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Has anyone a knife—please give me a knife—"

A pocket-knife was quickly provided.

Quelch opened it, and sawed through the knotted cord at the end of the sack.

It came open at last, and the occupant of the sack was able to stir his legs!

He stirred them! A foot thrashed out, and there was a fearful yell from Mr. Quelch.

"Ooooooh!"

The occupant of the sack had no intention of landing that foot on Quelch's nose! It was quite an accident! But it was a rather painful accident!

"Bless my soul—take care, Mr. Quelch!" exclaimed Capper. "Prout—my dear Prout—be calm—be calm! We are helping you—"

"Urrrrggh!"

"Wingate, take the head of the sack," gasped Mr. Quelch, rubbing his nose. "Pull it away!"

"Yes, sir!"

Wingate grasped the sack over the hidden head inside. He tugged. He tugged hard; and, now that the other end of the sack was open, the occupant wriggled out.

Innumerable eyes, fixed on him, bulged in amazement as the fat figure appeared in view.

That it was Prout nobody had doubted—not for a moment! Coker had schemed to bag Prout—he believed that he had bagged him—everybody else believed that he had bagged him; and all eyes looked to see the portly form of Prout roll out of the sack, now that the unhappy prisoner was released at last.

It was a portly form that rolled out! But it was not Prout's portly form! It was a fat figure well known to all eyes; and it rolled out, sprawled, sat up, gurgled, groped for its spectacles, and jammed them on a fat little nose, and blinked round dizzily. And from fifty fellows came an astonished howl:

"Bunter!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Only Bunter!

"BUNTER!"

"Oooooogh!"

"Bib-Bub-Bunter!"

"Groooooh!"

"Great pip!"

"It—it—it's not Pip-Pip-Prout; it's Bib-Bib-Bunter!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Bunter!" repeated Horace Coker, like a man in a dream.

Coker gazed at the fat Owl of the Remove with unbelieving eyes.

It seemed like some kind of unearthly magic to Coker. He had bagged Prout in that sack, and it was Billy Bunter who rolled out of it!

Coker's eyes fairly popped. He doubted their vision.

Quelch gazed at Bunter. He stared at Coker. He gazed at Bunter again. Like everybody else, Quelch had taken it for granted that it was Prout. Who but Prout could have been bagged in Prout's study? Nobody could have supposed that a Remove fellow had been bagged in the Fifth Form master's study.

But it was not Prout; it was Bunter. This was why Bunter had cut roll. He had been here—bagged in the sack.

"Bunter!" gasped Mr. Quelch again. "Ow! Oh crikey! I say, you fellows—Oobogh!"

"What does this mean, Bunter?" shrieked Mr. Quelch. "What have you been doing in Mr. Prout's study?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. The fat junior scrambled to his feet, wildly dishevelled from his strugglings and wriggings in the sack, and blinked at his Form-master through his big spectacles.

In the sack, Bunter had wanted to be let out. That was his only desire while tied up the sack. Now, however, that he was let out, he realised that his presence in Prout's study required explaining.

"It wasn't the cake, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"The cake?" Quelch glanced at the cake. Then he fixed his gimlet eyes on Bunter again. There was a ripple of laughter from the crowded passage.

"Oh scissors!" murmured Coker. He began to understand.

He had parked himself in ambush for Prout. Prout, after all, had not come in. It was Bunter who had come in in the dark after that cake. This trickled slowly into Coker's brain.

"Bunter!" Quelch seemed to bite off the words "Bunter! You came here to take away that—that cake—"

"Oh, no, sir! I—I wouldn't! I—I don't like cake!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Bless my soul!" said Mr. Capper. "This foolish boy came here to purloin a—a cake, and that equally foolish boy Coker played an absurd trick on him—absurd! Mr. Prout, I suppose, has not come in at all!"

"Coker!" almost roared Mr. Quelch. "Oh, yes, sir!"

"You were perfectly aware, Coker, that I supposed—that we all supposed—that it was your Form-master, Mr. Prout, who was in that sack!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Why did you not state otherwise at once?"

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "I—I—"

Even Coker had wit enough not to say that he had not known otherwise. Even Coker could realise that he had had a fearfully narrow escape, and

rejoice that it was only Bunter in the sack, and not Prout. Even Coker had sense enough not to splutter out that he had meant it for Prout, and got Bunter by mistake.

"How dared you allow us to remain in such an error!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "You knew that we supposed it to be Mr. Prout—"

"I—I—I—"

"If you were in my Form, Coker, I should cane you! You deliberately allowed us to suppose that it was Mr. Prout, knowing that it was only this foolish junior, upon whom you had played a foolish trick unworthy of a senior boy!"

Coker said nothing. In the circumstances, he was more than willing to let it go at that.

Quelch turned to Bunter. "As for you, Bunter, you had the audacity—the impudence—to enter Mr. Prout's study to take away a—a—a cake! You fully deserved to fall a victim to Coker's practical joke, absurd as it was! Indeed, if Coker knew that you were coming to his Form-master's study with such intentions, he was fully justified in intervening, though he should certainly have intervened in a less absurd and ridiculous manner."

"I—I never—" gasped Bunter. "Coker's childish pranks are for his Form-master to deal with. I shall deal with you, Bunter! Follow me to my study!"

"Oh crikey!" Through a grinning crowd Billy Bunter followed his Form-master.

From Quelch's study, a minute later, there came a loud howl. But there came only one. Quelch had administered only one whop, doubtless thinking that enough, added to Billy Bunter's harrowing experiences in the sack.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, as the Removites went up to prep—"well, there's such a thing as fool's luck. Coker meant it for Prout all right!"

"Might have guessed that Prout would never get it, as Coker meant it for him!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Anybody else might have got it, not Prout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "But what terrific luck for Coker! If he'd got Prout—"

"He thought he had!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites yelled.

Prout, when he came in from Court-field with Hacker, heard about it, and sent for Coker.

Coker's heart was beating rather fast as he entered Prout's study. If Prout guessed—

Prout was not likely to guess that a member of his Form had entertained such an idea as bagging him and leaving him to squirm in a sack. Prout would not have believed it if told. He was far from guessing it.

He spoke to Coker a little severely. He pointed out that, though he would naturally have expected a member of his Form to intervene if he found that a junior boy intended to purloin a confiscated comestible from his study, he would also naturally have expected a senior boy to intervene in a manner worthy of the dignity of a senior Form, and certainly not by playing a trick with a sack, worthy only of some junior.

However, as Coker's motives had, evidently—to Prout—been good, he excused him—and that was that!

Coker returned to his own study in a thoughtful mood.

Potter and Greene gave him glances of anxious inquiry.

"O.K.!" said Coker. "Prout doesn't know a thing! I—I'm rather glad he doesn't—I mean to say, I might have been bunked, and that would be a pretty serious thing for the school. I'm not the sort of fellow that Greyfriars can afford to lose, as you know. I'm not going to bag Prout; I'm going to let him rip!"

Potter and Greene wondered whether old Horace had a spot of sense somewhere, after all. This looked like it.

"I shall give him a chance, at any rate," concluded Coker. "The man's an ass! He doesn't understand me, and I suppose never will; but I shouldn't wonder if he means well—in his way, you know. I shall give him a chance, at any rate!"

So it only remained to be seen what Prout would make of the chance Coker gave him!

THE END.

(Now look out for "THE MYSTERY OF VERNON-SMITH!" next week's spanking five yarn of Harry Wharton & Co.)

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NOT CRICKET!

Amusing and Amazing School Story of Jack Jolly & Co., the cheery chums of St. Sam's.

By DICKY NUGENT

"Not good enuff!" Jack Jolly & Co. pricked up their ears.

"Grate pip! You can't do this!" he gasped. "Why, it's—it's not cricket!"

"Eggsactly. It's nothing like cricket at present," said Sir Frederick, with a contemptuous glance at the seniors at the nets. "I am hoapful, however, that this drastik step I am taking will result in real cricket being played by the seniors at St. Sam's. Good-day, Birchmall."

And the chairman of the St. Sam's guvvernors, with a kert nod, turned on his heel and strode off towards the gates.

"My hat!" mormered Jack Jolly. "The old buffer seems to be riding the high horse to-day."

Sir Frederick started slitley. "Mito I ask what you are talking about?" he asked. "The same thing as you, of course," grinned the Head. "The thing you were saying isn't good enuff—my salary!"

"Your salary?" yelled the chairman of the St. Sam's guvvernors. "Why, my dear chap, you must be dreaming! I was not talking of your salary, but of your cricket!"

Jack Jolly & Co. chuckled. The Head gasped.

"Your salary, Birchmall, is quite suffishant—indeed, more than suffishant!" went on Sir Frederick, with an indignant snort. "In fact, now you raise the question, Birchmall, I may as well tell you that unless there is a dickens of an improvement in your first eleven cricket, you are going to suffer a reduction in that far too generous salary at a very early date!"

"Oh, grate pip!" ejaculated the Head, in dismay.

"First eleven cricket at St. Sam's just at present is a sheer farce," said Sir Frederick skornfully. "Your seniors, Birchmall, bat like beginners and field like fumbling, footling fatheads; and their bowling borders on the beastly!"

"Look here—" protested the Head.

"I repeat, Birchmall, it's not good enuff!" stormed the chairman of the St. Sam's guvvernors. "I insist on a speedy improvement in senior cricket at this school, and I have already decided on one way of getting it. The first match, I helecve, takes place in a week's time."

"True enuff," growled the Head. "The First Eleven open the season with a home match against St. Bill's."

"Very well, then. Unless," said Sir Frederick solemnly, "the First Eleven win their first match, I have decided to cut your salary by ten per cent!"

The Head stared at him agarst.

"I believe you're needing a tip-top



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HARRY WHARTON CALLING ALL CHUMS!

"How can any fellow possibly stack away the vast quantities of tuck that Billy Bunter is alleged to eat?" is a question put to me by a reader who calls himself "Doubting Thomas." He goes on to say that, on consideration, he has come to the conclusion that Bunter's capacity has been greatly exaggerated.

"Doubting Thomas" doesn't know Bunter as I know him. If he did, the only doubt he would have would be whether it was possible to exaggerate the fat Owl's capabilities in the tuck-taking line!

I must admit it's pretty hard to believe that any fellow can sit down to a good dinner, with three helpings of everything, and then go straight to the tuckshop and start eating doughnuts. Yet I have actually seen Bunter do that—not once, but many times!

The fact is that chaps like Bunter can go on almost indefinitely. You don't meet them so often nowadays. Moderation in eating is the modern fashion, and most of us are brought up to it from infancy and can't get out of the habit. But in earlier times, Billy Bunters were a common phenomenon.

I have actually seen in an old curiosity shop in Courtfield a printed programme of an eating contest between two champion gormandisers, in which they were each set to eat the following amazing mountain of tuck:

- 144 rissoles
- 2 4-pound loaves
- 50 sausages.

The prize went to the man who finished this gargantuan supper in the shortest time.

Our prize porpoise, greedy as he may be, could never, I feel sure, dispose of such an appalling quantity of food at one sitting. Yet in those far-off days (the programme was 150 years old) it was apparently looked on as quite an ordinary feat!

You can take it from me, "Doubting Thomas," that the descriptions you read of Bunter's appetite are not in the least exaggerated. If anything, in fact, they are under-stated!

HARRY WHARTON.



(The very distant future, old bean!—Ed.)

HOBBIES UP TO DATE!

Fishing.

By HAROLD SKINNER

Fishing in its elementary stages is a very simple pastime. All you need is a stick, some string, a bent pin, and a worm. You put the string on the end of the stick, the pin on the end of the string, and the worm on the end of the pin—and then you can say you've made a good beginning!

The next thing is to settle down to a good long wait. Open the old lunch basket, uncork the merry old ginger-pop, and spread yourself out. Time is going to be no object with you. A bite will come—in time.

Probably as the shades of night are falling you will see a skirmish in the water. Then is the time to grip your rod and battle with the finny specimen that has fallen for your bait. Plant your feet firmly on the ground and haul in slowly.

Ah! Here he comes! Gosh! What a monster! Why, it's a tunny—and a 700-pounder at that! Got him at last! Where's that bludgeon? Wallop! It's all over—and now you're waking up again and you realise it's time to go home.

The sardine-tins, I regret to say, were empty, but that's by the way.

There are many other aspects of fishing into which I should like to go. The question of how to describe the length of your catches with your hands without smacking passers-by on the face, for instance. Alas! My space is filled, and these engrossing



(The very distant future, old bean!—Ed.)

LORD MAULEVERER—THE IDEAL HOST!

Says SQUIFF

Lord Mauleverer is the ideal host. Having spent a week with him during the Easter vac., I can say that from personal experience.

At the same time I'll admit that he does like taking things easy!

If it's a rest cure you want, Mauleverer Towers gets the vote every time. On the other hand, if you like hustle and bustle, the massive luxury of Mauly's ancestral home at the aristocratic languor of his lazy lordship are apt to overwhelm you a little—possibly to put a slight damper on your youthful enthusiasm!

As a native of the old New South Wales, I like hustle and bustle; and I'll grant that the Towers, though a magnificent place, did check my boyish exuberance.

Mauly, however, was a surprise. I had quite thought he would have brekker in bed every morning and spend most of the day snoring. But far from it! He played tennis with me, took me riding, accompanied me on a fishing

trip, and in general gave me quite a hectic time. All with the same elegant languor as he displays at Greyfriars—but he did it!

To crown it all, on the third morning, he suggested a swim.

"The swimmin'-pool in the grounds is undergoin' alteration, so I shan't be able to go there; but I had thought of tryin' a new pool that's opened at a roadhouse a mile or so down the road," he said. "I suppose you don't feel like a swim yourself, Squiff?"

"Feel like it? Why, it's just the idea I was waiting for!" I said, enthusiastically. "I'll come like a shot!"

We duly went swimming that morning. We didn't go in quite the manner I'd have preferred to go—at a brisk walk, with towels and things under our arms—but we did go. A Rolls-Royce, complete with chauffeur and manservant, whirled us to the swimming-pool in streamlined style. Mauly's man opened the door for us when we got out. He carried towels, costumes and wraps for us.

sort of day for slacking about and sun-bathing.

"Just five minutes; and then we'll turn in and change again," I said.

Five minutes was quite enough for me. But Mauly looked as if he would have been agreeable to staying in for half an hour or more. The mystery about Mauly, it seemed to me, was deepening!

"Shall we sprint back instead of using the Rolls?" I asked the old bean, when we had dressed. "It'll restore the circulation. I feel I need it, myself."

For a moment a peculiar spasm passed across Mauly's face. But it was only momentary. Next moment he was smiling amiably.

"Yaas. Just what I'd like, dear man."

We sprinted. Mauly had a bit of bad luck and tripped up on a stone. The result was a spot of concussion and the rest of the week in bed. And out of that came the solution to the mystery of Mauly.

When I went in to see him that evening, you see, he was half asleep and half awake and had a temperature. And muttering to himself, he let the cat out of the bag completely. He was saying: "Comin' fishin', old bean? What about a spot of tennis? Swimmin' this mornin'! Yaas, of course!" A

long pause and then: "Gad! It will be good to have a real good snooze when old Squiff goes!"

Yes, he'd just been pretending to like exercise—so that I should enjoy my stay at the Towers. And he'd done it so well that I hadn't even suspected him!

As I remarked before, dear reader—Lord Mauleverer is the ideal host!

STRANGE, BUT TRUE THAT—

You can't get Hurree Singh to sing in a hurry.

Brown is always in the pink.

The one fellow you can never cow is Bull.

Cherry has rarely been known to be stony.

Copper never gets as mad as a hatter. The Shell's best exponent of the art of frying is Stew-art.

WISECRACK

Fisher T. Fish is setting up a catering business for supplying packed tuck to fellows spending "halfers" out of doors.

Fishy usually gets a picking out of his money-making schemes; but it is generally thought that he will pick six out of picnics!