

PULLING COKER'S LEG!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Horace James Coker's leg was made to be pulled, but never has it been pulled to such good purpose as in this lively, humorous story of Greyfriars School!

THE FIRST CHAPTER Putting His Foot Down!

WHIZ!

Thud!

"Yarooop!"

That was all, but it signified a lot.

The "whiz" was the sound of a snowball hurtling across the quadrangle at Greyfriars one wintry morn. The "thud" was the sound of the same snowball coming into violent contact with something solid.

The yell was from Horace James Coker, of the Fifth, who was, as a matter of fact, the solid object with which the snowball had collided.

Coker collapsed into the snow.

Coker had fallen!

To Coker himself, that was almost tantamount to saying that the heavens had fallen. The fall of the mighty Roman Empire was a rather important affair. The fall from his high estate of Lucifer, Son of the Morning, was quite noteworthy. But neither of those occurrences was half so noteworthy or important as the fall of Horace James Coker.

That was how Coker felt about it, anyway. He picked himself up and glared round with a glare which combined rage and astonishment in equal proportions.

He had been hit by a snowball. He—Horace Coker, the great and far-famed Horace, of the Fifth—had actually been hit by a snowball! It was preposterous—almost incredible. But it was true.

The only possible inference was that a passing junior had the extraordinary and amazing "nerve" to use Coker's hefty person as a target. It would have been unreasonable to imagine that a spherical object could form itself out of the snow and attack Coker of its own volition. Coker was not over-endowed with brains, but he had sufficient to see that that hypothesis was absurd.

With a grim and set expression on his rugged face, the great man of the Fifth scrambled to his feet. He was just in time to see a figure in Etons disappearing into the House. The miscreant had flown from the scene of his crime!

But the matter couldn't end there. Obviously something had to be done. Coker

tramped back towards the School House, grimly determined that something should be done.

The culprit was, of course, almost certain to be a Remove fellow. The disappearing junior had had the "cut" of a Removeite about him. Outrages of this kind were always the work of Remove fellows, anyway. Coker's first impulse, therefore, was to hasten to the Remove quarters and mop up the floor with the entire Form, on the principle that he would thereby be certain of punishing the guilty party.

On second thoughts, he decided not to do that. It was barely possible, of course, that instead of Coker mopping up the floor with the Remove, the Remove might mop up the floor with Coker. Coker didn't exactly admit that possibility to himself, but he subconsciously realised that there were drawbacks about such hasty action.

The situation, however, was one demanding drastic treatment. And an orgy of assault and battery among the Remove being inexpedient, Coker decided on another plan. So far, although he had had "scraps" galore with the Remove, he had never really explained to that disrespectful Form just what code of etiquette and behaviour he demanded from them. The thought came to him now that the time was ripe for the issue of an exact statement of his position, so that the juniors should have no excuse for being disrespectful in future.

Perhaps, after all, he had acted rather hastily at times. It might be that the outrageous behaviour of the Remove arose out of ignorance of Coker's greatness and importance. Possibly, if the facts were explained to them, they would understand, and treat him with his due amount of respect and awe in future.

Coker decided to see Harry Wharton, and issue a sort of command, or ukase, or ultimatum to him, as captain of the Remove. That would be Coker's last word on the subject. Any "cheek" he received after that, he mentally vowed, would be treated without mercy.

He entered the House, sprinted up the stairs three at a time, and tramped towards the Remove quarters.

Fortunately, the Remove passage was almost deserted when he reached it. If half a dozen Removeites had been there to observe the arrival of Coker, no doubt the course of events after that would have been very different from what actually happened. Ribald greetings would have been addressed to the invader. Coker would have stopped, and all his previous resolutions would speedily have been forgotten.

But the passage was clear. And Coker reached Study No. 1 without having cause to change his ideas.

Without bothering about the formality of knocking on the door, the great man of the Fifth entered the study.

Five juniors were there when Coker tramped in—the Famous Five of the Remove. They looked round at the opening of the door, and five separate and distinct glances were bestowed on Horace Coker.

"Forgotten something, Coker?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Eh? Not that I know of. What do you think I've forgotten, young Bull?"

"Thought perhaps for a moment you'd forgotten to knock on the door. But I've just remembered, of course, the Fifth pride themselves on their pigsty manners, don't they?" finished Johnny Bull, with a nod.

The rest of the Co. chuckled. Coker turned red.

"If you're trying to be funny, young Bull, I warn you that you're in danger of getting something that won't strike you as a bit funny!"

"Dear me! So Coker's come all the way here to ask for trouble!" remarked Bob Cherry reflectively. "I rather fancy we can oblige him, can't we, you chaps?"

"What ho!"

Harry Wharton rose from the armchair and took his hands out of his pockets. Nugent slid off his perch on the edge of the table, and Hurree Singh, with a dusky smile, got up from the window-ledge.

Coker eyed them grimly and clenched his fists. Then, with an effort, he overcame his temptation to wade in, and unclenched them again.

"Don't be silly young asses!" he said gruffly. "I haven't come here to give you

a licking. Dare say you deserve it, but that's not what I've come for."

"Oh, thank you, Coker! You don't know how relieved we all are!" gasped Bob Cherry, with a well-feigned sob of relief.

"The thankfulness to the esteemed and ludicrous Coker is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Matter of fact, I've come to speak to you, young Wharton, about a rather serious matter."

"Fire away, old bean!" said the captain of the Remove good-humouredly.

"I've just been hit by a snowball. Somebody's had the infernal cheek to bash a snowball at me! Me, you know!" said Coker impressively.

"Awful!" said Johnny Bull gravely.

"Dreadful!" remarked Nugent.

"Horrible!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Coker looked a little dubious.

"Well, I'm not saying it's horrible," he admitted. "Perhaps that would be going too far. But it's dashed rotten when a senior occupying a position like I occupy in the School has to stand being snowballed like a scrubby little Second Form fag. So I'm going to speak to you rather plainly about it, Wharton."

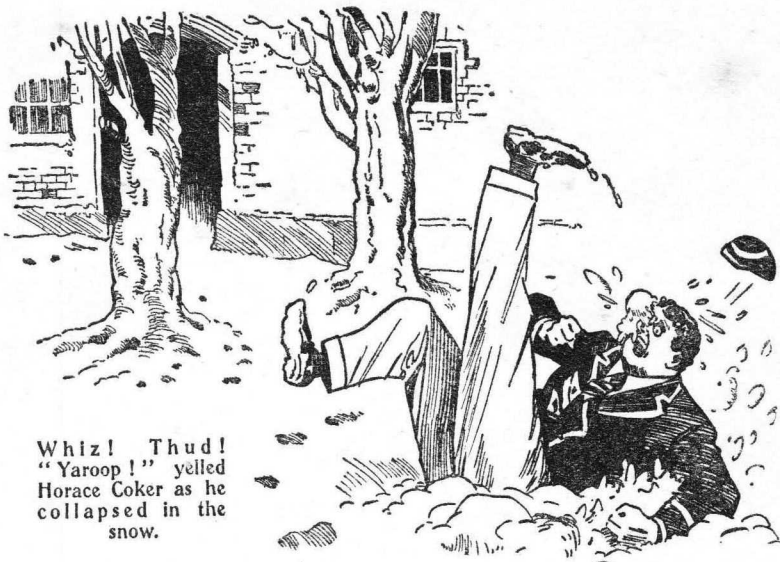
"To me?" asked Harry Wharton, in surprise.

Coker nodded.

"I've come to the conclusion that it must have been a Remove chap, and as I believe you're the sort of gang-leader of the Form——"

"The what?" asked Wharton sharply.

"Well, the Form captain, then, if that's what you call yourself," said Coker im-



Whiz! Thud!
"Yarooop!" yelled
Horace Coker as he
collapsed in the
snow.

patiently. "As you're the Form captain, I've come to you about it, see?"

"Oh!"

"I shall overlook the particular matter of the snowball. But I'm going to make you personally responsible for the future treatment I get from the Remove Form!"

"You are, are you?" murmured Harry Wharton, closing one eye gently to his grinning chums.

"There seems to be a misunderstanding among you fags as to my exact status in the School," said Coker solemnly. "How it arose, I can't for the life of me understand. But it's undoubtedly there, and I'm going to get rid of it. See?"

"I see!" smiled Wharton.

"So that there can be no misunderstanding in the future, I'll just explain briefly why I'm entitled to the same respect you give to Wingate and the other blessed prefects," said Coker, his lip curling slightly. "In the first place, I'm in the Fifth. And the Fifth, as a Form, are as good as the Sixth—and a dashed sight better! Get that?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, apart from that," said Coker, disdainfully ignoring the laugh, "I myself am at least the equal of the prefects in this

School in every respect. Take footer, for instance. Among fellows who know it's recognised that I'm the best centre-forward at Greyfriars."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wharton involuntarily.

Coker paused and looked at the skipper of the Remove for an instant. Then he went on:

"Again, at cricket. Any chap with a knowledge of cricket will tell you that there's nobody else here who is able to play quite like I can."

"Well, that's true enough, anyway!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Glad you've got the sense to see it, young Cherry," said Coker unsuspectingly. "Anyway, to cut a long story short—seeing that in every way I'm at least the equal, and in most cases the superior, of anybody else at Greyfriars, it seems to me that it's up to you fags to behave to me as you do to a prefect. I'm here to tell you that I jolly well expect it, and that there's going to be a thumping big row if you don't toe the line. Savvy?"

Johnny Bull and the rest closed round, ready to wade in and frog's-march their distinguished visitor back to his native haunts as soon as their leader gave the signal.

But, to their surprise, Harry Wharton did not give the signal.

Instead, he eyed Coker rather thoughtfully.

"You mean that, Coker?" he asked.

"Of course I mean it, you young ass!"

"You want us in future to treat you with great respect?"

"Precisely!"

"Even deference?" suggested Wharton.

"Well, why not? You can't have too much of a good thing, after all."

"Right! It's a deal, then," said Wharton.

"Look here, Harry——" said Bob Cherry.

"All right, Bob. It's settled," said Wharton, turning an expressionless face to the astonished Bob Cherry. "Coker wants to be treated with respect. Well, we'll oblige him."

"Good! It's a change to hear a fag talking sense for once!" remarked Coker, with satisfaction. "You quite understand, then?"

"Absolutely! We've got to treat you with respect and deference. That right?"

"Just it!" nodded Coker. "See that you do it, then. Mind, I shall keep an eye on you!"

With that, the great man of the Fifth, his nose elevated several degrees higher in the air, stalked out of the study.

Four surprised and rather indignant juniors surrounded their leader as the door slammed behind Coker, and demanded the why and the wherefore.

Apparently Harry Wharton's explanation satisfied them, for a couple of minutes later there was a burst of laughter from Study No. 1.

By that time, of course, Coker was out of earshot.

THE SECOND CHAPTER Changing Coker's Mind!

"GOOD morning, sir!"
Coker jumped.

He was just walking into the School tuck-shop on the day following his visit to No. 1. Potter and Greene, his study-mates, were with him. Potter and Greene usually were with him when he visited the tuck-shop. Unkind critics had even voiced the opinion that it was chiefly on account of Coker's liberal tuck-shop expenditure that Potter and Greene chummed in with him at all!

Coker had just put forward the suggestion that they adjourn to the tuck-shop and indulge in a snack. Potter and Greene had both voted the suggestion an excellent one. Accordingly, they had adjourned.

There were half a dozen or more juniors occupying the high stools at the counter of Mrs. Mible's little shop. Coker passed them by like the idle wind which he regarded not. The great man of the Fifth was not in the habit of noticing juniors unless circumstances forced him to do so.

That, however, was what happened on this occasion. Hardly had Coker reached

the counter before his attention was directed to them by a most surprising happening.

Instead of greeting Coker with bland indifference, or, as sometimes happened, with ribald remarks, every junior in the shop doffed his cap and gave utterance to the polite and respectful salutation:

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Eh?"

"Good-morning, sir!"

Coker looked astonished. Potter and Greene fairly blinked.

"Are you speaking to me?" asked Coker, evidently still unable to understand this strange phenomenon.

"Yes, sir!"

"And—and you're calling me 'sir'?" stuttered Coker.

"That's right, sir!" answered Bob Cherry gravely. "Nothing wrong with that, is there, sir?"

"Privilege to be allowed to speak to you at all, sir!" said Frank Nugent, raising his cap again.

"Well, my hat!"

For a moment the great man of the Fifth scarcely knew what to say. Then a smile appeared on his rugged countenance—a lofty, condescending sort of smile, but one that seemed to express a good deal of satisfaction.

That smile broadened almost to a grin when Tom Brown and Squiff, two other Removites, came in and raised their caps with elaborate politeness.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the newcomers simultaneously.

"Hem! Good-morning!" acknowledged Coker. "Good-morning all, in fact! I must say, this rather pleases me. Seems that you fags are learning manners at last! Dish out some tarts to these kids, and put it down to me, Mrs. Mible!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" came in a respectful chorus from the crowd of Removites.

And they waded into jam-tarts at Coker's expense with great cheerfulness. Apparently there were compensations attaching to the business of behaving politely towards Coker!

Coker and his two satellites partook of their snack and strolled out of the tuck-

shop. Their departure was the signal for a general doffing of caps and a chorus of "Good-day, sir!"

Coker bestowed a condescending nod on the surprisingly polite juniors, and left the tuck-shop, beaming.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he asked triumphantly, outside the tuck-shop. "Those kids are beginning to knuckle under, what?"

"Hem!"

"Hum!"

"I always thought they'd come round in time, you know. Goodness knows I've had to put them in their places times enough. Now my patience is being rewarded at last. They've become respectful and polite—I'm satisfied."

"Hem!"

"Got a cough, Potter?" asked Coker, with a frown.

"Nunno! But I was just thinking——"

"Don't attempt things that are beyond your powers, old chap," said Coker, with heavy sarcasm.

"Hem! I was just thinking that those Remove chaps were almost too polite to carry conviction," said Potter. "Dunno how it struck you, Greene, but I got the idea that either they'd all gone off their rockers——"

"What?" roared Coker.

"Or else that they were indulging in some deep rag," concluded Potter. "What did you think, Greeney?"

"Just the same as you, old man!"

"Why, you silly cuckoos," roared Coker furiously, "haven't either of you got the sense to see that those kids were simply behaving properly for once?"

"Can't say it occurred to me at all," admitted Greene. "When Remove kids start addressing you as 'sir'——"

"Well, quite right, too!" snorted Coker.

"I know it's an unusual way for juniors to speak to seniors. But, after all, what's wrong with it?"

"Hum!"

"To my mind, it's only fit and proper that they should use some courtesy title in talking to seniors. Now that they've started it, I'm going to keep 'em up to it,

anyway!" said Coker. "Got anything to say to that, you fatheads?"

The fatheads had nothing to say to it. They came to the conclusion that experience might change Coker's mind more easily than all the argument in the world, and they let it go at that.

Potter and Greene were right. Coker eventually learned that they were right, but it took two or three days of illuminating experience to convince him.

It was all right at first. Coker's feelings on being "capped" and addressed as "sir" in all quarters were very agreeable indeed. It was quite exhilarating to stroll about, receiving the salutations of the Remove, on the first day.

True, the reactions caused among other Forms were not altogether favourable from Coker's point of view. In the Fifth, for instance, the Remove's new departure was greeted at first with amazement and then with unrestrained mirth. Coker felt slightly disappointed over that circumstance, but it did not affect him very deeply. He consoled himself with the thought that the prophet is proverbially without honour in his own country, and then dismissed the Fifth from his mind.

On the second day of the new regime the Remove were even more polite than before. They seemed to have come to a common agreement to abandon the title "sir" in favour of "excellency." Coker, having recovered from his first shock, decided that that was all to the good. After all, the masters were entitled to "sir," and Coker didn't think a great deal of the Greyfriars masters. "Excellency," in the circumstances, was a better title; a little grandiose, perhaps, but distinctive and, on the whole, very suitable.

It was on the third day that Coker felt his first doubts.

Coming downstairs, full of joie de vivre and good will to all men, Coker ran into Peter Todd, of the Remove. Todd, as a rule, was among the cheekiest of his cheeky Form, but he seemed to have become infected with the general wave of remorse which had swept over the Remove recently.

Coker paused on seeing him, expecting

to receive a respectful bow and a polite "Good-morning, excellency!"

His expectations were fully realised. In fact, they were surpassed. Instead of merely bowing, Peter Todd made a deep obeisance. And instead of contenting himself with a mere "Good-morning, excellency!" he went considerably better with:

"Hail, your highness!"

"What?" gasped Coker, aghast.

"Hail, your highness!" repeated Todd, making another obeisance.

Several other Removites, coming up together, joined him, with a solemn chorus of:

"All hail, your highness!"

"Hail, great one!"

Coker pinched himself to make sure that he was not dreaming.

"Look here, you young asses, I'm not 'your highness'!" he exclaimed, half pleased and half vexed. "No need for you to say 'your highness' to me."

"But there is," said Wibley. "Isn't your highness the most important man at Greyfriars?"

"Isn't your highness far greater than the prefects and masters?" asked Frank Nugent seriously.

"Well, that's true, of course," admitted Coker, frowning. "But——"

"Then why not 'your highness'?" asked Bob Cherry. "Very appropriate, I think!"

"Oh, rather!"

Coker smiled.

"Well, all right, then. Have it your own way," he said indulgently, and went on his way.

But it seemed, by the expression on his rugged face, that he was beginning, for the first time, to entertain doubts. Even Horace found that it required an effort to swallow "your highness."

It was when "your highness" gave place to "your majesty" and "your exalted majesty" that Coker began to feel the urge of inward reaction. The thing had definitely gone too far now. He saw, for the first time, that it was, after all, possible to have too much of a good thing. Respect and politeness and obedience were

all very well; but when they led to fellows addressing him as "your exalted majesty," they were almost as bad as the disrespect and impoliteness and disobedience from which Coker had suffered before.

By dinner-time that day Coker's temper was in a decidedly ruffled condition. By tea-time he was raging. Disillusionment had come to the great man of the Fifth. It had been a long time coming, but it had come at last. And a bitter disillusionment it was.

He realised now that the whole School was laughing over him. His appearance in the Hall, the quad., the Games Study in the Fifth passage, and anywhere else where two or three fellows were gathered together was the signal for roars of laughter. Nobody now had any doubt as to the meaning of the Remove's astonishing display of politeness towards Coker, of the Fifth. It was all a "rag"—a tremendous and entirely successful "rag." Even Coker began to see that now.

The climax was reached after tea, when practically the entire Remove marched en masse to the Fifth Form passage. It was a sort of procession, led by Bob Cherry and Bolsover, playing a mouth-organ and a tin-whistle respectively, and it attracted quite a lot of attention on its way to the quarters of the Fifth.

Headless of the protests of the outraged Fifth, the Removites invaded the Games Study at the end of the passage. Coker was in that apartment, laying down the

law to a group of bored Fifth Formers. He looked round with a start as the door was flung open.

"What the dickens——" he exclaimed, frowning.

There was a roar from the doorway.

"Hail, great Coker!"

"All hail, your most excellent majesty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Please, your majesty," said Harry Wharton meekly, "we've come to award you a medal."

"Look here——" roared Coker, his face becoming a deep and wrathful red.

"Please, your majesty," said Harry Wharton meekly, "we've come to award you a medal."

"A—a medal?" stuttered Coker.

"To award you a medal as a token of our most humble respect and esteem," went on Wharton solemnly. "Your majesty, on this most auspicious occasion it behoves your humble servant to say a few words——"

But Coker's humble servant's few words were never spoken. Coker should, of course, have been delighted to receive such a respectful deputation. But he wasn't. For once in a way, respect and humility from the Remove gave him no pleasure

whatever. On the contrary, they seemed to inspire him to wrath. Coker saw red.

With an unintelligible growl, Coker rushed at the humble captain of the Remove.

Apparently that rush was not altogether unexpected. In the single second that elapsed during Coker's passage across the Games Study, a dozen Removites lined up to receive him. Coker had anticipated wiping Wharton off the map. Instead of which he found that the person who actually experienced the sensation of being wiped off the map was Horace James Coker! Coker roared.

"You—you—I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you! I'll—— Yarooooop!"

"Bump him!" roared a dozen voices.

"He doesn't appreciate politeness!" grinned Peter Todd. "Give him a bumping instead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here's a brainwave! Bump him till he asks us to treat him with disrespect in future!" yelled Vernon Smith above the din.

"Good egg! Up with him!" grinned Wharton.

Bump!

"Whooooo! Look here——" shrieked Coker.

"Do you want us to be disrespectful in future, Coker?" asked Wharton.

"No, you rotters! Yarooooop!"

"Sure?"

"Oh crikey! Lemme go!" groaned Coker. "All right, then, you young beasts! I'll agree!"

"Then it's distinctly understood that for the future we treat you with as much disrespect as we like?" asked Wharton.

"Ow! Yes. Anything you like, blow you!"

"Good! Let him go, then, chaps!"

The grinning Removites released their unhappy captive and departed. Great were the rejoicings in the quarters of the Remove that night. Coker himself had agreed to be treated for the future with disrespect. And with treatment of that kind the Remove were most happy to oblige him!

THE END

THE SLACKER'S ALPHABET

By LORD MAULEVERER

The Slacker of the Greyfriars Remove

A is the ARM-CHAIR drawn up to the fire.

B is for BED, without which I'd expire!

C is for CUSHION, so downy and soft.

D is for DREAMS when I snooze "up aloft."

E is for EASE as I quietly muse.

F is the FOOTSTOOL supporting my shoes.

G's the "GOO'-NIGHT" which I drowsily sigh.

H is for HAMMOCK. Oh, there let me lie!

I is for IDLENESS. What could be nicer?

J's the JAPER. (Sleep's gone in a trice, sir.)

K is the KICKS bestowed on my person.

L's LETHARGY—some chaps show aversion.

M's for MORPHEUS, with arms so caressing!

N's the NIGHTMARE—a subject depressing!

O is for OPTICS, with eyelids like lead.

P is the PILLOW tucked under my head.

Q's for QUIET, essential for rest.

R's RIP VAN WINKLE, the chap who knew best.

S is for SNORES—the windows are shaken!

T's for TORTURE—in class when I waken!

U is the UPROAR of Cherry's big feet.

V's for VIGOUR when he upsets my seat.

W is for WORK—long may I abstain!

X is 'XERCISE—it gives me a pain!

Y is for YAWNS. I'm needing sleep sorely!

Z's ZEPHYRS on the brow of

Yours,

MAULY.