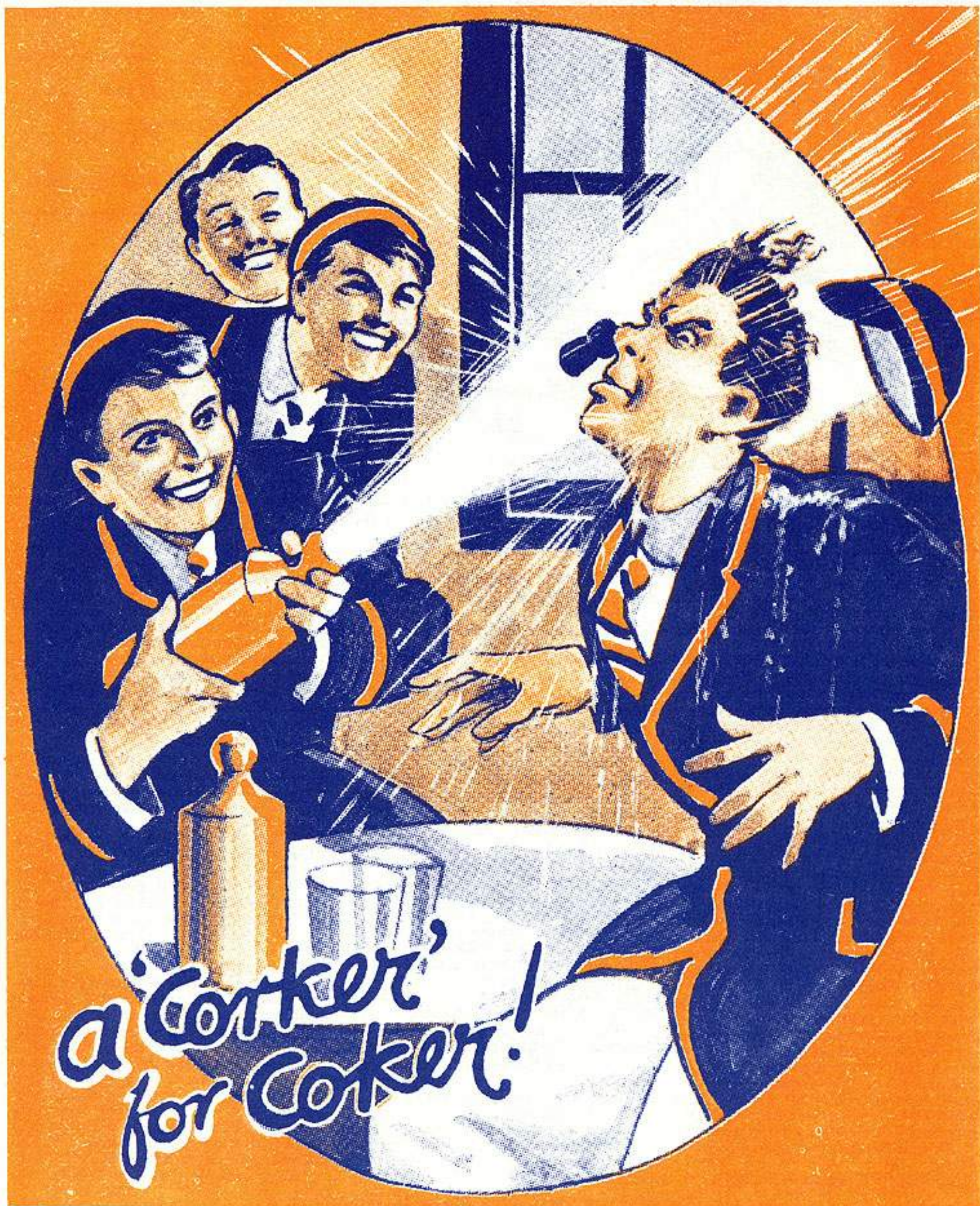


A STAR TURN—HORACE COKER—IN A STAR STORY!

The MAGNET 2^D



*a Coker's
for Coker!*

COKER'S DESPERATE VENTURE!



By
**Frank
Richards.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Merely a Misapprehension!

HELP!" It was the voice of Billy Bunter, on its top note. Harry Wharton & Co. stared round.

"I say, you fellows! Help!" yelled Bunter.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars had come in at the gate of Wharton Lodge, and were walking up the drive towards the house. The Easter holidays were drawing to a close, and the chums of the Remove were discussing the coming term at Greyfriars as they strolled along in the bright April sunshine. They had not noticed that Billy Bunter had dropped behind.

Bunter, of course, was tired. He had walked a mile that morning. Bunter had more weight to carry than the other fellows; not to mention a larger breakfast! So he had dropped behind, and he was still plugging wearily along the road when the Famous Five turned in at the gate of Harry Wharton's home.

But something had evidently indeed Billy Bunter with a new sudden, and surprising energy.

As the chums of the Remove looked round, they beheld Bunter coming in at the gate, going strong. His little fat legs twinkled as he ran; his fat face was crimson and streaming with perspiration, and his extensive mouth was wide open. He gasped and panted, and puffed and blew, as he came pounding up the drive after Harry Wharton & Co.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

The Master Laughed.—No. 1,210.

"The esteemed Bunter is in a terrific hurry!" remarked Horace Janset Rain Singh.

"I say, you fellows!" shrieked Bunter.

"What on earth's the row?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Ow! Help!"

The Famous Five stared past Bunter. Through the open gateway they could see a section of the sunny Wainford Road; but there was nothing visible on the road to account for Bunter's alarm.

"What's up, you fat ass?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"Groogh!" gasped Bunter breathlessly. "I say—help!"

"Is it a mad bull?" asked Bob, in wonder.

"Oh dear! Ow! I say—Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

He came pounding desperately on, spluttering for breath. He reached the juniors, and clutched at the nearest for support. That one happened to be Johnny Bull. Johnny gave the fat junior an unceremonious shove, and Billy Bunter sat down in the drive.

"Ooooh!" he gasped.

The Famous Five stared down at the spluttering Owl of the Remove.

"What's happened?" demanded Wharton. "What the dickens—"

"It's kik-kik-kik—" stuttered Bunter.

"Kick?" repeated Wharton.

"Kik-kik-kik—"

"Do you mean you want to be kicked?" asked Bob Cherry, drawing back his foot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! No! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "It's kik-kik-kik-Coker!"

"Coker!" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"Ow! Groogh! Yes! He nearly got me! Ow! Help! Keep him off!" gurgled Bunter. "The beast's after me! Groogh!"

"You silly ass! Coker won't come here after you!"

"Ow! I tell you he's coming!" gasped Bunter. "Just coming! Oh dear!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared towards the gate again.

They knew, of course, that Horace Coker, of the Greyfriars Fifth, was in the neighbourhood. Only the previous day they had landed an ink-blot, and had had trouble with the obstinacious Horace. Coker and his friends Bunter and Greene were on a cycling tour in Surrey, in the Easter vacation, and they were putting up at an inn half a mile from Wharton Lodge. Coker, of the Fifth, died, moved, and had his being in trouble; and the Famous Five naturally expected to find trouble wherever they found Coker.

But they certainly did not expect Coker of the Fifth to butt in at Wharton Lodge. Coker was not expected to have any sense; but even Coker should have had a limit.

"What utter rot!" said Nugent. "Coker won't come here!"

"Ow! I tell you—" gasped Bunter.

"If he does, we'll give him a jolly warm reception," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The warmth will be terrific!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Wharton. "Look!"

"Coker, by gum!"

Framed in the open gateway was the burly figure of Horace Coker. He was striding in from the road.

There was a squeak from Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows! Keep him off!"

Billy Bunter had only too much reason to dread the great man of the Greyfriars Fifth. The previous day, Coker, having lost his way, had impressed Bunter into his service as a guide; and Bunter had led him far astray. Which had considerably annoyed Coker.

"Keep him off!" gasped Bunter. "I

say, you fellows, you keep him off while I gerraway!"

"Fathead! We'll handle him all right!" said Johnny Bull. "Blessed if I thought even Coker would have the nerve to come and kick up a shindy here. Bag him, you men!"

"What-ho!"
If Coker of the Fifth had butted into Wharton Lodge to hunt for more trouble the Famous Five were ready to give him all he wanted, and a little over.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five made a rush, and met the burly Horace as he came striding up the drive.

They did not speak. There was nothing to be said. It was a time for action, not for words. They collared Coker on all sides, upended him, and brought him down on the drive with a bump.

"Yaroooh!" roared Coker as he landed.

"Got him!"

"Rag him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Leggo! You young scoundrels!" bellowed Coker. "You young villains! I'll smash you! Oh, my hat! Yaroooop!"

Coker of the Fifth struggled frantically. He punched wildly on all sides. But Coker had simply no chance. Coker was a burly and hefty fellow, but five to one was heavy odds. Coker was rolled over, and bumped, his rugged features rubbed into the earth, till he hardly knew what was happening to him. Horrid gasps and gurgles came from Coker, mingling with yells of laughter from the chumps of the Remove.

Billy Bunter had started for the house, but he turned back now. Coker was safely held; there was nothing to fear from Coker. When there was nothing to fear William George Bunter was as brave as a lion. Bunter came rolling back to the scene of the struggle.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, lemme gerrat him! Give a chap a chance! Lemme get hold of his nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Gurrrrrrgh!" came in agonised accents from Horace Coker, as Bunter captured his nose.

"I say, you fellows, hold him while I pull his nose! Mind you don't let him go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrrrgh! Leggo! Led do by dose!" gurgled Coker. "Ow! Oh! Wow! Ooooooogh!"

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

"Sit on him, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker was still struggling wildly. But his struggles ceased when Billy Bunter sat on him. Bunter's weight was not to be argued with. Horace Coker gasped helplessly and collapsed.

"He, he, he! Now hold his paws while I jolly well pull his nose——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ooooooogh!" moaned Coker.

There was a quick footstep on the drive. Colonel Wharton, with astonishment in his bronzed face, came striding on the scene.

"Good gad! What's all this—Harry——" exclaimed the colonel.

Harry Wharton glanced round.
"Only Coker, uncle! He came in to look for trouble, and we're giving him some."

"Groooooogh!" moaned Coker.
"Indeed!" said the colonel. "In that case he has certainly had enough! Let him get up!"

Coker of the Fifth was released. He sat up and spluttered for breath. The Famous Five regarded him with grinning faces.

"Ow!" gasped Coker. "You young scoundrels! Ooooh! You young ruffians! I'll smash the lot of you! Oooooh!" Coker staggered to his feet. "I'll jolly well spifficate you all round——"

"Pile in!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Lots more if you want it."

"The lotfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker," chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Come, come," said the colonel, smiling, and interposing as Coker made a movement towards the juniors. "If you look for trouble, Coker, you must expect to find it."

"Who's looking for trouble?" bawled Coker. "I came here to call on you this morning, and——"

"What?"

"And if this is the way you receive a visitor——" bawled Coker in breathless indignation.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry

A BORN DETECTIVE!

Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, is firmly convinced that he comes under this category—but when he tackles a detective's job it becomes painfully obvious that he's

A BORN ASS!

Wharton. "D-d-d-did you come here to call on my uncle, Coker?"

"Yes, you young villain! Ow!"
"That idiot, Bunter——" ejaculated Bob.

"I say, you fellows, I thought he was after me——"

"You fat chump!"
"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"You seem to have been rather hasty, my boys," said Colonel Wharton, a little severely.

"That fat duffer thought Coker was after him," said Wharton ruefully, "and we thought——"

"Why didn't you tell us, Coker?" demanded Bob.

"You young villain, did you give me a chance to speak?" roared Coker.

"Um! Well, perhaps we didn't!" admitted Bob. "But——"

"Let's kick Bunter," suggested Johnny Bull. "It's all Bunter's fault."

"Why, you beast——"

"I—I came here to speak to you about the burglary last night, sir!" gasped Coker, "and these young hooligans set on me——"

"They seem to have fancied that you were after Bunter," said the colonel, his mouth twitching.

"Eh? I never even saw Bunter——" gasped Coker. "Not till the fat scoundrel sat on me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently there had been a mistake. It was as a common and harmless caller that Coker had arrived at Wharton Lodge that morning. He had called to

see the colonel; and no doubt his reception had surprised him. Certainly it had annoyed him.

"You boys owe Coker an apology!" said the colonel.

"Sorry, Coker!" gasped the juniors. "The sorrowfulness is terrific, my esteemed fatheaded Coker."

Horace Coker snorted. An apology was all very well; and doubtless consoling in its way. But it could not undo the ragging and rolling and bumping that Coker had suffered.

"Come!" said the colonel, trying hard not to smile. "You boys must really be a little less hasty. Come with me, Coker."

Coker, with a vengeful glare at the juniors, and still gasping for breath, walked on up the drive with Colonel Wharton. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another rather ruefully.

"Poor old Coker!" murmured Bob. "He's always asking for it! A fellow couldn't guess that he wasn't asking for it this time."

"That fathead, Bunter——" said Harry

"That silly owl, Bunter——"

"Oh, really, you fellows! I thought he was after me——"

"Let's all kick Bunter!" said Johnny Bull.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper!"

"Come here, Bunter!"

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter rolled away hurriedly after Coker and the colonel—unkicked.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"JOLLY here!" remarked Potter.
"Jolly!" agreed Greene.

"So long as Coker isn't in the offing," added Potter.

"Oh, of course!" agreed Greene.

The two Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars sat on the bench under the tree in front of the Bunch of Grapes inn, on the Wheatfield road.

It was, as they agreed, jolly.

The April sunlight twinkled through the branches overhead, flickering on the bottles of ginger-pop and glasses on the table. Potter and Greene leaned back lazily, a wide stretch of green meadows and dusky woodlands before their eyes. Coker of the Fifth was absent; he had gone to call on the colonel at Wharton Lodge. Coker had consulted his comrades before making that call, and they had agreed that he couldn't do better. If Coker had proposed to call on anybody in the county of Surrey, his comrades would have agreed that he couldn't do better. Anything that relieved them, for a time, of Coker's attractive company, seemed a good thing to Potter and Greene.

Potter and Greene were winding up the Easter vacation with a cycling tour in company with Horace Coker. Coker was a good fellow in his way, and very useful on a tour. Coker had plenty of money, and he never expected his comrades to stand their whack, which was a distinct advantage. On the other hand, Coker had his drawbacks. If Coker did not say, "I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my mouth, let no dog bark!" at least he thought it. It was

possible to have too much of Coker. During the past few days, Potter and Greene had had much too much of him. They had even debated the idea of taking a sudden turning and disappearing over the horizon, and leaving Coker to continue that cycling tour on his lonely own.

So this rest from Coker was grateful and comforting.

Coker had decided to put up for a few days at the Bunch of Grapes. Potter and Greene had no voice in the matter. Had they raised objections, Coker would have brushed them aside ruthlessly. But as a matter of fact, they had no objections. It was a comfortable inn, and the grub was good, and they were tired of taking wrong turnings and wrong roads under Coker's masterly leadership. So they rested, and were content.

"There's that chap Lancaster!" yawned Potter.

Greene glanced round carelessly at a rather tall, handsome young fellow coming up the lane towards the inn.

He was the only other guest at the Bunch of Grapes, beside Coker & Co. Potter and Greene rather liked him. He was rather older than themselves; about the age of most Sixth-Formers at Greyfriars. He was extremely handsome, obviously athletic, and very well-dressed. What Potter and Greene liked him for was the fact that he had thrashed Horace Coker. Potter and Greene had long been of opinion that what Horace Coker really wanted was a "whopping." Dick Lancaster had given him the whopping he wanted, and that, from the point of view of Coker's loyal chums, was all to the good.

Lancaster glanced carelessly at the Greyfriars Fifth-Formers, and passed into the inn.

Potter and Greene continued to sip ginger-pop, and admire the sunny landscape. Ten minutes later there was a whirr of a bicycle in the lane.

"Young Wharton!" yawned Potter.

Harry Wharton dismounted from the bicycle, leaned it on the big tree before the inn, and came up to the porch.

"Seen Coker, kid?" called out Potter.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes. He came to my place to see my uncle, but we thought he was after Bunter, and ragged him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter and Greene.

Potter and Greene evidently saw something entertaining in the misapprehension that had had such painful results for Horace Coker.

"I've called here to see Lancaster," added Harry. "Do you know if he's about?"

"Yes, he went in about ten minutes ago."

"Thanks!"

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove entered the inn. Lancaster was not to be seen there, but the plump, rosy-cheeked waiter informed the junior that Mr. Lancaster had gone into the garden.

Wharton passed through the inn, into the long garden that stretched down to the river at the back.

The garden was large, with many paths winding among trees and bushes and shrubberies. Wharton glanced round for Lancaster, but did not see him. However, as the waiter had said that he was in the garden, the junior expected to find him there, and he proceeded to look about the paths.

He came suddenly in sight of Lancaster.

The young fellow was leaning against the trunk of a beech, his hands in his

pockets, staring away in the direction of the river, of which a shining glimpse could be had through the trees.

His hands were thrust deep into his pockets. Under one arm was the volume of *Livy* which seemed his inseparable companion.

His handsome brow was dark with thought, his well-cut lips set hard; his whole expression one of gloomy reflection.

Harry Wharton paused.

Lancaster seemed so wrapt in thought that he hesitated to disturb him. He wondered, too, what could have called that black moodiness to the handsome face.

For a minute or two Harry watched the silent, still figure leaning on the beech, uncertain whether to approach or not. But as Lancaster did not stir, or look round, the junior approached him at last.

Lancaster started suddenly at the sound of his footsteps; and spun round with a blaze of anger in his eyes.

"You here, you fool! I told you not to come here again—" he broke out angrily. He checked himself suddenly as he saw the Greyfriars junior's astonished face, and flushed. "Oh! You! Sorry—I thought it was someone else."

In an instant, by magic as it seemed, the cloud was gone from the handsome face and Lancaster was smiling.

"You, Wharton! My dear kid, I'm glad to see you! I must have startled you." He laughed. "Of course, you know that I wasn't aware it was you, or I should not have said what I did."

"That's all right," said Wharton, smiling. "But I hope I'm not disturbing you—"

"Not in the least! I was just thinking!" said Lancaster. "Did you come over to see me?"

"Yes!" said Harry. "I've a message from my uncle, Colonel Wharton. I buzzed over on my bike. Coker—you remember Coker—"

"Oh, quite!" smiled Lancaster.

"He's at Wharton Lodge now, with my uncle," said Harry. "And—and my uncle would like to see you, if you'd like to run over, because—" He broke off, hesitating.

Lancaster regarded him curiously.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"Well, yes, in a way," said Harry. "I hardly like to tell you, it's so rotten and ridiculous, but—"

"Go ahead, kid! I shan't mind, whatever it is."

"There was a burglary at my home last night," said Harry. "Some beastly thief broke into the house—"

Lancaster started a little and a faint flush came into his face. His handsome eyes narrowed.

"Some what?" he repeated.

"Some beastly thief," said Harry. "As it happened, Coker butted in and the rascal was scared off."

"That was lucky!"

"Yes, rather; and, of course, we're obliged to Coker in a way, silly fathead as he is," said Harry. "But—I hardly like to tell you, but my uncle thinks you'd better know—" He hesitated again.

Lancaster laughed.

"I think I can guess," he remarked. "I could not sleep last night and I went out for a ramble. I learned later that Coker was awake, and that he followed me, and fancied all sorts of things."

"Oh! You know, then!" exclaimed Wharton, rather relieved. "Of course, Coker is a frightful ass. But no doubt you've noticed that."

"It rather leaps to the eye, doesn't it?" said Lancaster. "Yes, Coker woke me up about three in the morning and



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accused me of burglary. I advised him to apply to the police."

"Well, even Coker wouldn't be ass enough for that," said Harry, "though he's fool enough for almost anything. He seems to have followed you part of your way and fancied you were heading for Wharton Lodge. The odd thing is, that there really was a burglary—a coincidence, of course. But Coker has got it into his fat head that it was you—"

"What a brain!"

"Coker's the biggest fool at Greyfriars," said Wharton. "But, of course, he fancies this because you whopped him yesterday when he was ragging me. But he's got the idea fixed in his silly head. That's the kind of howling ass he is."

"But Colonel Wharton does not—"

"Of course not," said Harry quickly. "My uncle's idea is that you should come over to the Lodge and see Coker in his presence. He thinks that between you you may be able to clear this rot out of Coker's silly head. It's all tosh, of course; but Coker can't be allowed to say such things, or to think them, if it can be helped."

"Your uncle is a magistrate, I think?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Then is this official?"

"My dear chap, of course not!" exclaimed Wharton, colouring. "My uncle doesn't doubt you for a moment, any more than I do. He thinks that a friendly talk may make Coker see reason and get the fatheaded idea out of his head. The sooner he chucks it, the better, of course."

"I understand."

"It rests with you entirely whether you come or not," said Wharton. "But my uncle would like you to come and stay to lunch. The idea is to make Coker see that he's made a fatheaded mistake."

Lancaster nodded, and stood silent for a moment or two. He seemed to be thinking.

"Your uncle's very kind," he said at last. "But I don't think I'll come. I'm not very much concerned about Coker and what he thinks. Let him rip."

Wharton's face fell a little.

"Coker isn't really a bad chap," he said. "I suppose you feel rather sore about it—but Coker can't help being an ass, you know. If you'd come—"

"I'd rather not come, really." The moody look, for a moment, clouded the handsome face. "No, I won't come. Tell your uncle I'm obliged for his



Frank Nugent held up a pocket mirror, and Coker glared at his reflection in the glass. "Like the effect?" asked Bob Cherry. "You—you young villains!" shrieked Coker. "You're not going to leave me like this!"

kindness; but it's not worth troubling about."

"But I'd like you to come very much," said Wharton, "if only for lunch."

"No, I'd rather not," returned Lancaster.

Lancaster half-turned away. It was a hint that the interview was over, and Harry Wharton, feeling extremely uncomfortable, understood it. He waited a moment or two, Lancaster looking away towards the river.

"Well, all right, then!" said Harry at last, awkwardly. "I say, I'm sorry this happened, Lancaster."

"That's all right; it's nothing."

"So-long, then!"

"So-long, kid," said Lancaster, without looking at the junior.

Harry Wharton, with a troubled face, went back to the inn. Lancaster leaned on the beech again, his brow blacker than before.

Wharton went through the inn. Potter and Greene glanced at him as he came out of the porch.

"Coker still at your place, kid?" called out Potter.

"Yes!" said Wharton briefly.

"Keep him there as long as you can," said Potter.

"What!"

"Keep him to lunch," said Potter, "and beg him to stay to dinner. Put him up for the night. You can have him as long as you like."

"And longer!" said Greene.

"Rats!" said Wharton.

And he remounted his bicycle and pedalled away to Wharton Lodge, with a cloud on his brow.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker Knows!

COLONEL WHARTON tugged at his grizzled moustache and stared at Horace Coker. He was standing before the fire in the library at Wharton Lodge. Coker of the Fifth sat facing him. There was a grim and dogged expression on Horace Coker's rugged face. Whether Coker was in the right, or whether Coker was in the wrong, there was no doubt that Coker's mind—such as it was—was made up. Argument had no effect on Coker; unless it was to make him more obstinate. The colonel looked annoyed and impatient; but at the same time he was troubled.

"Absurd!" said Colonel Wharton, for the fifth or sixth time. "Utterly absurd!"

"Well, I don't think so!" said Coker. "The question is, whether you can think at all!" grunted the colonel. "I am disposed to doubt it."

Coker's eyes gleamed. He was strongly tempted to tell Colonel Wharton that he regarded him as a silly ass. That, undoubtedly, was Coker's opinion of the bronzed old soldier. But there was something about the colonel that restrained Coker from stating that opinion.

"It's perfectly clear," said Coker—"clear to me, at least! That fellow Lancaster is a crook—"

"Nonsense! From what my nephew has told me, I understand that Lancaster gave you a thrashing yesterday which you certainly deserved."

"Nothing of the sort!" interrupted Coker hotly. "We had a scrap; but I'm not a fellow to be licked by a tailor's dummy like that chap. We never got to a finish—"

"And that has put this foolish idea into your unreflecting head," said the colonel tartly.

"That has nothing to do with it. I tell you, sir, that I went into his room by mistake, and saw him with a case of tools—jolly queer-looking tools, too. He was frightfully startled. The waiter had been telling us about a burglary at the bank at Wimford, and I put two and two together—"

"And made five of it."

"That made me suspicious," went on Coker unheeding, "and then, seeing him sneak out of the inn in the middle of the night, I fancied I knew what he was up to, and followed him. I lost him at the park wall; but when I came on to the house there was a burglar here. Ain't that clear?"

"Certainly it is a strange coincidence," said Colonel Wharton. "But I am assured that it is nothing more than that."

"That's rot!" said Coker.

"What?" boomed the colonel.

"Well, I mean, you're wrong," said Coker. "I couldn't see the fellow in the dark, but I'm sure it was Lancaster. Potter and Greeno don't agree with me—"

"I should imagine not!"

"But they agreed that I'd better come over and talk to you about it," said Coker. Coker was not really a suspicious fellow, or he might have suspected why his comrades had agreed to that. "They thought I'd better not go to the police at Wimford, as there's no actual proof—"

"Good gad!" exclaimed the colonel,

aghast. "If you should venture to do anything of the kind—"

"I jolly well would, if I could prove it," said Coker independently. "But there's no actual proof, as I said. But you being a magistrate, I think you ought to take the matter up—"

"I am taking it up to this extent," said Colonel Wharton. "I have sent my nephew to fetch young Lancaster here. I have no doubt that the whole matter can be cleared up in a friendly talk, and your mind disabused of this absurd suspicion of a very fine lad—a lad, sir, who is the son of an old brother officer of mine, killed on the Somme."

"I don't know who he is," said Coker, "and I jolly well don't care! I know I've got it right."

"Rubbish!"

"Well, I stick to my idea," said Coker, "and I don't believe he will come back here with your nephew, either. I know he's a crook—that's a cert—but he strikes me somehow as a fellow who would not tell lies if he could help it. I don't believe he will come here and tell you a heap of lies unless he's driven to it."

"I am assured that he will return with my nephew, and that he will laugh at your fantastic suspicion!" snapped the colonel.

"Well, we'll jolly well see," said Coker obstinately.

The colonel grunted and paced the library impatiently. His brow was deeply furrowed. Not for a moment did he credit Coker's strange suspicion of young Lancaster. But there was a trouble in his mind. Lancaster, as he knew, had been left an orphan at an early age, when his father fell in the War. His only relative, so far as the colonel knew, was an uncle who had gone to the bad, and who was now dead.

What the boy might have gone through in the years since the War the colonel did not know, and he had wondered a little. He seemed to be well off; yet Captain Lancaster, who had had nothing but his Army pay, could have left him little. In his uncle's care he might have fallen into bad associations. But that the lad, with his handsome face and frank, cheery manners, could be a breaker of the law, was unimaginable, to Colonel Wharton, at least.

The door of the library opened, and Harry Wharton appeared there. His face was flushed with rapid riding. He came alone.

Colonel Wharton stopped his pacing, and fixed his eyes on his nephew.

"Where is Lancaster?" he asked.

"He wouldn't come, uncle," answered Harry.

The colonel knitted his brows. Horace Coker's lip curled. Coker had been right again.

"What did I tell you, sir?" asked Coker.

"Silence!" rapped the colonel.

"Look here—"

"Silence! Why did not Lancaster come, Harry?"

"He said that Coker could think what he liked, that he wasn't worth troubling about," answered the junior.

"No doubt he would take that view," assented the colonel. "Still, I wish he had come, and we might have cleared up this unpleasant matter."

"I jolly well knew he wouldn't come, and said so!" hooted Coker.

Harry Wharton gave Coker a grim look.

"You silly, cheeky ass—" he began.

"That will do," said Colonel Wharton.

"Coker, as young Lancaster declines to see you here, the matter is at an end. As you know, I am a magistrate—and

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I tell you that you are making a foolish mistake, and suspecting an honourable lad on no reasonable grounds whatever. I warn you that you may find yourself in trouble if you repeat this ridiculous story elsewhere. I advise you to hold your tongue."

Grunt from Coker.

"That is all I have to say," added the colonel. "I understand that you came to this district on a cycling tour. The sooner you proceed on your tour the better. That is all."

"That isn't all," said Coker, coolly, as he rose. "I suppose I couldn't expect much sense from a country J.P.—"

"What?" roared the colonel. "You had better go, Coker. I am under an obligation to you for having prevented a burglary in my house last night; otherwise, I would box your ears, sir! You had better go."

And Coker, with a snort of defiance, went.

Colonel Wharton was left pacing the library, with a grim and knitted brow.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Hop It!"

"HERE he comes!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ready!" murmured Harry Wharton.

"The readyfulness is terrific!"

There was a suppressed chuckle from five Greyfriars juniors lurking in cover in a clump of willows by a field-path.

At a little distance a burly figure appeared in view, coming directly towards the clump of willows.

Horace Coker had left Wharton Lodge, and was on his way back to the Bunch of Grapes. He was quite unaware of the fact that the Famous Five had got ahead of him by a short cut, and were waiting in ambush. He was not to become aware of that until he reached the ambush.

Coker came striding on. It was close on lunch-time, and Horace was ready for his lunch. His lunch, however, was farther off than Coker supposed. Many things were destined to happen to Horace before lunch.

There was a sudden rush of feet as Coker swung on past the clump of willows. Before Horace Coker knew what was happening he was collared on all sides, and came down on the ground with a heavy bump.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "What—who—my hat! You young villains!"

"Hold him!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"We've got the silly ass!"

"Let go!" roared Coker. "Why, you cheeky little beasts, I'll jolly well mop up the whole gang of you! Leggo!"

"Hold the silly fathead!" said Harry Wharton.

"You bet!"

Horace Coker was well held. Four of the famous Co. had a limb each, and with his arms and legs grasped in a tenacious grasp, even the burly and beefy Horace was powerless. He sprawled in the grass, wriggling, and glared up at Harry Wharton.

"You cheeky young rotter—" gasped Coker.

"Cheese it," said Harry. "I've got something to say to you, Coker! We couldn't handle you at my uncle's house, so we've collared you here! You've got to stop playing the giddy ox!"

"Leggo!" roared Coker.

"You came along here on a cycling tour," said Harry. "You've made yourself a general nuisance. You pitched into me yesterday, and that chap Lancaster thrashed you—"

"I thrashed him—"

"We're fed-up with you," continued Wharton. "What we want to know is—are you going on to-day on your bike?"

"No," roared Coker, "I'm not!"

"Why not?" demanded the captain of the Remove.

"Because I jolly well don't choose!"

"You mean that you're chucking your cycling tour because you've got

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Old Lady: "That's a thing I could never do, hit a poor little bird with a stone from a catapult."

Bad Boy: "I'm blown if I can, either, mum!"

Now you've finished laughing get busy on a joke yourself. I've heaps more splendid prizes waiting to be won!

a silly idea in your fat head about young Lancaster?"

"I'm going to keep an eye on him, if you want to know," snorted Coker. "I know jolly well what he is! I'm no fool!"

"Gammon!" said Bob Cherry.

"Tell us an easier one," grinned Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know what I know!" gasped Coker. "As for that old idiot Colonel Wharton—"

"That what?"

"That old idiot—"

"You cheeky fathead!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I suppose it's no good talking to you. Sure you won't get on your bike and continue your jolly old tour to-day?"

"I jolly well won't!" snorted Coker. "I'm going to do as I jolly well please! And I'll jolly well mop you up—"

"The mopfulness will be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed Coker," chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Well, we're going to make you tired of this part of Surrey," grinned Bob Cherry. "We see quite enough of you at Greyfriars, old bean, and we don't want you hanging about in the hols. It's possible to have too much Coker."

"The too-muchfulness is terrific!"

"If you don't leggo—" bawled Coker.

"Hold him!" said Harry. "I've got the cord here."

Coker, wriggling like an eel, was safely held. Harry Wharton proceeded to bend his left leg at the knee, and wind a cord round his ankle and thigh.

The cord was securely knotted. Then another length of cord was tied round Coker's wrists, and secured.

"Now let him go!" said Wharton, laughing.

Horace Coker was released. He made a frantic effort to rise, and bumped down in the grass again.

"Like a helping hand?" chuckled Bob.

"I'll smash you!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five grasped the burly Fifth-Former, and dragged him up. Horace Coker stood, stork-like, on one leg. He glared at the grinning juniors in almost speechless fury.

"Untie my leg!" he gurgled.

"My dear man, you're going to hop home!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Hold him upright, you men, while I decorate him!"

Coker needed holding. With only one leg to stand on, it was difficult for him to keep the perpendicular.

Four of the juniors held him, while Bob Cherry extracted several tubes of colour from a pocket. Evidently the Famous Five had come prepared. Coker eyed those colour tubes apprehensively.

"If—if you dare—" he gasped. "Oh, you young ruffian! You—you young scoundrel! Oooooh!"

Bob squeezed out colour with a liberal hand. Coker's nose was painted a bright crimson. Blue stripes adorned his cheeks. Black circles surrounded his eyes. His large ears were tinted green. His forehead and chin were painted yellow. The decorations finished, Bob squeezed the remnants of colour in the tubes down the back of Coker's neck.

Coker's aspect by that time was startling.

"You—you—you—you—" gurgled Coker helplessly.

Frank Nugent held up a pocket mirror. Coker glared at his reflection in the glass. What he looked like it would be difficult to say, unless it was a Red Indian in a new coat of war-paint.

"Like the effect?" asked Bob.

"You—you young villains!" gasped Coker.

"Now you can travel," said Bob cheerily. "Hop it!"

"You're not going to leave me like this!" shrieked Coker.

"Just like that, old bean! You'll make rather a sensation at the inn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hop it, old man! You'll hop home all right, if you don't get run in as an escaped lunatic."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker had to hop as soon as the juniors released him. With one leg tied up, there was nothing for it but hopping. Coker hopped.

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

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Coker. "Oh crumbs! Oh scissors! I'll smash you into little pieces! I—I—I'll—"

"Hop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker's aspect, with his decorated countenance as he hopped frantically on one leg, was excruciating. The Famous Five yelled with laughter.

"Got going!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You're giving me a pain, Coker. Ha, ha, ha! Get going, old bean!"

"I won't!" shrieked Coker. "Do you think I'm going back to the inn like this? I'll smash you!"

"I think you are," agreed Bob.

"The thankfulness is terrific!"

"Now, all kick together, and start

him!" said Harry Wharton, wiping his eyes.

"Yaroooh!"

Coker started.

Under the persuasion of five boots, not gently applied, he had no choice about starting. He started, followed by a howl of laughter.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Coker will be the death of me yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leaving the hapless Horace to hop, Harry Wharton & Co. walked back to Wharton Lodge to lunch. Coker, in a frame of mind to which no known language could have done justice, hopped and hopped.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker Astonishes the Natives!

POTTER started almost convulsively.

Greene stared with bulging eyes.

"What—what—what is it?" gasped Potter.

"Goodness knows!" stuttered Greene.

Potter and Greene were still adorning the bench outside the Bunch of Grapes. They were thinking of lunch. But all thoughts of lunch were driven from their minds by the sight of the strange, weird figure that came hopping towards the inn.

They jumped up and stared.

For the moment they did not recognise their great leader. Coker's nearest and dearest relation would hardly have recognised him in his war-paint. Even his affectionate Aunt Judy would not have known her beloved Horace.

A carter who had stopped to water his horse at the trough before the inn stared at Coker with starting eyes. The rosy-cheeked waiter stared from a window; the innkeeper stared from the porch. The ostler stared, and rushed for a pitchfork. Startled and alarmed voices were heard on all sides. Never had there been such a sensation at that little wayside inn on the Wheatfield Road.

Coker hopped on

He had selected the most solitary field paths on his way back to the inn. Coker, as a rule, rather liked the limelight, but in his present remarkable state the less attention he attracted, the better he liked it. Coker, for once, was anxious to imitate the modest flower that was born to blush unseen. But he had to come out into the open when he arrived at the inn.

He hopped across the lane, his rugged face crimson with fury under its coat of many colours.

"Here you keep off, whoever you are!" exclaimed Potter, in alarm.

The strange figure was hopping directly towards the two Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars.

"It's a blessed lunatic!" gasped Greene. "I say, let's dodge into the inn. He may be dangerous."

"You silly idiots!" bawled Coker. "Don't you know me, you dummies? It's me, you potty chumps!"

"C-c-Coker!" stuttered Greene.

"C-c-c-cook-Coker!" stammered Potter, like a fellow in a dream.

Coker's face was unrecognisable; but his voice was familiar. Also the polite epithets he addressed to his chums.

Horace Coker made a last exhausted hop, and reeled against the table under the tree, and panted. He glared at his chums.

"You silly idiots——"

"Coker!" gasped Potter. "Oh, my hat! Coker, is—is—is it really you, old chap?"

"You howling ass!" roared Coker.

"What on earth have you done this for, Coker?" asked Greene, in amazement. "Is it a game?"

"You burbling idiot——"

"People'll think you're potty!" gasped Potter. "Blessed if I don't think you must be! What did you do it for?"

The ostler came running round the inn with a pitchfork in his hands.

"Where's that loony?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, 'ere he is! Now, you blessed lunatic, you get out of this——"

"Keep him off!" shrieked Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep that idiot off, you dummies! Keep that pitchfork away!" shrieked Coker.

Potter and Greene hastily interposed.

"It's all right, my man!" gasped Potter.

"All right—it's only Coker—it's a joke of some sort——"

"Looks like a blinking loony!" said the ostler, eyeing Coker suspiciously.

"Keep him off!" roared Coker.

"All serene, old man!" Potter waved the ostler away. "You can't be surprised at people taking you for a lunatic, Coker, when you get yourself up like this! What did you do it for?"

Coker raved.

"You fathead! You dummy! You idiot! You chump! Do you think I did it? It was those cheeky fags—they collared me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is there anything to laugh at, you dummies?" howled Coker. "Will you get me loose? I've hopped nearly half a mile on one leg——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Potter and Greene.

"You—you—you cackling chumps! Will you get me loose?" raved Coker.

"I'll jolly well punch your heads as soon as I get my hands loose! Let me loose at once, you chortling chumps!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Potter.

"Untie that cord!" roared Coker. "Do you want to keep me like this all day? Get a move on, you idiots!"

Potter and Greene, almost doubled up with merriment, proceeded to fumble with the cord on Coker's wrists. But the knots were well tied, and Coker was impatient. While his friends fumbled with the knots Coker told them what he thought of them.

By this time the various spectators had learned that Coker was not a wandering lunatic, but the victim of a practical joke. Alarm gave place to merriment. There were grinning faces round Coker, and grinning faces at the windows of the inn.

Coker was not in a merry mood. He could see nothing whatever to laugh at. But he was the only person present who was not amused. Potter and Greene were laughing too much to deal effectually with knots that had been tied with all the skill of a Boy Scout. Coker raved at them in vain.

"Will you get me loose, you dummies? Will you get me loose, you silly fatheads?"

"Oh dear! Ha, ha! These knots are jolly tight!" gurgled Potter. "Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haven't you got a pocket-knife, you benighted idiot?"

"Oh, all right!"

George Potter sorted out a pocket-knife and opened it. He began to jab at the cord on Coker's brawny wrists.

"Be quick!" yelled Coker. Coker was quite tired of being the centre of a yelling circle.

Potter jabbed more hurriedly. There was a fiendish yell from Coker.

"Ow! Ow! Wow!"

"What's the matter——"

"I didn't tell you to carve me like a turkey, you fathead!" shrieked Coker. "Keep that knife away, you dangerous idiot."

"Look here, how can I cut the cord if I keep the knife away?" demanded Potter. "Be reasonable."

"You silly chump! You silly fathead! Cut that cord! Quick! Yarooooop! If you cut me again I'll smash you!"

Coker wriggled frantically.

"Better keep still," said Potter. "If you wriggle like that you may get cut——"

"Yaroooh!"

"There! I told you so!"

"Oh, you fathead! Oh, you dummy! Oh, you ass!" gasped Coker.

The cord was cut at last. Coker's hands were free. The first thing he did with his hands was to clench them into a pair of leg of mutton fists. Potter and Greene backed away hastily.

"You silly chumps!" hissed Coker. "I'll jolly well punch your silly heads! I'll jolly well—— Yarooooop!"

Coker had forgotten, for the moment, that his leg was still tied. He made a jump after Potter and Greene, rolled over, and sprawled on his back with his free leg sawing the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Gimme that pocket-knife, you fathead!" roared Coker.

Potter tossed the knife to Coker and prudently retired into the inn. Greene prudently followed him. Coker's chums felt that it would be only wise to give him a little time to cool down.

Coker sawed at the cord on his leg, and was free at last. He scrambled to his feet, panting. He gave a glare—a many-coloured glare—round at a circle of grinning faces, and stamped into the inn. He stamped up the staircase to his room. What Coker needed most just then was a wash; and he was in a hurry to get one. On the upper landing he passed Lancaster coming away from his room. Lancaster started, and stared at him.

"What the thump——" he ejaculated.

Coker gave him a glare, and rushed past him, leaving Richard Lancaster laughing. From the door of his room Coker glared round again.

"You cackling rotter!" he hooted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lancaster.

"What the thump's this game? You look a pretty picture!"

"You cheeky toad! I'll smash you!" roared Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lancaster went down the stairs laughing. Coker stamped into his room and roared for hot water. He needed hot water, and plenty of it; and a scrubbing-brush and lots of soap. A grinning waiter brought him hot water, and Coker gave him a ferocious glare by way of thanks. Then he slammed his door and started washing.

Coker was a long time washing. His face was crimson with scrubbing when he came down, at last, to lunch. His eyes glinted under knitted brows. He glared at Potter and Greene, searching their faces for a smile. Potter and Greene, with almost superhuman efforts, contrived not to smile. Smiling, at such a moment, would have been dangerous. But they were glad when lunch was over and they could escape from Horace Coker's glinting eye. Then they smiled—loudly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Bunter!

"BUCK up, Bunter!"
 "I'm tired!"
 "Get a move on, Fatty!"
 "I tell you I'm tired!"
 "Like us to carry you?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.
 "Beast!"
 "Think of tea!" said Bob Cherry.
 "We're going to have tea when we get in!"
 "Blow tea!"

Billy Bunter came to a halt. Evidently the Owl of the Remove was tired when the mention of tea failed to spur him on.

The Famous Five halted also. Harry Wharton looked resigned; Johnny Bull snorted; the other fellows grinned. Billy Bunter's company at Wharton Lodge did not add a lot to the happiness and comfort of the Easter holiday party.

Before Bunter started on a walk he had no doubt that he could walk any other member of the party off his legs. After a mile or so, however, the matter was rather different. A mile was enough for Bunter. After that, he crawled like a tired snail.

The Famous Five had enjoyed a ramble among the scented woods, rich in the green of a sunny spring, that bright April afternoon. But the ramble had slowed down to a halt. Billy Bunter was tired, and when Billy Bunter was tired, that was the only thing to be considered of all the many things that were going on in the wide universe.

"Well, are we standing round here to watch Bunter puffing and blowing?" inquired Johnny Bull. "What did the fat idiot start for, if he can't walk?"

"The dear man rather over-loaded at lunch," remarked Bob Cherry. "He never does remember the Plimsoll line. You'd feel a bit fagged if you were carrying Bunter's lunch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I say, you fellows, let's have a rest," said Bunter. "Let's sit down for half an hour—"

"Like a lot of fowls!" said Johnny Bull, with a sort.

"Well, I'm not going on!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, buck up!" said Harry.

"Shan't!"

"You fat ass!"

"If that's the way you talk to a guest, Wharton, I can't say much for your manners," grunted Bunter.

"Well, you're such a jolly peculiar guest, old fat man," said the captain of the Remove. "I think Job would have got a bit impatient, if you'd stayed with him."

"Beast!"

"Well, look here, you take a rest, and we'll come back this way," said Frank Nugent.

"If you rotters are going to walk away and leave me—"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—"

"Let's rest for half an hour, and then go straight back," suggested Bunter.



"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lancaster. "What's the giddy game, Coker? You look a pretty picture."
 "You cackling rotter!" hooted Coker. "I'll—I'll smash you!"

"That will get us back in time for tea. I don't see that you need to bother about anything else."

"What about up-ending him, and rolling him along like a barrel?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yah!"

"Look here, we're only ten minutes' walk from the Bunch of Grapes," said Harry. "We'll drop you there, Bunter, and call for you coming back. You can have a ginger-pop while you're resting."

Billy Bunter brightened for a moment at the mention of ginger-pop. But he shook his head.

"I'm going to rest here," he said. "You might have brought a bottle of ginger-pop with you, Wharton. I suppose you didn't?"

"Never thought of it, old fat bean."

"You wouldn't!" said Bunter bitterly. "I can tell you that when I have guests at Bunter Court, I don't treat them like this."

"I suppose you don't want to kick him, Wharton," remarked Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "But I'll kick him, if you like."

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Let's go on," said Harry. "We'll come back this way."

"Let's!" said Nugent.

And the juniors got on, by the leafy path through Wimford Wood. Billy Bunter blinked after them through his big spectacles indignantly. It was just like those beasts to leave him on his own.

"I say, you fellows!" shouted Bunter. Four of the Co. walked on unheeding; but Harry Wharton turned his head.

Peculiar guest as he was, Bunter was a guest at Wharton Lodge.

"What is it, Fatty?" called out Harry.

"Got any toffee?"

"No, ass!"

"Beast!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and ran after his friends. They disappeared in a few moments from Bunter's indignant gaze.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter.

He looked round for a comfortable spot to rest. It was a warm and sunny afternoon, and Bunter's fat face was bedewed with perspiration. Bright sun-rays gleamed and glistened through the branches, and Bunter blinked round for a shady spot. He found a cosy bed of turf, screened by thick bushes, and stretched himself there with a satisfied grunt.

It was very pleasant to rest his fat limbs on the soft grass. All Bunter needed to complete his happiness was a large supply of toffee. But those beasts, of course, had never given a thought to what Bunter might want. A bottle of ginger-pop would have been grateful and comforting; but those beasts, of course, had not thought of that, either.

Still, it was very pleasant to rest in the shade, and Bunter would probably have fallen asleep, and forgotten the selfishness of a selfish world, but for a sound of footsteps that came along the path about a quarter of an hour after the juniors had gone.

The footsteps turned from the path into the wood and stopped. Billy Bunter blinked round. He was closely screened by the bushes; but through the

openings of the green twigs he saw that a man had stopped under a big oak-tree at a little distance. He was a small man, with sandy hair and ferrety eyes, in dingy tweeds, with a bowler hat. Billy Bunter started as he recognised the man. He had seen that ferret-eyed man before, when the Greyfriars fellows had come on him lurking in the park at Wharton Lodge.

The man stood there, under the oak, and lighted a cigarette. He scowled as he smoked. Apparently he was waiting for someone to join him in the wood. Billy Bunter remained very still. The ferret-eyed man did not look a pleasant customer to meet in a lonely wood, and the Greyfriars fellows were far away by that time.

Ten more minutes passed, and then there was again a sound of footsteps. A rather tall, graceful form passed the clump of bushes that hid Bunter, and joined the ferret-eyed man under the oak.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes opened wide behind his big, round spectacles. It was Lancaster, the handsome fellow who was staying at the Bunch of Grapes, who had arrived.

The ferret-eyed man greeted him in a surly tone.

"Oh, you're 'ere, Dick!"

"I'm here, Weasel."

Bunter sat up.

According to Horace Coker's amazing statement, Dick Lancaster, the handsome, aristocratic-looking orphan son of an officer who had fallen in Flanders, was a "crook"; and Coker, at least, believed that it was Lancaster who had attempted the robbery at Wharton Lodge the night before. Bunter had heeded Coker's statement as little as the other fellows. But now he was startled.

Lancaster evidently knew this rascally-looking fellow, and was meeting him secretly in the wood, at a distance from the inn where he was staying. Bunter could not help wondering what it meant. The fellow called him "Dick"; which indicated that they were on intimate terms. And he called the ferret-eyed man by a nickname. Billy Bunter's besetting sin was inquisitiveness, and he felt more inquisitive than ever in his fat life before as he blinked at the two through the interstices of the bushes.

"I been hanging about," went on the surly voice of the ferret-eyed man. "You says I ain't to come up to the inn, and I don't see why not, Dick."

"Fool!"

Lancaster's tone was sharp. Bunter could see that his brow was knitted and clouded. Dick Lancaster did not seem to be in a good temper. He had looked like a fellow without a care in the world when he had come to tea at Wharton Lodge with the juniors the previous day. Now he looked as if all the cares in the world had descended on his young shoulders.

"Look 'ere, Dick—" growled the Weasel.

"I tell you, we cannot be too careful," muttered Lancaster. "That fool who is staying at the inn—an idiot, named Coker—has—"

He broke off suddenly. He spun round, and stared towards the bushes that hid Bunter.

Bunter was not conscious of having made a sound. But the ears of the boy who had been trained among crooks were as sharp as a wolf's. The look on his face, as he stared towards the bush, startled Bunter, and the fat Owl felt a thrill of fear.

"What's up? What's got you, Dick?" muttered the Weasel.

"Someone is here," breathed Lancaster. "I heard—"

"Only a blooming rabbit."

"Fool!"

Lancaster strode directly towards the bush. Discovery was now certain, and Bunter started up with a squeak of alarm.

"I—I say, I—I ain't here!" he gasped. "I—I mean, I—I was fast asleep! I—I never saw you fellows—"

Lancaster, with glinting eyes, grasped the fat junior by the shoulder. With a strength that few would have guessed dwelt in his slim, elegant frame, he jerked him out.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Leggo! Ow!"

"Struth!" exclaimed the Weasel.

He made a stride at Bunter, his little ferrety eyes ablaze. Billy Bunter blinked at him in terror, and dodged round Lancaster.

"Ow! Keep him off!" he yelled.

"You spying little 'ound!" hissed the Weasel.

Lancaster, for a second, had seemed as enraged as the Weasel by the discovery of the Owl of the Remove. But he recovered his composure instantly. The black look passed from his face, and was replaced by a smile. He made a sign to the Weasel, and the ruffian backed away, though still scowling and watching Bunter with a savage eye.

"Hallo, kid!" said Lancaster. "You startled me! What the thump were you doing there?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "I—I was sitting down to rest—oh dear! Keep that beast off! I wasn't doing any harm. Keep him off!"

"The man won't hurt you, kid," said Lancaster reassuringly. "Don't be alarmed. He's quite an honest fellow, and he's come to see me about a job I'm trying to get for him. Don't mind him."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The Weasel was quick to take his cue from his master. With an effort, he cleared the brutal scowl from his ill-favoured face.

"It's all right, sir," said the Weasel civilly. "Don't you be afraid of me, sir! You made a cove jump, sir, turning up so sudden. I don't mind you 'earing what I got to say to Mr. Lancaster, sir! I'm looking for a job, sir, and Mr. Lancaster is going to 'elp me, seeing as I was his uncle's servant, sir."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked from one to the other. The explanation was plausible enough, though even the obtuse Owl wondered a little why they should take the trouble to explain to him. And he could not forget the fierce look that had flashed over Lancaster's face when he first discovered him.

"It—it's all right," stammered Bunter. "I—I think I—I'll go and look for my friends. I know the way they've gone."

"I'll walk with you a little way, kid," said Lancaster. "I came out for a walk." He glanced carelessly at the Weasel. "I'll see you later, my man! No hurry, I suppose?"

"None at all, sir!" said the Weasel.

Billy Bunter rolled to the footpath, and Lancaster walked with him. The fat junior was quite reassured now. Lancaster chatted pleasantly as they walked up the footpath towards the inn. He explained cheerily that the Weasel was an old servant of his uncle's, who was out of work, and had come down to see him and bother him about getting him a job.

He added laughingly that he did not want such a down-at-heel fellow calling

on him at the inn where he was staying. After which the conversation was supplied by Bunter, in great quantities, and Dick Lancaster had the pleasure of hearing all about Bunter Court, and the glories thereof.

At the end of the footpath, on the Wheatfield Road, he left Bunter, and the fat junior rolled on, feeling very pleased with himself and with Lancaster. That astute young gentleman had listened to Bunter's fatuous talk with a polite interest that Harry Wharton & Co. never showed. Lancaster stood looking after him for a few moments, with a smiling face; but when he turned back into the wood his brow was black.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Breaker of the Law!

THE Weasel was still standing under the oak in Wimford Wood, smoking cigarettes, with a scowling face, when Dick Lancaster rejoined him. He eyed the son of "Handsome Lancaster," of the Loamshire Regiment, apprehensively as he came up. Boy as Lancaster was, the ruffian evidently regarded him with something like fear. Lancaster's eyes glinted at the uneasy, stubbly face.

"You bungling fool!" he said in a low voice. "If I had not discovered that fat fool, he would have heard everything!"

"No 'arm done, Dick!" muttered the Weasel.

"No; as I found him in time. He must have been there when you came. But never mind that!" said Lancaster abruptly. "The few words he heard meant nothing to him." He dismissed Bunter with a gesture of contempt. "The fat fool hasn't the brains of a rabbit, fortunately. If it had been one of the others—" He broke off. "Look here, Weasel! The game's up here. You're to get out at once—and I shall clear in a day or two."

The Weasel stared at him.

"You ain't trying it on at Wharton Lodge agin, Dick?"

"No!" snapped Lancaster.

"There's the other crib we've marked out—General Sankey's place—"

"I tell you the game's up here!" said Lancaster. "All we've got to do now is to flit. You disappear at once; but I shall stay on a few days, not to excite remark."

"I don't see it!" muttered the Weasel uneasily but obstinately. "There's something you ain't told me, Dick. You ain't been the same the last few days. It ain't like you to run from a little risk. You ain't been the same since you got in with them schoolboys."

Lancaster gave him a sudden, sharp, searching look.

"You're not such a fool as you look, Weasel," he said. "I suppose you wouldn't understand that meeting those fellows, and being trusted by them, would make me feel—" He broke off again.

"Wot do you mean, Dick?" grunted the Weasel.

"Nothing. Let it pass. But I tell you the game's up here. There's suspicion already. You've seen that fool at the inn—a fellow called Coker. Well, that fool, by sheer chance, by sheer stupidity, in fact, has found out more than the keenest detectives at Scotland Yard have ever been able to find out. He knows who cracked the crib at Wharton Lodge last night. It was he who interrupted me."

(Continued on page 12.)

"Half-Time" Gossip!



ON Saturday, April 25th, there is the big climax to the football season—the Cup Final at Wembley. The players of two clubs playing next door to each other—Birmingham and West Bromwich Albion—are preparing for that great struggle. I shall have a lot of interesting things to tell you about those two teams in my notes next week; and so, meantime, I can work off replies to some Final-tie queries which have reached me, and which may prove of general interest.

This season's Final is to be between a First Division and a Second Division club. Thus there is a chance of the trophy going to a club outside the First Division. I am asked when last that happened. The answer is in 1912 when Barnsley staggered the football world by winning the trophy. By a strange coincidence West Bromwich Albion—at the time in the First Division—were the side beaten by Barnsley. Wouldn't it be funny if West Bromwich were the next Second Division side to win the Cup?

On three occasions since the War a Second Division side has been in the Final tie—Huddersfield Town in 1920, Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1921, and West Ham United in 1923. On each of those occasions the Second Division side was beaten, of course, and it is also a fact that although three sides from the Second League have had their Cup Final chances, not one of them has succeeded in scoring a goal in the last grim struggle. By way of heaping up the coincidences, it may be mentioned that

after being beaten in the Final tie of 1920 Huddersfield Town won promotion to the First Division, and that West Ham United did the same after being beaten in the Final of 1923. And West Bromwich Albion have been seriously engaged in the promotion struggle for many months.

ANOTHER question which reaches me is whether a Third Division side has ever won the Cup? Literally, the answer to that question is in the negative. I should explain, however, that in 1901 Tottenham Hotspur won the Cup when they were members of the Southern League. Technically speaking, that Southern League could then have been regarded as the Third Division, but it was not known as such, and the two Third Divisions only came into being after the War.

With the football season rapidly approaching its end, these are anxious days for many of the professional players. They are wondering, some of them, what will be their fate at the end of the season.

Will they be signed on again, or will they, in popular language, get "the sack"?

WE are sometimes apt to think of professional footballers with the big League teams as men whose positions are secure. This is true so far as the top-notchers of the game are concerned. Those who have played regularly with the first elevens of the clubs with which they are now connected will have no fears concerning whether they will be re-signed. Outside the top-notchers—the famous men—there are, however, scores of players whose fate hangs in the balance. They may be out of a job after the first Saturday in May—not signed on and no wages coming in. Let us not forget these players when the end of the season comes.

The Football Players' Union has been thinking about these players recently, and has appealed to the clubs to treat them as well as they possibly can.

The Players' Union, very properly, in my view, says that it is unjust that players should "get the sack" from their clubs and that at the same time these clubs should put a transfer fee on their heads.

I have a reader who asks me if this is possible and that if it is a practice. In a way I am sorry to have to say that it is. The footballer can be told, at the end of a season, that his services are no longer required by a particular club, but that club can also put a transfer-fee on his head, which must be paid by some other club before this particular player can be signed.

THE suggestion now made by the Players' Union is that any player whose services are no longer required by a club should be given a free transfer. There seems to be justice in this demand, but this question, like most other questions, has two sides. It is undoubtedly a fact, for instance, that some players do not like to be given a free transfer.

They have a feeling that if no sort of price is put upon their heads, then managers in general will get the idea that they are no good at all.

Again, if a player is given a free transfer, it is perfectly obvious that he can't have any share in a fee when he is signed on by another club.

In this matter of signing on, the players could often do more to help themselves.

Suppose that there is a player not signed on at the end of a season, and for whom his old club is asking a five hundred pounds transfer fee? That player finds a club willing to sign him on, but the new club is not prepared to pay the five hundred pounds transfer fee. If the player will then go to the League Management Committee, tell them the facts, make it plain that it is the transfer fee which is preventing him joining a new club, the Management Committee are always ready to arrange matters. In other words, it is not the wish of the Management Committee that any player should remain out of a job, and, incidentally, without summer wages, because of the fee which is on his head.

IN any event, it is inevitable that there will be a fair number of footballers out of a job when this season ends. The clubs generally have had a thin time financially, and there are many managers and directors who are at their wits' end to know whence the summer wages are coming. In these circumstances it is only natural that the summer wages bill will be cut down to the lowest possible minimum.

That is why I emphasize that we can be sorry, about this time, for the players who have not had a very successful season. Their worries about the future are many.

During the season we have dealt, in this feature, with many strange happenings on the football field. A correspondent draws my attention to an unusual event which happened recently in a Second Division match between Burnley and Barnsley. There was an exciting struggle for the ball between the Burnley goalkeeper and a Barnsley forward. In the course of it the players crashed against the goalpost, snapping it, and bringing down the whole structure, net and all. At the same time the ball travelled over the line.

The referee, quite rightly in my view, awarded a goal, as the ball went over the line before the goal structure finally crashed. It was within his discretion to do this. It was an incident not provided for in the rules, though the rules do provide for the cross-bar being displaced in the course of a game.

It is stated that if through any cause the cross-bar is displaced, then the referee may award a goal when a shot is made which would, in his opinion, have caused the ball to go under the cross-bar if it had been in its place.

COKER'S DESPERATE VENTURE I

(Continued from page 10.)

The Weasel clenched his hands. "But he don't know, Dick; he can't know—"

"He thinks he does. Wharton and his friends laugh at the suspicion. Colonel Wharton thinks him an utter fool! The colonel asked me to meet the fellow at his place to-day in order to clear the foolish fancy out of his mind," said Lancaster, with a bitter smile.

"And you went, Dick?"

"No!"

"And why didn't you?" demanded the Weasel. "You could 'ave pulled the wool over his eyes, if you'd liked. You can get round anybody."

Lancaster was silent for a moment or two.

"You wouldn't understand, Weasel. I'm what I am—what my poor uncle and circumstances made me. I'm not kicking. There's no hope for me, except in going on as I've started. But—I couldn't face my father's old friend and tell him lies! I couldn't!"

"Struth! You couldn't tell him the truth, Dick!" said the Weasel, with a husky chuckle.

"No. And so I kept away."

"It's risky, Dick! He'll wonder why you didn't go; and mebbe he'll begin to get suspicious—"

"I had to risk that!" said Lancaster abruptly. "It's no good talking, Weasel. The game's up here, and we're done with this part of the country. You'll get to Wimford, and take the first train back to London."

"That job at Sankey Grange is as easy as pie. I've got it all mapped out for you, Dick—"

"I tell you I'm done with it here! That's enough for you, Weasel! I mean what I say."

"That feller, Coker, you call him, could be put where he couldn't open his silly mouth, Dick!" muttered the Weasel.

Lancaster started.

"You dog! If you lay a finger on him—" he breathed.

"Well, I don't get you!" growled the Weasel. "All very well to talk to me about the game being up 'ere; but you ain't told me all, Dick. There's something else. You're weakening."

"That will do, Weasel!" said Lancaster curtly. "You'll take your orders, and carry them out."

The Weasel eyed him sullenly, suspiciously. He was conscious of some subtle change that had come over the boy crook, a change that he could not understand, but which he knew was there.

"You can give me orders, Dick!" he growled at last. "But there's others you got to consider. There's Slimy Sugden—"

"Slimy must make the best of it," said Lancaster. "I tell you I've made up my mind. Nothing more in this district. Now clear off, Weasel. Those Greyfriars fellows may come back this way, and I don't want them to run into you. I've got appearances to keep up."

The Weasel gave him a long, sharp, suspicious stare, nodded, and turned away. He disappeared through the wood, leaving Lancaster alone.

Lancaster leaned on the oak, his brow black and moody.

The Weasel's sharp eyes had seen the change in the gentleman crook, and he was keenly conscious of it himself. Somehow, he hardly knew how, contact with the frank, cheery, Greyfriars

juniors had wrought that change. It was their cheery trust in him that hurt him most, bitterly as he knew how unworthy he was of trust. They had taken him at face value, with never a suspicion. They had laughed at Coker's suspicions. Yet every one of them had ten times the brains of Horace Coker. A fool had blundered on the truth that was hidden from all other eyes. Lancaster could have found it in his heart to wish that Harry Wharton & Co. knew him as Coker fancied he knew him, in his true colours.

Crime had not weighed heavily on his conscience hitherto. He had been trained to it by the wretched man in whose hands he had fallen at an early age; and all other ways were closed, or seemed to be closed, to him. Now, almost for the first time in his strange life, he realised that he had a conscience, and that it was troubling him.

Long he stood there under the tree, black and bitter thoughts chasing one another through his tormented mind.

He stirred at last, and slowly took his way back to the inn. The Weasel was gone; by that time the train was bearing the ferret-eyed man back to the distant City. It was a relief to know that he was gone. Crime, and the shadow of crime, could be dismissed from mind for a few peaceful days, in the quiet countryside.

Coker & Co. were loafing on the bench outside the Bunch of Grapes when Lancaster arrived there. Potter and Greene gave him cheery smiles. Coker gave him a grim and suspicious glare.

Unheeding the Greyfriars seniors, Lancaster passed into the inn. Coker's glare followed him till he disappeared.

Then Coker snorted.

"That cheeky rotter—" said Coker.

"What's up now?" yawned Greene.

"Taking no notice of a fellow, as if a fellow didn't know what sort of a rotter he was!" growled Coker. "Let him wait a bit, that's all!"

Potter closed one eye at Greene—the eye that was farthest from Coker. Greene smiled into a glass of ginger-pop.

"Just let him wait a bit!" repeated Coker. "He can fool that old ass, and those young asses—and you silly dummies! He can't fool me! I know him!" Coker glared at his chums.

"What are you grinning at, Greene?"

"Wa-was I grinning?"

"You were, you idiot! So were you, Potter! You fellows think I'm on a false scent!" said Coker accusingly.

"Um!" said Potter.

"H'm!" said Greene.

"Well, you'll see," said Coker, "and he will see! I shall see! We shall jolly well all see—to-night!"

"What are we going to see to-night?" asked Potter. "There'll be a moon, the waiter says. What are we going to see by the light of the moon?"

"I'll tell you that later! Least said soonest mended," answered Coker mysteriously. "Can't be too careful in dealing with a crook; and you fellows know what fools you are!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Potter. "You—you put it so well, Coker! So tactfully, too! Your Aunt Judy must have been awfully careful about your manners, Coker, when you were a nipper."

"Frightfully!" agreed Greene.

"To-night," said Coker, "we shall see what we shall see! That's enough for the present."

To which Potter and Greene heartily assented. Less than that from Coker would have been enough.

Something, apparently, was "on" for that night; some masterly strategy on

the part of Horace Coker. Possibly Coker expected eager questioning on the subject. But he did not get any. If Potter and Greene wondered what it was, they did not express any curiosity. So it was left at that; and that night, according to Coker, they were going to see what they would see!

While Coker was giving so much thought to Lancaster, that youth was giving little enough to Coker. He had, indeed, forgotten Coker's existence, important as it was.

In his room above, Lancaster paced to and fro with a knitted brow, haunted by black thoughts; black and bitter thoughts that had risen from the repentance, or half-repentance, of a breaker of the law. Faces haunted his mind—the ferrety, suspicious face of the Weasel—a fat and greasy face which was that of Slimy Sugden, "fence" and moneylender; other faces, dark and cunning and wolfish in looks—faces of men among whom his lot had been cast. And with those mingled the cheery faces of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, so strangely different, looking as if they belonged to another world. Those golden hours of a spring afternoon were dark and bitter to the breaker of the law.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Ginger-Pop for Coker!

"I SAY you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Jolly old Bunter!"

"The Bunterfulness is terrific and superfluous!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had not expected to see Billy Bunter again till they came back through the wood. Once the fat Owl was sitting down they had not supposed that he would move in a hurry. But here he was, rolling along Wheatfield Lane, fat and crimson and perspiring. The juniors had turned back from their walk, intending to head for Wharton Lodge and tea, when the Owl of the Remove appeared in the offing.

"So you found you could move after all, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "I suppose you realised how we must be yearning for your company."

"The yearfulness was preposterous, my esteemed Bunter."

"I say, you fellows, we're not far from the Bunch of Grapes!" said Bunter. "You remember we had some ginger-beer there yesterday?"

"What about that, Fatty?"

"Well, it was jolly good ginger-beer," said Bunter. "My idea is to stop there and have some more. Then I shall feel up to walking home to tea."

"Might as well," said Frank Nugent. "I'm dry, for one."

"The dryfulness is—"

"Terrific!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton hesitated. After the interview with Lancaster that morning he wondered whether that rather mysterious young fellow wanted to see the Greyfriars party again. His manner had been abrupt and extremely discouraging, and Wharton had concluded that he had taken offence—as was not surprising—at the accusation made against him by a Greyfriars senior. The juniors, of course, were not responsible for Coker and his vagaries; but it was quite likely that Lancaster preferred to see nothing more of any Greyfriars men, in the circumstances.

"Well, what about it, captain?" asked Bob, looking at Wharton. "To pop or not to pop; that is the question, as Shakespeare might have said."

"I'm not sure Lancaster wants to see



"I—I say, I—I ain't here!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, I—I was fast asleep. I never saw you fellows!"
 a Lancaster grasped the fat junior by the shoulder and jerked him out of the bush.

anything more of us," said Harry. "That fool Coker has put his back up, I'm afraid."

"Well, he knows Coker doesn't belong to us," said Bob. "If he did, we'd give him away with a packet of cigarettes."

"That's so, of course; but——"

"What rot!" said Bunter warmly. "The inn doesn't belong to Lancaster, does it? Look here——"

"Fathead!" said Wharton. "As he's staying there, it would be only decent to keep off if he doesn't want to see us."

"Better to drop in, I should think," said Nugent. "It will show him that we don't take any notice of Coker's rot. If we see him there, we can make that plain."

"Something in that!" admitted Wharton. "But——"

"Look here, Lancaster will be glad to see me, at any rate," declared Billy Bunter. "We're quite friends!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I tell you I met him after you fellows left me, and we had a jolly talk together," said Bunter. "He was awfully interested in what I told him about Bunter Court."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! He's got better manners than you fellows, and chance it!" snorted Bunter. "When I told him that my pater kept six cars, he said it must be no end jolly."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He didn't hint that a fellow was bragging when I mentioned that Bunter Court was three times as big as Wharton

Lodge!" said Bunter. "Nothing of the kind! Not like you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you happen to meet Lancaster?" asked Harry.

"He was meeting a man in the wood—that sandy-haired man with the ferret eyes that we saw hanging about your place, in the park——"

Harry Wharton started.

"You fat ass! What do you mean? What could Lancaster have to do with a rascally-looking rogue like that man?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Are you gammoning, you fat chump?" asked Bob Cherry, staring at the Owl of the Remove.

The juniors all regarded Bunter curiously. They remembered that Coker had founded his suspicion of Lancaster partly on some "shady-looking" fellow with whom, he fancied, Lancaster was in touch. It was rather a shock to think that, on that point at least, Coker might have been right. If Lancaster knew the ferret-eyed man, it was strange enough, for that individual undoubtedly carried the signs of roguery plainly written in his sharp, cunning visage.

"It's all right, you fellows," said Bunter. "Lancaster explained to me how it was. The man is an old servant of his uncle's, and he's come down here bothering the chap to get him a job, as he's out of work."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"If that's the man Coker saw, that accounts for the jolly old milk in the giddy coconut," remarked Bob. "Lancaster looks a good-natured chap; just the fellow to help a lame dog over a stile."

"Oh, he's all right!" said Bunter. "We had quite a nice talk. He's rather taken to me."

"Bow-wow!"

"The fact is, he's an aristocratic chap, and he takes to me as one of his own sort!" explained Bunter. "He would naturally take to a fellow of good family. I don't suppose he would care to see much of you fellows; but he would be glad to see me at any time. Look here, don't let's waste any more time. I want some ginger-pop."

"Oh, come on!" said Harry.

The juniors walked on to the inn. They saw nothing of Lancaster when they arrived there; but Coker & Co. were sitting at the table under the tree, with ginger-beer before them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob cheerily, as the juniors came up to the table.

Coker frowned at them.

"What do you fags want here?" he demanded.

"Ginger-pop!" said Bob.

"Well, I don't want you hanging about here!" said Coker. "You can clear off, and get your ginger-pop somewhere else."

"Oh, my hat! Have you bought the inn, old bean?"

"Don't be cheeky, Cherry! I never stand cheek from Lower School fags!" said Coker warningly. "Just clear off."

The Famous Five smiled. They were used to Horace and his high-handed manners and customs. But if Coker thought he could order them off from a wayside inn, Coker was only making

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(Continued from page 13.)

one more of his innumerable mistakes. Harry Wharton called to the waiter for ginger-beer.

"I've told you I don't want you fags here!" hooted Coker.

"Coker, old man—" murmured Potter.

"Shut up, Potter! Do you think I'm going to let Lower Fourth fags sit down at the same table with me?" demanded Coker hotly. "There's a limit, by Jove!"

"Dash it all, it's a public inn!" said Greene.

"Shut up, Greene! If you can't talk sense, don't talk at all. I've given you that advice before."

"Oh dear!" sighed Potter.

Evidently the great Horace was hunting for more trouble. Potter and Greene exchanged a glance, rose from the bench, and walked into the inn. If Coker was going to start a shindy, their idea was to leave him the shindy all to himself. Coker glared after them.

"Where are you going?" he bawled.

Potter and Greene did not answer that question. They disappeared. The waiter brought ginger-beer and glasses, and Bob took a bottle to open it. Coker fixed a menacing eye on him.

"I've told you to clear, Cherry! Put that ginger-beer down!"

"My dear chap, I'm going to put it down," said Bob affably. "Can't put it down till I've opened the bottle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, put the bottle down!" hooted Coker.

"The bottle wouldn't go down!" said Bob, shaking his head. "My mouth isn't the size of yours, Coker!"

Coker stared at him. Coker was not quick on the uptake; and it did not dawn on his powerful intellect that the cheery Bob was deliberately misunderstanding him.

"You young idiot!" said Coker. "I mean, you're to let that ginger-beer alone, and clear off! I don't want you here."

"Just what I was thinking about you, old chap," said Bob. "Your face rather spoils this beautiful landscape. Take it away!"

"And bury it!" suggested Johnny Bull.

Coker of the Fifth breathed hard. Bob continued his operations with the cork just as if Coker did not exist. Coker strode round the table at him. He did exist, and he was going to make that clear.

"Now, you cheeky young sweep—Oooooooooooooch!"

The cork came out of the ginger-beer bottle. So did the ginger-beer—just in time for Coker. It caught the rugged features of Horace Coker in a foaming flood.

"Oooooooooooooch!" spluttered Coker.

He staggered back, streaming with ginger-beer.

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

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"Have some more, Coker!" chuckled Johnny Bull. And he turned his own bottle on the Fifth-Former of Greyfriars.

"Oh! Ow! Oooooch! Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered Coker, as he received a fresh supply. "Wooooooooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll—groogh!—I'll jolly well—ooooch!—woooch! Groogh! Gug-gug-gug!" gurgled Coker, as ginger-beer was turned on him from all sides. "You young sweeps—ooooch!—you young hooligans—woooch! Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker fairly fled. Ginger-beer clothed him like a garment, as he dodged into the inn. Probably he went in search of a towel. A grinning waiter brought a fresh supply of ginger-pop, and the Greyfriars juniors sat down to dispose of it, untroubled further by Horace Coker. Coker was still towelling when they left the inn and walked home cheerily to Wharton Lodge to tea.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Coker on the Trail!

MIDNIGHT!

The inn was closed, dark, and silent.

From somewhere in the darkness came the whirr of an ancient grandfather clock. Horace Coker rubbed his eyes.

Coker was not sleeping.

Potter and Greene had gone to bed. Coker had not gone to bed. Coker, fully dressed, sat at his open window, at the balcony at the back of the inn. Coker was on the watch.

The previous night Lancaster had left the inn surreptitiously, and Coker had followed him as far as Wharton Lodge. He had lost him at the park wall; but he entertained no doubt that Lancaster was the cracksman whom he had interrupted at the Lodge.

Proof was lacking, and proof was what Horace Coker wanted, and was determined to get. Hence his midnight vigil.

Coker had thought it all out, for Coker, in spite of what his friends thought of him, was capable of thinking. The cracksman's attempt at the Lodge had been defeated. He was likely to try it on again. If he did Coker was going to nail him. Coker had it all cut and dried.

The previous night Coker had been kept from sleep by the painful state of his nose, which had been seriously damaged in his scrap with Lancaster. Coker's nose was better now, and he was sleepy. On this occasion he found it difficult to keep awake.

He was determined to keep awake, quite determined; but as the night grew older and older, it became more and more difficult. Coker nodded, and Coker yawned; and every now and then Coker found himself dropping into a doze. He had almost to prop his heavy eyes open.

But Coker was a stickler. He reflected rather bitterly that it would have been better had Potter and Greene sat up with him to watch. He had suggested it to them. They had grinned and gone to bed. They did not share Coker's suspicion of young Lancaster; but had they shared it they would not have been likely to give up a night's rest to play the detective. Horace Coker was made of sterner stuff.

But it was very hard to keep awake. Coker nodded more and more. Again and again he dabbed his rugged face with a wet sponge, to drive away

Morpheus. But he grew sleepier and sleepier. It was an intense relief to Coker when suddenly, from the silence of the balcony outside, there came a faint creak.

Coker sat up, wide awake on the instant.

His heart beat hard as a shadowy figure passed his window. It was Dick Lancaster.

Coker's eyes gleamed.

Lancaster, clear in the bright April starlight, passed down the steps into the garden. Coker stepped cautiously out on the balcony, and followed.

In the dim old garden, thick with trees and shrubberies, he lost sight of Lancaster; but he heard the click of the gate at the bottom of the garden. He swung over the gate to the path that ran along the bank of the river.

Ahead of him was the tall, slim figure of Lancaster, walking slowly. Coker, with gleaming eyes, followed.

Evidently—to Coker—the crook was at his old game again. This time Coker was going to make sure of him.

The figure ahead came to a halt on the bank. Leaning against a tree, Lancaster folded his arms across his breast, and stood there, staring at the glimmering water.

Coker came to a stop, puzzled.

He was not likely to guess the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the handsome crook, and he was perplexed. If Lancaster had left the inn, as Coker believed, to carry out some nocturnal robbery, he did not seem in a hurry about it.

In point of fact, no such thought was in the crook's mind. His strange way of life made him sleepless in the small hours. He was thinking, as he stood looking moodily at the river, strange and dark thoughts.

Whether it was the fact that suspicion had been aroused, or whether it was the influence of the cheery Greyfriars schoolboys, Dick Lancaster had been in earnest when he told the Weasel that he was done with the "game" in that quarter. No "haul," howsoever great, would have tempted him into Wharton Lodge again.

He stirred at last, and moved slowly up the bank.

Coker followed like a shadow.

Much to Coker's surprise, the fellow was strolling along slowly and leisurely, as if he had no particular destination in mind. He did not look back once.

The direction he was taking along the river would not lead him anywhere near Wharton Lodge. Coker began to wonder whether he had, after all, made a mistake. But it was not easy for the great Horace to realise that he might have been mistaken. Common mortals might err, not Horace Coker. Coker kept doggedly on.

If the fellow was a crook, bound on a lawless errand, he was strangely unwary. Several times a twig snapped under Coker's foot, and Lancaster did not turn his head. Several times Coker, feeling certain that his quarry would glance back, darted into cover. But Lancaster did not glance back. He moved on, slowly but steadily, Coker following him like a faithful shadow.

He stopped again, and once more leaned on a tree, gazing out on the river. There was a murmuring and creaking from a mill-wheel that turned in the current on the other side, an eerie sound in the silence and shadows of the night. Coker waited impatiently.

Was it possible, after all, that the fellow was simply taking a stroll by starlight? Coker was loath to believe it. It was quite an unpleasant idea that he had given up his night's rest

to shadow a fellow who was strolling around in the starlight with no particular object in view.

When Lancaster stirred again he did not pursue his way. He turned back, and came striding along the river path, directly towards Coker.

Coker jumped.

He had not looked for that.

It was borne in on his mind, at last, that Lancaster had simply gone out for a ramble in the light of the stars and was now returning to the inn. It was quite a disagreeable discovery—and what followed was still more disagreeable. For that unexpected movement on the part of Lancaster took Coker quite by surprise, and he had no time to hunt cover. Lancaster almost walked into his shadower.

He gave a start as he saw Coker. Coker, realising that it was too late to back out of sight, faced him. He caught the glint in Lancaster's handsome eyes, in the starlight.

"So you were following me?" said Lancaster in a low voice, with a contemptuous tone in it that brought a flush to Coker's cheeks.

Coker was annoyed to feel himself turning red.

"I suppose I can take a walk if I like!" he retorted, rather lamely.

"You were spying on me."

"I was jolly well following you," said Coker, "and I'm jolly well not afraid to tell you so, either. I jolly well followed you last night, and jolly well nearly caught you at it! And if you think I'm afraid of you, Mister Gentleman Cracksman, you're jolly well mistaken, see?"

Lancaster set his lips.

"I've thrashed you once," he said quietly.

"Rats!" retorted Coker undauntedly. "We never finished that scrap, and I'm jolly well ready to finish it when you like—here, if you choose!"

"I've a good mind—" began Lancaster.

Coker snorted defiance.

"Don't mind me!" he jeered. "I'm jolly well ready for you! I'd jolly well lick you as soon as look at you, and chance it."

"Oh, get out of the way!" snapped Lancaster angrily. "You're not worth quarrelling with."

"Feeling funky, what?" jeered Coker.

"Fool!"

"Well, put up your hands, you cheeky rotter!" hooted Coker, squaring up to his enemy. "You fancy you had the better of me in that scrap yesterday. You don't seem anxious to try it on again."

"Get out of the way!"

"Rats!"

"If you don't shift, I shall shift you!" exclaimed Lancaster, his anger breaking out.

"I'd like to see you do it!" jeered Coker.

"You'll see that soon enough, you silly ass!" snapped Lancaster—and he strode straight at the Greyfriars Fifth-Former.

Coker did not budge an inch. Coker was not the fellow to budge. His hands were up, and he hit out vigorously as Lancaster came on. Coker was quite eager to be able to tell Potter and Greene, in the morning, that he had licked the fellow whom those fat-heads fancied that he couldn't lick.

Coker was not, however, destined to give Potter and Greene that glad news in the morning.

Probably Horace Coker was aware, at the back of his mind, as it were, that he was no match for Lancaster. But

if he knew it, he was not going to admit it, even to himself. He was ready to try his luck again, in the hope of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

But if Coker entertained a hope of getting the upper hand of the fellow

who had "whopped" him once already, that hope was speedily knocked on the head. In their earlier encounter Lancaster had been good-humoured, and had spared Coker all he could. Now he was very far from good-humoured. He was intensely irritated by Coker butting into his troubled reflections, interrupting a train of painful thought. His irritation found expression in the way he handled the obstreperous Horace. Coker, to his rage, and astonishment, was knocked right and left, like a punchball, and he went down into the grass by the margin of the river with a heavy crash.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Coker.

Lancaster glanced down at him angrily and scornfully.

"Are you satisfied, you fathhead?"

"Ow! No! Oh! You rotter! You wait till I gerrup!" gasped Coker.

He scrambled to his feet, breathless, exasperated, and more determined than ever. If pluck and doggedness could win a victory, Coker was going to win. So fierce was Coker's rush that Lancaster had to give ground before it, and he backed away, Coker following him up fiercely with sledge-hammer drives till he was treading in the rushes on the margin of the stream, and could retreat no farther. There Lancaster rallied, and drove Coker back by sheer hard hitting.

Thud! Thud! Thud! came the blows on Coker, and he acknowledged every one with a grunt.

There was a bump as Horace went down again. He lay gasping, slower to rise than before.

Lancaster gave him a look, and turned away, evidently intending to walk back to the inn, regarding the fight as over. That was too much for Coker. The fight was not over yet; it was not over so long as Horace Coker could stand and brandish a leg-of-mutton fist. Breathless and panting, Coker staggered to his feet and rushed after his foe.

"Hold on, you rotter! Stop, I tell you!" gasped Coker. "Put up your hands, you worm! Take that!"

Lancaster spun round as Coker rushed at him. He met the burly Fifth-Former of Greyfriars with a right-hander that fairly spun Coker off his feet. Coker staggered back, and back, and back—and fell!

Splash!

"Oooooooh!" came in a gurgle from Coker. He had fallen backwards into the river, and in an instant the water closed over him.

Lancaster started, and stared at the widening circles in the bright starlight. He ran close to the edge of the grassy path by the river. He watched for Coker to come up, and saw his head emerge from the water, six or seven yards out. Coker was struggling wildly. Lancaster had taken it for granted that a Fifth Form man of Greyfriars could swim; and, in fact, Coker could swim, after a fashion, in suitable attire in a bathing-pool or bath. But with his clothes on, in deep water, it was quite a different proposition, and Coker simply struggled blindly and helplessly as the current tore him away.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lancaster.

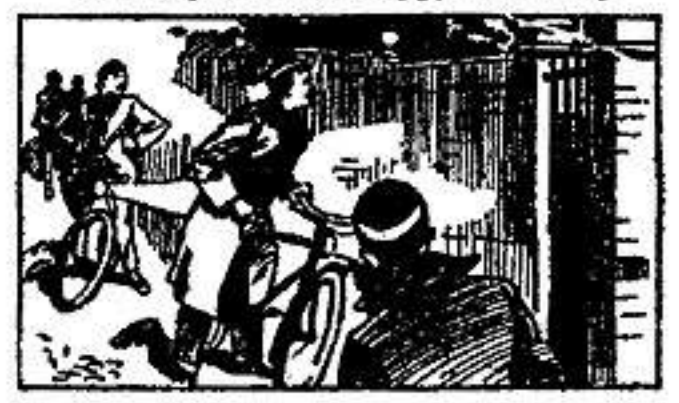
His handsome face suddenly whiteened.

That swift glance showed him that Coker was powerless to save himself—that the river was sweeping him away to drown him. In a twinkling he threw

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The night it was foggy and late,



When the Co. cycled up to the gate.



Said Gosling: "Look 'ere,



I'll report yer, that's clear."



But a tip saved that horrible fate.

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off hat and jacket, and his shoes followed; and he plunged into the river and swam out towards Coker with swift and powerful strokes.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

For Life or Death!

HORACE COKER hardly knew what was happening to him. That sudden plunge into the water had taken him quite by surprise. He had not noticed, or realised, how near he was to the river. An under-tow, caused by the suction of the mill-wheel at a little distance across the stream, dragged him out as he came up; and Coker found himself struggling for his life in deep water, far from the bank. How many times his head went under, how much water he swallowed, Coker never knew. He was too dazed and confused to realise anything clearly.

Had Coker been asked, he would have stated, without hesitation, that he was the best swimmer at Greyfriars. He was quite unaware that he was the worst. But he did not realise that, or anything else, as he was swept to death in the rushing waters.

The water sang and bubbled in his dizzy ears, the murmur of the revolving mill-wheel came dully; and louder came the boom of rushing waters over the weir. And Coker went whirling helplessly—so swiftly that it seemed that even a swift and powerful swimmer had no chance of reaching him in time to give him help.

But Lancaster's rapid strokes cleft the water almost like lightning; the lithe and agile figure gleamed through the water like a darting fish. Coker, drowning helplessly, suddenly felt something grasp him, felt his head above the surface, and his mouth drawing in great gulps of air instead of water. And glaring round dizzily, Coker saw a handsome, set face—white and rigid with resolve. And he knew that it was his late adversary that was grasping him and holding him up from death.

"Groooooogh!" gurgled Coker.

"Hold on!"

Lancaster snapped out the words.

Coker held on.

The wonderful swimming powers on which Coker had often expatiated in the games study at Greyfriars, had utterly failed him now. Coker held on, and was deeply thankful for something to hold on to.

With Coker hanging on to him, Lancaster fought against the rush and whirl of the river. He had known, when he plunged in, that he was taking his life in his hands. He realised now that the danger was more terrible than it had seemed. Coker was a helpless burden, and a strong swimmer unencumbered would have been in danger. But with steady coolness and courage he fought for his life and Coker's, and with terrible efforts won his way towards the bank.

But within three yards of the tempting, grassy slope, an under-current caught him and whirled him out again. Over the river at this point long branches jutted from an elm, and one of them dropped almost to the water. Lancaster clutched at it as he was swept away, caught the extremity of the branch, and held on.

His weight dragged the branch down into the water. But it held him, and gave him a much-needed rest.

Under him and round him the water

raced on, seeking to tear him away and rush him to death. But he held.

Alone he would have been safe. He might have clambered on the drooping branch and gained the tree; he could have swum across the nine or ten feet of swirling water to the bank. Cumbered by Coker, he was powerless to do either. And every moment that passed was precious; for strong and sinewy as he was, the effort was telling upon him and his strength was ebbing.

"Groooooogh!" gurgled Coker. "Oh, my hat! Oooooh!"

Cra-a-a-ack!

Lancaster's jaw set grimly. He knew what that crack from the drooping branch meant. The drag on it was breaking it.

Coker's face, white as chalk, glimmered from the water in the star-shine. Coker understood. He knew that if Lancaster let him go, he was doomed to die in the swirling water; and he knew, too, that if Lancaster did not let him go the branch would break in a very few minutes, and both of them would be swept away to death.

Coker drew a shivering breath.

"Leave me alone!" he breathed.

Lancaster smiled faintly.

"I say, I'm sorry!" panted Coker. "You're a good chap. You can't help me out, and I'm done. No good two of us going! Let go!"

"Don't be an ass!"

Lancaster's glance swept the bank in despair. There was no help—no chance of rescue! At that hour—one o'clock in the morning—the countryside was utterly deserted. No cry could have reached as far as the mill across the river, even if it could have awakened the miller in time to lend aid. There was no help—no rescue—and only a breaking branch between them and death. And a long crack came from the elm branch, telling that it had not many moments to last.

"Save yourself, you dummy!" breathed Coker. "I'll chance it! You can't help me out."

"Sink or swim together!" said Lancaster.

"No good both going!" said Coker, and he released his hold on Lancaster. But a firm grasp was on him, and Lancaster held him with one hand, while he clung to the branch with the other.

The water swirled and bubbled round them. Perhaps the temptation assailed Lancaster then to let his helpless burden go and save himself. But if it assailed him he drove it away. It was sink or swim together! Once more his despairing eyes swept the starlit bank. But there was no help—no hope! Under the silent stars the struggle had to be fought out—to end in defeat and death, unless by a miracle.

Cr-a-a-a-ack!

"It's going!" muttered Coker. His face was colourless and set hard. With all his faults Coker had boundless pluck. "Save yourself, old chap! Save yourself, you dummy!"

Lancaster did not heed.

There was a sudden snap. The broken branch trailed in the water, and on the instant the two of them were whirled away.

What happened after that was never known to Coker. His senses fled in a wild insanity of swirling, whirling waters. A roar was in his ears—a roaring of falling, tumbling water. The river tore at him, dragged at him, buffeted him like a giant. But always there was a strong hand that held him from death. Wild and whirling minutes—while a brave and dauntless heart fought for life in the shadow of

death; and Coker's senses left him and he knew nothing more.

Consciousness came back with a jerk. Something was dragging across his face—the wet twigs of a willow. His dizzy eyes blinked round him. Water was swirling up to his shoulders; his head was in a willow bush that hung down the bank, and Lancaster, holding him with one hand, was grasping the willows with the other. Against all probability, against all hope, the strong swimmer had won to the bank and grasped at the bunch of willows and held on.

But he was exhausted now—it was with the last ounce of his strength that he held. The bank was almost within reach, but he was powerless to do more. Had Coker remained unconscious both would have been lost. But Coker was able to help himself now, and he grasped at the willows and relieved Lancaster of his burden.

Lancaster did not speak; he could not. His handsome face was lined and worn with the intensity of the struggle. He held on to the sagging willows, breathing in gulps.

Long minutes passed, while the strength slowly came back to his aching, exhausted limbs. Free of Coker's dragging weight, he recovered. He stirred at last and gave Coker a helping hand to drag himself through the willows. The task was easy in itself; but spent by the long struggle they found it difficult enough. But they struggled through the willows at last, and collapsed in the grass on the bank, and lay there, side by side, exhausted but safe.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Makes Amends!

LANCASTER was the first to stir. He rose slowly and stiffly to his feet, and shook the water in heavy drops from his drenched clothes. The colour was returning to his face. He smiled faintly as he looked down at Coker.

Horace Coker sat up.

"Oooooogh!" said his first remark.

He gouged water from his eyes and blinked at Lancaster. He made an effort to rise, and his rescuer gave him a helping hand. Coker leaned on a tree and breathed hard and deep.

"Feeling better?"

"Ow! Yes!" gasped Coker. "I—I'm rather winded! I say, that was touch and go!"

"It was!" agreed Lancaster.

"I think I must have had a touch of cramp," said Coker.

"Eh?"

"I'm a first-class swimmer, you know."

Lancaster stared at him.

"Are you?" he ejaculated.

"Oh, yes!" said Coker. "Precious few fellows at Greyfriars swim like I do, I can tell you!"

"I can quite believe that!" assented Lancaster, smiling.

"I was a bit knocked out when I fell in," said Coker, seeking for reasons to account for what he could not help realising was rather a poor show in the swimming line. "You gave me a terrific thump, you know."

"I know," said Lancaster. "I'm sorry!"

"Oh, that's rot!" said Coker. "You didn't know I was going to tumble into the river. I was punching you and you punched me. That's all right! Still, it was a terrific thump and it knocked me out, and I—I wasn't up to swimming much. And I think there was a touch of cramp, or—or something. You'd

hardly have fancied I was a good swimmer."

"Hardly!" agreed Lancaster.

"While the actual fact is, I'm about the best swimmer at Greyfriars," said Coker. "They've never picked me out to swim for the school, but that's due to sheer fatheadedness. It's the same with games. I never play for school; they don't understand my quality. Look here, you've saved my life, Lancaster."

"We both had a narrow escape."

"As it turned out, I was—helpless—being knocked out, and getting a touch of—of cramp," said Coker. "It might have happened to the best swimmer. But, as the matter stood, I should have been drowned if you hadn't fished me out. There's no doubt about that."

"I suppose not."

"Well, look here," said Coker. "A chap can only say he's sorry! I came out after you to-night feeling absolutely sure that you were a frightful rotter, and—and"—Coker's face flushed crimson—"believe me, I thought that there was a lot of evidence. I really did believe that you were some sort of a crook—I really believed that it was you who tried to bring off a robbery at Wharton Lodge last night. I see now I've been a fool!"

Lancaster started, and looked at Coker very curiously.

"What do you mean exactly by that?" he asked.

"Well, it's plain enough," said Coker.

a crook. That a crook would face almost certain death for the sake of a stranger, and an enemy, seemed impossible. Lancaster had saved Coker's life at the imminent risk of his own; and Coker had changed round completely in his views. Coker could not think badly of a fellow who had done what Dick Lancaster had done. Having changed his opinion, Coker went right round the compass, as it were.

He was silent for a few moments, thinking. Then he held out his hand to Lancaster.

"I'm sorry!" he repeated. "I made a fatheaded mistake about you, and I'm sorry! There's my fist on it."



Lancaster met the burly Coker with a right-hander that fairly spun the Fifth-Former off his feet. Coker staggered and fell backwards into the river. Splash!

"How you got to the bank, I'm blessed if I know," said Coker. "I thought we were both goners when that branch went."

"So did I!"

"You ought to have let me go," said Coker. "There wasn't an earthly—though it seems to have turned out all right. I say, you're a plucky chap! Why, I've been a regular beast to you, and you came in for me and stuck to me when you could have saved yourself easily. Plenty of fellows wouldn't have done that. I'm blessed if I quite know why you did it!"

"You'd have done it for me," said Lancaster, smiling.

"I—I hope so! I'd have tried!" said Coker. "Yes, I'd have tried—but, honestly, I don't think I could have brought it off."

Lancaster's eyes glimmered with amusement. He had no doubt that Coker would have tried; but it was pretty certain that he would not have "brought it off."

"The sort of fellow I thought you were wouldn't have done what you've just done. That's rot! You knew how precious little chance there was for you if you stuck to me; and you did stick to me. It was ripping! Of course, I see now that I was mistaken about you!"

"Oh!"

"I don't often make mistakes," said Coker. "In fact, I can't remember ever having made one before. But I own up that I was mistaken about you! I can't say fairer than that. You punched me pretty hard. If you'd like to punch me again you're welcome! I deserve it!"

Lancaster did not answer, but he regarded Horace Coker curiously. What had happened had evidently made a tremendous change in Coker's opinion of the mysterious guest at the Bunch of Grapes.

Coker was not the fellow to do things by halves. On evidence which he now regarded as circumstantial and misleading, he had believed that Lancaster was

Lancaster shook hands, smiling.

"The fact is, I—I never quite believed that rot!" went on Coker. "It was—was a sort of idea, you know. Anyhow, it's over now! I'd like to hear any fellow say a word against you, that's all! I'd jolly well mop him up! I don't know much about you, Lancaster, but if you ever want a friend, I'm your man."

"Thank you! Shall we get back to the inn?" said Lancaster. "The sooner we get out of these wet things the better."

"Right-ho!" said Coker.

They walked back to the inn together. Coker talked all the way; Lancaster was almost silent. Coker, as an enemy, had irritated him, as a friend he gave him the same tormenting feeling of shame and remorse that Harry Wharton & Co. had given him. Little did Coker dream of the thoughts that were passing through the mind of his silent companion.

Coker admitted that he had made a mistake about Lancaster; but it was irksome to the great Coker to feel that he had been mistaken. Slowly but surely Coker was persuading himself that he had, somehow, regarded Lancaster as a very fine fellow, and had never really doubted him.

They reached the inn, and parted on the balcony with a cheery good-night. Horace Coker tumbled into bed and was asleep in about two minutes. Sleep was much slower in coming to Dick Lancaster.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Change of Front!

HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"That ass again!"

"Coker wants more!"

It was quite early in the morning. Billy Bunter was still snoring in bed. Harry Wharton & Co. were taking a trot along the drive before breakfast, and they were quite astonished to see Coker.

Horace Coker came striding up the drive with a set and serious expression on his rugged face. Evidently Coker had turned out early that morning. Harry Wharton & Co. stared at him. They could hardly suppose that Coker had come with friendly intent, after the happenings of the previous day. Coker had been made to hop; Coker had been swamped with ginger-beer. Apparently he wanted more. If he did, the cheery chums of the Remove were ready to give him all he wanted.

"Collar him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Rag the silly ass!" said Bob Cherry.

"The ragfulness is the proper caper!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"Hold on, though," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Let's ask him what he wants first. We made a mistake yesterday."

"Oh, he wants trouble," said Bob.

"Does Coker ever want anything else?"

"Still, let's ask him."

"Oh, all right!"

Coker gave the Famous Five a rather grim look as they bore down on him. He had not forgotten his hopping experiences, or the ginger-beer. But he had not come hunting for trouble.

"Oh, you kids!" he said. "Is your uncle up yet, Wharton?"

"Yes, he's up," said Harry.

"You've called to see the colonel again?" asked Bob, disappointed.

"Sure you ain't looking for a shindy?"

"Don't be a young ass!" said Coker.

"I've come over early to see Colonel Wharton! It's rather important. I don't want him to do anything hasty or silly about young Lancaster."

"Eh?"

"What?"

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at Coker.

"Well, you know what these old noodles are," said Coker. "Being a J.P. and all that, he might butt in and cause a lot of trouble. He may have got an impression from what I said yesterday that there was something against that young fellow Lancaster. It would be a pity if he made a fool of himself."

"What the thump—" ejaculated Wharton in amazement.

"I'd better see him at once," said Coker. "It would be very unfortunate if he started saying things about a splendid chap like Lancaster."

"Great pip!"

"Is—is—is Lancaster a splendid chap?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Yes, he is!" said Coker warmly.

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"And if you jolly well say he isn't, young Cherry, I'll jolly well whop you, see?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

"My esteemed idiotic Coker——"

"The chap's a first-rate sportsman," said Coker; "one of the very best! That's why I'm anxious to see the colonel. He may have got a wrong impression from what I said. If he butted in and did anything silly it would be very unpleasant for Lancaster."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

Horace Coker marched on towards the house, leaving the Famous Five staring blankly. This change of front on the part of Coker of the Fifth was rather startling.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton.

"The silly owl seems to have changed his mind," said Bob. "Such as it is!"

"I wonder what's happened?" said Nugent.

"I suppose the silly idiot's found out somehow that he made a silly mistake," said Harry. "I suppose he understands now that Lancaster is all right. Fancy Coker understanding anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove followed Coker to the house. Colonel Wharton had come out on the terrace, and he stared at Coker with a grim brow and gave a grunt by way of greeting. The colonel had tried, but tried in vain, to dismiss Coker's story from his mind, and it had troubled him deeply, in spite of himself. The sight of Coker of the Fifth was by no means welcome to the old soldier.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Coker.

Grunt!

"I've called to see you about a rather important matter."

Grunt!

"About young Lancaster——"

Colonel Wharton held up a commanding hand, and his eyes glinted under his grizzled brows at Coker.

"Not a word more!" he rapped. "I refuse to hear one more word from you, Coker, against that lad! Not a word!"

"I hope you don't think I'm going to say anything against a splendid chap like young Lancaster, sir!" exclaimed Coker warmly.

The colonel stared, as well he might.

"What? What?" he ejaculated.

"There's nothing against the chap that I know of," said Coker. "He has some tools in a bag in his room. Well, any fellow might have! He goes out for a stroll when he's sleepless at night. I've done the same thing myself."

"One night he happened to stroll in this direction, and the same night there was a burglary here. Coincidences like that happen often enough. Anybody who would condemn a chap on flimsy circumstances like that would be a silly fool, in my opinion."

Colonel Wharton gazed at Coker. Harry Wharton & Co., who had arrived on the spot, smiled.

"Listen to the words of wisdom!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"There's such a thing as common sense," proceeded Coker. "Lancaster's a splendid chap! I'd say so anywhere. And I want to point out to you, sir, that you being a magistrate, if you take any steps against that chap, you'll be making a silly mistake, and perhaps doing a lot of harm."

"Good gad!" said the colonel.

"So don't do it!" said Coker. "If you've got any doubts about young Lancaster, you can take it from me

that he's all right. I'm not the fellow to make mistakes."

"Holy smoke!" murmured Nugent.

"You young ass!" roared the colonel. "Only yesterday you were urging me to take steps against that young fellow, on no better grounds than your own ridiculous suspicions of him."

"Well, I didn't know then what a splendid chap he was," said Coker; "and—and to a certain extent you misunderstood me. You—you didn't quite get my meaning, sir! I don't blame you."

"Blame me?" ejaculated the colonel.

"No, sir! You're a country J.P., and nobody expects a J.P. to be very bright," said Coker.

Colonel Wharton gazed at him.

"I got over here early because I was rather anxious," continued Coker. "If you butted in and made things unpleasant for that chap, it would be a fathomed mistake and dashed unpleasant all round!"

"I was not likely to take any steps against a lad whom I like and respect, you stupid young ass!"

"Well, that's all right, then," said Coker; "but you never know what to expect of an old donkey of a county justice. Not that I think you're an old donkey, sir," added Coker graciously. "Still, I wanted to make sure that it was all right. It would be rather thick for a splendid chap like Lancaster to have a rotten story like that told about him."

"You seem to have changed your opinion of that lad, Coker."

"Well, I wouldn't exactly put it like that," said Coker. "What I mean is, that I know now that he's a sportsman, and I didn't know it before. After all, he's a stranger to me. But my judgment is pretty reliable; and you can take my word for it that that fellow is all right."

"A fellow who would do what he did is a real white man, and I'll jolly well punch any fellow's head who says he isn't. I don't mean yours, sir! I hope I know better than to punch an old fogey. But anybody else——"

"You seem to me, Coker, to be as complete a fool as any boy I have ever seen," said Colonel Wharton. "But I am very glad you have sense enough to realise that you were mistaken about Captain Lancaster's son. It is at least frank of you to own up. I conclude that something has occurred to cause you to revise your opinion." He paused a moment. "Have you breakfasted?"

"Not yet, sir. I came over early."

"Come in and breakfast, then," said Colonel Wharton. "I shall be very glad to hear what has occurred to cause this change of view on your part."

"Thank you, sir; as a matter of fact, I'm rather peckish," said Coker cheerfully; and he went in with the colonel, the juniors following.

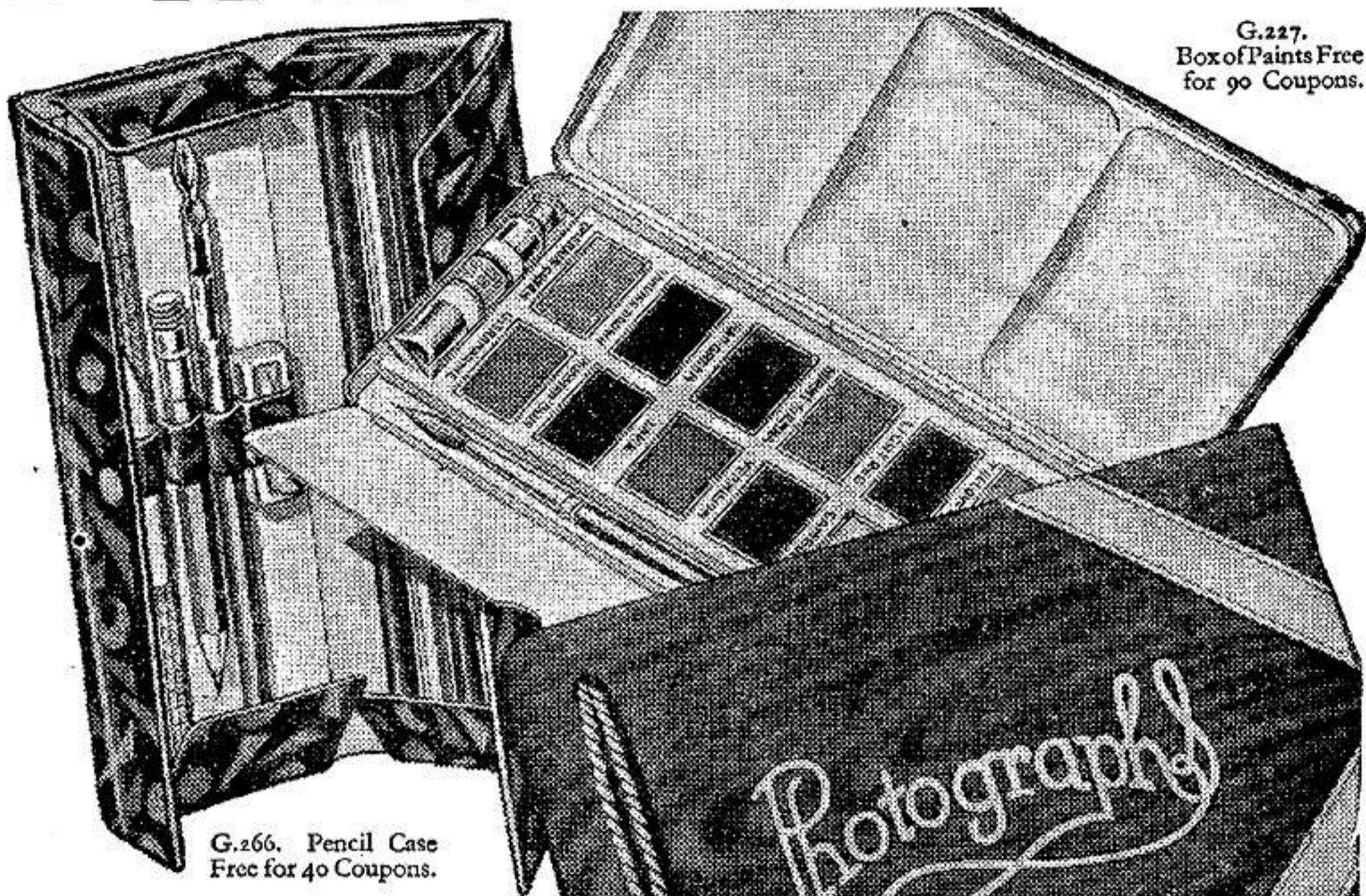
Over the breakfast table, Horace Coker recounted the adventure of the preceding night, the colonel and the juniors listening with deep interest.

At least half Coker's story consisted of lengthy explanations of the unexpected and surprising failure of his swimming powers. But his auditors knew what Coker's swimming powers were like, and they were aware that he had been within an ace of death, and that he had almost dragged Lancaster to the same fate.

"A fine lad!" said the colonel when Coker had finished at last. "A very fine lad, by gad! No wonder you are ashamed of having suspected such a lad!"

(Continued on page 22.)

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COKER'S DESPERATE VENTURE!

(Continued from page 20.)

"I can't say I exactly suspected him," demurred Coker.

"Well, you have come to a more sensible view now, and so we need say nothing more about that," said Colonel Wharton.

When Coker took his leave, Harry Wharton & Co. walked as far as the Wimford road with him. For once, they were feeling quite friendly towards the great man of the Fifth. They smiled at one another when Coker left them and went tramping on towards the inn.

"Of all the fatheads!" said Harry Wharton.

"Of all the asses!" said Frank Nugent.

"Of all the preposterous and ridiculous chumps!" said Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"Of all the benighted bandersnatches!" said Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Coker's the jolly old limit!" he said. "There never was such an ass before and there never will be such an ass again! Coker's the one and only! But I'm glad he's got sense enough to see that Lancaster is all right."

"Yes, rather; especially as there's a chance, at least, that Lancaster may come to Greyfriars next term," said Harry. "We'd be jolly glad to see him there!"

"What-ho!"

"He'd go into the Sixth," said Nugent. "We shouldn't see much of him. Still, I'd be glad to see him a Greyfriars man."

And all the chums of the Remove were agreed on that.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Surprising!

"WE go on to-day!"

Coker made that announcement to Potter and Greene.

Potter and Greene had breakfasted at the Bunch of Grapes, not at all downcast by Coker's absence. They had not even wondered where he was. So long as he was not present there was nothing to worry about.

After breakfast, however, as they strolled out of the inn in the bright April sunshine, Coker dawned on them. And his first remark was that the cycling party was to go on that day.

Potter and Greene raised their eyebrows. They were ready to go on, if it came to that. But this sudden change of plan was a little surprising.

"What's the big idea?" asked Potter.

"We started on a cycling tour," said Coker. "I suppose you don't call this cycle touring—hanging about an inn all day long. It's time you fellows bucked up a bit."

"It was you decided to stop here, wasn't it?" howled Potter.

"Don't yell at a fellow, Potter. I say that we're going on to-day, and I mean it!" said Coker. "If you've had your brekker we may as well get the jiggers ready. I had my brekker at Wharton Lodge."

"Oh, that's where you've been, is it?"

"Yes; I had to see that old fossil to see that he didn't make a silly ass of himself. You fellows can look to the bikes while I speak to young Lancaster."

"Oh dear! Are you going to have

another row before we start?" asked Greene.

Coker glared.

"Who's going to have a row?" he demanded.

"You, I suppose! Why can't you leave young Lancaster alone? For goodness' sake, don't kick up another shindy!"

"Don't be an idiot, Greene! I keep on telling you not to talk at all if you can't talk sense. I'm going to ask young Lancaster to join us."

"What!"

"He's on some sort of a holiday here," said Coker. "I dare say he would like to join up in a cycling tour in agreeable company. I don't know whether he's got a jigger here, but he could get one from Wimford, anyhow. I'd like him to come, and I suppose you fellows haven't any objection."

Potter and Greene fairly goggled at their great leader.

They had fancied that they knew every kind of an ass Coker was, and that he could surprise them no further. But he had surprised them once more.

The previous night they had gone to bed after refusing to join Coker in his scheme of keeping watch on the suspected crook. They had left Coker still firm and fixed in his belief that Lancaster was a crook, and that it was up to him, Horace Coker, to show up that crook in his true colours. Of what had happened since they knew nothing. So Coker's suggestion that Lancaster should be asked to join the cycling party was really staggering.

Coker glared at them.

"If you've got any objection——" he began belligerently.

"What—what—what's the game?" stammered Potter. "Mean to say you want a fellow you believe to be a crackman——"

"Don't be an idiot, Potter!"

"Well, what do you mean?" hooted Greene.

"I mean what I say. I like the chap, and I believe he feels friendly towards me," said Coker. "I'd like him to join up. And I'd better make this clear at the start. If you fellows want to remain my friends you'd better say nothing against that chap Lancaster. That's a thing I don't intend to stand!"

"You—you—you don't intend to stand?" babbled Potter.

"No," said Coker. "I'm a patient chap and a good-tempered chap and a forbearing chap, as you know. But there's a limit. And if you fellows can't see what a splendid sportsman Lancaster is, you'd better keep your silly opinion to yourselves. If you've got anything to say against him, look out for trouble, that's all!"

"Nobody's ever said anything against him, except you!" shrieked Potter in almost frenzied tones. "Only you!"

"Only you!" howled Greene.

"There's nothing to get excited about," said Coker. "I simply want you to understand that I'm hearing nothing against Lancaster. Any rotten suspicions you may have had——"

"We never had any!" raved Potter.

"Any rotten, sneaking, miserable suspicions you may have had, owing to trivial circumstances, you'd better shut right out of your minds," proceeded Coker, unheeding. "I've no use for them. If you had the sense of bunny rabbits you'd see that Lancaster is all right."

"We know he's all right!"

"We never thought——"

"It was you——"

"Only you——"

"All this argument is beside the point," said Coker calmly. "Take it

from me that Lancaster is all right. That's final. Now, you fellows, get the bikes out, and I'll see if Lancaster will join up."

Coker walked into the inn, leaving his comrades in a dazed state. Potter gazed at Greene. Greene gazed at Potter.

"Has he gone off his chump?" gasped Potter.

"Was he ever on it?" asked Greene.

"The howling ass!"

"The benighted fathead!"

"The burbling chump!"

"The piffing idiot!"

"The fozzling, footling freak!"

"The dunderheaded dunny!"

It was quite a chorus—strophe and antistrophe, Potter and Greene taking it in turns.

Unheeding, Coker went into the inn to look for Lancaster. He found that handsome young gentleman sitting by a window, reading Livy, and looking none the worse for his strenuous adventure of the previous night. Lancaster lowered the classic volume, and gave Coker a nod and a smile. He understood that the Greyfriars Fifth-Former was friendly now, and what he thought of Coker's intellect he did not state.

"Topping morning!" said Coker cheerily.

"Tip-top!" agreed Lancaster.

"My friends and I are going on," explained Coker. "We're on a bike tour, you know, to wind up the Easter vac."

"I hope you'll have a good time."

"Well, what I was thinking of is this: You might like to come," said Coker. "We'd be jolly glad of your company. If you haven't a jigger here, we can fix you up with one from Wimford. What about it?"

Lancaster looked at him. This was a change of front with a vengeance. Evidently not a shadow of suspicion lingered in the mind of Horace Coker.

"We're going to wind up the tour at my place," went on Coker. "I'd like you to meet my relations. We could put you up there for a few days, if you cared to stay. In fact, my people would be jolly glad to meet you when I tell them what you did. And a few days on the bikes would be jolly, what? I don't know how you're fixed for tin, but I'm standing the tour. It's my treat, you know. I say, I'd be jolly glad if you'd come!"

"My dear chap, it's awfully good of you," said Lancaster.

"Not at all! You'll come?"

"I'd be glad, but I'm expecting my—my tutor here," said Lancaster regretfully. "The fact is, I'm preparing for an entrance examination. I'm going to school for a few terms. I've had a tutor up to now, but——"

"My hat!" said Coker. "You'd have to go straight into the Sixth at your age, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, that's so."

"By Jove!" said Coker. "Tell your people to make it Greyfriars. There's no school in the country like Greyfriars. Fellows talk about Eton and Harrow and Winchester and Rugby; but that, of course, is only because they haven't been to Greyfriars and don't know the real goods. You can take it from me that Greyfriars is the pick of the basket. It's my school, you know," added Coker, as if that clinched it beyond possible cavil.

Lancaster laughed.

"You're very good," he said. "Does that mean that you'd like to see me at Greyfriars, Coker?"

"Jolly glad!" said Coker. "Look here, I'd take it as a favour if you'd put it to your people and get them to send you to Greyfriars."

"I don't blame you, sir, if you misunderstood me," said Coker. "You never know what to expect of an old donkey of a county justice." "What?" fairly barked Colonel Wharton. "Not that I think you're an old donkey," added Coker graciously.



"Then it's a go!" said Lancaster gravely.

"Good!" said Coker heartily. "I suppose you can't miss your tutor and come along with us?"

"Sorry, I couldn't."

"Well, good-bye, then," said Coker. "See you next term at Greyfriars."

He shook hands with Lancaster very warmly, and went out to join Potter and Greene. They had the bikes ready by that time.

"Well, is Lancaster coming?" asked Potter.

"No, it can't be done. He's waiting here for a tutor man to join him," said Coker. "Otherwise he would be glad."

"Would he?" murmured Potter.

"What did you say, Potter?"

"Nothing, old bean. Of course, anybody would be glad to travel with you, Coker. Isn't it a treat?"

"That's so," agreed Coker. "Well, I'll settle up the bill and we'll get off. I'm really sorry Lancaster can't come, and I know he's disappointed. Still, we'll see him again at Greyfriars."

"At—at—at Greyfriars?" gasped Potter and Greene together.

"Yes. He's going to school, and I've advised him to make it Greyfriars. As a sensible chap, he's taking my advice. He's going to arrange it with his people. If he comes into the Fifth we shall be pals. If he goes into the Sixth, as I suppose he will, I don't think he's the sort of chap to put on any Sixth-Form swank, and we can be friends all the same. It will be rather ripping, what?"

"Oh dear!" said Potter and Greene.

They had given up hope of ever understanding Horace Coker.

Coker settled the bill with the inn-keeper. This was the department in which Coker was really useful. Then the cyclists started. Coker glanced back and waved a large hand to Lancaster at the window, and Lancaster smiled and waved back to him.

En route Coker imparted to his comrades the story of the rescue in the river, and Potter and Greene at long last understood. Coker added that if they ever said another word against Lancaster it would be his painful duty to punch their heads. After which Coker asserted his masterly leadership and led the party by the wrong road, and by a succession of wrong roads and wrong turnings they proceeded merrily on their way.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Back to School!

"**H**ERE we are, here we are, here we are again!"

Bob Cherry was singing. At all events, that was his belief. The crowd of Greyfriars fellows who swarmed on the platform supposed that he was shouting.

It was the first day of term, and the Greyfriars fellows were returning to the old school. The Famous Five had met, and packed themselves together into a carriage with five or six other Remove men. Bob Cherry, leaning out of the doorway of the crowded carriage, was expressing his exuberant spirits in song,

what time he scanned the swarm on the platform.

"Looking for somebody, Bob?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Eh! Yes, rather!"

"Here I am, old fellow!" came a fat squeak from the swarm, and Billy Bunter appeared in the offing. "Looking for me, what?"

"Not at all, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Pass on, friend, all's well!" said Bob cheerily.

"Look here, I'm coming in!"

"No room for a fellow double-width—"

"Beast!"

"You see, you're an out-size in Bunters—"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter squeezed in past Bob. He blinked round the carriage, in which every seat was occupied and three or four fellows were standing.

"Who's giving me a seat?" he asked.

"Echo answers who!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"The whofulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The standfulness in the esteemed perpendicular is the proper caper."

"I say, Toddy, give a chap a seat!" urged Bunter. "I say, Squiff, are you giving me a seat? What about you, Smithy?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I suppose you don't mind if I sit on your knees, Nugent?"

"I shouldn't mind, if my knees were made of reinforced concrete," answered Nugent. "As it is, I do mind, a lot."

"Beast!"

Bunter stood. With an injured and indignant expression on his face, he stood. But nobody seemed to mind Bunter's indignation. They passed by his wrathful and reproachful looks like the idle wind which they regarded not.

"Can't see him!" said Bob Cherry, still scanning the platform.

"Who, what, and which?" asked Harry Wharton.

"That chap Lancaster! If he's really coming to Greyfriars this term he may be among the crowd somewhere. Can't see him, though."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"If Lancaster's coming he will go into the Sixth. He may not want to see a lot of Lower Fourth chaps."

"I fancy he would like to see me!" said Bunter. "We were quite friends, you know."

"Fathead!"

The rest of the Co. joined Bob at the door and window, and surveyed the platform. But the tall, slim figure of Lancaster was not to be seen among the innumerable swarm of juniors and seniors. If he was coming to Greyfriars that day, he did not seem to be among the crowd that were changing trains at Lantham Junction.

A porter came along and slammed the door, and the Famous Five sat down or stood and the train rolled out of Lantham. There was a cheery buzz of talk in the crowded carriage as they rolled on to Courtfield.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned out of the train at Courtfield. Billy Bunter hooked on to them.

"I say, you fellows! This way for the local train."

"You going on by the local, old fat bean?" asked Bob.

"Yes, old chap!"

"Then we'll walk."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled off to catch the local train. Walking did not appeal to William George Bunter. The Famous

Five walked out of the station, strolled cheerily down the High Street, and started across Courtfield Common. After a long train journey it was pleasant enough to walk in the bright sunshine, and the common looked fresh and green. It was Bob Cherry who suggested taking a short-cut through the Popper Court Woods.

"Fathead!" said Johnny Bull. "We don't want to start the term with a row with Sir Hilton Popper. The old ass doesn't like to see Greyfriars men in his woods."

"That's his bad taste," answered Bob cheerily. "Besides, we shan't meet old Popper. Let's!"

The path through Popper Court Woods looked shady and tempting; and it saved half a mile on the way to the school. Bob Cherry had his way; and the Famous Five swung themselves over a paling and sauntered on cheerily under the ancient trees.

"If we get spotted by a keeper——"

grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, there's no keepers about," said Bob.

"The spotfulness is not a terrific probability," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, "and if we see a ridiculous keeper we can cut runfully."

"Hark!" said Nugent.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

There was a sound of someone moving through the bracken close by the path under the trees. The juniors came to a sudden halt, with serious faces. Even the cheery Bob looked serious; realising, rather late, that it was, as a matter of fact, injudicious to begin the new term with a row. That reflection came, however, too late to be of any use.

"Cover!" murmured Bob; and as the footsteps approached through the bracken, the juniors backed behind trees on the other side of the path.

A minute later, a tall and slim figure emerged into the path. The juniors hugged cover and the newcomer passed them without seeing a sign of them. After he had passed they looked out from cover; and Harry Wharton uttered a surprised exclamation. He had only a back view of the

graceful figure going along the path; but he knew it instantly.

"Lancaster!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, my hat!"

"It is the esteemed and ludicrous Lancaster!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in wonder.

The slim figure turned in the path at the sound of voices, staring at the Greyfriars juniors. They stared at Dick Lancaster. They had wondered whether they would see him at Greyfriars that day; and utterly unexpectedly, they had found him in Popper Court Woods.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"LANCASTER!" repeated Harry Wharton. "You here?"

"And you!" said Lancaster. "What the thump are you doing here?"

He had stared in astonishment at first; but now his face broke into a smile; the pleasant smile that made the handsome face very attractive.

"Trespassing!" answered Bob cheerily.

"Trespassing!" repeated Lancaster. "That's what old Popper would call it—though really there's a public foot-path through this wood," said Bob Cherry. "We're standing up for the rights of the jolly old public; also, taking a short-cut to the school. Sec?"

"I see! You're going back to Greyfriars?"

"That's it; first day of term," said Harry Wharton. "We're walking from the station; and that ass Bob insisted on cutting off half a mile this way. If old Popper spots us there will be a row."

"The rowfulness will be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "Old Popper is a worthy and esteemed old hunks."

"But what about you——" asked Nugent. "Are you trespassing, too, Lancaster?"

Lancaster laughed.

"No; I'm staying at Popper Court."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "If old Popper's a relation of yours, of course, he isn't an old hunks; but a fine old English gentleman, all of the olden time, you know."

"And we esteem him terrifically!" said Hurree Singh.

"He's not a relation," said Lancaster. "But—well, I'm staying with him; I've been here a few days—since I saw you kids in Surrey. I dare say you know that Sir Hilton Popper is a governor of Greyfriars. As a matter of fact, he has entered my name at the school."

"Then you're really coming to Greyfriars!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes; I shall blow in later in the day," said Lancaster, with a smile. "I've seen the Head already; and I shall enter the Sixth."

"Good egg!" said Harry Wharton.

"If they make you a prefect," said Bob, "you'll go easy with the Remove, for the sake of auld lang syne, what?"

Lancaster laughed again.

"Don't bank on that!" he said. "Look here, if you kids are trespassing, the sooner you cut on the better. Sir Hilton isn't a particularly good-tempered man, I believe."

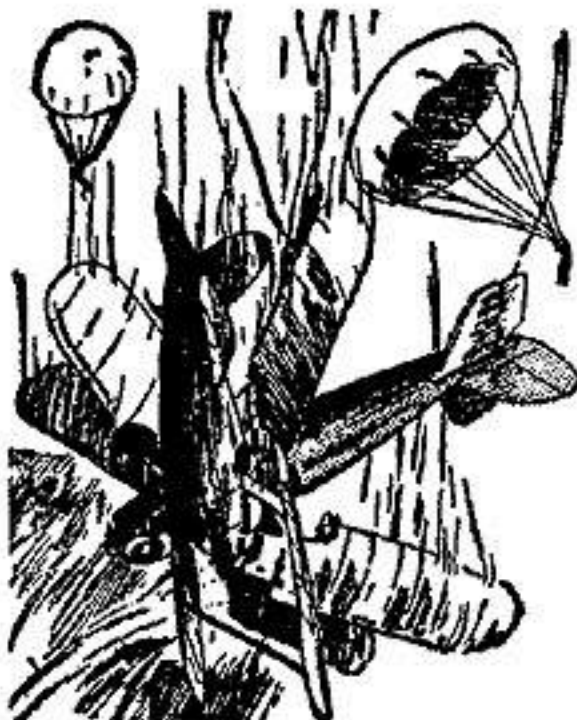
"Don't we know it?" grinned Bob.

"I'll walk with you, in case we meet a keeper," added Lancaster. "In fact, I'll see you safe off the premises, you young sweeps."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors walked on cheerily with Lancaster; glad to see him again and

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glad to learn that he was coming to Greyfriars School—though somewhat surprised to hear that he was staying with a governor of the school at Popper Court. Lancaster's company proved useful, as a little later they came on Sir Hilton's head-keeper, who gave them a rather grim look.

"It's all right, Joyce," said Lancaster. "I'm taking these fellows through the park."

Joyce touched his hat and stepped aside.

"Narrow escape!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Lancaster, old bean, you're useful as well as ornamental."

"You young ass!"

Lancaster smiled and talked cheerily as he conveyed the juniors across Sir Hilton Popper's extensive estate. But every now and then he fell into moody silence. They reached the farther side of the wood at last, and had almost reached the gate on the Courtfield Road when a tall figure in riding clothes, with an eyeglass jammed under a grizzled eyebrow, stepped into view.

"Phew!" murmured Bob Cherry.

It was Sir Hilton Popper, and he strode towards the party with a grim and frowning brow. He took no notice of Lancaster, which was a little odd, as Lancaster had stated that he was a guest at Popper Court. He stared grimly at the Famous Five.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly.

"H'm! Taking a short cut, sir," answered Harry Wharton, lifting his hat politely, an example that was followed by the other fellows.

Respect was due to a governor of Greyfriars—especially when he was standing in the way with a riding-whip under his arm.

"Trespassing, you mean," grunted Sir Hilton. "I know you—all of you. I've caught you in my woods before. Your headmaster shall hear of this."

"You fathead, Bob!" muttered Johnny Bull.

The juniors looked at Lancaster rather in dismay. Under his convoy they had passed Joyce, the keeper, safely. As a guest at Popper Court they supposed that he had a right to take fellows through the estate if he liked. But Sir Hilton's manner towards him was certainly not that of a hospitable host. He seemed to treat Lancaster as if Lancaster was not there. Harry Wharton & Co. were puzzled, and feeling decidedly uneasy.

Lancaster broke in abruptly, with a flush in his cheeks.

"The boys are with me, Sir Hilton," he said. "I offered to take them by a short cut through your woods."

"Like your impudence, sir!" flamed out Sir Hilton, addressing Lancaster for the first time, and his eye gleamed at him through the eyeglass. "Like your dashed impudence, sir! Who the dooce are you, sir, to allow trespassers on my estate?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

The juniors stood silent and uncomfortable. Lancaster's face was red, but it paled to white. If he was a guest at Popper Court, Sir Hilton's mode of entertaining a guest was decidedly peculiar.

"I think you forget yourself, Sir Hilton," said Lancaster quietly, and his lip curled. "I am not accustomed to being spoken to in that manner. If you prefer me to leave Popper Court, I am ready to go on the instant."

The old baronet's lips opened for an angry reply. But he shut his teeth,

and his grizzled moustache, on the words he had been about to utter.

"These boys are acquaintances of mine," went on Lancaster. "I met them in Surrey during their Easter holidays. I think—"

"You need not tell me what you think!" snapped Sir Hilton Popper. "It is what I think that matters, and I will not allow schoolboys to trespass on my estate. I will allow nothing of the kind, sir. Though I am bound to say, sir, that if these boys are acquaintances of yours, they are more respectable than some of your acquaintances—unruly, young rascals as they are!"

"That is enough," said Lancaster, in the same quiet tone. "If you cannot keep your temper, Sir Hilton, you had better say no more."

"What?" roared Sir Hilton. "What?"

"I shall see these boys off the estate," said Lancaster. "And you will oblige me by not reporting the matter to their headmaster."

Sir Hilton Popper's face, already crimson, became purple. Once more his mouth opened for a torrent of angry words; once more he bit off the utterance in time. He grasped his riding-whip, and for a moment the juniors wondered whether he was going to use it on Lancaster. But if that was his impulse, the lord of Popper Court checked it. He pointed to the gate with the riding-whip.

"Go!" he said in a choking voice, addressing the juniors. "Get off my land at once! Do you hear?"

The juniors walked on in silence. Lancaster followed them. Sir Hilton Popper was left standing in the path, grasping his riding-whip almost convulsively, staring after them with glinting eyes under knitted brows.

There was a faint smile on Lancaster's face as he opened the gate.

"It's all serene!" he said lightly. "You needn't be afraid of being reported at the school. Sir Hilton won't mention the matter."

"I—I hope we haven't landed you in any trouble," said Harry Wharton.

"Not in the least. Sir Hilton's bark is worse than his bite," said Lancaster, laughing. "Off you go! I shall see you later at the school."

He waved his hand, and shut the gate behind the juniors. As they started for the school they heard the booming voice of Sir Hilton Popper in the distance behind them.

"Impudent young scoundrel! Huh! Dashed impudent young scoundrel, by gad!"

Apparently Sir Hilton Popper was addressing his guest. His booming voice died away, the juniors getting out of hearing as quickly as they could.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath, "that's jolly queer, you men!"

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Harry Wharton. "Anyhow, I suppose it's no bizney of ours! Let's trot!"

And they trotted, and arrived at Greyfriars School, where Bob Cherry playfully tipped off the ancient hat of Gosling, the ancient porter, as he went in. Gosling grabbed his hat and hooted.

"Look 'ere! Wot I says is this 'ere you—"

But the Famous Five ran on cheerily to the House, without waiting to hear what Gosling had to say.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

First Day of Term I

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Bow-wow!"

Hall was crowded at tea-time. There was an incessant buzz of voices and clatter of crockery. All sorts of things not included in the school commissariat adorned the long tables, freshly unpacked from boxes from home. Fellows exchanged news, and compared notes about the "hols," and whacked out cakes, and bags of biscuits, and pots of home-made jam.

Prefects, sitting at the high table, sometimes frowned on the Lower boys, sometimes rapped out "Silence!" or "Less noise there!" But on the first day of term, even the behests of Sixth Form prefects were not carefully heeded. Every fellow had something to say, and said it sometimes over and over again. Bread pellets whizzed, and one from the Remove table actually landed on the prominent nose of Horace Coker, sitting in state among the Fifth. Whereat the great Coker glared round, and, catching sight of the Famous Five, shook a brawny fist at them.

New kids, silent and forlorn, wondered whether they would ever be able to join in such a cheery buzz and scramble, little dreaming how soon they would shake down into new ways. Fellows who had been only a term at the school stared at new kids with the bored air of very old and experienced men, and said to one another, "What a crew!" Skinner of the Remove abstracted a pot of jam belonging to Billy Bunter, while that fat and fatuous youth was bagging a plate of tarts belonging to Ogilvy. Bunter scoffed the tarts, stared round for his jam, and raised a roar of wrath. But the jam, like the dear, dead days in the song, was gone beyond recall.

Harry Wharton & Co. were grouped at the Remove table. Mr. Quelch, their Form master, was not present. First day of term was a busy day to him. Fellows stood as well as sat. Vernon-Smith had a foot on a chair, a cup of tea resting on his knee. Peter Todd sat on the table, and swung his legs. Fisher T. Fish, on the floor, hunted among innumerable feet for a halfpenny he had dropped, and almost wept when he failed to find it. There was good things galore which the Famous Five had unpacked and brought into Hall, which was doubtless the reason why Billy Bunter joined them.

"I say, you fellows," roared Bunter, "make room for a chap! I say, some beast has scoffed my jam! I say, you fellows, I've got a whacking cake in my box, unless the cook forgot to pack it! I'm going to whack it out in the dorm after lights out. I'll tea with you now, old chaps! Pass that cold chicken! No need to carve; I can manage the lot. I say, you fellows, I heard Wingate say there was a new man coming into the Sixth this term!"

"Is he wound up?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry— I say, you fellows, who do you think—this is good chicken!—who do you think is coming into the Sixth? An old friend of mine."

"I've only heard of one new man in the Sixth," said Harry Wharton, "and that's Lancaster."

"That's the chap I mean. Quite an old pal of mine," said Bunter. "I

(Continued on page 28.)

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The ISLAND of SLAVES!

BY STANTON HOPE.



There was a shuddering explosion, and the slave dhow's port side vanished suddenly in smoke and wreckage. The "Fish of Death" had done its work!

Chotajee's Chance!

THERE was a long, shuddering explosion, and the dhow's port side vanished suddenly in smoke and wreckage. The craft heeled over, then bow and stern took a curious cant upward as the vessel broke in half.

"Got her!" Guy whooped.

Swiftly after the detonation of the torpedo itself came an even mightier explosion. The whole cargo of ammunition on board the gun-runner blew up to an ear-shattering roar and a blinding flash of flame.

It was as though the lid had been lifted off some volcano. Amid the flame and smoke the dhow went skyward in fragments with a number of limp, sack-like objects among the debris. There was no chance for the submarine to cut and run; as she would have done

normally to escape the danger of the effect of such an explosion. The concussion was terrific, and the Vixen lurched drunkenly in the sea.

"Take cover!" Guy bellowed to the men on deck.

The ratings raced to the conning-tower as there rained down upon the sea a mighty hailstorm of fragments of what once had been the dhow of Sulaiman, the Murderous!

"Tearing tornados!" Guy Easton crouched low behind the canvas and bridge rails of the conning-tower.

Just in time, the gunners and other ratings who had been on deck scurried into shelter, and the skies rained fragments of wood and blazing canvas, as though the outraged gods had loosed their thunderbolts!

The oily swells of the Arabian Sea lighted curiously with phosphorescent flame in all directions as the debris of the destroyed dhow splashed into the water.

Clack! Clack! Clackety-clack!

Splintered wood and iron bolts hammered down upon the submarine's steel deck, one chunk missing Guy's head by a fraction.

Flaming strips from the furled sail of the torpedoed dhow fell more slowly to the surface of the sea, and hissed to the touch of the water. One piece caught up in the submarine's wireless aerial, where for a few moments it formed a flaming banner over the vessel. Then the clattering, splashing, and hissing ceased. The sea rolled calmly under the white, tropic stars, and only the stark beam of the Vixen's searchlight remained to illuminate the vortex, two cables' lengths away, which marked the spot where Sulaiman's dhow had been blown sky-high.

Quickly rising, Guy snapped an order for the light to be switched over the whole affected area of sea. Miracles sometimes occurred in connection with a big explosion, but no miracle had helped Sulaiman or his cut-throats. Wreckage littered the deep-sea swells, but there was no sign of a living soul. The cold-blooded murderer of the two British boats' crews at Kohut had met swift and complete retribution.

Again Guy snapped out an order, and the light was switched off. Once more the Vixen rolled, like a harpooned whale, in the black ocean swells. Guy gave the "dismiss" from action stations, and the crew went about their ordinary duties, while those below, who were off watch, came up on deck to see what remained of the handiwork of the deadly "fish" they had loosed.

Sub-Lieutenant Tony Dunn, Guy's second-in-command, came leaping up from the control-room.

"Shiverin' jellyfish! So we bagged the swabs!" he whooped. "That's all square with Sulaiman!"

"The whole cargo of ammunition in that hooker went west in one wallop," Guy answered. "Sharks will be on their way here from twenty miles' radius."

A small figure came bounding up the steel ladder like an excited monkey. It was Chotajee, the little Bengali, who acted in the submarine jointly as store-keeper and cook's assistant.

At the beginning of the action he had practised his own motto, that "discreetness is the better part of valour," and had "gone to earth" in what he had believed to be the safest part of the submarine. Now that the torpedo had done its deadly work, and the sea had been swept clean of the murderous Arabs with the quick-firing gun, he had bounced up, with the resiliency of a rubber ball, to join in the celebration of the victory.

"Wah, wah! Shabash!" he howled delightedly. "Bravo! Well done, illustrious British Raj! Truly have we this day struck smiteful blow for empire on which the sun never sits!"

He clenched his fists, and did a kind

of shadow sparring exhibition round the narrow bridge.

"Are any debased badmashes left?" he demanded fiercely. "Lead me to same! Like British poet has quoth, 'We don't seekfully look for fightfulness, but, by jingo, if we do, we have noble ship and toughful men, and—'"

"Jolly good!" Tony applauded. "You shall have your turn, Chota, old chutney!"

He turned toward Guy, who had relaxed discipline in consideration of the general excitement on board owing to the great victory over the gun-running dhow.

"Ay, Chota," Guy smiled, "I'm jolly sorry that you had to be below when the Arabs were popping off that Q. F. gun of theirs. After dawn you shall get your chance."

The little babu suddenly stopped like a toy with the clockwork run down.

"A-after the dawn, s-sahib?" he stammered. "Was there anticipations, then, of more fightfulness?"

"More fightfulness!" Tony hooted. "To-night's scrap has been a giddy picnic! To-morrow the skipper here will give you your big chance."

"My honourable aunts!"

"You shan't be done out of the fun for a second time," Tony said. "When we tackle the whole mob of slavers on Khoof Island, you shall lead the van!"

A quaver crept into Chotajee's voice.

"Wh-what van, sahib?"

"The forefront of battle, I mean, old top. To-morrow you shall have the opportunity you want—for death or glory!"

"Munchful Mangoes!"

Tony slapped him on the back.

"You're a lucky chap!" he congratulated.

"Er—er—misfortunately," Chotajee gulped, "I have strainfully hurt limgamentary sinew of leftful leg on previous visit shorewards. Alas! that I shall not have physical capacities for frontful leadership of gallant Jack-ahoy in battlings with the debased sheikh!"

Both the naval chums were anxious to bag Ras Dhin and Sheikh Haji, and to break up the organisation of slavers on that Island of Slaves which stood in black silhouette six miles across the gently heaving sea.

Captain Knox wirelessly congratulated on the result of the Vixen's fight with the dhow. In addition, he gave precise orders for the morning.

The submarine was to throw ashore a landing-party on the north coast of the island shortly before the dawn, and they were to lie low, ready to act as a fighting force to take the Arabs in the rear. The Falcon would anchor at seven-thirty, and begin the attack of Khoof forthwith.

Another half an hour's work affected repairs in the Vixen, and all aboard breathed more freely as the gas-engine was started up and she began to throb with life.

There was no sign of any dhow having left Khoof, although the submarine made a wide circuit of the place. Then, in the darkest hour before the dawn, she crept near the shore, and landed more than half of her crew by trips in her two collapsible boats.

The chief danger was on land, and Guy put himself in charge of this force. Tony, as second-in-command, had to remain on board and find solace in the hope that there would be the chance for him to get in some useful work with the four-inch gun. As the only man who could speak Arabic, Chotajee had the unsought honour of accompanying the landing-party.

By dawn the Vixen was submerged, except for her watchful "eye"—the periscope. Guy, Chotajee, and the armed seamen were lying up among the rocky cliffs of the north coast of Khoof. Somewhere in the southward the Falcon was racing at full speed toward the Island of Slaves. The stage was all set for the big attack on Sheikh Haji and Ras Dhin, the terrible yellow-eyed Abyssinian!

The Mystery of the Rocks!

"**B**RRRRGH!" Chotajee shivered. "Cold?" inquired Guy, who was keeping the Bengali with him. "It'll be warm enough after daylight, old sou, when the scraping begins!"

He glanced along the rocky cliffs, where his armed bluejackets were lying motionless among the crags and crannies in the darkness. Three men as outposts were on the higher ground, ready to give instant warning of the approach of any enemy.

"My humble thoughts, sahib," Chotajee mumbled, "were concerned with surpriseful ease of landing. Was it not great admiral who said the 'wise enemy eyes both fore and aft of figure-head'?" Surely the debased Haji, after such bangful bobbery at sea, would have sent forth wretched spies along seagirth coast of island?"

"There's no doubt that Arabs did come down to the coast," Guy said. "That scrap with the dhow was some time ago, and they have probably gone back to the village. Certainly there wasn't a sign of anyone when we landed."

Yet Chotajee's remark had deepened a doubt which had been in his own mind. There was no sign that any watcher had slipped away to warn Sheikh Haji at the village. Yet it seemed incredible that the sheikh should have left that part of the coast unguarded after the rumpus at sea, and especially as it was on this side of the island that the slaves and their Arab masters had come.

Looking round in the darkness at those tumbled rocks along the sea-coast, Guy felt that there was some mystery.

His front and flanks were protected, and the watchful submarine guarded him to his rear.

Leaving his chief petty officer in charge, he quietly crept away alone.

It had been low tide before the submarine had put the landing-party ashore. It might be that that ledge of rock where he and Tony had seen the slaves would be uncovered, and he had just time to look round again before daylight.

Ten minutes of scrambling among the rocks brought him to the place.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS RETOLD.

LIEUTENANT GUY EASTON, SUB-LIEUTENANT DUNN and CHOTAJEE, a Bengali interpreter, of H.M.S. Falcon, having been ordered to board a suspicious-looking dhow heading a southerly course out of the Red Sea, are cut adrift during a storm and cast ashore on the Island of Khoof. Gathering information that slave-trading is being carried on between Sheikh Haji of Khoof and Ras Dhin, a giant Abyssinian, the trio, disguised as Arabs, board a mahalla bound for Aden. The mahalla is attacked by a villainous crew of cut-throats in the pay of the slave-traders, but Guy proves equal to the occasion and the enemy are made prisoners and handed over to Captain Knox of the Falcon. Subsequently Guy is put in charge of the Vixen, the fastest submarine in commission. Guy is patrolling the Island of Khoof in his new craft, when, like a ghost in the night, a rakish dhow glides towards the Vixen, her camouflaged quick-firing gun spitting flame and shell. At a word of command from Guy a torpedo from the submarine goes streaking away towards the dhow. (New read on.)

Steadying himself on the treacherous surface while foam from the ocean swells bubbled round his ankles, he advanced toward a narrow cranny in the cliff-side. The greatest width of it was not more than six feet, and the rugged pillar sloped upward. Then suddenly Guy stopped short. In the cranny and just within reach of the most advanced surf, was the huddled figure of an Arab!

"Phew!" Guy breathed.

He drew back against the rocks, and his hand instinctively went to his Service pistol in its holster.

The Arab made no movement, and to Guy, whose eyes had developed cat-like qualities in the darkness, there was something unnatural about the position of the Arab which told him that there was no danger from this man.

Lest anyone else should be farther in this crevice of the cliffs, he held his automatic in his hand, and advanced a few steps toward the prone and huddled figure. The man was unconscious, and a bad bruise on the back of the head and other injuries showed him the reason.

Evidently this Arab, who appeared to be unarmed save for the usual curved knife in his belt, had been left as a sentry. Looking upward, Guy saw the projected barrel of a long rifle, and rightly deduced that the man had slipped on the rocks. His gun had fallen from his hand, and he had descended into that cranny.

Guy lifted the unconscious Arab in his arms and cautiously carried him forward to higher ground. He put him down in a small alcove in the rock's side, and moved round a natural bend in the cranny down a steep slope.

Again he stopped short. Just ahead of him he heard the low rumbling of water. Guy dared not advance another step without a light, so, taking out his electric torch and holding it away from his body, he switched it on.

The crevice had widened, and at his feet was a bubbling pool of seawater, obviously fed by the tide through some other inlet among the tangled rocks. Beyond the pool the crevice narrowed again, and the path led upward in rough-hewn steps.

"By jingo!" Guy thought. "P'raps this is what those Arab swabs were waiting for—low water—so that they could get across to this place! I'll explore these steps!"

Fired with fresh enthusiasm, Guy advanced into the water. The tide had not come up far, but he had to wade almost to the waist to get across. At low tide the water would probably have come just above his knees.

On the other side he went up step by step, while the light of his torch showed the jagged rocks on either side, moss-grown and dripping with water. Right before him was a solid slab of stone blocking his path.

Like a burglar at a safe, Guy moved the white disk of light from his torch along the edges of that stone. There were even cracks along the edges, but no sign of any metal work in the shape of a lock or hinges.

Suddenly he thrilled to a strange phenomenon. The perpendicular crack to the side of the rough stone on which his torch-light played was widening! The stone was a door! It was opening outward, and Guy instantly switched off his light and crouched back against the rocks.

(Guy is on the verge of making a startling discovery, chums! On no account miss the next instalment of this thrilling serial—it's better than ever! Order your MAGNET early!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,210.

COKER'S DESPERATE VENTURE!
(Continued from page 25.)

made friends with him in the hols, you know. You fellows met him, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "We were awfully pally down in Surrey in the hols; you fellows remember that he put up with you chaps, because you were friends of mine. I expect to see a good deal of him here. I say, pass that jelly!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes jolly old Coker!"

Coker of the Fifth came along from the Fifth Form table. Harry Wharton & Co. greeted him with smiling faces. Coker had a very serious expression on his rugged face; and if Coker wanted trouble on the first day of term, there was heaps ready for him.

"Look here, you kids—" began Coker.

"Us what?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"The kidfulness of our esteemed selves is not terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker."

"Shut up!" rapped Coker. "I've got something to say to you fags. I've heard from a Sixth Form man that Lancaster is coming here this term. He's going into the Sixth."

"Ancient history!" said Wharton.

"Tell us something new, Coker."

"Oh, you knew it, did you?" demanded Coker.

"Knew it before you were born, old bean," said Bob Cherry. "Why, he's only coming to Greyfriars because he knows some nice fellows in the Remove."

"Us, you know!" grinned Frank Nugent.

Horace Coker frowned.

"That's what I'm going to speak about," he said. "I'm rather friendly with that chap, Lancaster. He's quite a good sort. Now, you kids met him in

the hols, and I understand that he was rather civil to you."

"You understand that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "My hat! Fancy you understanding anything, Coker! How do you do it, with a brain like yours?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Less noise there!" shouted Loder of the Sixth, from the high table.

Coker glared round at Loder to show his contempt for prefects and the Sixth Form generally. Then he glared at the Famous Five.

"I don't want any check!" said Coker.

"I'm going to give you a tip—"

"Thanks!" said Bob, holding out his hand. "How much?"

Coker stared.

"I don't mean a tip, you young ass," he said, "I mean a tip."

"Lucid, at all events," said Bob.

"The lucidity is terrific."

"And the tip is this," went on Coker.

"This man Lancaster was rather civil to you kids in the hols. He's a civil chap. But you're not to fancy you can be friendly with a Sixth Form man at school. You're not to bother him when he gets here. I understand that he hasn't come yet—"

"That's the second thing Coker understands, in one day," said Bob admiringly. "What a brain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Coker. "I'm giving you the straight tip. You're not to claim acquaintance with Lancaster, and bother him, because he was civil to you in the hols. I shan't allow that! Have a little sense! I'm warning you for your own good; because if I find you bothering the man in any way, I shall whop you. Got that?"

"We've got it," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "I'm sure you mean well, Coker; but we don't need advice from a born idiot. Now, see that jam tart?"

Wharton held up a jam tart. "Got that?"

"Eh? What? Ooooooh!" spluttered Coker, as he got it! It spread out over Coker's features as it crashed.

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

"Ooooooh! Why; I—I—I'll—" Coker dabbed sticky jam from his face and rushed for vengeance. "I'll jolly well—yarooooooop!"

In a twinkling Horace Coker disappeared under a swarm of Removites. He rolled on the floor, and a dozen fellows trod on him; and Bob Cherry shoved a cream puff down his neck, and Nugent mixed a jam tart with his hair. Coker bellowed and struggled.

"Less noise there!" shouted Wingate, coming along with his ashplant. "Now, then, Coker, what do you mean by ragging with a lot of fags—you a Fifth Form man? Chuck it at once."

"Why, I—I—you—you—" spluttered Coker. He staggered to his feet, sticky and furious. "I—I—I'll—"

"Get out of this!" said Wingate. "You're a senior—behave yourself. Now, you fags, keep quiet!"

And the infuriated Coker was shepherded back to the Fifth Form table, where he dabbed jam from his face, and breathed fury, and asked Potter and Greebo what the thump they were cackling at. Harry Wharton & Co. finished their tea, untroubled by further good advice from Coker, and marched cheerily out of Hall, leaving the great Horace still extracting jam from his hair.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next topping yarn in this grand series. It's entitled: "CRACKSMAN AND CRICKETER!" and shows Frank Richards in tip-top form. Order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE and thus avoid disappointment!)

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Definitive Herald

No. 42.

LAUGH AND GROW FAT.

April 25th, 1931.

Edited by
HARRY WHARTON,
F.G.S.

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THE TERROR OF THE WRING

COMPLETE THRILLER BY DICKY NUGENT

INTRODUCING ALF. ARMSTRONG

THE FIGHTING FURY

"May the best man win!"

Thus spoke brave Alf Armstrong, known as the Terror of the Wring, as he stepped off the scales after weighing in for his forthcoming fight for the Heavyweight Championship of the world.

Rudolf Fowler, his opponent, smiled a sinister smile.

"That remains to be seen!" he sneered, with crushing sarcasm. "I suppose you're not likely to funk it and fall to bits by any chance?"

"Likely, isn't it?" laughed Alf, with his rapier-like wit.

With this brief interchange, the rivals parted, never to meet again till two hours afterwards when the great fight was due to start.

Little did Alf Armstrong dream as he left the international sporting club that his mean, sneaky, treacherous opponent had already arranged for several gangster friends of his to kidnap the boxer he feared and take him for a ride. Nevertheless, that was the actual state of things, and when Alf suddenly felt himself hit over the napper with a sledge-hammer and flung into a powerful car, his keen intelligence realised that there was dirty work afoot!

He put up a despit resistance, but even he was no match for half a dozen secondaries armed with all the most modern implements of warfare, and even, chivalry he was overcome, taken to a gloomy house on the outskirts of the city, tied up in a chair, and left to watch a bomb which his enemies had placed in front of him, timed to explode in an hour's time.

The hour passed on leaden wings, but our hero waited for the explosion with iron resolution!

Bang!

Suddenly the bomb went off, blowing the house to smithereens.

Fortunately, Alf Armstrong had braced up his muscles ready for it. The result was that it merely blew his bonds asunder and left him intact.

With a grim smile on his handsome face, Alf stroled out of the smoking ruins and hailed a passing taxi.

"Drive like the dickens to the big fight!" he ordered.

The taxi leaped forward, but no sooner had it reached the first corner than there was a rattle of machine-gun fire from the gangsters, who had concealed themselves behind a pillar-box. The taxi-driver fell over his wheel, wounded in a hundred places; Alf Armstrong, his eyes gleaming with determination, took control himself and continued to drive forward, while a hail of bullets whined about his ears. His head was riddled with them, but fortunately his body escaped unscathed, so no damage was done.



No sooner had he left the machine-guns behind, than several cars driven by other gangsters rushed straight at him with the intention of smashing him to pieces. Alf, who was an expert driver, merely accelerated and drove clean through them, steering them about the road like ninpins.

Meanwhile, at the gate stadium, the huge crowd was waiting impatiently for the big fight to begin. Rudolf Fowler entered the ring promptly to the music, and was greeted with a howl of boosing and hissing. Evenhandedly the ref. joined him and addressed the crowd.

"Gentlemen!" he cried. "Alf Armstrong has failed to turn up and I therefore award the world's championship to—"

"Half a minute!" interrupted a calm voice just then, and amid a hurricane of cheers, Alf Armstrong himself, fresh as paint after his adventures, leaped over the ropes, ready for the fray!

The villainous Fowler went white as driven snow when he saw that all his plans had come to nought. He trembled violently and his nose sagged; but nothing could save him now from taking his gruel.

The gong sounded and the seconds dropped out of the wings. The Big Fight had begun!

Bang, crash, wallop, thud, biff, bonk, whop!

Alf Armstrong's fists fairly battered his opponent. Fowler stood up to it for half a second, then he turned tail and fled.

"Wringy!" he cried, as he sped round and round the ring.

"Likely, isn't it?" grinned Alf, and he farly flung himself at his craven adversary.

Crash!

One mighty snipe landed on Fowler's jaw, and, with a scream of agony, he sailed through the air to land among the spectators in the gallery. After picking himself up, Fowler rushed for the nearest egress and never showed his ugly face again.

After which, amid the plaudits of the idolising crowd, our hero was declared Champion of the World!

FURNISH YOUR STUDY ON NOTHING

OUR "SAY WHEN" SYSTEM BEATS THE LOT

"Just Give the Order— We Do the Rest"

Mr. Braze: Good-morning, Mr. Everboy! So you're thinking of celebrating spring by returning your study!

Mr. E.: Yes, sir, but the idea of my taking a deposit is really on me, then! Help yourself to my money; there is no deposit!

Mr. Braze: Thank you very much, Mr. Braze. I have thought of buying about a hundred pounds worth of student furniture on request!

Mr. E.: Oh, yes! I want a "Bizzabo" desk, a "Snocor" field sofa, two "Hold-U" easy chairs, and one pair of ink stools, please!

Mr. Braze: Then how do I order and by the time you get back, you will find that the goods have already been delivered in a plain van driven by masked men. Finished the job, sir? Thank you, this box is so popular.

Mr. E.: I am glad you are pleased, sir. The "Say When" System, of course, simply means that you say when you want a single item of this great firm has ever had to sign an agreement!

Mr. E.: I shall be most happy to supply them with all they want. Now, sir, here is your Free Policy covering you against carriages, lines and delivery. Please also accept this season ticket to your favourite cinema. If there is anything more I can do—

Mr. E.: That is all just now, thank you. Good-day, Mr. Braze!

Mr. E.: One moment, sir! You've forgotten your Free Handprints in the quad. Goodbye, sir!

The evidence seems to be conclusive. Spring has definitely arrived!

Mr. E.: I am lost in wonderment! Anyway, there's the question of the first instalment—

Mr. B.: Pardon, my dear sir, but we make a practice of never accepting a first instalment here!

Mr. E.: You are really too kind! Then about the remaining instalments—

Mr. B.: Oh, we abolished them long ago.

Mr. E.: Then how do I pay?

Mr. B.: You don't! I have booked you order and by the time you get back, you will find that the goods have already been delivered in a plain van driven by masked men. Finished the job, sir? Thank you, this box is so popular.

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The evidence seems to be conclusive. Spring has definitely arrived!

IS IT SPRING?

"G.H." Reporter Investigates a Rumour

In view of the persistency of the rumour that spring had really arrived, we sent out our Special Investigator yesterday to see what evidence he could discover of the truth of the report.

He returned with the following notes:

Mr. Quetch walked into the Remove Form-room for morning lessons, reading a humorous paper, and afterwards handed

round a bag of toffee before starting Latin.

Manuoverer has been asking with fellow for a word to rhyme with "Roofs," and is alleged to have burst into tears on being told "noisy."

Bolsover major, after being on the face by an ink-pellet from a Third Form bag, smiled broadly and patting the bag in question on the head.

Fisher T. Fish is said to have presented a crossing-sweeper at Courtfield with a penny.

The Head has just been observed doing handprints in the quad.

Gooding smiled to-day.

The evidence seems to be conclusive. Spring has definitely arrived!

CRICKET PROSPECTS—TWO POINTS OF VIEW

SUMMING UP THE REMOVE XI

BY ONE WHO IS IN THE TEAM.

There's no doubt about it, the Remove team's in for one of the most successful seasons on record. Wharton and Cherry and Redwing have shown in the practice games we've already had that they're the same mighty batsmen that they were last year, while Hurree Singh's bowling is even more terrific than it was, which is saying heaps! Mark Linley, too, seems to be coming on as a bowler; he has developed a slow ball with a tricky break that's going to puzzle the very best of our opponents! In the field, we're stronger than ever. Wharton has had us hard at it, fielding every evening this week, and if there's one catch missed in the opening game, I'll eat my hat. Make no mistake about it, fellows, whoever meets the Remove this year is going to be well and truly whacked!

Without question, unless something drastic is done, this season is going to be the most disastrous ever known. In the practice-games played so far Wharton and Cherry and Redwing have shown that they've degenerated into mere tooth-rattlers at the wicket, while Hurree Singh's bowling is painful to have to watch. Mark Linley fancies himself with a so-called tricky ball. It's so tricky that a Second Form fag could play to it blindfold and be fairly sure of scoring half a dozen boundaries per over! Goodness knows what will happen when one or two decent batsmen stand up to it! As to the fielding, the least said about it the better. In the hope of bringing his impot team up to scratch, Wharton has had them out every night on belting practice, quite without result. If the cry "Butterfingers!" is not heard dozens of times during the opening game, I'm willing to eat my hat and anyone else's besides! Summing it all up, the Remove team as at present constituted is the most pitiful collection of wrecks ever seen on a cricket field. Don't kid yourselves, chaps, they'll lose every match!



AMAZING GREYFRIARS MYSTERY

Coker Held Up to Public Ridicule

IMPOSTOR ESCAPES IN TAXI

Dere Editor—Irite to call your attention to one of the most extraordinary mysteries I have ever come across. I pride myself on possessing more than my fair share of brains, and any friend of mine will tell you how clever I am at detective work. Notwithstanding this, even I am puzzled to find a solution to this amazing mystery. Here are the facts, simply and plainly set down. Naturally, I don't expect that your brainless readers are capable of making any helpful suggestions, but out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, as it were, it's just possible that someone may hit on a clue.

1. I've had a kind of feud recently with a cheeky Remove fag named Wibley, who's supposed to be rather hot at disguising and impersonating.

2. On several occasions, as a result of that feud, I've had occasion to wallop this chap Wibley.

3. One day last week, my Aunt Judy turned up. Much to my surprise and annoyance, she behaved in a very extraordinary manner. After holding me up to public ridicule, she started rocking me about with her broly.

4. Strangely enough, a big crowd of fags followed us all round the School, grinning like hyenas. I heard the name "Wibley" mentioned several times, and once somebody even called my aunt "Wib." They seemed to have Wibley on the brain.

5. Eventually my aunt took me to Proun, said she was very displeased with me, and requested him to cease me. I had to submit to the unseemable indignity of "bending over!"

6. Feeling sore in more senses than one, I saw my aunt off to the station. There a remarkable thing happened. Another lady, dressed elegantly the same, was getting off the train; and on seeing me, she rushed forward and kissed me. She turned out to be my real Aunt Judy!

7. When I turned round the other aunt, whom I now realised to be an impostor, had pulled her skirts above her nose, revealing make-up, trousers, and was running like a deer for the egress. In spite of my frantic efforts to reach her (or I should say him), the impostor escaped in a taxi.

8. On returning to Greyfriars, laughing crowds of fags followed me all over the place, clapping me unmercifully. Among the cheeky young cubs I recognised Wibley, who had previously been missing any trimmings. I have racked my brains in vain to find out what it all means. Somehow or other, Wibley seems to be concerned in the affair. But how is a problem I think you will agree that it is the most baffling and intriguing mystery ever known. Yours in perplexity, HORACE COKER.