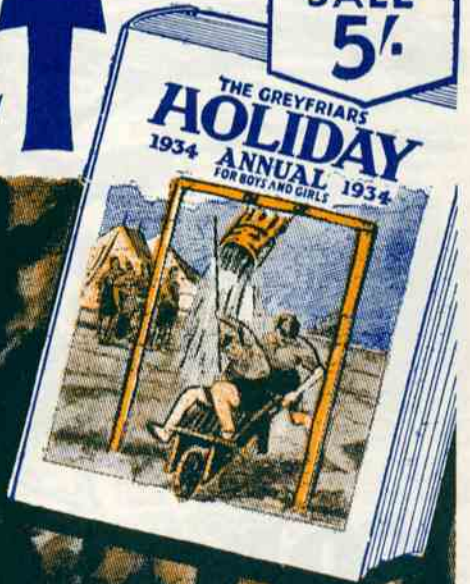


"COKER, THE HIKER!" Tip-top Story of the Ho'diday Adventures of the Chums of Greyfriars.

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THE LOST HIKER!



COKER, THE HIKER!

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

FATHEADS!"

It was a deep, deep voice, in tones of intense exasperation. "Idiots!"

Harry Wharton & Co. sat up and took notice.

"Dummies!"

These complimentary remarks were not addressed to the Greyfriars hikers. The fellow who made the remarks was not in sight. But the deep, wrathful voice came quite clearly through the hawthorn hedge.

"Duffers!"

It was a warm September afternoon. The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were seated in a cheery row on a grassy bank by the side of a Warwickshire lane. Lord Mauleverer was extended at full length, taking it easy. Billy Bunter was munching toffee. It was a large packet of toffee, and for ten minutes or more Bunter's jaws had been in incessant motion, and were still going strong. The hikers were taking a little rest by the roadside, the Famous Five admiring the scenery, which was magnificent, Mauly-doing, and Bunter munching, when that deep, irritated, exasperated voice came booming through the hedge behind them.

"Footling fatheads!"

Some fellow, evidently, was in the field behind the hawthorn hedge, and not in a good temper.

"Chumps!"

His vocabulary seemed to be extensive.

"Chuckleheads!"

The Famous Five grinned at one another. They recognised that voice. It was quite familiar to their ears, though they had not expected to hear it again till next term at Greyfriars. The voice belonged to Horace Coker of THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,336.

the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, and it was clear that Coker of the Fifth was cross about something.

"Dolts and underheads!"

Lord Mauleverer raised a sleepy head from the pack it was resting upon.

"I know that jolly old voice," he remarked. "The language seems familiar, too. Is that old Coker?"

"Sounds like him," grinned Bob Cherry. "I wonder who he's talking to? Can't hear anybody else."

"Coker's doing a solo," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Blithering idiots!" went on the voice in the field. "Burling jabberwocks! Not a sign of them. Piffing duffers! Thundering asses!"

Bob Cherry rose to his feet, grinning, and peered through the hedge. On the other side, standing in the field, he spotted Coker of the Fifth. That big, burly, hefty youth was staring about him, with a red and wrathful face, as if in search of somebody. The "somebody" evidently wasn't there. Hence Coker's wrath and his string of compliments.

"Blithering, blithering, blethering owls!" went on Coker eloquently.

"Can't lose sight of 'em for a minute, without the silly asses getting lost! Footling fatheads!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry suddenly, through the hedge.

Coker jumped.

Evidently he had not been aware that anyone was at hand, listening to his dulcet tones.

He stared round.

"What the thump—" he ejaculated.

"That you, Potter or Greene? Oh, it's you, you cheeky young sweep! What the thump are you doing here, young Cherry? And who are you yelling at?"

"Whom, dear man—whom?" said Bob. "Don't they teach you grammar in the Fifth Form?"

Horace Coker glared.

"You cheeky young tick! Can't you wait till next term for a licking!" he hooted. "I've a good mind—"

"You have?" ejaculated Bob.

"Where do you keep it, Coker?"

"What?"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob, "Coker says he has a good mind. Did any of you know that he had a mind at all?"

"Never!" said Frank Nugent, chuckling.

"The neverfulness is terrific!" chortled Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, you're all there, are you?" roared Coker. "I can tell you that I've a jolly good mind—"

"You can tell us so, but we shan't believe it," interrupted Bob Cherry. "You can't have a mind without having brains. And you jolly well know that you haven't any brains, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker, redder than ever with wrath, came trampling through the hedge.

Bob Cherry backed away, smiling. The hefty Horace emerged into the lane, and stared at the smiling hikers. They picked themselves up out of the grass, with the exception of Billy Bunter.

Bunter had not yet finished the toffee, so he had no time or attention to waste on Coker of the Fifth.

"Pax, old bean!" said Harry Wharton amicably. "No rags in the hols. Give Coker a bit of your toffee Bunter."

"Shan't!" said Bunter.

Bunter's refusal was hardly necessary. The idea of being given a "bit" of the sticky wedge in Bunter's fat hand was simply and purely an insult to the great man of Greyfriars.

The expression on his speaking countenance made the hikers chortle.

But Coker, with a great effort, controlled his wrath. He had lost his friends, Potter and Greene, and he was

—HARRY WHARTON & CO., THE GREYFRIARS HIKERS!

in need of information. Instead, therefore, of slaughtering the hikers on the spot at one fell swoop, Coker spoke almost calmly.

"Have you seen a pair of silly duffers anywhere about?" he asked.

"Not a pair," answered Bob Cherry. "Only one."

"Oh, you've seen one of them! Good! Which was it—Potter or Greene?"

"Neither. The only silly duffer I've seen is named Coker," answered Bob affably.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the hikers again, entertained by the eloquent expression on Horace Coker's countenance. Again, with a manly effort, Coker controlled his wrath.

"Look here, I've lost those two duffers," he said. "I mean, they've lost themselves. We had a bit of a row, and I knocked their heads together."

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated the hikers. If Coker had knocked his friends' heads together, it was not really surprising that they were missing. Coker seemed surprised and irritated; but it did not seem surprising to the juniors.

"I left them in the field," went on Coker. "I told them plainly I shouldn't wait for them. We've been on a hike, you know, and I've made it a rule not to wait for them. Still, as I knew the silly asses would miss their way without me to guide them, I came back for them. And they're gone—gone!" repeated Coker. "I never met them on the way, and I never found them here. Wandered off, you know, like two silly kids—just as if they were fatheaded juniors, instead of Fifth Form seniors. If you've seen anything of them, tell me where to look for them—see?"

"Haven't seen them," said Bob. "And I shouldn't wonder if you don't see them again, old bean. Banging fellows' heads together is liable to make them walk away, and stay away."

"Just a few!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Don't be a cheeky young scoundrel," said Coker. "Look here! They must be somewhere about. Scatter and look for them!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I'll sit down here for a bit," said Coker. "I've done a good many miles to-day. Tell them where to find me if you spot them. Hunt all over the place."

The hikers looked at Coker, and looked at one another, and grinned. At Greyfriars Coker never could get it into his head that he was not a fellow to give orders. It was always Coker's custom to speak as one having authority, saying "Do this!" and he doeth it. Coker had had many lessons on this subject, some of them quite drastic, but they had never seemed to teach him anything. The idea of occupying the rest of the afternoon hunting for Coker's lost sheep did not appeal to the hikers a little bit. Even if Coker had asked them nicely, they would have had to decline. But Coker did not ask them. He told them.

"Time we got moving!" remarked Harry Wharton, slinging on his pack. "Get going, Bunter! You can guzzle as you go."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Good-bye, Coker!"

The hikers started. Horace Coker stared after them. Obviously, these cheeky juniors were not going to regard his lordly behest. Coker's wrath hitherto had been simmering just below boiling point. Now it boiled over. He made a rush after the hikers.

He grabbed Bob Cherry with one

hand, Johnny Bull with the other, these two happening to be nearest.

Crack!

Their heads came together with a resounding concussion. It was quite a loud crack! Louder still rang the roar they gave.

"Now—" said Coker. Evidently Coker considered that the treatment meted out to Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, would have a beneficial effect on Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove!

But he got no further with that beneficial treatment! Six hikers piled on Coker as one man! Coker was up-ended, and he came down on Warwickshire with a mighty bump!

"Whoooooop!" roared Coker.

"Bump him!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Scrag the cheeky ass?" howled Bob Cherry.

"Scrag him terrifically!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ow! Oh! Leggo! I'll smash you!" roared Coker, struggling wildly. "I'll pulverise you! I'll spificate you! Pll—yaroooooop!"

The hikers gave Coker three minutes—three hectic, wild and whirling minutes! Those minutes were crammed with incident. What happened to Coker he hardly knew. He was in quite a dazed and dizzy state when the

When Coker says "Turn," they all turn; when Coker says "Stop," they all stop. At least, so thinks Horace Coker when he joins up with the Greyfriars Hikers and tries to take control in his usual lordly manner. But Coker, the Hiker, is booked for an unpleasant surprise!

hikers marched on again, leaving him for dead, as it were!

Coker sat up.

"Grooooooh!" said Coker. "Ooogh! Urrghh!"

He sat and blinked and gurgled! He was smothered with dust from head to foot—he was of the dust, dusty! His hat had disappeared. Later he discovered it down the back of his neck, in a sadly crumpled state. His mop of hair was wildly tousled, and stood up on his bullet head like quills upon the fretful porcupine!

In the distance the cheery hikers faded out of the picture, Bob Cherry looking back and waving a hand in farewell. Then they were gone! Coker still sat where he was, blinking and gurgling! He blinked, he gurgled, and he gasped—and the hikers had covered a mile of Warwickshire lanes before Coker of the Fifth had finished blinking, gurgling and gasping.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Little Way!

"'LL go!" said Billy Bunter. "You!" exclaimed all the hikers together.

It was really surprising.

Billy Bunter, as a hiker, left a lot to be desired. Dodging his share of the work had been reduced to an exact science by Billy Bunter. Generally he got away with it, as it was more trouble to get Bunter to do anything than to do it oneself. Bunter carried anything he dropped it. If he

washed-up, he splashed fellows, or broke things, or lost things. If he drove in a single tent-peg, it was certain to jerk out again. If he filled the cooking-stove, he was sure to put more paraffin outside than inside. By such astutis means as these, Bunter had a rather easy time—without achieving great popularity among the Greyfriars hikers, naturally. But now, here was Bunter offering to do some work!

Under a glowing sunset, the walking party had halted at a spot which looked ripping for a camp. On the edge of a wood flowed a glistening stream, with fields stretching beyond. Far in the distance a red-tiled house could be seen, to which the land evidently belonged. It was a good half-mile to the house, and the question was whether permission should be asked to camp at that delightful spot, and who should go up to the house to make the request.

It was judicious, and only civil, to ask leave. And Billy Bunter offered to go and ask!

"You see," explained Bunter, "it's a jolly good idea for the most presentable member of the party to go. Lots of hikers are scrubby sort of blighters, and people don't like 'em about. Seeing me, they'll know the party's all right, see?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"I mean, suppose you went, Bob, they might take us for a lot of hooligans."

"What-a-at?"

"And refuse us leave to camp. Same if you went, Bull!"

Johnny Bull looked at Bunter!

"And if Inky went, they might think he was a Christy minstrel or something, and think we wanted to give a performance, or something of the kind," went on Bunter.

"You terrifically fat-headed frabjous freak—" ejaculated the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Mauly would be all right—but you're tired, ain't you, Mauly?"

"Yaas!"

"Leave it to me, then!" said Bunter. "Dash it all, when you've got a gentleman in the party, make use of him, what?"

"Ye gods!" said Frank Nugent.

"You fellows get camping," said Bunter briskly. "They're sure to give leave, so that's all right. Have the grub ready by the time I get back. It won't take me half-an-hour."

"Cut off, you flabby freak!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, taking a path through the trees. The reasons he had given for going did not convince anybody; still, there was no reason why he should not do a little work for once.

The rest of the party set down their packs in the grass by the lane, outside the gate. Bunter had advised them to get on with the camping; but they did not feel disposed to take possession of the field by the stream until leave had been obtained from the proprietor. Outside the gate, however, was public land, where any loyal subject of King George the Fifth could camp if he liked. All the hikers were hungry after the march; and the cooking-stove was set up, the provisions unpacked, and all hands set to work preparing supper.

Bunter, had he been present, would probably have been called upon to peel the potatoes, or fetch water, or something or other. As it was, the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer performed the various duties, and Bob Cherry did

the cooking—and a savoury and appetising odour was soon issuing from the tin saucepan on the stove. The fat Owl of the Remove had plenty of time to get to the distant house and back before the supper was ready—even at Bunter's usual rate of progress.

The fat Owl, however, had not gone very far!

Well as they knew their Bunter, and used as they were to his trickery, the hikers did not suspect what Bunter was up to.

As soon as he, was well out of sight, the fat junior came to a halt. He sat down at the foot of a shady tree, fanned his perspiring face with his hat, and grinned.

Then he extracted sticky toffee from a sticky pocket and munched it.

And there he remained!

That was Billy Bunter's way of doing his share of the work, for once.

He had no intention whatever of walking a half-mile to the country-house, and a half-mile back. His intention was to keep out of sight while the work was going on; and turn up again in time for supper. He was prepared to "chance it," so far as camping in the field was concerned. Leave to camp might have been refused; in which case the hikers would have marched on looking for another spot. Bunter did not want to march on. Chancing it was better, in Bunter's opinion, than exertion.

Having finished his toffee, Billy Bunter leaned back against the tree and rested luxuriously. He was in no hurry to move. It was no use to get back to the halting-place till supper was cooked. There was nothing to eat till then, and he might have been asked to do some work, and perhaps kicked if he did not! Bunter allowed a good hour to pass, and then, rested and refreshed, he rose to his feet and rolled back to the lane.

He sniffed appreciatively as he caught the scent from the saucepan.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Back already?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Mean to say you've done a mile in an hour!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You're exceeding your jolly old speed-limit, old fat bean."

"I should have been back before, only I stopped to have a chat with them at the house," said Bunter calmly. "Rather decent people!"

"Well, have they given leave to camp in the field?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh! Yes! Glad if we will!" answered Bunter airily. "Keen on it, in fact. That's all right."

"Good! Let's get the things in the field, and the tent up!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "Lend a hand, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton! After I've walked miles and miles—"

"Squat down and shut up, then!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Five hikers proceeded to carry the packs into the field and to set up the tent. Bob Cherry remained in charge of the cooking, and Billy Bunter sat and rested—no doubt needing a rest after a walk of nearly a hundred yards! The camp was pitched between the wood and the stream, near a little rustic bridge that spanned the water. By the time the camping was done, the stew was done, and Bob carried the well-filled saucepan carefully into the camp, and the stove was extinguished and carried in. Then the hikers sat down in a cheery circle to supper under the westering sun—six of them glad to know

that they had leave to camp in that pleasant spot, and the other one not bothering in the least about it, but devoting his whole and undivided attention to the stew.

Honk! Honk! Honk!

A green Austin car came along the lane, and three fellows sitting in it stared at the hikers in the field.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That Highcliffe gang again!" said Bob Cherry.

"Pon & Co.!" said Frank Nugent. "I thought we'd seen the last of them!"

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson stared blankly at the hikers. The car halted, and the chauffeur stared, too, as if surprised to see the Greyfriars fellows there. Ponsonby stood up and shouted across.

"Here! What are you Greyfriars cads doin' there?"

"Shall I get him with a potato?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Harry.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Ponsonby.

"Get out of that field at once."

"Likely!" grinned Johnny Bull.

Wharton stared at the dandy of Highcliffe in wonder.

"Does the silly ass think he can order us off?" he exclaimed.

"A little mistake, if he does!" said Bob. "I fancy I'd better let him have this potato. He's asking for it."

"Get out of it, you Greyfriars rotters, or I'll jolly soon have you turned out!" shouted Ponsonby.

"Last time of asking—he's jolly well going to have it!" said Bob, and he jumped up and took aim with a large potato.

Whiz!

Crash!

Ponsonby sat down suddenly in the car. He grabbed at Gadsby and Monson to save himself, and dragged them over with him. There was quite a mix-up on the floor of the green Austin.

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

"He, he, he!" cackinated Billy Bunter.

Breathless and infuriated exclamations came from the green Austin. The Highcliffians sorted themselves out and scrambled up. Pon shook a clenched fist at the chucking hikers, snarled to the chauffeur, and the car rolled on and disappeared. And the Greyfriars hikers went on cheerfully with their supper, dismissing Pon from their minds—though, as it happened, they were shortly to be reminded of him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Trouble!

"**T**OPPING here!" remarked Harry Wharton.

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

After supper, the hikers sat in the sunset resting at ease, gazing over the meadows and woods, with blue hills in the distance. Billy Bunter was not looking at the scenery; he was slowly but surely adding a bag of bullseyes to the two or three suppers he had packed away one after another. Bob Cherry had sorted his Holiday Annual out of his rucksack, but it lay on his knee unopened. In the golden glow of the sunset Warwickshire was well worth looking at.

Very rare traffic passed in the lane by the field gate. The only habitation in sight was the country house to which the land belonged; and of that, only a glimpse of red tiles and chimneys could be seen, far away on the other side of the bubbling brook. The Greyfriars fellows seemed almost to have the world to themselves.

"Warwickshire's a fine county!" remarked Nugent.

"Nearly up to Dorset!" agreed Bob, who belonged to Dorsetshire.

"Or Surrey!" said Wharton, with a smile. Surrey was the native county of the captain of the Remove.

"Hardly up to Yorkshire," observed Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "My people belong to Yorkshire!" he added, rather unnecessarily. The other fellows could have guessed that one!

Lord Mauleverer opened his lips to say something about Hampshire. But he closed them again lazily. It was too much trouble to talk.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes somebody!" remarked Bob, as he spotted a tall figure emerging from a woodland path on the other side of the brook.

"Owner of the place, very likely, coming to see that we're not using his gates for firewood!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

The hikers regarded the distant gentleman with some interest. He was tall, and rather bony, and had a light coat thrown on over evening-clothes. His face was angular, and adorned with a prominent nose and shaggy, grey eyebrows. In one sharp eye an eyeglass gleamed.

He stood under the distant trees, staring at the hikers' camp, his eyeglass gleaming in the sunset like a red eye.

"Seems interested in us, anyhow," remarked Johnny Bull. "He must belong to the house—he came from that direction."

"Can't say he looks frightfully pleased!" said Bob. "Here, Bunter, is that the man who gave you leave for us to camp here?"

"Eh, what?" Bunter's mouth was full of bullseyes. "Eh?"

"Look at that old johnny," said Bob. "Seen him before?"

Bunter turned his spectacles on the monocled gentleman, blinked at him, and shook his head.

"Never seen him before," he answered.

"You didn't see him up at the house?" asked Harry.

"Up at the house?" repeated Bunter blankly. The fat Owl had almost forgotten his trickery by that time. "What house?"

"Fathead! You saw somebody at the house when you asked leave to camp here," said Harry.

"Oh! Yes! Rather! Of—of course! It—it—was somebody else—a—a man with a ginger moustache," said Bunter hastily. Billy Bunter was never at a loss for convincing details.

"I suppose there's no mistake about the matter?" said Harry Wharton rather uneasily. "That old sportsman doesn't look happy about it."

"Well, I suppose Bunter knows whether he got permission or not," said Bob. "Did they make it quite clear, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes! Quite! In fact, they begged us to stay," said Bunter. "Made a point of it—very keen indeed about it."

The hikers looked at Bunter. They were beginning to feel uneasy, and Billy Bunter's asseverations did not make them any less so. Bunter, obviously, was prevaricating; and there was something amiss somewhere.

For there was no doubt that the old gentleman with the eyeglass was angry, and getting angrier as he surveyed the hikers' camp. Distant as he was, the wrath in his angular, weather-tanned face was unmistakable. Billy Bunter, busy with bullseyes, did not waste any attention on him; but the Famous Five

and Lord Mauleverer began to feel worried.

The man with the eyeglass stood for a couple of minutes surveying the camp. He had a thick Malacca cane under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand as he got into motion at last, striding with whisking long legs towards the little bridge over the stream. If ever hostility was depicted on a human countenance, it was depicted on the bony, tanned face of the man with the eyeglass.

He came quickly towards the bridge, strode across it, and entered the field where the hikers were camped. The camp was quite near the stream, and he reached it with a few strides from the bridge.

dare to cast doubt on my word? What? What?"

"Not at all, sir! But—we had permission to camp here—one of us came up to the house and asked leave—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter, blinking at the angry man through his big spectacles. Bunter was getting a little alarmed. Bunter had not foreseen this—Bunter never foresaw anything! All he had thought of was getting out of his share in the work! But he realized that there was trouble in store for him, if the hikers discovered that he had never been anywhere near the house where he was supposed to have asked leave to camp.

"What?" came in a hoot from the

explanation of Pon's check in ordering them off. This fierce old sportsman was evidently a relation of the dandy of Highcliffe.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter in dismay.

"Well, whoever you are, we had leave to camp," said Harry. "Bunter, who was it gave you leave?"

"A—a—a man!" gasped Bunter. "I—I had quite a talk with him. I say, you fellows, that old codger's gammoning! I—I saw quite a different man at the house. Chuck him into the water!"

"Shut up, you fat chump!"

"What?" roared the colonel, purple with wrath. "You propose to assault



"Get out of that field at once, you Greyfriars rotters," shouted Ponsonby, "or I'll jolly well have you turned out!" "He's asking for this potato," said Bob Cherry, "so I suppose I'd better let him have it!" Whizz! Crash! The flying potato caught Ponsonby full in the face.

Harry Wharton & Co. rose to their feet. Only too plainly, there was going to be trouble.

"You young rascals!" was the old gentleman's greeting. There was a rather stiff military air about him, which rather reminded Harry of his uncle, Colonel Wharton. But this old sportsman was evidently not a good-tempered old military gentleman like Colonel Wharton. Plainly he had a fierce temper; and that temper was now roused.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Harry respectfully.

Two fierce eyes and an eyeglass glittered at him.

"Wrong!" repeated the old gentleman. "You impudent young tramp! How dare you trespass on my estate? What?"

"If this is your land, sir—"

"If!" snorted the irate old sportsman. "If! Do you doubt my word? Do you

angry gentleman. "Who gave you leave? If any of my servants gave leave for tramps to camp on my land, by gad, I will discharge them on the spot! But I do not believe you! Not a word! How dare you stand there and tell me falsehoods!"

Wharton crimsoned.

"I'm doing nothing of the kind!" he snapped. "And we're not tramps, as you can see jolly well! We're hikers; and I tell you that we have leave to camp here."

"Who gave you leave? No one has a right to, excepting myself."

"And who may you be when you're at home?" inquired Bob Cherry politely.

The eyeglass gleamed at Bob.

"I am Colonel Ponsonby, the proprietor of this estate!" snorted the old gentleman.

"Ponsonby!" gasped all the hikers together. That name was only too familiar. They guessed all at once the

proprietor of the land you are trespassing upon? 'By gad, I'll have you all taken into custody as rogues and vagrants! By gad!"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Johnny Bull. "If it's your land, and you're too jolly mean to let a fellow camp on it, we'll clear!"

"The clearfulness will be an immediate and prompt proceeding, my esteemed and infuriated sir," said Hurrree Jamset Ram Singh, a remark that made the old colonel turn his eyeglass on the Nabob of Bhanipur with a startled stare.

"Look here, Bunter, you fat scoundrel," roared Bob Cherry, "did you get leave to camp? Did you go up to the house at all?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "I wondered why he offered. That fat villain has been spoofing again!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Who gave you leave, then!" roared Bob.

"A—a—a man named Johnson," gasped Bunter. "A—a—a man with a black moustache—"

"You said a ginger moustache a few minutes ago—"

"D-d-d-did I? I—I mean a ginger moustache," stammered Bunter. "He said his name was Parkinson—"

"Parkinson?"

"I mean Jackson—that is, Johnson. And—"

"The fat, spoofing slug never went to the house at all!" said Bob. "He was just getting out of sight to slack!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

The truth had dawned on all the hikers now. They gave Billy Bunter looks that made him back away in alarm.

The position was quite a painful one. In the full belief that they had leave to camp in that delightful little meadow between the wood and the stream, the hikers had camped there. And the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove had only been pulling their leg. They had no leave, and evidently weren't going to get any.

"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish!" grunted Johnny Bull. "We'd better cut—and kill Bunter later!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Tramps and vagrants!" hooted the old military gentleman. "Gad, I could scarcely believe my ears when my nephew informed me that a gang of vagrants had camped on my land! By gad!"

"Is your nephew Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe School?" asked Harry.

"What? Yes, certainly!"

"Then he knows perfectly well that we are not vagrants. We belong to Greyfriars School—"

"Don't argue with me, you impudent young rascal!" Colonel Ponsonby pointed to the gate with his stick.

"Go! Take your rubbish with you and go! Immediately! Instantly! Great gad, a man cannot sit down in peace to a cigar after dinner without being called on to turn vagrants off his land! Cad!"

It was evident that Pon had "told the tale" to his uncle after seeing the Greyfriars fellows camped in the meadow. They could guess that he had pitched it hot and strong.

"Oh, that villain Bunter—" muttered Nugent.

"Kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, I tell you it's all right!" gasped Bunter. "That old donkey is gammoning! Chuck him into the stream head over heels!"

"Shut up, you fat idiot— Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob, as Colonel Ponsonby made a stride at Bunter and whacked with the Malacca.

Whack!

"Yarooooh!" roared Bunter.

Whack!

"Whoooooop!"

Billy Bunter fled for his fat life. He headed for the field gate at about seventy m.p.h. And the fierce old gentleman turned on the other hikers, gripping his Malacca and glaring, as if strongly disposed to serve them all the same.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Touch-and-Go!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. gathered in a group, eyeing the man with the eyeglass warily.

They were not fellows to be whacked THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,356.

like Bunter—as Colonel Ponsonby was going to discover if he made any further use of his Malacca. They were very nearly as angry as the old gentleman now.

It was true that, as Bunter evidently had not obtained leave to camp, they were trespassing; but there was no harm done, and they were ready to go. Really there was no occasion for all this wrath and excitement. And their annoyance was not diminished by the sight of Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson emerging from the woodland path across the stream and regarding them—from a safe distance—with mocking grins. Pon & Co. were enjoying this little scene. It was a score for them over their old enemies of Greyfriars.

"I've ordered you to go!" boomed the old gentleman. "Off with you! Take your rubbish and go! Do you hear me?"

"We're not deaf," remarked Bob.

"What—what?"

"We could hear you from Warwick, or Coventry," said Bob cheerfully. "You're not exactly whispering."

Colonel Ponsonby's purple visage assumed a deeper purple.

"Young rascals! Impudent young scoundrels!" he gasped. "My nephew told me that I had to deal with a crew of insolent young ruffians—and, by gad, he was right! By gad, yes!"

"You don't know your jolly old nephew so well as we do," said Johnny Bull. "He's a lying rotter, sir!"

"What—what?"

"The liefulness and the rottenfulness of the esteemed Ponsonby are terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Colonel Ponsonby seemed on the point of choking. He started towards Johnny Bull, raising his cane.

Johnny Bull eyed him like a "tike" of his native county of Yorkshire.

"Better not!" he said grimly.

Bob hastily pulled Johnny back.

"Let's cut," he said. "Keep your wool on, Colonel Ponsonby. It won't take us ten minutes to pack, and you can have your jolly old field all to yourself."

"I will not give you one minute!" roared the colonel. "Go—and drag your rubbish into the road! Go!"

"You must give us time to pack, sir," said Harry.

"I will call my keepers and have you thrown into the road, and your rubbish after you!" roared the colonel. "Go!"

"Look here— Oh, my hat!" yelled Wharton, as a sudden lick of the Malacca caught him across the shoulders.

With a blaze in his eyes, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove wrenched the Malacca from the colonel's hand and flung it away. It dropped into the stream below the bridge. The water was deep below the bridge, and that Malacca was probably gone for good. The hikers were strongly tempted to send its owner after it.

Colonel Ponsonby stood as if spell-bound. He stuttered with wrath.

"Great gad! Young scoundrel—ruffian—vagrant—tramp—footpad! I will call my keepers! You shall all be taken into custody!"

Stuttering threats, the colonel strode away towards the bridge.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Nugent.

"What a life!"

"There are terrific uses and downs in the hikefulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "This is one of the esteemed downs."

"The chokey old clump!" exclaimed Wharton, with flashing eyes. "If he wasn't an old man I'd jolly well have

punched his cheeky head! Let's get packed and get out of this."

"The sooner the better!" growled Johnny Bull.

And the hikers started unpegging the tent. Colonel Ponsonby strode away, fuming, as far as the bridge over the stream. He tramped on the bridge, and halted there, waving his hand to the three Highcliffe juniors in the distance, and shouting to his nephew.

"Cecil! Call Higgs and Jenkins and Simpson!" he roared.

Harry Wharton glanced round at him. The rustic bridge over the stream was formed of two broad planks, laid side by side, and there was no balustrade, or even a handrail. September rains had filled the stream, and the water lapped on the planks and made them slippery. It really was not a safe place for an excited old gentleman to stand and gesticulate.

"That old ass will be in, if he doesn't take care!" said Harry.

"Serve him right!" growled Johnny Bull.

"A dip would cool his temper, perhaps!" grinned Bob.

"Well, I fancy Pon's been pulling his leg about us," remarked Nugent. "He would pile it on, of course, the lying cad. That old sportsman would think differently if he knew that his precious nephew had been hunting us all through the vacation to steal Bob's Holiday Annual."

"Cross-grained old blighter, all the same," said Wharton, whose shoulders were smarting from the lick from the Malacca. "Hurry up! We want to get clear before we have a shindy with a mob of keepers."

"Cecil! Do you hear me?" roared the old colonel.

Ponsonby made a sign of assent from the distance, and disappeared into the trees again. Gadsby and Monson remained, watching.

Colonel Ponsonby turned round in the middle of the bridge, and glared back at the hikers' camp. Evidently he was eager for Higgs, Jenkins, and Simpson to arrive and handle the hikers. Bob Cherry glanced at him, smiled, and waved his hand affably.

"Keep cool, sir!" he called out. "We shan't be long! We're not going to worry Higgs and Jenkins and Simpson!"

The hikers chuckled.

"By gad!" gasped the old colonel. "If I had my cane I'd lay it round your shoulders, you insolent young rascal!"

"Dive for it!" suggested Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Colonel Ponsonby, spluttering with wrath, stooped and scanned the stream, evidently in the hope of spotting his lost Malacca. If it had been floating he might have recaptured it, with painful results to the hikers; but it was a thick stick with a heavy metal head, the eyeglass dropped from the colonel's fiery eye, and he made a grab at it, overbalanced, and plunged.

Splash!

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Bob. "He's in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Greyfriars hikers.

For the moment, they saw only the comic side of the incident. Really, it did serve the angry old gentleman right to get that sudden dip.

But the next moment, Wharton's face became grave, and, leaving the half-dismantled tent, he ran towards the stream.

A hand came up from the water, but not a head.

He had noticed already that the water was deep below the bridge, and that

there was a good current, swollen by rain of the night before; and it flashed into his mind that the old gentleman could not swim! What looked like a comedy was turning swiftly into a tragedy.

The hand swept the air over the shining water, and disappeared again. Bob Cherry gave a startled yell.

"He's under! My hat! He's drowning."

"Oh crumbs!" The hikers rushed towards the stream. From a distance, on the other side, Gadsby and Monson stared blankly; but Harry Wharton was already there. He ran down the bank to get level with the helpless man who was being swept away, and leaped in.

The water was over his head in a split second; but his grasp was on the man under the surface, and he dragged him up.

He was not thinking now of that angry whack from the Malacca, from which his shoulders still smarted. He was only thinking of an old man in danger of death. Up came the colonel, in the grasp of the Greyfriars junior, and his gasping face appeared above the surface—strangely changed now. The purple wrath had been washed out, and it was an old, pinched, white face that appeared in the sunshine.

The colonel was half-unconscious. He grabbed feebly at the schoolboy who was saving him, gurgling chokingly for breath.

Wharton, keeping his head above the surface, swam strongly; but the current was stronger than he had guessed, and it washed him rapidly down-stream; but for the other fellows he would soon have been in serious difficulties. But, Bob Cherry was racing down the bank, the others at his heels, and Bob came plunging in, Johnny Bull after him, then Lord Mauleverer. They all grasped at the drowning man; and he was dragged to the bank, where Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh helped them ashore.

Colonel Ponsonby was laid in the grass. The drenched juniors stood and shook the water from their whartons panting hard after his exertions. The old gentleman sat up, dizzily, and blinked.

"Groooogh!" was his first remark.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Change for the Better!

"GROOOOGH!" said Colonel Ponsonby, for the second time.

He blinked at the Greyfriars juniors with a watery smile.

He gasped.

"All safe now, sir!" said Harry. "The sooner you get in and get changed the better, I think, sir. You're jolly wet!"

And Wharton walked back to the camp, followed by the other fellows, and they resumed getting down the tent.

Four of the hikers were in need of a change, being wet to the skin; but that had to wait.

Colonel Ponsonby sat, drenched and dripping, and blinked after them. He groped for his eyeglass, to jam it into his ancient eye, but it was gone; it had joined his Malacca at the bottom of the stream.

"Groooogh!" said the colonel, for the third time.

He staggered to his feet. Gadsby and Monson were running down to the spot now, but they had not yet arrived.

Colonel Ponsonby stood rather unsteadily, blinking at the busy hikers. A ducking did not hurt the schoolboys much, though certainly it would have been judicious to get out of their wet things as soon as possible. In the case of an old gentleman of more than sixty it was more serious, and undoubtedly the colonel would have been well-advised to hurry home and get dry. Instead of which, as soon as he got into motion he started for the hikers' camp.

"Oh, my hat! Here he comes again!" growled Johnny Bull. "Can't the old ass see we're going as fast as we can? We'd better chuck him into the water again."

The hikers chuckled. Dripping with water, and looking very old and pinched, the colonel arrived at the camp. Wharton gave him a look.

"We shall be gone in two minutes, sir!" he said. "There's no need for any more rowing—and you'll catch cold if you stay to see us off."

"What's your name, my boy?" asked

"No harm done! We ought not to have camped on your land, but we thought that—"

"We thought we had leave, sir!" said Nugent. "A spoofing rotter pulled our leg! And we'll be gone in two ticks! Buck up with that canvas, you men!"

"Buck up, for goodness' sake!" muttered Bob. "Here comes Pon and a whole crew of them!"

Gadsby and Monson had crossed the bridge now. After them, at a run, came Cecil Ponsonby, and with him three men in the garb of keepers. They came rather breathlessly up to the camp. Pon blinked at his uncle.

"You're wet, sir—" he began.

"What—"

"By gad, I think I am, Cecil!" answered the colonel; "and it might have been worse."

"Did they pitch you into the water, uncle?" exclaimed Ponsonby. "It would be like them! I know these fellows—a gang of utter young ruffians, too—"

"I suppose we mustn't punch Pon's nose, with his uncle here!" remarked Bob.

"Blow Pon's nose—let's get off."

"What? what?" boomed the old colonel. "No, Cecil, these boys did not pitch me into the water! They pulled me out when I fell in."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Pon in amazement. "But—"

"We saw it, Pon," muttered Gadsby. "Wharton went in for him—"

"I thought he was gone," said Monson. "Jolly lucky Wharton got hold of him in time. We were too far off to help."

"Cecil!" barked the old colonel.

"Yes, uncle!" Pon was not looking grateful or obliged for the service to his uncle. His look at the hikers was black and bitter.

"Cecil, you are mistaken in your opinion of these boys! Such young rascals as you represented them to be would never have rushed to the help of a man who had been abusing them, ordering them away, and even striking one of them with a cane! I am sorry—deeply sorry—that I was misled."

Ponsonby made no answer to that. His rage was too deep and bitter for speech. The old gentleman gave him a sharp look—a very sharp look indeed—and turned to the hikers again.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" said Harry, wondering what was coming. Evidently the ducking in the stream, and his narrow escape, had wrought a very great change in the old gentleman's estimation of the Greyfriars hikers.

"Camp here! Camp as long as you like! Here are welcome—more than welcome! Send up to the house for anything you want! Help yourselves!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"You're a sportsman, sir!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Make yourselves free of the whole estate!" said Colonel Ponsonby. Having changed his opinion of the hikers, he was going the whole hog, so to speak. "Make yourselves at home!"

Wharton glanced at his comrades. Then he answered:

"You're very kind, sir—"

"Not at all! You've saved my life! Do you think I am ungrateful?" boomed the old colonel, with a hint of his former fierceness.

"Oh, no, sir! But—thank you, all the same, but I think we'll get going," said Harry.

"What? what? You'll do nothing of THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,555.

RAISE A LAUGH AND WIN A PENKNIFE

like Norman Berry, of 16, Esmond Street, Gt. Horton, Bradford, Yorks, who sent in the following winning effort:



Blinks: "My breath is coming in short, sharp pants."
Jinks: "D'ye expect it to come in plus fours?"

the old gentleman, in a strangely changed and subdued voice.

"Eh? Wharton!" answered Harry, astonished by the question.

"Very good! I am glad to meet you, my boy! I think that my nephew must have been mistaken in you!" said Colonel Ponsonby. "I owe you my thanks!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

"The fact is, I am ashamed to admit it, but I cannot swim!" said the colonel. "I was drowning, helplessly, in my own river, begad, when you pulled me out. You have saved my life, my boy. Certainly, you endangered it in the first place—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "We never asked you to take that header, did we?"

"Shut up, Johnny, old bean!" said Nugent. "It wouldn't have happened if we hadn't been here, I suppose."

"Well, well, never mind that," said Colonel Ponsonby. "It was kind as well as brave of you to come in for me, Wharton, and I am extremely sorry I caned you with my Malacca—very sorry indeed, by gad!"

"That's all right, sir," said Harry.

the sort!" roared Colonel Ponsonby. "You are soaked to the skin! Put up that tent again, and change your clothes! I forbid you to go! By gad!"

"The fact is, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"But—"

"Rubbish—"

"But I say—"

"I think I understand! You are not friends with my nephew! Apparently you have met before, on unfriendly terms! I will set that right! Cecil!"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Ponsonby, hardly knowing what to say, so utterly confounded was he by this unexpected turn of affairs. Gadsby and Monson stood staring on blankly. The three keepers were already retiring from the spot, realising that there was no "chucking-out" to be done now.

"Cecil! Where did you meet these boys before?"

"They—they belong to a school near Highcliffe—," stammered Pon.

"I understand! Schoolboy rowing and ragging, hey? What? What? Well, the best thing you can do is to make friends! What! This boy Wharton has saved my life at very considerable risk to himself! After I had given him a cut with my cane, begged! You and your friends are staying with me, Cecil, and this is a good opportunity for you to make friends with these boys who are near you at school! What? what?"

"Oh!" gasped Ponsonby. "As they seem to make a point of it, repeat my invitation to them," said the colonel.

Ponsonby pulled himself together. He felt like choking with rage and chagrin. But he had good reasons for not desiring to offend a rich and indulgent uncle. And a few falsehoods never cost Pon much!

Suppressing his feelings, he turned to the hikers, with an expression of great frankness on his face, which might have deceived them had they not known their Pon so well.

"I hope you fellows will stay and camp here," said Ponsonby, in his blandest tones. "We haven't been friends—but it seems that you've saved my uncle's life, and I'd forgive my worst enemy if he did that—and, after all, we're not enemies, are we? I really hope you'll do as my uncle wishes, and camp at Ponsonby Park as long as suits you."

"Well spoken, my boy!" boomed the colonel. "Exactly what I should have expected of you, Cecil! Now, Wharton, you and your friends will stay!"

It was scarcely possible to refuse further. The hikers did not trust Pon an inch; but they naturally did not want to tell his uncle so. Neither did they wish to offend an old gentleman who, with all his fierce and fiery temper, seemed to be a decent old boy in the main. So, after another exchange of glances, the hikers assented. After all, it was late, close on dark, and the spot was excellent for a camp; and they were not keen on resuming the march after nightfall. They had a very strong objection to being under any obligation to Cecil Ponsonby; still, Ponsonby Park belonged to his uncle, not to him. Still feeling a little dubious, but feeling, too, that it would be very ungracious to refuse, they assented. Having assented, they thanked the colonel warmly for his hospitality.

The matter being thus amicably settled, Colonel Ponsonby started for the distant house, followed by his dutiful nephew and Gadsby and Monson. The look that Pon gave the hikers over

his shoulder showed exactly how kind and friendly he felt towards them!

But they did not heed Pon.

"All's well that ends well, what?" grinned Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where's Bunter? Anybody seen Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "Bunter's on the run! He doesn't know we're still camping here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Nothing had been seen of Bunter since he had disappeared out of the field-gate at 70 m.p.h. The juniors had forgotten his existence till this moment! And now they forgot it again as they proceeded to work to get the tent up again before it was quite dark.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Sat On!

"O H dear!" groaned Billy Bunter.

Bunter was up against it. He had cleared out of the disputed meadow as fast as his fat little legs would carry him; two licks of the colonel's Malacca being quite enough for Bunter! He had done a hundred yards up the lane, like a runaway steam-engine. Then, although he slackened speed, he kept on running. He expected, of course, that the hikers would soon be following. Not till he was a quarter of a mile ahead did Bunter come to a stop; and then he only stopped because his supply of wind had quite petered out. Gasping and gurgling for a fresh supply, the fat Owl of the Remove blinked round him, half expecting to see an angry old gentleman in pursuit with a brandished Malacca.

But there was no one to be seen, and Bunter sat down on a grassy bank by the roadside to rest.

Fortunately he had had his supper before these disastrous happenings. Nothing could have been more fortunate; for, otherwise, there would have been no supper for Bunter!

He sat and rested, while the sun sank lower behind the hills, and the shades of night, as a poet has already expressed it, were falling fast!

His eyes, and his spectacles, were fixed on the road by which the hikers would have followed him—if they had broken camp and marched.

They seemed a long time coming!

Considering the circumstances, at the moment when Billy Bunter had faded out of the picture, the fat junior was not likely to guess that the hikers, after all, were remaining at that camp.

He expected to see them every moment; but they did not happen. And sunset deepened into darkness, and still they did not happen!

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter.

He simply could not make out why they had not yet passed. The road was unmistakable; that was the way they would come, if they came at all. Bunter was not at all inclined to walk back and meet them on the way. He disliked walking, and he feared that the fierce old colonel might be still in the office. But he was very anxious to see them arrive. It was time to turn in, and he wanted his blankets in the tent.

"Beasts!" repeated Bunter for the umpteenth time.

They had not come—they were not coming! If they had started they must have taken a turning—just like the silly asses to lose their way, when Bunter was no longer with them! Or they might have camped by the roadside—Bunter thought now of that possibility.

He heaved himself to his feet at last. In spite of his dislike of exertion, and his dread of the fiery old colonel, he had to go back, if he was to sleep in the tent that night.

But he had left it rather late. The darkness in the country lanes was deep, and little relieved by the glimmering stars.

Any fellow but Bunter certainly could have found his way back a quarter of a mile; and the hikers had no doubt that he would turn up sooner or later.

But Bunter was not only short-sighted. He was obtuse and he was lazy. He came to a turning where a thoughtful rural district council had placed a wooden seat for weary wayfarers at the corner. Presently Bunter plumped down on that seat, for a few minutes' rest. When he restarted after the interval, he blinked round him in the deep shadows, in utter dismay. Having taken no note of the direction of the lanes when he sat down, he was no longer aware of the right route to follow. Which was the way he had just come? which was the way he wanted to go? and which was the new turning? was a puzzle to which Billy Bunter could not find the answer.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter, addressing space.

He blinked and he blinked and he blinked! Then it occurred to his fat brain that the camp might possibly be within hearing, and he yelled:

"I say, you fellows!"

"Fellows!" answered the echo from the wood along the lane.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Beasts!" came back, booming from the wood.

"I say. Where are you? Answer a chap! Beasts! I say, you fellows, I'm here!" bawled Bunter.

"Here!" answered the echo.

But there was no other answer! Evidently the hikers' camp, though it could not have been far off, was not within hearing of Billy Bunter's dulcet tones.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

He stood and blinked again! Then to make matters worse it came on to rain, and a rather chilly wind was rising! Bunter was tired, and he was getting sleepy. He had to find that camp!

Taking his chance of the right road, the fat Owl of the Remove started. He plugged on wearily; hoping every minute to sight the hikers' tent.

He was not really likely to sight it, for, as a matter of fact, he was going back the way he had come from the grassy bank where he had taken his first rest.

He was encouraged, however, by a feeling that the lane he was following seemed familiar! He was sure that he had passed this way before—and it did not yet occur to him when.

He plugged on manfully, gasping and grunting; and, at last, his fat little legs quite tired, he sank down on a grassy bank to rest.

Then it slowly but surely dawned on his fat brain that this was the grassy bank on which he had rested after his first flight from the hikers' field.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter.

He was back again where he had started from!

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

He felt that it was, somehow, the hikers' fault! It was always some comfort to Billy Bunter to feel that whatever happened, it was not his own fault!

Those beasts had turned in by this time, wherever they were, and were



As Colonel Ponsonby stopped on the slippery bridge and peered into the water, his eyeglass dropped from his fiery eye. He made a grab at it, and in so doing overbalanced and slipped. "Oh, my hat!" yelled Bob Cherry. "He's fallen into the water!"

fast asleep—never caring a straw about Bunter! Searching for him—not likely, Bunter reflected bitterly. After all he had done for them, they were leaving him to wander all over Warwickshire in the dark, and would not have cared if he had wandered all over Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, too! Not a straw!

He sat, and grunted and groused for a long, long time before he lifted his extensive weight for another march. Now, at all events, he knew the way—that was something. He had only to keep straight on, past that rural district council seat at the cross-roads, and he would arrive at the spot where he had left the hikers, if he did not find their camp on his way. There was one comfort in that—but not much, for Bunter was tired and fearfully sleepy. However, he started plugging along.

At last—at long, weary last—he arrived at the crossroads again. There was the wooden seat, dim in the darkness—beyond it, the lane Bunter had to follow. He was going to sit down and rest again—but experience, as the proverb states, makes fools wise; and this time Bunter carefully noted the direction before he sat down.

Then he approached the seat, and sat! The last time Bunter had sat on that seat it had been bare. Naturally, he supposed that it was bare now, in such a lonely place, late in the evening. He was short-sighted; and, anyhow, he was not a cat to see in the dark! He did not even look at the seat before he sat down.

How was Bunter to know that a weary

wayfarer, who had lost his way, had arrived at the seat at the crossroads?

How was Bunter to guess that the weary wayfarer, tired out and despairing of finding his way again in the dark, had lain down on that seat to rest, and had fallen asleep there?

How was Bunter to imagine that the unseen wayfarer was lying on his back, with his eyes shut and his mouth open, and with his head at the end of the seat nearest Bunter—the end, naturally, on which Bunter sat?

Bunter could not know these things! He could not guess these things! He just sat down—on the upturned face of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars!

He sat down hard and heavy, as was natural when he was so jolly tired; he plumped his weight down like a sack of coke.

The next moment he knew that it was not the hard, wooden seat he was sitting on! It was something softer.

It was something that moved with convulsive suddenness. It was something that emitted a startled gurgle!

"Urrrrrgh!"

"Oh crickey!" gasped Bunter.

"Wurrgh!" came in an agonised, suffocated gurgle from under Billy Bunter's extensive weight. "Yurrrrgh!"

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter. "What the—"

The figure on the seat heaved wildly. Hands grasped Billy Bunter and hurled him away; and the fat Owl of the Remove sat down in the grass, with a roar that awoke half the echoes of Warwickshire.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Within His Grasp!

CECIL PONSONBY came out of the french windows on the terrace of Ponsonby Park, and glared along in the shadows.

Two glowing cigarette-ends guided him, and he joined Gadsby and Monson, who were lounging against the stone balustrade, smoking.

"How's the old bean?" asked Gadsby, with a yawn.

"Caught a cold?" asked Monson.

"The old fool's gone to bed," answered Ponsonby. He spoke in a low voice. Even Pon did not want anybody but his confidential chums to hear him speaking of his uncle as an old fool! "I believe he's got a bit of a chill—I hope so!"

"You hope so?" repeated Gadsby, with a curious glance at Pon. Old Colonel Ponsonby had made his nephew and his nephew's two friends right welcome at his country house in Warwickshire, and had been kindness itself to the dandy of Highcliffe. Even Pon might have been expected to feel some faint glimmer of appreciation, if not gratitude. But anyone who crossed Pon's lofty will and pleasure, was sure to awaken his bitter rancour.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. "The old ass! I fancied I had those cads where I wanted them—I'd have enjoyed seein' them kicked into the road. And then that old idiot tumbles into the water, and one of them does a dramatic stunt pullin' him out, and he makes friends with them—pah! It's sickenin'!"

"Well, look here, Pon, it's jolly lucky that man Wharton pulled him out," said Gadsby. "He was drownin' under our eyes—"

"Rubbish! I don't suppose he was in any danger! Of course, those cads would make capital out of it."

Gadsby made no rejoinder to that. He knew that it was not true; as, indeed, Pon himself knew.

"Well, it happened, anyhow," said Monson. "They're in the old bean's good books now. Fact is, Pon, you did pile it on a bit, tellin' the old boy about them—he could see for himself they weren't the hooligans you made out, as soon as he clapped eyes on them—"

"It would have been all right, but for the old fool takin' that tumble. That dished it."

"Has he been jawin' you?" grinned Monson.

Ponsonby snarled.

"Yes; jolly nearly half an hour of it! Tellin' me what a fine fellow that rotter Wharton is, and advisin' me to make a friend of him when I go back to Highcliffe next term. As good as tellin' me, too, that I'd been lyin' about the cad—exaggeratin' he called it—"

"Well, you did a bit!" grinned Monson.

"Oh, chuck it! Look here!" Pon leaned on the balustrade, and lighted a cigarette. "It's turned out rotten, in a way—I'd liked to see those Greyfriars tramps chucked out on their necks; but where they are they're where we can get at them. We lost trace of them in Oxfordshire, and I began to think we'd never find them again—and then they come bargin' along here, where we're stayin'. Just askin' for it."

"Go slow," said Monson, shaking his head. "Your nunky's a bit crusty with you now, Pon. And if you ragged those rotters, after pretendin' to make friends—"

"They're not the fellows to come sneakin' to him and tellin' him," said Ponsonby. "They're cads, but they've got their limit. Besides, they can't swear to who it was mopped them up in the dark."

"Not good enough," said Gadsby. "There's six of them, without countin'—"

that flabby freak, Bunter; and we're only three. What's the good of goin' out collectin' black eyes and thick noses?"

"If you're funky—"

"Funky or not, I'm not goin'!" snapped Gadsby. "And if you want to know what I think, it's rotten to jump on the fellows who've just saved your uncle's life. Let 'em alone."

"Don't preach at me, you nincompoop! If you're funky, say so, an' stand out!" snarled Ponsonby. "You got cold feet, too, Monson?"

"Call it what you like, but I'm not wakin' up a hornet's nest in the middle of the night," answered Monson, shrugging his shoulders.

Pon eyed his friends evilly.

He was in a mood for any act of reckless ruffianism. But his friends had cooler heads, and perhaps better hearts. Anyhow, it was plain that they were not going to join him in an attack on the hikers' camp.

"You know what we're after them for," said Pon, after a savage pause. "There's fifty pounds' reward hangin' on to gettin' hold of that Holiday Annual that that brute Cherry carries in his rucsack. They'd be taken by surprise, and we could get hold of it."

"More likely to get a biff with it; in Cherry's paws," said Monson. "That's happened already, and I don't want it to happen again."

"Well, I'm goin' to chance it, anyhow," said Ponsonby. "Perhaps it would be safer to go quietly without givin' an alarm, and cut out the raggin'."

"Lots!" agreed Monson.

"It would suit you two funks better," sneered Ponsonby. "Well, come on, and leave it to me. You can stand by to help cover the retreat if the cads wake up and get after me."

Gadsby and Monson exchanged reluctant glances. Evidently they would have preferred to give the Greyfriars camp a wide berth. But they were Pon's guests, and a good deal under Pon's influence. And they did not like the hostile, threatening gleam in Pon's

eye. They gave in with a very reluctant assent.

Having finished their cigarettes, the three young rascals fetched their hats, and started.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and a dark night. There was little doubt that the hikers had long been in their blankets. And after a day's march it was probable that they were sleeping soundly.

The three Highcliffians followed the path through the woodland, and reached the bridge across the stream. From there they could see the hikers' tent in the starlight.

All was still and silent.

"Gone to sleep long ago," muttered Pon. "Come on!"

"We'll wait here," murmured Gadsby.

"Are you afraid of them when they've got their eyes shut?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Gadsby and Monson sulkily followed Pon towards the camp. A dozen yards from the tent they halted.

"I'm goin' no nearer," said Gadsby. "Ten to one you'll wake them, and they'll come whooping out after us like a mob of Red Indians."

"Wait here, then," growled Ponsonby.

And he stole forward on tiptoe by himself. Gadsby and Monson, with a furtive look at one another, backed away silently towards the bridge again. They had little faith in Pon's success. And they were very keen to keep the line of retreat open. If the hikers awakened and discovered the raiders, there were likely to be hard knocks going, and Gadsby and Monson had already captured all the hard knocks they wanted from Harry Wharton & Co.—and a few over. Standing on the bridge they peered after Ponsonby; but failed to see him in the deep gloom. They could only dimly make out the shape of the low tent. They waited.

Meanwhile, Ponsonby crept to the tent. The flap had been left open for air, and he could look in, though the inside was so black that he could see nothing. But he could hear the steady breathing of sleepers.

He turned on the light of his electric torch. It glimmered over six sleeping faces, calm and peaceful. He turned the glimmering beam to and fro, counting the sleepers; but there were only six. Bunter was not there. That did not matter to Pon. It made his task rather easier, as there was more room to move in the tent. He stepped in, and his eyes flashed to and fro in search of Bob Cherry's rucsack.

On the previous occasion he had snatched that rucsack from under Bob's sleeping head, but he had got away with it. But on the present occasion Pon's luck seemed to be in. In the beam of light he made out Bob's mop of flaxen hair, and saw that it was resting on a folded coat. The rucsack was somewhere else. And, making no sound, Pon searched the tent with his eyes, and spotted it at last.

It lay close by Bob, between him and the canvas of the tent. With beating heart Pon stepped closer, in dread every moment that one of the sleepers might awake. Stepping between Nugent and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, he stooped and grasped the rucsack.

Slowly, silently, he lifted it. Within it he could feel the shape of a large and rather heavy book. It was the much-disputed Holiday Annual, and it was in Pon's grasp at last—fairly within his grasp.

Silently, softly, like a thief in the



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night—as indeed he was—the dandy of Highlife stepped back to the opening of the tent.

He shut off the light and slipped the torch into his pocket. Then he stepped out, and crashed into an unseen figure that, at the moment, was entering. That utterly unexpected collision took Pon completely off his balance. He staggered back, caught his foot on one of the sleepers, and fell backwards with a crash, landing fairly on the slumbering hikers.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter on the Spot!

HORACE COKER awoke suddenly. He awoke very suddenly indeed.

Coker was a sound sleeper, and he was sleeping soundly, stretched on his back on the wayside bench at the crossroads.

But the soundest sleeper would have awakened had Billy Bunter sat on his

face as he slept. Rip Van Winkle would have opened his eyes on the spot.

Coker awoke, gurgled, gasped, guggled, and grabbed and heaved at the unknown heavy object that was squashing his features.

That object rolled off, bumped, and roared.

Coker sat up dizzily. "What the thump!" he gasped. "Is that you, Potter? Is that you, Greene? Who the thump—?"

(Continued on next page.)



Send your football queries to "Linesman," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. It's his job to answer knotty problems—and it's a job he likes!

AWARD OF PENALTY KICKS!

ONE of my readers wants to know if there have been any changes in the rules of football for the current season. The changes which have been made are not very important, but as I think that every player of every game should keep himself fully acquainted with the rules of the game he plays, we may as well mention here the changes, so as to be right up to date.

One of the rule changes of the current season refers to the award of penalty kicks. As you doubtless know, a referee can order a penalty kick even if the ball is outside the penalty area at the time when the offence is committed inside the penalty area. The old rule used to read that a penalty kick could be awarded irrespective of the position of the ball *if in the field of play*. The words *the field of play* have now been cut out of this rule, and a penalty kick can now only be awarded if the ball is in play.

Some people have wondered why such a seemingly slight alteration was considered worth while. I will tell you how it came about. There was a match being played in a certain competition last season. The ball had gone out of play, and had been placed in a position for a corner-kick. Thus the ball was in the field of play, but not in play, and there was a little trouble among the players who were waiting in the goalmouth for the ball to be swung across from the flag.

The referee awarded a penalty kick, and justified himself—quite rightly, as I thought, and quite smartly, too, by declaring that the ball was in the field of play.

The law-makers had to agree that the referee had interpreted the rule with literal correctness, but, of course, it was never meant to be so applied. That however, was not the referee's fault. Anyway, the alteration has now been made and the referee cannot now award a penalty kick unless the ball is actually in play at the time the offence is committed. Please note, however, that the right of the referee to award a penalty kick for penalty area offences when the ball is in play outside the penalty area has not been taken from him.

If a player is fouled by an opponent in the latter's penalty area, and the ball is in the opposite goal-mouth, a penalty may be given.

RULES NEED RE-DRAFTING!

ONE other football rule has been altered. This deals with the player who has been off the field for any cause. Previously, a player who had been off the field to have an injury attended to could dash on at any moment. And players often did dash on to help their side out of a tight corner. I have a recollection of a Barnsley player, some years ago, who had received an injury to his foot. His boot was taken off by the trainer, who was giving him attention just outside the touch-line. Suddenly, and while the player was still without his boot, his own side were in a tight corner. So, with one boot off and one boot on, the Barnsley man dashed into the fray and saved his side from losing a goal.

This ingenious fellow would be penalised under the new ruling, which now lays it down that a player who has been off the field for any reason must not come back on to the field until the ball has gone out of play, and must report to the referee his intention of coming back.

I want you to note in passing, however, that even this football rule—like so many other rules of the game—must not be taken too literally. There are plenty of occasions in every match on which a player goes outside the field of play for one reason only—that of playing the ball. The wingers go over the touch-line and outside the field of play every time they take a corner-kick. But, of course, they need not report to the referee before they come back. One of these days I shall succeed. I hope, in persuading the law-makers of football to re-draft and re-write the whole of the rules, with a view to making each rule mean no more—and no less—than it says. But I am afraid I shall have to keep pegging away at this subject for quite a long time.

DEVELOPING YOUNG FOOTBALLERS!

THESE early days of a new football season are very important ones for all the football clubs. It is not strictly true that in football a good start is half the battle. All the same, I am a great believer in the virtues of a good start. A win or two at the beginning of the season puts everybody connected with the team on good terms with themselves. The players get confident too, and that helps. On the other

hand, when a bad start is made to the season the effect may be disastrous. The people in charge of the team may get panicky, and make wholesale changes which only drive the side from bad to worse. I am not in favour of a big number of changes in a side merely because two or three matches have been lost.

I think that much the more sensible course was the one taken by the manager of a club some little time ago. The team had made a very bad start. The manager scarcely knew what to do. He tried changes, but these had no good effects. So one day he sat down and did some quiet thinking. From among his players he picked out what he thought was the best possible eleven. Then he sent for these eleven players, and addressed them something like this.

"The team has made a very bad start, but I believe you lot can pull the 'side round. I have made up my mind that, barring accidents, I shall play you eleven men for the next six matches no matter what happens. I shall not change that decision even if you lose by a record score." The manager was as good as his word. He stuck to that eleven for the next six matches, but even before the fourth had been played he would not have changed it even if he had not made the previous decision. The eleven players who had been trusted pulled the side round to a winning way.

There were two reasons for this. The players themselves knew that they had the confidence of the management. That was one reason. The other reason was that the players who were kept together, without any change in the make-up of the side, got to know each other better, and consequently played the more effective football.

I commend this idea to all those in charge of a football team which has made a bad start to the season.

Just now the Corinthians Football Club, with the assistance of the Arsenal Club, are trying a scheme for the development of young footballers. I shall watch very closely for the results of this scheme because I am convinced that the boys who are able to make use of it should develop into better footballers. For the boys who are lucky enough to be able to avail themselves of this scheme will attend classes, and, like the classes at school, there will be a real teacher—an expert at the game who is also a competent coach. Team tactics, correct training, equipment, food values, and so on, will be talked about in the classes. Then there will be lessons given on the field of play. As only a limited number of boys will, however, be able to attend these classes I have got some additional information as to how they will be conducted, and will pass it on to you next week.

Meantime, don't forget to write me on football topics—any football topic in which you are interested will interest me.

"LINESMAN."

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Since his meeting with the hikers far back on the road, when they had left him for dead, Coker of the Fifth had covered miles and miles.

He had been hunting for Potter and Greene, but he might as well have hunted for needles in a haystack.

His long legs felt as if they had marched all over the county of Warwick from end to end; and really Coker might have done so, without discovering his friend, for Potter and Greene, having taken a train at the nearest station, were no longer in that county at all.

Hiking with Coker had lost its charms, if any, for Potter and Greene of the Greyfriars Fifth. When matters reached the stage of Coker, in lofty wrath, banging their heads together, Potter and Greene had got into a fed-up state, which was not surprising, though it seemed to have surprised Horace Coker.

Potter and Greene, like the guests in Macbeth, had stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once. And Coker might have roamed through Warwickshire, from Leicester to Worcester, without finding them.

It was not till quite late in the evening that Coker had realised that Potter and Greene were hopelessly lost, by which time he also made the interesting discovery that he was hopelessly lost himself. Hence his resting on the wayside seat, and the weary slumber from which Billy Bunter's weight, dropping on his face, had awakened him.

Coker rubbed his face, which felt rather hurt. Indeed, he had a feeling that his nose had been pushed through the back of his head. It hadn't, but undoubtedly it felt as if it had.

Billy Bunter sat in the grass, almost at his feet, roaring. Bunter was startled, as well as Coker. Also, he had hit Warwickshire hard, when Coker heaved him off. He sat and bellowed.

"What the thump—who the dickens—what—" stuttered Coker. He rose from the bench, and groped at the bellowing object in the grass. His finger and thumb closed like a steel vice on a fat ear, and he jerked William George Bunter to his feet. "Who—what—"

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Leggo my ear, you beast! You're pulling it off! Who-hooop!"

"Bunter!" hooted Coker. "You fat freak—"

"Ow! Beast!"

"So that Remove gang's round here—what?" said Coker. "I was rather hoping I should come across you again. I owe you a jolly good whooping all round. Where are the other cheeky young sweeps, Bunter?"

"Ow! Leggo! Wow!"

"I'll begin with you," said Coker; and he began with Bunter. All the Greyfriars hikers, of course, deserved to be thrashed in the most thorough-going manner for having ventured to lay their hands upon the lofty person of Horace James Coker, of the Fifth Form! Only one of them, apparently, was at hand, so Coker started on that one!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Oh crickey! Help! Yaroooh!"

Whooop!" roared Bunter.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Yaroooooooop!"

Billy Bunter wriggled desperately in Coker's mighty grasp. He had no more chance in a tussle with Coker than a fat snail in a tussle with an elephant. But Bunter was desperate! He put down his bullet head and butted.

Fortunately—for Bunter, not Coker—

Bunter's bullet head landed where Coker kept his supply of breath!

That supply of breath was knocked right out of Coker by the crash!

"Oooooogh!" gurgled Coker.

He staggered, and released Bunter! He clasped both hands to the spot where the fat Owl's bullet head had crashed, and gurgled horribly.

Bunter lost no time.

Generally his movements were slow. But at this moment a flash of lightning had nothing on Bunter!

The instant Coker's hefty grasp relaxed, he flew.

Panting, the fat Owl of the Remove bolted down the lane which led to the hikers' camp. He had wanted a rest, when he sat on Coker's face. Now he was not feeling the need of a rest. He was feeling the pressing need of placing wide spaces between himself and Coker.

But Coker did not pursue. Coker was winded! Coker sat, or rather fell, on the wayside seat again, pressing both hands to his equator, and gurgling hideously. Bunter vanished into the night, leaving Coker uttering weird, horrible, and ghastly sounds, such as were seldom heard even in a jazz band.

Bunter did not stay to listen to Coker's musical efforts. He did the dark lane at racing speed!

Not till his fat little legs refused to run farther did Bunter stop. Then he staggered against a tree, gasping.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

There was no sound of pursuit. He was done with Coker. That, at least, was a relief. Bunter was tired of the wild adventures of that exciting night. Having rested and recovered his breath, the Owl of Greyfriars blinked round him, and restarted. As a matter of fact, he was now within a score of yards of the meadow where the hikers had camped, though he was still unaware that they had camped there.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter. "Where are they? Dodging a chap very likely— Oh lor! Where have the beasts got to?"

There was no sign of the hikers camping in the lane. But Bunter, as he plunged woefully on, came to the gateway of the meadow, and, blinking in, saw the hikers' tent, dim in the starlight, near the glistening stream. He blinked at it in wonder.

Evidently, the Greyfriars hikers had camped in that field, after all. They must have fixed matters somehow with that fierce old gentleman! There was the tent—and, obviously, they were in it—fast asleep, the awful rotters, and not even dreaming of Bunter!

Anyhow, the fat wanderer was home at last. He thought with a deep yearning of his blankets. Tired and sleepy, the hikers' tent was a gladsome sight to Billy Bunter's eyes.

He tramped through the gateway and approached the tent. All was dark and silent—evidently the hikers were asleep. But it seemed to Bunter that he caught a wink of glimmering light in the tent through the open flap, for a moment. It was gone again, and all was dark.

He rolled on wearily.

He reached the tent, and rolled in—and crashed into Cecil Ponsonby coming out! It was really a night of surprises for Billy Bunter! Sitting on Coker's face had surprised him! Now he was surprised again by bumping headlong into a fellow sneaking out of a tent where he had supposed that all the occupants were fast asleep.

But surprised as Bunter was, he was not so surprised as Harry Wharton & Co., over whom Ponsonby went sprawling backwards.

An elbow jammed in Bob Cherry's eye,

and another in Wharton's ear. A foot crashed into Frank Nugent's neck. Johnny Bull gave a muffled howl, under Ponsonby, who was sprawling bodily across his face. The startled hikers started up on all sides.

"Oh crickey!" spluttered Billy Bunter. "Who—what—I say, you fellows, who bumped into me? Beasts! Playing larks on a fellow!"

"Owl! Wow! Gerroff!"

"Oh, my hat! Wow!"

"Who's banged that blinking rucksack on my face?" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Bob, you ass, it's yours—I can feel that blessed Holiday Annual in it, bangin' on my nose, by gad! You silly ass—"

"Who the thump—"

"Get a light!"

"Who's got that torch? Who's got a match?"

"Oh, great Scott!"

Ponsonby scrambled up desperately. Mauleverer had grasped the rucksack, which had bumped on his face. Nugent had grasped Ponsonby by the ankle, which belonged to the foot jamming into Nugent's neck. Who it was the hikers had no idea—indeed, they had no idea of what was happening, except that something had bumped down on them and startled them out of slumber. It was not Bunter, for though they could hear the voice of the returned Owl, it came from the opening of the tent; Bunter was outside.

"Scrag him!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Banging his silly rucksack on a fellow's nose in the middle of the night—have you gone off your silly dot, Bob Cherry?"

"I didn't!" gurgled Bob. "I haven't! I—I wasn't! Somebody's bunged an elbow in my eye."

"Is somebody here?" gasped Wharton.

"Oh, where the thump are those matches?"

"I've got somebody by the leg," gasped Nugent. "Who is it?"

Only a wrench at the captured leg answered. Ponsonby wrenched wildly to get away before there was a light. But Nugent held on. A match glimmered out, and Harry Wharton held it up. Then there was a yell:

"Pon!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

To March or Not to March!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Ponsonby!"

"That Highcliffe cad!"

Harry Wharton lighted the lantern that hung on the tentpole. The hikers' tent was illuminated now. Ponsonby, desperate, was still struggling; but Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull had hold of him, and Lord Mauleverer was still grasping the rucksack that Pon had captured. The dandy of Highcliffe was a prisoner.

"You, you cur!" said Wharton, looking at him.

"That's my rucksack he's got hold of!" said Bob. "We know what the rotter wanted here."

"Yaas! I knew it was your Holiday Annual bangin' on my nose," remarked Lord Mauleverer. "I thought you were larkin', you see! My nose is jolly well damaged!"

"Pon's is going to be!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"There's that fat idiot Bunter! He's wandered back," said Johnny Bull.

"Looks as if we shall never lose him!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Looks as if he wandered in at the right moment for once," said Harry.



As Ponsonby stepped out of the tent he crashed into Billy Bunter who was entering. Crash! The utterly unexpected collision took the Highcliffe junior completely off his balance. He staggered back and, with a crash, landed fairly on the slumbering Greyfriars hikers!

Wharton. "Did you knock Pon over on us, Bunter?"

"Eh? What? Exactly!" said Bunter promptly. "Knowing that he was here, stealing Bob's rucksack, I knocked him spinning, you know."

"You fat, lyin' rotter!" snarled Ponsonby. "I'd like to see you knock me spinnin'. You barged in as I was goin' out, you lyin' toad."

"Oh, really, Ponsonby—"

"The bargefulness of the esteemed Bunter was an absurd fortunate circumstance," chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The estimable and dishonest Ponsonby would have bagfully snaffled the plunder."

"Right man in the right place, you know," said Bunter. "That's me, all over! Don't you fellows take any notice of that Highcliffe cad! I knocked him down—just as I did Coker an hour ago, up the road!"

"Will you let me go?" hissed Ponsonby.

"What about marching him up to the house and letting the jolly old colonel see exactly the sort of rotter his nephew is?" suggested Johnny Bull.

Ponsonby caught his breath.

"It would serve him right," said Harry. "But— Oh, kick him out! He hasn't got what he came for, anyhow!"

"He's going to get what he didn't come for," said Bob, "and that's a jolly good kicking!"

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

"Yank him out, then!" growled Johnny Bull.

Ponsonby was yanked out of the tent. His face was white with fury as he

went. He had failed once more, when success was within his grasp.

As the hikers hustled him out of the tent he cast a glance round in the faint hope of seeing Gadsby and Monson running to the rescue. But he did not see them. Gadsby and Monson were running—but it was in the opposite direction. They had heard the uproar from the tent, and they knew that Pon had made a failure of it—as they had fully expected! And they had lost no time in taking their departure.

"Kick him!"

"All together!"

"I say, you fellows, give a fellow room!"

Ponsonby fairly flew. He stumbled over in the grass and scrambled up, panting with rage, and ran for the bridge. He was across it in a twinkling and running, and he vanished into the dim night.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Now it's Bunter's turn," said Johnny Bull. "We owe him a jolly good kicking for spoofing us about getting leave to camp here. This way, Bunter!"

"Why, you beast," exclaimed Bunter indignantly, "if that's how you thank a chap for chipping in and saving you from being robbed—"

"Fancy Bunter coming in useful, for once," remarked Bob Cherry. "Of course, a fellow ought to try to be useful when he can't possibly be ornamental."

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I've had a fearful time," said Bunter. "I'm awfully tired, and I'm getting hungry. What about getting me another supper while I take a rest! Wake me up when it's ready."

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'm not joking!" hooted Bunter.

"Anybody want to stay up and cook another supper for Bunter?" inquired Bob Cherry. "Don't all speak at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the sort of gratitude I expect from you fellows!" said Bunter bitterly. "Talk about a child's tooth being sharper than an ungrateful serpent! Yah!"

And Bunter rolled into the tent. The hikers followed him, and were soon in their blankets again and sleeping—lulled, perhaps, by Billy Bunter's hefty snore!

When the September sun rose over the hills and dales of Warwickshire the hikers turned out. They had accepted Colonel Ponsonby's kind invitation to camp on his land—but, in the circumstances, they were rather anxious to get off it. Accepting the old gentleman's hospitality while scrapping with his nephew made the position a little too awkward. If there was more trouble with Pon they preferred it to happen at a distance from Ponsonby Park.

So there was an early breakfast. Billy Bunter's objections to early rising were overcome by the simple process of rolling him, like a barrel, out of the tent. After breakfast the hikers were about to break camp, when a tall and angular figure came across the little bridge, and an eyeglass—a new one evidently—gleamed at the Greyfriars fellows.

(Continued on page 16.)



COKE, THE HIKER!

(Continued from page 13.)

"Good-morning!" barked Colonel Ponsonby.

"Oh, good-morning, sir!" answered the hikers.

"Up early—what?" said the colonel, with an approving grunt.

"The earliness to bed and the early risefulness are the ways to be healthy and wealthily wise, esteemed sahib," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

The colonel grinned.

"Oh, quite!" he said. "Don't be in a hurry to break camp. Glad to see you here, begad! I'd like my nephew to see more of you, too."

Thinking of Pon's nocturnal raid, and of their intention of marching quite, quite early, the hikers coloured a little.

"Any of you care for riding?" went on the colonel. "Look here, walk up to the house; look at my horses. You'd like scampering over the fields on horseback—what? Well, trot along—what, what?"

"You're awfully good, sir!" said Harry, hardly knowing what to say. In the face of this hospitable kindness it was hardly possible to stick to the intention to get off as quickly as possible. Obviously Uncle Ponsonby was not made of the same stuff as Nephew Ponsonby.

"Not at all! Glad! Any of you, or all of you, any time in the morning, you'll find me about," said Colonel Ponsonby, and, with a nod to the hikers, he turned and marched away stiffly across the bridge again.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry, when he was gone. "Jolly old scout, and no mistake! His bark's worse than his bite—what?"

"A lot worse," said Harry, with a smile. "We can't very well refuse. And I must say I'd like to sample his horseflesh."

"Same here."

"The samefulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, you keep an eye on me and I'll show you how to ride, you know," remarked Billy Bunter.

"Who wants to ride like a sack of coke?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"One of us had better stick here and guard camp," said Bob. "Uncle Pon is true blue, but Nephew Pon would jump at the chance of ragging the camp if we left it unguarded. I don't think dear old Pon is frightfully pleased by his uncle taking to us like this."

"Not fearfully," said Nugent, laughing. "Bunter can stay and mind the camp as he can't ride—"

"Who can't ride?" yelled Bunter indignantly.

"You can't, old podgy porker!"

"You cheeky ass! I'm jolly well going!" roared Bunter. "I have jolly nearly everything put on me already; but you're not diddling me into sticking here all the morning, I can tell you! Yah!"

"If Pon comes along you can yell for help," said Bob.

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"I shan't be here; I'm going riding, had not the slightest suspicion that three treacherous young rascals were creeping on him from behind.

"I'll stay, you men," said Lord

Mauleverer.

"Rats! You won't! You're keener on backing a gee-gee than any of us," said Harry. "Toss up for it."

"Yes, that's a good idea," said Bunter. "You fellows toss up for it; leave me out, as I'm going riding, anyway."

"Kick him!"

"Beast!"

The juniors tossed for odd man out, and the lot fell to Bob Cherry.

"All serene!" said Bob cheerfully.

"I'll get the washing-up done while you fellows are witching the world with noble horsemanship—as jolly old Shakespeare puts it. Have a good time!"

And Bob whistled cheerily, if not musically, while the other fellows crossed the bridge and disappeared in the wood on their way to the house.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

"ONLY that rotter!" said Ponsonby.

"Um!" said Gadsby and Monson dubiously.

Pon & Co. were sauntering along the lane by the camping meadow and they paused at the gate. Far away from the hikers' camp Harry Wharton & Co. were enjoying a scamper on horseback. Pon scowled at the sight of Bob Cherry carrying a bucket of water from the stream for washing-up.

"You fancied there'd be nobody here!" grunted Monson.

"They're too jolly cute!" said Gadsby. "They know jolly well that Pon would be lookin' for a chance at them."

"Well, I thought they'd all go when I suggested to my uncle to take them ridin'," growled Pon. "But I suppose we couldn't expect them to leave the place unguarded. Anyhow, there's only one of them here."

"Heftiest beast of the lot," said Monson.

"Are you afraid of a Greyfriars cad—three to one?" sneered Ponsonby. "If you are, we can sneak round through the trees and get him from behind. We can tie the brute up while we get hold of that dashed Holiday Annual. We're on to a good thing this time."

"Oh, all right!"

Gadsby and Monson were not enthusiastic. Still, it did seem an easy thing, three to one, especially if Bob was taken by surprise. And he did not seem to be much on the alert. As a matter of fact, Bob was thinking chiefly of clearing up and getting a lunch ready for his comrades when they returned, and hardly remembered the unpleasant existence of Cecil Ponsonby. Neither would he have hesitated to tackle the three slackers of Highcliffe all at once if they barged in.

Three to one as they were, Pon & Co. were very cautious. They had tackled Bob three to one before, with unhappy results for themselves. Hard hitting was not in their line at all.

They passed on to the wood by the lane, entered the trees, and came round the rear of the camp. From the cover of the trees they watched Bob Cherry. He was now seated on a camp-stool near the tent, engaged in scouring the frying-pan, whistling cheerily as he scoured.

"Easy as pie!" murmured Pon.

Gadsby and Monson nodded.

They crept out of the trees almost on tiptoe behind the unconscious Greyfriars fellow.

Scouring and whistling, Bob Cherry

had not the slightest suspicion that three treacherous young rascals were creeping on him from behind.

He was not aware of the presence of Pon & Co. till they were close enough to spring on him, and then they all sprang together.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

The camp-stool went over, the frying-pan crashed into the grass, and Bob sprawled over it, in the grasp of the three.

Ponsonby jammed a knee into the small of his back, pinning him down.

"Ow!" gasped Bob.

"Got the cad!" snarled Ponsonby.

"Hold him! Get that cord round his paws—quick! Jam his head on the ground if he howls."

"You rotters!" gasped Bob, struggling fiercely. "You funky cads! Let me get up and I'll thrash the three of you, and glad of the chance!"

But Pon & Co., having got the champion fighting-man of the Greyfriars Remove down, were not likely to let him get up again.

Even taken at such a disadvantage, Bob Cherry put up a hefty struggle, and they had their hands full with him.

But he was pinned down, and his wrists were dragged together at last and a cord knotted round them.

Then Pon & Co. released him and scrambled to their feet, panting and breathless.

"We win, I think!" grinned Ponsonby.

Bob gasped for breath.

"You cur! Let my hands loose! I'll jolly well bang your features through the back of your head for this!"

"My turn to do the bangin', old bean!" chuckled Pon, and he reached over and gave Bob's nose a tweak.

"Urrrrrrgh!" gurgled Bob.

"Hallo, he's tryin' to kick!" said Pon. "Tie his legs, too!"

"Oh, leave him alone!" said Gadsby.

"Tie his hoofs, I tell you! Here's a tent-ropes. I'll cut it. It doesn't matter if we damage their rubbish."

With a cut tent-ropes Bob's ankles were tied together, after another scrambling struggle.

Then he lay quite helpless, crimson with wrath, and glaring defiance at the young rascals of Highcliffe.

Gadsby glanced round rather anxiously.

"My hat! If your jolly old uncle should barge in just now, Pon!" he murmured.

"He won't," answered Pon coolly. "He's gone to the other end of the estate with those rotters. They're a good mile off. We're all right."

"You won't be when I get at you!" gasped Bob.

"You're not gettin' at us in a hurry!" said Ponsonby. "Where's that Holiday Annual, you Greyfriars bargee?"

"Find out!"

"I'll find out fast enough—from you!" said Pon, taking up the frying-pan.

"Turn him over, you men!"

"Look here!" muttered Gadsby.

"You're not goin' to pitch into a fellow with his hands tied, Pon!"

"That's exactly what I'm goin' to do," answered Pon coolly. "That sort of bargee is safer with his paws tied. Turn him over!"

"I'm not goin' to touch him!" grunted Gadsby sulkily.

"Turn him over, Monson!"

"Oh, all right!"

Bob Cherry was rolled over in the grass. Ponsonby flourished the frying pan by the handle.

"Where's that book I want?" he asked.

"Find out!" roared Bob. Whack!
 "Oh crumbs! Ow!"
 "They whacked me with this jolly old fryin'-pan once when they got hold of me, back in Oxfordshire, a week ago," remarked Ponsonby. "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Where's that Holiday Annual, Cherry?"
 "You rotter!"
 Whack, whack, whack!
 "Oh crikey! Oh, you cad! Yaroooh!" roared Bob Cherry, wriggling wildly.
 "Look here, we can find it in the tent, Pon," said Gadsby. "It's bound to be somewhere near at hand—"
 "Shut up, Gaddy!"
 Whack, whack, whack, whack!
 Pon was enjoying this. He was paying off many an old score, and paying them off with interest. It was the first chance he had had of thrashing Bob Cherry, and he was making the most of it. The whacks from the flat of the frying-pan came down hard and fast.
 "Ow! Oh! Ow! Rescue!" roared Bob, in the faint hope that his friends might be within hearing. "Rescue, Remove! Rescue, Greyfriars! Whoop!"
 Harry Wharton & Co. were far out of hearing. But, as it happened, there were other ears to hear!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Horace Takes a Hand!

HORACE COKER stared. "My only hat!" ejaculated Coker.
 He fairly blinked.
 Coker of the Fifth was looking rather dusty and rumpled and untidy, and he was feeling fearfully hungry as he tramped along the shady Warwickshire lane that sunny September morning. Having passed the night sleeping on the wooden seat at the cross-roads, Coker had wakened rather stiff and rather cross. Coker had quite given up, by this time, the idea of finding Potter and Greene. He realised at long last that those two youths, for reasons unknown to Coker, had got fed-up with the hike and vanished for good.
 Hiking on his lonely own did not appeal much to Coker, and his idea was, first to get to some inhabited place where he could obtain breakfast, and then to take the train for home. That was how Coker came to be tramping down the lane past the hikers' field, and at quite a little distance the uplifted voice of Bob Cherry fell on his ears.
 Halting at the gate, Coker stared across the field.

He spotted the hikers' tent, and the scene that was going on near it. Coker had rather hoped to spot the Remove hikers so that he could mete out to them the punishment they richly deserved. But at the sight of a Greyfriars junior with his limbs tied, and a Highcliffe fellow thrashing with a frying-pan, all Coker's hostility to the Removeites vanished on the spot. Coker was not the fellow to let this kind of thing go on without intervening.

Having stared blankly at the scene for nearly a minute, Coker came through the gateway. He came up to the hikers' camp at a run.

Pon, whacking with the frying-pan, had no eyes for anything but his victim. Gadsby and Monson were watching him; the former frowning, the latter grinning. None of them saw Coker.

He arrived like a bolt from the blue. "You young rotter!" roared Coker, as he arrived breathlessly.

He grasped Ponsonby by the collar and dragged him back.

"Oh gad!" gasped Pon. "Who—what—"

"Rescue!" yelled Bob.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Yooooop!" shrieked Ponsonby, as Coker smacked his head right and left with large and heavy hands. "Ow! Wow! Help me, you fools! Back up, you funks! Yaroooooop!"

"Oh crikey! Coker!" gasped Bob Cherry, wriggling over and contriving to sit up. "Good old Coker! Go it!"

"Help me!" screamed Ponsonby.

Gadsby and Monson half-heartedly advanced. Coker smacked out, and Monson spun over as if a flail had hit him.

Gadsby did not wait to be smacked. He jumped back in time. And Monson did not stop for a second smack. He squirmed promptly out of reach.

Then Coker restarted on Ponsonby. Smack, smack, smack, smack! rang his heavy hands, while Pon struggled and roared and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry. "Go it!"

Ponsonby wrenched himself free at last and ran. Gadsby and Monson were already running. The three disappeared across the bridge.

"I fancy that young scoundrel will remember that!" panted Coker. "Ow! I've made my hands ache on his head!"

"I fancy his head will ache more than your hands, old bean," grinned Bob. "Mind untying me, Coker?"

Coker released the Remove junior. Having done so, he regarded him with a rather grim eye.

"I owe you a jolly good hiding," he remarked. "But you seem to have had one, from that young Highcliffe cad."

"Let it go at that, old bean," answered Bob good humouredly.

He did not want a row with Coker, just after Horace had rescued him from the Highcliffians.

"I'll let it go at that!" agreed Coker.

"But not so much of your 'old bean,' I don't like it, from fags!"

Bob Cherry chuckled. Coker had rushed to the rescue, and Bob was duly grateful; but Coker was always Coker! "Had your brekker?" asked Bob, tactfully changing the subject.

"No. I've been looking for a show where I can get one!" grunted Coker.

"Have it here, then," said Bob. "Lots of stuff, and I'll get it for you and welcome!"

Coker thawed very considerably. As a matter of fact, he was fearfully, frightfully hungry. He had a healthy appetite, and he had had no supper the previous night. Breakfast, just then, was a very important consideration to Coker of the Fifth. And a Remove fellow fagging at getting breakfast for Coker of the Fifth was a right and proper state of affairs, from Coker's point of view, at least.

"Thanks!" said Coker.

He set up the camp-stool and sat down on it. Bob Cherry, wriggling a little from the effects of the frying-pan, lighted the cooking-stove and proceeded to cook. The savoury odour of frying bacon and eggs and kidneys was grate-

ful and comforting to the hungry Horace.

"Where are the other fags?" asked Coker, when Bob set an ample and substantial breakfast before him.

"Gone riding with the jolly old sportsman w h o

owns this place," answered Bob. "I was guarding camp when those rotters caught me napping. Jolly glad you happened along, Coker! Pon would have got away with it this time, and no mistake."

"Was he after something?" asked Coker. "I thought the young rotter was just pitching into you."

"He was after my Holiday Annual," grinned Bob. "Pon's been tracking us all through the hols to bag it."

Coker, his mouth full of bacon, stared.

"What the thump does he want your Holiday Annual for?" he asked. "He could buy one at any newsagents."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Mine's a rather special one," he explained. "You remember the smash-and-grab raid at Courtfield, just before the end of the term at Greyfriars?"

"Eh! Yes! What about it?"

"The man got away with a bagful of jewellery, after smashing old Lazarus' shop window," said Bob.

"They got him, and they got his confederates. But the jewellery is still missing, and there's a reward of fifty pounds for the finder!"

"I believe I've heard of it," said Coker. "But what—"

"It seems that when the smash-and-grab man was on the run he got hold of Bunter, who had my Holiday Annual, and tried to send a message to the other thief," said Bob. "Pon was spying, and he thinks that the message was put in my Holiday Annual, and that if he can get hold of it he will be able to snaffle the fifty pounds reward for finding the loot."

"What rot!" said Coker.

"Well, I dare say it's rot, but Pon seems frightfully keen on it," said Bob.

"He's after that Holiday Annual like a dog after a bone. We've looked through it a dozen times, but we can't find any secret passage in it. Pon thinks he would have better luck if he snooped it."

"I'll look at it," said Coker. "If there's anything in it I shall spot it at once, of course. You fags are rather fools, you know."

"You cheeky ass—"

"What?" roared Coker.

"I—I mean—" stammered Bob, remembering that he owed his rescue, and the preservation of the Holiday Annual to Horace Coker. "I—I—I'll get it! If you spot anything in it about the loot, of course, we shall hand it over to the police at once, so that they can find the stuff."

"I should make you do that, of course," said Coker calmly.

Bob opened his lips to reply, but again he remembered what he owed to Coker, and did not answer. Speech might be silver, but silence was golden, in dealing with Coker of the Fifth. Bob really did not want to have to bang him with the frying-pan.

He went into the tent and sorted out his breakfast and then took the volume.

"I'll look through it," he remarked.

"If there's anything in it I shan't be long spotting it. You've been jolly careless with this book, Cherry—most

(Continued on next page.)



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of the pages are scorched! You're a careless young ass!"

"You see—"

"Don't talk!" said Coker.

Again Bob Cherry suppressed his feelings. Coker sat at ease in the grass, turning page after page of the Holiday Annual, and Bob busied himself with the duties of the camp, which Pon & Co.'s attack had interrupted.

Coker, as a matter of fact, was rather keen and curious about the Holiday Annual after what Bob had told him. He examined it with very great care. If there was, as Ponsonby certainly believed, a secret message in the book, from one crook to another, telling where the lost plunder was hidden, the discovery was worth making, and Coker had no doubt that he would make it. Brains, of course, were needed for this sort of thing, and Coker was far from suspecting that he was short of that necessary article. If the secret was there, Coker was going to spot it. If he failed to spot it, obviously it could not be there.

The latter, it seemed, was the case. After about an hour with the Holiday Annual Coker gave it up.

"All rot!" he pronounced. "That young rotter Ponsonby is a fool to think there's any secret message in this book, and you fags are fools to take any notice of his rot—fools all round! And that's that!"

Bob Cherry glanced round from peeling potatoes, and smiled genially.

"Think so?" he asked.

"I don't think so—I know," said Coker. "You can take it from me that it's all rubbish! You're rotten careless with your books, Cherry—lots of the pages are scorched, and pencil scrawled, and all that—"

"I don't remember scrawling with a pencil—"

"Just slovenliness," said Coker—"a book like this is worth taking care of."

"If there's anything pencilled in that book, let's see it—"

"Only a scratch like a cross scrawled on a page! There's no writing in the book," said Coker. "As I've said, young Ponsonby is a fool, and you're another. But I'll tell you what—there's a jolly good story in this book—a South Sea story—and I'm jolly well going to read it. Shut up and keep quiet while a fellow reads!"

Coker stretched his long limbs in the grass, rested his chin on his hands, with the Holiday Annual open and upturned, and started reading. Bob Cherry, as bidden, duly shut up, feeling quite glad that Coker, on his side, had shut up—a thing Coker seldom did! And so the sunny September morning passed quite pleasantly till Harry Wharton & Co. came back from their ride.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Bombshell!

"COKER!" murmured Harry Wharton, as the chums of the Remove came across the bridge into the camping field.

"The esteemed and ludicrous Coker!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"The jolly old lion and the jolly old lamb," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "I fancied that Coker would be on the warpath, if we met him again."

"Looks peaceful enough, begad!" remarked Lord Mauleverer.

"I say, you fellows, we don't want Coker here," said Billy Bunter. "I knocked him down last night—"

"I can see you doing it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

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"Well, I jolly well did—and the beast will be kicking up a shindy about it, and—"

Billy Bunter blinked at Coker of the Fifth very uneasily through his big spectacles.

"Well, if he kicks up a shindy that's all right," said Harry. "You can knock him down again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter grunted. He dropped behind the chums of the Remove as they walked into camp. The juniors had enjoyed a scamper on horseback, with the exception of Billy Bunter, who had fallen off and stayed off. On second thoughts—often the best—Bunter had decided that he preferred terra firma to the uncertainty of a saddle, and he had not, after all, shown the other fellows how to ride. He had found an orchard and apples, which he really liked better than riding. Bunter was feeling, on the whole, quite pleased with his morning, but he was not pleased to see Coker of the Fifth. He eyed that hefty and long-limbed youth very uneasily.

All the fellows were surprised—not so much to see Coker there but to see him so peaceful. Apparently he was on quite friendly terms with Bob Cherry, which was extremely unexpected. Coker had just finished reading that excellent South Sea story when the juniors came back, and he was sitting up in the grass speaking to Bob in quite a benevolent manner—for Coker!

"Jolly good book!" said Coker. "I advise you to take better care of it, young Cherry!"

"Thanks!" said Bob meekly.

"Not at all!" said Coker graciously. "As a Fifth Form senior it's my duty to give advice to silly fags, and whop them too, if necessary. I say, that stuff you're cooking smells all right! You seem to be able to cook! You're not such a fool as you look, Cherry."

"I'd say the same of you, Coker, if I wasn't so jolly truthful—"

"Eh?"

"I—I—I mean, stay to lunch and sample the stuff!" said Bob hastily. "Here come the other fellows—they'll all be glad to see you when I tell them how you stood by me."

Coker glanced round at the juniors coming up. He seemed thoughtful.

"I'll stay," he said. "It's a bit infra dig to mix up with a lot of fags; still, we're not at Greyfriars now, and there's no need to mention it there next term, see?"

"Oh, my hat! I mean yes, quite!" gasped Bob.

The Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer arrived. Coker gave them a nod. That was rather civil of Coker! He had, of course, not very much civility to waste on Lower Fourth fags! They could consider themselves lucky, in Coker's opinion, not to be thrashed all round, as they deserved!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" sang out Bob cheerily. "Had a good time?"

"Ripping!" answered Harry. "The old colonel is a jolly old sportsman, and he's got some jolly good horses. Hallo, Coker!"

"Pon's been here," said Bob. "He came with the other two cads, and they had me in a fix, and Coker barged in and mopped them up. Pon would have got away with the Holiday Annual this time, if Coker hadn't happened! And I should have got the ragging of my life! They didn't stay long to argue with Coker."

"Oh!" said Harry. The juniors understood now the unexpected state of affable peace that reigned between the lion and the lamb! "That was jolly good of you, Coker, especially after the

way we handled you yesterday. Stay to lunch, old tulip?"

"I'm going to lunch here," said Coker. "But don't call me old tulip! It's cheek!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"And don't cackle when I speak!" added Coker.

"Well, you're really enough to make a cat laugh, ain't you, Coker?" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Look here—" roared Coker.

"Order, my infants!" interposed Bob Cherry. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, Coker weighed in like a good little man, and got me out of a fearful fix. Pon & Co. had me tied up like a turkey, and Pon was whopping me with a frying-pan, when Coker barged in. I'm awfully obliged to Coker—and you fellows—"

"Just the same!" said Harry.

"The samefulness is terrific."

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Vote of thanks to Coker, all round."

"Hear, hear!"

"Jolly glad if you'll stay to lunch, Coker! Honoured!"

"The honorific joyfulness will be preposterous."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"That fat young scoundrel butted me in the breadbasket last night, when I was whopping him," said Coker, frowning at the fat Owl of the Remove. "I've a jolly good mind—"

"Keep him off!" roared Bunter.

"Let him off, Coker," said Harry gravely. "Not worth your notice."

"Well, there's something in that!" agreed Coker. Fortunately, it was always easy to pull Coker's leg. "I suppose you kids never saw anything of Potter and Greene?"

The juniors shook their heads.

"They've gone home, I fancy," said Coker. "I thought we were going to get on all right, after I'd knocked their heads together, you know, to show them that I wouldn't stand any nonsense. But they seem to have got their backs up about something and cleared off. Well, let 'em rip! If that grub's ready, I'm ready."

"Just on!" said Bob. "Sort out the gold and silver plate, you fellows."

The gold and silver plate—otherwise tin plates and dishes—were sorted out. Bob had cooked an Irish stew, in which he had used up nearly everything that was left in hand in the provender line. But it was quite a successful stew; and everybody was hungry, and every fellow passed his plate for more—Bunter a good many times.

Coker talked during lunch.

In the circumstances, feeling extremely obliged to Coker for the help he had given Bob at a critical time, the hikers gave Coker his head—and let him run on without contradiction or interruption.

Coker was, in his own belief, one of those strong, silent characters—and his conversation was unlimited.

He told the juniors what silly asses Potter and Greene were, and how they had tried his patience on the hike till he had been fairly driven to banging their heads together. He also told them what silly young asses they were themselves. He told Bunter not to make such a row eating—advice which elicited a grunt of wrath from the fat Owl. He told Lord Mauleverer not to yawn—which was really asking a lot of any fellow who was listening to Coker's conversation! He told Bob Cherry to keep his hoofs still—and never dreamed how narrow an escape he had of a drive from one of the hoofs! Coker, in fact, made himself pleasant and agreeable



"We'll nab him easy as pie!" murmured Ponsonby as the three Highcliffe juniors spotted Bob Cherry seated on a campstool near the tent, engaged in scouring a frying-pan and whistling cheerily. "Come on!" The three Highcliffians crept up, almost on tiptoe, behind the unsuspecting Greyfriars fellow.

all round, in his own inimitable manner!

The hikers were pleasant and patient, feeling that it was up to them.

But, undoubtedly, they were rather looking forward to Horace Coker taking his departure after lunch. That afternoon the march was to be resumed; and all the hikers were rather keen to get on the road, and bid Coker a friendly adieu. Other thoughts, however, were stirring in the great mind of Horace Coker.

He was both pleased and surprised by the respect shown him by these juniors, who were so cheeky at Greyfriars! They were, of course, only giving him his due; still, it was very agreeable. Coker expanded into great good-humour.

"Well, about time we got packing," remarked Harry Wharton at length. "We're doing five miles this afternoon." "Hold on," said Coker. "I've been thinking."

The juniors refrained from asking him what he had done it with!

"I've been hiking with Potter and Greene, as I told you," said Coker. "They've let me down! I'll come on with you fags."

"Eh!" "What!"

Coker, perhaps, expected a burst of enthusiasm! It did not happen. The hikers stared at him in surprise and dismay.

"I mean it!" said Coker.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

"You see, we're nowhere near Greyfriars, or Greyfriars fellows," Coker kindly explained. "There's nobody we know to see me letting myself down like this!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You needn't say anything about it at school next term. I shouldn't like the fellows to know, of course."

"Oh crikey!"

"It's a bit undignified, perhaps," said Coker. "But, dash it all, I don't care—in holiday-time, you know!"

The hikers gazed at Coker, suppressing their feelings.

"I mayn't be able to stand it long," went on Coker, happily ignorant of the fact that the hikers felt that they couldn't stand it at all. "But I'll see you through for a few days! It will be rather a catch for you kids, having a senior man with you, to show you how to do things, and order you about and so on."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"The catchfulness will be truly terrific."

"The only condition I make," said Coker, "is that you don't brag about it at Greyfriars afterwards, and make a fellow look a fool—hiking with a lot of silly kids, you know."

Silence followed that remark. Johnny Bull casually reached out to the handle of the frying-pan. Bob Cherry drew a deep, deep breath. He owed a debt of gratitude to Coker. Coker was putting a heavy strain on it. But Bob was the man to play up.

"Look here—" began Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I say," stammered Bob.

"Let's!" He gave his comrades a beseeching look. He was asking a lot of them, and he knew it. "I—I say, let's call it a go!"

There was a long pause. Then Harry Wharton, feeling that it was up to him, said, with an effort:

"Let's!"

And it was so!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"MOVE!" said Coker.

"Eh?"

"Don't slack about!"

"Look here—"

"And don't jaw!"

If that was the way Coker had talked to Potter and Greene, as no doubt it was, those two youths had perhaps been well-advised in chucking up hiking with Horace!

It was the way, at all events, in which he talked to the junior hikers.

The Greyfriars hikers were on the march; swinging along cheerily as usual, with Bunter lagging behind—also as usual!

Coker could walk! He was not a graceful walker; but his long, sinewy legs could cover the ground. Harry Wharton & Co. were quite good walkers; but hiking was not a foot-race. Sauntering pleasantly along was the idea. Coker's idea, however, seemed to be to put on steam. He put it on—and grew irritated at the laggards.

"Remember," said Coker, "we're doing ten miles before we camp."

"Five!" said Harry Wharton.

Coker looked at him coldly.

"I said ten!" he rejoined.

"And I," said Wharton agreeably, "said five."

"We'd better have this clear," said Coker. "If I'm giving orders, I'm giving orders! See?"

Bob Cherry touched Wharton gently on the arm, before he could make answer. Wharton suppressed the answer he was about to make—with difficulty.

"Now, get a move on," said Coker.

"I'll see the pace. Keep up! Don't dawdle! Don't slack about! Pick up a little beef from somewhere."

"I say, you fellows—"
"Don't jaw, Bunter," said Coker. "Keep your breath for walking! You'll need it."

"Look here, you beast—"
"I've told you not to jaw," said Coker. "If I have to smack your head, Bunter, you'll know it! I want one thing clearly understood at the very beginning—I don't want any cheek! Keep that in mind."

Coker marched on again. Behind him the hikers exchanged eloquent looks. Behind the hikers Billy Bunter puffed and blew and gurgled and groaned.

"How long are we going to stand this?" inquired Johnny Bull in a sulphurous voice.

"It's up to us," said Harry. "Coker did us a big service. Let's stand it as long as we can. Coker's not a bad chap, really—only a born idiot."

"Yaas, stick it," said Lord Maul-
everer.

"I say, you fellows—"
"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

Coker marched on, farther and farther ahead. He stopped at last, for the juniors to come up.

"Call this hiking?" he inquired sarcastically.

"Yes, we call it hiking, Coker," answered Nugent mildly.

"Well, I don't! Do you want me to borrow a wheelbarrow and wheel you along?" asked Coker, still sarcastic. "For the love of Mike, get a move on! I can't dawdle about like this. A gang of feeble infants, by gum! It will do you good to be put through it a little. I'll put you through it. March!"

On they went again.

Coker glanced round.

"If you don't want me to come back and kick you, buck up!" he said.

Harry Wharton & Co. rather envied Potter and Greene. If this was hiking with Horace Coker, a little of it went a long way. The question was, how long patience would stand the strain.

Coker halted at a cross-roads. There was a signpost, but what had been painted on it had been long ago obliterated by the weather.

"This way," said Coker. "We're going north, and that lane leads straight north." He pointed to the south. "Follow on."

"We turn to the right here," said Johnny Bull.

"We don't!" said Coker.

"I've got it on the map—"

"Never mind the map! Maps are rather rot, anyhow. Leave it to me."

Coker marched on, heading south-west. Thick hedges and trees shaded the lane, and Coker was out of sight in a moment. A glimmer came into Bob Cherry's eyes. He put his finger to his lips.

"This way!" he whispered. Almost on tiptoe Bob stole through a gap in the hedge. The other fellows, in wonder, followed him. Billy Bunter rolled after them, gasping.

"What's the game?" asked Frank Nugent.

"We can't kill Coker," explained Bob, "and, after what he did for me, I hate to let him know what we think of him. Still, flesh and blood can't stand Coker. Let him lose us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter breathlessly.

The hikers settled down in a row behind the hedge, wondering what would

happen next. If Coker marched on to the south-west, without stopping for them, it was all right. He would arrive in Wales or Cornwall if he kept on long enough, and he was more than welcome so to do. The hikers could not help thinking that Warwickshire would be a much more attractive county with Horace Coker outside the county borders.

They waited, cheerfully, resting in the grass, and watching the road through the interstices in the hedge.

After about ten minutes there was a sound of heavy, tramping feet in the road. It was either Coker or an escaped elephant. So they expected to see Coker.

They were right; it was the great Horace. He reappeared from the shady lane into which he had disappeared a short time ago, and stopped again in the middle of the cross-roads, staring round him with a puzzled look.

"Hallo!" roared Coker. "Where are you?"

Echo replied; but the junior hikers were very careful not to follow the example of echo. They lay very still in the grass behind the hedge.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Coker, in exasperation. "The little idiots! They haven't even sense enough to follow their leader! They've gone and

lost themselves—just like Potter and Greene were always doing!"

There were silent smiles behind the hedge. Billy Bunter repressed a fat cackinnation.

"Hallo!" roared Coker. "Hi! Can you hear me? Where are you?"

Echo replied again; there was no other answer.

"The blithering little idiots!" It was like the hikers' first meeting with Coker on the road; they heard him from behind a hedge, while Coker did his solo. This time, however, they were very very careful not to reveal their presence. "Oh, the silly young asses! I was a fool to say I'd hike with them; still, I can't turn them down, after saying I would! But where the dickens have they got to? If they expect me to tramp all over the country hunting for them, they'll be jolly well disappointed, I can tell them that. Hallo! You young fatheads, where are you? What?"

Echo—and silence.

"They could hardly have taken the other road after I told them distinctly to follow me," growled Coker; "but, by Jove, it looks as if they might have! I'd better go on and see, I suppose. Silly little idiots!"

Coker tramped off by the lane that led northward, looking for the missing hikers in that direction.

His heavy footsteps died away in the distance.

"Tact!" remarked Bob Cherry,

"saves a lot of trouble in this jolly old life! Coker's gone by the road now that we were going by—but there are lots of roads, and one's as good as another on a hike. There's a footpath across this field—let's see where it leads."

"So long as it doesn't lead to Coker, all serene!" remarked Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the hikers strolled across the field, and then across another field, and then along a lane, in cheery spirits. Coker of the Fifth was not really a bad chap, and they were glad to part with him without a shindy. But there was no doubt they were glad to part from him.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Pon Is Playful!

"THAT overgrown, fat-headed brute!" said Ponsonby.

In such uncomplimentary terms did Pon allude to Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School.

The golden September afternoon glowed over fields and woodlands, when the green Austin came gliding along behind Coker of the Fifth.

It was some hours since the junior hikers had been "lost," and Coker was very much annoyed at their stupidity. Nothing could have been plainer than Coker's orders to them, so it was really difficult to understand how they could have got lost. But they had! Coker, who was a dutiful fellow, felt that it was his duty to find them, if he could. He had said that he would hike with them, and Horace was a man of his word.

Still, he was getting fed up. Harry Wharton & Co. seemed as thoroughly lost as Potter and Greene. Coker gave them all till sunset. If he didn't find them by nightfall, they could go and chop chips—Horace was done with them! It was some time yet to nightfall, however, and Coker was swinging along a dusty road, with his eyes open for the lost hikers, when Pon & Co. sighted him.

Pon & Co. also were looking for hikers. At least, Pon was! Gadsby and Monson were tired of them. They would have preferred to stay on at Ponsonby Park. But when Pon decided to resume the motor tour Pon had to have his way—and Pon had so decided. Resuming the motor tour meant hunting the Greyfriars hikers—Pon being as keen and determined as ever. Failure after failure, instead of discouraging him, only made him more bitterly and vindictively determined.

Coker did not look back at the sound of a car behind him. He did not even step to the side of the road. If the car wanted to pass Coker, it could go round Coker! That was Coker's lofty and independent view. A fellow holding these views ran some risk of getting a car in the middle of his back! But Coker did not reflect on that; he was not much given to reflection.

Honk, honk, honk!

Jervis sounded on the horn. Pon & Co. looked at Coker from the car, Pon with an evil glitter in his eyes.

He was still feeling the effects of Coker's heavy smites. He would have been glad to give Coker a few of the same.

"Slow down as you pass that long-legged fool, Jervis!" said Ponsonby.

"Yes, sir!"

Gadsby and Monson looked quite alarmed.

"I say, Pon!" exclaimed Gadsby, "for goodness' sake, don't wake up trouble with that hefty brute!"

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"He smacked my head this mornin'," said Ponsonby. "Do you want him to smack it again, you ass?" demanded Monson.

Ponsonby did not reply to that. He looked round, and took hold of a walking-cane that lay on the seat behind him. With that cane gripped in his hand, Pon waited for the car to pass Coker, keeping the cane out of sight.

Jervis, as instructed, slowed down. The car crawled past Coker, who gave it a careless glance.

"Greyfriars cad!" called out Ponsonby.

Coker started, and stared. "Oh! It's you!" he ejaculated. "Asking for another thrashing, you cheeky little Highcliffe sweep!"

Crack!
The cane in Pon's hand flashed out of the car, and cracked on Coker's hat with a loud crack.

"Cut on, Jervis!"
The car shot on, leaving Horace Coker staggering in the road. His hat was nearly smashed on his head, and Coker was in a state of wrath and astonishment that could not have been expressed in words.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Highcliffe juniors, staring back at Coker over the back of the car. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"One for his nob!" grinned Ponsonby. "Oh crickey! He's after us!" chortled Monson. "Tryin' a race with a motor-car! Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker set his crushed hat straight on his head and started at a frantic run after the green Austin. The three Highcliffians grinned back at him.

"Slow down, Jervis!" said Ponsonby. "Let him draw up."

"Yes, sir!"
"Oh gad! Don't let him get too near!" gasped Gadsby. "Jervis knows how to drive!"

Ponsonby knelt on the back seat, the cane in his hand, watching Coker coming up the road like an escaped rhinoceros. The car slowed, and Coker—perhaps to his own surprise—found himself overtaking the Highcliffians.

He charged on, crimson with fury. There was no doubt that, if Coker got hold of Pon after that crack on the nut, serious things would happen to Pon. And Coker had high hopes of getting hold of him now. Gasping for breath, Coker charged on, with outstretched hands to clutch hold of the slow-moving car and scramble in over the back. Coker, when his dander was up, was the man for such deeds!

His finger-tips almost touched, when Pon leaned over and suddenly lashed with the cane again.

Coker had not expected that. Really, he might have—but he hadn't! The cane cracked down on his hat with a mighty swipe, and Coker sat down in the dust behind the car.

Bump!
"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Highcliffians.

Pon was getting away with this. He was having great luck in dealing with Coker of the Fifth—much better luck than with Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove. Gaddy and Monson began to "enthusia." As Coker sat down behind the green Austin, Gadsby shied an apple, and Monson an orange, from a basket in the car. Both missiles took effect. Coker got the apple in his eye, and the orange in his ear. Then he was left sitting.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The merry laughter of the Highcliffians floated back. Jervis was grinning, apparently finding it amusing also. Coker, evidently, was not in the least amused. He roared like a bull as he scrambled up. He charged after the car again.

"My hat! He's not tired yet!" chortled Monson. "Give him another lick, Pon! By gum, this is as good as a show!"

There was a sudden shake as Jervis jammed on his brakes. Pon & Co. glared round at him.

"Don't stop, you ass!" yelled Monson.

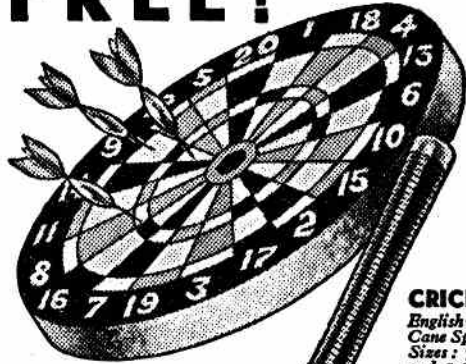
"Oh gad!" stuttered Pon.
Jervis could not help it. From a gate on one side of the road, a couple of farm horses pulled out, drawing a long wagon behind them. They were making for another gate on the other side of the road. Horses and wagon blocked the way, and were evidently going to continue blocking it for two or three minutes at least. The car had to slow down and halt till the impediment was gone.

The merry Pon had not foreseen such an incident as that. Neither had his cheery comrades. Their laughter died away suddenly.

Keeping the car just ahead of Horace Coker, and cracking him on the nut when he charged within reach, was a scream of a joke. Falling into his infuriated clutches was quite another matter. And it was the latter that was going to happen now.

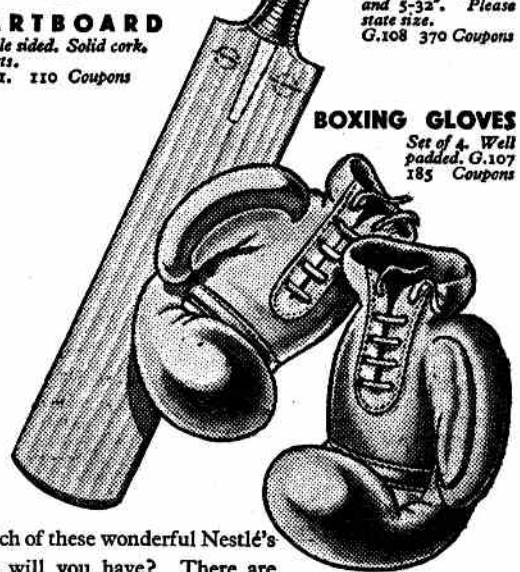
On came Coker, in a rhinoceros-charge. The car stopped;
(Continued on next page.)

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it had to stop. And Coker reached it, grasped it, received a swipe on the head from Pon's cane without even feeling it, and clambered over the back, and came headlong into the green Austin like a thunderbolt!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Lending Coker a Hand!

PONSONBY yelled, in the mighty grasp of Horace Coker. He flew out of the car as he yelled, and landed in the road.

Gadsby and Monson were trying to scramble out, before their turn came!

A hefty hand grasped the collar of each of them, behind. Their heads came together with a sounding crack!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Gadsby and Monson together.

Bump! Bump! They landed beside Ponsonby.

Pon and Co. sat up in the road, dusty and dazed and dizzy. The farm cart was passing slowly across the road ahead; the way would soon be clear—but too late for the Highcliffians! Coker turned to Jervis, who sat like a wooden image in his seat.

"You in this?" demanded Coker, unpleasantly.

"No, sir!" said Jervis. "Not at all, sir."

Coker's gleaming eyes and jutting jaw were enough for the chauffeur. Jervis did not want to sample his leg-of-mutton fists. The biggest and burliest fellow in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars could have handled Jervis twice over. Jervis was not keen on it.

"Oh! You're not?" snorted Coker.

"Not at all, sir!" said Jervis, very respectfully. He did not "see" having his features altered in shape, on account of the festive Pon.

"All right, then!" said Coker. "Get off the car!"

"I'll stay, if you don't mind, sir."

"I'm not having you cut off," said Coker. "Get down!"

"You see, sir—"

"I said get down!" remarked Coker.

"I don't care twopence whether you step off, or whether I bung you off. Take your choice."

Jervis decided to step off—and did! Then Coker stepped out.

He surveyed the three Highcliffians grimly. They had been about to get up! On second thoughts, they remained where they were. Coker at close quarters was terrifying.

"Well, I've got you!" said Coker. "You cracked me over the nut with a stick, young Ponsonby! Some of you bunged things at me! I'm going to kick you! Hard! Get up."

"You bullyin' rotter!" panted Ponsonby.

"I—I say, it was only a-a-a joke!" groaned Gadsby.

"Look here, chuck it," said Monson. "We've had enough, see?"

"You may think so!" assented Coker.

"But I don't agree! My hat's wrecked, and I've got a bump on my head! Stand up!"

As they were going to be kicked—by the largest feet at Greyfriars School—when they stood up Pon & Co. naturally preferred to sit!

"Jervis!" yelled Pon, desperately. "Collar him! We'll help!"

Coker looked round at the chauffeur. "Get on with the collaring," he remarked. "I'd just as soon knock the stuffing out of you as not."

"Not at all, sir!" said Jervis. "No business of mine."

"You rotter, Jervis," yelled Pon. "If

you don't back up, I'll ask my father to sack you."

Jervis gave Coker a look-over. But evidently he decided that it was not good enough, for he shook his head.

"Sorry, sir, but I'm engaged to drive the car," he said. "After all, you struck the young gentleman first, sir!"

"No bizney of yours, you rotter! Tackle him."

"I don't think that comes within my duties, sir!" answered Jervis, smoothly.

"Go and get help, then!" howled Ponsonby.

"Stir a stump, my man, and I'll jolly soon make you wish you hadn't," said Coker. "Don't speak to the man again, Ponsonby! I'm giving orders here! Are you getting up?"

"You bullyin' Greyfriars rotter!" groaned Pon.

Coker stepped to him and grasped him by the back of his collar. Pon came to his feet then, with a swing of Coker's hefty arm.

Holding Pon by the collar, as if he did not want to part with him, Coker then turned his attention to Gadsby and Monson.

They squirmed swiftly out of the way. But they did not squirm quite swiftly enough. Coker's heavy foot landed on Gaddy, and then on Monson—and then they were running.

They scudded back along the road, and did not stop till they were fifty yards distant. Then, panting, they halted and stared back, ready to run again if Coker pursued.

But Coker did not take any further heed of Gadsby and Monson. A kick apiece for them seemed to satisfy Coker.

He picked up the cane that Pon had dropped in the car, and holding Pon's collar with his left hand, whacked with his right. Half a dozen swipes rang like pistol-shots on Pon's elegant trousers. And Pon's frantic yells rang far and wide.

"That will do, I think," said Coker cheerfully. "Get into the car."

He tossed Pon into the car.

He followed him in, sat down, and jerked Ponsonby into the seat beside him. Then he called to the astounded Jervis.

"Get going!"

"But—" gasped the amazed chauffeur.

"I said get going!"

"But Master Ponsonby—"

"We're going motoring together this afternoon," said Coker, with grim humour. "I'm borrowing the car!"

"Oh, my eye!" said Jervis blankly.

"Don't start the car, Jervis!" shrieked Ponsonby. "Run for a policeman!"

"You didn't want a policeman on the scene when you were cracking my nut with that stick!" grinned Coker.

"You won't get one now, my boy. I was badly in want of a lift when you came along. You're going to give me the lift I want. Still, it's your car, and you can give orders to the shover. Tell him to drive."

"I won't!" yelled Ponsonby.

"I think you will," smiled Coker. "You see, if you jib at my orders, I'm going to pull your ears—like that—"

"Whoooop!"

"And like that—"

"Yaroooh!"

"And I fancy you'll get tired before I do. Are you telling that shover of yours to drive, or not?"

Ponsonby gasped with pain and rage. He felt rather like the man in the story who went out to shoot a rabbit and woke up a tiger. He was utterly helpless in Coker's hands; and even if Jervis had put up a fight, Coker would have knocked the chauffeur out quite

easily. Pon had started this little game, and Coker was going on with it—and Pon repented, from the bottom of his heart, that he had started it!

He could hardly believe that Coker really intended to take possession of his car, and him, and the chauffeur, for the afternoon! But Horace was in deadly earnest. As he had said, he wanted a lift—and Pon had barged in just in time to give him the lift he wanted!

"Get going, Jervis!" spluttered Ponsonby, quite unable to stand the hefty pulling of his ears. "G-g-g-et g-g-going!"

There was a suppressed grin on Jervis' smooth, clean-shaven face as he took his seat at the wheel. Perhaps he was inwardly a little entertained by this fall of the lofty and lordly Pon!

"Now, I've lost some fellows," said Coker. "You know the fellows, Ponsonby—those Remove kids, of Greyfriars. They've wandered off somewhere, losing their way, like silly little idiots. I shall never find them on foot, that's pretty clear. You're going to lend me the car till I find them—see?"

Ponsonby could only pant with rage.

"You catch on, my man?" said Coker to the chauffeur. "Look out for a gang of hikers. You've seen them before, and you'll know them. Up one road and down another—all over the shop—see? Get me?"

"Oh yes, sir!" gasped Jervis. "But sir—"

"I've no use for butts!" Coker pointed out.

"I—I have to take my orders from Master Cecil, sir."

"Don't you worry about Master Cecil," answered Coker. "Master Cecil is doing exactly as I tell him. Ain't you, Master Cecil?" He grinned at the infuriated Ponsonby. "Still, as I said, it's your car, and you can tell your shover what to do. Tell him to start looking for those hikers."

"I—I—I—" gurgled Ponsonby.

"Oh! Ow! Leggo my ear, you thundering brute! D-d-do as you're told, Jervis! Wow!"

"Yes, sir!" said Jervis.

And he drove on.

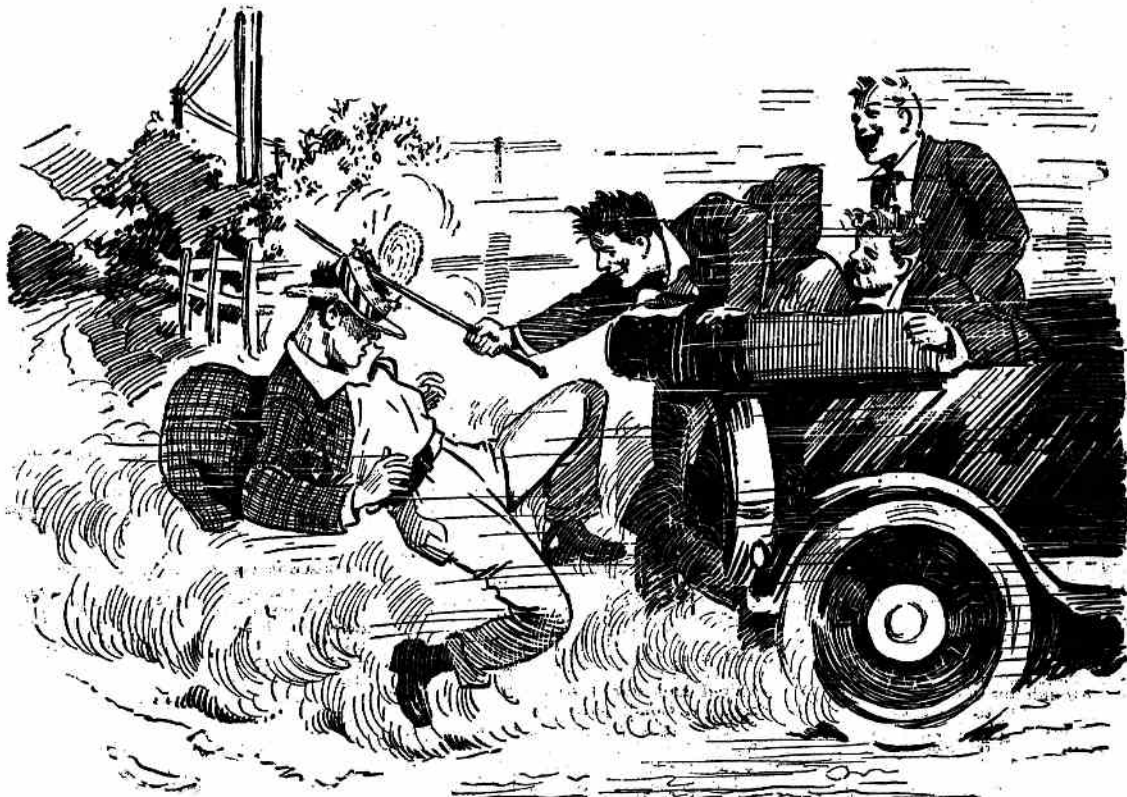
Gadsby and Monson, in the distance, saw the car start—and saw it vanish. They were left behind. Coker was not thinking about them, and Pon was only thinking about himself and the extraordinary predicament he was in. The green Austin rushed on, leaving Gaddy and Monson to disappear astern.

"Not a bad car," remarked Coker approvingly. "Rather lucky you came along to give me a lift, Ponsonby."

"Oh, you rotter! I'll have you run in for this!" gasped Pon.

"For lending me your car?" grinned Coker. "My dear boy, you can refuse to lend it to me if you like—though I'm sorry for your ears if you do! Keep your eyes open for those hikers, Jervis—if that's your name. You've got to keep on driving till you find them, if it takes you till midnight."

Pon sat beside Coker as the green Austin ate up the miles, smouldering with fury. Once or twice he thought even of jumping from the car, but he dared not! He even thought of turning desperately on Coker, but still less did he dare to do that! He thought of shouting for help to people on the road, but Coker's expression was so very grim and unpleasant that he did not venture to do so. Once, when a constable was passed on the road, he very nearly made the venture, but a



Gasping for breath, Coker charged on with outstretched hands to clutch hold of the slow-moving car. His finger-tips almost touched, when Ponsonby leaned over suddenly and lashed with the cane. The cane cracked down on Coker's hat with a mighty swipe!

grip on his arm warned him that he had better not. Pon was for it, and he had to make up his mind to it.

It was a horrid afternoon for Cecil Ponsonby. He enjoyed Horace Coker's company even less than the Greyfriars hikers had enjoyed it. He longed for that motor drive to come to an end.

But it was a long, long time before it came to an end. The September afternoon faded into evening, and the green Austin was still scouring roads and country lanes in search of the Greyfriars hikers. Harry Wharton & Co. had covered about five miles since parting with Coker, but Coker covered, probably, more than a hundred in search of them. Certainly he could not have done that on foot.

Up and down and round about went the green Austin. The sunset was gone, and stars were coming out in the sky, when Jervis slowed down and pointed to a tent, standing on a stretch of green common near a village.

"Is that it, sir?" asked Jervis. Coker looked.

"That's the party!" he agreed.

"Halt!" The green Austin stopped at last. Coker stepped out.

"Thanks for lending me the car, Ponsonby," he said, with grim humour. "Next time you come across me you mayn't be so handy with your stick and a fellow's hat—what? Here, take this, my man!" Coker tipped the chauffeur a pound note. "You can clear off, Ponsonby—I'm done with you!"

Coker walked across the common towards the tent, and Ponsonby lost no time in clearing off. And his feelings towards Horace Coker as he cleared could not have been expressed in any known language.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker in Command!

"I SAY, you fellows—"
"Get out the plates, Bunter!"
"I don't see why I should do all the work! Besides, I don't know where the plates are. I didn't see them packed in that bag. I say—"

"Kiok him!"
"Beast! I say, I'm frightfully hungry," said Billy Bunter.
"Famished! I hope you fellows got enough grub in. Lucky we haven't got Coker here to wolf it. How that fellow eats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! If there's anything I loathe, it's to see a fellow stuffing, and stuffing!" said Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the hikers.
"Oh, shut up and let's have some grub! You might get out the plates, Nugent, as you know where they are and I don't. You're standing just beside the bag where Bob packed them. I say—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry suddenly as he sighted a burly figure approaching across the common.

"Who—what—?"
"Coker!"
"Oh, my hat!"

The Greyfriars hikers stared at Coker. Supper was ready, and the hikers had been about to sit down to it in the soft starlight. They had heard a car on the road at a little distance, without heeding it. Plenty of cars passed and repassed. Coker came as a complete surprise to them.

They blinked at him as he strode up. "Oh crikey! That beast Coker!" grunted Billy Bunter.

"Oh, so here you are!" exclaimed Coker, as he arrived. "I've found you, you silly young asses!"

"Fuf-fuf-found us!" stammered Bob. "How on earth you lost yourselves, I can't imagine!" said Coker. "You're blithering little idiots, I know; but there's a limit. Never heard of such absolute idiots!"

The hikers looked at Coker, and looked at one another. They had never even dreamed that Coker would find them. But he had, for there he was!

"Oh dear!" murmured Bob Cherry. "How—how—how did you find us, Coker?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Hunting for you," said Coker. "I might never have done it, though, if I hadn't borrowed a car. That Highcliffe cad Ponsonby cheeked me on the road, so I made him lend me his car for the afternoon."

"Oh, great pip!"

"But for that you'd have stayed lost," said Coker. "Silly little idiots! I was a bit of an ass to promise to hike with you; but I said I would, and I will. But mark this—don't get lost again, or I'll leave you lost! I'm not going to spend another afternoon hunting for you, if you haven't sense enough to follow your leader. I mean that, mind!"

"Oh!" gasped the hikers.

"Look here—" began Johnny Bull. "All serene!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "Just in time for supper, Coker. Get out those plates, Bunter."

"I'm sitting down."
"Get up, then, you fat imago!"
"You know I'm tired!" said Bunter indignantly.

"This won't do," said Coker. "No slacking here! Bunter, get up!"

Having found the hiking party, Coker had resumed authority on the spot. "Now, then, get a move on!"

"Shan't!" hooted Bunter.

"Won't you?" grinned Coker. "We'll see about that! I'll say this for you other young sweeps, you're not slackers. I don't suppose I shall have to whop you for slacking."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I'll see that Bunter doesn't slack. Now, then, up with you!"

Coker took Bunter by his fat neck, and heaved. Bunter sprawled and roared. A jab from Coker's foot helped him up.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Get out! You're not wanted here—I can jolly well tell you! Mind your own business! I say, you fellows—Yaroo!"

Smack!

"Whooooop!"

"Get out those plates!" said Coker.

Billy Bunter blinked at Coker, with an infuriated blink that almost cracked his spectacles. The other hikers had made Bunter work sometimes—not often—for it was no easy task. But the lot of them together were not so bad as Coker. Compared with the high-handed Horace, they were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked on, rather worried. They did not want a shindy with the fellow who had rescued Bob from Pon & Co. They did not want Coker running the show, either. So they were in rather a dilemma. It seemed a good idea to decide the matter peaceably by putting up with Coker for one night, and then getting "lost" again on the morrow. The question was whether human flesh

and blood could put up with Horace Coker even for a few hours.

Anyhow, there was no reason why Bunter should slack. Bunter had done enough slacking on that hike.

With a fat face crimson with fury, Bunter sorted out the plates. Bob Cherry served out the supper. It was a savoury supper of sausages and chips.

"Where's the salt?" asked Nugent.

"Didn't you get it out, Bunter?"

"No, I didn't," grunted Bunter.

"Get it out, Bunter!" said Coker.

"All serene; I'll get it!" said Frank hastily.

"You won't!" said Coker. "Sit down! Get the salt, Bunter!" He gave Frank Nugent a push, and Frank sat down again, rather hurriedly, with a bump. "Now, then, Bunter—"

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"Don't jaw!" said Coker. "Just do as you're told! I'm not here to be argued with!"

"You cheeky beast! Yaroo! I say, you fellows, rag that beast, and kick him out!" yelled Bunter.

"Look here, Coker—" began Harry Wharton restively.

"Don't jaw, Wharton!"

"Look here—" roared Johnny Bull. "Hold your tongue, Bull! Now, then, Bunter, if you don't want your head smacked again, hurry up with that salt!"

Billy Bunter found the salt quite quickly.

Supper was disposed of—rather in silence, so far as the junior hikers were concerned. Even Billy Bunter did not talk, for once, though he glared continually at Coker with deadly, almost demoniac glares. Coker, however, did talking enough for the lot.

Coker was in a cheery good humour. Quite unaware of the reason why the schoolboy hikers were giving him his head, Coker had an impression that they were gratified and honoured by a Fifth Form man joining the party. So long as they did what they were told, and shut up, it seemed to Coker that this hike might be quite a success, though, of course, he could not forget that it was a little undignified to be hiking with Lower Fourth fags. Coker talked a good deal, laying plans for the morrow, mapping out a route. It was not the route the juniors had planned; but that did not matter. Coker was in command now, and his word was law.

"Now, then," said Coker, getting up at last, "wash up before going to bed. Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day. Bunter take that bucket and fetch water from the pond."

"I say, you fellows—"

"I don't want to have to tell you twice!" said Coker.

Bunter fetched the water.

"Now wash up," said Coker. "Don't you kids help—it's Bunter's job. I'm going to stop his slacking."

"Oh, we'll all lend a hand!" said Bob.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Coker calmly. "You'll do exactly as I tell you, and nothing else, so long as I'm giving orders here."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hold your tongue, Bunter! Get on with the washing-up!"

Billy Bunter cast an appealing blink at the other hikers. Lord Mauleverer grinned. The other fellows exchanged glances, and were silent. Somehow, anyhow, they felt that they were going to endure Coker till they could lose him again. If it could possibly be done, they were going to do it.

Bunter washed up.

He did it in his usual way. Coker surveyed the result, and shook his head. Coker was not satisfied.

"Call that washing up, Bunter?" he said. "Dirty little beast! The things have got to be washed. Wash 'em all over again!"

"I say, you fellows—" moaned Bunter.

"I said, wash 'em over again!" said Coker ominously.

Bunter, with feelings too deep for words, washed the things over again. This time he washed them clean.

"That's better," said Coker approvingly. "Now pack them all away tidily. There's going to be no slovenliness in this camp."

Bunter packed them all away tidily.

After that, the hikers turned in. There was no room for Coker in the tent, which was fairly well packed at the best of times. Coker took his ground-sheet and blankets outside. It was a fine, mild night, and Coker was, at least, hardy. The lantern was put out, and the hikers settled down to repose. There was a murmur of voices in the tent; the hikers, as well as Coker, had plans to lay for the morrow.

"Quiet, there!" called out Coker. "Don't jaw! Go to sleep!"

There was silence in the tent.

Horace Coker slept like a top. He did not open his eyes till the sunshine was streaming down again on the common. He was up with the sun—with all his little faults and weaknesses, Coker was an energetic fellow, and no slacker. He bawled into the tent:

"Now, then, turn out! Up with you!"

Snore from Bunter.

(Continued on page 28.)



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ALLISON OF AVONSHIRE!

By JOHN BREARLEY



WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

LEN ALLISON, the young boss of a motor works, is set on stealing the plans of a supercharger, which is the invention of his crippled uncle,

SIMON ALLISON. But Simon's son, **Bill**,

and **MIKE DOYLE**, a mechanic, time and again outwit the attempts of a thug named

VALETTI, who is in Len's pay, to steal the plans.

BILL plays for Avonshire as a cricket professional to keep the family finances together. Meantime, Mike Doyle "borrows" Valetti's car for demonstration purposes. Old Simon's invention proves highly successful. On returning home, however, Bill and Mike discover that Valetti has stolen the plans. They get on the trail of the crook, learning from Len Allison that he is making for Portsea in a car.

(Now read on.)

The "Cannonball" Drives!

MEANWHILE, at the bottom of the shaft, Cannonball Mike Doyle was tearing his hair over the delay.

"What th' plague kept ye?" he demanded wrathfully, as Bill landed beside him. "All right, I can guess! You've told that yellow pipsqueak to bolt, haven't you?"

"Yes. It was the only way to save stirring up a lot of mud!" Bill's jaw was rock-like. "Len's done—finished with. So's the Allison family feud! But we're still going to square up with Valetti, if it's the last thing we do. That hound'll be only too glad to crawl aboard any ship that's leaving England after we've done with him!"

"Crawl? He ain't goin' to crawl—he'll have to be carried aboard!" blazed Mike. "Len's your affair. But I've got my own debt to settle with Corsica Phil!"

With Bill at his heels, the resolute Irishman darted through the tunnel to the manhole. Up and out into the fresh air, through the garden and over the wall they hurried, and a final sprint brought them to their own car. But, as Bill yanked open the door, Mike thrust past him.

"I'll drive now!"

The once-famous driver spoke quietly enough, yet there was something in his

manner—a fierce intensity that set Bill's every fibre tingling with sudden excitement. After four long years, Cannonball Mike Doyle was on the job again, fit and ready for the greatest race of his career.

Starting up, the Irishman backed out of the trees, swung the car and shot her along the lane so slickly that Bill's new-found exhilaration increased by leaps and bounds. Mentally he ran over the country roads ahead, and spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Over the bridge, and first left. Take the road through Little Bramley. There's a filling-station on the right past the village."

"Good boy!" Mike grunted approvingly.

With a hundred-mile road-race in prospect, juice and plenty of it was the first need. Ten seconds later, he whirled across the bridge, and in another two minutes pulled up at Little Bramley.

"Seen an Allison roadster come past lately?" Bill inquired of the petrol-pump attendant while they waited—and concealed his delight with difficulty when the man, who knew him well, answered promptly.

"Ay! Feller came past in one just now—matter o' twenty minutes ago, maybe."

"Travelling fast?"

"Nay, nothin' wonderful, Mr. Allison. Fairish lick, ye might say!"

That puzzled Bill. He had pictured Valetti blinding through the night, all out. But, when he said as much to Mike, that cool, shrewd warrior only shrugged.

"Phil's got no reason to burn the road up—yet! He reckons he's safe. He knows Len daren't set the police on him—and he doesn't know yet that we're hard on his trail. Also—" Mike's underlip jutted out, "he doesn't know that the Allison supercharger's in working order already!"

"He will, though!" declared Bill, and then was jerked back against his seat as the tourer, with her tank full and four two-gallon tins piled in the tonneau, hurtled away from Little Bramley.

As she topped the first hill, Mike

turned suddenly, his eyes twinkling in a dry, peculiar smile.

"Yo're fond o' speed, aren't you?" he drawled. "O.K. then—hold your hat on! Boy, we're goin' fast!"

And that was the last remark uttered for nearly forty miles—forty of the most hair-raising, thrill-packed miles Bill had ever known!

Under Mike's magic hands the long, low car fed, roaring through the darkness; across and through the hills, over the desolate downs beyond Daleham, climbing, dipping, racing all the while. The clamour of the supercharged engine dulled Bill's ears; made the night hideous with screaming echoes. Wind lashed his face, brought tears to his squinting, straining eyes.

"A speed-maniac" people had called him, many a time and oft, but he got all the speed he wanted then with Cannonball Mike Doyle at the helm. At that dazzling pace an ordinary driver would have ripped the stuffing out of the roadster in the first twenty miles, or piled her up in a hedge. But Mike was no ordinary driver.

It was, indeed, the first time Bill had ever seen a great "speed ace" in action—and the experience left him breathless with admiration and wonder.

Never in his life had he witnessed such marvellous cornering, such smooth gear-changling, such superb all-round control. The tourer seemed to fly on and on like some strong-winged bird—a ripping, roaring projectile, shooting up hill and down, flinging the miles behind its hissing wheels.

Yet Mike was no "demon driver." There was no crouching low over the wheel, with shoulders hunched and elbows squared, about him. Impassive as a Sphinx, he lolled back easily in his seat as though it was an armchair; his jaws moving steadily, hands gripping the wheel lightly, but firmly, half-closed eyes fixed straight ahead. So cool was he, and so quiet, that every time Bill glanced at the speedometer he got a fresh shock.

Sixty-five—seventy—seventy-two—

"On country roads at night—my hat!" muttered the awestricken

William, as the needle crawled up, wavering between seventy-five and eighty.

Wharr-rrmm! The roadster catapulted under a railway bridge, leaving thunderous echoes in her wake. Over another steep rise—down. Tortured tyres screeched as Mike took the next corner on two wheels, with Klaxon blaring. Then they were scooting through a long flat valley, with black hills to the right, and fleeting glimpses of a river to the left.

Wharr-rr-m! Another car leapt into view. Bill glanced at it, saw that it was a small saloon, and forgot it. They passed it in a flash, skimmed across an old stone bridge, and pelted through a sleeping village.

On and on. The hedgerows were mere black blurs, trees swished down on them and whipped behind, signposts pointed, flickered and then vanished. On—on, past more houses, a few more cars, but still no sight of the car—Valetti's car. Fifty miles from Avonport, Bill stirred and relaxed his taut muscles.

"Think we'll catch him!" he cried, with a note of appeal in his voice.

"Yes!" was all that Mike said, as the tourer raced onwards.

They caught up with Corsica Phil Valetti five minutes later!

Valetti Crashes Through!

PERHAPS it was just luck, perhaps it was Fate, whichever you like. But they caught him, and on a long straight stretch of road into the bargain.

Until then, Corsica Phil, in his own phrase, had been "sitting pretty."

All the way from Avonport he had maintained a steady fifty, breezing along at what, to him, was a nice, comfortable pace. He had no need to hurry. Plenty of time. The ease with which he had out loose from Len, and made his treacherous flit, filled him with a boundless admiration for himself.

It had been all so simple.

Len, that poor, credulous young fool, could not—dared not—try to stop him, he knew. And though Mike Doyle and "that cub" Bill Allison had put more than one spoke in his wheel of late, the last and best laugh of all had come his way. He had finished with them all, now; finished with Avonport and England, too, for good.

True, he had delayed rather longer than anticipated in Len's house after the successful theft of the Allison plans, but that had been unavoidable. Now, however, Portsea lay ahead. He even knew a "snide" garage there, not far from the docks, where he could dispose of Len's fine roadster quickly and quietly before crossing to Ireland soon after dawn.

After that—America, the land of the free, where money is king and the law something to snigger about! One of the things that seriously annoyed Corsica Phil about Britain was the ridiculous fact that judges and juries couldn't be squared or scared.

In Detroit or Cleveland, U.S.A., he could lay hands on half a dozen "clients" who would bid feverishly against each other for the plans of the Allison supercharger, now snug in his possession.

Therefore, Corsica Phil smiled like the proverbial Cheshire cat as he hummed along in his stolen roadster. He was

still smiling when suddenly the roar of a supercharged engine beat riotously on his ears, and caused him to fling a hasty glance to the rear.

For the first time a slight frown puckered his beetling brows.

Traffic, up till now, had been scarce, for the hour was late. A few homing cyclists, a farm-wagon or so, and a sprinkling of motors, that was all. But now another car was coming up like the wind—travelling at a speed far greater than his own; and the long, brilliant beam flung out by its headlights whitened the hedges and road as it swam steadily upon him.

Expertly he judged the other's pace—and whistled thoughtfully. Then his frown deepened a little, as, of a sudden, strange misgivings stirred in his breast.

Somehow—for some occult reason—he didn't quite like the look of this flyer overhauling him at such breakneck speed.

It was absurd, of course. Nerves, perhaps! No one was chasing him—no one could be. And yet—and yet—

The farther he went, and the closer the other car came, the less he liked it.

All his life Valetti had lived by his wits and "hunches," and now something—a small, insistent voice in his brain—began to whisper warnings. The newcomer's speed, the reckless manner in which he was burning up the road, worried him. During the next mile, the pursuing searchlight crept closer still, then suddenly caught him full in its glare and flung his distorted shadow on to the windscreen. And always that strident bellow of the supercharged engine grew louder.

A prey to rising uneasiness, Valetti thought fast.

Should he pull in and wave this crazy fool on? Or should he accelerate and see what happened? After a moment's hesitation he chose the latter course, and cursed huskily at the result!

Spurt for spurt the other driver answered, and, still that infernal headlight bathed him in its clear, merciless radiance. Valetti's smouldering doubts flamed up into hot fear then.

Somewhere or other a cog had slipped in his carefully-made plans, and the game was up. He was being pursued—hunted by a car yards faster than his own!

But who was behind the hunter's wheel? Not Len Allison—he would stake his life on that! Nor the police, for they would not chase him, they would telephone ahead and have him stopped. No, there was only one answer to the question—and Phil Valetti's blood ran cold as he guessed it.

Cannonball Mike Doyle; his old and bitter foe on the race-tracks of America!

He was the only man Valetti knew who would, or could, slam a private car through the night at such a killing bat. "The Cannonball" was racing again, after four idle years. And—

"With the new Allison supercharger!" groaned the dismayed, bewildered fugitive, listening to that menacing roar at his back.

Corsica Phil Valetti's face, almost touching the steering-wheel, was as the face of a snarling fiend.

Putting forth all his skill and daring, he streaked away in a desperate effort to escape. Portsea was forgotten—his arrangements there would have to be postponed until he was clear of the relentless pursuer. Keep moving, twisting and doubling in his tracks—that was

his only game now! Valetti stepped on the gas.

Deeper and deeper he plunged into the network of quiet lanes, caring nothing for direction. At every corner he risked his neck, and once, cut straight across a triangle of grass at some crossroads, missing the signpost by a hairsbreadth. But always Mike trailed him like a weasel after a rabbit, creeping up, creeping up, until—

A sudden hoarse yell tore at Valetti's throat.

Right before him at last glimmered the white gates of a level-crossing—and those gates were closed. There was a train coming; he could see it gliding on like some monstrous fiery serpent athwart his course. His yell became a sob, and for a moment he hesitated. But then, in the next, he saw his slender chance—and took it!

Crowding the roadster to the utmost of its power, he aimed dead for the centre of the left-hand gate. He gripped the wheel convulsively; ducked at the last split-second, and—

Crash-sh!

Valetti burst through!

Stout timbers snapped under the smashing impact, the windscreen cracked into a myriad whorls and stars. A heavy blow punched the roadster squarely on the nose, the noise of the train added itself to the din, and then—crash! again. Valetti shattered the second gate wide open, whooping like a maniac.

"Now follow me, curse you!" he howled, and flashed a triumphant glance backwards.

He was just in time to see the Cannonball hurtling straight for the ragged gaps he himself had made!

Yet it was Bill—young Allison, of Avonshire—who was the real hero of the death-defying feat that followed.

With the train almost at the crossing, and the thought of Bill in his mind, Mike had faltered; grabbed at the brake-lever. Speeding was one thing, nipping in front of a train something else entirely. Bill, however, thought otherwise.

Delirious with excitement, the reckless youngster half-rose, shouting at the full pitch of his lungs.

"Go on, Mike, slam her through—slam her through! Hang the train—you can do it! Don't let Valetti escape—chance it, man, chance it—"

Mike chanced it!

Wharr-rr-rrmm! The tourer seemed to leap forward suddenly like a spurred racehorse, while broken gates rushed to meet her. Bill saw a man leaning out of the signal-box, shouting something, waving his arms; saw a huge black and fiery mass rear high above his head and heard the piercing squeal of locked wheels dragging on steel metals. For one hideous second, death hissed at his elbow, and the whole world rocked. And then:

"Wirrooooo!"

Above the uproar sounded a wild Irish yell. The demented signalman, the train, the wrecked gates, all vanished as by magic, and forty yards ahead, the tail of Valetti's roadster was whisking round a bend. They were through—clear!

Bill, limp as an empty sack, glanced foggily at Mike, who sat grim and implacable, but with beads of sweat glistening on his seamed brow.

The Irishman's tight lips were moving.

"Bill, you're a knockout! I'd never

have done that but for you! We've got th' spalpeen now, though. Phil's gettin' ready to quit!"

And the shrewd, experienced "Canonball," who knew his former rival of old, was correct.

Corsica Phil was all in. The savage, ruthless determination of the hunters had broken his nerve at last. Moreover, the roadster had suffered badly in its encounter with the gates. Its steering was faulty, its engine overheated, and the cracked windscreen more of a danger than a help in narrow lanes. The end was in sight.

Worn-out, exhausted by his own rage and terror, the fugitive crook panted.

Mike Doyle was sitting right on his tail now, playing the old racing game of forcing an opponent beyond the limit of his power and speed till either he or his engine conked out. Valetti could spurt no more.

The Allison supercharger had beaten him—that was what it meant! And, as the bitter realisation forced itself upon his tired brain, he staked all on one last card, and played it.

Suddenly, without warning, the Corsican slackened a little and pulled out—swerving wickedly right across the lane. But, alas, his judgment failed at the pinch. He swerved too soon and—too much!

Rrr-rr-rrpp!

Even as Mike altered course like lightning, Valetti's roadster took charge and skidded full-tilt off the road. Across a ditch and through the hedge it ploughed, amid the clash of broken glass, the clang of metal. Its nose dipped, the back wheels rose sickeningly, and for a moment the tail bulked, motionless, against the blackness of the sky.

Then, with a final terrific crash, the car turned turtle. The race was over—for good!

(Make sure you read the concluding instalment of this powerful serial. Order next week's MAGNET early!)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

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

THE first query for me to deal with this week comes from a reader who signs himself "Air-minded," of Rochester. He wants to know what is

THE LONGEST AIR TRIP

that can be made by an ordinary passenger? I take it that he means a non-stop flight, and, if this is so, then the voyages which are frequently made by the famous airship, "Graf Zeppelin," are the longest. The "Graf Zeppelin" starts her voyages at Friedrichshafen, on Lake Geneva, and does not stop until she reaches Pernambuco, in Brazil. After a call here, she goes on to Rio de Janeiro, completing the journey in three days. Considering that it is about 18 days sea journey from Southampton to Pernambuco, you can imagine what a saving of time this is. The airship, however, does not make the journey regularly.

South America is fairly well supplied with air lines, and aeroplanes can be picked up at Rio, which will take the traveller down as far as Buenos Aires, and then across the Andes to Valparaiso. This city is connected by plane (with frequent stops and changes of course) with Chicago and New York, and this appears to me to be about the longest passenger trip which can be taken.

Another long journey which can be made by plane is that from England to Vladivostok, which, of course, necessitates change of planes. It is now possible to travel by regular air lines over all the continents of the earth, but the "Graf Zeppelin" is the only means of passenger-carrying air transport over the great oceans.

I have handed on the next "poser" to "Mr. X." for an answer. George Bradshaw, of Leicester, wants to know the explanation of

THE CHINESE RINGS TRICK.

In this trick, the conjurer takes a number of steel rings, and joins them together in a mysterious manner. The rings appear to be perfect, and are allowed to be handled and examined by the audience. This trick, however, depends on the manner in which the conjurer allows the rings to be examined, and also on his quickness in substituting prepared rings for those which the audience have inspected.

To begin with, he takes two perfectly genuine rings. These are examined, and found faultless. But, by sleight of hand, they are changed for two rings which are already linked together. These two are

now examined, and the conjurer changes them again for the two genuine rings and a special trick ring which has a split in it. By means of the split ring, the two genuine ones can be joined in a series of three rings. Again there is a substitution, and three rings which have been linked together in manufacture are shown to the audience for examination. By manipulating the split ring, the conjurer can form a chain of six links, while his hands allow him to make it appear that all eight rings are linked together.

The complete set of rings can be purchased at any conjuring store, together with a full list of the various combinations which can be built up by means of the split ring. The set consists of eight rings, in the following combinations: Two genuine rings, two linked rings, three linked rings, and one split ring. A considerable amount of practice is necessary before the trick can be carried out without fear of detection.

With regard to the second trick which this reader mentions, he does not give sufficient detail concerning the manner in which the trick was presented. It could have been worked in a number of ways. Amateur conjurers should remember that the great secret in conjuring is the manner in which a trick is presented. One conjurer can make an absolutely simple trick look most mysterious, while another simply "gives the game away," even though he may have the best apparatus that money can buy.

A Manchester reader, who signs himself "Magnetite" (what a number of you fellows use this non-de-plume!) wants me to publish

A PHOTOGRAPH OF FRANK RICHARDS.

If he only knew how modest Frank is! He was almost horrified at the suggestion of allowing his noble features to be translated into cold print! And reminded me that I had "pinched" a photograph of him some years ago, and published it in our special 1,000th number! I dare say that, as "Magnetite" says, a large number of my readers would jump at the chance of seeing the portrait of the author of our splendid stories. Well, I shall have to see whether I can dig up that old photograph.

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

Why Cannot Anyone Build on the Battlefield of Waterloo? ("Curious," of Bradford). Because the site of the battle is preserved as a memorial. It is not the

only place in Belgium and France where builders are not allowed. A number of sites of famous battles in the Great War are similarly preserved—notably Vimy Ridge.

The Largest Library in the World. ("Bookworm," of Glasgow): Leningrad claims to possess the largest collection of books in its public library. London, New York, and Chicago run it pretty close.

Can Mice Sing? (J. B., of Beccles): Certain types of mice have been heard to make noises that sound like singing. A variety of Egyptian mice can also "waltz" round and round!

What is Shale-Oil? (Fred H., of Charlton): A peculiar rock which is found in Scotland, and mined like coal, is submitted to a variety of processes, which free oil from it. Oil-shale, as the rock is called, produces petrol, paraffin oil, wax, and crystals of ammonium sulphate.

Can a Hen Live with Its Head Cut Off? ("Sceptic," of Sunderland): Cases are on record of this happening, and the hen has subsequently been fed by tubes inserted in the neck. One is said to have lived without its head for over a year. I should mention, however, that nearly all the stories of "headless hens" come from the United States!

Space is running short, chums, and I must not forget to jog your memory regarding those two magnificent books, "The Holiday Annual," and "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories," which are now on sale. Don't forget that the former has been reduced in price to five shillings, while the latter is only two shillings and sixpence. Those of you who have birthdays approaching, will doubtless remember to drop a few discreet hints whenever any benevolent uncles are hanging around!

Take it from me, these two books represent the finest value obtainable in boys' annuals—and your newsgate can give you particulars of a book club that will allow you to obtain them in due course without undue outlay! Ask him the next time you call in at his shop!

My oft-repeated advice to "order your copy in advance" applies especially to next week's issue, which is a real tip-top number! Frank Richards can always be depended upon to produce the finest of all boys' yarns, and next week's long complete tale of the Chums of Greyfriars is no exception. It is entitled:

"THE KIDNAPPED HIKER"

and if any author can pack more fun and amusement into a story, I should like to know who he is! It's a great yarn, chums, and it is well backed up by our other splendid features. You'll enjoy every line of the final instalment of our serial: "Allison of Avonshire," and you'll chuckle with delight at the special "Greyfriars Herald" supplement. Finally, you will find full particulars of the wonderful new story which takes the place of our present serial.

YOUR EDITOR.
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,336.

COKER, THE HIKER!

(Continued from page 24.)

"I'm going for a dip in the pond," said Coker. "You fags are going to do the same. Turn out."

"It's a bit early—" remarked Nugent, rubbing his eyes. "Don't jaw. Turn out."

The hikers turned out—with the exception of Bunter. But Bunter was not long in following their example. Coker reached into the tent, grasped a fat ankle, and the Owl of the Remove turned out—in a scrambling heap, yelling.

"Buck up!" said Coker. "Get a move on! Got your towels? Where's your towel, Bunter?"

"I don't want a towel!" yelled Bunter. "I'm not going anywhere near that beastly pond—" Bunter broke off with a yell. "Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast. I'm going, ain't I?"

And Bunter went. Having had their dip, the hikers prepared breakfast. Coker's face was quite sunny. He was finding hiking with these juniors more agreeable than hiking with Potter and Greene of the Fifth. Over breakfast he kindly told them so—no doubt thinking that it would buck them considerably.

"And I'll tell you what," said Coker, beaming, "I was thinking of giving you a few days—but I'll jolly well see you through till the end of the hols. I mean it."

Coker meant it. The hikers meant something quite different; but they did not mention that to Coker.

Breakfast over, Bunter was ordered to wash up. This time he raised no objection beyond an enraged blink. He was tired of Coker's strenuous measures with sashers.

"Now," said Coker, "get on with the packing. I'll walk into the village and get the grub for the day. When you've packed, follow on, and you'll find me ready with the stuff. Don't be late. I shall expect you in exactly half an hour."


Coker had it all mapped out. The route—as mapped out by Coker—lay through the village. Coker was going to the village shop to get the supplies. By the time he had got them, the hikers

should be on the spot. Coker knew how to manage.

Scarcely believing in their good luck, the hikers watched Coker stride off across the common to the village, which was about a quarter of a mile away. He disappeared in the distance, and they smiled.

"Coker expects us to join up in half an hour!" remarked Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Think he may have to wait a little longer than that?"

OH, YEAH!



George: "What are you doing now, Bill?"

Bill: "I've got a job with an engineering firm, and we make calculations to thousandths of an inch."

George: "How many thousandths are there to an inch?"

Bill: "Hanged if I know. Must be millions!"

For the above joke a useful penknife has been awarded to P. G. Tabard, 34, Windermere Avenue, Kenton, Middlesex.

"The thoughtfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pack away!" said Harry Wharton. "Put it through quickly. The sooner we're off the better. Coker will come back when we don't turn up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

The hikers packed swiftly. Even Billy Bunter lent a hand with the packing, without waiting to be kicked. The tent was packed in record time; the rest of the things got together; and Coker had hardly reached the village shop, and started his shopping there, when the hikers were ready for the march. And they marched—in the opposite direction!

Like good hikers, they left everything neat and tidy behind them; there was no litter, no rubbish, left about. Hardly a sign of them remained to greet the eyes of Horace Coker when he came back.

They marched at a good speed, even Billy Bunter putting it on. Taking great care to avoid the route mapped out by Coker overnight, the hikers disappeared over the horizon.

It was more than an hour later that Coker came back. He was loaded with shopping; and he had waited long and impatiently in the village for the juniors to join him there. They had not joined him; and Coker, at last, had come back for them—prepared to tell them what he thought of their slowness and slacking, in no measured terms.

But they were not there to be told! Coker, in growing surprise, stared round for them, and for the camp. So neat and tidy were the hikers that it was some time before Coker discovered even the site of the camp! When he discovered it, it was of little use to him; it was quite deserted, and there was no one in sight.

"Well, my hat!" said Coker. Evidently the hikers had marched. And, in spite of the plainest instructions from Coker, they had taken a wrong direction! It was amazing—but there was no doubt of it—for they were gone! Like the Hunter of the Snark, who beheld the fatal Boojum, they had suddenly, silently vanished away.

"Well," said Coker, "of all the blithering little idiots—of all the fat-headed, fooling little lunatics!—Gone! Lost again! Lost! Well, this time they can jolly well stay lost!"

And they did!

THE END.

(Travel with the happy Greyfriars Hikers through more humorous and thrilling adventures. Watch out for "THE KIDNAPPED HIKER!"—next week's tip-top tale.)

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No. 51 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

September 23rd, 1933.

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Hires out his services for five shillings an hour. Let me will your Form-master to forget that input he gave you! Let me transfer to your skipper's branch a few thoughts about giving you a place in the oven! Spell-casting and bewitching a specialty! Reduced rate for willing prefects to have toothache—half-a-crown!—GEORGE BULSTRODE, The Palace of Power, Remove Passage.

AS OTHERS SEE THEM

What I Think of George Tubb

By Arthur Carme

Yes, I've read the scurrilous, libellous attack on me by the inky-fingered Tubb, and I'd like every reader of this respectable junior rag to know that Tubb shall pay dearly for it!

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!"

The words of the immortal bard ring in my ears with renewed meaning, as I think about this grubby-faced king of the fags! I've kicked him and cuffed him and welded my anvil on him, just as if he were my own young brother. And what have I got from him in return? Only base ingratitude! My own personal gratification. Nothing could be further from the truth. If only he knew it, he has often hurt me more than it has hurt him. But I've recalled the old proverb—"Spare the rod and spoil the child," and I've gone ahead with it despite my humane feelings—just for George Tubb's good!

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM

WEEKLY WISDOM

Young Page's a craze for guns and revolvers is so wild that it keeps him awake half the night. He sits up in bed gazing out of the window for hours. The only consolation I can come to, is that he's watching out for "shooting" stars!

Hiking or Biking?

Combine the two by carrying Fisher T. Fish's Patent Folding Bike! Strap it on your back with the rest of your kit—it weighs only 100 lbs.!

SKINNER, WERE SURPRISED!

In bending over to pick up a penny he'd dropped, Skinner split his trousers at the rear. We always knew Skinner lived up to his income, but it's the first time we've heard of him being behind with his "rent"!

HIGHCLIFFE BITERS BIT!

MILK CHURN JAPE REACTED



Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, came back from the holidays last term full of bright ideas. He blossomed out with a particularly bright one on first day of last term at Greyfriars. Alonzo Todd had been left behind in the rush for the school bus, and was padding the hoof from the station. Ponsonby and his clever friends ran into our Prize Duffer, and Pon gave his clever friends a wink to prepare them for something frightfully clever in the way of japes.

Then Pon suddenly pointed a trembling finger up the steep hill that leads from the village to Mugsgrave's Farm. "Look! Look!" he cried hoarsely. "Pon's pals grinned. 'Lonzy dropped his suitcase and stared. All he could see was a milk-lorry, laden with empty churns from the station, rattling slowly and painfully up the steep incline. 'Pray, what is the matter, my good youth?' asked 'Lonzy in alarm. 'It's tragic—terrible!' gasped Pon. 'Something's wrong with that lorry—it keeps slipping back! In a few minutes they'll lose control completely, and it will slide downwards to crash to pieces here at the bottom, unless—' 'Goodness!' gasped 'Lonzy, innocently. 'Unless what?' 'Unless some brave fellow will dash after it and release the churns!' said Pon, with an artistic shudder. 'If they lose their load they could

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Dear Editor, I suppose it's natural that we should want holes to go on for ever; but all good things must come to an end, and, anyway, we shouldn't appreciate them if they didn't. One of my first jobs will be to call their meeting of the Remove Footers Club—and in that of activity that will follow, I shall seem settled in to term life again. Bos Grexary here are roughly one hundred days of sweet, so-called scrapes lying ahead of us, my hearties, and I do enjoy every one of them! Mickey Drexon Shuro, an it's myself that would be glad to be thing of going back, if it wasn't that, in a way, O'm glad! Myre Laxner personally, I shall be very happy to give me extra work in Greek this term, and I'm keen to start! (Help Ed.) Harold Skinner: I feel the same as I feel at the approach of every term—like a giddy convict booked for three months' and!

Thoughts on the Approaching New Term

Dear Editor, I'm pelted by a numerous sequence of intellectual abnormalities of fortuitous description bearing considerable mutual similitude inasmuch as they originate in the inordinate complexities of that popular accessory maritime recreation which consists of a hempen vessel extended over a timber framework, and furthermore, after innumerable embarrassments regarding mechanical subtleties (which produce an inordinate noise in the activity of my sudoriferous glands) in the pal conjunction of my anatomy with the terrestrial sun, to induce a massive indicating my comprehensive opinion to the unnecessary complication of nature's apparatus in question. I hereby place on record my sentiments in regard thereto and make intirety to the manufacturers thereof for such a structural simplification as will produce an accessory of infinitely less pure character! Yours human betterment, ALONZO TODD.

'Lonzy's Little Letters

(The only meal we can get out of this jumble is that when 'Lonzy, as a deck-chair it collapses as soon as he sits in it, he's as foggy in fixing a deck-chair as he is in writing letters, we don't wonder at it!—Ed.)

Remove's Greatest Soccer Season

With the approach of the new term, all thoughts are turned to the forthcoming football season. So far as the Remove are concerned, the outlook has never been more rosy. With a bit of luck we may turn this into the greatest footer season the Remove has ever known. There's nothing like optimism in the grand old winter game—especially when that optimism is justified by the solid facts of the case! The solid facts in this case are that we still preserve intact the team that finished up last season in such rattling good style. Every man-jack is as fit as a fiddle, and as keen as mustard to get on to the field. What our old rivals from St. Jim's and Highcliffe and Rookwood have in store for us, we don't know. But if it comes to that, we don't care, either! In our present mood we feel we're quite capable of meeting all comers, and giving them a trouncing. It will be great to hear the "Plonk!" of the good old leather splere on Little Side once more—the ball bobbing between Wharton and Smithy and Inky, till it finally crashes into the net, and the howl of "Goal!" thunders across the field! Make no mistake about it, ahead anyway, there's a great season ahead of us. We've got the men, and we've got the enthusiasm—and before many weeks are past, barring accidents, we shall have the well-knit team that will cut through our opponents' defences like a knife cuts through butter! To put it poetically, taking liberties with some well-known lines in the process:

Come the four corners of the world in teams, And we shall shock them— Nought shall make us rue, If Greyfriars to herself do rest, but true!

Let Coker solve your problem. He has one vacancy for a platoon pass-anger when he returns to school!

1066, The Spanish Armada—What's wrong with that?

1066, The Spanish Armada—What's wrong with that?

LETTER FROM AN IMPORTANT PERSON

Dear Editor, I write to protest against the ever-diminishing space which the railway companies provide underneath the seats in railway carriages. It's a scandal and a shame, and something jolly well ought to be done about it! Time was when a fellow could squeeze underneath any carriage to travel under a carriage seat, firmly resolved to send on the fare to the company as soon as he receives a postal-order! I took that alternative, dear Editor, and if only I could have squeezed under a seat, all would have been well, for my customary foresight I had provided myself with a platform ticket for the other end. Unfortunately, I couldn't squeeze under the seat—hence the undignified spectacle of a Greyfriars man being dragged out of a carriage by his feet to the mews of the mooking barrier of the ignorant rabble! I trusted you'll support me for all you're worth in my demand for railway carriages with plenty of space under the seats. Only when they're reinstated in all carriages will an honest man feel safe in travelling without a ticket again! In a state of boiling indignation, Yours truly, W. G. BUNTER.

PLAY POTTYBALL! The pottiest ball in the world. However you throw it, it bounces back and hits you on the back! Singe while it bounces! As supplied to all the leading kindergartens and mental homes! C. R. Temple (Fourth), writes, "It simply fascinates me!" Ask your Tuckshop Dame for one to-day!

OLD GAG REVIVED Scene: Railway booking-office. Scrubby Fag: "Please, I want to go to Birmahale." Booking-Clock: "Bosh! You don't want to go to Birmahale—you mean, you've got to go!"

Driven from Home But only the rub folk with limousines or taxis at their command! The rest of us go to the nearest railway-station on Nunnucks' pony!

1066, The Spanish Armada—What's wrong with that?

1066, The Spanish Armada—What's wrong with that?