



COKER'S SIDE-SHOW!

FRANK RICHARDS

Five pounds to anyone who can make Horace James Coker laugh! Read how three wily Greyfriars wanglers made the attempt, and enjoy a fortune in laughs!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

NO HELP FOR COKER.

"YOU'RE a silly ass, Potter! You're as big an ass, Greene! I tell you it's up to us—I've already told you that! I'm doing it, and you chaps are going to help."

"But, look here, Coker——"

"Shut up, Potter——"

"Coker, old man——"

"Dry up, Greene! You talk too much, old chap! I've already said you're helping me, and that's enough,

isn't it? As important members of the Fifth it's up to us to help. It's in a good cause, and I'm just the man for the job."

Horace Coker was laying the law down in his study. Harry Wharton and Co., happening to be passing the open door, paused to listen, smiling as they did so. They did not consider it eavesdropping to listen to Coker talking. Coker, they knew, loved to have fellows listening to his words of wisdom, and so they often obliged the "great man" by listening,

whether he knew they were listening or not. Coker was always entertaining.

"The position's this," went on Coker's booming voice. "The Vicar's getting up a church fête, and he's asked Greyfriars to help. Quite right, too! He's asking for suggestions for side-shows, and that sort of thing. Well, as you know, I put up a suggestion to the Head. He turned it down. The Head's a good sort in some ways, but he's rather a thick-headed old idiot!"

"You—you ass, Coker! You can't expect——"

"Shut up, George Potter! Now, as you know, I suggested a boxing show with myself as the chief attraction. I was going to offer a fiver to the fellow—villager or Greyfriars man—who could knock me out in twelve rounds. The Head," ended Coker, more in sorrow than anger, "turned it down—got quite ratty when I started to argue with him—goodness knows why. Anyway——"

"You idiot, Coker!" snorted Greene. "Can't you see this isn't going to be a fairground show? The Vicar would have a dozen fits at the very idea——"

"Will you shut up?" roared Coker. "Think I don't know better than the Head or the Vicar what the folks want? Rot! Piffle! Still, I'm willing to let the Beak have his way. We've got to let him have his head at times, I suppose, whether we approve or not. Still, it doesn't matter now. I've hit on a better idea."

"Coker, old man," said Potter pleadingly, "drop that silly idea for goodness' sake! It's a mad idea. It——"

"If you call my ideas silly, Potter——"

"Well, you must be——"

"Shut up! You've too much to say, George Potter!"

"But it's a mad idea, I tell you, Coker," said Potter desperately. "We'll be the laughing stock of the village as well as Greyfriars. People laugh at you quite enough, Coker——"

"What?" yelled Coker.

"You're funny enough as it is, Coker!" It was Greene speaking now, and, for once, Greene was speaking frankly to Coker. "But you're not thumping well going to make us as funny. You're not making fools of us!"

"Look here—— Why, I'll—I'll——" Coker spluttered with wrath. "Does this mean you're not backing me up?"

"No fear! We'd look nice, wouldn't we?" demanded Potter heatedly. "Fifth-formers playing a silly kids' game like that! Where's your dignity, Coker?"

But evidently Coker had lost or mislaid his dignity.

"Why, you—you cheeky rotter, Potter!" Coker exploded. "Won't back me up, eh? We'll see about that! Why, I—I'll——"

"Look out!" murmured Harry Wharton. "Now for fireworks!"

The warning was necessary. From Coker's study came a sudden howl, followed by the tramp of feet, and sundry heavy thumps and crashes. Obviously Coker was quelling the mutiny in his study—or trying to. Next moment a figure came flying out through the doorway. It crashed against the passage wall and slid down on the linoleum with a bump.

"Greene or Potter?" chuckled Bob Cherry. "It's—— My hat! It's Coker!"

It was Coker! Usually Horace Coker had his own way in that study—usually it was Coker who did the throwing out when throwing out was, in his lofty view, necessary. But this time Potter and Greene,



"Listen, fat clam!" said Fish. "We're going to lift that fiver—you, Sammy and me. I'll tell the world it's the cutest idea I've ever struck! We're going to make Coker laugh. Now, get an careful of this, Bunter!"

obviously, had asserted themselves; the worms had turned, and it was their study-leader who was thrown out now.

"There, you burbling idiot! That's what we think of you and your potty ideas!" gasped Potter.

He and Greene, looking heated and somewhat battered, emerged from the study and departed—rather hurriedly.

Coker, looking equally heated and battered, but far more angry, staggered dizzily to his feet. His rugged features were red with rage and amazement.

"They—they pitched me out—me!" he choked. "Pitched me—

chucked me out of my own study, the rotters! Why, I—I——"

He looked about him for a sight of Potter and Greene, who by this time had vanished. Like a raging tiger he stared this way and that way in frantic indecision, and then he seemed to see the grinning faces of the Famous Five for the first time.

"Oh, it's you!" gasped Coker. "What the thump are you kids grinning at? Why, I'll——" The Fifth-former broke off and his rage seemed to vanish. He eyed Harry Wharton & Co. thoughtfully for a moment, and then he nodded. "Yes, you'll do," he added. "Come inside, kids."

Coker marched back into his study. Apparently he had quite forgotten Potter and Greene now. Harry Wharton winked at his chums, and they marched in after Coker. They all wanted to know what Coker's idea actually was.

"It's like this, you kids," began Coker. "You've heard all about the fête, of course. Well, I've decided to hold a side-show—to help the cause, you know. I told Potter and Greene I'd want——"

"Yes, we heard——"

"Don't interrupt, Wharton," said Coker. "Well, Potter and Greene can go and eat coke, anyway. They'd only muck the thing up. You kids will do, as it isn't a case where brains or common sense is required. All you'll have to do is just to obey my orders, see?"

"Oh, quite!" smiled Harry Wharton.

"The seefulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Singh, in his wonderful English. "Also the Cokerfulness——"

"Shut up, Singh! Dry up, Wharton! Now, my idea's this," said Coker, coming to the point. "I'm going to offer a prize—say a fiver—to the spectator who can make me laugh! How's that?"

"Wha-what?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Be quiet, Nugent! Well, that's the wheeze. It's quite original. I saw a side-show like it at a fairground not long ago—in the hols. I——"

"But you said it was original——" began the startled Wharton.

"Eh? So it is, ass! You see, all that's necessary is for a chap to be of iron self-control—like me. I defy anyone to make me laugh if I don't wish to," explained Coker. "I've mastered the art of self-control long ago. As I say, I shall offer a fiver,

and the crowd'll be charged a bob a time to try to make me laugh. Well, what do you think of the idea, young Wharton?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The yell of laughter from the Famous Five should have told Coker that.

"Not so dusty, eh?" smiled Coker, evidently accepting their hilarity as approval of his idea. "It'll cause no end of amusement—what? Well, I shall dress up as an Indian, just to make it more mysterious and fetching—there's some suitable clobber in the Dramatic Society's property box. And I'll want a chair and a platform, but I'll make the platform myself; you know I'm a bit of a dab at carpentry work. And I shall want a 'ballyhoo' man—you know, the chap who bawls out 'Walk up!' and all that sort of stuff—and a chap to take the cash, too. That's where you kids come in."

"Do we? Oh, crumbs!"

"Yes, just to make yourselves useful—to do the donkey-work, in fact," said Coker candidly. "You'll make a good 'ballyhoo' man, Cherry—you've got plenty of gab and a voice like a foghorn. You, Wharton——"

"Hold on, Coker," grinned Wharton. "You're taking too much for granted, old bean! If it's donkey-work, then it's your job, old chap!"

"Eh? Look here," exclaimed Coker, staring. "does that mean you kids actually refuse——"

"Exactly," grinned Harry Wharton. "We refuse to help an awful ass to make a bigger ass still of himself—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughing, the Famous Five turned to leave the study. But Coker, having been turned down by his own study-mates, wasn't going to be turned down also by cheeky Removites.

"Here, hold on!" he roared. "So you kids think you can treat me like that, eh? We'll see about that!"

He rushed at the Famous Five, evidently intending to mop them up collectively. But the Famous Five

paper basket jammed over his head.

Leaving him thus, Harry Wharton & Co. streamed cheerily from the study. It must have dawned on even Horace Coker, then, that he need expect no aid from the Famous



Fish started to dance in front of Coker, his thin face twisting into weird expressions. The crowd roared at his antics, but not Coker. He just glared at Fishy, his rugged jaw set and grim.

knew Coker, and had anticipated his move.

What happened next Horace Coker himself never quite knew. Something like an earthquake seemed to envelop him, and when it was all over and the dust had settled somewhat, Coker found himself seated in the study coal-scuttle with the study waste-

Five any more than from Potter and Greene.

Coker, however, was a sticker!

THE SECOND CHAPTER. TOO SMART OF FISHY!

"WHERE on earth is Bob?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Here's Bunter," said Harry

Wharton. "Bunter knows everything. Seen Cherry, Bunter?" It was the following afternoon, and the Famous Five—minus Bob Cherry—had just arrived at the Vicarage grounds where the fête was being held. The chums had arrived rather late as they had been busy selling tickets until the last moment. Now, as they mingled with the colourful crowd, they looked about them for their missing chum, Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter, the fat member of the Remove at Greyfriars, chuckled explosively as he rolled up to the chums, a smear of chocolate on his plump face.

"He, he, he! Yes, old chap, I've seen Cherry," he said, "and heard him, too! He's going it strong. If Coker doesn't smash him——"

"Eh—Coker?" said Harry. "You mean——"

"He's helping Coker," grinned Bunter. "Spilling the spiel——"

"What?"

"That's what Fishy calls it, anyway," grinned Bunter. "You can hear him from here. That awful ass, Coker—— Here, hold on, Wharton—I say, lend me a bob——"

But Harry Wharton didn't wait to lend Billy Bunter a bob. He had already caught sight of a big crowd across the grounds, and now he easily recognised Bob Cherry's powerful voice sounding above the hubbub of laughter and voices.

"The—the silly chump!" said Harry, laughing. "He's 'ballyhooin' for Coker, after all! Come on!"

Diving through the laughing crowd they soon came in sight of Coker's side-show. There it was, and there was Coker. He was dressed in flowing white robes and a turban, and his face and hands were stained brown. Even so, there was no possibility of

anyone mistaking Coker's identity; of not recognising that brown, rugged face as that of Coker's.

Behind Coker was a high screen on which was painted in large letters—and Cokerish spelling!—the following:

"RAM DAS COKER!
INDIAN SEAR
MASTER OF SELF-CONTROLL!
Five pounds offered
to anyone who can
MAKE
RAM DAS COKER
LARF."

Obviously Horace Coker had written that inscription; it was just as obvious as the fact that Coker had, undoubtedly, built the platform upon which he was now seated in state. It was built of matchboarding and nails—especially nails! How Coker had managed to get in so many nails to the square inch was a mystery to all but Coker. The platform rather resembled a switchback—and a rickety one!

Two steps led up to the platform, and at the bottom of these stood Alonzo Todd, looking very self-conscious and rattling a collecting box. At the top stood Bob Cherry, his face as robust as his voice.

"Roll up, roll up!" Bob Cherry was bawling. "Roll up and see Horrid Horace, otherwise the Indian missing-link, Ram Das Coker, the famous unconscious comedian. Horrid Horace is guaranteed to make a cat laugh, but defies the world to make him crack even a grin."

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter. "Isn't Bob Cherry going it?"

Bob undoubtedly was enjoying himself. Coker undoubtedly wasn't. To judge from his ferocious glares at Bob Cherry it was taking all his famous

supply of self-control to prevent him committing assault and battery upon his "ballyhoo" man.

"It's fairly drawing the crowd, anyway," laughed Harry Wharton.

"And the cash, too," grinned Nugent. "Alonzo's box sounds pretty full already. Nobody's made Coker laugh yet evidently, though."

"Heaps have tried," grinned Bunter. "But Coker couldn't see a joke if it was as big as a house. I say, Harry, old man, lend me a bob——"

"Going to try to make Coker laugh, Bunter?" demanded Wharton.

"No fear! He'd jolly soon boot me off if I tried," said Bunter. "I'm hungry, old chap. Lend me a bob just to try some of those gingerbreads on that stall. I'll let you have it back out of my next postal order——"

"Never mind the postal order," grinned Harry Wharton.

He handed over a shilling to Bunter. It was always worth a shilling to get rid of Billy Bunter! Bunter grabbed it and vanished through the crowd.



Beside himself with fury, Coker started to dance and gesture in helpless fury. That did it! Coker's home-made platform refused to stand the strain, and it collapsed under his heavy prancing. Just in time, Bob Cherry jumped to safety with the five-pound note.

But he never reached the gingerbread stall. A bony hand clutched the fat junior, and he found himself facing Fisher T. Fish, the Yankee member of the Remove. Behind Fish was the little fat figure of Sammy Bunter, Billy's younger brother.

Fishy's cute face wore an eager, excited expression.

"You're just the guy I guess we're looking for, Bunter," said Fish briskly. "I kinder guess you're the

guy who's going to make that boob Coker laugh. Yep!"

"Eh? Look here, Fishy——"

"Listen, fat clam!" said Fish, lowering his voice mysteriously. "We're going to lift that fiver, Bunter—you, Sammy and me! It's a cinch—I'll tell the world it's the cutest idea I've ever struck. You're going to make Coker laugh——"

"I'm jolly well not," snorted Bunter. "I'm going——"

"Aw, listen," snapped Fishy, and he whispered in Bunter's fat ear. "Get this earful, Bunter: I go on the stand and start prancing before Coker. Sammy, hyer, gets under the stand and rams a pin into Coker. When Coker jumps up you make him laugh. I guess——"

"You ass, Fishy! How the thump——"

"Ventriloquism, Bunter!" whispered Fishy. "Ain't you a good ventriloquist? I'll tell the world you are! Well——"

"M-mum-my hat!" Slowly a fat grin spread over Bunter's face. "I say, that's a jolly good wheeze, Fishy. But what about the fiver? We know what a mean swindler you are——"

"Aw, I guess it was my idea, but I'm a generous guy, Bunter. Twoten for you and one-ten for Sammy," said Fish in a businesslike way. "Is it a go? Good! Then I guess we'd better get going before some other guy earns the dough."

It was a go. Bunter felt he could make good use of two pounds ten! His fat face beamed as Fish whispered a few brief instructions, and then the three conspirators hastened for Coker's side-show.

Armed with a pin stuck on the end of a stick, the grinning Sammy Bunter disappeared among the crowd

at the back of the side-show. The cute Yankee business-man climbed up on to the platform and faced Coker.

There was a yell from the Greyfriars fellows:

"Go it, Fishy! Tell him one of your tall Yankee yarns!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Fish didn't try to make Coker laugh with a tall story. He started to dance and prance in front of Coker, his thin face twisting into weird expressions.

Fishy was bony, and his face wasn't handsome at the best of times. His antics and contortions now made the crowd laugh—but not Coker. He just glared at Fishy, his rugged jaw set and grim. And then——

Suddenly Coker jumped up with a wild howl, and following that howl came a yell:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter was undoubtedly a good ventriloquist. It was Coker's bellowing laugh without a doubt—or seemed to be. The crowd stared blankly, and then roared with applause!

"He's done it—the skinny kid's done it!"

"Good old Fishy! Cough up that fiver, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But above the bedlam of laughter and cheering could be heard Coker's voice raised in wild protest.

"I didn't—I didn't laugh, I tell you! Oh, crumbs! I tell you——"

"Yes you did! Play the game, Coker!"

Yells of protest and catcalls drowned Coker's furious protests, and Coker, almost beside himself with wrath and dismay, started to dance and gesture in helpless fury.

That did it. Coker prided himself on being a carpenter, but that home-made platform simply refused to stand

Coker's heavy prancing. It collapsed, and Coker, still roaring, vanished from view amidst a medley of planks of wood.

Just in time Bob Cherry, still waving aloft Coker's five-pound note, jumped to safety. He was instantly surrounded by the yelling and hilarious crowd.

"Pay up—the kid's earned it!"

"Yep! I guess that fiver's mine, Bob Cherry," yelled Fisher T. Fish. The American junior was gleeful and triumphant, knowing he had the good-humoured crowd behind him. "I guess you'll hand over the green-back pronto, Cherry!"

"Yes, Coker laughed right enough," said Harry Wharton. "Better stump up to Fishy, Bob."

"Hear, hear! Hurrah!"

Coker was forgotten now. The crowd had heard Coker laugh—or believed they had—and they clamoured for fair play. Bob Cherry was puzzled, but he was only too ready to pay out if Fish had earned the fiver. But—Coker had denied laughing, and Coker wasn't a fellow to tell whoppers, even to save a fiver!

Yet Bob himself had heard that howl of laughter, and so he grinned and handed the five-pound note into Fish's bony fist. Fisher T. Fish



"I guess the show's over," said Fishy, starting to walk on. "I guess—yaroop!" The show wasn't over—not so far as the Bunter Brothers were concerned! They wanted their fair share of the fiver, and a fat fist, with all Billy Bunter's fury and weight behind it, smote Fish on the nose!

promptly departed. But the going was not quite so good as he had hoped for!

A fat hand suddenly clutched Fishy's bony arm, and Bunter's grinning, gleeful features spoiled Fishy's view. Behind Billy was his hopeful minor, Sammy.

"He, he, he! It worked like a giddy charm, Fishy," chortled Billy Bunter. "Now what about my two-ten, old chap?"

"And my giddy one-ten," giggled Sammy Bunter happily, also hoving unexpectedly into Fish's disgusted view. "Cough it up, Fishy!"

"Shurrup, you fat clams!" hissed Fishy. "Waal, I swow! I—I'll pay you galoots at Greyfriars——"

"You jolly well won't," sniffed Billy Bunter. "I want mine now, old chap. We know you, Fishy! I say, old Lambe or the Head will change the fiver, Fishy."

"Cough it up," grinned Sammy.

Fish scowled and glanced about him anxiously. But they were fairly clear of the crowd now, and Fish nodded disgustedly at last.

"Aw, well, I guess you fat clams will spill things if I don't," he grumbled. "Look hyer, I guess there's no need to change the fiver, Bunter. Hyer you are!"

He fished into his pocket and produced some silver and coppers. Slowly he counted out into Bunter's fat palm a florin, a sixpence, and fourpence in coppers. He was turning to deal with Sammy when Billy Bunter, after staring blankly at the coins in his fat palm, gave a roar:

"Here—hold on, Fish!" he yelled. "What's this?"

"I guess and calculate that's your two-and-tenpence," said Fishy.

"Wha-what? B-b-but you said two-ten——" howled Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish shook his head.

"I guess you got me wrong, Bunter! I said two-and-ten—and I guess that means two-and-tenpence. Yep! Hyer, Sammy, hyer's your one-and-tenpence!"

"Why, you—you——" Bunter nearly burst with amazed wrath and indignation. "Why, you—you Yankee swindler! You sus-said——"

"I guess it was my idea, and I take the big share—yep!" said the cute business-man of the Remove irritably. "I guess you ain't getting a cent more, you fat clams!"

"Why, you—— Look here——"

"Nope! I guess the show's over," said Fishy, starting to walk on. "I guess—— Yarroop! Ow! Oh, Jerusalem!"

The show wasn't over—not so far as the Bunter Bros. were concerned. And Fishy roared with anguish as a fat fist, with all Billy Bunter's fury and weight behind it, smote the cute junior on the nose. He roared again as Sammy Bunter, as furious and disappointed as his major, joined in the sudden assault upon Fishy.

With Bunter minor and major smiting him hip and thigh, Fisher T. Fish floundered backwards, yelling in anguish.

"Ow! Yarroop! Jerusalem crickets! Let up, you boneheaded guys! Ow-ow! Yaroop!" he shrieked. "I tell you——Oh, crikey!"

"Pay up, you rotten swindler!" roared the valiant Bunter. "Smash him, Sammy! We'll make him pay up our share! He wouldn't have got the fiver but for us. It was you stuck the pin in Coker, and it was me——"

"Eh? What's that?"

It was a new voice—Horace Coker's! Naturally the commotion had attracted a crowd at once—and it attracted Coker, who, as it happened,

was just in search of Fisher T. Fish. It also attracted Harry Wharton & Co.

"Here, hold on, you asses!" shouted Harry Wharton in alarm. "You can't scrap here. What on earth——"

"Leave 'em to me," bawled Coker in sudden excitement. "I heard the fat rotter say something about sticking a pin in me. Someone did——"

"What?"

"Someone stuck a pin in me on the platform," roared Coker excitedly. "I knew there was something fishy about this. Bunter was just shouting——"

"I heard him, too," said Bob Cherry, startled. "Bunter——"

He grabbed Bunter and hauled him off Fishy. Bunter blinked round, suddenly aware of the crowd.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped.

"Bunter, what does this mean?" said Bob Cherry. "You said Fishy wouldn't have got that fiver but for you, and that Sammy shoved a pin in Coker. What——"

"Eh? Oh, no—nun-nothing of the kind," gasped Bunter in alarm. "Sammy and I had nothing to do with it—nothing. It was all Fishy's idea, and the beast promised me two-ten out of it, the rotten swindler. Now he only wants to pay me two-and-ten-pence, the beast! You—you see——"

"Bunter——"

"It was Fishy, I tell you," howled Bunter. "I'm not a ventriloquist at all, and——"

"What? So that explains——" began Harry Wharton.

"Nunno! I meant to say," said the flustered Bunter, "that it wasn't I who made Coker laugh by ventriloquising. It—it must have been someone else, you know. And Sammy——"

"So that's it," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Sammy sticks a pin into Coker; then when Coker opens his mouth to howl, Bunter ventriloquises and makes him seem to laugh. Just one of Fishy's cute ideas."

"I—I guess you guys have got me wrong," the alarmed trickster was saying, when Coker, whose brain functioned slowly, seemed suddenly to grasp the plot in all its baseness.

"So that was it?" he bawled furiously. "Stuck a pin in me and then——Why, I'll—I'll——"

Coker didn't stop to finish saying what he would do; he just did it!

He went into action right away, and for several whirling minutes Coker, Fishy, Billy Bunter and Sammy Bunter were mixed up in a wild sort of whirlwind. Sammy broke free first, and charged desperately through the laughing crowd, followed an instant later by Billy Bunter. When things cleared a little Fisher T. Fish looked like a bundle of rags—and Coker had the five-pound note in his fist!

"Here it is, Cherry!" he bawled. "Shove that in Toddy's collecting box. Now, you Yankee swindler——" "Yaroooooop!"

Fisher T. Fish bolted for his life, with Coker's heavy boot following him up at every step. Both disappeared across the Vicarage grounds, and Fishy's wails of anguish died away.

That ended Coker's side-show. But it wasn't quite the end for Fish, Billy Bunter and Sammy Bunter. Coker seemed to think that their punishment should be continuous, and he made a point of kicking the three conspirators every time he saw them after that, and, for many days after the fête, life was scarcely worth living for the Bunter Bros. and Fisher T. Fish.

"PLAYING THE GAME!"

Author unknown, but probably NOT by

CYRIL PEELE,

The Black Sheep of Rookwood.

Y ou fellows who aspire to fun
Will always find in me
A model (not a working one)
Of what you shouldn't be.

I'm very generous, you know ;
A kindly-hearted sort ;
My bookmaker will tell you so,
For I'm his chief support.

I'm fond of animals, of course,
And these I study hard ;
I know the life of every horse
On every racing-card.

And chemical experiments
Are greatly in my line ;
I study the constituents
Of nicotine and wine.

For exercise I'm always ripe ;
My ardour is so bright.
I often climb a water-pipe
At twelve o'clock at night.

I'm energetic, and I'm fond
Of any kind of trade ;
For I can judge a Diamond,
Or wield a Club or Spade.

I once addressed the School in Hall,
Upon the platform, too ;
The only words I now recall
Were, "Ow-wow-wow ! Yaroooh !"

I've often been admired, I know,
In classes by my Beak ;
He told me several days ago
That I am quite unique.

He said, "All kinds of boys I get,
Some dull, and others clever ;
But you're the only one I've met
Who has no brains whatever."

I play the game ; it is my pride ;
I hate those who deceive.
I play it best when I can slide
Two aces up my sleeve.

And I shall play the game to win,
And play it fair, until
At last I'm called to enter in
My cell at Pentonville.

