

Be introduced to Coker's Aunt ^{in this} Number.

In this
issue—
A
splendid
long
School
Tale,
entitled—

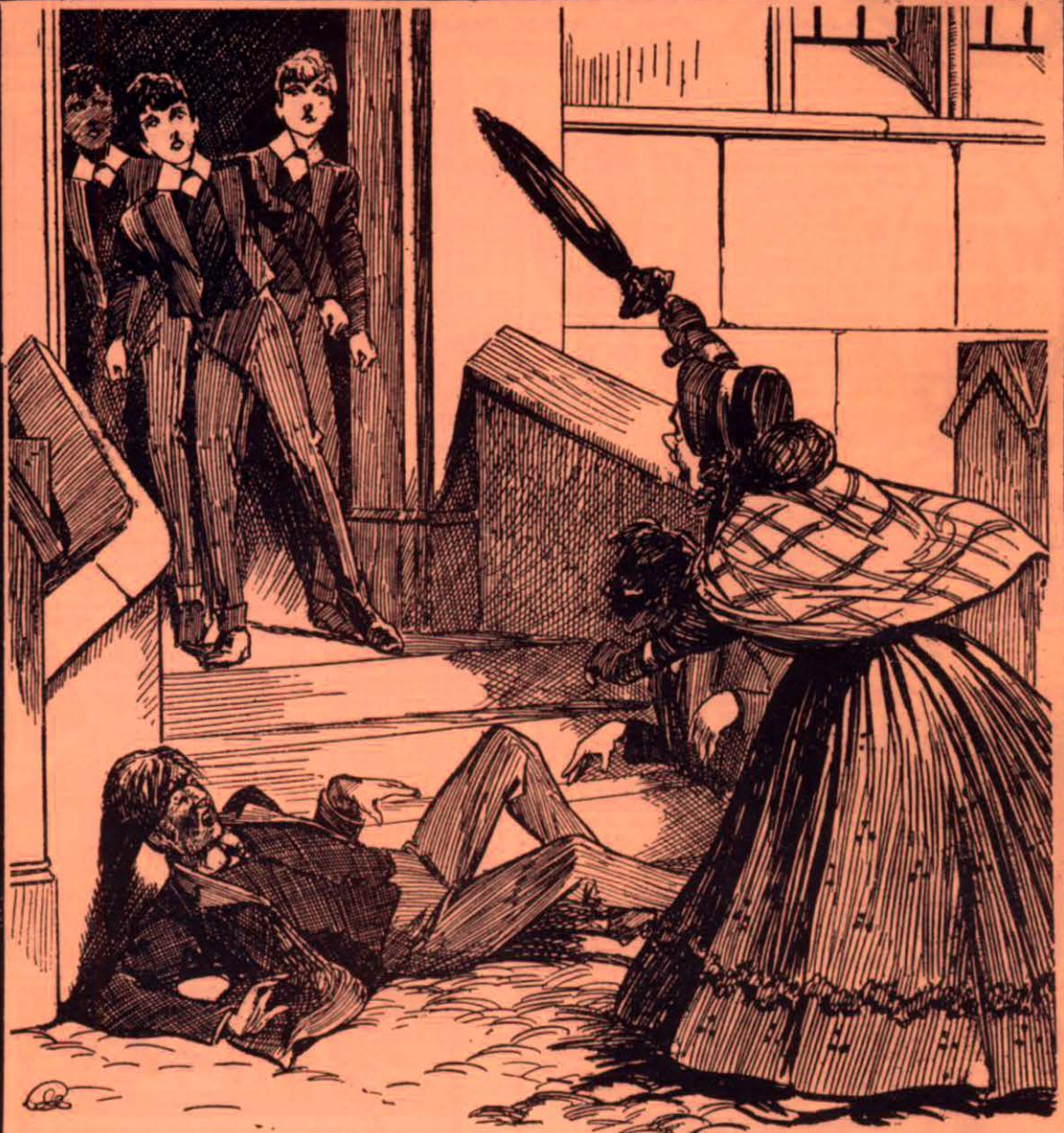
The Magnet 1st Library

Coker's
Catch,
By
Frank
Richards.

No. 145 |

Grand, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

| Vol. 5.



"Horace!" she shrieked. Coker groaned. "My only hat!
It's Aunt Judy!"

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School Tale of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Coker Wants Vengeance.

"COKER'S coming!"

A fag put his head in at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove, shouted out that warning, and vanished.

Harry Wharton looked up from the footer he was repairing, only in time to catch a glimpse of legs vanishing past the doorway.

"My hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

He ran to the door. Footsteps were dying away up the passage, and he caught a glimpse of Gatty of the Second. Then he glanced down the passage towards the stairs, and

"Coker's coming!" A fag put his head in at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove, shouted out that warning, and vanished.

saw that the warning had not been an empty one. Coker and Hobson of the Shell had just entered the Remove passage from the end towards the stairs.

Harry Wharton laughed a little.

Gatty's warning had been very good-natured, and might be useful; but Wharton was not at all afraid of the Shell fellows. But he was on his guard. He looked back quickly into the study.

"Back up, you chaps! It's trouble!"

Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came quickly towards him. The three juniors stood in the doorway, and watched the Shell fellows. Coker and Hobson caught sight of them, and grinned. They were evidently

satisfied at seeing that the chums of the Lower Fourth were at home, and that their visit was not in vain.

"Better lock the door," suggested Nugent.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur nodded assent.

"The lockfulness is terrific!" he remarked.

Harry Wharton shook his head decidedly.

"Let 'em all come," he replied. "We're not afraid of the Shell. Besides, they would wait outside for us, and they know we wouldn't spend a half-holiday in the study to keep out of their way."

"Yes, that's so."

"The so-fulness is terrific!" assented Hurree Singh.

"We'll give them all the trouble they want, too," said Harry Wharton. "They're big chaps, but there are three of us. And they won't take us by surprise. Let 'em come."

Coker and Hobson were coming.

"Hallo, Coker!" said Nugent, in a casual way, as the burly Shell fellow came up. "Have you got your remove into the Fifth yet?"

Coker flushed red, and Hobson grinned. That was a very sore point with Coker. It seemed as if he would never get his remove. At exams Coker was helpless and hopeless, and the most judicious shoving on from his Form-master could not get him that much-desired remove. The spectacle of a chap in a tail-coat still in the Shell, among the juniors, afforded great delight to the Lower Forms, and whenever Coker cuffed a fag, that fag was certain to retort with a question about the time when Coker expected to get his remove, till Coker was sick of the subject. And the more he flew out into tempers on the subject, the more he was chipped about it; and even Hobson, his special chum, was sometimes facetious about it, which led to strained relations in Coker's study.

Coker glared at the Removites.

"I'm jolly glad to find you in," he said. "I saw that cheeky fag scuttling upstairs, and I know he came to warn you to bolt."

"Well, we've not bolted," smiled Harry Wharton.

"Even the door's not bolted, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific!"

"I'll give you something to grin about," said Coker.

"Look here, one of you chaps put a picture up on the notice-board—a picture of me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "Was it a picture of a chap in a grey beard with the inscription: 'Still in the Shell?'"

"Yes, it was," said Coker angrily.

"Then I'm your man!" said Nugent. "It's the artistic temperament, you know. I can't help doing these things."

Coker clenched his fists.

"I'll jolly well teach you not to do it," he exclaimed.

"Come on, Hobby!"

"All serene," said Hobson, pushing back his cuffs, preparatory to backing up his chief.

"Master Coker! Master Coker!"

Coker paused as he was rushing forward, and looked round angrily. Trotter, the Greyfriars page, came up with a telegram in his hand.

"Master Coker! Telegram for you, sir. I've been hunting for you heverywhere," said Trotter.

"Oh, blow the telegram!" snapped Coker.

"Better open it," advised Hobson. "I've heard of people telegraphing money. You never know."

"Oh, all right!"

Coker took the telegram.

The three chums of the Remove still stood in the door of the study, waiting. Nugent grinned as a thought came into his mind, and he stepped back into the study, and took a hand broom from the cupboard. It was a very ancient hand broom, and had seen service in No. 1 Study. It was about to see more.

Nugent poured water over the worn head of it from the kettle, and then thrust it up the chimney. A shower of soot came down, and sparkled and fizzed in the fire. The head of the broom, when Nugent withdrew it, was thick with soot. The junior chuckled softly, and stepped back towards the door, holding the broom behind him.

Meanwhile, Coker had retired a few paces and opened the telegram.

He gave a snort as he read the message.

"My hat, this is rotten!"

"Not bad news?" asked Hobson.

Coker grunted.

"It's my Aunt Judith."

"Oh!"

"She's coming down to Greyfriars this afternoon," said Coker. "Seems to have sent this wire from the station. That's just like Aunt Judy; she makes up her mind to do things all of a sudden, and never gives a fellow a chance."

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If I'd had enough notice she was coming, I could have gone out for a spin for the afternoon. I call it rotten."

"So it is," said Hobson sympathetically.

"May be here any minute, I suppose," said Coker.

"They've been a long time bringing me this wire."

"Waiting for you heverywhere, Master Coker," said Trotter.

"Well, get out; there's no answer."

And Trotter departed, with a sniff. He had expected at least sixpence after hunting for Master Coker everywhere. But, as a matter of fact, Coker was not in a position, financially, to present him with a sixth part of that sum. Coker was in that pleasant situation known as "stony."

"I suppose you'll have to see the old girl," said Hobson.

"I suppose so. If I try to get out I shall run into her in the Close, as sure as a gun!" said Coker. "Still, there's time to lick these cheeky fags."

"All serene; I'm ready."

Coker thrust the telegram into his pocket.

Then the two Shell fellows advanced again. They looked very formidable antagonists for the Remove lads. The latter were sturdy and strong fellows for their age, but the Shell was two Forms above the Remove, and the difference in age and weight was, of course, great. In addition to that, Coker was old enough, and more than big enough, to have passed into the Fifth long before, and, as a matter of fact, Coker had more than once licked fellows in the Fifth in fistical encounters. But the chums of the Remove did not flinch. They were used to rows in the Remove passage, for the Remove was a most unruly Form, and always rowing with others or among themselves, and Harry Wharton & Co. were not afraid of a few hard knocks. Coker and Hobson had chosen the time well, however; for it was a fine half-holiday, and the other studies were deserted; there was no help at hand for Harry Wharton & Co.

"Now then," said Coker, in his most truculent tone, "you're going to have a licking all round. You can either take it quietly, or not, as you choose—"

"We'll choose not, please," said Wharton blandly.

"If you make a row you'll get it worse, that's all."

"We don't mind."

"Oh, all right! Go for 'em, Hobby!"

And the two Shell fellows rushed in at the doorway of No. 1 Study with brandished fists, and then there were ructions.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Kicked Out!

"BACK up, you fellows!"

"The backfulness is terrific!"

"Give 'em socks!" gasped Coker.

The three juniors were driven back into the study by the rush of the Shell fellows. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was swept off his feet by a drive from Hobson, and crashed against the table, knocking it flying into the fender. There was a crash of books and paper, and inkpot and pens.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "Groo! Yooh! Grooh!"

His roar of laughter ended thus unintentionally as Nugent whipped the sooty broom forward, and jammed it into his face.

"Groo!" gasped Coker. "Hoo! Yooh! Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent.

Coker staggered back.

His mouth and eyes and nose were crammed with soot, and he was blinking and sniffing and gasping and spluttering.

"Oh! Oh! Y-you young bib-bib-beast! Gerroogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent advanced upon the unfortunate Shell fellow, dabbing with the broom. Coker hit out wildly, and barked his knuckles on the broom, and yelled again. Nugent drove him to the doorway with dab after dab.

Meanwhile, Hobson was sparring with Wharton. Much bigger as the Shell fellow was, Wharton held his ground well. He was a splendid boxer, and in first-class condition.

Hobson, to his surprise, found that he had met something like his match.

Coker retreated blindly out of the study, knocking his smarting eyes to get the soot out. Hobson was prancing round Harry Wharton, getting harder knocks than he gave all the time.

As Coker backed away blindly down the passage to escape the lunging sooty broom, Frank turned his attention to Hobson.

Hobson saw him coming, and backed away.

Unfortunately for him, Frank Nugent was between him and the door, and he could not back out that way.

He backed into a corner.

"Look here," he roared, "you keep off! Keep that thing



Alonzo stood in the way with his hands uplifted, evidently determined to play the role of peacemaker. "Out of the way, Toddy!" shouted the chums of the Remove, as they charged down upon Coker and Hobson. (See page 3.)

away! I'll smash you if you bring that thing near me! Yaroo! Yaroo! Yoo-hoo!"

The broom was dabbing on his face.

He made a wild clutch at it, and it dabbed under his chin, and then on his head. Then he made a break for the door. The sooty broom trailed along his ear as he fled.

He dashed into the passage and escaped; and the chums of the Remove, crowding in the doorway, sent a roar of laughter after him.

Hobson joined Coker in the passage.

Coker's eyes were streaming and smarting, and he was still knuckling them furiously. Hobson rubbed his face with a handkerchief and snorted. He reduced the handkerchief to a state of African blackness, but worked no great improvement in the state of his face.

"Oh!" groaned Coker. "Oh!"

"Groo!" mumbled Hobson.

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

"You young rotters! I'll—I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, we can't have Shell bounders swanking about our passage!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We've had to drop on Coker for that before now. Let's clear them out!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Back up, Remove!" shouted Harry Wharton, calling along the passage for recruits, in case any of the fellows should be in their studies; for Coker and Hobson were furious, and preparing for a desperate struggle.

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Two heads were put out of study doors. One belonged to Billy Bunter, in the last study in the passage. Seeing that nothing more promising than a row was in progress, Billy Bunter promptly withdrew his head and closed the door. The other head belonged to Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars. Alonzo might be clumsy, and he might be unlucky, but he had heaps of pluck. He ran along the passage at once to help.

"Good old Toddy!" exclaimed Wharton. "Back up!"

"My dear Wharton, I trust there is not a serious quarrel—"

"Not a bit of it!" said Wharton cheerfully. "We're only going to chuck these Shell bounders downstairs."

"Come and do it, you cheeky young beggars!" roared Coker.

Alonzo blinked at them.

"It would save trouble if you were to retire peaceably, Coker!" he exclaimed. "You are certainly trespassing here, and encroaching upon the rights of others. My Uncle Benjamin always told me that it was very wrong to encroach upon the rights of others. I consider—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"My dear Coker, you are personal. My Uncle Benjamin says that personalities are the result of a very bad training—"

"Come on!" shouted Wharton.

"My dear Wharton—"

Alonzo stood in the way, with his hands uplifted, evidently determined to play the role of the peacemaker.

NEXT WEEK: "THE LEADER OF THE NEW SCHOOL"

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS

"Out of the way, Toddy!"

"But, my dear— Oh!"

The chums were charging, and Alonzo, being unfortunately in the way, went spinning along the wall, and fell in a heap. Then the three Removites crashed into the Shell fellows.

Coker and Hobson hit out blindly.

There was hard hitting on both sides, and Nugent's sooty broom came into active play once more, and it did more execution than the fists of the juniors.

Alonzo sat up, gasping. Even Alonzo realised now that peaceful words were superfluous, and he pushed back his cuffs and rushed into the fray.

He delivered a terrific swipe at Coker, which unfortunately missed Coker and caught Nugent on the side of the head.

Frank yelled, as he went reeling.

"Oh! Ow!"

Alonzo gasped.

"My dear Nugent, I'm so sorry——"

"Oh, you frabjous ass——"

"I'm sorry— Yoh!"

Coker's fists crashed on Alonzo's chest, and levelled him with the linoleum. Nugent came up to the scratch again gallantly, and two or three more Removites, Bulstrode and Hazeldene and Linley came on the scene, attracted by the noise—and a combined rush of the juniors swept Coker and Hobson to the stairs.

Hobson went rolling down.

Coker clung to the banisters with one hand, and punched away furiously with the other, and the juniors settled upon him like a swarm of bees.

Coker was dragged off the banisters and rolled bodily down the stairs, and all sorts of things rolled out of his pockets as Coker rolled.

He was quite breathless and bewildered by the time he reached the lower hall, and had hardly a gasp left in him.

Harry Wharton looked round quickly.

It was usually far from safe to have a row just there, with the masters' studies so near at hand; but no master had appeared on the scene. It was evident that the fineness of the afternoon had tempted them all out of doors. There was no interruption from the upper powers to be feared.

"Chuck them out of the House!" shouted Wharton. "Roll 'em into the Close!"

"Hurrah!"

"The hurrahfulness is terrific!"

"Go it, Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was hardly a struggle left in Hobson or Coker. They were breathless and "done." The juniors rolled them across the hall to the wide-open portal. Outside they went rolling, and the soot from them left black trails on the white stone.

"Down the steps!" roared Nugent.

"Hurrah!"

And Coker and Hobson rolled down the steps into the sunny Close. There they landed on the ground, and sat up, torn and sooty and dishevelled and gasping. The Removites crowded the steps and the doorway, gasping, too, and laughing with what breath they had left.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent suddenly. "Look there!"

In the excitement of the struggle neither the Shell fellows nor the Removites had observed that a cab had driven in at the gates. They did not observe, till this moment, that an old lady in a remarkable bonnet had alighted, and was gazing at the scene in astonishment and horror.

"Phew!" said Wharton.

"My word! It's Coker's aunt, as sure as a gun!"

"Coker's aunt! Great Scott!"

Coker of the Shell heard the words, and blinked round

sootily in the direction of the old lady. He gasped and gasped.

"My hat!"

The new-comer came up with horror-stricken countenance. She gazed with wide eyes at the Shell fellows sitting at her feet.

"Horace!" she shrieked.

Coker groaned.

"My only hat! Aunt Judy!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker's Aunt!

AUNT JUDY stared in blank horror at her beloved nephew for a moment more, and then she grasped her umbrella in a businesslike manner. Her hostile intentions were evident, and the Removites hastily crowded back. Coker jumped up like a jack-in-the-box. Hobson groaned, and sat where he was.

"Aunt Judy!"

"My darling Horace! You have been assaulted!"

"Oh, no——"

"I will punish these young ruffians——"

"My hat!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Beat a retreat—quick! I don't like the look of that gang!"

"The gangfulness is terrific!"

Coker caught his aunt by the arm, just in time to stop her charging up the steps.

"It's—it's all right, aunt!" he gasped, with an unhappy glance at the juniors. "This is only a game!"

"Horace!"

"You see, it's a half-holiday to-day," said Coker, "and—I got so excited at the prospect of your coming, that I—I started this game!"

"That's it," said Hobson, dragging himself so far as to sit on the lowest step. "It's all serene!"

"My darling Horace——"

"It's all right, aunt!" persisted Horace. "You see, we call this game— Hang it, you ass!" he whispered fiercely to Hobson. "What do we call it?"

"King of the Castle," said Hobson.

"Of course!" said Coker. "You see, we call this game 'King of the Castle,' auntie. Those chaps there have to keep the top of the steps, you see, and we—we have to be rolled down, you know. It's a splendid game!"

"Brings your muscle up," said Hobson.

"That's it," said Coker, with a grateful look at his chum. "It's specially intended to bring a chap's muscle up, you know, auntie. The Head specially recommends it in the case of weak and nervous boys."

"My only hat!" murmured Harry Wharton. "If Coker's aunt believes that——"

"Of course, she believes her darling Horace!" said Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The darlingfulness of the esteemed Horace is terrific. And the beloved and venerable aunt believes him fully!"

"Looks like it."

It certainly did look like it. The Removites looked on at the scene with great interest. Coker's aunt was evidently a great admirer of Coker, and nothing that Horace did could be wrong in her eyes.

Her face cleared as he gave his explanation.

"Very well, Horace," she said. "I really thought you were fighting at first!"

"Oh, aunt!"

"I really did!"

"Fighting!" exclaimed Horace, in horror. "My dear Aunt Judy!"

"I am sorry I did you injustice, Horace!" said Miss Coker.

"But your dear father was a very pugnacious man—very pugnacious. I remember once when he fought with a dreadful grocer's boy, when we were both quite young, and split all his eggs upon the ground. I remember it perfectly, because eggs were so dear at that time, and he had a black employer, and when your father was afterwards, he was very careful to take no notice of him."

Whether it was the dreadful grocer's boy, or dear Horace's papa who had the black eye, and which of them was reprimanded by his employer, and which it was saw which pass and took no notice of him, was not quite clear from Miss Coker's statement, nor did Horace seem inclined to inquire for more exact particulars.

"I should advise you to play some less rough and dirty game," said Miss Coker. "You are in a most dreadful state, Horace."

"Am I, auntie?"

"Yes. You must run away and change your clothes at

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once, Horace, and wash yourself, and mind you part your hair in the middle in the way that makes you look so sweet. You will have to see the Head with me."

Coker gave the grinning Removites a furious look with one side of his face, keeping an affectionate grin on the other side for Miss Coker's benefit—an effort which brought about an almost alarming distortion of his features.

"Yes, aunt," he said meekly.

"Run away, then, Horace, and mind you do not play these rough games any more. When you are in need of excitement, I should recommend guessing charades, or playing a round game for hazel-nuts, which will amuse you without spoiling your clothes."

Coker gasped. The Removites tried not to laugh, out of politeness towards Miss Coker. But the idea of Coker, the terror of the Shell, playing a round game for nuts was too much. The juniors staggered away with all kinds of mysterious chuckling sounds proceeding from them.

Miss Coker ascended the steps of the Head's house, and was admitted there, and disappeared.

Coker and Hobson looked at one another.

"Well, this is luck!" said Coker lugubriously.

"I'll smash those Remove bounders," growled Hobson.

"Oh, never mind them!" growled Coker. "I'm thinking about my Aunt Judy. She's a jolly old girl to swallow things like that, but—"

"Oh, blow your Aunt Judy!"

"She's come down for the afternoon," groaned Coker. "I shall have to show her over the school, and introduce her to the fellows."

"Groo!"

"She's awfully decent to me, and I'm very fond of her," said Coker.

"Yes, you look it."

"Well, a chap can be fond of his aunt without wanting her to come to his school, I suppose," said Coker argumentatively.

Hobson grinned.

"Yes, I s'pose so. Does she always carry that umbrella?"

"I believe so?"

"Been in the family, I suppose, ever since the Flood?"

"Oh, rats!"

"And that bonnet," said Hobson. "My eyes—that bonnet! I believe it belongs to the Early English style."

"She's always worn it," said Coker.

"It looks as if she has," assented Hobson, who was very much disturbed and damaged by the tussle with the juniors, and was taking it out of his friend, in a way one's chums sometimes have. "Must have been dug up in Nineveh, I suppose, in the first place."

"Oh, let my aunt's bonnet alone," said Coker.

"My dear chap, I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole. I suppose she got her set of features at the same establishment—"

"Never mind her features."

"And her voice—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Coker went up the steps. He didn't want to quarrel with Hobson just then; he felt that he needed a friend to stand by him in entertaining his aunt. Now, Aunt Judy certainly was, from a schoolboy's point of view, a terror. Her old-fashioned costume and early Victorian bonnet, her corpulent umbrella, her cotton gloves, and her endearing expressions towards her nephew, made Coker simply wriggle, and made him turn cold at the thought of walking her about among the fellows.

It was at such a time that he needed a true chum to stand by him through thick and thin, Coker felt. And a horrid suspicion was rising with him that Hobson was picking a row in order to fall out with him, and escape Aunt Judy for the afternoon—which it is probable was precisely what Hobson was doing.

Hobson followed Coker slowly in.

"I say, Coker, I'm sorry about shoving you out in that state to see your aunt," said Harry Wharton, in his frank way. "Of course, we had no idea—"

Coker grinned.

"Oh, it's all right, Wharton! I'll lick you for it another time."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Always ready," he replied. "We'll give you a warm time whenever you care to come to the Remove passage."

"The warmth of the time will be terrific."

Coker and Hobson went in. They headed for the dormitory to clean off the soot, and change their decidedly dirty collars. Hobson was growling discontentedly all the time.

"Don't forget to part your hair in the middle, in the way that makes you look so sweet, Coker," he remarked sarcastically, when they had finished their ablutions.

Coker flushed red.

"Look here, Hobson, you just shut up!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

"If you want a thick ear, you've only got to ask for it," roared Coker.

Hobson sniffed.

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"More rats!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

That was enough for Coker; or, rather, too much. His feelings had been already sorely tried. He rushed at Hobson and smote him. Hobson retorted in kind, and they closed in an embrace that was not affectionate, and pranced round the dormitory, punching at each other wildly.

The door opened and Trotter put his head in.

"Master Coker wanted in the 'Ead's study."

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

They parted, glaring at each other. Coker put his tie straight, and left the dormitory. Hobson followed suit; but he did not wait for Coker to come out from his interview with the Head. He went to the bicycle-shed and took out his machine, and in two minutes was pedalling contentedly along the Friardale Road. He had failed his chum in the hour of need; but he had escaped Aunt Judy.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

About Horace.

DR. LOCKE, the respected Head of Greyfriars, sat in his study, with a far from happy expression upon his face. Dr. Locke had been enjoying his half-holiday.

With a bright fire blazing in his study, and the open window giving a wide view upon the trees in the Close, and with the voices of the boys sounding cheerfully in the distance from the footer field, the Head had been very comfy. There were papers upon his writing-table, papers in mysterious characters, which, deciphered, would have been found to be fragments of the great Greek tragic poet; it being Dr. Locke's custom to beguile his leisure moments by preparing his new edition of "Æschylus"—a new edition which was intended to make some sensation among at least nine or ten old gentleman in quiet cloisters at Oxford. Upon the doctor, so pleasantly engaged, descended Aunt Judy.

As a matter of fact, Aunt Judy's coming was not unexpected; but, deep in the fascinating work of the editor, Dr. Locke had forgotten all about Coker's aunt. The "Seven Against Thebes" were of more interest to him at that moment than Horace Coker or even Miss Judith Coker. When Miss Coker was announced, the Head looked up absently from "Æschylus," and passed his hand over his brow, and then he rose in his old-fashioned, courteous way, with his old-fashioned, courteous bow.

"My dear Miss Coker," he exclaimed, "pray sit down! How very kind of you to come so far!"

"Not at all, doctor," said Miss Coker. "I am very anxious about Horace."

"Dear me," said Dr. Locke, who, still deep in classical reflections, and not yet quite awakened to the outside world, as it were, imagined for the moment that Miss Coker alluded to Horace of the Satires, our old friend Q. Horatius Flaccus. "Dear me, Miss Coker, I had no idea that you took so deep an interest in such subjects!"

Miss Coker stared, as well she might.

"Really, doctor—"

"But I am delighted," said the Head, with a pleased smile. "I am delighted to see any lady take so deep an interest in matters of this sort."

"It is quite natural, I suppose," said Miss Coker, puzzled, "that I should take an interest in Horace."

The doctor nodded.

"Quite natural," he assented—"quite natural, and very delightful. May I ask which of his works you prefer?"

"Really, doctor—"

"You are, doubtless, devoting your attention to him especially just now," the Head suggested. "That is what you mean by saying that you have anxiety on the subject."

"Yes, yes, that is quite right."

"Very good. I was not aware that you were a Latin student, Miss Coker."

Miss Coker stared.

"Neither am I, doctor."

Then the doctor stared.

"You—you are not—"

"Certainly not."

"Then—then, may I ask, what is your interest in an author who writes in that tongue?" asked the perplexed Head.

"What! Horace does not write in Latin."

The Head smiled.

"I assure you that he does, Miss Coker."

"Dear me! How very clever of him!" said Miss Coker.

The Head coughed.

"Certainly he was a great writer," he remarked. "But

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a person is naturally expected to be able to write in his own language."

"Dear me," said Miss Coker. "I do not quite understand you. I suppose you mean that Horace writes in Latin for his class-work—hexameters and things."

The Head rubbed his chin.

"He has never written to me in Latin," said Miss Coker. "But I have no doubt that the dear, clever boy could if he wished, or in Greek, either, for that matter."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"And, indeed, if Horace is so advanced as you say, I really do not see any adequate reason for not passing him into the Fifth Form," said Miss Coker.

"Horace—in the Fifth Form!" gasped Dr. Locke, thinking for a moment that Miss Coker was insane.

"Certainly. I am sure he has been long enough in the Shell."

Then the facts dawned upon Dr. Locke. He had quite forgotten that Miss Coker's nephew's Christian name was Horace. Miss Coker, naturally, did not think it possible for anybody to forget an important thing like that.

"Ah!" gasped the Head. "You are speaking of—of your nephew."

"Certainly. Whom did you imagine I was speaking of?" asked Miss Coker, in great astonishment.

The Head coloured a little.

"Bless my soul! A mistake on my part; it is of no consequence. You—you came, of course, to see me about your nephew. I think you acquainted me with that circumstance in your letter," said the Head.

"Yes. I am anxious about Horace."

"Ah, yes, Horace Coker, certainly!"

"The dear, clever boy has been so long in a lower Form," said Miss Coker. "It is preying on his mind, and keeping him from attending to his studies as he desires. You may have probably noticed that he is a very keen student."

Dr. Locke coughed.

He had noticed, and the master of the Shell had noticed, that Horace Coker was one of the veriest slackers that had ever slacked at Greyfriars. But naturally he did not feel inclined to tell Miss Judith Coker so. The good lady was evidently a great believer in her nephew, and placed the greatest trust in the explanations he gave, every vacation, to account for his position in the school.

"Dear Horace would go ahead like—like a steam-engine," said Miss Coker, after pausing a moment to think of a suitable simile, "if he had proper encouragement. He would have proper encouragement if he had a place to keep up. That place is in the next Form above the Shell—I think the Form he is in at present is called the Shell."

"Exactly!"

"He is growing so big a boy, that he is chaffed—I think he called it chaffed, or chipped, or something of the sort—about being in the Shell so long. Dr. Locke, I want to appeal to you to give Horace a chance, without waiting for the examinations. I know you sometimes pass a boy into a higher Form—"

"A boy who shows exceptional cleverness may get his remove earlier," said the Head, "but—"

Miss Coker beamed.

"Yes, that is exactly Horace's case. I am sure the dear boy is exceptionally clever. His Uncle James said that he was the most brilliant Latinist he had ever spoken to. I remember the incident perfectly, for it was on the day that Uncle James had an execution in the house, and came to us to borrow seventy pounds. You have surely noticed, Doctor, Horace's exceptional cleverness. You spoke just now yourself of his writing in Latin. I am sure it is very clever to be able to write in Latin, or—or in Dutch," added Miss Coker, with a glance at the papers littered on the Head's desk—apparently taking the Greek characters for a kind of Dutch.

Dr. Locke checked a smile.

"I have already been thinking about Coker," he said. "I have consulted with the master of the Shell, and with Mr. Prout of the Fifth, and we think it may be possible to give Coker his remove."

"Oh, how kind of you, doctor!"

"Not at all. It is rather absurd, as you say, that a youth of Coker's age and size should be in the Shell, among lads of fifteen."

"It is due to over-study," sighed Miss Coker. "Dear Horace has often told me how it is. He studies so hard as to overtax his brain, and then he finds his mind quite a blank on the day of an examination."

The Head coughed.

"As a matter of fact," said Miss Coker, with a beaming smile, "I have no doubt that Horace is really fitted to take his place in the Sixth Form, if he had a chance to do himself real justice."

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"Suppose you send for Horace now," suggested Miss Coker.

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"Very well."

The Head touched the bell, and Trotter was sent for Coker.

"The dear boy!" said Miss Coker. "He was playing a very rough game when I arrived, and was quite covered over with soot. It is a game called 'King of the Castle.' I dare say it is one of the favourite games here, doctor—but the soot must be very detrimental to the boys' clothing."

The Head was saved from the necessity of replying by the arrival of Coker.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Lucky for Coker.

COKER came to the Head's study with some misgivings. He had had to explain at home how it was that he never passed up in the school, and he had related all sorts of explanations on the subject—chiefly attributing his permanent position in the Shell to the effects of over-study. Miss Coker's promise to use her influence with the Head to get him his remove had caused him half-relief and half-alarm. He hoped Miss Coker would be able to do it, but he was very doubtful how the Head would take an outside suggestion on the subject. He guessed that Aunt Judith's sudden arrival at Greyfriars was for the purpose, and he felt very uneasy as he tapped at the Head's door.

Dr. Locke bade him enter.

Miss Coker gave him an affectionate glance as he came in, as who should say, "Isn't he nice?"

Coker ducked his head.

Coker probably had some qualities. He was very big, and very clumsy, and very obtuse, but he had the saving grace of a sense of humour. He knew that he wasn't clever, and there was no humbug about him as a rule on the subject. He wanted his remove into the Fifth, not because he thought he was on the average intellectual level of the Fifth Form, but because it was pleasanter to be in the Fifth than in the Shell at his age, and he admitted it.

His inability to grapple with subjects that some of the fags could tackle filled him with a comical despair. But he said, with some justice, that it was rotten for him to have to stick among the juniors till he was a bearded man because he hadn't a taste for any language but his own, and liked cricket better than mathematics—not that he was specially good at cricket, or football either. At the summer game he was generally called "Butterfingers" when he fielded, and as a batsman he had a late cut that would have made the angels weep. When Coker was batting it was quite a common thing for the fags to say to one another, "Let's go and see Coker stump himself." And at footer he was irresistible in a charge, but he was quite as likely to charge one of his comrades off the ball as anybody else, and when he passed, it was said that he generally passed to an opponent.

His general incompetence was a subject of hilarity to Coker himself, as well as to everybody else at Greyfriars. He took it seriously only on examination-days and on occasions at home when he was cornered by affectionate relatives and asked to explain why he wasn't head of the Sixth.

The explanations Coker gave were fearful and wonderful. His most humorous explanation was attributing his failures to over-study. The idea of that appealed to Coker's sense of humour. He could never get through his prep. without a shove from Hobson, and when he construed in the class-room he would stumble over words that were perfectly familiar to fags in the Second Form. Coker was the despair of the Shell-master, who would have been glad enough to see him removed into the Fifth; but Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was by no means eager to receive a pupil with Coker's reputation.

Dr. Locke looked long and hard at Coker.

He wondered whether he would be justified in giving the densest slacker at Greyfriars a sufficiently hard push to send him into the Fifth.

After all, what purpose was served by keeping him in the Shell? So far as his attainments went, he might as well have been left in the Fourth Form. But a fellow in tail-coats in the Fourth would have been ridiculous. But he was little less ridiculous in the Shell, with a moustache beginning to appear on his upper lip. Perhaps it would be no worse for him to be a fool in the Fifth than to be a fool in the Shell. That was how the Head put it to himself. Needless to say, he never thought of putting it like that to Miss Coker.

Coker dropped his eyes.

He wondered what effect the "old girl," as he mentally styled his aunt, had had on the Doctor. He was quite in doubt whether he was going to get a remove into the Fifth, or a licking.

"Coker!" said the Head at last.

"Yes, sir."

"Your aunt is very anxious about you."

"Yes, sir."

"You have caused her anxiety by your continual failures."

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"Yes, sir."
 "She is anxious about your future."
 "Yes, sir," said Coker cheerfully.
 "My dear Horace—"
 "Yes, aunt."
 "Dr. Locke is going to give you your remove!"
 "Ahem!" said the Head dubiously.
 "Thank you, sir."
 "Coker is really a— a difficult case," said the Head. "I hardly know what to do with Coker. I know it must be a great disappointment to his people to see him still in the Shell."
 "It's rotten, sir!" said Coker. "I—I mean, I don't like it myself, sir."
 "Then you might surely have made an effort!" said the Head, somewhat tartly.
 "Yes, sir."
 "The dear boy has made continual efforts," said Miss Coker, with a fond glance at her nephew. "I am sure that his constitution has suffered from his efforts. I had an uncle who worked so hard to pass an examination that he died of rheumatism—at least, if it was not rheumatism it was pneumonia, or something of that sort, and the doctor asked me if it was in the family, and I said 'Good gracious, no!' It was in the same year that Horace was cutting his dear little teeth, and everybody said what a fine baby he was, and you could hear him when he cried at the very end of the garden. I remember it was a very long garden, and there was a pear-tree at the end, where we used to sit and have tea in the afternoons, and—"
 "Exactly!" murmured the doctor, despairing of ever reaching the end of Miss Coker's reminiscences, and venturing to interrupt. "Coker, then—"
 "It will be so nice to see the dear boy rewarded for all his hard work and sticking to his lessons like a— a Trojan," said Miss Coker. "At least, I don't know whether the Trojans ever stuck to their lessons, but I believe they were a hard-working race of people, and made wooden horses, or something of that sort. I distinctly recollect Uncle James making a remark that was really very learned and classical on the subject at the time that we were buying a wooden horse for Horace, who was then five years old, and a sweeter child—"
 Dr. Locke murmured something.
 He began to feel that he would pass Horace into the Sixth Form itself, or make him Head of Greyfriars, to get Miss Coker to take her departure.
 "Then it is settled?" asked Miss Coker.
 "You see—"
 "The good kind doctor has sent for you to say that it is settled, Horace," said Miss Coker. "He knows that you are misunderstood by your Form-master."
 "My dear madam—"
 "You remember, Horace, the occasion you have related to me several times when you corrected your Form-master's Latin—"
 "Oh, don't mention that!" said Coker, in a hurried whisper.
 "But I must mention it, Horace, to do you justice. It was through your Form-master using a false quantity, you said. I really do not know how much he should have used, but if he used a wrong quantity of Latin, or anything else, I am sure it was very foolish of him, and—"
 "I—I will discuss this matter with the—the masters concerned," said the Head. "I do not think it necessary for you to waste any more of your valuable time, Miss Coker."
 "Not at all, doctor!" beamed Miss Coker. "My time is of no value whatever where dear Horace is concerned!"
 The doctor groaned, and then, remembering himself, tried to change it into a cough. It was a most remarkable sound that finally proceeded from his mouth, and Miss Coker looked at him in some alarm.
 "Dear me, doctor! You are not ill?"
 "A— a slight—er—it is over now!" gasped the Head. "I—I think you may safely leave this matter in my hands, Miss Coker."
 "But I suppose I may remain till it is settled?"
 "Till—it—is—settled?"
 "Yes."
 "My dear Miss Coker—"
 "You are going to consult with the masters?"
 "Exactly."
 "Then surely I may wait in the study?"
 "Ahem!"
 "I should be so glad to see my darling Horace show what he can do, and I am sure you will be very much surprised. I am sure he knows the correct amount of Latin—the correct quantity, as you would say."
 Coker grinned.
 Dr. Locke involuntarily passed his hand across his brow.
 "I—I think—"
 "So I will wait till it is settled," said Miss Coker. "I shall never be at rest till my darling has his remove."
 Dr. Locke gasped.
 "I—I think you may leave this matter to me, madam," he
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said. "I—I think I can guarantee that Coker will get his remove."
 "You are sure, doctor?" asked the relentless old lady.
 "Ye-es, I think so."
 "Quite—quite sure?"
 "Yes," said the Head desperately. "Quite sure."
 Miss Coker rose.
 "So kind of you!" she said. "Perhaps you will see me to my cab, Horace?"
 "With pleasure!" said Horace, with alacrity.
 "Good-bye, my dear doctor."
 "Er—good-afternoon, madam."
 Horace walked Miss Coker off. She had gained her point. Horace Coker saw Miss Coker into her cab, to his great delight finding that the old lady had a train to catch, and could not stay to see Greyfriars at all. She promised him another visit shortly, and, meanwhile, she held a conversation of five minutes' duration with Horace at the door of the cab. An interested crowd of fellows of all Forms gathered round to watch, but they did not hear what was said.
 But they saw the expression of Horace Coker's face grow brighter and brighter, and when at last his aunt kissed him good-bye, he threw his arms round her neck, and hugged her, and gave her a sounding smack that could be heard at a great distance. Then he stood, cap in hand, looking after the cab as it drove away, and in the exuberance of his spirits he waved it round his head. It was plain that Horace Coker had some reason to rejoice.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Coker, of the Fifth!

THAT was how Coker got his remove.
 The next day it was known all over Greyfriars that Horace Coker, of the Shell, had been removed into the Fifth, and was a full-blown senior.
 But that was not all that was known.
 It was rumoured in the Form-rooms and the passages that Coker's aunt had been so delighted with his success that she had come down really handsome.
 Coker's aunt was well-known to be rolling in money, as the juniors put it. Coker told wonderful tales of her wealth. His stories were backed up by the fact that he sometimes received liberal tips, and sometimes hampers, from Aunt Judith. If Coker's rich aunt had come down handsome, Coker was in clover.
 And it was soon seen that Coker really was in clover.
 He was seen to pull out a handful of sovereigns in the Close. On another occasion, he absent-mindedly folded up a five-pound note to make a spill to light the gas, and stopped himself only just in time.
 Such things as these took a fellow's breath away.
 Greyfriars fellows, as a rule, had well-to-do people belonging to them. But a five-pound note was a very rare possession there. Fellows in the Sixth had been known to possess them. Harry Wharton, of the Remove, had had one once. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sometimes showed a crisp fiver, and so did Wun Lung, of the Remove. But not commonly.
 There was Ionides, of the Sixth, the son of a rich Greek merchant, and he was certainly plentifully supplied with money, and he was the only fellow at Greyfriars who was known to carry banknotes habitually. To see Coker in possession of paper payable at the Bank of England, and so much of it that he could absent-mindedly use a banknote for a pipelight, was astounding. Coker's banknotes were talked of in hushed tones in the junior rooms. Immense respect was shown to Coker.
 The fellows agreed that it was high time that Coker was in the Fifth, and there never was a fellow more suitable to be in the Fifth, and to grace and adorn that or any other Form.
 His backwardness was attributed to incompetence on the part of his Form-master. Coker was all right. A fellow who had five or six banknotes in his trousers pocket could not have very much the matter with him, physically, morally, or intellectually.
 Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, had been inclined to give Coker rather a warm reception into the Form. But the story of the banknotes and the handful of gold changed Blundell's opinion. He began to feel that, perhaps, he had misjudged Coker. After all, it was quite time he passed into the Fifth, and it would be only civil to give the chap a friendly reception.
 Bland, of the Fifth, who was Blundell's chum, quite backed him up. He suggested taking up Coker, and making something of him. Blundell was doubtful about the possibility

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of making anything of Coker; but he thought of the bank-notes, and said nobly that it was a fellow's duty to try.

Coker's old friends in the Shell showed that though lost to sight, he was to memory dear. Hobson, rather regretful of that little row in the dormitory, and of his base desertion of his friend—which had turned out unnecessary, after all, as Aunt Judy had not stayed for the afternoon—bubbled over with affection as he congratulated Coker on getting his remove.

It was after morning lessons on Thursday, and Coker had just come out of the Fifth-Form-room after his first morning there.

Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, had received Coker with a grunt, and during the morning had discovered that he was even a bigger duffer than he was popularly supposed to be; and so Coker had not had a wholly pleasant time in the Form-room. The only time he gave correct answers to any questions was when Blundell whispered to him what to say.

But Coker never allowed this kind of thing to depress him. If differences of opinion with his tutors had depressed Coker, Coker would have passed his whole existence in a state of depression.

Coker had a way of allowing reproof and sarcasm to flow off him like water off a duck's back, leaving him quite serene.

It was a happy faculty of Coker's, and saved him a great deal of worry. It did not advance him in his studies.

Coker came out with Blundell and Bland and Higgs, all three of whom seemed quite fond of him. Hobson was waiting in the passage, having cut off at once for the Fifth-Form door as soon as the Shell came out.

He came up to Coker with a sweet smile.

"Hallo, old boy!" he said. "Congratulations."

Coker stared at him.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Congratulations," repeated Hobson, with a sickly smile.

"What about?"

"Why, getting your—your remove, you know," said Hobson, astonished.

"Oh, that!" said Coker, in a tone as if that had happened ages back. "Thanks."

"I was glad to hear it," said Hobson.

"Oh!"

"I'm glad, you know."

"Thanks," said Coker loftily. "You're very good. But would you mind passing on?"

Hobson stared, "Passing on?" he murmured.

"Yes. It's a bit infra dig., you know, for a Fifth-Form chap to stand about talking to juniors."

Hobson's mouth opened wide.

He could only stare blankly at Coker, gasping like a fish out of water.

Coker slipped his arm through Blundell's, and strolled on with him, leaving Hobson still gasping and staring.

"My only hat!" Hobson ejaculated at last.

And he drifted off in amazement.

He had not expected the remove into the Fifth to make such a tremendous difference to Horace Coker at once.

But there was no doubt it had.

Coker was a senior now.

He did not mean to let the youngsters forget it. He draped his new-found dignity round him like a Spanish noble his cloak.

Coker's nose was very high in the air as he strolled out into the Close with Blundell and Bland and Higgs.

"My hat!" said Hobson, again. "My only chapeau!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Remove came pouring out of their class-room. "Here's Hobson in a fit."

"The fitfulness is terrific."

Hobson blinked at them.

"Have you seen Coker?" he asked.

"Coker?"

"Yes. Since he's got his remove?"

"No," said Wharton curiously. "I suppose it makes a difference. He's a senior now."

"Tremendous swell!" said Hobson. "Won't speak to a chap in the Shell. Ha, ha, ha! Not that it makes any difference to me. I don't care! Ha, ha! Of course, I don't care! I call it caddish. But I don't care a rap. Not me!"

And Hobson snorted to show that he didn't care.

The Removites laughed.

"Let's go and have a look at Coker," said Nugent.

"Good egg!"

"Where is he, Hobby?"

"Oh, he's in the quad!" snorted Hobson. "Walking with Bland and Higgs—chumming up with seniors already. He's forgotten old friends."

Hobson had forgotten, too, how Coker's old friend had THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 145.

failed him in the hour of need. But we all have bad memories at times.

The Removites crowded out into the Close, Harry Wharton & Co. looking for Coker. They found him. He was walking up and down in a slow and graceful promenade, with Bland and Higgs and Blundell. The four seniors looked very imposing, at least, in their own eyes, and they regarded with lofty glances some mere juniors—Shell fellows—who were playing rounders.

Harry Wharton chuckled.

"My hat! Coker's on the high horse!" he exclaimed. "Blessed if I don't think he'll get a crick in the neck if he keeps his chin at that angle. I say, Coker."

Coker looked down on the Removites.

He did not deign to speak. Juniors were beneath his notice. Only yesterday he had been a junior himself; but now he was a senior of the seniors.

"Coker, old man!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Deaf, Coker?"

"The deaf-fulness of the esteemed Coker is terrific."

"Run away," said Coker, with a wave of the hand.

"What!"

"Run away and play."

"My hat!"

"It's rotten for these youngsters to be allowed the run of the quad," said Coker, in a complaining tone to Higgs. "I think there ought to be a playground marked off for them, you know. Haw!"

"Yes, rather," said Higgs.

"Certainly," Bland remarked. "They're a general nuisance."

"Oh, my only chapeau!" said Bob Cherry. "Coker, you're rich—you're too rich! Oh!"

"I can't waste my time talking to juniors," said Coker.

"How long have you been a senior?" shrieked Tom Brown.

"None of your cheek, kid!"

"Here, you buzz off, you youngsters!" exclaimed Blundell.

"Now, then, off with you!"

The Fifth-Formers looked hostile. Harry Wharton & Co. retreated, almost sobbing with merriment. The new dignity of Horace Coker was too comic.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Shell Do Not Like It.

HORACE COKER had obtained his remove, and he did not allow Greyfriars to forget that fact. His aunt Judith had come down handsome on the strength of his remove into the Fifth, and that fact was also evident to all Greyfriars. The rise of Coker was one of the most-discussed phenomena in the history of Greyfriars.

The Fifth had received him with open arms. Blundell and Bland had asked Mr. Prout to put Coker into their study, and Mr. Prout, who was puzzled where to put him, assented at once.

Coker carried his chipped desk, and his rocky coal-scuttle, and his footer and his bat, and his dog-eared books, into Blundell's study, or, rather, they had been carried for him by admiring new friends in the Fifth. It was an honour to carry things for Coker.

Coker was becoming a great leader already. In fact, Higgs had mooted the suggestion of asking Coker to captain the Fifth Form eleven. Higgs, who was a little given to classical quotation, put it in Horatian language, as suitable to the occasion, "Nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro," only Higgs made it "Nil desperandum Cokro duce et auspice Cokro." Which was very clever of Higgs.

He pointed out that the name of Coker was as easy to decline as the name of Teucer, and he did it; and a remark of Potter's, to the effect that he certainly would decline the name of Coker, was frowned down, though Potter's remarks were generally considered funny.

Coker was very much flattered.

Although he was in the Fifth now, he found even that ancient verse difficult to construe, but he was willing to take Higgs's word for it. And when Potter changed the ablative of Coker into "cock-crow," instead of Cokro, for a joke, there was another general frown, and Potter was given to understand that there was a time to joke, and a time not to joke. And a time not to joke was when the popular Coker was concerned.

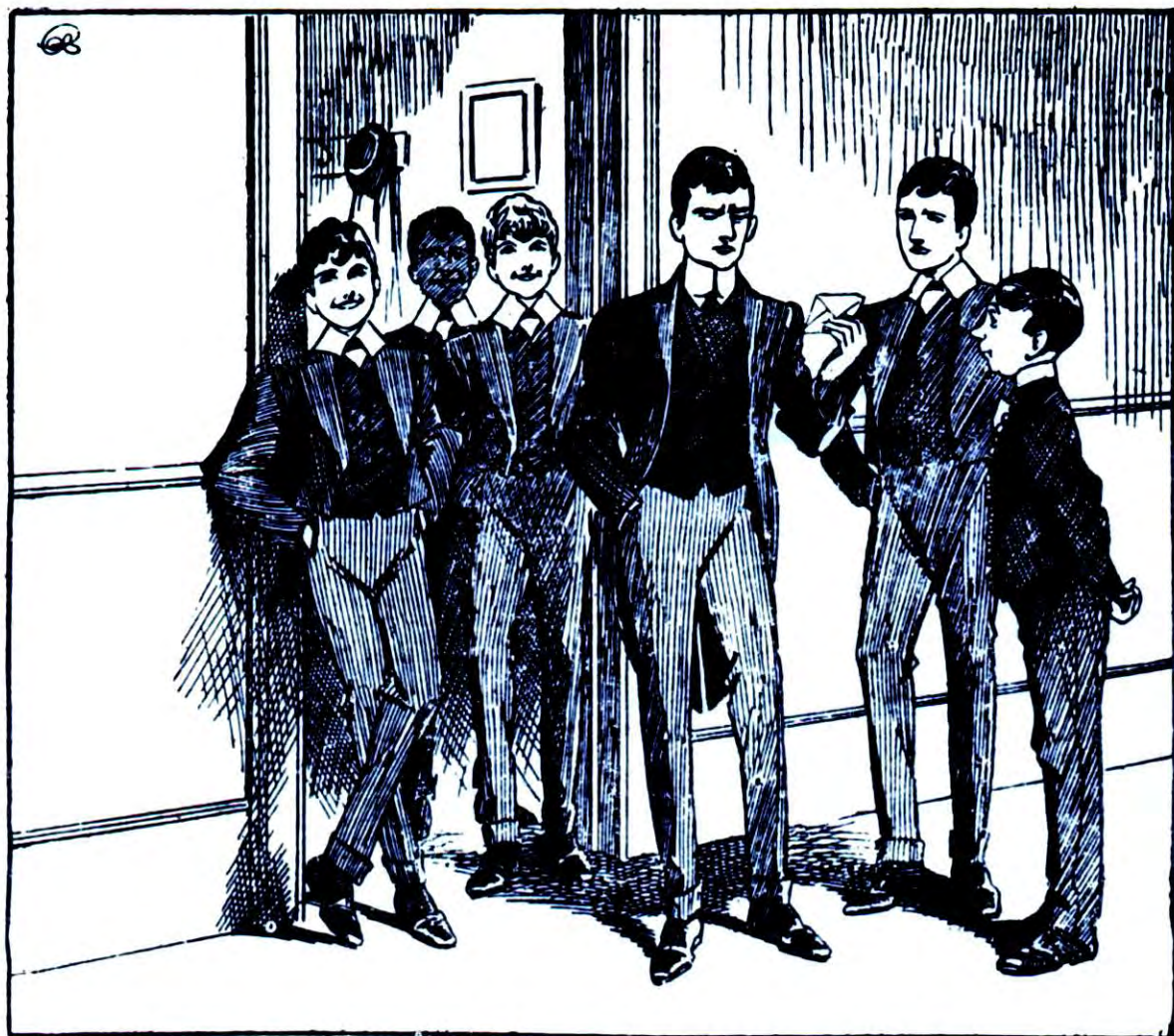
Coker's progress in the Fifth, in short, was a triumphal one.

Which was a joy to Coker.

But in the Shell there was, metaphorically speaking, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

It cannot be said that the Shell were sorry to lose Coker. That wasn't it. But to have him passed over their heads in this manner, when the dullest of them could have

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"Master Coker!" said Trotter. "A telegram for you, sir! I've been 'unting for you heverywhere!"
(See page 2.)

construed his head off, so to speak, and then to have him carrying his nose high in the air and declining to speak to Shell chaps—that was the unkindest cut of all.

The Shell were furious.

Hobson, in the Shell passage, was loud in his denunciations of the fellow who had refused to recognise old friends as soon as he got his remove, and he declared that the Fifth Form chaps were sucking up to Coker because of Aunt Judy's money.

"Just you wait till the tin's gone," said Hobson darkly; "then you'll see what you will see!"

And as this statement was really incontrovertible, no one attempted to controvert it.

But Coker went on his way serenely, regardless of the Shell.

The question was whether the Shell would allow themselves to be disregarded in this high-handed manner.

Hobson called a crowd of the Shell fellows together in the Form-room that evening, and uttered quite a philippic on the subject.

He found sympathetic hearers.

The Shell were all wrathful. There was a general desire to pull Coker down off his perch, as they put it in the familiar language of the Form-rooms.

How was it to be done? was the query. But there was no doubt about the genuineness of the general desire to do it.

"The check of it!" said Hobson. "Only yesterday he was a blessed Shell chap himself, you know—only yesterday!"

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"And he'd have been at the bottom of the class, too," remarked Pimble, of the Shell; "only the Form-master wouldn't have such a big chap at the bottom of the class, just for appearances' sake!"

"Pimble's right!"

"Yes, rather!"

"And now," said Hobson wrathfully—"now he's a full-blown senior, with more blessed airs than a chap in the Sixth!"

There was a groan from the Shell fellows—either for Coker or for the Sixth it was not quite clear which—but perhaps it relieved the Shell feelings to deliver that heavy groan.

"Why, Wingate doesn't swank about the passages as Coker does!" Hobson exclaimed excitedly.

Another deep groan.

"What I say is, the bounder ought to be put in his place!"

Cheers.

"He ought to be lugged off his perch!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He—he deserves to have Hoskins play his flute to him!" said Pimble. "Don't you think so, Hooley?"

Hoskins, who was a musical genius, and who composed fearful and wonderful things on the piano, frowned at Pimble.

"Really, Pimble—" he said.

"Look here," said Hobson, "I think we ought to tell Coker what we think of him! Those chaps in the Fifth are

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making a sickening fuss of him. I hear that he's going to stand a big feed on Saturday afternoon, to celebrate his getting into the Fifth. You'd naturally expect him to stand it to his old Form-fellows. But not a bit of it. He's going to stand it to the Fifth."

"Rotten!"

"Shame!"

"Yes; that's it, it's a shame!" agreed Hobson. "Would you believe it, I chummed up with that chap all the time he was in the Shell, and stood by him through thick and thin? Many's the time I've borrowed money off him!" said Hobson indignantly. "Now he's forgotten all that, and now the Fifth will—"

"Borrow money off him!" said Pimble.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Hobson. "They're mean enough for anything! Look here, suppose we go to the Fifth in a body, and tell Coker what we think of him before the blessed lot of them?"

"He might cut up rusty."

"Let him! We're not afraid of Coker!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's digging in Blundell's study," said Hobson. "They're there now; I saw them through the window. They let Coker sit in the armchair—Blundell's sag told me—and put his feet on the fender."

"Shame!"

"They're soaping him up like anything. I call it caddish!"

"Rotten!"

"Who's going to back me up in going to the Fifth Form passage, and telling Coker our minds?" exclaimed Hobson, who was wildly excited by this time, and completely carried away by his own eloquence.

"We'll all come!"

"Hurrah!"

"Come on, then!" exclaimed Hobson.

And the Shell fellows swarmed out, with Hobson at their head. As they made their way in a crowd towards the Fifth Form quarters, they encountered Harry Wharton & Co. The Removites stared at them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the row?"

Hobson looked round at them.

"We're going to see Coker—to tell him what we think of him!" he exclaimed. "You fellows can come along, too, if you like!"

"Where are you going?"

"Coker's study!"

"You'll have the Fifth on you."

"Blow the Fifth!"

Wharton laughed.

"We'll wait here, and render first aid when you come back!" he said.

"Oh, rats!" said Hobson.

And he led on his merry men into the Fifth Form passage.

It was the hour when most of the Greyfriars fellows had tea. The greater part of the Fifth Form were at home. Fellows were seen in the passage carrying kettles of water into the studies. From some of the rooms came a smell of frying, or a scent of tea and toast, and from one or two proceeded a sound of breaking crockery.

The door of the study shared by Coker, Blundell, and Bland was half-open, and the Shell fellows could hear movements within. Coker was at tea with his new friends evidently, and the old friends, who would so willingly and cordially have made merry upon one of Aunt Judy's bank-notes, were out in the cold. The thought added fuel to their wrath.

Fifth Form fellows looked out at the Shell juniors, and frowned. As a rule, a Shell fellow found in the Fifth Form passage was liable to be cuffed at sight. But there were rather too many of them now for any one or two Fifth-Formers to venture to cuff them. They stalked on, exchanging glances of defiance with the Fifth.

They reached the door of Coker's study, and Hobson opened it further with a tremendous kick, which sent it crashing back against the wall. Then the Shell fellows crowded in.

Former, as he now was, it was flattering to him, for Blundell was the captain of the Fifth, and a great man in the Fifth Form passage.

As in the cases of many great men in history, Coker's soul was expanding with expanding prospects, and he was becoming a truly great character.

Coker was pleased. The study was much larger than a Shell study, and better furnished, and the easy-chair was by common consent reserved for Coker. Bland had been making toast, and Blundell had made the tea. Bland helped Coker with much grace of manner, insisting that Coker shouldn't rise from his seat.

"My word!" said Coker. "This is better than the Shell!" "I'm glad you think so," said Higgs, who had come in to tea, on the strength of Coker's munificence. "Of course, a fellow like you was wasted in the Shell!"

"A fellow like Coker would be an ornament to any Form!" said Blundell.

"Just so," assented Bland.

"Have some more toast, Coker?"

"Thanks, I will!"

"If Coker finds any difficulty in Fifth Form work, I'm sure there are lots of fellows will be only too pleased to help him," said Blundell. "It's not to be expected that a chap in Coker's position will be able to swot at Latin like other chaps."

"Never could," said Coker, demolishing nearly a round of toast with a tremendous bite.

"Of course not! Now, if you ever want a little help in the classics, I'm your man!" said Higgs, in the most friendly way.

"Thanks, old chap! Pass the ham!"

"Here you are!" said Blundell. "Now, if mathematics stump you at all, you just speak a word to me!"

"I will," said Coker.

And he meant it.

"You see—" began Higgs, and then he broke off. "My hat!"

The door had crashed open at that moment.

The Fifth fellows jumped to their feet as the heroes of the Shell came crowding in.

Hobson surveyed the tea-party with a sarcastic glance.

"Having a nice time here?" he remarked.

"Looks like it!" sneered Pimble.

Coker looked round.

"Hallo! Who are you?" he asked.

The Shell fellows simply gasped.

They had grown used to the "side" adopted by Horace Coker since he had passed into the Fifth; but to hear him pretend that he had forgotten their faces was a fresh surprise.

"You—you—" stuttered Hobson.

Coker looked at his companions.

"These chaps friends of yours?" he asked.

Blundell chuckled.

"Not much!" he said. "They're juniors!"

"Do you usually have juniors come bolting into your study?"

"Hardly!"

"Well, if they're not guests of yours, you might tell 'em to get out!" said Coker. "I never could stand being bothered by juniors!"

"Quite right!" said Higgs. "My belief is, that in a properly-regulated school the junior would be isolated, like—like small-pox patients, you know!"

"Jolly good idea!" agreed Coker.

"You—you swanking rotter!" roared Hobson.

Blundell pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he roared.

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"We've come to talk to Coker," said Pimble. "Coker, you're a rotten fraud!"

"Beastly cad!"

"Boulder!"

"Frig!"

"Spoof!"

"Cad!"

The Shell fellows did not mince their words. They hurled those epithets at Coker, apparently expecting him to wither under their scorn. But Horace Coker showed no signs whatever of withering.

He yawned.

"I wish you wouldn't allow juniors in this study," he remarked. "I never could stand youngsters about me."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Old Friends.

COKER, of the Fifth, was pleased with himself just then.

He had been standing a few things to grace the tea-table in Blundell's study, though the room now, by the way, was not called Blundell's study. Blundell himself had suggested that it should be considered as Coker's study, and himself and Bland as Coker's study-mates.

Coker consented; he was flattered. Full-fledged Fifth-Formers.

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ANSWERS

That was too much for the Shell.

They had come there to tell Coker what they thought of him. But now that they had come, words seemed inadequate to express their feelings. They felt that deeds were required, and, without waiting to consult about it, they rushed upon Coker.

"Rescue, Fifth!" roared Blundell.

The Shell fellows swarmed round the four Fifth-Formers.

The latter hit out valiantly, and as they were all big and strong fellows, Coker as big and strong as any, their blows told severely. But the juniors were in great force. They rushed Coker & Co. into a corner, and piled on them there. Then Pimble, who was of a humorous turn of mind, took the table by the edge and shot the whole of the tea into the fender—tea and toast and ham and crockery and everything. There was a terrific crash. Coker's tea to the Fifth was "queered" with a vengeance.

"Oh!" roared Coker. "Look there! Go for them!"

He had his old chum Hobson in a loving embrace, and was punching his nose till Hobson howled and roared.

Fifth-Formers were turning out of the other studies now in force.

The news of a junior raid upon a senior study was astounding, incredible at first, till the noise in Coker's room showed it to be true.

The Fifth came in numbers, in great wrath.

Big fellows came smiting their way into the study, and the unfortunate juniors were hurled right and left, and kicked out one after another into the passage.

There they fled as fast as they could get away, but only to run into the hands of other Fifth-Formers further along the passage, and to be cuffed and kicked along to the end without mercy.

The tide had turned against the Shell.

In a few minutes there was only one Shell fellow left in Coker's study, and that was Hobson, and he did not stay from choice. Coker had his head in Chancery, and was pommelling him with the force and precision of a piston-rod.

Hobson struggled and yelled.

"Kick him out!" exclaimed Higgs. "My hat! Look at that mess in the fender! Kick the young boulder out!"

"They've mucked up everything," said Bland, picking a jam-dish out of the grate, the jam having received the addition of cinders and a heap of salt. "We'll give him this to take with him."

He wiped out the jam-dish on Hobson's head.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker.

Then Hobson was kicked out.

Bewildered, with a very swollen nose that was streaming red, and one eye closed up, and his hair matted with jam, Hobson staggered along, and was helped by kick after kick from the Fifth-Formers he passed, till he escaped from the dangerous precincts.

A roar of laughter from the group of Removites greeted him as he staggered into view.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hobson blinked at them out of one eye.

"Groo!" he gasped. "Yaroo! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wasn't your old chum glad to see you?" asked Nugent sympathetically.

"Must have been," said Bob Cherry. "Look at the jam he's given him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hobson passed his hand over his head, and his fingers came away sticky with jam. He staggered off, gasping, leaving the chums of the Remove yelling.

"Well, I must say that things are funnier since Coker passed into the Fifth," said Harry Wharton. "All the same, he's a cheeky beast, and I don't like him holding his nose so high in the air."

"Rather not!" agreed Nugent.

"The highfulness of his esteemed nose is terrific!"

"Nature elevated it a bit," remarked Nugent. "Coker can't help that. But he needn't add to the effect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it will fall to us to take him down a peg or two," said Wharton, with a shake of the head.

And the Removites responded unanimously:

"Hear, hear!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Rough on Coker.

THE visit of the Shell fellows to his study to tell him what they thought of him did not have the expected result of bringing Horace Coker off his perch. As a matter of fact, it rather seemed to fix him more securely upon that coign of vantage. The Shell, after their painful experience at the hands of the Fifth-Formers, were not likely to repeat the visit. In fact, in the Shell dormitory, that night there was groaning galore, and many reproaches directed against Hobson. Half the Form had black eyes or

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swollen noses—in fact, the only fellows who had escaped damage were those who had taken no part in the expedition. And these fellows did not even sympathise—they grinned.

Hobson was so much damaged that he had no energy left to combat adverse criticism. One of his eyes was quite closed, and the other very nearly so, so that objects did not appear to Hobson as they appeared to other fellows. His nose was nearly twice its usual size, and three of his handkerchiefs were stained a tall-tale crimson—so much so, that if Hobson had been found near the scene of a murder there was evidence enough about him to get him hanged half a dozen times over.

So Hobson let the Shell growl, and the Shell growled.

And when Coker, the next day, met some of the damaged heroes in the Close, he grinned at them, and pointed them out to Bland and Higgs, and was overheard to say that the prefects really ought to look after those kids better.

Coker had always swanked over the Remove a little, even when he was in the Shell. Now that he was in the Fifth he had become unconscious of their existence.

When Alonzo Todd, who was polite to everybody, following the excellent precepts of his Uncle Benjamin said good-morning to him in the quad, Coker only waved his hand, as if brushing a fly away, and walked on.

Alonzo stared after him in amazement.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Something must be the matter with Coker. I trust I have not offended him in any way. Surely he cannot bear malice for that little row in the Remove passage the other day."

Alonzo rubbed his nose reflectively.

His Uncle Benjamin had often warned him never to let the sun go down on his wrath, and although, as it happened, the sun had only lately risen now, Alonzo felt that it would be better to clear up the matter. He hated being on bad terms with anybody, and if Coker was bearing malice, the sooner it was explained away the better.

So the Duffer of Greyfriars hurried after Coker, and attracted his attention by digging him in the ribs with a bony knuckle—a way Alonzo had, Coker gasped, as if he had been punctured, and swung round.

"My dear Coker—" began Alonzo.

"Ow!" gasped Coker.

"I trust, my dear Coker, that you are not remembering the little tussle we had the other day in the Remove passage?" said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me that it is wrong to bear malice."

"You young ass!"

"It is wrong, and therefore you should not allow yourself to become a prey to angry feelings, Coker. 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,' as the poet so touchingly observes, for it is in accordance with their natural proclivities. Let bears and lions growl and fight, for they were endowed with these propensities. But children—"

"You ass!"

"You should never permit the effulgence of such uncontrolled passions," said Alonzo, with a shake of the head. "Your digits were never intended to be doubled up in a compact manner for the purpose of smiting one another upon the salient features, such as nose and jaw."

"My hat!"

"Therefore, my dear Coker, I trust that you will be willing to accept the hand of friendship," said Todd, holding out his right hand.

Coker inspected it.

"What's that?" he asked.

"My hand," said Alonzo mildly.

"Well, it would be the better for a wash," said Coker.

"Take it away."

"My dear Coker—"

"And don't you have the cheek to speak to seniors in the quad," said Coker. "I'd lasso you, only I know you're a harmless lunatic! Only don't do it!"

"My dear—"

"When you address me you should say sir," said Coker, growing exalted. "I expect respect from young people."

"Oh!" gasped Alonzo.

"Now buzz off! If you have the cheek to speak to me again I shall give you a licking. Go and eat coke!"

"Coke?" gasped Alonzo.

Alonzo had a curious habit of repeating things that were said to him when he was startled and confused. He was quite bewildered now. He could not understand Coker in the least.

"Yes!" roared Coker. "Get away, and don't jaw!"

"Jaw?"

"Do you want me to give you a thick ear?"

"A—A thick ear?"

"My hat!" said Coker. "It's a giddy parrot in etons! Look here, young shaver—"

"Y-y-young shaver?"

"Look here, get off the earth! Buzz off! Bunk! Absquatulate!"

"A-a-a-absquatulate?"

"My hat! He's fairly off his rocker!"

"Rocker?"

Coker lost patience. He was strongly inclined to smite Alonzo, but although a big, overbearing fellow, and sometimes given to bullying, he was good-natured. Instead of levelling Todd with the earth, he thrust his hands into his pockets and strode away. But Alonzo was not satisfied. He ran after Coker, and gave him a dig in the ribs again.

"My dear Coker, pray listen to me—"

"Ow! Yow!"

"Dear me! Have I winded you? I'm so sorry! I wanted to explain that my Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me that—"

"Buzz off!" roared Coker.

"My dear Coker, I—"

Coker grasped Alonzo Todd by the shoulders and swept him round, and sat him down on the ground with a bump.

Alonzo gasped.

"Ow!"

"There!" panted Coker. "Now, don't you talk to a senior again without permission, and don't you puncture a chap's ribs, anyway."

"My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked, Coker!" gasped Alonzo. "He would be shocked at your conduct—nay, disgusted!"

"You young ass! I— Oh! Yaroooh! Yarooop!"

Coker suddenly broke off, as there was a rush of feet, and five or six hands seized him and swept him off the ground.

"Bump him!" roared Harry Wharton.

"Leggo!" yelled Coker frantically.

He struggled in the grasp of the Removites. Harry Wharton & Co. had seen him sit Alonzo Todd down, from a distance, and they had rushed up at once. As a matter of fact, it came a little hard upon Coker; but the Removites had not heard what had passed. They only knew that Coker the Great had laid violent hands upon a Removite, and they were ready to avenge the insult to the Form at once. So they rushed upon Coker, determined to make it clear to him that even if he had gained his admittance into the ranks of the Fifth, he must leave the Remove alone.

"Bump him!"

"Hurrah!"

Coker struggled fiercely, and knocked down two of his assailants; but the rest were too many for him. He was swung into the air and bumped, and bumped again. Alonzo Todd staggered to his feet.

"My dear fellows," he said, "pray do not hurt Coker. He is a very bad-tempered and unreasonable person, but my Uncle Benjamin always said that one should bear with a bad-tempered person patiently. You see—"

"Oh, buzz off, Toddy!"

"My dear Nugent—"

"Bump him!"

"Give him one more!"

"Ow! Yow! Help! Rescue, Fifth! Yaroooh!"

"My dear fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out!" exclaimed Tom Brown. "Here come the Fifth bounders!"

And the Removites sauntered away, leaving Coker sitting on the ground, and gasping for breath, and his chums in the Fifth to find him there. Harry Wharton caught Alonzo by the arm and hurried him off. Todd was inclined to stay with Coker and offer him gentle ministrations, for it appeared that his Uncle Benjamin had always impressed upon him to succour the distressed. But Harry knew that Alonzo would need some succouring if he was still upon the spot when Coker recovered.

Coker did not look quite so stately as of late, as he walked away with Bland and Higgs. Bob Cherry remarked that he looked as if some of the starch had been taken out of him. And indeed he did.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Great Catch for Coker.

LODER, of the Sixth, came out of his study with a thoughtful frown on his face. Loder was a prefect; but it was not his duty as a prefect that was worrying him now. He could generally contrive to let his duties as a prefect shift for themselves. Loder was thinking now of—Loder. He went along the Sixth Form passage to Carne's study, and entered without knocking.

Carne, of the Sixth, was seated in his easy-chair, with his feet on the table, and a cigarette between his lips. There was a blue haze in the room. As the door opened, Carne matched the cigarette from his lips and threw it into the

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fire with the same movement of his hand. He had evidently had practice in that kind of thing.

Then he gave a gasp of relief.

"You ass, Loder! You startled me."

Loder grinned.

"You're the ass," he said. "If I had been a master coming in, what about the smoke in the room. It's risky, Carne."

"Oh, hang!"

Loder threw the window open.

"I've looked in to see if you've got a couple of quid," he remarked.

Carne laughed.

"Say a couple of pennies," he said.

"It's serious, Carne."

"Same here."

"Look here," said Loder, "I've had something on the Woodford races. I was morally certain that Blue Bird would romp home."

"My hat! So was I."

"You!" ejaculated Loder.

"Yes," said Carne ruefully; "and I had three quid on him, at three to one against. And he came in sixth."

"Well, you are an ass!" said Loder.

"What about yourself?" demanded Carne. "You were as certain as I was that Blue Bird was a winner."

"Well, he lost," said Loder. "Two quids are gone, and the worst of it is I was doing it on tick. I was so certain, you see, that Blue Bird was a dead sure snip."

"Same here again," grinned Carne. "How much do you owe?"

"I owe Banks two pounds."

"And I owe him three."

"And you've got no tin?"

"None."

"Expecting any?"

"Ten bob on Saturday; not much use."

And the two seniors looked grimly and ruefully at one another. It seemed awfully sporty to put money on the races, and Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, had often complimented them upon their sportiveness—as he could afford to do, as he drew a regular income from them and several other foolish young fellows in the school. But being a "giddy sport" had its awkward side. Dead certs were really extremely uncertain—or, rather, they were, as a rule, certain—to lose.

"Well, this is rotten," said Loder at last. "If you can't stand it, I suppose I'd better try Ionides. I hate borrowing of that chap."

"So do I," said Carne. "But now you speak of it, I can see it's the only thing to be done. Let's go together."

"All serene."

And Loder and Carne made their way to Ionides' study. There was no doubt that Heracles Ionides, the Greek senior, was rolling in money; and he was generally willing to lend to fellows whom he was certain could repay him. As a matter of fact, it was his money chiefly that caused the Greek to be tolerated in the Sixth, for his character was not a pleasant one; and the best fellows, like Wingate and Courtney, had very little to say to him.

The two seniors found him at home. He was sitting at his table, with a silver pencil in his white fingers, and a paper before him jotted over with figures. He looked up at his visitors and grunted.

"Just looked in to see you, Ionides," said Loder cheerfully. "Bury?"

"No," said the Greek, putting the paper into his pocket.

"The fact is, old man," said Loder, "we're in a fix; and, of course, we thought of a chum like you at once to help us out. You're the only fellow in the Sixth, as a matter of fact, that I'd care to ask a favour of."

The Greek showed his teeth in a grin.

"Thank you!" he said.

"Fact is, we've been backing Blue Bird," said Loder. "I'm stuck for two pounds, and Carne for three. Can you help us?"

Ionides laughed.

The two seniors stared at him.

"Blessed if I can see where the joke comes in," said Carne testily. "I'm in the dickens of a hole, Ionides, and I don't care about being sniggered at."

"Pardon," exclaimed the Greek, "but it is funny."

"I don't see where the fun comes in."

"Nor I, either," exclaimed Loder angrily.

The Greek waved his white, ringed hand deprecatingly. "It is all right," he said, "only it happens that I cannot lend you the money, because—"

"Because what?"

"Because I have backed Blue Bird myself."

"My hat!"

"I have lost seven pounds," said Ionides. "I have paid

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five of it, and was thinking of coming to one of you fellows to borrow the other two."

Loder and Carne exchanged glances of dismay.

"Well, that's what I call simply rotten," said the prefect. "We're all in the same ditch together, then."

"Looks like it," growled Carne.

The Greek showed his teeth again.

"But I have an idea," he said.

"To raise the tin?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead!" said Carne eagerly. "I simply must have it. Banks won't wait for his money. Of course, I'm not afraid of his coming up to the school, or anything of that sort, but he won't trust me a second time."

"Of course, he must be paid," said Loder, "but I'm blessed if I can see how. What's your idea, Ionides?"

Ionides chuckled.

"You have heard of Coker?" he asked.

"Coker! A big clumsy chap in the Shell?" said Loder. "He is in the Fifth now."

"Oh, yes, I remember; the Head gave him his remove through being badgered by his relations, or something," said Loder. "What about Coker?"

"Ah, you are not observant," said the Greek. "You have been thinking too much about Blue Bird, perhaps. I, Heracles Ionides, keep my eyes and ears open. This Coker has an aunt, who is wealthy. She has presented Coker with unlimited pocket-money for having obtained his remove at last, and the Fifth Form are making great fuss of Coker, and he has passed over all his old friends in the lower Forms."

"Just like him, I should say."

"Exactly!" said the Greek. "You see, Coker is ambitious, like Julius in the play. It is a grievous sin, and grievously will Coker answer it, as your Shakespeare says."

"I don't see—"

"Coker rolls in wealth," said Ionides. "Fellows are all trying to pick up the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. He has passed over all his old friends, and swanks about with the head boys of the Fifth. It has occurred to me that such a windy and vainglorious person as Coker would be very much flattered if some notice were taken of him by the Sixth."

"Ah!" said Loder and Carne together.

"It would turn his head," the Greek remarked. "His head is somewhat turned already by the favour of the Fifth. If he could be taken up by Sixth-Formers, I really believe that the worthy Coker would be as wax in our hands."

"My hat!"

"Are you sure about the money, though?" asked Carne dubiously.

"I myself have seen him produce a handful of banknotes and gold to show to someone else," said Ionides. "I think he certainly had more than twenty pounds."

"Phew!"

"It is time to make hay during the sunshine," said Ionides, with a grin. "Let us make up to the worthy Coker, and make a great friend of him, and I do not think we shall be troubled to pay these small debts to Mr. Banks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You agree?"

"Yes, rather!" said Carne. "It's a chance, anyway."

"Then it is settled. It will be a great catch for Coker to find friends in the top Form of the school; and, of course, he must expect to pay for it."

Loder and Carne chuckled. There was no doubt that Coker would pay for it, if he obtained the distinguished honour of their friendship. And the three seniors sallied forth together to look for Horace Coker.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker the Humorist.

"COMING for a stroll, Coker?" asked Higgs of the Fifth. Tea was over in Coker's study that Monday evening. Coker lay back in the armchair, with a fragment of a tart in his hand, doubtful whether he should finish it. Coker was growing quite delicate in his appetite. He had always been a hungry fellow, ready to eat pretty nearly anything. But of late he had been living on the fat of the land. The horn of plenty had never ceased to flow. Aunt Judy, in her enthusiasm, had simply piled money on him. Aunt Judith was so rich that she hardly realised how much a banknote or two might mean to a school-boy. Her liberality had made her nephew rich beyond the dreams of avarice—while it lasted. In justice to Coker, we must state that he was getting through his wealth at a really creditable speed.

Plenty had reigned in Coker's study ever since he obtained his remove, and indeed there was a time of plenty all along the Fifth-Form passage. Coker was an open-handed fellow among his friends. The Fifth thought him a jolly chap, and regretted that he had not got his remove whole terms earlier.

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EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

Higgs's idea of making him captain of the Form team had caught on.

Coker had played footer in the Shell, and he was as big as any Fifth-Former, and there was no reason why he shouldn't play in the Form eleven. To captain it was Coker's ambition, of course, and it was an ambition that his new friends were disposed to gratify. In private, Blundell and Bland agreed that it would be possible to get the captainship out of Coker's hands when an important match had to be played. It was swank that Coker wanted, and there was no valid reason why he shouldn't swank to his heart's content.

It is quite possible that in his heart Horace Coker knew exactly to what he owed his wonderful popularity. It is quite possible that inwardly he grinned at it all. But he liked it all the same—and, after all, the Fifth-Formers could not, for very appearance sake, drop him suddenly after making so much of him. The dim reflection of his glory would be left after the reality was gone—with the last of his cash. Perhaps Coker all the time was not so simple as the other fellows believed.

The Fifth Form rejoiced in Coker. Some fellows did not join in the general enthusiasm, but they were set down as prigs and swots—indeed, Potter won great applause by calling them pro-Boers.

The name of Coker flourished throughout the length and breadth of the Fifth-Form passage. Nearly everybody in the Fifth had dropped into Coker's study some time or another to have tea, or to sample the cake, or to drink Coker's health in his own ginger-pop, or to borrow a bob to be repaid on Saturday, or something of the sort. And Coker was so free and generous that the fellows couldn't help liking him. It was probable that they would be able to help it when Aunt Judy's banknotes had all gone the same way. But that, as the novelists say, is anticipating.

Coker yawned.

"I don't know!" he remarked. "It's getting dark."

"Yes, so it is," agreed Higgs at once. "Let's have a game of chess."

"Oh, chess is a bore!" said Coker. He couldn't play chess, but he preferred to put it like that.

"Come to think of it, chess is rather a bore," said Bland, with a nod. "What do you say to a game of draughts, Coker?"

"Tired of draughts," said Coker.

"Come and have a box in the gym," suggested Blundell.

"I'd rather have a box at the theatre," said Coker.

Coker was given to making puns of this sort. The most obvious and barefaced play on words was good enough for Coker. Coker's puns had always been hooted in the Shell; even his friend Hobson declaring that he regarded them as unmistakable symptoms of softening of the brain. That was before Aunt Judy had come down so handsomely, of course. In the Fifth Form, Coker's puns sent fellows into convulsions. They were looked upon as brilliant flashes of wit sufficient to set any table in a roar; and it had dawned upon Horace lately that he was really a great humorist.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rang through the study. Higgs and Bland and Blundell roared in concert. Higgs wiped his eyes.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "You'll be the death of me, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, if I were in Germany, I should have books at a beer-garden!" said Coker, further.

This further development of the pun was greeted with shrieks of laughter. Blundell and Bland clung to one another and almost wept. Higgs seemed in danger of going into hysterics. Coker, infected by the general merriment, and thinking that the joke must really be jolly funny, laughed, too.

While the study was thus shaking with merriment, the door opened, and Potter looked in. Potter looked surprised.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "What's the joke? I could hear you yelling in my study! Let a chap into the joke! I'll bet it's Coker again!"

"You're right!" almost sobbed Higgs. "Ha, ha, ha! It's Coker! I know that chap will be the death of me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blundell and Bland.

"Tell a chap the joke!" said Potter eagerly. "I knew it was Coker. No chap except Coker ever raises a laugh like that. Tell a chap." He appealed to Coker.

"Oh, Higgs'll tell you!" said Coker modestly. "It's nothing really!"

"Nothing?" gasped Bland. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha! You see, Blundell said to him, 'Come and have a box in the gym.'—Oh, ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes?" said Potter.

"And then Coker said—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Coker said—s-said— Oh, dear! Hold me some-body!" gasped Higgs. "Coker said— Ha, ha!"
 "But what did Coker say?" demanded Potter, with great interest.

"He said—ha, ha!—he said—he'd rather have a box at the theatre!" stuttered Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter

"And then—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, that wasn't all—" gasped Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Coker said—he said— Oh, dear! He said that if he were in Russia—"

"Germany," said Coker.

"I—I meant Germany—he said that if he were in Germany, he would box them at a beer-garden!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter, not in the least seeing any joke, but determined not to be left out of the laughter.

"That's not right!" exclaimed Coker.

"Of course it isn't!" said Bland, with an indignant look at Higgs. "You've got it all wrong, Higgs!"

Higgs looked dismayed.

"Well, you tell him, Bland?" he said.

"No; let Coker tell him," said Bland, rather hurriedly. "Go on, Coker. It sounds so much better the way you tell it."

"Oh, all right!" said Coker. "You see, Blundell said 'Come and have a box in the gym.' I said, 'I'd rather have a box in the theatre.'"

He paused; and Potter, knowing what was wanted, burst into a roar of laughter. This was rather hard on Potter, for he had already laughed at that part when related by Bland.

But Potter was an obliging fellow, and though the joke was not very laughable, he thought that Coker's considering it funny was laughable enough; so he laughed at Coker instead of Coker's joke, which was just as good.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter.

"Well, then, I said—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter again, a little too previously.

"I said—you see, that's how it was—Blundell said come and have a box in the gym, and I said I'd rather have a box in the theatre," said Coker, in his heavy way. "Then I said that if I were in Germany I'd have boxes in a beer-garden."

Potter had never been in Germany, and knew nothing about Germans except certain vague notions about German sausages and a threatening Navy. Boxes in a beer-garden were quite Sanskrit to him. He did not even know that Coker was using the plural of "box," and he wondered why Coker should consider it funny to say that he'd have a box in a garden. But it was his duty to laugh, and he laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter's laugh started the others again. They laughed in chorus. Coker beamed upon them. He was taking up his rightful position as a champion humorist at last. His light had been hidden under a bushel all the time he was in the Shell; but he was coming into his kingdom at last.

He turned over rapidly in his mind whether the unwritten

laws of punning would allow any reference to Chinese Boxers, or Irish bogs, and whether a musical box could possibly be dragged in. Perhaps Higgs saw by his expression that a fresh pun was coming, and he warded it off by skilfully changing the subject.

"We haven't had that stroll," he remarked. "Coming out, Cokey, old son?"

"Cold out," said Coker.

"Quite right—let's stay in the study!"

"Bit stuffy here, too."

Coker rose and stretched his big limbs.

"Perhaps we may as well have a stroll," he remarked. "We can get some ginger-pop at Mrs. Mimble's, anyway!"

The Fifth-Formers exchanged glances of satisfaction. When Coker was standing treat at the school shop, Coker was great.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Higgs.

"Yes, rather!"

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"Come on, then," said Coker lazily.

And he strolled out of the study with his friends of the Fifth. It was getting dusk in the Close when they entered it, but there were still a good many fellows out of doors. Among them were Hobson and Pimble and Hoskins of the Shell. They exchanged glances as they saw their old friend, and lined up in his path with the cheery greeting:

"Hallo, Coker!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Go-By.

"HALLO, Coker!"

Coker glanced down at the Shell fellows along his nose.

"Who are these fellows?" he asked, turning an inquiring glance upon Blundell & Co.

Blundell sniffed.

"Only some fags," he said.

"Fags are a bore," said Coker.

"They are!"

"Get away you kids!"

"Buzz off!"

"Hallo, Coker!" repeated Hobson obstinately. "Can you settle up that tanner I lent you last week to get toffee?"

Hobson had invented the tanner on the spot. The idea of a full-blown Fifth-Former borrowing sixpence and buying toffee with it was too cruel.

Coker turned crimson.

"You blessed cheeky fag!" he exclaimed. "Get off!"

And he lunged out at Hobson.

The Shell fellow promptly retreated.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Hobson. "Who borrowed the tanner?"

"He, he, he!" shrieked Pimble. "Where's the toffee?"

The Fifth-Formers made a rush at the juniors, who melted away, but continued to yell from the distance.

The seniors, with their noses very high in the air, walked on, pretending to take no notice of the taunters.

Coker held his head so high that he really seemed in danger of getting a crick in the neck. Perhaps that was why he received a pat on the back from Bob Cherry, as the five seniors passed a group of Removites.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned at the sight of Coker's nasal elevation. Bob Cherry gave him a friendly poke in the small of the back that made him gasp.

"Ow!" said Coker.

"All right?" asked Bob.

"All right!" roared Coker. "What do you mean, you cheeky fag?"

"Thought you might have a stiff neck, or something," said Bob innocently. "You'll get one, you know, if you walk about like that."

Coker glared at him.

"You—you—you—"

"Don't take any notice of these fags," said Higgs loftily.

"It makes them conceited."

"Just that," agreed Potter.

"Quite right," said Coker, with a wave of the hand to the juniors. "Buzz off, you youngsters. It's time you were indoors, too!"

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

"Look here, you kids—"

Coker began angrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Coker, you'll kill me!" sobbed Nugent. "You are too rich; you are really, you know, Horace."

"The richness of the esteemed and silly Coker is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"Oh, run away and play, you kids!" said Coker loftily.

"I don't want to have to box your ears."

"My hat!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't stop for us. You can begin the boxing as soon as you like, Cokey."

Coker sniffed, and walked on with his nose in the air, and the other Fifth fellows adopted the same manner.

The stateliness of their bearing was a little marred, perhaps, by a yell of laughter

A SPLENDID NUMBER.

"THE GEM" XMAS
 DOUBLE NUMBER.

PLEASE GET IT.



Nugent advanced upon the unfortunate Coker, dabbing with the sooty broom. Coker's eyes and mouth were filled with soot. "Oh! Y-you young bib-bib-beast!" he spluttered. (See page 2.)

from the Removites, and a wild yell from the distance, in the voice of Hobson:

"Where's that toffee?"

"Oh, Coker gets richer every day!" grinned Wharton. "I imagine he gets poorer, too, as he goes on standing treat as he's been doing lately. I shall be glad to see how he gets on with Blundell & Co. when all his tin's gone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I imagine there will be a sudden drop in Coker stock when that takes place," grinned Nugent.

"The dropfulness will be terrific!"

And the chums of the Remove chuckled. It was not likely that Coker would keep up his loftiness when his financial resources were exhausted. And they were curious to see the end of the comedy. Meanwhile, Coker & Co. had met Loder, Carne, and Ionides as they walked on towards the tuckshop with his Fifth-Form friends.

Coker glanced at the three Sixth-Formers as they came towards him, and his glance was very dubious. Coker had been on strained terms with them before. Ionides, the Greek, was given to bullying, and he had once made the mistake of bullying so big a fellow as Coker.

Now, it was very right and proper that Horace Coker should cuff fags of the Second and Third Forms; but when a Sixth-Former cuffed him, the cheek of it was astounding, and Coker had retaliated in a way that made Ionides very careful to let him alone afterwards.

So now, when Ionides came up with Loder and Carne, Coker was prepared for trouble. His Fifth-Form friends

gathered round him, as if to stand by him against all-comers. Coker smiled with gratification. After all, he was in the Fifth now, a senior himself, and his old enemy would hardly dare to attempt to bully him, even with a prefect to back him up.

But it was soon clear that the Sixth-Formers did not mean trouble. Ionides appeared, by his manner, to be oblivious to any passages-of-arms between himself and Horace Coker in the past.

Loder was smiling his most agreeable smile, and Carne was quite amiable—a sufficiently remarkable thing in Carne to attract attention.

"Hallo, Coker!" said Loder, quite affably.

"Hallo!" said Coker.

"I've been going to see you for dog's ages, to congratulate you about getting your remove," explained Loder.

Coker had had his remove for four or five days now, so Loder had evidently taken his time about it. But that did not matter. It was something to be congratulated in public by a Sixth-Form prefect, and Coker purred.

"Thanks, Loder," he said. "You're very good."

"Not at all," said Loder. "Carne was saying to me that, as a matter of fact, you ought really to be in the Sixth."

Coker nodded assent. He thought so himself.

"Just so," said Carne.

"I am sure a fellow like Coker would be an adornment to any Form," said Ionides. "I sincerely hope he will soon get his remove into the Sixth."

"Thanks!" said Coker.

"Meanwhile," said Loder, "we should be glad to see some more of you, Coker, my boy."

"Thanks!" said Coker.

"As a matter of fact, we really regard you as a Sixth-Former in effect," said Ionides. "You are resting transiently in the Fifth."

"Merely a bird of passage," said Carne.

Coker coloured with pleasure.

It was something, certainly, to be made so much of in the Fifth; but to have big fellows in the Sixth chumming up with him in this way—well, it was simply ripping! Coker had learned to despise the Shell, and to forget the mere existence of any Form below the Shell. He now began to look upon the Fifth with disdainful patronage. Why should a fellow of his merits be thrown upon Fifth-Formers?

Blundell, Bland, Higgs and Potter saw the way things were going at once, and they were furious.

Higgs put his arm through Coker's.

"I say, Cokey, come on," he said.

"I wish you wouldn't call me Cokey," said Coker. "My name's Coker."

"Sorry. I meant Coker. Come on."

It was only a few days since Coker had thrilled with pride at being addressed in public by Higgs as Cokey. He had progressed since then.

"No hurry," said Coker.

"We were going to look in at Mrs. Mimble's," said Bland hintingly.

"No hurry, that I can see."

"If you're engaged, Coker, we won't bother you," said Loder significantly. "But we thought you might like to come and have a chat in our study."

Coker's eyes danced.

"With pleasure!" he exclaimed.

"Come on, then. I should advise a fellow like you, really, not to waste his time going about with these youngsters."

"Youngsters!"

Blundell & Co. could have eaten Loder for that word. They could have eaten Coker, too, when they saw him accept Loder's arm and turn away with him.

"Here, I say, Coker," exclaimed Potter, "you're coming with us!"

"You're coming to Mrs. Mimble's!" said Blundell sharply.

"Coker, old man—" Bland remonstrated.

"It's all right," said Higgs uneasily. "Coker's all right. He's coming with us."

"Another time," said Coker, with a wave of the hand. "Plenty of time, you know. I'll see you fellows later."

And he strolled away with the Sixth-Formers.

Blundell, Bland, Higgs, and Potter stood transfixed.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Potter, staring after Coker and the Sixth-Formers, as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. "My solitary chapeau!"

"Great Scott!" said Blundell hopelessly.

"The worm!"

"The cad!"

"What can you expect, taking up with rotten juniors?" said Blundell. "It was our own fault."

"After we've put up with him for nearly a week," said Bland pathetically.

"The worm!"

"The rotter!"

"After laughing at his rotten puns, too!" said Potter wrathfully.

"The ungrateful beast!"

"Did you ever hear of, or dream of, a sillier and fat-headed rotten punster?" demanded Higgs. And the other fellows admitted that they never had.

"Like his cheek, inflicting his rotten jokes on us!" said Potter. "I came jolly near telling him so, too."

"Hopeless cad!" said Blundell.

"I'm done with him."

"So am I."

"I wash my hands of him," said Potter, with a suitable gesture accompanying the words. "I'm done with the junior cad!"

And they walked away in great indignation. The whole scene had been witnessed by Harry Wharton & Co., and Harry burst into a laugh as the disappointed Fifth-Formers walked off. Bob Cherry looked a little puzzled.

"What's the little game?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Coker's given the Fifth the go-by, that's all!" roared Wharton. "Don't you see? He's chucked the Shell for the Fifth, and now he's chucked the Fifth for the Sixth!"

"My hat!"

"It's the same old game," grinned Wharton. "They're after Aunt Judy's tin. Old Coker is getting on. He can't

get much further ahead than this, unless the Head takes him on as a special chum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was not likely to happen. Coker was at the summit of his ambition now, and he was in a state of dreamy contentment as he sauntered into the house, his arm linked in Loder's—to the wonder and admiration of all the fags who beheld him.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Expensive Friends.

HARRY WHARTON was right in the motives he assigned to the Sixth-Form trio; but it is probable that those same motives were visible not only to the Removites.

It is quite likely that Coker saw them, too; but Coker did not mind. Coker knew only too well that he would never be valued highly for his brains, or for his manners, or for his beauty. He wanted to be rated high, and he could only be rated high for his cash. That was something.

After all—that was the way Coker put it to himself—some fellows have one quality, some have another. He had money, as it happened. But, after all, a chap who was a good cricketer was a good cricketer because Nature had made him like that; and a handsome, pleasant fellow was handsome and pleasant because the Fates had so ordained it.

The Fates had not been kind to Coker in this respect, certainly—he wasn't handsome, and nobody had ever found him very pleasant—but wealth was as good a gift as any other. Why shouldn't a chap be valued as much for having banknotes in his pocket as for having a Greek nose, or a jolly temper, or a tricky leg-break? That was what Coker wanted to know.

Anyway, whatever might be the object of the three seniors, Coker was willing to bask in the sunshine while it lasted.

He seemed to be walking on air as he went in with the seniors, and he tried to look quite cool and accustomed to it as he sauntered into Ionides's study, but he did not quite succeed.

Ionides stirred the fire to a cheerful blaze, and Loder closed the door, and Carne pushed an easy-chair forward for Coker. Ionides's study was very handsomely furnished, for the Greek had spent money like water for the purpose; and Coker could not help thinking that it was even a greater improvement upon Blundell's study, than Blundell's study was upon his old quarters in the Shell.

"Comfy there?" asked Ionides, turning back from the fire.

"Oh, yes, quite, thanks!" said Coker.

"Have a cigarette?"

Coker hesitated. Smoking among the juniors was strictly forbidden—and no less strictly among the seniors—but Ionides's habits were well known. When Ionides was seen gasping across a playing-field with "bellows to mend" all the time, everybody knew the cause of it.

But Coker's hesitation lasted only a moment. Why shouldn't he smoke? There was no danger, anyway, in the presence of a prefect.

"Thanks, I will!" he said.

Ionides pushed the box towards him—expensive, gold-tipped Turkish cigarettes, which no one else at Greyfriars could have afforded to smoke, even if they had been given to the same habits as the Greek.

"Match?" said Loder.

"Thanks!"

Coker accepted a light.

The three seniors drew up their chairs, and lighted cigarettes also. Loder had taken the precaution to lock the door, and to open the window at the top. Coker tried to puff away at the cigarette in the same way that the others did, and succeeded in getting a volume of smoke down his throat, and a cloud of it into his eyes, which made him gasp and choke for some time, and blink tearfully.

But Ionides tactfully chose that moment for stirring the fire again, and made enough clatter to take attention off Coker's indisposition, and the Fifth Form hero soon recovered, and puffed away again more cautiously.

The sound of footsteps passing the door made Coker look round uneasily. Loder laughed.

"It's all right," he said. "Nobody will come in. It's safe here. Of course, we have to put this sort of thing down among the juniors."

"Of course," said Coker.

"It wouldn't do, you know. But among ourselves—for I really regard you as one of ourselves, of course," said Loder.

"You're very kind."

"A fellow like you is thrown away in the Shell. I shall try and use what influence I have with the Head to get you a higher remove," said Loder.

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"You're awfully good."
"In that case, I hope Coker would share my study," said Ionides.

"That I jolly well would," said Coker. "You're jolly well fixed up here, old chap."

Coker trembled inwardly as he called a Sixth-Former "old chap." But the ceiling did not fall in, neither was there an earthquake within hearing. Coker breathed again.

Ionides said something in Greek.

"What's that?" said Coker.

"I was just saying that you would be a valued friend to me," said Ionides, with a smile that showed nearly every tooth in his head. "I should be honoured by your friendship if you were in the Sixth. But even as it is, I think we ought to see a great deal of our friend Coker."

And he glanced at the others. They nodded.

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Carne, as if an idea had suddenly struck him. "Suppose we introduced Coker to Mr. Banks. Banks could put him on to a good thing. You can see that Coker is a sportsman."

It was the wife of Mr. Banks himself, used over again at second-hand for Coker's benefit. Coker seemed to swallow it greedily enough.

"Oh, yes!" said Loder. "He's got the look of a sportsman. If he won, he'd spend his money like a prince. If he lost, he could stand it without whining."

"That's just the impression Coker gives me," Ionides remarked.

"Well, what do you say, Coker? Would you care to meet Banks?"

"What is he?" asked Coker.

"Bookmaker."

"Good! I'll sample him," said Coker.

That was meant for a joke, and in Blundell's study it would have been greeted with a roar of laughter. Coker was disappointed, and a little nettled, when the Sixth fellows failed to see that it was a joke at all.

"Look here," said Loder, "there's a jolly good thing coming off to-morrow. I've got a dead sure snip. Willoughby II. for the Woodford Handicap. What do you say, Coker? If you like to place some tin in my hands I'll look after it for you."

"Thank you!" said Coker.

"Well, how much would you care to place?"

"Five bob," said Coker.

Loder made a gesture.

"Don't be funny," he remarked.

"Well, say ten," said Coker, who thought this was being very sportsmanlike and reckless indeed.

"Now, look here, Coker, I'm not joking," said Loder. "If you like to place seven or eight pounds in my hands, I'll see to a good thing for you."

Coker gasped.

He was prepared to hand over half-a-sovereign, or even a whole sovereign, with the serene inward knowledge that he would never see it again. To that extent he was willing to pay for his friendship in the Sixth Form. To pay for it in lumps of seven and eight pounds at a time was rather beyond his mind. His cash would not last long at that rate. And Coker was no fool. He knew that the kindness of the seniors would last exactly as long as his cash.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Carne.

Coker shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Thanks awfully, but I don't think I'll do it. I remember now that I've promised my Aunt Judy never to gamble. I'd forgotten, but I remember it now."

The three seniors exchanged glances.

"Perhaps you don't trust me, Coker," said Loder, in a low and very significant tone.

Coker shifted uneasily.

"Oh, yes, I do!" he said.

"Perhaps you think I've been badly informed, and that I can't place the money for you to advantage," said Loder unpleasantly.

"Oh, no!" said Coker, getting a little alarmed. "I—I'm sure you can do it. Only you see, I—I've promised Aunt Judy never to gamble."

Loder made an impatient gesture.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "Will you do it or not?"

Coker looked at him squarely.

"No," he said.

The seniors exchanged baffled glances. They had not expected so much obstinacy in Coker. All three of them were greatly inclined to seize upon Coker and wipe up the floor of the study with him.

Coker blew out a cloud of smoke. He was quite cool. His position was, that he was being courted for his money, and was willing to shell out to any reasonable extent. But unreasonable demands made the whole thing "not good enough."

"Coker, old man," said Carne at last, "we happen to be rather hard up at the present moment. Could you lend us seven pounds?"

Coker shook his head.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE LEADER OF THE NEW SCHOOL"

"Sorry, I couldn't," he said.

"But you have the money," urged Loder.

Coker was silent.

"Now, look here, old chap," said Ionides, in his soft voice, "you might oblige us in this little matter, you know—as a friend."

"I'm sorry."

"Of course, seven pounds is nothing to a chap like Coker," said Loder. "He's only joking with us. Now, Coker—"

But even that failed to draw Coker. He rose, and threw the stump of his cigarette in the fire.

"I think I'd better be going now," he remarked.

The three Sixth-Formers also rose, and there were very ugly expressions upon their faces. They did not like to feel that they had blundered, and that a mere clumsy, heavy-footed Shell fellow had seen through them.

"This won't do!" said Loder abruptly.

"So-long!" said Coker.

The three seniors looked as if they would spring upon him. Coker gave them a casual sort of a nod.

Loder stepped to the door quickly.

"Hold on a minute!" he exclaimed, with his back to the door.

Coker paused.

"Certainly," he said.

"Look here, Coker, we want you to oblige us in that matter," said the prefect, with emphasis.

"I'm sorry," said Coker. "But it can't be done."

"You don't deny that you have the money?"

"Oh, no!" said Coker uneasily. "I suppose I have it."

"What are you going to do with it, then?"

"Keep it," said Coker.

Loder snapped his teeth, and sprang towards him. If Coker had lied, and pretended that he had no money left, it would have saved Loder's feelings a little. But, as a matter of fact, Coker was not a liar. And, besides, he knew himself too well; he knew that if he lied, he would lie so clumsily that he would never be believed.

"You cheeky young cad!" shouted Loder.

Coker backed away.

"Here, hands off!" he exclaimed.

"Collar him, Carne!"

"You'd better let me alone!" exclaimed Coker. "I suppose you don't want me to tell all the fellows what you brought me here for."

Loder's hands dropped to his sides. He stared at Coker for a moment or two, and then threw the door open.

"Get out!" he said.

And Coker got out.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Captain Coker.

COKER ran till he reached the end of the Sixth Form passage, and then he dropped into an easy stroll. His brief friendship in the Sixth was at an end; but Coker was not foolish enough to let the Fifth Form fellows know how and why it had ended. Coker was not exactly clever, but he was too clever for that.

Blundell, Bland, and Higgs, and Potter were standing in a group at the foot of the big staircase when Coker strolled along. They gave him a glare, which he affected not to notice. He paused, with a grin.

"Coming into the study?" he asked. "I say, suppose we get young Trotter to fetch in the ginger-pop? That'll save trouble."

The Fifth-Formers stared at him.

They knew how valuable Coker was to them. They did not dream that the Sixth fellows would lightly let him go. Had he come back of his own accord?

Coker strolled on towards his study as if he expected them to come. They looked at each other and followed him.

Coker walked into the study. His manner was jovial, as it had been before that meeting with the Sixth, and perhaps a little more jovial. Coker realised that he stood upon very slippery ground.

"You might call in Trotter," he said. "I want him to take a banknote to Mrs. Mimble to change."

The banknote did it.

"Certainly," said Bland.

And he went to look for Trotter. Coker sat down in the armchair. Blundell and Higgs, unable to restrain their curiosity as to what had happened in Ionides's study, came over to him.

"Look here!" exclaimed Blundell. "What did you go off with Loder and his lot for?"

Coker yawned.

"Oh, just for a chat, you know."

"Why didn't you stay with them, then? If the Fifth Form isn't good enough for you—" began Higgs hotly.

"Oh give him a chance to explain!" said Potter.

"My dear chaps," said Coker lazily, "I don't see why a chap in my position shouldn't be civil to the Sixth. As for chumming outside one's own Form, the idea's ridiculous, of course. It couldn't be done."

"Oh, I see!"

"Well, that's right."

"Yes, remember, a fellow in Coker's position!" said Potter. "Don't forget that! After all, it's only natural for the Sixth to be civil to a fascinating chap like Coker."

"Potter's right."

Bland returned with Trotter. The House page gaped at the sight of the five-pound note he was wanted to change, and scribbled down the things wanted as Coker dictated them to him.

The list dictated by Horace Coker was quite sufficient to banish any lingering trace of distrust or ill-feeling in the study.

It was a long list, and when the goods were supplied Coker would only expect three pounds change from the fiver.

Trotter departed upon his mission, and peace and confidence reigned once more in the study.

"I must say that Coker's a decent chap," said Blundell. "If I've done Coker any injustice, I'm sorry for it."

"And I jolly well hope he won't get his remove into the Sixth," said Bland. "Though I'm sure Coker could get it easily enough if he chose to work for it."

"He could get it on his head," said Higgs.

Coker stretched out his legs to the fire and grinned. He had quite re-established himself in the good graces of the Fifth, and he realised that he had had an escape, and he mentally resolved not to follow the wiles of the Sixth any more. Ionides and Loder and Carne might be swagger friends to stroll about the Close with, but they were decidedly too expensive.

The chaps in the Fifth, to put it in commercial terms, were of a lower quality, but much cheaper.

Trotter returned with the heavy-laden basket lent him by Mrs. Mimble, and the change of the five-pound note. The latter Coker carelessly slipped into his trousers-pocket, as if it were a mere bagatelle.

A fellow who could do that was deserving of great respect. Great respect, accordingly, was paid to Coker. He tossed Trotter a shilling for his services, and the page departed in high feather. Twopences were commoner with him than shillings. It was not so very long since the Fifth-Formers had had tea, and a very substantial tea too, but they were quite ready to eat currant-cake, and preserved fruits, and to drink Coker's health in ginger-pop.

And they drank it. Ginger-pop flowed liberally to the tune of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow." Coker felt that he really was a jolly good fellow.

"Speaking of footer," he remarked presently.

Nobody had been speaking of footer, but the fellows were all attention at once.

"Exactly," said Higgs. "About footer, you know—"

"That idea of yours of making me footer skipper in the Fifth," said Coker. "I think it's a jolly good idea myself."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'd do my best to pull the matches off, you know."

"Nil desperandum, Cokro duce et auspice Cokro," murmured Higgs, classically.

Coker looked at him. He had heard that before, and hadn't known what to make of it, and it occurred to him that perhaps Higgs was making fun of him in an unknown tongue. Coker did not mean to stand that sort of thing.

"Look here, Higgs, if you're punning on my name—" he began.

Higgs looked dismayed.

"Oh, I say—" he said.

"I don't like it!"

"But I wasn't," said Higgs. "I was quoting Horace, altered to suit the occasion, you know. 'Teucro duce, et auspice Teucro—'"

"You said 'Cokro' just now."

"Yes, that's the ablative, old man—ablative absolute, you know."

"Absolute rot, I call it!" said Coker.

Whether this was intended as a pun, Coker's friends did not quite know, but they thought they were pretty safe in treating it as some sort of joke, anyway. There was a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Absolutely!" said Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you funny dog!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker was quite placated. An accepted wit, says the sage, has but to say "Pass the salt" to set the table in a roar. Coker was evidently an accepted wit now, for at the least remark the study was set in a shriek.

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"Well, speaking of football," said Coker again.

"Yes, Coker?"

"Go it, old chap!"

"I don't mind captaining the Form team, if you fellows like to arrange it."

Blundell slapped him on the back.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "We'll try it, anyway, and see how it works. Here's to Coker, captain of the Form team—Captain Coker!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the health was drunk with acclamation. The noise was heard along the passage, and other fellows came looking in to see what was the matter. The sight of preserves and cakes and jams and fruits on the table, and endless arrays of ginger-beer-bottles, convinced them at a glance that they were wanted in the study.

And they came in, in force.

Coker's hospitality was boundless—and Blundell & Co. were very generous in sharing Coker's property with the whole Form. The study was soon crammed as full as it would hold. There was a scene of great enthusiasm. The idea of Coker as footer captain seemed to catch on like wildfire. He mightn't be able to play footer, perhaps—that was a moot point—but there was no doubt that he could stand first-class feeds.

"Hurrah for Coker—Captain Coker!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the joyous meeting did not break up while there was a bottle of ginger-beer left corked, or a cake uncut. What results would accrue from Coker's election as footer captain in the Fifth the fellows did not yet know. But upon one point Blundell & Co. were assured—they were secure of Horace Coker. The Sixth would not be able to wile him away from them now.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry's Little Wheeze.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Have you chaps heard?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Bob asked the question excitedly on Tuesday morning, some time after morning classes, as he met Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent in the Close.

The two juniors stared at him.

"Heard what?" asked Harry.

"The news."

"What news?"

"About Coker."

"Coker again!" said Nugent. "Toujours Coker! Coker encore! We're getting fed up with Coker, old son!"

"But the news—"

"Well, what is it? Have the Shell been ragging him?"

"No. No chance, I expect."

"Have the Fifth given him the order of the boot?"

"No. I think the Sixth have done that. He's thicker with Blundell & Co. than ever," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Has his Aunt Judy come again?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Has she sent him a hundred pounds this time?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then what is it?" demanded Nugent. "If you've got news, why the dickens don't you propound it?"

"You haven't given me a chance. The Fifth—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well?"

"The Fifth have made him—ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Get it out, you ass!"

"The Fifth have made him footer captain!" yelled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Nugent stared.

"Footer captain!"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"In the Fifth!"

"Just it."

"My only hat!"

And Harry Wharton and his chum roared too, joining in Bob's stentorian peals of merriment. Coker, as Fifth-Form footer captain was richer than ever.

"That's their bid against the Sixth, I suppose," said Harry, at last. "They're keeping him out of Loder's hands that way."

"I suppose so."

"But you've seen him play! I saw him charge his own goal-keeper once! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors yelled again.

"But I've got an idea," said Bob Cherry, when his mirth had subsided a little. "It's a real, A1, copper-bottomed, non-skidding, ripping idea!"

"Go ahead!"

"We've all had a lot of airs and graces from Coker. We're

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all pretty well fed-up with him and his funny ways, and the swank of those Fifth-Form bounders, I think."

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I've got a dodge for taking them down a peg or two."

"Expound, you ass."

"Why shouldn't we challenge the Fifth to a game of footer?"

"What?"

"No, I'm not off my rocker," said Bob Cherry coolly. "I think it's a ripping idea. Why shouldn't we challenge the Fifth?"

"Rats! They'd never play the Lower Fourth. They'd consider it infra dig, the asses!"

"I know that—as a rule. But we may chip Coker into playing. Then, too, there's the fact that he's no good as a Fifth-Form footer captain. Blundell and the rest know that well enough. They're only doing it to butter him up, of course. When they have to play an out-match against a team that's any good, they'll get up some excuse to leave Coker out, or else shove him in as back. He can play back after a fashion, but he's about as fit to captain a team as to captain an airship."

"But he'll see through it if they chuck him."

"That's the idea. I think Blundell & Co. will play us, thinking they can walk right over us," grinned Bob Cherry. "See—they'll think the Remove easy enough to lick, even with Coker as their skipper."

Harry Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"Something in that," he assented.

"Then—then there'll be a surprise for them!" Bob Cherry chuckled. "We'll make up a junior team, including the Upper Fourth and the Shell—picking out the best players in the Lower School, any Form. See? We can make up a team that way that would give the Fifth Form trouble at any time—and with Coker as their captain, we may—"

"Lick them!" roared Nugent.

"That's it, lick them!" assented Bob Cherry. "What do you think of the wheeze?"

Harry and Frank rushed at Bob Cherry, and seized him, and waltzed him round in their glee.

"Hurrah!" shouted Nugent.

"Hurrah!" roared Wharton.

Bob Cherry gasped.

"Go easy, you duffers! You like the idea?"

"Ripping!"

"Good! Then it's a go!"

And a go it was.

The moment the idea was communicated to the other fellows it caught on. Lick the Fifth—beat the top Form but one of Greyfriars on the footer ground! It was like a dream—the fellows would have given weeks and weeks pocket-money to do it. Lick the Fifth! For that noble object, all the Lower Forms at Greyfriars were willing and ready to pull together as one man!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Junior Eleven.

HARRY WHARTON believed in striking the iron while it was hot. The next day was a half-holiday, and then Harry knew, the Fifth had no match on. Had they had one, it was likely enough that they would have left Coker's appointment till Thursday. Now, they were likely to get up some scratch match on Wednesday afternoon, and play Coker as captain, and make him feel as if he were a real skipper. The challenge from the Remove would fall in beautifully with that. The licking the Remove intended to give them would come as a pleasant, or otherwise, surprise.

Harry Wharton, then, lost no time. He meant to get his team together that day, and challenge the Fifth to a match for Wednesday afternoon. At the thought of licking the Fifth, and even of merely playing them, the Removites felt several inches taller. Even Billy Bunter felt a glow of Form patriotism at the idea, and was observed to take some slight interest in matters outside the tuckshop.

Wharton and his chums held a discussion on the subject in No. 1 Study immediately after dinner. It was decided that Wharton would have to captain the team, and at least six Removites would have to play in it—Wharton himself, Bob Cherry, Nugent, Tom Brown, Hurree Singh, and Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire. They were players who could give any opposing team some trouble, and if the rest of the eleven was of equally good quality, there was a good chance of snatching a victory.

"We'll ask Temple, Dabney, and Fry, of the Upper Fourth," said Harry, "and Hobson and Pimble, of the Shell."

"Good," said Bob Cherry.

"And the sooner the quicker," Harry added.

"The soonfulness ought to be terrific."

And the chums set out to look for the other fellows. They found Hobson and Pimble in the Close, looking towards

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Coker, who was sauntering there with some of the Fifth. Coker seemed serenely unconscious of their existence.

"The rotter!" said Hobson wrathfully, as the juniors came up. "Look at him. You'd think he'd been in the Fifth for a term at least, instead of less'n a week."

"Swankin' beast!" said Pimble.

"What do you Remove kids want?" grunted Hobson.

"We're thinking of a little joke on Coker and his new friends," Harry Wharton explained blandly.

The Shell fellows became all politeness immediately.

"Oh, if that's it—" said Hobson, quite graciously.

"That's it?"

"What's the idea?"

"They've made Coker captain of the football team in the Fifth."

Hobson snorted.

"They're just sucking up to him, of course," he said.

"Well, they haven't given him the job on his merits, I know," said Harry, laughing. "Look here, we're going to challenge the Fifth to a match."

"My hat! Challenge the Fifth!"

"Yes," said Harry coolly.

"They won't accept."

"I think they will; but never mind that. If they do accept, will you fellows play in the team? I want to make it representative of the whole lower school—all the best players below the Fifth."

"You want me to captain?" asked Hobson.

"No, we don't," said Wharton promptly. "I'm captain, and I've got five men already. I want you two chaps to play, because you're a ripping half, and Pimble can keep goal jolly well."

"Of course, we couldn't play in a team unless there was a majority of Shell fellows in it, and a Shell chap was captain."

"Oh, all right!" said Harry shortly, turning away.

"Sorry to have troubled you. It's all right."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Hobson. "Don't be in such a dickens of a hurry. I haven't said that I won't play yet."

Wharton turned back.

"Well, shall I put your name down?" asked Harry.

"Who have you got in the team, so far?"

Harry ran over the names. Hobson and Pimble looked at one another. They did not like the captaincy remaining with the Remove, and that was clear. Otherwise, the idea struck them as an excellent one.

"Of course, we could get up a Shell team, and challenge Coker's lot ourselves," said Hobson musingly.

"Oh, play the game!" said Nugent.

"Look here—"

"Quite right," said Harry warmly. "It's our idea, and you've no right to borrow it. But get up a Shell team, if you like. You know very well that the Shell's in rotten form, and you've nothing to put into the field against forwards like Higgs and Blundell, and a half like Potter, for instance."

Hobson had to admit that.

"Still, you'll concede that the team ought to be captained by someone higher than a Remove chap," he remarked.

To which Wharton's reply was brief and emphatic:

"Rats!"

Hobson grinned.

"Well, we'll play," he said.

"All right. I'm to put your names down, then?" asked Harry, opening his notebook.

"Yes."

"Good. They're down."

And the chums of the Remove walked away to visit Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth. The Upper Fourth and the Remove were generally on terms of warfare; but Harry was sure they could unite for so laudable an object as licking a still higher Form, and he was right there. As soon as he found Temple, and explained the idea to him, Temple jumped at it; only he laboured under the same delusion as Hobson, that a fellow higher in Form than a Remove ought to be captain.

"Hobson thought that," said Harry Wharton. "I explained to him that it was rot."

"Well, it was rot in Hobson," agreed Temple. "I agree with you there. Hobby couldn't captain a team of white rabbits. But in this case, Wharton, you'll admit as a reasonable chap that an Upper Fourth fellow ought to lead!"

"Rats!"

"Now, look here, Harry Wharton—"

"Boah! The question is, what are you going to do? If you're willing to play in the team, I'll put your names down."

Temple, Dabney, and Fry looked at one another. They didn't like Wharton's way of putting it; but to have a hand

in inflicting a defeat on the Fifth Form was a great temptation.

"You're a blessed cheeky fag," said Fry. "You ought to be asking us to captain your rotten team!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, we're not," he said. "I want Temple to play inside left, and you two as halves. Hobby's going to be centre-half. If you care to take it on, well and good; if you don't, I'll look further. I'd rather have you chaps, but I can get some decent players either in the Shell or the Remove."

"The decentfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Singh. "It is a really great chance of an esteemed lifetime for the elegant and honourable duffers."

"Well, I think we can play," said Temple.

"Oh, rather!" remarked Dabney.

"Shall I put your names down?"

"Yes, shove 'em down. If before the match comes off, you feel it your duty to resign the captaincy to me, I sha'n't refuse it."

"Thanks," said Wharton, laughing. "I've got the team all right now, then, and it only remains to make the Fifth play us. I think it will work all right; and if they play, I think we shall beat them. It will be gorgeous for the lower school if we do. We shall have to go and see Coker after lessons to-day, and put it to him. I was thinking of a chap from each Form going—you, Temple, and Hobson, of the Shell, and myself. What do you think?"

Temple nodded.

"Good," he said. "I dare say we shall get chucked out on our necks; but, I suppose, we can risk that?"

"Yes, we'll risk it. We must explain that it's a flag of truce," said Harry. "Upon the whole, we'll catch Coker somewhere outside the Fifth-Form passage—they're death on juniors there. Hobson and his lot had an awful time visiting Coker the other day. It's settled, then: you play?"

"Yes, it's settled."

"Oh, rather!"

"Good. Then we'll interview Coker immediately after lessons," said Wharton, with a grin. "and I rather think Coker the Great and the Fifth-Form bounders will come down off their perch a little over this."

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Challenge Accepted.

WHEN the Fifth came out that afternoon, there was a group of Removees standing near their class-room door, the Removees having been dismissed a few minutes earlier. Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting for Coker.

Coker gave them a lofty look as he came out with Higgs and the rest. He regarded it as really a bore that these youngsters should persist in shoving themselves under his notice.

"Coker! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Coker walked on with his nose in the air.

"Coker! Coker! Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Coker! Coker, Coker, Coker!" said Bob.

"Look here!" exclaimed Coker angrily, as Bob ran through the positive, comparative, and superlative of his name. "Look here, you buzz off! I don't like being bothered by kids."

"But we want—"

"You want a thick ear, I think," said Higgs.

"And you'll get it 'ere," said Coker, dropping the aspirate for the sake of another of his brilliant puns. Higgs paused a moment to reflect, and then, realising that it was a joke, he burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker smiled.

"Look here, Coker—I mean, Coker," said Bob. "You see—"

"Oh, get away!"

"We want to congratulate you, and to congratulate the Fifth," said Harry Wharton. "We've heard that you are footer captain, Coker."

"Well, that's right," said Coker.

"And a jolly good captain, too," said Higgs.

"What-ho!" chimed in Potter. "I must say that Coker would make a good footer captain for the Sixth, for that matter."

"Well, we've brought you a challenge."

"A what!" said Coker.

"A challenge from the Lower School. We're making up a combined team to meet the Fifth, and we want to play you."

"Oh, rot!" said Coker loftily.

"Mere rot," said Higgs.

"Bosh!" said Bland.

"I say, Blundell, you're Form-captain—what do you say?" asked Harry Wharton.

Blundell pursed his lips.

"Oh, it's for Coker to say," he replied. "But we'll talk it over, kid. When do you want to play?"

"Wednesday afternoon."

"Oh, we're engaged!" said Potter.

"You're not engaged," said Wharton coolly. "I made a point of making sure of that. If you're afraid to meet us—"

"What!" roared the Fifth-Formers.

"If you're afraid to meet us, of course, we'll let you off, but we thought we'd give you a chance," said Wharton. "Besides, it will be a chance for old Coker to distinguish himself as footer captain, you know."

"We'll let you know," said Blundell briefly.

"We're all in this," said Temple of the Fourth. "All the lower Forms are represented, Blundell, so you won't be playing merely the Remove."

"Certainly not," exclaimed Hobson. "The Shell are in it, too."

"Well, I don't know that we object to playing the Shell," said Blundell. "Anyway, we'll let you know."

And the Fifth-Formers walked away.

"Think they'll play us, Harry?"

Wharton nodded.

"I think so, Bob. Blundell must mean to leave Coker out of all important matches, but he can't make him footer captain without playing him sometimes. I think he'll jump at this, as a safe occasion for playing Coker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton showed his usual judgment in that. That was exactly the thought that was passing through Blundell's mind.

He thought over the junior challenge as he walked off with his friends, and the more he thought of it the better he liked it.

The Fifth had secured Coker for ever, so to speak, by making him footer captain. Even the wiles of the Sixth would be useless now; Ionides and Loder could offer him no distinction so great as that.

Only, of course, it wouldn't do to let Coker captain the Form team in any match of importance. Some excuse would have to be found for Blundell to take his old place as footer captain on such occasions.

But it wouldn't do to make Coker suspicious. He must be played in some matches. And if a series of easy matches could be arranged, for Coker to play in as captain, it would be more easy to shift him out of the team for the harder matches. Blundell had already thought of that. Harry Wharton's challenge really came as if purposely designed to assist him.

It was necessary to talk it over a little; needless to say, not in the presence of Coker. Blundell murmured a hint to Bland, and that obliging youth walked Coker off to the tuckshop, to stand him some of Mrs. Mimble's special hot home-made lemonade, a very pleasant drink on a winter's afternoon. And then the other fellows discussed the matter by themselves.

"We'll play the Remove," said Blundell.

"Rather infra dig.," Higgs remarked.

"Never mind that. We must play Coker sometimes, or he'll think we're only making fun of him, making him footer captain."

"That's so."

"But if we played him in the match with the Sixth, or against the Ramblers—"

"My hat!"

"Couldn't be done."

"Of course not," said Blundell. "We'll play him against Wharton's youngsters, and get up a series of matches of the same sort. It will be as good as our usual practice, for us; in fact, we'll take it instead of practice. Only mind, don't speak contemptuously of the match before Coker. Let him think it's a hard tussle, and that we depend on him to pull us through."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, we all like Coker," said Blundell, who did not wholly admit even to himself that he was "spoofing" the new fellow in the Fifth. "But it's no good blinking facts, is it?"

And the others agreed that it wasn't.

They joined the two in the tuckshop. Coker greeted them with a hospitable grin.

"Have some of this," he said. "It's my treat. Trot it out, Mrs. Mimble."

"Certainly, Master Coker."

"You're very good," said Blundell. "Thank you, Mrs."

Mimble; I'll have a large one. Look here, Coker, I want to speak to you as our footer captain."

"Go ahead," said Coker.

"Do you think we might play the Remove?"

"Cheeky kids!" said Coker.

"Yes, that's so; Coker's right, you chaps."

"Oh, yes, Coker's right!" said Higgs and Potter, drinking hot lemonade the while.

"But after all, it isn't only the Remove," Blundell remarked. "There are Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers in it. If you thought fit, Coker, I should like to play them."

"Oh, all right!" said Coker.

"Mind, it's not an easy job," Potter remarked. "Young Wharton is a wonderful goer, and that chap Linley from Lancashire is a real terror, you know."

"Yes, so he is."

"We shall have a tussle, as a matter of fact," Blundell said solemnly. "But with Coker to pull us through, I think it will be all right."

"Nil desperandum, Cokro duce et auspice Cokro," murmured Higgs.

"Quite right, Higgy."

Coker nodded genially.

"All serene," he said. "If you want to play them, I don't mind. Of course, we shall lick the young bounders hollow."

"Oh, of course!" said Blundell. "But it will be a tussle, you know, that's all. But with you in the lead—"

"Play 'em with pleasure," said Coker. "Have some more?"

"Thanks, I will!"

"Who says cake?"

"I!"

"And we'll let Wharton know we accept," Blundell remarked. "You might go and tell him now, Bland."

Bland cast a regretful glance at the cake.

"I'll go and tell him in a minute or two," he said.

And it was not till the little party in the tuckshop broke up that Bland went to take the message to Wharton. He looked into the junior common-room, where there was a crowd of Removites.

"We'll play you," he said.

"Good!" said Harry Wharton.

And that was all. Bland retired, and the juniors chuckled softly.

"There's a surprise in store for the Fifth," Wharton remarked. "Coker the Great is going to have a fall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It had not entered into the calculations of the Fifth at all that the juniors could possibly win. They had regarded the challenge itself simply as a piece of swank. But the Removites meant business. They had the best team it was possible to pick from the lower school; and the Fifth had only an average Fifth-Form team, and the worst captain they could have found within the walls of Greyfriars. There was a chance at least for Harry Wharton's eleven—a sporting chance, at least—and that was enough for the juniors. They were already dwelling in their minds upon the gorgeous glory of licking the Fifth.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Does Not Want to Borrow.

"I SAY, Coker!"

Billy Bunter put his head cautiously into Coker's study in the Fifth-Form passage, and blinked in through his big spectacles.

Bunter had been stalking Coker for some time, trying to find him alone; and at last he had succeeded.

There was no one in the study besides Horace. Horace was sitting on the table, swinging his legs, and he looked far from favourably upon Bunter.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Bunter took another cautious blink round, in case enemies should be nigh, and then came into the study.

"I want to speak to you, Coker, on a rather important subject," he remarked, as he closed the door.

"Oh, rats!" said Coker.

"Oh, really, Coker, I—I know your time is very valuable," said Bunter. "Of course, I know it's cheek of a chap to intrude on a fellow like you—a fellow with heaps of engagements, and sought after by all the school."

Coker grunted.

"I—I only wanted just to speak about old times," said Bunter, watching Coker very cautiously. "I hope you don't think I've come here on the make, Coker. I hope I'm incapable of anything of that sort. What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything," replied Coker.

"Of course, you're miles above us chaps now," said Bunter. "I know that. I feel just as friendly as ever, but I know, of course, that you haven't time to talk to juniors. But I'd like just to chat for a few minutes over old times."

Coker looked at him fixedly.

"You know my Aunt Judy's rich?" he asked grimly.

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"I—I've heard so."

"You know she came down handsome when I got my remove?"

"Ye-es."

"And you want to borrow some tin?"

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"I haven't any to lend to juniors, and any time to talk to them, either," said Coker. "There's the door."

"Oh, really—"

"Shut the door after you."

Billy Bunter did not stir. He wriggled his fat person in a deprecating manner, all the time keeping his eyes fastened upon Coker, ready to escape if the Fifth-Former made a hostile demonstration. But Coker was too lazy to move from his seat on the table.

"You see, Coker, I know a lot of chaps have been buttering you up, because you're rich," said Bunter. "I'm not that sort. I wouldn't say nice things to a chap because he had tin in his pockets. I admire you personally."

Coker grunted.

"I haven't the least ulterior motive in coming here," said Bunter. "I just wished to have a chat about old times. If you offered me a five-pound note at this moment, I should refuse it."

"It's not likely you'll have the chance," grinned Coker.

"They were such pleasant times," said Bunter, with an air of dreamy reminiscence, "when you used to come to my study in the Remove—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Coker. "I came only once or twice."

"Ahem! And I used to stand you such jolly feeds—"

"That you jolly well didn't," said Coker. "It was that Chinese chap. We made him stand the feeds, and you never paid a penny towards them. You used to get a feed yourself for nothing, and that's why you asked Hobson and me."

Bunter coughed.

"It was so nice, having you in the study, Coker."

"Rats!"

"You were so pleasant—"

"Oh, pile it on!"

"And we felt so honoured at being visited by a Shell fellow—"

"Blow the Shell!" said Coker.

"I—I mean, a chap who was just getting his remove into the Fifth," explained Bunter. "Of course, we knew you ought to have had your remove long ago."

"If you're going to start joking on that subject here—"

Bunter backed away in alarm.

"Oh, really Coker, I—I wasn't! I—I mean, we all regarded you as really a Fifth-Former, you know—and—"

"Liar!"

"H'm! And I'm sure we were all delighted to hear you were footer captain in the Fifth," said Bunter. "I know you'll lick Wharton's lot to-morrow."

"I don't need you to tell me that," said Coker.

"You're such a splendid back, you know."

"I'm going to play forward for the Fifth."

"I—I meant forward."

"No, you didn't; you meant back."

"Of—of course, I meant back," agreed Bunter. "But I know you will play forward quite as well as Wingate himself could."

"You don't."

"H'm! Look here, Coker, there's another matter I wanted to speak to you about. Of course, you know I wouldn't come here borrowing money!"

"I don't know anything of the sort."

"H'm! But the fact is," said Bunter, with a burst of confidence, "I'm expecting a postal-order, Coker."

Coker stared at him.

"I've been disappointed about it this afternoon," Bunter explained. "It was to have come by the five post, but it didn't. It's from a titled friend of mine, and I suppose he's so full up with social engagements that he's forgotten to send the postal-order. Things like that do happen among society people."

"Do they?" said Coker.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter. "And my titled friends move in the very best society. Well, as I was saying, the postal-order hasn't come. It's rotten, of course, because I was depending on it to—to pay a bill. I suppose you wouldn't mind cashing the postal-order for me, Coker, as you've plenty of ready cash? It would save me the trouble of going down to the village."

"Certainly!" said Coker, with a bland smile. "Bring it to me as soon as it arrives, and I'll cash it on the spot."

Bunter coughed.

"H'm! I mean, you wouldn't mind cashing it in advance? That's what I really meant, Coker. You see, it will be here

by the last post to-night for a dead cert., and I shall hand it over to you at once."

Coker grinned.

"It's for ten shillings," said Bunter. "If you care to let me have nine-and-six now, I would willingly let the odd tanner go for interest."

"Go hon!"

"Well, say nine shillings."

The door opened, and Bland and Higgs came in. Billy Bunter blinked at them in alarm. He had been very careful to stalk Coker and find him alone for this interview. But he could not guard against interruptions like these, of course. Bland and Higgs did not seem pleased with finding him in the study, either. They knew Billy Bunter.

"Hallo!" said Higgs. "Chumming up with fags—ch, Coker?"

"Didn't know you had a visitor," said Bland.

Coker turned red.

"He's no visitor of mine," he exclaimed. "I suppose you don't imagine I know persons in the Remove?"

"I suppose not."

"What's he doing here?" asked Higgs.

"Lying!" said Coker.

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"What did he come for?"

"Money."

"Oh, really, Coker! I—I distinctly said that I hadn't come for money. I told you that if you offered me five pounds I should refuse it," exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.

"My word!" ejaculated Higgs, in righteous indignation. "I suppose he's come to sponge on you, Coker, because you're in funds just now? How utterly rotten!"

"Disgusting!" said Bland.

"Beastly!"

"Caddish!"

"Kick him out!" said Coker.

"Yes, rather!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, in great alarm. "I—I'm just going. You needn't trouble. I—I was just going, really, you know. Look here, I only came here to ask Coker to cash a postal-order for me. I—I—ow! Yow!"

Bland swung Bunter to the door, and Higgs planted a heavy boot behind him.

The Owl of the Remove spun into the corridor.

"Ow! Yow! I say, you fellows—Ow!"

"Hallo! Who's this?" exclaimed Blundell, coming along the passage. "Fags in my study! Take that, you cheeky young rascal!"

Bunter took it, on his ear, and yelled again. Then he went pounding down the passage at top speed. Bunter was not a light weight or a runner, but he got out of the Fifth Form quarters in record time.

"Cheeky young bounder!" said Blundell, coming into the study. "What did he want?"

"Came here to sponge on Coker," exclaimed Higgs indignantly.

Blundell was horrified.

"What! The awful young cad!"

"Simply disgusting!"

"Oh, too rotten for words!"

Coker, who was still sitting on the table, swinging his legs, laughed. Perhaps he was laughing at Bunter.

Perhaps he wasn't!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Kind Offers.

HARRY WHARTON had had his challenge accepted by the Fifth, and he had selected his team. Although there was no doubt that his team was a strong one, and stronger than any eleven selected solely from the Remove could have been, there was the drawback that the Shell, Fourth Form, and Remove fellows had not practised together, and so something might be wanting in combination. Wharton made use of what little daylight was left that day to give them some practice, against a scratch team of juniors, and he was pretty well satisfied with the result. He gave orders that the team were to turn out for more practice before breakfast on the following morning—an order that the Remove took cheerfully enough, but at which the Shell and Fourth fellows were inclined to sniff. But they had accepted Harry Wharton as their captain, and there was no excuse to rebel, and they all wanted to beat the Fifth.

The match was an unusual one, and, of course, excited immense interest in the lower Forms. The Remove had sometimes played the Upper Fourth, and beaten them. They had been serenely convinced of their ability to beat the Shell, if put to the test. But to play the Fifth—a senior

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Form! It was enough to send a thrill through all the lower Form-rooms.

And, the match being so peculiar and important, every fellow who fancied that he could play footer wanted a place in the team. As Wharton had already made the best selections possible, and wasn't inclined to change, he was naturally considered a hopeless idiot by half the juniors of Greyfriars. Even Alonzo Todd, who was the most patient fellow in the Remove or out of it, was inclined to lose patience with Wharton, he was so obstinate.

For Todd had a curious delusion that he could play footer. Sometimes the humorous spirits in the Remove would get up a spoof match, and make Alonzo play, for the simple purpose of rotting him and enjoying a hearty laugh. On such occasions Alonzo was really great. The number of goals he had kicked—through his own posts, as a rule—was astonishing. And the trivial rules of the game never bound down a soaring soul like Alonzo's. He would play the ball in touch, all by himself, for minutes together sometimes, and he had been known to pin the goalie against a goal-post, and hold him there by main force, and yell to another fellow to kick the ball into the net. Such exploits added to the gaiety of Greyfriars, but they did not recommend Alonzo for a place in the junior eleven to play the Fifth Form.

"My dear Wharton," Alonzo expostulated, "I am perfectly willing to play, and I am not seeking the place for my own personal glorification. My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to beware of pride and vain-glory. But it is for the good of the team. You want the best players possible. Play me."

"My dear ass—"

"You see, Wharton, my desire is to be useful. My Uncle Benjamin always told me to be useful to others."

"You really want to be useful?" asked Wharton thoughtfully.

"Oh, certainly!"

"Well, you can come and shout."

"Shout!" said Alonzo, perplexed.

"Yes," said Wharton generously. "You shall have a good place behind the goal, you know, and—and look on."

"Look on!"

"That's it. And whenever you see me kick a goal, you shall shout hurrah."

"Hurrah!"

"Or hip-pip, just as you like," said Wharton. "That will be useful. It bucks a fellow up to hear himself cheered. How do you like the idea?"

Alonzo looked at him doubtfully.

"I trust you are not jesting with me, Wharton!" he said seriously.

"Jesting!" ejaculated Wharton, adopting Alonzo's own habit of repeating what was said, with a perfectly serious face.

"Yes. My Uncle Benjamin says that one should never jest upon a serious subject."

"Subject!" repeated Wharton.

"He would be shocked—nay, disgusted!"

"Disgusted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

Alonzo looked at Nugent in surprise. He could not see anything to laugh at himself.

"My dear Nugent—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is really—well, my Uncle Benjamin would characterise this untimely merriment as unseemly."

"Unseemly!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes, indeed. Such would be the opinion of my Uncle Benjamin."

"Benjamin!"

"My dear Wharton—"

"Wharton!"

Nugent shrieked. Alonzo Todd looked at Wharton more in sorrow than in anger, and retired from the study. The chums of the Remove yelled. Todd heard it as he went, and shook his head sadly. There was evidently no making the juniors hear reason—what Todd regarded as reason.

Bulstrode was another fellow who considered his claim to play indisputable. He spoke to Wharton about it that evening in the common-room.

"I suppose you'll let me know if you want me for the team?" he remarked.

Wharton nodded a cheerful assent.

"You can depend on that," he replied.

Bulstrode snorted.

"Well, do you want me?" he demanded.

"As a matter of fact, I don't."

And Bulstrode snorted again and walked off.

There were even generous offers from the Second and Third Forms to supply players for the match. Nugent minor, of the Second, thought that the team would be more

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representative of the lower school if there were a Second-Form chap in it. Nugent minor, of course, would be the chap!

Gatty, of the same Form, was inclined to agree with Dick Nugent so far as the first part of the proposition went, but disagreed with the second. The Second Form ought to be represented, but Gatty was the man.

Wharton's reply to both was couched in the same terms—the ancient and monosyllabic reply:

"Rats!"

Which quashed the pretensions of the Second Form. Hulkes, of the Third, suggested that, while it was quite right to sit on those cheeky Second-Formers, he was a very proper person to play in the eleven, and he was quite huffy when Wharton made him exactly the same reply.

Both Hobson and Temple, too, reminded Wharton that he had only to say the word, and they would gladly relieve him of the responsibility of captaining the junior team. He did not say the word.

Early on Wednesday morning Wharton called up the players in the Remove dormitory. They turned out cheerfully enough, and as Hobson, Pimble, Temple, Fry and Dabney were not up, the Removites went to call them.

They called them by means of stripping off their bed-clothes, and there were yells of protest and threats of vengeance; but the footballers turned out, and went down to the ground in a body.

It was a fine, hard morning, and they put in some excellent practice before breakfast, and Harry Wharton was more and more pleased with the prospects of his team.

As they came back from the ground for breakfast, they met Coker and his friends of the Fifth strolling in the Close. The Fifth-Formers regarded them with tolerant smiles.

"Been getting some practice, youngsters?" asked Blundell, with a laugh.

"Yee, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Well, you'll need it," grinned Higge. "We shall wake you up this afternoon."

"We shall wake them up and shake them up," said Coker.

Whether this was intended for a pun was not clear; but it was evidently a joke, and the Fifth-Formers roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away, leaving them still roaring. Frank Nugent gave a very expressive snort.

"It's simply sickening, the way they butter that chap up!" he exclaimed. "Blessed if I know how he doesn't see through it!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I rather fancy he does," he replied. "Coker isn't half the ass the Fifth chaps take him for. They're spoofing him, and I shouldn't wonder if he was spoofing them, too, all the time."

And the Nabob of Bhanipur opined that the spoof-fulness was terrific.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Match with the Fifth.

COKER had a new swagger on when he came out of the Fifth-Form-room after morning lessons that day. That day he was to appear in public as the football skipper of the Fifth—a fellow truly great. He was to lead the Fifth Form footballers to victory, and establish his fame as a skipper and as a centre-forward. It was true that when he had played for the Shell he had played back, but he chose to play in the front line for the Fifth, and there was no one to say him nay.

If the Fifth had not utterly underrated their opponents, they would have been very anxious about the result of that match.

But they never dreamed for a moment that the Lower School could stand up against them, however poor a team they put into the field.

Age and weight should have carried everything before them, without considering the additional experience of older fellows.

They did not reckon upon the fact that the Remove players were trained to the last inch, and habitually kept themselves at top form and in the pink of condition. Harry Wharton could have turned out a team at any time, at ten minutes' notice, in a fit condition to play the game of their lives. It wasn't so in the Fifth; and under Coker's lead, too, the best players in the Fifth weren't anxious for places. There was no glory to be got from a match with the Lower School. And any old thing was good enough to play against the juniors.

The juniors noted the carelessness on the part of their rivals, and rejoiced. A fall was coming for Coker and the Fifth, and the swank of the last week would be dearly paid for.

After morning school, Wharton led his team into the field

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again for a quarter of an hour's practice against a scratch eleven.

He would not keep them at it longer, for fear of making them stale for the afternoon.

There was no doubt that the junior team was a good one, and they were getting into the way of working together.

If there was any danger, it was that Hobson or Pimble might be selfish with the ball, and not let the Remove forwards have it; but that was a risk that had to be run, and Wharton meant to keep his eyes open. He didn't mean to stand any nonsense; and he wouldn't have stood any from Sixth-Formers themselves if they had played in an eleven under his lead.

The question of a referee was an important one, and Wingate, of the Sixth, was asked.

The Greyfriars captain laughed when he was told of the match.

"They'll wipe you off the ground, Wharton!" he said.

"Not with Coker to captain them," said Harry.

Wingate frowned.

"But I don't know whether it's desirable for the Remove to beat the Fifth, even if they could," he said. "There's such a thing as discipline, and it will give you kids swelled heads."

"It will be a lesson to the Fifth to buck up, and not to butter up that ass Coker in the way they're doing," Wharton suggested.

Wingate grinned.

"Well, there's something in that," he agreed. "Look here, I've nothing special to do, and I'll referee if you like. But I don't expect anything but to see you juniors rushed all over the field and made wrecks of."

"We don't mind risking it."

"All right, then. I shall stop the game at half-time if I think you're not fit to go on."

"Right you are," said Wharton. "We don't mind."

And so Wingate was on the ground at half-past two with the junior team. The Fifth-Formers had not turned up yet, although half-past two was the time fixed by mutual agreement for the kick-off.

The juniors knew, of course, that Coker & Co. were affecting to treat the match with carelessness, as a matter of no importance. But they made a mistake in assuming swank of that sort where Wingate was concerned.

Wingate looked up at the clock-tower when the half-hour had been exceeded by one minute exactly, and called a fag to him. It was Nugent minor, of the Second.

"Take a message to Coker from me," said Wingate quietly. "Tell him that I give him two minutes exactly to get his team on the ground. If he isn't here by then, the match is off, and I shall call on Coker, and give him a hiding for himself."

Nugent minor grinned with delight at the idea of carrying such a message to the great men of the Fifth.

"Right-ho!" he said.

"Hurry up!"

Dick Nugent did not need to be told to hurry up with a message like that. He simply flew.

The Fifth-Form footballers were already in their playing clothes, standing in a group in their overcoats and chatting outside the School House. They grinned and winked to one another as Dick Nugent came flying up.

"Here's a message from the juniors," chuckled Higge.

"Ha, ha! They're in a hurry."

"They're tired of waiting," grinned Blundell.

"Let 'em wait!" said Coker, with a grin.

"Ha, ha!"

"Everything comes to him who waits," Coker remarked. This was probably a joke. At all events, the Fifth-Formers laughed loudly. Nugent minor stopped, breathless.

"I say, you Fifth bounders—"

"Hallo, young shaver! What's that?"

"A message—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Is Wharton getting cold in the feet?"

"It's from Wingate."

"Oh!"

"He says that if you're not on the ground in two minutes the match is off."

"Oh!"

"And he'll give Coker a licking."

Coker turned pink.

The Fifth-Formers looked at one another with sickly smiles. They had forgotten Wingate, and the fact that he might not wait with the patience the juniors might have shown.

"H'm! P-p-perhaps we'd better get off," said Coker, with assumed carelessness.

"May as well," said Blundell.

"Oh, yes! After all, it's time."

"You'd better hurry up," said Nugent minor, with a grin. "Wingate is in a wax, and he may lick you all round."

Blundell made a cut at him, which he dodged, and the footballers of the Fifth made their way to the footer ground.

Wingate gave them a stern glance as they came up.

"You're late!" he exclaimed.

"Only a few minutes," said Coker. "And it really doesn't matter when a chap's playing these youngsters, does it?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Wingate sharply.

Coker affected to be deaf. The coats were thrown off, and the two teams ambled into the field.

There was no doubt that the junior eleven looked very fit and well. They were, of course, smaller than their opponents, with the exception of Hobson and Bob Cherry, who were big fellows for their age. But the juniors were in great form, and the Fifth came on looking far from up to their level in that respect.

And then Coker was captain!

The juniors, who were round the field in crowds, augured very much from that circumstance.

It would have alarmed the Fifth themselves, if they had dreamed that by any chance, under any circumstances, the juniors could have beaten them. They did not dream it yet. But it was coming!

Coker won the toss, and selected his goal. Sun and wind, however, were of little moment then, and it mattered little. Harry Wharton kicked off to the sharp phip of the whistle, and the game began.

From all quarters fellows had come to see the match, many juniors leaving their own play to see the team figure against the seniors.

They expected a thrilling time—and they had it.

The Fifth started proceedings with a heavy rush, which was intended to smash the juniors and knock the whole side sky-high.

It did not have that result.

Far enough from that! For as if by magic the junior forwards broke away, leaving their opponents stranded, and beating the halves quite easily, brought the leather up to the senior goal. There Hurree Singh received it from the centre, and bore it along the touch-line till it was time to send it in, and then he let Nugent have it, and Nugent slammed it over to Wharton as the backs tackled him. Harry Wharton received the pass, with only the goalie to beat—and he beat him with a kick that was so fast that it made the Fifth-Former's head swim. The ball glanced past the goalie's ear and found the net, and there was a roar:

"Goal!"

"Bravo, juniors!"

"Goal! Hurrah!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

No Glory for Coker.

"GOAL!"

The Fifth smiled. They had not expected a reverse so soon. But, of course, accidents will happen in the best of regulated teams. That was their view of the situation.

The idea that the juniors could beat the Fifth still appeared impossible to them, and though they did not like it, they restarted cheerfully enough.

They still intimated by their bearing, that the obliteration of the Lower school was merely retarded. There could be no doubt that such an event was, in the very nature of things, bound to fulfil itself.

Harry Wharton took them in at once.

"On it, kids!" he whispered, as Wingate piped them off again. "Never mind the man. Get away with the ball."

And they did. A smile went right along the junior front rank. Nugent and Temple were very ably supporting Harry Wharton, and Hurree Singh, right; and Mark Linley, left, were as keen as greyhounds, on the wings.

"Now, juniors!" yelled their supporters, as they saw Wharton & Co. coming again in very determined fashion.

"Rub another in!"

The Fifth were superior to such exhortation. Evidently, they were going to win on superior smiles and disdainful laughs. Coker was in earnest, of course. But he was about as useful on a footer-field as a bull in a China shop. He was spoiling all combination.

The Fifth were standing it pretty well, but Harry Wharton saw plainly that very soon they would lose their tempers with Coker, and then they would be at the juniors' mercy.

Coker was certainly a danger to the enemy in one way. He was clumsy, and very heavy. If he fell on anyone it would certainly be painful for them.

"He'd make a good cab-horse," said Higgs, in an aside to their "right." "The thud of his hoofs is enough to break the turf."

Mark Linley heard the Fifth inside-right's remark. Higgs reddened. But there was no help for it. The jibe was soon "THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 145."

passed down the junior rank, and the fellows could hardly play for laughing.

"We'll see that the beast doesn't get away!" said Bob Cherry from behind.

"Rather!" grinned Tom Brown, his colleague, at back.

"We'll see that Coker is severely 'kopped' every time he comes this way."

But there was really no danger of the Fifth captain breaking through the junior halves, and Bob Cherry and the New Zealander might rest on their laurels.

The attack was unquestionably going the other way. The Fifth halves were hard put to it to keep Harry Wharton & Co. out.

Time and again Coker "spoiled things" for his side. The Fifth were rapidly losing their swank. Even Higgs was merely malicious. Coker was being followed by anything but blessings. The benighted state of his mind, as regarded footer, was amply revealed in his play.

Suddenly, Harry Wharton intercepted a pass from Blundell to Coker. Higgs uttered an exclamation of annoyance. But the junior vanguard were off. Down the green they swept. Potter, the centre-half for the Fifth, took his defeat cheerfully, and, "diddling" the full-backs beautifully, Harry Wharton & Co. were in front again with the goalie only to beat.

They did it quite simply. The goalie straightened himself up. In his mind there couldn't be any doubt that Wharton would shoot. But Harry Wharton did not do that. He simply deflected the ball to Nugent, and that worthy rolled it quietly into the corner of the net with the sole of his boot.

The juniors, spectators, and team alike, roared with laughter. The Fifth were furious.

The whole thing had been got through, thanks to a mistake by Coker. Wherever did the ass learn his footer? That was what they wanted to know.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Good old Coker! What a nice chap to give things away like that to the juniors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Higgs looked at his chief as if he would have liked to jump on him. The rest of the Fifth would probably have used "boiling oil" on their skipper.

Wingate pipped them off again. The Fifth were at last inclined to take matters seriously. Even Coker was not quite so clumsy as usual for the next ten minutes. But their combination was very scrappy, nevertheless.

Higgs and Blundell "nursed" Coker as much as they could, but it was not much use. The new Fifth-Former was a duffer at the game.

Harry Wharton and his friends were making rings about their opponents. Potter was the only Fifth fellow who could take the match good-naturedly. He was also the only fellow on his side who was playing anything like a game.

But one swallow does not make a summer, is a very true saying. In footer it means one good "half" cannot save a side.

Then Coker's blunders began again. The Fifth could not get through. Several times they were within an ace; but a miss was as bad as a mile.

"But Coker can be relied upon to muck things," grinned Frank Nugent. "Especially if he happens to be right up in goal."

The juniors grinned as they made the pace hot for Coker's man.

"Nip it about there, in front!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Puncture them again, kids!"

"The esteemed solution would be of no use for such an agreeable puncture," said Hurree Singh.

"Right-ho!" said Wharton, laughing.

And the junior attack moved forward again. Higgs and Blundell saw it coming, and they made a desperate effort. Utterly ignoring his skipper, Higgs sent Blundell a pass. But Coker was brilliant for once. He actually took the pass which was not intended for him.

Harry Wharton & Co., it must be said, had expected him to "miss fire," and he bore down in all his weight on the halves, there being "just a chance" at the moment through the junior front rank. Hobson, the centre-half, came for him. But just as he was about to tackle, his foot slipped, and Coker got ahead to the full-backs themselves.

"Go on, Coker!" yelled the Fifth spectators, coming down from their perch at one fell swoop. "Put it in! Charge Brown down!"

The Fifth had its dignity perhaps, but goals were goals. Here was a distinct chance. Coker had only to beat the full-backs. And was not Coker as big as a house? Had he not the strength of many horses? Charge, Coker, charge! What were two Remove wights at full-back to Coker? Surely they were not more than the mites in cheese, so—

"Charge, Coker, charge!" yelled the delighted Fifth.

Higgs was inclined to reason that it was going all right,

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after all. Coker would score. That interception was really a good thing. But he didn't think so when he looked again.

Instead of meeting Tom Brown, Coker found his way barred by Bob Cherry, a fellow nearly as heavy as himself.

Bob Cherry made for his opponent as if he were going to charge him right over. Coker brought all his weight up in a moment, but not quick enough for Bob Cherry.

When Coker got up again, only then did he realise that Bob Cherry had outwitted him.

He had used his weight to throw himself in the mud. The crowd were not cheering him, but the victorious junior back.

"Well done, Cherry!" they shouted. "Splendidly done, sir! On the ball, juniors!"

And the juniors were. They carried the ball to the other end like a flash. Higgs and the Fifth team, generally, were stunned. They had made certain that Coker would get right through by his weight alone.

"Buck up, Fifth!" roared their supporters.

There was no pretence now. They were anxious about their side's ability to win. It was more than in question.

"Two down, and nearly half-time!" said one fellow indignantly. "What are they dreaming about?"

"Ask Higgs and Blundell," retorted Hazeldene, grinning. "They've got Coker on board as a passenger. Tell 'em to bring out the goalie and 'dock' the skipper. He'd be a little more use in the net!"

"Here they are! Here they are again! Here they are!" cried another junior excitedly.

Harry Wharton & Co. were coming with a vengeance. The Fifth managed to send the ball back to the halves once or twice. But the junior halves, led by Hobson, were as "mighty hunters," and making no mistakes. They fed their forward line like Internationals.

"Here they are!" yelled the juniors again. "Good old Wharton. Good old Nugent! In with it!"

The junior passing was beautiful. Higgs & Co. made every effort to cover their captain's awful mistakes. But it was no use. The passing of Harry Wharton & Co. was the neatest of timing and kicking.

Down the ground they rushed. Every man in his place and moving like the unit in a regiment, they converged on the goal. Mark Linley's centre was perfect, and, without waiting to steady himself, Harry Wharton caught it "full toss" with his right, and slogged it into the bottom corner.

"Beauty, Wharton—beauty!" shouted the junior supporters. "Great shot, sir!"

And Higgs and Blundell looked relieved when Wingate blew for half-time. To put it mildly, the Fifth had not had a look in. There could not be any doubt about the juniors playing them to a standstill.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Coker Duce et Auspice Coker.

"NOW, Fifth! Let's have you!"

The bumptiousness of the first-half had been entirely discarded. It was recognised that the Fifth would have to make real work of it to stave off defeat, let alone win.

"We have only been playing with them," said Coker. "We'll show 'em next journey. Make it hot for 'em, Higgs!"

Higgs turned away to hide his face. The juniors grinned. Coker was really too funny to be let loose on them so suddenly, they thought.

Higgs, Blundell, and the other fellows knew quite well that they had been overplayed. But they were determined to try and stave off defeat, whatever Coker might do.

And the second round started with Coker more a passenger than ever. The Fifth side looked to Blundell and Higgs for guidance.

Potter was the man who could have skippered them better than anyone. But the Fifth weren't in the mood to recognise a good player to-day. The "accepted lights" must be taken, or none.

Then the Fifth pressed. Higgs and Blundell played up, and for a time it looked as if the Fifth were going to score a goal every five minutes.

But Harry Wharton & Co. were not napping. They regarded the first half as a little recreation. The Fifth had not been dangerous once, and now that they seemed to be bucking up, the juniors were not alarmed.

Bland, on the Fifth left-wing, suddenly developed a tendency to "wing it" down the touch-line. But he found Hurree Singh a doughty opponent, and his wild rushes were effectually stopped. Frank Nugent and Fry, too, were always on hand on that wing, and the Fifth's hope in that direction soon died a natural death.

But they were undoubtedly pressing. Harry Wharton & Co. knew it from the fact that they could not institute a real attack on the Fifth goal for some time. The juniors were assuredly on the defensive.

But at last the pace of the Fifth slackened. Higgs and Blundell were desperate.

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ONE
PENNY.

Once or twice they were very near to fouling. But Wingate had his eye on them, and the pulling up of the right-wing man was quite sufficient to show them that that could only result in disaster. "A man off" would mean certain defeat, even if they managed to get level in the meantime.

Then the juniors came into their own again. They were distinctly the better team if not the heavier. Their footer had been consistently good all through the match.

Out went the leather to Mark Linley on the wing from Bob Cherry. The Lancashire lad was expecting it. Quick as thought he drew the opposition all on himself. Quicker still he whizzed it across to Frank Nugent as Coker & Co. crowded on him.

Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh were off with it down their wing in an instant. There was a feeble protest of off-side, only for a moment. They were as "on-side" as it was possible to be.

Seeing the danger, Higgs and Blundell rushed across after the ball. They got there in time to see Hurree Singh about to centre from the corner.

Mark Linley had followed his pass, and was well up in goal.

"Let me have it!" he yelled, as Hurree Singh's centre swerved right into the goal-mouth.

And, leaping in the air as it came, Mark made no mistake. "Goal! Goal! Goal!" cried Harry Wharton, shaking Mark Linley by the hand. "What a lovely header you are, old son! Bravo!"

"Bravo, Linley!" shouted the crowd. "It was your goal all the way!"

The Fifth were now clearly a beaten side. Four nothing just after the interval was terrible.

"Now, kids, slam it in, sure and often!" grinned Harry Wharton. "Keep her moving! That's all we've got to do!"

The junior team laughed. The day was theirs, let the Fifth do what they would. To reduce a lead of four goals was a big undertaking. The whistle went again. At once it was seen that the Fifth had resolved on rough play. But Wingate came down on them sooner than they expected.

Coker was stopped in a foul charge.

"Do that again, Coker," said Wingate, "and you'll go off without the option of explaining!"

That was sufficient. The Fifth were hopelessly beaten. Their only chance would have been to cripple their antagonists. But it was not given to them. Wingate would see to that. And the juniors continued on their victorious career.

Five minutes sufficed for Hobson to put the ball in the net again, and a sound was heard from the Fifth supporters very like booing.

"It'll be merely whistle and goals now!" grinned one junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Phip!

The whistle went.

The match was over, and the juniors had beaten the Fifth hollow, and Coker & Co. hadn't a goal to show for themselves.

The juniors grinned as they came off. The Fifth Form players left the field with brows as black as thunder, with one exception—Horace Coker. Coker seemed to be pretty well satisfied with himself. And Higgs, in a bitter accent, trotted out his well-worn classical quotation, in tones of the bitterest sarcasm:

"Nil desperandum, Cokro duce et auspice Cokro!" My hat!"

Coker looked at them.

"Hard cheese!" he said. "You fellows must back me up better next time, that's all!"

The Fifth players stared at him.

It was too much.

Their already sore feelings were too lacerated.

With one accord they rushed upon Coker and smote him. The astonished footer captain rolled on the grass with a roar. The Fifth players bumped him, and bumped him again. And then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, they marched off.

"My hat!" said Coker, sitting up and looking round him dazedly. "Oh, my only hat!"

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

"M-m-my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh said that the "Ha-ha-ha-ha" was terrific! And he was right; it was.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, by Frank Richards, entitled "THE LEADER OF THE NEW SCHOOL." Order your copy of the MAGNET in advance. Price One Penny.)

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A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.



STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

"John Vincent"—otherwise Stephen Morison, a London business man—lands at Vera Cruz with fifty large cases marked "Cutlery." The cases really contain sovereigns to the amount of £200,000, which Morison has stolen from the firm of Messrs. Crawford, Linscott & Co. Morison deposits the cases in a cellar and imagines his secret safe, until a Mexican, named Pedro Valdez, undecives him by calling him "Morison," and demanding the stolen money. The embezzler attempts to defy the Mexican, but the latter produces a revolver and points towards the door.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Vanished Gold—Stanley Dare Appears on the Scene.

Four men stood just within the doorway, and a single glance at their faces showed that they were desperadoes who cared little what crime they might commit. One of them closed the door, and they came and stood round the table. A half-caste, named Leon Scala, was the spokesman, as he was also the leading spirit of the society. He heeded Morison no more than if he was a mere dummy, and if anything this added to the ex-manager's terror.

"Two men will remain in this house to guard the treasure," he said. "Mark Sefton, the Englishman, and you, Valdez, are chosen for that task. You will see, too, that this man"—he pointed to Stephen Morison—"does not quit the house again. We can decide afterwards what to do with him. We shall meet here again with the rest of our members in three days' time, when a division of the money will be made."

The Englishman, referred to as Mark Sefton, stepped forward. He was a lithe, muscular, determined-looking man, who seemed to care but little for his associates. He glanced at Morison with some contempt.

"You seem to be a very poor specimen," he said. "There is not much backbone in you City people when you are brought face to face with real danger, and I imagine that you are already beginning to regret your felony."

"That will do!" exclaimed Leon Scala. "We don't want you to engage in long conversations with this man."

"Don't you?" sneered Mark Sefton. "Then you had better set someone else to the task of keeping guard over the gold, for I am not anxious for the job. While I am here I talk to this man or not, just as I please. I have told you before that I don't allow any man to dictate to me, so don't try it on."

Silence fell upon the group of men, for desperadoes though they were, they all feared, and some of them hated, the Englishman, perhaps because of his superior daring. Leon Scala's face grew black as thunder, but he choked back whatever retort came to his lips.

After a few minor matters had been arranged, the meeting broke up, and the three men who had not to remain took their departure, leaving Mark Sefton and Pedro Valdez on guard. Stephen Morison had fallen forward on the table in a dead faint.

The evening of the third day had arrived, and Leon Scala, with five associates this time, knocked at the door of the house occupied by Stephen Morison.

There was no response.

They knocked a second time, more loudly. Still there was no response.

"What is the meaning of this?" snarled Leon Scala. "Are both the fools asleep? If they have allowed Morison to slip through their fingers, they had better clear out of Vera Cruz, for there won't be room for them to live in the same city as I do."

"Force the door!" suggested one of the others. "Mark Sefton is not the man to let a prisoner slip through his fingers. Something unusual must have happened."

His suggestion was followed, and in a very few minutes the lock was forced and the door swung open on its hinges. The place was in darkness. The half-caste struck a match and lit a lantern, but no sooner had he done so than a furious imprecation burst from his lips.

On the floor, stretched out in a state of insensibility, was

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Pedro Valdez. There was a cup on the table containing some dregs of coffee, and a smoked cigarette was on the floor. But Mark Sefton was nowhere to be found in the house.

"Valdez has been drugged!" cried one of the men. "Look here! There is a grey sediment in the coffee dregs. Demonio! If that fellow Sefton has betrayed us—"

"Betrayed us! To whom?"

Leon Scala had snatched up the lantern, and descended the stairs to the cellar. Stephen Morison was there, but he, too, was insensible. The cases were piled up neatly against the wall. Scala lifted one of them. It was empty. A very brief examination showed him that they were all empty. The cases had been rifled, and the whole of the money was gone. For a little while he stood there quite stupefied. He could not believe it. Then he rushed to the upper room again and told the others. Valdez was just recovering consciousness.

"Where is Mark Sefton?" demanded Scala.

"Mark Sefton! Isn't he here?" replied Valdez, in a dazed manner. "We were having coffee and cigarettes this morning—"

"This morning! Caramba! At what hour?" cried the half-caste.

"At eleven o'clock."

"Have you been lying here unconscious since then?" shouted Scala.

"I remember nothing since," replied Valdez. "What is the time now?"

"Eight o'clock at night. The Englishman, Stephen Morison, is in the cellar unconscious. Mark Sefton has disappeared, and the cases which contained the gold are all empty."

Pedro Valdez staggered to his feet.

"What do you say?" he yelled.

"The gold has disappeared! It has been stolen!"

The half-caste's rage as he made this announcement baffles description. He vowed vengeance against the traitor in such terrible language that even his associates shrank from him in fear.

"He must have planned this from the first," cried Pedro Valdez. "He tricked me, for I never had the slightest suspicion."

"Tricked you, you fool!" hissed Leon Scala. "He has tricked us all! But he can't have got clear of the city yet. He must not escape us. You hear what I say, all of you? He must be caught. And when we lay hands on him we'll treat him to something in the way of torture that will be a lesson to others not to try the same game. Swear that you will not rest until you have hunted him down! Let every one of us here swear it!"

They took the oath there and then, and it was one that none of them would be likely to break. Then they went out to search the city. But although they scattered in every direction, and kept up the search until daybreak, it was fruitless. Mark Sefton had vanished, and left not a trace behind him.

Twenty-four hours had passed, and during that time not a soul had been near the house on the outskirts of Vera Cruz occupied by Stephen Morison. The gang of desperadoes headed by Leon Scala did not consider it worth while to return to the place now that the gold had gone. And they cared nothing whatever about the ex-manager. His fate now was a matter of indifference to them, for he could not in any case be a menace to their safety. Being a criminal

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himself, and not a greatly experienced one, he was at the mercy of such masters of the science of crime as Leon Scala and the gang, or so-called society, of which he was the moving spirit.

It was shortly after eight o'clock on the following evening that a good-looking, sunburnt, keen-eyed young fellow, wearing a Panama hat, and dressed in the costume of a ranchero, or small farmer of the country, knocked smartly at the door, and not receiving an answer to his summons, turned the handle and entered the passage.

There was a lighted candle standing on a deal table in one of the rooms, but that was the only visible sign there that the place was occupied. But from somewhere down below came the sound of shuffling feet, and then a burst of shrill laughter. The young ranchero was evidently startled at the unexpected sound, but he hastened down into the cellar from which it had proceeded.

A lantern was hanging from a hook in the wall, and its light fell on a man who was standing in the centre of the floor, gazing at a pile of boxes that were ranged up against the wall.

He turned as the young ranchero entered, and bowed politely to him.

"Whom have I the honour of receiving?" he asked.

The ranchero glanced at him curiously, and saw that the man was hollow-cheeked and wild-eyed. A stubbly beard of a week's growth was upon his chin.

"My name," said the young ranchero, "is Stanley Dare."

Stephen Morison rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I seem to know the name," he replied. "I heard once—Ah, I know now! They call you the Boy Detective."

Stanley Dare nodded.

"I'm afraid I have no commission to give you," pursued Morison; "but you will stay and take dinner with me, of course. The firm have given me long leave of absence, and the money—Ah, about that money! I don't seem quite clear, but no doubt that is what you have called about."

"You are Stephen Morison, late manager of Messrs. Crawford, Linscott & Co., African merchants," said the young detective quietly.

Morison smiled in a vacant manner.

"Late manager?" he said. "Do you imagine, then, that the firm could do without me?"

Then suddenly his whole manner changed, and a look of intense cunning came into his bloodshot eyes. He gripped Dare by the wrist.

"They tried to make out that I had the gold, and that my name was John Vincent," he whispered. "Why should they call me John Vincent? And the gold—two hundred thousand pounds! Well, look in those cases yonder, piled up against the wall, and see how much gold you will find in them."

He gave a hoarse, cackling laugh, and snapped his fingers. Stephen Morison was mad!

The young detective had realised this from the first. But he was not going to take a madman's word. Crossing the cellar, he tested every box to see if it was really empty, for from information which he had received he knew that the money had been packed away in some such cases.

"The money has really gone," he muttered. "The robber has been robbed. I thought that when I found Stephen Morison my task would be finished, but it has practically only just commenced."

He was right. The task before him was likely to prove as difficult, complicated, and dangerous as any which he had ever undertaken.

On the Trail—The Broken Link.

Stanley Dare, the young detective, had been engaged by the firm of Crawford, Linscott & Co., South African merchants, to try and trace their absconding manager, Stephen Morison, and also to endeavour to recover the stolen money, or, at all events, as much of it as possible. The recovery of the money was to the firm of the first importance, as so large a sum as two hundred thousand pounds would be a serious blow to them if it was lost for good.

The Scotland Yard authorities were also on the track, but their efforts were concentrated on the capture of the criminal, that always being the first consideration of the official police. For this reason Stanley Dare worked entirely independently of them.

With infinite patience and skill the young detective had conducted his inquiries in England, had learnt of the large quantity of gold that had been drawn from various banks in the company's name, and also of the passenger on board the sailing-ship Cuban, bound for Vera Cruz.

The ship was a small and not particularly well-found one, and the fact of anyone electing to go a voyage on board of her as a passenger was, to say the least, curious, and to Dare's mind suspicious.

The altered name he naturally expected, but the description of "John Vincent" did not exactly tally with that of

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Stephen Morison. The ex-manager had a dark beard and moustache, whereas "John Vincent" was clean-shaven. But, for the matter of that, a razor would remove a beard and moustache in a very few minutes, and there is no more effective way of altering the appearance of a man's face.

But carefully as Morison had laid his plans, these were one point on which he had made a slip, and which was not overlooked by the keen intellect of the young detective.

The ex-manager had not taken the precaution to provide himself with fresh clothes, but had boarded the Cuban in a suit which he had worn many times before. This gave Stanley Dare the required clue. He had traced Morison to Vera Cruz, and then to the house on the outskirts of the city, with the result which we have seen.

"I must cable information of Morison's whereabouts to the Scotland Yard officer who is now hunting for him in New York," Dare told himself; "but his arrest will do little good now. He is mad, and unless he recovers his reason it will be useless to take any action against him. My work now is to get on the track of the men who have the money."

Quitting the cellar, he commenced a systematic search of the premises, in the hope of obtaining some clue which would put him on the trail. There were ample proofs of other men having been in the house, but who they were, what they had been doing there, and where they had gone, were matters of which they had left no trace behind them.

He was in an upper room of the house, when he heard two men enter by the outer door. They were talking excitedly. One of them was Pedro Valdez.

"The police have become unusually vigilant during the past few days," he was saying. "We were being followed, but we have managed to give them the slip. We had better remain here for a little time until they get out of the way. Demonio! These days are not like the good times of a few years ago, when for a few dollars the police would take care to be deaf and blind to all that was going on. They are becoming virtuous."

"I think not," replied his companion. "There is a large reward offered for the capture of the Englishman Morison, and their new-found virtue lies in the hope of getting this reward. By all the saints, I have a mind to turn virtuous myself and secure the reward, for the Englishman is still in the cellar! I can hear him. He is mourning over the empty cases, I suppose."

The two miscreants laughed at the idea, and the young detective, who had overheard the conversation, crept to the door of the room to hear more. These men evidently knew something of the vanished money, he reflected, and they might yet unwittingly give him some valuable information.

"To hand over the Englishman to the police for the sake of the reward would be too risky a game," pursued Valdez. "It is wise to have as little to do with the police as possible. We shall have all our work cut out in hunting down Mark Sefton."

"Hang him, yes!" exclaimed the other. "It is curious that in this matter we should be baffled by an Englishman. It was clever the way he drugged you and got away with the whole of the money. Two hundred thousand pounds! Caramba! There is not another man in our band who could have done it!"

"He will not escape us!" hissed Valdez. "Leon Scala has sworn to have revenge, and he is a man who keeps his word. And I have heard that he has news. We are to meet to-night."

"Where?"

"In the hut of Pablos, the contrabandista."

Having ascertained that the coast was clear, they quitted the house. Stanley Dare watched them from the upper window. As their backs were towards him and it was dark, it was not likely that he would be able to recognise them again except by their voices. But that was not a matter of great consequence. He meant to act on the information which they had, without knowing it, given him. An Englishman named Mark Sefton, evidently a former member of the gang, had made off with the money, and they meant to hunt him down and recover it.

"I shall have to join in the hunt," said Dare to himself; "for if this gang of robbers, or worse, once lay hands on the money, Messrs. Crawford & Linscott can say good-bye to it. Leon Scala, I should say, is a prince of desperadoes, and he has some news for the rest of the gang which will be told them in the hut of Pablos, the contrabandista. I shall have to be present at the meeting in that hut somehow, though how I am going to manage it I have yet to find out."

He descended the stairs and quitted the house, but he had not gone a hundred yards when he decided that he ought to see what Stephen Morison was doing, and whether he had any food in the house. He was in that peculiar stage of madness when in all probability he might remain down in

the cellar with the empty cases, which once contained the gold for which he had sacrificed friends, position, and freedom, until he was too weak to move, with the result that he would die of starvation. His crime had already brought its own punishment—a more terrible one even than the law would have inflicted.

Returning to the house, Dare searched all over the place for the ex-manager. He was not to be seen. As soon as the two men were gone he must have come up from the cellar, passed into the yard, and quietly quitted the house.

"Well, he must go," said Dare. "The matter of his capture rests in the hands of the police. Now for the contrabandista's hut, which I must contrive to find without making any inquiries as to its whereabouts."

The young detective had a tolerably accurate idea where the hut would be situated, as he knew that the favourite haunts of smuggling craft were among the rocky islets, dangerous shoals, and sandbanks that bordered the coastline to the south of the harbour.

Consequently he quitted the city by the south gate, and made his way along the sandhills that stretch for miles and miles along the shore, until he was level with a group of islets that lay about a mile out to sea.

A light was faintly visible on one of them, and, on getting his binocular glasses to bear on it, he saw that the light proceeded from a log hut. And he saw more than that, for a boat containing two men was being pulled in the direction of the islet. It was steered into a tiny cove. The two men jumped on shore, and presently disappeared into the hut.

"I am on the right track," thought Stanley Dare. "That is evidently the hut of Pablos, the contrabandista. The question is, how am I to get to it? I could swim the distance, but I have no fancy for providing in my own person supper for a hungry shark. I must hunt about for a boat of some kind."

There were some fishermen's boats hauled up on the beach—clumsy affairs that he could not have launched without assistance, and, even if afloat, so big that one of them approaching the islet must have attracted attention.

However, after a lengthy search, he was fortunate enough to find a small flat-bottomed boat, something like a punt, with a single oar in it, which was used over the stern. As the owner was not visible—indeed, the whole stretch of beach seemed to be deserted—he could not go through the formality of hiring it, so he borrowed it, without permission.

Twenty minutes later he reached the islet, having made a wide sweep round some of the rocks in order to avoid observation, and, stepping on shore, secured the boat.

Voices came from within the hut, and the light streamed out of the doorway.

Making his way noiselessly round to the back, Dare peeped in through a chink between the logs. Five villainous-looking men were seated round a rough table formed of planks, resting on a couple of empty barrels. Some of them were smoking the everlasting cigarette. There was a bottle containing aguardiente on the table, and they were drinking the spirit from tin mugs. Leon Scala and Pedro Valdez were among the five, although the young detective did not learn their names until afterwards. Scala was speaking.

"Mark Sefton is a fool," he said. "To think that he can escape us. He has been long enough a member of the band to know that our system does not fail—to know that our spies work silently and surely. Does he suppose, then, that we are going to fail in his case?"

"He hopes to baffle us because he knows exactly how we work," said Pedro Valdez, "which outsiders do not know."

"There is something in that," admitted the black-bearded ruffian, who was holding the bottle up to the light to see how much of the smuggled spirit was left in it.

"It is a hope which will never be realised," pursued Leon Scala. "We know what the police of England did not know—that Morison sailed in the Cuban under an assumed name, and that the stolen money was stowed away somewhere in the ship. We knew every move-

ment of the fool Morison from the moment he set foot on shore at Vera Cruz. We have done with him, and have turned our attention now to the traitor who has played us false. Already I have learnt a great deal. To begin with, the gold is now on its way back to England on board the mail steamer Shannon."

"What!" Pedro Valdez leaped to his feet, and the others stared blankly at their leader. "By all the fiends, then we have lost it! Is Mark Sefton on the steamer with it?"

"No, he is not," replied Scala; "and the gold is by no means lost. It is only in safe keeping until the right man comes to claim it. Listen! The gold, packed now in ordinary specie-boxes, has been despatched by Sefton to a friend in England. The name of that friend I do not know, but we shall discover that later. With the specie he has despatched half of the broken link of a steel chain. The link when whole would be about two inches in length, and it has been torn asunder in a peculiar manner. Sefton's instructions to his friend are that the money is not to be handed over to anyone under any pretence whatever unless he or she produces the other half of the link."

"He fears that if we hear what has become of the money one of us will disguise himself to represent him, and claim it," said Valdez.

"Precisely!" replied Scala. "His idea is that the break in a chain link cannot be imitated exactly. The two halves must fit. The idea is a clever one. It is for us, now, to follow Sefton, kill him—for there must be no half-measures—and obtain the other part of the broken link. One of us presents it, and the money is handed over."

"Demonio!" cried the bearded ruffian, who was Pablos, the smuggler. "That half link of chain is the most valuable bit of steel in the world. In exchange for it one obtains a million dollars, or, in the money of England, two hundred thousand pounds. But why did not Mark Sefton go in the same ship?"

"Because he fears us!" hissed Leon Scala. "He fears the vengeance that we shall take on him for his breach of faith, and he can only hope to escape by dodging about from one part of the world to the other. When he thinks we have given up the chase, he will claim the money."

Stanley Dare had been listening so intently to this conversation, that he had failed to observe the stealthy approach of a man who had come over from one of the other islets in a light boat, and crept up stealthily to see who it was that was standing against the back of the hut.

Suddenly the young detective felt a grip upon his shoulder, and, swinging round, found himself face to face with a man who held a levelled revolver in his hand.

"Perhaps the señor will explain what he is doing here?" said the man. "There are friends of mine in the hut who will be glad to hear the explanation."

"I shall be happy to give it to them," replied Stanley Dare, "if my knowledge of the Spanish language is equal to the strain."

The young detective had recognised at once that he was in a particularly tight corner, but he did not for a moment lose his self-possession. He was armed, but for the moment his weapon was practically useless, because his opponent had him covered, and would probably fire if he attempted to reach for it.

Meanwhile, the men in the hut, hearing voices, had come out to see what was the matter.

"Who have you there, Miguel?" demanded Leon Scala.

"A visitor, who takes an interest in your conversation," replied Miguel ironically.

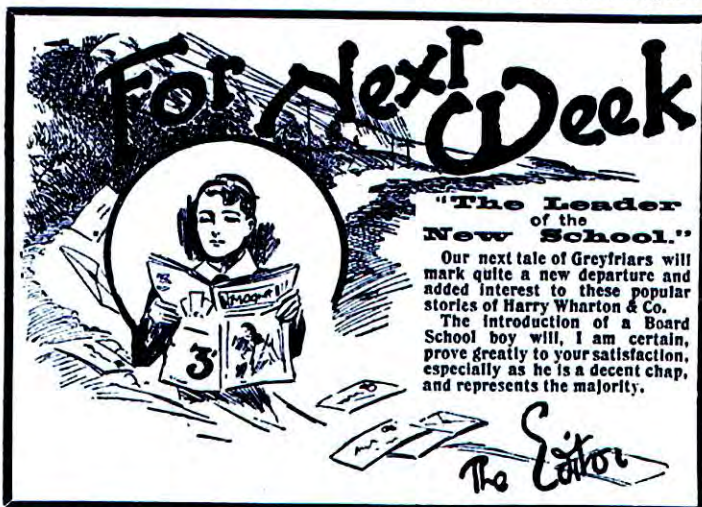
"A visitor! Caramba! Let me see him!"

Stanley Dare was thrust unceremoniously into the hut, and the assembled miscreants eyed him with menacing looks.

"A young ranchero, by his dress," continued Miguel. "But, strangely enough, he speaks our language with the accent of a Britisher."

"A mere youth," said Leon Scala, eyeing Stanley Dare contemptuously. "What brought you spying here, boy? Are you tired of your life already?"

(A long instalment of this splendid detective story next week.)



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