

"COKER'S NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS!"

EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY INSIDE.

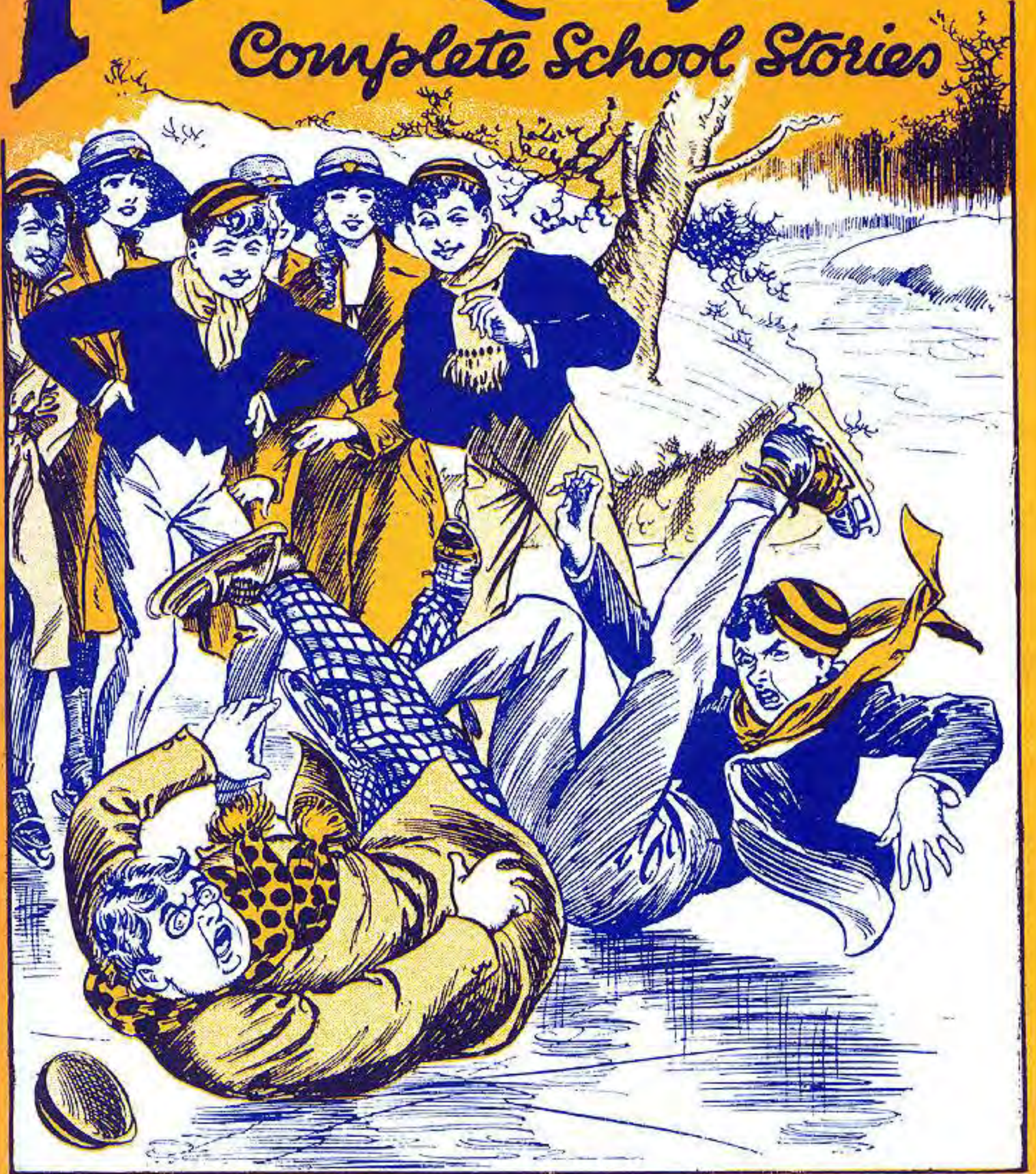
No. 935. Vol. XXIX.

Week Ending January 9th, 1928.

The Magnet 2^d

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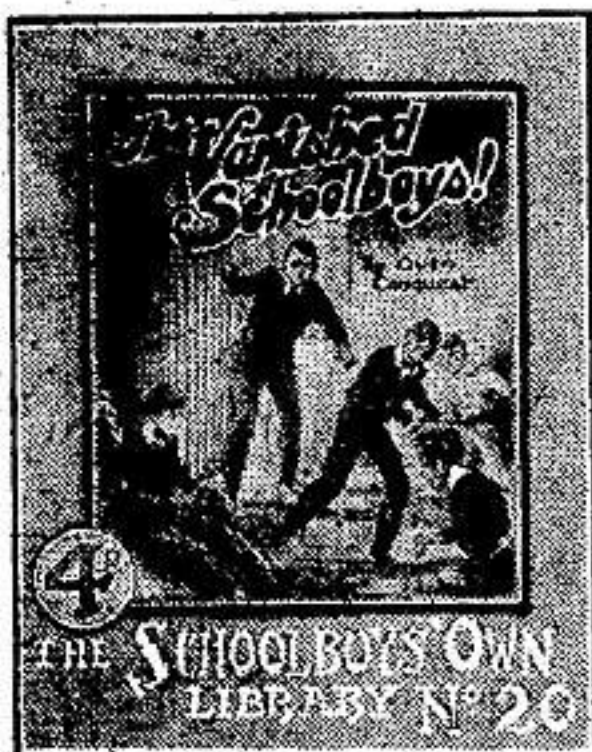
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To and from Your Editor:

A NEW SUPPLEMENT!

LAST week I mentioned that I had something "up my sleeve" in the way of Supplements for the New Year we have just embarked upon. I am now in a position to give you more details. It has been suggested often enough by readers that, having proved a successful editor of the Greyfriars Herald, Harry Wharton should begin to turn his energies to something better in the way of journalism. Suggestions for a new Supplement have poured into this office, and a careful sifting of the letters reveals the fact that Magnetites are extra-keen on sport. Well, then, boys, Harry Wharton is going to launch into the world of Sport. His first essay in this new line will be devoted to football. I have seen the first number of Harry Wharton's Football Supplement, and really it passes all expectations. Don't run away with the idea that it deals with football at Greyfriars. Not a bit of it. Mr. Frank Richards is quite capable of keeping us up-to-date with that. Wharton has taken a real plunge into Professional Football, Amateur Football; in fact, every kind of football, and everything appertaining thereto. His contributors include a sprinkling of his old staff and a number of celebrities in the footer world who know the game inside out. I'm saying nothing more at this juncture except to remind you that this New Supplement—a four-page one—will "kick off" in three weeks' time. Look out, then, for

HARRY WHARTON'S FOOTBALL SUPPLEMENT!

"MANY THANKS!"

Thousands of readers of the MAGNET have sent me Christmas and New Year greetings, and I prize their letters, cards, and other tokens more, perhaps, than they imagine. Very many thanks! Wherever possible—that is, where my chums gave their names and addresses—I have replied personally. But hundreds of readers have remained anonymous. To these I would voice my thanks and appreciation here. You're a jolly sporting crowd, and I'd like to shake every man jack of you by the hand. That includes you girls, too, for it is astonishing how many members of the fair sex read the MAGNET regularly.

DRAWING!

A correspondent who signs himself "A Regular Reader" has sent me a sample of his work as a draughtsman, and wants my opinion of it. The picture he sent me was a copy of a sketch that appeared in the MAGNET, and I must say that "Regular Reader" has got the right idea of expressing himself in black and white. I would advise him to take a course of instruction at an Art School—not a very expensive affair—where his obvious talent for drawing will be brought out. If he does this I shall be interested to hear, from time to time how he is progressing.

Next Monday's Programme.

"QUELCHY'S QUEER ADVENTURE!"

By Frank Richards.

That's the story on the programme for next week, and it's a winner all the way. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, is not an adventurous sort as a rule, but even such august personages as Form-masters sometimes find themselves up against it. Don't miss this yarn, boys!

"POSTMAN" SUPPLEMENT!

Harry Wharton & Co. have devoted their next number to the postman—the gentleman who delivers "fivers"—sometimes—to the stony-broke fellows at Greyfriars.

"THE MYSTERY OF LONE MANOR!"

Look out, too, for the next instalment of this detective serial. Ferrers Locke is nearing the end of his quest. Mind you are in at the death, boys.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY!

Bulstrode of the Remove will appear in our gallery next week, making No. 20 in this novel series. Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

'TO MAINTAIN AN EVEN TEMPERAMENT AND PASSIVE DEMEANOR IN FACE OF ALL TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS——' Extract from the list of—



A rollicking extra-long story of the Chums of Greyfriars, featuring the one and only Coker.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Different Coker!

"COKER!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Going skating, old chap?"

Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars paid no heed. He turned his nose very high in the air and strode on, regardless of the greetings.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove were strolling along the towing-path by the River Sark, carrying their skates. A spell of rare wintry weather had heralded in the New Year, and the river was frozen hard. Snowflakes were falling thick and fast, and as there had been a heavy fall overnight, the whole countryside was clad in a glittering mantle of white. The snow lay several inches deep in some places.

The boys of Greyfriars had hailed the snow and the frost with immeasurable delight. Snowfights were the order of the hour at Greyfriars, and there was skating on the river.

The Famous Five and Squiff had arranged a little skating party for that afternoon, instead of footer. The Cliff House girls were coming, and Hazeldene had gone to meet them.

The chums of the Remove were looking forward to a very pleasant afternoon on the river. They had arrived opposite the island, the spot where it had been arranged they should meet Marjorie Hazeldene & Co., and were slowing up when the heavy tramp of footsteps behind caused them to look round.

They saw the tall, burly figure of Horace Coker hurrying along. He had a pair of skates tucked under his arm, and he evidently was also on skating bent.

Coker did not even condescend to look at Harry Wharton & Co. as he passed by. The great and mighty Horace had a "short way" with the juniors—and especially with Removites. Those youths were far too cheeky and troublesome for his liking, and it was Horace

Coker's custom to treat them with lofty aloofness.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned.

"We're far beneath old Coker's notice, so it seems," said Bob Cherry. "Let's give the silly duffer a snowball—perhaps that will make him notice us."

So saying, Bob bent down and made a fine large snowball in his hands. Then, taking careful aim, he sent it flying at Coker.

Whiz!

"Yarooooogh!" roared Coker.

The snowball struck him beautifully in the nape of the neck, and, bursting, commenced to run down his back. Coker gave a wild jump and clawed at the back of his neck.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton & Co.

"Yerrugh! Yah! Wow! You little rotters!" spluttered the mighty man of the Fifth, wheeling round and glaring homicidally at the Removites.

"You got it in the neck that time, Cokey, didn't you?" said Frank Nugent sweetly.

"You—you—you——"

Harry Wharton & Co. halted and stood together shoulder to shoulder.

They saw the war light gleaming in Coker's eyes, and they expected him to rush at them to seek retribution. Horace Coker was the most belligerent fellow at Greyfriars, and he held a very exalted opinion of his own importance. It was almost sacrilege to throw anything at Coker—in Coker's estimation.

Horace Coker paused, clenching his huge fists, and he seemed to gulp something down in his throat.

"You—you—you——" he said.

"Come on, Cokey!" murmured Bob Cherry in a soft voice. "We shall have the greatest pleasure in rolling you in the snow."

Instead of coming on, however, Coker somehow managed to force a smile, and he wagged a forefinger reprovingly at the Removites.

"Now, you Remove kids, just you mind what you're up to!" he said. "I—ahem!—don't approve of such conduct!"

Harry Wharton & Co. started. They blinked at Coker almost unbelievably.

"Wh-what did you say, Coker?" stammered Wharton.

"I don't approve of such conduct!" said the mighty man of the Fifth in very severe tones. "Please bear that in mind, you youngsters, and don't let it occur again!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Wharton.

"Mum-m-my only hat!" said Bob Cherry, in a faint voice.

Frank Nugent, Hurree Singh, Johnny Bull, and Squiff were too surprised to speak, even. This sort of thing was so unlike Coker; they could not understand it a bit.

Coker wagged his forefinger again and then, wriggling because of the snow that was melting down his back, he turned and walked on.

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked bewilderedly at each other.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Did I hear aright? Do mine aged ears deceive me? Was that really Coker?"

"It was!" said Johnny Bull dazedly.

"There's only one Coker on this earth. I'm blessed if I can understand it!"

"But—but I buzzed a snowball at him!" said Bob Cherry, almost wildly.

"Yes, rather!"

"And it biffed him in the back of the neck, and went down his back, and made him jump!" gasped Bob. "And—and it was Coker! Coker didn't try to slaughter us! He—he took it lying down!"

"It's a complete knock-out!" said Squiff.

"The knock-outfulness is terrific!" murmured Inky, in his weird English.

The chums of the Remove gazed after the retreating form of Horace Coker in great astonishment. Bob shook his head still unconvinced, and proceeded to make another snowball.

His chums followed suit, and next minute six hefty-sized snowballs went whizzing through the air at Coker.

Crash! Splish! Thud!

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Those snowballs burst all over the Fifth-Former, and he leaped wildly on the towing-path. His yells rang out stridently on the frosty air, and, staggering about in the snow, he lost his balance suddenly and fell over with a fiendish yell.

"Woooooop! Yah! Wow-wow!"

Coker scattered the snow in all directions as he floundered there on all fours. He blinked round at Harry Wharton & Co., spluttering with wrath, and shook a huge fist at them.

"You cheeky young rotters! I—I'll skin you young sweeps for that! I—I'll spifficate you! Yow! Wow! Ger-rooogh!"

"That's Coker, right enough!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Now let's look out for squalls!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

Coker struggled up, his rugged face wearing a furious look. He started to charge at the Removites, his soul thirsting for vengeance, swift and sudden. But he had not gone far before he brought up short and stood there, breathing hard through his nose, and glaring at the grinning Removites.

"I—I—I—" he stuttered.

"My hat!" said Frank Nugent. "Coker's stopped again. I do believe he's funky of us!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Not Coker! He'd fight a den of lions if he got waxy enough," he said. "What on earth is the matter with the silly fathead? Look at the horrible faces he's pulling!"

Horace Coker was working his face into some really horrible contortions. As a matter of fact, he was striving hard to disguise his wrath and put on a smile; but Harry Wharton & Co. were not to know that. They regarded him in some alarm.

"Good lor'!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Just look at Coker's chivvy! I—I believe he's going to have a fit!"

"He's mad!" said Squiff.

Hurree Singh shook his head sadly.

"The madfulness of Coker is terrific, my worthy chums," he said. "He's got ludicrous bats in his esteemed belfry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker bestowed a ghastly grin on the chums of the Remove.

"You—you kids are exceeding a joke, you know, and I must ask you to chuck playing the goat," he said with an effort. "You like your little jokes, I know, but there's a limit to everything. If you throw any more snowballs I shall get wild."

"You—you'll get wild!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, I shall get wild!" said Coker severely. "Now run away and play, there's good kids."

"Mum-my word!"

Coker shook the snow from his person and walked away rather hurriedly. He picked up his skates, casting a nervous look at Harry Wharton & Co., and then continued on his way with unusual speed.

The Removites were too flabbergasted to do anything but gape for quite three minutes.

"Well, carry me home to die, somebody!" ejaculated Bob Cherry at last. "What the dickens has come over Coker?"

"Goodness knows!" said Frank Nugent wonderingly. "He doesn't seem the same Coker. Why, under ordinary circumstances, we should have been rolling Coker in the snow by now, and stuffing his cap down his back, and rubbing snow into his hair. Something's wrong with Coker."

"Rather!"

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Harry Wharton knitted his brows in perplexity.

"It's jolly strange, and no mistake," he said. "It isn't like old Coker to be so docile. We must go farther into this."

The juniors were just about to follow Coker up, in order to "go farther" into the mysterious matter, when they heard a cheery shout near at hand, and, looking round, they saw Hazeldene coming towards them with his sister Marjorie, Clara Trevlyn, and Phyllis Howell.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here are the girls. We'll leave Coker till later."

"Rather!"

The three girls looked very pretty and charming, and they greeted the Greyfriars juniors with sweet smiles.

"Here we are," said Hazel. "Sorry to have kept you waiting, but I've been kicking my heels while Marjorie was titivating—"

"Oh, Hazel!" said his sister severely. "I was only doing my hair."

"Well, you were a jolly long time doing something," said Hazeldene indifferently. "I'm glad we fellows don't have a long mop to do up every time we want to go out."

"Rats!" said Miss Clara warmly. "I think you are a cheeky idiot, Hazel, so there! Well, you fellows, we've got our skates, so what about some skating?"

To which the Removites rejoined with much heartiness:

"What-no!"

"Let me fasten your skates for you, Miss Clara," said Bob Cherry gallantly.

"Thank you!"

The skates were soon on, and the girls glided on the smooth ice. Harry Wharton & Co. were quick to follow. The ice was perfect, and the air just right. And soon the sound of merry voices floated over the frozen river and echoed among the leafless trees.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Coker Cuts a Few Capers!

"HUH!"

Coker of the Fifth gave that expressive grunt as he halted higher up the river bank.

Pieces of melting snow were still trickling down his back and causing him extreme discomfort. He wriggled many times; and gave vent to several gasps and grunts as he sat down on the snowy bank and proceeded to fix on his skates.

Coker rather prided himself upon his skating powers. According to his idea, there was only one really "classy" skater at Greyfriars, and that one was Horace Coker.

He had heard that the Cliff House girls were going out skating on the river that afternoon, and so he had come along to show his prowess. Not that Coker meant to "show off." Such an idea never entered his head for one moment, of course. Coker, in his own estimation, rather erred on the side of modesty; although his schoolfellows were apt to think—and say—differently. He wouldn't dream of attempting to show off. It was only the juniors who did that. Harry Wharton & Co. were accompanying the Cliff House girls on the ice, and Coker felt that it was a great pity for these very charming young ladies to be escorted by "so-so" skaters, when he—Horace Coker—could give such a different display.

Coker had mentioned this matter to his chums, Potter and Greene, and had suggested that the three of them should

go out skating that afternoon and proceed to "cut out" the Removites by a brilliant display of skating.

Potter and Greene were usually ready to follow Coker's lead in anything. They seldom ventured to dispute his suggestions, and hardly ever dared to argue with him. Coker had a four-point-seven punch that was not to be argued with. But there was a limit to all things, and Potter and Greene were of the opinion that Coker's skating really was the limit. They had seen some of Coker's skating, and wild horses would not drag them out on the ice with Coker—especially with the Cliff House girls and Harry Wharton & Co. looking on.

The worms had turned—Potter and Greene had rebelled against their overbearing study-mate. They had told Coker in terse, incisive tones to "go and eat coke!" and had gone off with Fitzgerald and Smith major, leaving Coker to do his skating alone.

So Coker had come down to the Sark on his own, prepared to shine forth before the Cliff House girls as a skater of rare style and accomplishment, and to put "those cheeky Remove kids" absolutely and utterly in the shade.

"Huh!" said the burly Fifth-Former again. "Cheeky young rotters! I had half a mind to go back and mop up the ground with 'em. Groooogh! I shall catch cold if I don't get a move on. Well, here goes!"

Horace Coker stood up, and set out rather gingerly.

Despite the fact that he was a great skater, his feet had a decided tendency to travel in opposite directions. This tendency, in fact, grew more marked as the Fifth-Former got out farther on the ice. His right foot seemed bent upon travelling towards the island, whilst his left foot insisted upon going away in a north-westerly direction. The result was that Coker began to flounder. He saved himself with a wild plunge, and nearly came a cropper. Then he shot away across the ice like an arrow from a bow.

"Yoo-oogh!" gasped Coker. "It's jolly slippery."

He tried to slow down, but all his efforts were unavailing. As he had said, the ice was slippery, decidedly so, and the wind simply whistled past his ears as he flew down the river in the direction of the island.

"Yooooogh!" roared Coker. "Oh, crumbs! I—I can't stop! Yah! Wow! This is awful! Hellup!"

As the Fifth-Former sped towards the island at that reckless pace a fat form came floundering across the ice on a pair of skates.

That fat form was Billy Bunter of the Remove!

Bunter, also, was in trouble.

William George Bunter had ventured out on the river that afternoon, cherishing the hope that he might "run into" the Cliff House party—quite by accident, of course—and hang on to them, so that he would be invited to have tea at Cliff House afterwards with the others.

Harry Wharton & Co. had flatly and finally refused to take Bunter with them, and so Bunter had resolved to foist himself upon the party when the girls were there, knowing that the juniors would not dare to rag him in front of Marjorie & Co., and that the girls themselves would be too polite to tell him to go.

Billy Bunter was not a skater. He was too short-sighted, for one thing, and, for another, he was not built for skating. The Owl of the Remove had set forth, however, and no sooner had

he taken to the ice than he had got into difficulties.

He came whizzing across the bank just as Coker came shooting down towards the island. Coker saw Bunter coming towards him, but for the life of him the Fifth-Former could not alter his course. He yelled out to the fat Removite, but Billy Bunter was too terrified and confused to do anything but wave his arms.

"Look out, you mad idiot!" howled Coker. "You're cutting right across my path, and—"

"Yarooooogh!"

"Wow! Ow-wooooo!"

There was a violent concussion as Billy Bunter and Coker collided.

Coker's feet flew from under him, and he smote the ice with a mighty smite. As for Billy Bunter, he went down with a crash, and he woke the echoes with his terrified yells.

"Yah! Wow! Help! Murder! Yarooooogh!"

"Yow!" gasped Coker, sitting up dazedly. "You—you mad idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a shout of laughter from the cheery party of skaters that came gliding up from round the bend. Coker blinked round, and he gave a gasp of horror when he saw that the newcomers were Harry Wharton & Co. and Marjorie Hazeldene, Miss Clara, and Phyllis Howell.

Coker's face went redder than ever as he saw the girls laughing at him. He had come out specially to see the Cliff House girls and to let them see him. Now he was seeing them, and they were seeing him! And Coker would have given a term's pocket-money for the ice to open and swallow him up.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Here we are again, Coker!"

"Groooooogh!"

"And Bunt, too!" exclaimed Bob, grinning down at the fallen Owl. "My word, have you been teaching Coker to skate, Bunter?"

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

Coker sat on the ice, his face crimson with humiliation, whilst Billy Bunter sprawled beside him, moaning in a truly heart-rending manner.

"What a shame!" said Miss Marjorie, doing her best not to laugh. "Poor Coker and Bunter have had an accident."

"They have!" grinned Frank Nugent. "How did it happen, Cokey?"

"Ow!" gasped Coker.

"Wow-wow!" wailed Billy Bunter, groping for his eyeglasses and jamming them on his snub nose. "It was all Coker's fault! The mad idiot came barging along just as I was cutting a figure eight—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, you beasts!" moaned the Owl, glowering. "I'm hurt! Yow! My back is broken, and I think I've dislocated a rib, or something!"

"Oh dear!" said Phyllis Howell, with a wink at Miss Clara. "How terrible! Poor Bunter must be removed to the hospital at once. Perhaps he will have to undergo an awful operation—"

"Groooooogh!" said Billy Bunter. "I—I don't think it's as bad as that, you know. Wow-ow!"

"But, still, you shouldn't stay here any longer, Bunter," said Harry Wharton solemnly. "You never know what these injuries lead to, you know. There may be serious complications, and I should advise you to go off to the doctor at once. I'm afraid you won't be able to skate over the bank in your

present injured condition. We'll give you a shove, and you'll slide over to the bank. There are heaps of rushes there to land in. Lend a hand, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

"Yarooogh! Stoppit! I don't want to be shoved over to the bank!" roared Billy Bunter, as the Removites bent down to lay hold of him. "I don't want to go to a doctor, and— Yooooogh!"

"Shove!" said Harry Wharton.

He and his chums shoved! They all gave Billy Bunter a hefty push, and the Owl of the Remove went flying across the ice on his back, taking a straight course for the opposite bank.

"Yarooooogh! Yah! Wow! Help! Ow-wooop!" he yelled.

Billy Bunter carried a good deal of weight, and so, having attained a high momentum as a result of that shove, he had plenty of "way" with him! His plump figure slid swiftly over the ice, and he shot at the bank like a shell from a mortar. He reached it, and dashed right into the scraggy, frozen rushes. The air next minute reverberated with a piercing yell:

"Oooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton & Co.

Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. laughed, too, for the sight of Bunter whizzing across the ice on his back had been ludicrously funny. They knew, of course, that he was not seriously hurt, and they no more desired the Owl's company than did the Removites.

Billy Bunter struggled up on the bank, spluttering and gasping.

He gave Harry Wharton & Co. a glare that almost cracked his spectacles, and he shook a fat fist wrathfully at them.

"You beasts! Oh dear! Groogh! Yah! Rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter was boiling with wrath, but he did not feel inclined to venture out on the ice again!

Horace Coker was making valiant attempts to rise. He managed to struggle up at last, but his feet parted in various directions, and he sat down again. The juniors roared, and the girls looked highly amused.

"Yow!" moaned Coker. "This ice is beastly slippery! Give me a hand, you kids!"

"Oh, any old thing!" grinned Bob Cherry. "All hands on deck!"

The Removites gathered round, and many strong hands assisted Coker to rise. He was yanked up bodily, and as soon as he gained his feet—or, rather, his skates—he commenced to lurch and plunge wildly.

"Wowp! Yah! Oh dear! You—you're shoving me over!" he gurgled. "Leggo, you young idiots!"

"All serene!" grinned Harry Wharton. "As Coker asks so politely, who can refuse? Let him go, chaps!"

The juniors let Coker go, and he was left to maintain his balance as best he could. His evolutions on the ice were



"It's all right, girls—yah!" gasped Coker. "I'll show you how I do figure-skating. Wow!" Coker performed weird and wonderful evolutions with his skates, and it was a marvel that he did not tie his legs in a knot! (See Chapter 2.)

marvellous, to say the least. He twisted and twirled his legs in a manner that was remarkable to behold.

Clatter, clatter! Crash! Clatter!

Coker's skates beat a rapid tattoo on the ice, and the Cliff House girls drew back rather nervously.

"Yooooogh!" gasped Coker. "It's all right, girls—yah! I'm a jolly good skater, you know—Wooooooh! Dash the skates! I'll show you how I do figure skating—Wow!"

"What figures do you call those, Cokey?" asked Bob Cherry sweetly. "They look to me like hieroglyphics!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clatter, clatter! Crash!

Coker was performing weird and wonderful evolution with his skates. It was a marvel that he did not tie his legs in a knot.

"I—I—groogh!—think this ice must be extra slippery this afternoon!" he gurgled, as he lurched about. "You needn't run away, Miss Marjorie—Yow-ow! I—I shall be all right in a m-m-minute! Ow! Bust the skates! There's something wrong with the dashed things, I think. Gerroogh! Don't go, girls; I'm going to take you skating—"

Crash!

The mighty Horace was down again, and he flopped on the ice with a most dazed expression on his face.

Miss Clara skated round, and smiled sweetly at the fallen Fifth-Former.

"Thank you so much for your exhibition of figure skating, Coker!" she said. "It was wonderful—really! But I'm afraid it's far too complicated for us, you know. We could never hope to skate like you! Well, we must be off now! Good-bye!"

"Groooo-hooooogh!" said Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The merry party sped off, laughing, leaving Coker blinking after them, trying to get his second wind.

"Oh dear! Yah!" gasped Horace. "The young rotters! Then they've captured the girls, after all! Grooogh! I wanted to take them skating, and show 'em what I could do. Wow! I c-c-can't get up!"

Coker slithered and clattered for some time, and at length managed to get upright. But no sooner had he done so than he commenced to execute a species of clog-dance on his skates. His feet twirled up, his legs shot away in different directions, and down he came again with a terrific bump.

"Oooooogh! Yah! Oh dear!"

"That was enough for Coker!"

Either the ice was extra slippery, or his skates were out of order. There seemed to him to be no other explanation. In any case, the fact remained that he simply could not keep upright on the ice. So Coker, snorting deeply and with a very red face, proceeded to crawl across to the bank on all fours, his skates clattering behind him as he went.

It was a slow and arduous process, and several times the great Horace rolled over on his back, or sprawled at full length on his chest. In this manner he collected a good deal of slush on his clothes, and his hands and knees were numbed by the time he reached the bank.

William George Bunter had made himself scarce on seeing Coker coming. Hiding behind a tree close by, he blinked at Coker as he came crawling over.

Coker reached the bank at last, and he moaned and gasped dismally as he scrambled up on to dry land.

He was in a parlous state!

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He sat on the frozen grass and took off his skates. Then he removed his coat, and proceeded to shake off the slush.

A folded sheet of paper dropped out of one of the pockets as Coker shook his coat, and Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed curiously.

The paper fell into the rushes at the side of the river, and Coker did not notice it. He put on his coat with a grunt, tucked the skates under his arm, and stamped away towards Greyfriars, snorting.

As soon as Coker was out of sight, Billy Bunter came out of hiding.

He looked round artfully, and then made a dive for the rushes where he had seen the paper fly from Coker's pocket.

He found it, and picked it up. Unfolding the paper with a hand that trembled with curiosity, the Owl of the Remove commenced to read.

As he read that missive, Bunter's little, round eyes opened wide behind his spectacles, and when he had finished it he gave a low, long, drawn-out gasp.

"My word!" Billy Bunter's plump features relaxed into a wide grin, and his eyes sparkled. "My—my word! Here's a fine lark! Won't this cause a bit of fun at the school! Oh dear! He, he, he! This is prime! What an idiot Coker must be! He, he, he!"

And, chuckling deeply as though in possession of some huge joke, William George Bunter thrust the paper into his pocket and rolled away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker's Resolutions!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came into Greyfriars later that afternoon looking ruddy and cheerful after their run on the ice, which had been followed by a grand tea at Cliff House.

As they entered the Hall, they heard sounds of much laughter. The air, in fact, simply pulsated with mirth. The Hall was full of laughing, chortling juniors, and there was a crowd gathered round the notice-board, howling hysterically.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, in surprise. "Have we run into a giddy lunatic asylum, by any chance? What's on?"

"A bit of a rag, by the look of things," said Harry Wharton. "There's something on the board that is making everybody laugh. Let's go over and have a look."

"Rather!" said Frank Nugent. "We must be in this!"

They pushed their way through the hilarious throng.

The Hall rang with laughter. Tom Brown and Ogilvy were sobbing on each other's necks, Peter Todd was rolling on a form and kicking up his heels in mirth, whilst Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Upper Fourth were staggering about in the middle of the room in high glee.

"My hat! What the merry thump does all this mean?" demanded Harry Wharton, seizing Dick Rake by the arm. "What are you all cackling like a barnyard of hens for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rake boisterously. "It's the joke of the season! Ho, ho, ho!"

"What is?" hooted Bob Cherry.

"It's—ha, ha!—over there on the board!" gurgled Rake, wiping the salt tears of merriment from his eyes. "Feast your eyes on it! It's worth a guinea a box! Ha, ha, ha!"

Greatly wondering, Harry Wharton & Co. pushed their way to the notice-board.

Harold Skinner, Bolsover major, Snoop, and Stott of the Remove were standing in front of the board, mounting guard.

"Come on, you chaps!" roared Bolsover. "Come and gaze at this! Gaze at it, and weep! There's no charge for looking!"

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five and Squiff gazed upward at the sheet of paper that had been pinned to the board.

There was writing upon it, and the large, untidy scrawl of Horace Coker of the Fifth was immediately recognised. Had there been any doubt as to the authorship of that writing, all was dispelled when the spelling was seen. There was only one fellow at Greyfriars who wrote and spelt like that, and that fellow was Coker. Coker's handwriting would have disgraced any lag in the Second, whilst he had an inimitable style of spelling that was the constant despair of Mr. Prout, his Form master.

Everyone knew Coker's orthography and spelling. And Harry Wharton & Co. stared wonderingly as they looked at that paper, and proceeded to read it.

This is what was inscribed upon the paper:

"MI NOO YERE REZZOLUSHONS!

I, the undersigned, hearby make the following rezzolushons for the Noo Yere, A.D. 1926.

Rezzolved:

1. To bekum Kaptane of the Fifth.
2. To bekum Kaptane of the Vth Form Football Team.
3. To appli myself dilligently to my studdies and akkwire more nollidge.
4. To be self-sacrificing, kind, generous & bennevolent to awl.
5. To maintane an even temperrament and passifik demeanor in face of awl trials & tribbulashons.
6. To set a pattern & exsample to the rest of Greyfriars in maters of appeerance & deportment.
7. Also to set a pattern & exsample to my skoolfellows in awl branches of Sport—espeshally football.
8. To maintane my Honner and Digg-nity as a Senior, and deel with the cheeky Remove kids with a ferm hand!

(Sined) HORACE COKER."

There was no doubt that Coker, in writing this, had intended it to be a strictly private document. He had certainly not meant it to be exhibited on the notice-board, for all the school to see. But there it was, and all who saw it howled with mirth.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked astounded at first, but then their faces changed, and they, too, burst into loud laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry. "This is rich! Coker's New Year resolutions! My giddy aunt! What next?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold me up, somebody!" gurgled Squiff mirthfully. "Coker takes first prize for being a champion ass! He romps off with the whole giddy biscuit factory! Oh, my summer bonnet!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Harry Wharton gasped.

"This certainly beats the band!" he exclaimed. "How the dickens did it get on the board, though? I'll bet my boots Coker didn't put it there!"

"No; I stuck it up!" grinned Harold Skinner. "I knew it would cause a sensation!"

"Great pip! How did you get hold of it, Skinner?"

"I took it from Bunter," said the cad of the Remove, with a chuckle. "He found it down by the river, where Coker

had been skating. It dropped out of Coker's coat while he was shaking it, so Bunter said, and he picked it up."

"And read it, of course!" said Harry Wharton. "That's just like Bunter. Any decent fellow would have returned it to Coker without prying into what was on it!"

"Oh, of course, you would!" sneered Skinner. "It's a great joke, anyway."

"It's funny, but—well, it's rotten for poor old Coker to have his secret resolutions stuck up before the whole giddy school to be laughed at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner, in taking that paper from Bunter and posting it on the board, had certainly provided his schoolfellows with the laugh of their lives.

Fellows, arriving in the Hall and hearing the sounds of glee, came over, and saw, and then joined in the general mirth.

The Removites, in particular, were convulsed.

Some of them, led by Bolsover major, commenced to chant Coker's "Rezzolutions" loudly.

Coker was a fellow who had all manner of queer whims and notions which never failed to amuse his schoolfellows, although he took them seriously himself. This latest idea of his—that of compiling a list of New Year resolutions—was certainly most amusing to the rest of Greyfriars.

Coker must have spent a good deal of time and thought in making up that long list of his good resolves. His mind-searching and mental effort must have been considerable. To him it was undoubtedly a thing sacred to his soul—a document to be cherished in secret as the record of his higher, nobler cogitations.

Yet to the other boys of Greyfriars that paper appeared as a delicious piece of humour. The writing and the spelling had something to do with it; but it was the thought of Coker—their own Coker—making such resolutions, that tickled them so immensely. They feasted their eyes on that paper, and made merry over it.

"Old Coker must be getting frightfully serious in his old age!" said Frank Nugent, chuckling. "He's going to be captain of the Fifth, and captain of the footer, and learn a lot more things, and do a lot more things, and put the kybosh on little us—all in one year! I wonder if he'll keep his giddy resolutions!"

"Ha, ha! I wonder!" laughed Harry Wharton. "My hat! This accounts for old Coker's strange behaviour on the towing-path this afternoon. You remember, when we buzzed snowballs at him, and he turned round, as meek as a lamb, and told us off quietly and gently? Cokey would have loved to slaughter us, but he was sticking to his New Year resolutions. He was maintaining an even temperament and pacific demeanour in face of all his trials and tribulations!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the boys in Hall. There was a commotion at the door all of a sudden, and fresh laughter arose from that direction.

"Here's Coker!"

"Good old Coker!"

"Oh, noble Coker!" roared Peter Todd. "Oh, great and noble Coker! Truly a triton among the minnows! His wonderful intellect soars high above our sordid selves! He doth bestride the narrow world like a giddy Colossus! Let us bow before Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker strode into the Hall, frowning.

A REPRODUCTION OF THE LIST OF COKER'S RESOLUTIONS!

(Note Spelling.)

MY NOO YERE REZZOLUTIONS!

I the undersigned, hearty make the following rezzolutions for the Noo Yere A.D. 1926.

- REZZOLVED:
1. To becum Kaptane of the FIFTH.
 2. To becum Kaptane of the Vth FORM FOOTBALL TEAM.
 3. To appli myself dilligently to my studies & akkwire more nollidge.
 4. To be kind, self-sacrificing, generous & demure & kind.
 5. To maintane an even temperament & pacifik demeanour in face of all trials & tribulations.
 6. To set a pattern & example to the rest of Greyfriars in matters of appearance & deportment.
 7. Also to set a pattern & example to my schoolfellows in all branches of Sport—especially football.
 8. To maintane my Honour & Dignity as a Senior & deal with the cheeky Remov Kids with a firm hand!

Sined Horace Coker.

"There's a lot of silly giggling going on here," he said curtly. "What's the joke?"

"You, Coker darlint!" chortled Micky Desmond.

"Eh? Me?" demanded Coker, in surprise.

"Rather!" cried Bulstrode. "You're the joke of the term, Coker! Your resolutions are chunks better than a comic paper! Ha, ha, ha!"

The great Horace gave a start.

"Mum-my hat!" he ejaculated. "What do you cheeky kids know about my resolutions? I—Oh, gug-g-good heavens!"

Coker had reached the board, and he gave a jump when he saw the paper that was pinned thereon.

He gazed blankly at it for several minutes, a look of the most complete and utter bewilderment on his face. The juniors looked on, chuckling, and they saw Coker's visage go very red, and his mouth open very wide.

"Gug-g-g-great Scott!" gasped Coker. "How did this get up here? What—how—who—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Hearty congrats on the making of your New Year Resolutions, Coker! They're jolly good!"

"Are you going to keep 'em all, Coker?" inquired Squiff sweetly.

"I—I—I—"

"You might as well have gone the whole hog, Coker, and resolved to become captain of the school!" said Johnny Bull, and there was a fresh round of laughter at Coker's expense.

The mighty man of the Fifth glared round with a furious look.

"You cackling little rotters! What is there to laugh at—hey?" he spluttered.

"This is my paper—"

"We know that, Cokey!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We'd know your fist and spelling anywhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somebody has been picking my pocket!" howled Coker wrathfully. "I had it in my pocket, and it's a private document! Shurrup that row, will you? This is no laughing matter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other fellows in Hall apparently were of a very different opinion, for they laughed loud and long at Horace.

Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, came walking in with Bland, Fitzgerald, and Smith major. The seniors went over to the board, greatly wondering at the reason for the general hilarity. They gazed at that paper and read it in astonishment. Then they, too, burst into roars of mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Smith major. "Coker's made up some New Year Resolutions! Look at 'em! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Look here—" began Coker wrathfully.

Blundell wiped his eyes.

"So Coker's resolved to become Form captain and also skipper of the Fifth Form footer team!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my hat! The fearful cheek!"

"The wall-eyed idiot!" said Fitzgerald.

Coker's rugged face grew crimson. He tore down the list of resolutions and rammed the paper in his pocket. Then he glared round with a fiery eye, his huge fists clenched.

"Stop your cackling, will you, you idiots?" he roared, in a voice like that of a Bull of Bashan. "I jolly well won't be made a laughing-stock of! I—I'll—"

smash the lot of you! I'll show you! I'll—I'll——"

"Now, now, naughty!" said Bob Cherry, wagging a forefinger chidingly at Coker. "Let not your angry passions rise, dear fellow! Remember your giddy resolutions! You have solemnly sworn——"

"I haven't sworn!" hooted Coker. "I don't swear——"

"Resolved, then," said Bob. "You have solemnly resolved——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have solemnly resolved, Cokey, to maintain an even temperament and a pacific demeanour in face of all trials and tribulations!"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Coker.

"Be a good boy, Horace. Set us all a good example, old chap! You can't go back on your good resolves, you know, otherwise it will be our duty to bump you!" said Bob severely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker gulped.

He blinked round at the laughing fellows in Hall, and it really seemed, from his looks, that he was about to burst. But he choked back his fury with a herculean effort. Under ordinary circumstances Coker would have charged at the merry-makers like a roaring lion, and proceeded to smite them hip and thigh. It was not his way to take things quietly.

But Coker had a will. He prided himself upon his superior will-power. Potter and Greene called it obstinacy, and they likened Coker's obstinacy—or will-power—unto that of a mule. Nevertheless, when Coker set out to do a thing, he did it. He took himself very seriously, and he was nothing if not a stickler. He had made those New Year Resolutions, and he meant to carry them out to the letter.

"I—I—ahem!—I really don't see that there's anything to laugh at!" he said chokingly. "You cheeky young Remove rotters—hum!—you kids had better go away or I'll scrag you—I—I mean, I'll get angry——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A short, rather plump figure in cap and gown came striding into the Hall. It was Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout, the master of the Fifth. He saw Coker & Co. surrounded by the laughing juniors, and he made his way over to them. He fixed his gimlet gaze on Coker.

"What is the meaning of this unseemly disturbance?" he exclaimed. "Are you getting into mischief again, Coker?"

"Nun-no, sir!" stuttered Horace.

"Then why is there so much unseemly frivolity?" said Mr. Prout pertly. "Blundell, will you kindly explain?"

"Oh, my hat—I mean—er—certainly, sir!" gasped Blundell. "As a matter of fact, sir, Coker has made some New Year resolutions——"

"Bless my soul!"

"And we—ahem!—and everyone seems to think it funny!" spluttered Blundell, containing his mirth with great difficulty.

Mr. Prout adjusted his eyeglasses and peered at Coker over the top of them.

"Dear me!" he said. "You have made some New Year resolutions, Coker?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"That is a very commendable act on your part, Coker," said Mr. Prout. "Very commendable indeed! I trust they are good resolutions, Coker?"

"Ye-es, they are, sir!" stammered poor Horace.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Prout. "I need hardly say that I am very pleased to hear it, Coker. You stand in great

need of making good resolutions, and I very sincerely trust that you will keep to them."

"Ye-es, sir!" gasped Coker.

Mr. Prout looked round severely.

"Boys, cease this levity!" he said.

"You will kindly disperse!"

The juniors dispersed, chortling, whilst Blundell & Co. staggered away, overcome with mirth.

As for Horace Coker, he stood there in front of the notice-board, glaring, his fists working convulsively for some minutes, and then he turned on his heel and strode away snorting. At that moment Coker was possessed of a far from even temperament, and he displayed a demeanour that could not, even by the longest stretch of imagination, be called pacific!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Trying it On!

"**A**HEM! I say, Coker!" Billy Bunter's big glasses glimmered in at Coker's study door.

The great Horace was at home. He was seated at the table, frowning over a book entitled, "Manners and Deportment for Men." He looked up as Bunter spoke, and his frown deepened.

"Sheer off, Bunter!" he rapped curtly.

"Oh, really, Coker!" said the Owl of the Remove, insinuating himself further into the study. "That's not a kind way to receive a chap, you know!"

"Huh!" said Coker, feeling rather taken aback. "What do you want, Bunter?"

William George Bunter coughed. He wondered for a moment, as he watched the expression on Coker's face, whether it would not be wiser for him to retreat while he was safe. Coker looked neither pleased nor honoured by this visit, and he usually had a violent way of getting rid of unwelcome visitors.

But Billy Bunter was risking it. He came into Coker's study like the celebrated Daniel of Biblical fame, with a propitiating smile on his plump face.

The Owl of the Remove had read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested all of Coker's New Year resolutions, and he had pondered deeply over them—especially over Resolution No. 4. Billy Bunter, in fact, was most interested in that resolve of Coker's. That Coker was in earnest, Billy Bunter had no doubt, and he thought he would see how Horace intended to carry out Resolution No. 4, which stated that he would be "kind, self-sacrificing, gennerus and bennevolent to awl."

Billy Bunter, in fact, had come along with the intention of "trying it on" Coker.

"Ahem!" he coughed. "The fact is, Coker, I've come to ask your advice. It's a fearful cheek, I know, but you're the only chap in Greyfriars whom I feel I can turn to, Coker."

Coker's expression relaxed a little. The soft answer had the proverbial effect of turning away wrath.

"What's the trouble?" he said, thinking of his New Year resolutions, and feeling that here was a chance of showing how he could stick to his big ideals.

"Well, the fact is, Coker, I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Huh!"

Coker had heard that tale before—in fact, Billy Bunter's story of the expected postal-order had become almost a tradition at Greyfriars. He had been expecting a postal-order for terms, but so

far it had failed to turn up. Bob Cherry, indeed, was fond of remarking that when Bunter's postal-order did arrive, it would come hobbling in on crutches, complete with beard and side-whiskers!

"Yes, I'm expecting a postal-order," said Billy Bunter, blinking at Coker through his eyeglasses. "It's from one of my titled relations, and it's bound to be for a pretty good amount. I shall really have to complain to the postal authorities about it. The fact is, Coker, I'm on the rocks until my postal-order arrives."

Coker grunted again, and the Owl, assuming a pathetic expression, went on:

"It's a jolly rotten state of affairs, isn't it, Coker?" he said. "I'm absolutely broke, and I've had hardly anything to eat all day, and Mrs. Mimble won't let me have anything from the tuckshop on tick. I'm famished—starving, in fact! I know what a kind, generous chap you are, Coker, and I thought I'd come along and ask you to help me. If you could—ahem!—advance me something until my postal-order arrives, I should consider it a great favour. I'll repay you, of course, when the postal-order comes."

"Hum!" said Coker, with a bit of a glare. "I know I'm generous and benevolent—I mean to be—but I'm not sure that I ought to give you anything, Bunter!"

"I'm starving!" said Billy Bunter, in hollow accents. "I—I don't think I shall last the day out unless I get something to eat. You might take pity on a chap, Coker, and show your generosity. I—I rely on you, you know."

Horace Coker paused.

It was up to him to be generous and benevolent if he meant to stand by his good resolutions. He hardly liked the idea of giving Bunter money on the strength of his legendary postal-order, for he knew that the Owl was the biggest cadger and prevaricator in the whole of Greyfriars. But a really kind-hearted and benevolent fellow must not be a respecter of persons, but must mete out his charity with an impartial hand. So thought Horace Coker, as he weighed matters over in his mind, and at length his hand went into his trousers pocket.

"How much do you want, Bunter?" he asked.

"How about a quid?" said Billy Bunter, his eyes glistening in anticipation. "Make it a quid, Coker, and——"

Coker shook his head.

"That's too thick! I'm not standing you a quid, Bunter!" he said.

"Ten bob, then!" said Bunter eagerly. "I'll make do with ten bob!"

"Not from me, you won't!"

The fat Remove glowered.

"You—you mean beast! I—ahem!—I mean to say, I might be able to manage with a little less, old chap. Say seven-and-six——"

"I'll give you five bob," said Coker finally. "I don't think you deserve any more, Bunter. Here's five bob—take it or leave it!"

Billy Bunter fastened on the five shillings with great avidity. He slipped the money into his pocket with a concealed smirk.

"Thank you, Coker!" he said effusively. "You're jolly kind. I'll repay you when my postal-order comes, of course. I'll never forget your benevolence, Coker—really I won't!"

Billy Bunter rolled away from Coker's study chuckling. He had not expected to be so successful in extracting money from Coker. He made a bee-line for

the tuckshop, and was soon busily engaged expending the five shillings in ginger-pop and jam-tarts.

Several fellows came into the tuckshop and stared in surprise at Billy Bunter, seated at the counter with a plate of tarts and a pile of doughnuts before him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, looking in with the rest of the Co. "Have you come into a sudden fortune, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter did not speak—his mouth was full.

"My hat! The fat blighter has paid for his prog in real money!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, seeing Mrs. Mimble pick up the five shillings. "This is jolly strange!"

"The strangeness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh. "Only a little while ago the unworthy fat boulder was edgefully trying to borrow two bob from our esteemed friend Mauly."

Johnny Bull went into the tuckshop and clapped a heavy hand on Bunter's shoulder. The Owl gave a yell and commenced to choke and splutter as a piece of tart went down the wrong way.

"Ooooooch! Yerrugh! Oh, really, you beast—"

"Wherefore all this sudden wealth, Bunt?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Surely your giddy postal-order hasn't arrived at last?"

"Yow! Nunno, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "I'm expecting it to-morrow, though. As a matter of fact, I have received an advance upon it—"

"An advance—on your postal-order?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in wonder. "What burbling idiot have you taken in this time, you fat fraud?"

Billy Bunter gave a chuckle. "Coker!" he said.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Coker advanced me five bob on the postal-order I'm expecting from my rich relations," said the Owl fatuously. "He's not so hard-hearted as you beasts, you know. Coker's jolly kind and benevolent!"

"Great pip!" exclaimed Trevor, who had come into the tuckshop just then with Treluce and Skinner & Co. "Coker kind and benevolent! Since when?"

"Since he made his New Year resolutions, of course!" chuckled Billy Bunter, with his mouth full of tart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter at the recollection of Coker's list of resolves.

Harold Skinner looked hard at Bunter.

"Do you mean to say, Bunter, that Coker has got so soft as to give you five bob for nothing?" he demanded.

"Coker was acting up to his high principles of generosity and benevolence!" said Billy Bunter loftily. "He took pity on me because I was hungry, and advanced me five bob on my postal-order."

"My hat!" gasped Skinner.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Several other fellows came into the tuckshop, and when they heard the news they marvelled.

"Then Coker's keeping to Resolution No. 4!" exclaimed Skinner, his eyes gleaming. "He's going to be self-sacrificing and generous to all! He's actually doled out five bob to Bunter! Well, after that he'll do anything!"

"Rather!" chuckled Ogilvy. "There are heaps of far more deserving cases in the school than Bunter's. If Coker is benevolent enough to extend his charity to Bunter, he'll do it to anybody! Chaps, we must help Coker keep to Resolution No. 4, and find him some

cases that are in need of his kindness and generosity."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites rushed away over to the School House, chortling, and the Famous Five followed more slowly. They were grinning.

"Good old Coker!" said Frank Nugent. "He's started the ball rolling now by being benevolent to Bunter!"

"You're right, Franky!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Chaps, I think we shall see some fun ere long. Coker will have plenty to do, I reckon, to keep up to his giddy resolutions."

Harry Wharton was right.

The news travelled like wildfire all over Greyfriars that Coker of the Fifth had, in his kindness and benevolence, given Billy Bunter five shillings on the strength of the time-worn tale of the postal-order. And it was generally agreed that Coker should be given every opportunity of continuing the good work of alleviating distress and the giving of his substance to the poor and needy.

Coker was in for an extremely lively time in his role of benefactor.

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He was seated in his study, still pondering over the ethics of deportment as laid forth in the little text-book he had invested in, when there was a tap at the door, and Dick Rake of the Remove came in.

Rake had a somewhat grubby handkerchief applied to his eyes, and his frame shook with violent sobs.

"Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!" said Rake.

Coker stared at the weeping junior.

"M-m-my hat! What's the matter? What are you blubbing for, Rake?" he demanded.

"Boo-hoo!" sobbed the Remove brokenly. "I want help, Coker! Where can I find some noble-hearted, generous soul to whom I can pour out my troubles? Boo-hoo!"

Coker's manly bosom swelled with self-pride and that glorious instinct of protective care that the strong should have for the weak.

"Don't blub like that, kid," he said kindly, eager to keep to Resolution No. 4. "You're all right. You can tell me your troubles, you know. Bear up, young 'un!"

"Boo-hoo! I—I'll try!" said Rake tearfully. "Oh, Coker, you don't know

what a relief it is to have you to talk to! You inspire me with fresh confidence and courage! I—hem!—I am in terrible trouble, and I must have help! There has been a row in my study, and I have smashed the clock and burnt the hearthrug! There will be a fearful shindy when Quelchy finds out, and I—I shall have to pay for the damage, or make it good! How can I do that, Coker, when I have no money? Boo-hoo! What will Quelchy say? What will my people say? Must I be reduced to begging or stealing in order to make good the damage? Oh, I do feel cut up, I do! Boo-hoo-hoo!"

Rake wept copiously into the handkerchief, and his sobs were truly piteous to hear.

Coker patted him magnanimously on the back.

"There's no need for you to give way like that, kid," he said loftily. "You Remove blighters are always smashing something up, but it's hard on you if you're in reduced circumstances. I'm always ready to help kids in distress. I'll pay."

Rake shook his head, and his sobs broke out afresh.

"No, no! I couldn't let you do that, Coker!" he wailed. "You are kind, and generous, and noble, I know, but I cannot take advantage of you like this! It isn't money I want, but another clock and a hearthrug to replace the ones that are smashed! If only I might dare to ask you for your clock, and this hearthrug—"

"Hum!" said Coker, rubbing his nose. "I don't mind giving you those, but—"

"Lemme have 'em, Coker!" sobbed Rake. "Gimme the clock and the hearthrug, and I'll always be indebted to you!"

"All right," said Coker, with a great wave of self-sacrifice. "It's a good motto, to give up your goods to those who need 'em more. I must say it's jolly honest of you to refuse the money. Take the clock and the hearthrug, kid, and don't worry!"

Rake's tears ceased to flow by magic. He sprang forward with a cry, knelt at Coker's feet and kissed his hand reverently.

"Oh, Coker, how can I thank you?" he said brokenly. "I shall remember this to my dying day!"

Coker's heart beat with pride, and he felt now that any sacrifice was worth this show of humble gratitude. Not for one moment did he imagine that his noble leg was being pulled—Coker never could see the obvious. What a picture this would make, could the world but see it—this scene of a grateful junior kneeling before him in humility and respect and kissing his—Coker's—hand!

Coker's soul rose to transcendent heights, and he patted Rake kindly on the head.

"That's all right, kid," he said. "You needn't thank me. I'm only keeping to my resolutions. Take what you want."

Rake arose, took Coker's study clock and the hearthrug, and departed with these objects tucked one under each arm.

As the door closed behind Rake, a deep chuckle sounded, but Coker did not hear it. He was thinking of how ennobling had been his sacrifice. What were a clock and a hearthrug to the humble gratitude of a down-trodden junior?

A few minutes elapsed, and then there came another knock at the door.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 935.

"Come in!" said Coker.

The visitor was Oliver Kipps of the Remove—the school conjuring genius. Kipps usually wore a smile that wouldn't come off, but at this particular moment he looked woebegone indeed. He walked with a limp, and was supported on one side with an inverted broom, which he was using as a crutch.

"Oh, Coker," said Kipps, with a deep, anguished moan. "I—I have come to ask you to do something for me—to help me. I hardly dare to ask you, really, but—"

"Go on, kid," said Coker, in kindly tones. "I'll help you if I can. What's the trouble?"

"I am in pain—terrible pain!" moaned Kipps, hobbling in with the broomhead tucked under his left armpit, but holding the handle tight below, so that he could use it as a weapon if Coker should "cut up rusty." "You know what a clever conjurer I am, Coker. Well, I tried some of my tricks on Loder, just to show how clever I was. I produced beetles out of his cap and white mice out of the back of his neck. But Loder didn't appreciate my tricks. He took hold of me, and kicked me violently. He treated me with great brutality.

"Look at me now, Coker; I am but a wreck of my former self! I can scarcely walk, and it hurts me to sit down. Oh, Coker, it is cheek, I know, but I want to ask you to help me. To-night I have to do my prep. If I don't do it properly, Mr. Quelch will rag me in the morning. But I cannot do prep standing up, and I cannot sit down, Coker, because the chairs in my study are too hard! We have an armchair, but it is worn out, and the springs are nearly through the seat. But you have a beautiful armchair here. Oh, Coker, if only you would lend me that armchair to sit in, so that I can do my prep in comfort! You have no idea how eternally grateful I should be!"

Kipps finished up this long peroration with a heart-rending groan, and he staggered against Coker, as though quite unable to keep up.

Coker's heart was touched.

"All right," he said. "I am resolved to do all I can to be kind to my school-fellows and help them in distress. You were a silly young ass to try your conjuring tricks on Loder, but you may have the armchair. I really wanted it for myself this evening, but I'm ready to make any sacrifice in a deserving case. How are you going to get the armchair away?"

"I have some friends outside," said Kipps. "Coker, your exterior may be rough, but you have a heart of gold! I will call my friends in, and they will take the armchair away for me."

Kipps gave a whistle, and immediately Hazeldene, Pict Delarey, and Dick Russell came in. They grabbed Coker's armchair and whisked it away with great promptness.

Kipps hobbled to the door with the broom, and turned to Coker ere he went.

"Your noble action shall not go unrecognised, Coker," he said solemnly. "I shall see that the whole school knows of this self-sacrificing deed."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Coker graciously. "I'm only doing my duty. Shut the door."

Kipps shut the door and hobbled away.

Coker looked round his study and gave a grunt. Minus the clock and the hearthrug and the armchair, the room was beginning to look rather bare. He arose, and was about to stoke up the

fire when there was another tap at the door, and Wun Lung of the Remove came in.

Wun Lung was wrapped up in a blanket, and he appeared to be shivering.

"My hat!" said Coker, pausing with the shovel in his hand. "What's the matter with you, Wun Lung?"

"Grooogh! Me velly cold!" said the little Celestial, a look of piteous appeal in his almond eyes. "Velly cold weather, and poor Chinese feel it horrible. No fire in study; no coalee. Me sittee there and shiver till teeth rattle allee same. Handsome Coker give me coalee for fire—eh?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Coker. "You must be cold without a fire, Wun Lung. But can't you get some coal from the matron?"

The Chinese junior shook his head.

"No, no, coalee. Too latee to get coalee from matron. Me catchee death of cold if I don't get coalee velly quick. Givee coalee to poor Chinese, kind-hearted Coker."

"All right," said Coker, with an effort. "I suppose you need the coal more than I do, Wun Lung. Here you are!"

Wun Lung seized the coal scuttle and bore it away. He paused in the doorway and made a low bow to Coker.

"Poor Chinese velly much grateful," he said softly. "Him happy now allee light. Me tellee othel chaps about handsome, kind-hearted Coker."

With that, Wun Lung departed with the coal, leaving Coker looking very pleased with himself.

He was certainly being called upon to make a good many sacrifices in the cause of benevolence to his school-fellows, but what did that matter, so long as he was sticking to his New Year resolutions? Despite the amazing frequency of visitors who were in "trouble," Horace Coker as yet failed to see that his leg was being pulled. That was the great thought, and it comforted Coker.

There was not much else, indeed, to comfort Horace in his study just then. The fire got lower, and so did the temperature. Coker sat at the table, turned up his coat-collar, and applied himself at once to his little book on deportment.

He was suffering, perhaps, but he was content to suffer, for it was in a great and noble cause!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker Feels the Draught!

COKER was not to be left long in peace.

Callers came in great profusion, and all had harrowing tales of woe to tell. All had come to Horace Coker for comfort and help in their distress!

Bulstrode of the Remove was the next visitor. He gasped out to Coker that he was hungry. He wanted no money—only food! And Coker, convinced by Bulstrode's piteous plea, cleared out all that was in his study cupboard, and gave to the hungry Removeite.

Bulstrode took away with him quite a considerable amount of tuck. There was a ham-pie, and a Swiss roll, and a cake, and a jar of jam, some tarts, a tin of sardines, and some chocolate, among other things. He and a number of other Removeites made merry in the Common-room on the strength of Coker's tuck.

Sammy Bunter of the Second and a whole horde of fags turned up to supplicate Coker for charity. Coker bore with them all with heroic fortitude and generosity. There was no point in making good resolutions unless one stuck to them thoroughly, he thought, and so he filled the hungry with good things, as it were, and none of the applicants for benevolence were turned empty away.

It was really amazing, the number of juniors who managed to extract alms from Coker. The gentle art of "telling the tale" was practised extensively, and Coker, had he stopped to consider, must surely have thought it a matter of great wonderment that there should be so many importunate fellows and so much misery at Greyfriars.

Alonzo Todd, the Duffer at Greyfriars, was one of those who took advantage of Coker's generosity, though not for himself, of course. As Alonzo said, his Uncle Benjamin would be shocked—nay, disgusted—if he took money for his own aggrandisement. But he succeeded in extracting from Coker a subscription to the Society for Providing South Sea Islanders with Tracts and Trousers—an institution for which Alonzo was a zealous worker.

It was as well for Coker that he happened to be particularly "flush" at that period, and that he had practically unlimited financial resources forthcoming from his devoted Aunt Judy. Otherwise, he would soon have been "stumped out" as a result of those numerous demands that were made on his benevolence.

Potter and Greene came along the Fifth Form passage to do their prep, and—incidentally—to have a snack.

They opened the study door and walked in. Then they stopped short and gazed before them in amazement.

There was Coker, seated at the table in quite a huddled attitude, poring over his book. His jacket collar was pulled up tight round his neck, and his breath was coming forth in the form of smoke.

The temperature in the study was well on the way down to zero, and never before had the room looked so cold, empty, and cheerless.

"Mum-my only hat!" ejaculated Potter. "What the dickens—"

"Hallo!" said Coker, looking up with frosty eyes. His cheeks were rather blue, and his nose was particularly red. "Have you chaps come to do your prep?"

"Yes, we have!" gasped Greene. "What in thunder have you been up to in here, Coker? The place is like an ice-well."

"The idiot's let the fire out!" howled Potter furiously. "What's the game, Coker?"

Horace blew on his hands.

"There's no coal," he mumbled.

"No coal!" said Potter dazedly.

"But there was plenty in the scuttle!"

"Yes; but I've given that to Wun Lung," said Coker. "The poor kid had no coal, and he was shivering. So I gave him what coal there was here, and he took it away—scuttle and all."

"You—you burler!" yelled Greene. "What did you do that for?"

"Well, it was a charitable act," said Coker, as warmly as he could, under the circumstances. "It does a chap good to practise a little self-sacrifice now and again, you know. Besides, I'm living up to my resolutions."

"Your—your resolutions!" stammered Potter. "Oh, you howling ass! You've given our coal away, and let the fire go out, because of your fat-headed resolutions!"

"They're not fat-headed at all!" said Coker brusquely. "I'm carrying them out from jolly high moral motives. It would do you chaps good to make a few New Year resolutions, and stick to 'em."

Potter snorted and Greene howled. "Br-rrr-rrrr!" said Potter, glaring round the room. "The place looks empty. My hat, where's the armchair?"

"Kipps of the Remove has got that," explained Coker. "Loder booted him or something, so that he couldn't sit down on his own study chairs, so I let him have our armchair, as it was softer."

"You—you let a Remove—have our study armchair—because it was softer?" said Potter in a faint voice. "Gug-g-good heavens!"

"Where's the hearthrug, and the clock?" roared Greene.

"Rake of the Remove had that," said Coker. "He smashed the clock and messed up the rug in his own study, and I let him have ours, to save the kid from getting into a row. He was awfully cut up, and I did him a jolly good turn. That's charity."

"Charity!" spluttered Potter. "You—you've been doling out charity, Coker, with our study props. Oh, you crass idiot! You chortling chump! You burbling fathead!"

"Look here——" said Coker, beginning to glower.

"You've let the Remove have our coal, and our armchair, and our clock, and our hearthrug!" hooted Greene. "What the dickens next, Coker? You must be off your rocker!"

Potter had by this time reached the cupboard, obsessed with an awful thought. He opened the door and gazed within. That cupboard, like the one belonging to the celebrated Mother Hubbard, was bare. There was no trace or sign of any of the tuck that Potter and Greene had been cherishing for their evening snack.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Potter. "I—I guessed as much. The lunatic has given away our grub! I suppose the Remove has that, too?"

"Yes. I gave it to Bulstrode," said Coker. "And what of it? I paid for the tuck, didn't I, George Potter?"

Potter and Greene gazed at their study-mate with feelings that were unutterable.

"Well, my only hat!" gurgled Potter at last. "If this doesn't lick everything! I always suspected Coker of insanity, but I'm certain now that he's off his head. No fellow in his right senses would do the things he does."

"I did it for charity I tell you!" roared Coker. "Haven't I made New Year resolutions? Haven't I resolved to be self-sacrificing and generous and to——"

"You thumping ass!" hissed Potter. "Can't you see that you've been made a fool of? Doesn't it occur to your dense brain, Coker, that those Remove rotters have been pulling your leg again?"

"Rats!" said Coker with a sniff. "I don't believe it. The cases were genuine enough. I never give help unless the cases are genuine. Why, young Rake was so grateful that he went down on his knees and kissed my hand!"

"Went down on his knees and kissed your hand!" said Potter dazedly. "Oh, mum-my only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Greene. That little revelation by Coker came as an anti-climax to their feelings of horror, and Potter and Greene yelled hilariously.

Coker glared at them in wrath. "What is there to laugh at, eh?" he roared. "If you're looking for a thick ear, George Potter——"

"What about your resolutions, Coker?" gurgled Potter. "Isn't the giving of thick ears prohibited?"

"You—you—you——" Coker was about to say something rather emphatic, but his voice trailed off into a gasp as a weird, rattling sound came to his ears from outside the window.

Potter and Greene were silent, too, and they listened in great astonishment. The jangling notes of a barrel organ sounded from outside the window, mingled with much boyish laughter. Coker & Co. ran to the window and gazed without. A strange scene met their eyes.

There, in the gathering dusk, was a tumbledown barrel-organ standing beneath their window, surrounded by a chortling crowd of Greyfriars fellows. Churning at the handle of that organ was a ragged, miserable-looking individual, who appeared to be of foreign extraction. He plied the handle vigorously with one hand, whilst in the other he held out a battered Trilby hat.

The tune was recognisable after a time as the "Old Hundredth," but the broken notes and innumerable rattles and "tum-tums" that proceeded from the interior of the organ gave that tune a few somewhat discordant "effects."

The organ-grinder was looking upward disconsolately at Coker's study window, and when he saw the face of the mighty Horace appear he ground at the handle more wildly than ever, and

commenced to dance and gesticulate to him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the boys in the quadrangle. "Go it, Antonio!"

Coker's face took on a puzzled expression. He flung open the window and leaned out, glaring downward at the organ-grinder.

"Hey! What the thump are you making that row outside my study window for?" he rapped. "Go away! You're not allowed in here!"

"Mastah Coke!" cried the organist, letting go of the handle and extending his arms upward in an appealing attitude. "You are da gr-r-reat Mastah Coke! You taka da pity on da poor starving musician, yes! You hava da verr-ria kind heart, Mastah Coke!"

"My hat!" gasped Coker. "I—I——" "Helpa da poor, Mastah Coke!" cried the ragged one from below. "Taka da pity, spara da copper!"

And for the further edification of Coker, the organist churned lustily at his instrument; and loud, discordant sounds of melody arose on the evening air.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Coker Cuts Loose!

"H A, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton & Co., and the other juniors who were gathered underneath Coker's window added their voices to the general uproar.



Kipps gave the order, and Hazeldene, Piet Delarey, and Dick Russell grabbed Coker's armchair and whisked it away with great promptitude. Then Kipps hobbled to the door with the broom. "I shall see that the whole school knows of this self-sacrificing deed of yours, Coker," he said. (See Chapter 4.)

Coker glared down indignantly. "Shut up your cackling, you little sweeps!" he rapped. "I'll set you a good example in generosity and benevolence. Wait down there, my man. I sha'n't be long."

Coker disappeared from his study window, but quite a good time elapsed before he came out into the quad. A yell of laughter and wonder heralded his appearance. Coker was laden with clothes. He had a pair of striped trousers, a fancy waistcoat, a frock-coat, some boots, sundry collars and shirts, and a top-hat.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "What the dickens is Cokey up to now? Why—Ha, ha, ha! He's going to dress up old Wib—"

"Shurrup!" hissed Bob Cherry warningly, gripping Harry's arm. "Don't give the game away, Harry, for goodness' sake. This is really rich. Don't let on to anyone, yet, that that's old Wib dressed up as an organ-grinder."

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Famous Five and Squiff were convulsed with mirth as Coker strode up to the "organ-grinder" and dumped that heap of second-hand raiment on the barrel-organ. These six youths were more tickled by the affair than the other spectators, because they were "in the know." It had, in fact, been Bob Cherry's idea in the first place. He had suggested to Wibley, the amateur actor of Greyfriars, that he hurry down to Friardale, hire an old barrel-organ, and appear at the school in the guise of an organ-grinder, in order to test the extent of Coker's benevolence, and, at the same time to have "a bit of a rag."

Wibley had been "on" like a shot. Anything in the line of masquerade appealed to him. And there was no denying that Wibley looked, and acted, the part of the Italian organ-grinder to the life.

"Ah, Mastah Coke!" he said in a most melancholy tone. "I grinda da organ to maka da brass. I hear you are da verria benevolent young signor, so here I come to playa da tune. You like heem—yes?"

Coker shuddered. "No fear! I'm dashed if I like your music," he said. "I think it's an unearthly row! But I sha'n't send you away without lending you a helping hand, my man. Here's ten bob."

Wib took the money with cleverly-assumed eagerness. Not that he intended keeping it, of course. He and Harry Wharton & Co. had arranged that little joke merely for the sake of pulling Coker's leg, and to bring him back to earth, as it were, not to "make" anything out of him. The money would be returned afterwards. But the organ-grinder rose to the occasion right nobly. He muttered garrulously, and fairly grovelled in the snow at Coker's feet.

"Ah! Da kind and generous Coke! Da noble Coke!" cried the pseudo Italian. "He verria great benefactor. No more me live on Carraway seeds, thanks to da mighty Coke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the spectators. Horace Coker went red.

"Never mind about thanking me," he said magnanimously. "I'm only too glad to help a deserving case. I hope," said Coker, looking round meaningly,—"I hope the other chaps will take example from the way I'm sticking to my resolutions. Not that I want to brag, of course!"

"Good old Coker!" said Temple of the Fourth encouragingly. "What have you got the old clothes for?"

"They're for this unfortunate man," said Coker airily. "He must feel jolly

cold, dressed in those rags, in this freezing weather. Here, my man, put these things on. They'll keep you warm."

"Ah, si, signor!" said Wibley in a voice that fairly throbbed with gratitude. "You are verria kind."

"Not at all!" said Coker. "Let's see you get into 'em now. You'll be frozen otherwise."

Coker was not to know that the "Italian" organ-grinder had on some very warm schoolboy clothing underneath his rags. He felt quite concerned for the ragged one, and he fairly thrust him into the striped trousers, the fancy waistcoat, and the frock coat.

"My word, that is rich!" gurgled Frank Nugent, clutching Bob Cherry in his mirth. "I rather fancy I've seen that giddy waistcoat before somewhere."

"Great pip! So have I!" exclaimed Wharton. "It's one of old Prout's."

"So's the frock-coat and the bags!" ejaculated Johnny Bull. "Coker's been raiding Prout's clobber."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker glared round.

"Silence, you cheeky young sweeps!" he rapped. "These clothes may be Prout's, but I haven't raided them. They're his cast-offs—"

"Coker!"

That name, pronounced in an awful voice, sounded above the laughter, and everyone looked round, startled.

Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout, looking very amazed and indignant, strutted on the scene.

Coker by now had dressed the organ-grinder in the trousers, the waistcoat, and the frock-coat, and a shriek of mirth arose when he put the topper on that worthy's head. The effect was most ludicrous. The onlookers forgot Mr. Prout, and they yelled.

The Fifth Form master's face was a study as he gazed at the "Italian."

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Coker! Do you know what you are doing, boy?"

Coker glared at Mr. Prout.

"Yes, I know what I'm doing, sir," he said. "I've taken pity on this poor man. He came here, grinding this organ under my study window, to raise the wind—I mean to collect money to help—"

"Coker!" gasped Mr. Prout.

"It's all right, sir," said Coker. "This man is a deserving case, I'm sure. You see, I've resolved to give my help in all cases of distress, and I'm keeping to my resolves. The poor man was in rags—he had hardly any clothes to his back, as a matter of fact, and so I gave him these things to keep him warm."

"Gug-g-goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Prout. "Coker, are you mad? That is my waistcoat!"

"Yes, it was, sir," said Coker.

"You impudent boy, Coker!" shrieked Mr. Prout angrily. "I say it's my waistcoat. And, what is more, those are my trousers, and that frock-coat is my property!"

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

Coker looked rather blank, but he quickly recovered his self-possession.

"Ahem!" he coughed. "I—I felt quite sure that you didn't need these old things any more, sir. I rummaged 'em out of the matron's store-room—"

"Rummaged them out!" cried Mr. Prout wildly. "They are the clothes I gave to the matron to send to the tailor's for me, to be cleaned and pressed. How dare you confiscate them without my authority, Coker?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Horace.

He was floored.

The onlookers fairly hugged each other with merriment. As for Mr. Prout, he was very justly in a state of wrath.

"Coker, you are an irresponsible dolt, sir!" he stormed. "Your obtuseness and idiocy surpass my comprehension. How dare you take such liberties with my clothes, Coker, removing them from the matron's room in order to dress up this disreputable organ-grinder?"

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

The organ-grinder appeared to be rather nervous. He took up the shafts of the organ and proceeded to trundle it away, but Mr. Prout dashed after him.

"Come back, fellow!" he cried. "I will not allow you to decamp with my clothes. Remove them instantly—instantly, I say!"

Wib made some reply, and he proceeded to drag off Mr. Prout's striped trousers.

As he did so, however, he happened to rip up the ragged old trousers he was wearing underneath, and thus, of course, displayed his Eton "bags" beneath.

A shout of amazement went up from the Greyfriars fellows, and Mr. Prout blinked quite dazedly.

"B-b-bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "The wretch is wearing schoolboy trousers as well!"

"It's all up, Wib," sang out Bob Cherry. "Your giddy wig has fallen over on one side. You might as well turn it in now, and divulge the giddy truth."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rest of the Co.

Wib gave a gasp. His wig was certainly over on one side, and his own hair was revealed underneath. And so the amateur actor of Greyfriars took off the wig altogether, and then removed his heavy black eyebrows and flowing moustache. He grinned round at the astounded throng.

"Go-goo-good heavens!" stuttered Mr. Prout, like a man in a dream. "Wib-Wib-Wibley!"

Coker stood rooted to the ground, his face a picture of blank, horrified amazement.

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

The fellows standing round gazed at Wibley, and they drew deep, deep breaths. And then as the full significance of the startling revelation dawned upon them, they gave vent to their mirth in a loud, long, lifting howl of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spoofed!" yelled Potter, from the window of the study above. "Spoofed by the Remove, by gum!"

"It's Wibley, after all, Coker!" shrieked Temple hilariously. "Oh, my hat! Carry me home to die, somebody! Ha, ha, ha!"

The quadrangle fairly rang with the laughter. Mr. Prout gasped, and Coker gasped. Wibley, meanwhile, calmly proceeded to divest himself of Mr. Prout's coat and waistcoat and his disguise.

With his rags removed, Wibley looked quite his usual self once more, except for the grease paint upon his face. He grinned serenely at Coker.

"Well, Coker, here's your ten bob back," he said, extending the note. "I was going to return it later, of course, but you might as well take it now, old chap. You can buy yourself some carraway seeds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker was quite incapable of speech or of action for several minutes. His rugged features underwent a variety of wild expressions. Then, all of a

sudden, he gave a wrathful bellow and flung himself at the practical joker of the Remove.

"I'll give you barrel organ!" he howled, whirling Wibley over in his frantic embrace. "My hat, I'll pulverise you for this, you cheeky little sweep! I'll teach you to make a fool of me! I'll— Yarooooogh!"

Coker gave a yell as he and Wibley fell down together. They landed in the snow and commenced to roll over and over, struggling furiously.

The snow flew in all directions, and all that could be seen of Coker and Wibley was a mixture of whirling legs and arms. "Yarooooogh!"

"Yah! Gug! Gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the onlookers, weeping with mirth.

Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout strode forward with an exclamation of horror.

"Stop!" he ordered. "Boys, do you hear me!"

But no one was paying attention to the Fifth-Form master just then.

"Rescue. Remove!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Coker's broken his New Year resolutions! He's backslid! And he's whopping Wib! Pile in, kids!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites surged forward to the rescue of their Formfellow, but Mr. Prout intervened, for the second time.

"Stop! Desist, boys, I command you!" he rapped thunderously. "Let there be no more of this disgraceful disturbance! Coker! Leave Wibley alone and get up this instant!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Coker. "He's made a laughing-stock of me! He's spoofed me with his dressing-up! He—"

"Do you hear me, Coker?" thundered Mr. Prout, in tones of fear. "Arise this instant, sir!"

Coker, however, continued to pummel away at Wib, so Mr. Prout, without more ado, grasped the wrathful Horace by the collar of his coat and yanked him up by sheer force.

"Yooop!" gasped Coker. "Leggo, sir!"

"Coker, don't you dare to struggle with me!" rapped Mr. Prout, his eyes glinting with anger. "How dare you adopt this truculent tone! You are a fool, Coker, to allow yourself to be thus completely hoodwinked. You are a fool and a dolt, sir!"

"I—I—I—" spluttered Coker, wriggling.

"Come with me to my study, Coker, and I will have a talk with you, on the subject of New Year resolutions!" said Mr. Prout grimly. "Wibley, take five hundred lines for perpetrating such an audacious prank, and remove this ridiculous contraption from the school precincts immediately!"

"Yowp! Yes, sir!" moaned Wib, who felt rather hurt, although he had managed to dodge the major part of Coker's blows.

Mr. Prout gave a furlous glare round; and then, gathering up his raided garments, he strutted away, commanding Coker to follow.

The great Horace followed his Form-master, his face crimson with rage and humiliation.

A chorus of chuckles followed him on his way indoors.

"Well, that was rich!" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping the salt tears of merriment from his eyes. "Really, rich, my sons! Poor old Coker! He was properly taken in, wasn't he? I'm afraid, Wib, you've made him break one or two of his good resolutions!"

"Yow!" gasped Wibley. "The mad idiot nearly broke my neck into the bargain! I'm hurt! Ow-ow!"

"Never mind, old chap!" laughed Harry Wharton pacifically. "It was a jolly good jape, and you worked it beautifully. We'll do the lines for you!"

"Rather!"

Wibley gave a grin.

"Ye-es, it was a good jape, and I enjoyed it—except the last part!" he said. "I think I'd better keep out of Coker's way after this—he'll be seeking my blood. I don't suppose he'll be feeling inclined to keep to his good resolutions to-night, at any rate!"

Wibley was right!

Darkness was now falling over the countryside, and Dicky Nugent and Gatty of the Second were dispatched to Friardale to return the barrel organ. The fags did not mind this job in the least, apart from the fact that Harry Wharton had given them a whacking currant cake for their services. They churned out many a tune in the Friardale Lane on their way to the village, and very nearly got "run in" by P.-e. Tozer for disturbing the peace of the local residents.

Meanwhile, at Greyfriars, Horace Coker was feeling quite the opposite to benevolent and kind. His demeanour, when he came away from Mr. Prout's study was by no means pacific!

He realised, now, how he had been "spoofed" by the Remove, and when he returned to his study and found it cold, cheerless and bare, his feelings were too deep for words!

Coker did not say much. He took up a cricket stump and strode off to the Remove passage in search of his clock, the hearthrug, the coal scuttle, and the armchair.

The Removites were expecting Coker, and he soon found that he had walked into a perfect hornets' nest of trouble. Coker started the rumpus, and the cheery heroes of the Remove finished it! He was bumped along the passage, his collar and tie were rammed down his back and coal dust was rubbed into his hair.

Blundell & Co., hearing a commotion in the Fifth Form passage a little while later, looked out of their studios and beheld a strange sight.

They beheld Coker, roped up in his study armchair in the middle of the passage, with the hearthrug wrapped round him, and the clock hanging round

his neck, and the coal scuttle on his head. He was making horrible noises, and uttering the most awful threats upon the devoted heads of Harry Wharton & Co. who were lurking in the vicinity.

But, as soon as Blundell & Co. appeared, the Removites scuttled away like rabbits to their warrens, and Horace Coker was left in the hands of his Form-fellows. Roaring with laughter at his predicament, Blundell & Co. released him and afterwards helped him carry his belongings back into his study.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Fallen Dignity!

A GOOD night's rest and a day of comparative peace to follow had a mollifying influence on Coker, and he was soon imbued afresh with good resolutions.

He had been very arduously studying the little book on deportment, and, one day, when dinner was over Coker went down to the tailors in Friardale, and returned to Greyfriars laden with sundry parcels.

Coker appeared in a very abstracted mood during afternoon lessons, and Mr. Prout had to reprimand him sharply on more than one occasion. Wherever Coker's thoughts were, they were certainly not centred upon Q. Horatius Flaccus, as they should have been. Apparently he was pondering over some weighty matter that had nothing whatever to do with lessons.

As soon as the final bell had rung, Coker hurried away to the Fifth Form dormitory, and he was not seen again for some little time.

But when, at last, he reappeared, those who saw him stopped to stare.

A startling change had come over Horace Coker's appearance! It was as though a new and glorified Coker had descended upon Greyfriars!

The burly Fifth-Formor was not usually very careful over his personal appearance—in fact, he was sometimes slovenly. But now he dawned forth as quite a dandified fellow.

Coker's face was very clean, and he had put on a brand new collar of glistening white, and a gorgeous necktie that must surely have vied in pattern with Joseph's celebrated coat of many colours. He wore, too, an immaculate jacket with a flower in the button-hole.

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and trousers that had a crease of razor-blade sharpness down each leg, and brilliant patent-leather shoes, and spats! A dream of a toppler adorned his head, and he carried a pair of lavender-coloured gloves and a gold-knobbed walking stick.

Coker, in fact, was a vision of radiant loveliness; a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

Blundell met him on the stairs, and he fell back with a gasp.

"Mum-m-my word!" he ejaculated.

Fitzgerald and Smith major, who were coming up behind, also stopped, and they gazed at the sight before them in breathless wonder.

"Faith, an' is that Coker?" said Fitzgerald, in a faint voice. "It can't be! I must be dreaming!"

"It is Coker!" said Smith major, looking hard at Horace. "Yes, by hokey, it is undoubtedly old Coker. But isn't he got up in style? Oh, scissors! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blundell and Fitzgerald also laughed, and Coker glared.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded, greatly incensed.

"I'm cackling at a silly imitation of a tailor's dummy!" said Blundell.

"What are you cackling at, Smith?"

"I'm cackling at a frabjous, conceited idiot!" said Smith major. "What are you cackling at, Fitzgerald?"

"Faith, an' I don't know what it is," said the lad from Erin. "The ticket's fallen off entirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker snorted.

"You chaps can laugh, but you only show your silly ignorance!" he said disdainfully. "Perhaps, Blundell, when I have attained the captaincy of the Fifth, you will laugh the other side of your face!"

Blundell gave another roar.

"Oh, my hat! I see it all now!" he exclaimed. "This is another result of old Coker's New Year resolutions! He's out to maintain his dignity and deportment and to become captain of the Fifth and monarch of all he surveys."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fitzgerald and Smith major.

Coker went very red, but he restrained his ire. He must live up to his resolves, and maintain an even temperament and pacific demeanour in face of all obstacles. He must not allow anything to disturb his dignity and deportment. Resolutions were made to be kept, and it was up to him to set an example to the rest of Greyfriars.

So he gave a sniff of lofty contempt and walked on, followed by the laughter of his Form-fellows.

As he reached the lower landing a yell came to his ears, and, turning, he saw a party of Removites gazing at him.

Peter Todd shaded his eyes as he looked at Coker.

"My word!" said Peter. "He's washed his neck!"

"He's got a clean collar on!" exclaimed Squiff in tones of wonder.

"Look at his necktie—it properly hits you in the eye, doesn't it?" said Russell. "Where did you dig that up, Coker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker paused, and for a moment he contemplated making a rush at the chortling Removites. But once again his will-power came to the fore, and he contained his wrath, albeit with difficulty.

He walked on and passed out into the open air of the quadrangle.

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Fellows came rushing up from far and near to gaze upon the new Coker. They gazed at him and yelled. And Coker, as the general hilarity increased, grew redder and more inclined to give vent to his indignant feelings. He had intended that his dignified deportment should impress Greyfriars; that it should earn him a new respect in the Fifth and the veneration that was due to him from the fags. But things were not working out quite right, somehow. Instead of being impressed, the boys of Greyfriars seemed to be taking him as a huge joke. Coker couldn't understand it a bit.

"Silly little rotters!" he growled to himself as he made for the gates. "I'm blessed if I know what they're laughing at. I've—ahem!—forgiven the Remov kids for those jokes they played on me the other day. That ought to make 'em more respectful. The young blighters haven't got an atom of respect in 'em! Br-rrr-rrr!"

Coker walked on with his head very erect, and so went through the gates and along the Friardale Lane.

It occurred to Coker that he might try creating an impression at Cliff House. The snow had cleared; it was a fine, crisp afternoon, and he felt in the mood for walking. Yes, he thought, it would be a good idea to stroll over to Cliff House and see what impression he could make on the girls there.

Their opinion weighed a good deal with the Removites, he knew. Come what may, he was determined to bring the juniors in general, and Harry Wharton & Co. in particular, to a fuller realisation of his—Coker's importance. That having been achieved, he would have gained the first step in the fulfilment of his other resolutions—and particularly the one in which he aimed at becoming captain of the Fifth.

Coker walked on, swinging his cane and gaining in good-humour and confidence as he went. Eventually he arrived within sight of Cliff House, and he frowned a little when he saw a party of Removites chatting to Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. at the gate.

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith had ridden over on their bicycles after lessons to see their girl chums, and so had preceded Coker. But the great Horace was nothing daunted by this.

He paused down the lane to adjust his necktie and tilt his toppler at the correct Bond Street angle. Then, gloves in hand, and his cane tucked jauntily under his arm, Coker strutted on, putting a good deal of grace and dignity into his walk.

Miss Clara was the first to notice Coker, and she gave a little cry.

"Don't look all at once!" she exclaimed. "But something really gorgeous is coming along the road. I do believe it's Coker!"

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at the apparition of loveliness they saw approaching. Marjorie and her chums smiled.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You're right, Miss Clara, it is old Coker! All dressed up in his best bib and tucker, by Jove! Doesn't he look the last word?"

"The last-wordfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Coker is truly terrific!" grinned Inky.

Coker walked up; and when he came opposite the gate he looked at the girls and raised his toppler.

Marjorie & Co. smiled sweetly at Coker.

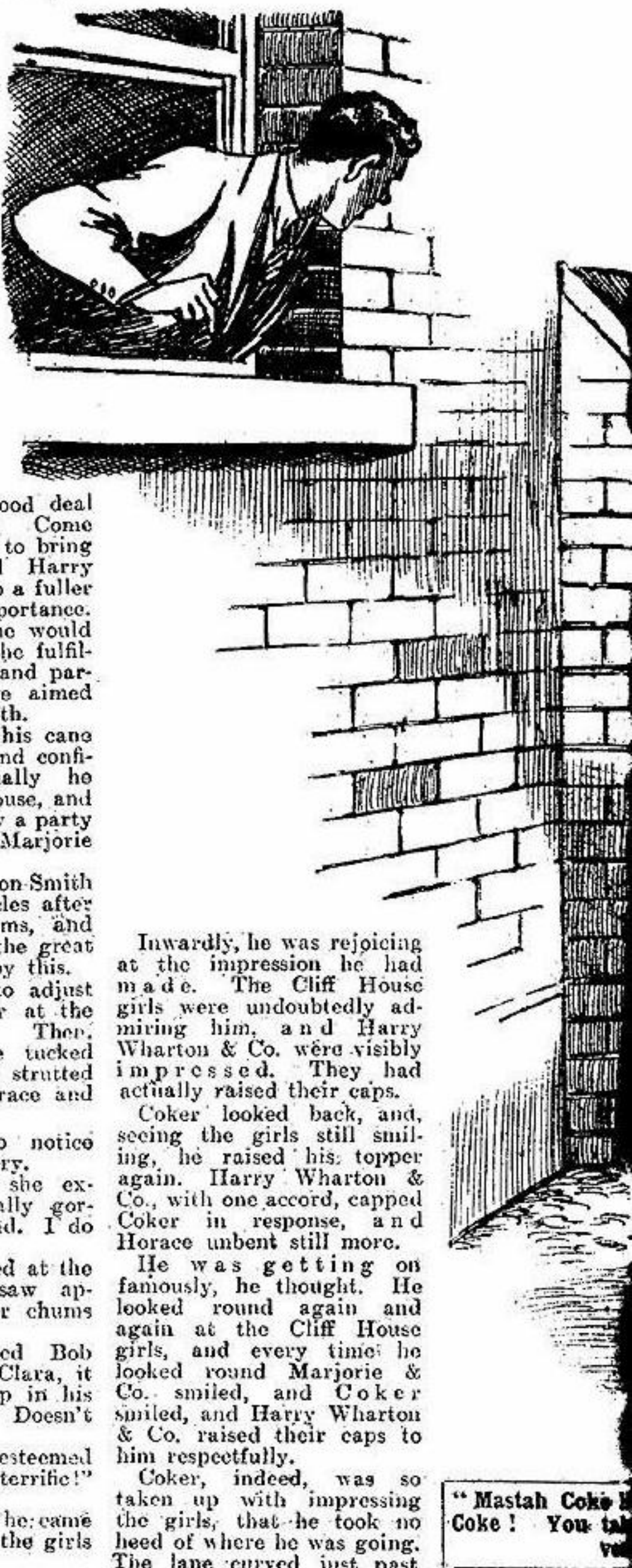
That encouraged Horace, and he made a bow.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene in a soft voice. "Isn't Coker excessively polite?"

"Well, we can be polite, too!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Come on, chaps, let's cap Coker! He's evidently out to be admired and respected—according to his giddy resolutions, you know!"

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith all raised their caps solemnly to Coker, and bowed as he passed by.

Coker gave them a condescending nod.



Inwardly, he was rejoicing at the impression he had made. The Cliff House girls were undoubtedly admiring him, and Harry Wharton & Co. were visibly impressed. They had actually raised their caps.

Coker looked back, and, seeing the girls still smiling, he raised his toppler again. Harry Wharton & Co., with one accord, capped Coker in response, and Horace unbent still more.

He was getting on famously, he thought. He looked round again and again at the Cliff House girls, and every time he looked round Marjorie & Co. smiled, and Coker smiled, and Harry Wharton & Co. raised their caps to him respectfully.

Coker, indeed, was so taken up with impressing the girls, that he took no heed of where he was going. The lane curved just past

"Mastah Coker! You talk!"

Cliff House, and there was a deep ditch at the side. Coker, instead of turning the bend, walked straight on, off the roadway and on to the grass.

He was turning round as he did so, and raising his topper again to Marjorie & Co. He even thought he might go so far as to wave his stick to them. But Coker's thoughts came to a sudden and abrupt termination. He reached the edge of the ditch and stepped blissfully over the brink. Coker was surprised to find his legs give way from under him, and next minute, with a fiendish roar, he went plunging wildly downward.

"Yaroooooogh!"

Coker's stick went one way and his gloves went the other, whilst he himself went into the muddy, slimy depths of the ditch.

Splash!

"Gerrooooooch!"

Coker sank beneath the surface with that loud, gasping gurgle.

The Cliff House girls screamed, whilst Harry Wharton & Co., bursting with laughter, came running post-haste to the spot.

As they arrived at the top of the bank, Coker's head and shoulders, festooned with weeds, appeared out of the murky waters. Coker's mouth opened wide, and he gave vent to a series of remarkable, choking noises:

"Yugh! Gerr-ragh! Wah!

Wow! Oooooch!"

Coker looked so indescribably funny as he stood there in the ditch that Harry Wharton & Co. burst into yells of laughter.

Coker blinked at them through the mud and slime, and he continued to gurgle in a fearful manner.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Coker!" roared Bob Cherry. "Why didn't you look where you were going, you frabjous idiot? Now you are in a mess!"

"Gug, gug, gug!" came from Horace.

Johnny Bull picked up the gold-knobbed cane, and, using it as a rake, fished Coker's topper that was floating, half-submerged, in the ditch. With the topper dangling on the end of the stick, Johnny held it forth and deftly dropped it on Coker's muddy head. Then he gave the crown of the topper a jab with the stick, and this had the effect of fixing it securely to its owner's cranium.

A fresh shout of laughter arose from the Removites.

Coker, spluttering and gasping incoherently, scrambled out of the ditch. Harry Wharton & Co. promptly scattered as he did so. They had no desire to get near Coker in his present ghastly state, and the effluvium that surrounded him was sufficient to keep them at a respectful distance, in any case!

Marjorie & Co. were quietly laughing at the gate of Cliff House. They had been alarmed at first, when Coker had taken that sudden header into the depths of the ditch, but now he was on dry land once more, and no serious damage had been done, they saw the comical side of the affair.

Coker picked up his stick, and, still with the topper on his head, he squeaked down the lane towards Cliff House.

He blinked dejectedly at Marjorie & Co. and gave a queer sort of gurgle as he passed them. The girls did their best to look serious, but Coker's appearance was so funny that they did not succeed in their efforts very much.

All the dignity and deportment had departed from the great man of the Fifth! Dripping with mud and slime, he squeaked back the way he had come, and so finally disappeared from view, leaving a long, long trail of weeds and water behind him.

Harry Wharton & Co. returned to the gate of Cliff House to chuckle over the affair with Marjorie & Co. Coker, meanwhile, returned to Greyfriars.

By the time he arrived at the school most of the mud had caked on him, and he was in a parlous state indeed.

Fellows gathered round to look at him. Everyone asked him how he had managed to get into that awful condition. But Coker made no reply—he could not; he was too full for words. He strode on towards the School House, with mud squeaking out of his boots as he went.

Coker went indoors, and made a beeline for the bath-room. He was not seen again for some time, but those who passed by the bath-room door heard him snorting and spluttering and gurgling, whilst all the time there was a great deal of splashing and scrubbing going on.

When at last Coker came downstairs his face was red and his hair tousled. He looked ready to slaughter

anyone on sight, so no one essayed to test Coker, by word or deed, to see whether he was still sticking to his resolutions. They let him go, and Coker went along to his study and there he snorted in solitude for the remainder of the evening.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Chance for Coker!

COKER looked rather gloomy and glum next morning. Blundell & Co., watching him, smiled at each other. Could it be that the great Horace was wavering, after all, in his will to keep those good resolutions he had made? Was it that the recent lively happenings had discouraged him? With another fellow, the answer might have been yes; but with Coker—well, Coker was different. His Form-fellows, having Coker's bulldog obstinacy in mind, wondered what he would be up to next. Surely he had not revoked his resolutions!

Many amused glances were cast at Coker in Hall that morning.

The great Horace stood there in the ranks of the Fifth, trying to appear loftily aloof, but still unable to disguise the melancholy of his manner.

Call-over was taken, and then, before dismissing the school, Dr. Locke stood up on his dais and regarded the assembled Forms gravely over the rims of his spectacles.

"Boys, I have an announcement of some importance to make," he said. "It has been suggested by Sir Philip Phadbury, one of the governors of this school, that a—er—somewhat unusual New Year innovation be made at Greyfriars. This, in effect, would be the appointment of a senior to assume the duties of a proctor—a proctor in charge of the Lower School."

There was a buzz of excited voices in Hall.

Dr. Locke raised his hand for silence.

"Lest there should be any misapprehension on the point, boys, I will explain more fully," he said. "A proctor at a college carries out duties that are similar to a prefect's in some respects, yet differing substantially from them, inasmuch as he is more of a tutor and counsellor to the boys under his jurisdiction, and works independently of the prefects."

"Broadly speaking, a proctor has more of a moral duty to his schoolfellows than a prefect. It is his place to advise and help the younger lads, to give them the benefit of his tact and considered judgment in all their difficulties and disputes. It devolves upon a proctor to look after the moral welfare of the juniors, to uplift them by pattern and example, and do his best to act as friend and guide in all aspects of school life."

"He has not the powers of a prefect to punish, yet he is vested with some of the authority of a master in advisory and tutorial matters. So far, the policy of this school has been carried on with the usual staff of masters and prefects, but, in deference to the suggestion of Sir Philip Phadbury, who is vastly interested in educational problems, I have decided to appoint a proctor for Greyfriars."

Everyone in Hall was interested and excited at the news.

The Head went on:

"The question of deciding upon the senior lad most suited to perform the role of proctor is necessary a somewhat—er—difficult one," he said. "The proctor

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the organ-grinder. "You are da gr-r-reat Mastah
on da poor starving musician—yes? You hava da
heart, Mastah Coke!" (See Chapter 5.)

must be a boy who is not already a prefect, and he must, of course, be one of very high attributes, both morally and physically. He must be a lad well suited to act as adviser and guardian to the junior members of the school.

"Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that the proctor had best be elected by popular vote. I shall give the school the opportunity of choosing its own proctor. Nothing would be more lamentable than to appoint a proctor who was unpopular, or did not pull well with his schoolfellows. The holding of an election will obviate that.

"In a few days' time I shall ask all Forms, up to and including the Upper Fourth, to choose, by election, a proctor from the ranks of the Fifth or Sixth. As regards candidature, this is open to all seniors who are not already prefects, and those wishing to put up for election as proctor should give in their names to me this morning. The school may now dismiss."

The boys of Greyfriars dismissed, all agog with the Head's announcement.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood in a group in the corridor outside, discussing the matter animatedly.

"Fancy a proctor for Greyfriars!" said Frank Nugent. "What the dickens next! I wonder if the Head thinks we need a giddy guide and moral uplifter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My word!" said Bob Cherry, as a heavy tread sounded on the corridor behind. "Here comes old Coker! I can hear his fairy footsteps. The poor chap was looking rather down in the mouth this morning, wasn't he?"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

The Removites turned to greet Coker, and when they saw him they could not help but notice a considerable difference in his demeanour.

Gone were Coker's gloom and dejection! He was walking along with head erect and chest thrust well out, and there was a strong, earnest look on his face.

He saw Harry Wharton & Co. staring at him, and he gave them a kindly nod as he passed by. The Removites blinked after Coker as he walked upstairs.

"My hat!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Coker looked jolly bucked all of a sudden. He actually condescended to notice us! What on earth has come over him?"

"His giddy resolutions are coming out strong again, I suppose," laughed Harry Wharton. "There's one thing about Coker, my sons—he's a sticker! Any other fellow would have been fed-up with giddy resolutions by now. Good old Horace—he always means well, doesn't he?"

"Rather!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Coker's a funny ass, but a harmless ass. But, I say, you chaps, he looks as though he's got something awfully important up his sleeve, doesn't he? I wonder what it is?"

Bob Cherry was not the only one who noticed that Coker seemed to have something "up his sleeve" that morning. Potter and Greene noticed it, and they grew very curious, but Coker would not divulge any information. Blundell & Co. noticed it, too, and came to the conclusion that Horace had further great things in mind that aimed at the fulfilment of his New Year resolutions.

But Blundell of the Fifth did not care to bother much about Coker just then. He himself had something very important in mind. The idea of becoming the Greyfriars proctor rather captured Blundell's fancy. He had often wished

to attain authority in the school, and had expressed his opinion more than once that fellows in the Fifth ought to be allowed to become prefects.

So Blundell went along to the Head's study and gave his name in as a candidate for the forthcoming election.

That afternoon, at about teatime, Dr. Locke pinned a notice on the board, and this was immediately surrounded by an interested throng.

A great shout of amazement went up at something the boys saw on that paper. This is the announcement it made:

"NOTICE!"

With reference to the appointment of a school proctor for Greyfriars, the following is a list of the candidates who wish to put up for election:

Benson, H. (Sixth).
Blundell, G. (Fifth).
Coker, H. (Fifth).

The date of the election will be announced later.

(Signed).

H. H. LOCKE, Headmaster."

It was the last name on that list that caught everybody's eye.

They understood now what it was that Coker had had up his sleeve all day. He had made up his mind to stand for the position as proctor of Greyfriars!

"My only winter chapeau!" ejaculated Peter Todd. "Then Coker has put up for the election! He wants to become the guardian of our giddy morals! He wants to be our proctor! What cheek!"

"The cheekfulness is terrific!"

It was cheek; there was no doubt about that. Pure, unadulterated, unvarnished cheek!

The Greyfriars proctor, so Dr. Locke had said, was to be an adviser and counsellor to the juniors. His duties were to keep kindly watch and ward over them and help them in their difficulties. He was to be a sort of guide, philosopher, and friend to the Lower School. And Coker—Horace Coker of the Fifth—aspired to fulfil that role!

No wonder Harry Wharton & Co. and all the juniors standing round said "Cheek!" No wonder Hurree Singh declared in his wonderful English that "the cheekfulness was terrific!"

"Blessed cheek!" said Bulstrode. "Who's Coker, anyway?"

"Echo answers who!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The blithering idiot ought to be bumped for his sauce in putting up for election!" said Bolsover major.

"Talk of angels!" chuckled Frank Nugent. "Here is Coker!"

Horace Coker came striding through the throng. He gave the juniors a very patronising smile; in fact, he looked quite beatific and benevolent. He had a paper in his hand, and, walking up to the notice-board, he affixed it there with a flourish.

The juniors were too interested in the paper to call Coker to account for his cheek. Coker strutted away, looking very important, and everyone's eyes turned to the notice-board.

The paper fixed there by Coker was written in his well-known hand and in his own inimitable style of spelling, and it was adorned with sundry blots and smudges. This is how it read:

"NOTISS TO THE LOWER SCHOOL AT GREYFRIARS!"

Whereas it has been announced by Dr. Locke that a Greyfriars Proctor is to be appoynted, I, the undersigned, begg to offer miself to the skool as a kandi-date.

I HEARBI call a meeting of the Elektorate in the Rag at six o'clock to receive mi Elektion Address.

It is hoaped that as manny of the Lower Skool as possible will tern up!

(Sined).

HORACE COKER."

There was a chuckle from the Removites grouped round the board. Coker's "Notiss" rather tickled them.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Johnny Bull. "Coker's called an election meeting in the Rag! He's going to deliver an election address! Oh, my hat! That ought to be worth hearing!"

"Rather!"

"I'm going!" said Bob Cherry promptly. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"Same here!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Let's rake up the giddy electorate, and we'll all go to Coker's meeting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker's notice, and the news that he was putting up as a candidate for the proctor's job, created a great sensation in the Lower School at Greyfriars. The Famous Five rounded up the electorate, and at six o'clock that evening quite a mob marched along to Coker's meeting.

Blundell, Fitzgerald, Bland, and a number of other Fifth-Formers stood at the end of the passage by the Rag, grinning.

The seniors were vastly amused at Coker's new exploit. Coker was serious in his determination to attain the position of proctor, but nobody took him seriously. Blundell & Co. seemed to regard the matter as a great joke.

This had made Coker indignant, of course, but gradually he had begun to take a philosophic view. It was jealousy—sheer jealousy on Blundell's part—that's what it was. Blundell had the nerve to aspire to be the Greyfriars proctor. Why, he couldn't even act efficiently as captain of the Fifth, and as for being captain of the Fifth Form football team—why, Blundell was a wash-out! That's how Coker looked at things, anyway; and he knew, because he—Coker—was always being shoved into a back seat by Blundell, and had actually been left out of the footer team.

But now, Coker thought, was the time to show Blundell what was what! Here was an excellent opportunity to attain his New Year resolves.

In his mind's eye, Coker saw himself already elected as proctor of Greyfriars—already he could see the juniors looking up to him as their mainstay and example, and worshipping him. In his role of proctor he would have plenty of scope to exercise his dignity and deportment, and to mete out his benevolence to the reverential fags who sheltered under his wing. That position would be the stepping-stone to higher things—to the captaincy of the Fifth, and perhaps he would eventually oust Wingate from the seat of the mighty and become captain of Greyfriars in his stead.

Coker, in fact, was quite carried away by his imagination, and it was in very confident mood that he strode along to the Rag to hold his first election meeting.

He turned his nose up at Blundell & Co. and walked on in high dudgeon.

They could cackle, the jealous asses. His-Coker's—turn was coming at last.

The Rag was crowded to capacity, and a thunderous roar greeted Coker's appearance. The Fifth-Former beamed at the ovation that was accorded him, and he bowed graciously to right and left as he walked up the gangway to the platform in front.

Mounting the platform, he turned and faced his audience. And that vast concourse of juniors gave him an encouraging cheer:

"Go it, Coker!"

"On the bawl!"

"Hurrah!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Stormy Meeting!

"GENTLEMEN—" began Coker, adopting a Napoleonic attitude.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen of the Lower School at Greyfriars—"

Toot, toot!

Coker gave a jump as the strident sounds of a motor-horn rang out over the hubbub.

"What's that rotten row about?" he demanded.

"It's only me!" grinned Bob Cherry, who had armed himself with an old motor hooter usually taken to footer matches when the juniors were spectators. "This is the signal for order!"

Toot, toot!

"Gentlemen!" bawled Coker. "This meeting is called—"

"Hear, hear!"

Toot, toot, toot!

"On this important occasion I rise to address you—"

"Hurrah!"

"I rise to address you—"

"Bravo!"

Toot, toot!

Coker paused, glaring. There was no chance for him to proceed until the noise had subsided. It was very gratifying to a candidate to see such enthusiasm in his audience, but at the same time it was almost impossible to make himself heard.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"On this important occasion—"

"Hurrah!"

"Order, order!"

"I rise before you—"

"Bravo!"

"I am here—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can see that, Coker!" yelled Trevor. "Where did you get that face?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker's visage was very red by now, and he was getting rather hoarse. He drew a deep breath, and plunged into his peroration with renewed vigour:

"Gentlemen, I am here to crave your attention for a little while!" he bawled. "I have come to say— Yarooooop!"

Coker really hadn't come to make that unintelligible remark; it burst involuntarily from his lips as a pat of butter, hurled by some unerring hand, struck him full in the mouth. Coker staggered back, spluttering, with the butter plastered all over his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Greyfriars electorate.

"Gerrugh!" gurgled Coker, clawing frantically at the clammy stuff on his face. "You little rotters—"

Toot, toot!

"Don't get waxy, Coker!" yelled Bolsover major. "Remember your

good resolutions! You mustn't create a bad impression by cutting up rusty, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker daubed at his face with a handkerchief, and managed to remove most of the butter. He swallowed his wrath—as well as a good deal of butter—with an effort, and proceeded:

"Gentlemen, this isn't a time for frivolity! We are gathered together to discuss a matter of vital importance to all! We must be circumspect—"

"Good word, that!" said Bob Cherry approvingly. "Coker must have looked it up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is imperative that we should view the situation with profound circumspection—"

"Hurrah!"

"And—and concentrate our votes—I—I mean, vote our thoughts—ahem!—that is to say— Hum!"

Coker paused, as if stuck, and he fished in his inner pocket for his notes.

But the audience were too enthusiastic to wait for Coker to consult his notes. Missiles began to whiz at the "stumped" orator from all directions, whilst Dicky Nugent & Co. at the back of the room produced their peashooters and sent forth a perfect barrage of peas.

Whiz! Bang! Wallop! Ping!

Coker danced about wildly on the platform, executing all manner of acrobatic feats in his frantic endeavours to dodge these missiles. A tomato hit him in the left eye, and an over-ripened egg squelched on his chin, and an orange in an advanced stage of decomposition landed on his nose, whilst a well-pumped-up football, "thrown in" by

Squiff, caught him in the region of the waistcoat, and bowled him over like a ninepin.

Thud!

"Yarooooop! Yah! Wow! Help! Ow-wow-wow!" roared the luckless candidate.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Rag ran with laughter until the windows rattled. Coker sprawled about amidst the litter on the platform, assailed by whizzing peas from all directions.

"Oh dear! Poor old Coker! He's having a high old time, isn't he?" gasped Bob Cherry, holding his sides. "I think we'll take pity on him, kids, and get him out!"

"Rather!"

Coker really looked as though he needed the aid of some Good Samaritan. Harry Wharton & Co., laughing, ran on to the platform. Although under fire themselves, they managed to drag Coker to the door.

Horace looked a sight for gods and men and little fishes!

The enthusiasm of the electorate had wreaked havoc with his personal appearance! His face was smothered with all manner of substances—chiefly rotten eggs and tomatoes—and his clothing was dusty and rumpled. His hair was matted and dishevelled, his jacket was split up the back, his collar was burst from its stud, and his tie dangled gracefully at the back of his neck.

Altogether Coker looked a wreck—an utter, complete wreck!

He staggered from the Rag, gasping and moaning, and Blundell & Co., who were still standing in the passage,

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Hearing a commotion in the Fifth Form passage, Blundell & Co., looked out of their studies and beheld Coker roped up in his study armchair. The unfortunate Fifth Former was making horrible noises, and uttering the most awful threats against Harry Wharton & Co.
(See Chapter 6.)

uttered roars of laughter when they saw him.

The youthful electorate of Greyfriars, still chortling with enthusiasm, trooped out of the Rag, and Blundell, Bland, and Fitzgerald smiled broadly.

"Well, so much for Coker's chances at the election!" grinned Blundell. "He doesn't stand an earthly, of course. I think, with a little judicious canvassing, I ought to pull off that proctor's job, and do old Coker in the eye—what?"

"Rather!"

And Blundell, Bland, and Fitzgerald went their way, to give the rest of the Fifth an account of Coker's election meeting in the Rag.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Campaigning for Coker!

"CHAPS, I've been thinking!"

Harry Wharton made that announcement in Study No. 1 the next day.

Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Inky, who were seated round the fire enjoying some roasted chestnuts, looked round curiously at Harry.

"You've been thinking, Harry?" said Nugent.

"Yes," said the Remove captain slowly. "About old Coker, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The mere mention of Coker's name was sufficient to evoke laughter from the chums of the Remove.

"Coker is still going strong in his election campaign," said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "That row we made in the Rag yesterday hasn't daunted him in the least. He's been canvassing all over Greyfriars for votes—"

"We saw him!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Poor old Coker didn't meet with much success, did he? They slung him out of the Second Form room, and the Third Form kids rigged up a booby trap in the passage when they saw him coming, and Temple's crowd pulled his leg no end when he went round to them asking for their votes. He seems to have been properly in the wars!"

"Yes, rather!" said Harry Wharton. "But, chaps, don't you think it's rather a shame? I mean to say, here's old Coker, fired with heaps of good resolves and simply full of manly intentions, waging an election campaign in the face of heavy odds, so that he can become proctor to little us!"

"My hat!" said Johnny Bull. "What are you sympathising with Coker for, Harry? He's such a fathead—"

"Yes; but don't you think Coker would make rather a good proctor?" said the captain of the Remove, with a chuckle. "Remember, kids, that the giddy proctor has got to be guardian of our morals. He's got to take the Remove under his wing, so to speak. Now, let us consider the candidates. Benson of the Sixth Form is all right, but I heard a little while ago that he had resigned from the lists. That leaves only Blundell and Coker."

"What-ho!" said Frank Nugent.

"Well, then, we have to choose between Blundell and Coker," said Wharton. "Blundell is a decent chap, and he's got his head screwed on the right way. But don't you think it would be heaps better fun if we had old Cokey as a proctor?"

Harry's chums looked at him for a moment, and then they burst out laughing.

"Why, I—ha, ha, ha!—I see the giddy drift of your remarks now, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 935.

Harry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Coker the proctor—it would be the joke of the term, of course!"

"The jokefulness would be truly terrific!" chuckled Inky.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton smote the table with his fist.

"Then it's settled!" he said. "We'll go on Coker's side! We'll all vote for Coker, and get the other chaps to vote for him, too! After all, Cokey should be given a chance to work off his New Year resolutions! He must be given an opportunity to show himself an hero. If he sticks to his giddy resolutions for long after becoming proctor, he'll be more than a hero—he'll be a martyr!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. arose and went forth to fight in Coker's cause.

A little while later Greyfriars was plastered with large, glaring placards. These placards were put up in all manner of conspicuous places—on the Hall door, in the gymnasium, in the corridors, on the trunks of the elm-trees in the Close, on the crossbars of the nets on the footer-field—everywhere in fact.

The placards bore this legend, painted in huge, bold characters:

"VOTE FOR COKER!"

Bob Cherry even went so far as to climb up on the roof of Gosling's lodge, and there, nailed to the chimney-stack, standing high aloft so that all Greyfriars could see, he left a placard with that compelling exhortation:

"VOTE FOR COKER!"

Horace Coker, when he saw these things, rubbed his eyes in amazement. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own optics. And he rubbed his eyes yet again when, gazing down from his study window, he saw a contingent of fags, headed by Dicky Nugent of the Second, marching round the quad, bearing sandwich-boards on their backs! On those sandwich-boards were scrawled, in glaring letters, the following election slogans:

"VOTE FOR COKER!"

"WE MUST HAVE HORACE!"

"THE PERFECT PROCTOR—COKER!"

and

"COKER FOR EVER!"

"Mum-m-my word!" stuttered Coker. "Wh-what the dickens!"

"Cheerio, Coker!" roared Bob Cherry, waving his cap cheerily from below. "Give your face a treat, old son—everything's all O.K.! We're acting as your election agents, you know! You can rely on the Remove for their votes! We're with you to a man! Vote for Coker!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the juniors who thronged the quadrangle.

Coker's face relaxed, and he gave a joyous gasp.

"Great Scott! Then the school's waking up at last!" he ejaculated. "Those Remove kids are backing me up! That shows they've got some sense, after all. They recognise my merits, and they want me to be their proctor! By Jove! That's great!"

Coker gave no thought, now, to the stirring election address he had been compiling at the table when his attention had been attracted to the window. He grabbed his cap and rushed downstairs.

A storm of cheering heralded Coker when he came out into the quadrangle. Removites and fags gathered round from every side, and Coker found himself surrounded by an admiring throng.

"Good old Coker!"

"We want him for Proctor!"

"Vote for Coker!"

"Hurrah!"

Coker looked round in great gratification.

"I'm glad to see you kids have come to your senses in time," he said. "The election comes off to-morrow, and it's jolly lucky you're not late in recognising my superior claims. I'll do the handsome by you all when I'm proctor. You'll have no need to worry, with me to come to for advice and protection, you know."

"Bravo!"

"The mighty Coker speaks!" yelled Peter Todd hilariously.

"Heir him and be thankful!" chortled Russell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Coker. You'll have to head the parade of giddy sandwich-men—or, rather, kids!" said Bob Cherry, tugging at Horace's arm. "You'll create a great impression, you know, marching round at the head of the procession!"

"Right-ho!" said Coker readily. "You kids are really sensible; I give you your due for that."

"Oh, thanks awfully, Coker!"

Dicky Nugent & Co. were lined up, with their sandwich-boards on their backs, and Coker took the head of the line. He looked round, his face wearing a most serious and earnest expression.

"Are you ready?" he rapped. "One—two—three! Quick march!"

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

Coker marched off, and the fags marched after him, and Harry Wharton & Co. and a crowd of juniors followed on behind, roaring.

Blundell & Co., crossing over from the gates, almost dropped when they saw that procession wending its way round the quadrangle.

"Gug-g-good lor!" ejaculated Bland. "It's Coker—running a sandwich-board procession! Oh, my only hat!"

"The burbling clump!" gasped Smith major. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker marched up, with the line of fags behind him, and he bestowed a triumphant grin on Blundell.

"Well, Blundell, how's the canvassing going?" he said. "I rather fancy this knocks you flat—what?"

It did!

Blundell gazed after Coker's procession as it marched on round the quadrangle, and he gave a growl. Everybody else was laughing at Coker, but Blundell could not see the funny side at all.

"The silly ass!" he snorted. "Fancy making an exhibition of himself like that! But—but he's got the juniors on his side, somehow. Oh crumbs! This looks like knocking me out of the running!"

The ringing of the bell for lessons brought Coker's electioneering procession to an end, and the juniors dispersed to their various Form-rooms, roaring with laughter.

It had now been decided by the Lower School generally that Coker would be "great fun" as a proctor. The juniors, with very few exceptions, were all going to plump for Coker.

And Coker, as he went in to lessons, walked as though on air, and his smile was most cheerful. At last, he thought, he was to come into his own. The proctor's job was as good as his!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Proctor!

"WELL?"

"What's the result?"

"Coker's won!"

"Hurrah!"

It was the following day, and the Hall at Greyfriars was crowded. The election for proctor had taken place that morning, and the whole of the Junior School had gone to the poll. Gwynne of the Sixth who, with Wingate, had been detailed to keep order at the polling-table in the Rag, had declared that all the juniors had gone "up the poll." But, then, the prefects were only taking a cursory interest in the election, as the issue did not affect them, and such cheap jokes were only to be expected.

The Famous Five and Squiff, Hazeldene and the Bounder came in from the quadrangle, eager to know the result. And when they heard it they chortled with the rest.

"Coker's won!"

"He's the giddy proctor!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There it was—written on the board in Dr. Looke's own handwriting. Harry Wharton & Co.'s election campaign on Coker's behalf had been successful. The great Horace was now the Lower School proctor.

Coker came into the Hall from upstairs, and he was greeted with a wild, enthusiastic roar.

"Here's Coker!"

"Here's the proctor!"

"See the conquering hero comes!"

"Chair him!" yelled Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five and a horde of Removites made a rush, and Horace Coker, before he knew quite what was happening, was whirled up on high by many hands.

"Bravo Coker!"

"You're our guardian angel now, old man!"

"Yaroooh! Yah! Groogh! Lemme down!" gasped Coker.

"Not much!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You've been elected proctor, Coker, and we're going to chair you. That's only right and proper, you know. Make way there for the mighty Caesar—I mean, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker's face was flushed with victory. Blundell had lost the proctorship by quite a considerable margin of votes. The juniors' votes—excepting those from the Upper Fourth—had been overwhelmingly on Coker's side, and he had simply romped home.

Now he had to bear his blushing honours thick upon him!

"Chaired" by the exuberant juniors, Coker was marched round the Hall and up the corridor.

A plump figure in cap and gown came whisking along in front. It was Mr. Prout!

The Fifth Form master stopped short when he saw that noisy throng approaching, with Coker mounted on high.

"Boys!" he exclaimed. "How dare you create this unseemly disturbance! What are you doing to Coker?"

"We're chairing him, sir!" chortled Peter Todd.

"Chairing him?" ejaculated Mr. Prout.

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "Coker's won the election! He's the proctor!"

"Coker—the proctor? Bah!" snorted Mr. Prout, quite the opposite to being impressed. "I refuse to sanction this ridiculous nonsense! Let Coker down immediately!"

Harry Wharton & Co. obeyed Mr.

Prout to the letter. They let go of Coker immediately, and the luckless proctor fell to the cold, hard linoleum with a resounding thud.

"Yaroooh!" roared Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!" grinned Nugent.

Coker lay on the floor in a most ungraceful attitude for a proctor, gasping and moaning dismally.

Mr. Prout gazed down expressively at his fallen pupil.

"Arise, Coker!" he exclaimed. "Don't make those ridiculous noises! Get up, sir!"

Horace rose painfully to his feet. He glared round at his enthusiastic admirers.

"You—you young asses!" he spluttered. "What did you let me down like that for? I'm hurt!"

"Never mind, Coker!" said Bob Cherry soothingly. "There's nothing like an even temperament and a pacific demeanour in times of trial and tribulation, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" cried Mr. Prout. "Coker, am I to understand that you have been elected into the position of proctor to the Lower School?"

"Ye-es, sir!" said Coker, summoning as much dignity as he could.

Mr. Prout gave another snort—a most emphatic snort.

"Ridiculous—absurd!" he exclaimed. "I regard the whole affair as a farce!"

You will kindly leave these juniors to their own devices, Coker!"

The Lower School proctor was only too glad to obey this behest.

Coker went away, walking with a decided limp, and Mr. Prout dispersed the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. and Hazeldene strolled downstairs, chuckling.

"Well, I wonder how Coker will enjoy his new job?" grinned Frank Nugent. "He's in for a rather rough time, I reckon! He'll stick to his guns, of course!"

"You bet he will!" said Bob Cherry. And Coker did!

Harry Wharton & Co. were expecting Marjorie, Miss Clara and Phyllis Howell over to tea that day, and Study No. 1 had been cleared up and garnished to receive the fair visitors from Cliff House.

There was to be rather a spread, too, and the Famous Five were in the tuck-shop later, buying the tuck, when Coker came in.

A good deal of laughter had been going on outside, and when the Removites saw the Fifth-Former they realised the cause of the merriment.

Coker was arrayed in a scholastic gown—a gown that had seen better days. It was very ragged in places, and its pristine black had turned to brown. Also, it was much too big for Coker, and it dangled round his legs at the back as he walked.



All unconscious of the ditch in front of him, Horace Coker turned round to raise his hat to the Cliff House girls. The next moment his legs gave way from under him, and with a fiendish roar he went plunging wildly downwards. "Yarooooooh!" he cried. "Groogh!" (See Chapter 7.)

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at Coker and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker glared.

"I want no laughter from you kids!" he rapped. "You must learn to treat your proctor with respect!"

"What—in that giddy gown?" sobbed Bob Cherry. "Where did you dig it up, Coker?"

"Look here——"

"It's an old gown belonging to Larry Tascelles!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Coker has evidently been doing some more rummaging in the store-room. Oh, my hat! What's the idea, Coker?"

"I'm the Lower School proctor, aren't I?" demanded Coker brusquely. "All proctors at colleges wear robes. I haven't got my robes yet, although I shall insist on having them! So I've put on this gown for the time being, as a mark of my authority!"

"Did you say insanity, Coker?" asked Frank Nugent sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker's frown deepened.

"Enough of this silly cackling!" he exclaimed. "I'm the proctor, and I've commenced my duties. I am looking after the welfare of you juniors, and I have come to supervise your orders in this tuckshop!"

The Famous Five exchanged glances.

"My hat! What awful check!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"The checkfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

Coker glared at the heap of good things that was piled up on the counter before Harry Wharton & Co.

"I can't allow this indiscriminate gorging in the Remove!" he rapped. "It isn't good for you kids. You'll be ill if you eat that lot!"

"But we're having friends to tea!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in exasperation. "Hang it all, Coker, we're not going to put up with this sort of petty interference! It's too thick!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't you answer me back, Wharton!" said Coker, in a grandiose tone. "I'm going to maintain an even temperament, mind, and be generous to you kids. At the same time I mustn't forget my dignity as a senior and the respect that is due to me as your proctor. Who are the friends you are having to tea?"

"Miss Marjorie, Miss Clara, and Miss Phyllis from Cliff House," replied Wharton warmly. "Hazeldene and Vernon-Smith will be coming, as well as the girls——"

"My hat!" said Coker. "So the Cliff House girls are coming to tea with you—what?"

"Yes; and we shall want all this tuck!"

Coker's demeanour changed.

"Very well, Wharton," he said. "You have my permission to buy what you like, under the circumstances. Don't glare at me like that, either. You must remember that I, as proctor, am your friend and protector, and there must be no bad feeling or I shall have to punch your nose—— I—I—mean, reprimand you severely. So-long, you kids. I'll see you later!"

And, with quite a gracious smile, Coker withdrew from the tuckshop, his gown dangling down behind him.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other.

"The silly duffer!" snorted Bob Cherry. "If Coker plays the giddy goat, now he's proctor, we shall have to see about unseating him, or making things so jolly hot that he'll have to resign. What exactly did he mean by saying that he'd see us later, Harry?"

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"I don't know," said Harry Wharton. "Some more of Coker's gas, I suppose."

The Removites went on with their purchases, whilst the Lower School proctor walked on across the quadrangle, hitching up his gown now and then, and made his way over to the fives-court, where a heated argument between Dick Nugent & Co. of the Second, and Tubb & Co. of the Third was in progress.

Coker, in his new role of proctor to the Lower School, was fully determined to fulfil it thoroughly, at whatever cost to himself. He was hungry to get really going, and when he heard the squabble in the fives-court he made direct tracks for the spot.

And, a few minutes later, the proctor of Greyfriars "got going" with a vengeance—and so did the fags! The squabble developed into a scrimmage, and the scrimmage into a riot, in which the well-meaning proctor was the central figure. By the time that riot was over, nothing could be seen of Horace Coker until the fags left the fives-court. Then—and only then—did the form and figure of the proctor appear. He was left sitting dazedly in the centre of the fives-court, looking dusty and dishevelled, and moaning in such a manner as to make it most apparent that, for all his good intentions, he had not succeeded in pacifying the fags, or elevating their morals to any extent!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Ruined Resolves!

TEA in Study No. 1 was going strong when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" called out Harry Wharton cheerfully.

The study was pretty full. Only by a considerable amount of wedging had the juniors succeeded in making room for their fair visitors. Marjorie, Clara, and Phyllis were looking very merry and bright as they sat at the festive board. That festive board literally groaned—as they say in the novels—under the weight of the good things that it bore.

The tap at the door was taken to mean that a new visitor had arrived, and the cheery party were quite ready to make him welcome, crowded as they were.

"It's Brownie, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "Come in, Brownie—Hullo, hallo, hallo! Coker!"

The juniors stared at the newcomer.

Arrayed in his tattered gown, and wearing a most propitiating smile on his rugged face, Horace Coker pushed himself into the room. He bowed to Marjorie & Co., and stood by the fireplace, rubbing his hands.

"Well, I've come, you kids!" he announced.

"Ye-es, Coker, we can see you've come," said Harry Wharton feebly. "What—ahem!—do you want?"

"Oh, I've just dropped in for a cup of tea and a friendly chat with you kids," said Coker condescendingly. "As the Lower School proctor"—Coker laid considerable emphasis on those words, and kept his glance fixed on Marjorie & Co., to see what impression he made on those young ladies—"as the Lower School proctor, of course, it is my duty to keep a protective eye on the youngsters under my care."

"Gug-g-great Scott!"

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed blankly at each other. Marjorie, Clara, and Phyllis looked surprised. Horace Coker, however, was quite at his ease. He rather regretted that the juniors did not seem to be overwhelmed at the distinguished honour of having him—Coker—to tea with them, especially now that he was a proctor. They should, by rights, have surrounded him and made a fuss of him, made way for him, so that he could get a seat at the table next to the girls, given him the best chair, and waited on him with becoming humility.

But, somehow, Harry Wharton & Co. didn't seem to think of that.

In fact, they behaved in quite a clumsy and far from obsequious manner.

Bob Cherry dug his elbow in Coker's ribs as he tried to force his way to the table, and Johnny Bull trod on his foot—quite by accident, of course!

Coker gave a yell, and commenced to jump.

"Yooooogh! You clumsy little rotter! Yah! My foot!"

"Sorry, Coker!" said Johnny. "You should get out of the way, you know. There's no room here!"

"Then why don't you make room?" demanded Coker hotly. "You can let me sit next to Miss Howell, Nugent!"

"Oh, can I?" said Frank, glowering.

"Yes," said Coker. "It's my duty as proctor, you know, to sit at the table to look after you kids. As a general rule, Miss Marjorie, I don't care about pigging with a gang of noisy fags, but now I have the responsibilities of my position to carry out, I don't mind. After all, one must be kind and benevolent to the youngsters."

"Oh dear!" murmured Miss Marjorie.

"What a dear, nice, condescending fellow Coker is!" sighed Miss Clara. "He puts things so nicely, and he's not a bit conceited, is he?"

"No; I'm afraid I'm a bit too modest," said Coker. "But it sets these kids a good example, of course. Lemme get at the table!"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged grim glances.

Coker as proctor might be good fun under some circumstances, but it was certainly no joke to have him "butting in" at their tea-party. It was too much of a good thing. Coker must be got rid of, promptly and permanently, and, Wharton, turning things over in his mind, had an idea.

He jumped up from his chair, and looked at the proctor with an air of meek humility.

"Take my seat, Coker!" he said. "Your place is here, at the head of the table, of course. We hardly know how to express our gratification at the honour of this visit."

The other Removites looked in wonder at Harry, and the Remove captain winked at them. Coker did not see that wink. He took Wharton's chair, and sat down at the table. He gathered his gown around his legs, and looked round with a patronising air.

"Are you comfortable, Coker?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Hum! I'm all right," said the Lower School proctor.

"Would you like a cushion, Coker—I mean, sir?" said Harry. "I'm sure you'd prefer to be called sir."

Coker looked pleased.

"Yes, you'd better call me sir," he said, with an impressive look at the girls. "As a proctor, I have a right to be called sir."

"Very well, sir!" chorused the juniors, taking their cue from Harry Wharton.

Marjorie & Co. tried hard not to

ANSWERS
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laugh. Coker's new role rather amused them.

"Tea will soon be ready, sir!" said Frank Nugent from the fireplace.

"Would you like some strawberry or raspberry jam, sir?" asked Bob Cherry.

"What about toast, sir?" said Squiff.

"Will you have your eggs boiled hard or soft, sir?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Try the esteemed sosses, sublime and honoured sahib!" said Hurree Singh solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker looked round, with a severe frown.

"Don't cackle in the presence of ladies, you little sweeps!" he rapped. "It's rude! Don't you know your manners?"

"We'll try to learn them from you, sir," said Harry Wharton humbly.

"Coker's just the right chap to teach us our manners," said Bob Cherry sweetly. "Aren't you, sir?"

Coker maintained a dignified silence.

The juniors busied themselves round the fire, and during the course of the operations—and while Coker was holding forth to Marjorie & Co. on the dignity and responsibilities of his position as proctor—Harry Wharton took an opportunity of passing certain whispered words round among his chums.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull thrust their way to the door.

"Please excuse me, sir," said Bob. "We'd better run along and get some more crocks."

"Huh!" said Coker majestically. "You're excused."

Bob and Johnny went. They returned ten minutes later laden with crockery, and wearing wide grins. Bob nodded significantly at Wharton.

The tea was made, and Frank Nugent was in the act of pouring it out, when there was a bang at the door. The sudden interruption made everyone jump, and—whether by accident or design is not known—Frank Nugent dropped the teapot on Coker's lap. The lid came off, and a flood of steaming hot tea went all over Coker's legs. The Greyfriars proctor jumped up with a fiendish roar:

"Yaroooooh! Ow! You clumsy little rotter! Yah! I'm scalded! You—you—"

"Coker!" cried Peter Todd, who had been responsible for the crash at the door, and who was now looking excitedly into the room. "Coker! Come at once! You're wanted!"

Coker blinked at the intruder.

"Grooogh! Who—ow!—wants me?" he gasped.

"Please come at once, Coker!" cried Peter. "You are the proctor, and you are the only one in the whole of Greyfriars to whom we can turn in our troubles! Someone will be in a frightful hole soon, and you must come, sir!"

Coker ceased to gasp, and he took on an air of majestic importance.

"Then somebody is in trouble?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!" cried Peter. "We want to stop a silly ass making a fool and a nuisance of himself! The services of the proctor are needed! Come on, Coker!"

Horace Coker turned to Marjorie & Co.

"Excuse me," he said. "My advice and assistance are apparently needed to get someone out of trouble. The youngsters need me, and, as their proctor, I must go. I'll be back shortly."

"Good-bye, Coker!" said Harry Wharton. "Come back if you can, won't you?"

"Oh, do come back, sir!" chorused the Co.

"MAGNET" PORTRAIT GALLERY.

No. 19—Herbert Vernon-Smith (of the Remove).



One of the most interesting characters at Greyfriars. Time was when Vernon-Smith was an out-and-out "rotter," a regular Ishmael. But all that has been lived down. Nowadays, his best friends—Harry Wharton & Co.—are the fellows whom he once counted his worst enemies. An excellent cricketer and footballer, a handy man with his "mitts," Smithy is a force to be reckoned with in the field of sport. One of his greatest traits is that he never acknowledges defeat, not because he is a bad sportsman, but because he is convinced that determination and resource will overcome any difficulty. The nickname of the Bounder still clings to him, but it has lost all its old harshness. Indeed, to-day, there is hardly a more popular member of the Remove than Herbert Vernon-Smith. Shares Study No. 4 with Tom Redwing—his greatest chum.

Coker strode away and followed Peter Todd along the corridor.

"This way, sir!" said Peter, leading the proctor down the dingy back stairs. "Oh, I hope you will be in time!"

"Why, what—" said Coker wonderingly.

"Follow me, Coker," said Peter in solemn tones. "You are the man for this job. Very shortly some silly ass will be in an awful hole!"

"Right!" said Coker. "You did the correct thing in calling on me, young Todd. Rely on me to help anyone in time of trouble!"

Peter gave a soft chuckle, but the proctor did not hear it.

Coker was led down the back stairs and out of the back door, into that part of the quadrangle where the school domestic quarters were situated.

No sooner had Coker rounded the corner of the housekeeper's block than there was a rush of feet, and he found himself seized upon violently from behind. The attack was so swift and sudden that Coker went down to earth before he realised quite what was happening. He gave a gasp when he saw himself in the hands of Peter Todd, Vernon-Smith, Tom Brown, and Mark Linley.

"Grooogh! Yow!" he roared.

"What's the game, you little rotters? Lemme go!"

"Not much!" chuckled Peter. "You're wanted, Coker! A chap will shortly be in a frightful hole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker commenced to shout and hit out wildly, but Vernon-Smith deftly rammed a handkerchief into his mouth and tied it there. Powerful though he was, Coker found himself helpless in the hands of the four lusty juniors.

While he was still struggling Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent came running up. They chuckled when they saw Coker in the hands of their Form-fellows.

"You've got that fathead, then?" grinned Harry. "Good egg! We've excused ourselves for a little while, so as to make sure that our giddy proctor is safe. This way to the coal-hole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker, gurgling, and rolling his eyes in a truly fearful manner, was dragged away by the Removites. They arrived at length at the spot where a large coal-hole was let in the ground. It was the entrance to the school coal-cellar, and was of goodly size.

Bob Cherry removed the large iron lid of the coal-hole, and Coker was

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hustled to the edge of the black, gaping aperture in the ground.

"A chap will shortly be in an awful hole," said Peter Todd solemnly. "This is the hole, Coker, and you are the chap! Savvy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you——"

Coker gurgled incoherently and renewed his struggles. But the juniors held him fast.

"You're going down the coal-hole. Coker, and there you will remain until our tea-party is over!" said Harry Wharton severely. "It's your own fault, you know, as you would come barging into our study. We don't want you interfering, and so as to keep you out of the way we have decided to shove you down here. Now then, you chaps, down with him!"

"Gerr-roooogh!" gurgled Coker furiously.

His legs and arms were grasped, and these limbs were bound securely with cord that Bob Cherry had in his pocket. Then Coker was thrust through the coal-hole and lowered into the depths.

"There's plenty of coal below, so it won't be much of a drop for Coker," said Harry Wharton, grinning.

"Don't go down in the mine, daddy!" sang Bob Cherry softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When Coker was down the coal-hole as far as his shoulders the juniors dropped him, and he disappeared with a rush.

A bump and a clatter of falling coal sounded from the black, noisome depths of the cellar below, and a faint gurgle arose:

"Oooooooogh!"

The lid of the coal-hole was replaced and the juniors ran away, chortling. They had effectively got rid of the interfering proctor. Coker, languishing in the depths of the coal-hole, would be quite safe until Harry Wharton & Co. chose to release him.

They all returned to Study No. 1, where fresh tea had been made and everything prepared for a glorious spread.

The addition of Peter Todd, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and the Bounder to that party increased the crush in Study No. 1 considerably, but the juniors' good spirits were by no means impaired.

Harry Wharton informed Marjorie & Co. that Coker would not be back, and the girls smiled and were wise enough not to ask questions.

The tea-party went on cheerily, and laughter and merrymaking were the order of the hour.

At last it was time for the Cliff House girls to go, and they left Study No. 1 reluctantly. Harry Wharton & Co. accompanied them down to the gates of Greyfriars and waved their caps to them in cheery farewell as they cycled off.

There was a motor-car standing by Gosling's lodge, and the juniors looked at it curiously as they turned back from the gates.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "It looks as though a visitor has arrived. I wonder who it is?"

"Somebody rather important, I should think," said Harry Wharton. "But let's go and have a look at Coker. The poor chap must be tired by now of rolling about on the coals. He'll raise a fearful shindy when he's released, of course, but it can't be helped. We can keep our end up with old Coker—what?"

"Ha, ha! Ratlier!"

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The chums of the Remove strolled across the quadrangle. They were rather taken aback, on rounding the corner that led to the back door of the School House, to see a crowd gathered in the vicinity of the coal-hole.

There were two outstanding figures in the crowd, and when their eyes beheld these personages Harry Wharton & Co. gasped.

One was Dr. Locke, and the other a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman, whom they recognised at once as Sir Philip Phadbury, one of the governors of Greyfriars.

"Dear me," the Head was saying, "what are these strange noises that are coming from below here?"

"It sounds like someone down in the coal-cellar, sir," said Temple of the Upper Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys!" said the Head. "This is no laughing matter. Sir Philip, I trust——"

"Never mind me, sir!" said Sir Philip Phadbury. "If there is a boy down there he must be fetched out and summarily dealt with. Where is the school proctor, whom, I understand, has just been elected? He should be here. It should be part of the proctor's duty to see that no boy perpetrates such tricks as prowling in a coal-cellar. As a matter of fact, Dr. Locke, I came here specially to see whether my suggestion of appointing a proctor had been carried out, and I should like to see the boy who has been elected. However, we will leave that matter till later. This—er—affair demands immediate investigation."

Dr. Locke bent over the lid of the coal-hole and stamped his foot upon it.

"Who is there?" he rapped in a loud voice.

"Gerroo-roooogh!" came a queer, muffled gurgle from below.

"Bless my soul! What——"

Crash! Tumble! Clatter! Crash!

Sounds of falling coal came from the confines of the cellar, followed by a sudden yell.

"Yarooogh Yah! I'm free now! Oooogh!"

Harry Wharton & Co., who had gathered round closely, exchanged startled looks.

"Oh jeminy!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Coker's got rid of his bonds! Now we shall hear some music!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look!" yelled Frank Nugent. "Here's comes Coker!"

Dr. Locke, Sir Philip Phadbury, and

the crowd drew back in wonderment as the lid of the coal-hole began to rise.

Then the head and shoulders of Horace Coker appeared, and the voice of Coker sounded in accents of deepest woe:

"Groooooogh! Yah! Oh dear!"

Coker was in a truly awful state. His hair was ruffled and dishevelled, and was positively full of coal dust. His face, too, was almost as black as a nigger's. And the gurgles and gasps he gave vent to were remarkable to hear.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dr. Locke, in amazement. "Is it—can it be—Coker?"

"Yerrugh!" said Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the crowd.

"Coker!" said the Head dazedly. "You—you have been down there, Coker, Marauding amongst the coal!"

Coker struggled out of the coal-hole and stood upright. Now that the whole of his person was on view he looked funnier than ever. His clothes were smothered with coal-dust, and bore rents in several places. The gown in which he had draped himself was now in a more tattered and torn condition than ever. It hung from his shoulders in a series of shreds, and the effect was comical.

The boys standing round gazed at the ex-denizen of the coal-hole, and they yelled.

"Silence, boys!" commanded Dr. Locke angrily. "Coker, how dare you play such a trick! You—the proctor, who should be setting an example to the other lads—you dare to make such a ridiculous exhibition of yourself!"

"Proctor!" ejaculated Sir Philip Phadbury. "Surely, Dr. Locke, this is not the proctor!"

"This, Sir Philip, is the boy who was elected as proctor, according to your suggestions," said the Head grimly. "I was afraid from the beginning, that the scheme would not be successful at Greyfriars, although I proceeded to put it into execution, in deference to your wishes."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Sir Philip.

Dr. Locke fixed Coker with a stern gaze.

"Coker, you foolish youth, have you no word to say for yourself?" he said. "Have you no explanation of this absurd affair to offer?"

Coker choked.

"I—I—I didn't go down there of my own accord, sir!" he managed to splutter at last. "I was shoved into the cellar by a gang of unruly juniors——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the onlookers, stricken afresh with a paroxysm of mirth.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Coker, is it possible that you—although acting as proctor—is it possible that you allowed yourself to be thus victimised by the juniors, over whom you should have been exercising a moral control?"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Coker.

"The boy is a fool—a big, clumsy dolt!" exclaimed Sir Philip Phadbury petulantly. "What a ridiculous figure to cut in front of the juniors! This lad does not appear to be a suitable proctor, Dr. Locke!"

"That was my opinion from the first, Sir Philip," replied Dr. Locke, a little tartly. "Personally, I consider a proctor to be quite superfluous at Greyfriars. The prefects, in whom I have every trust and confidence, are quite capable of dealing with all matters that are likely to come within the scope of a proctor."

Sir Philip Phadbury gave Coker a very expressive look.

(Continued on page 28.)

YOU REALLY MUST GET
YOUR CHUMS TO READ—

QUELCHY'S QUEER
ADVENTURE!

By

FRANK RICHARDS

Next week's topping yarn
of Harry Wharton & Co.

in

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THE WOLVES! Stab-in-the-back foemen, capable of any villainy, the Wolves cross Ferrers Locke's path at every turn. It's the Green Spider they want, however, for this weirdly-shaped ring holds the secret of the hiding-place of a vast treasure!

THE MYSTERY OF LONE MANOR!



Strovolsky!

THE knife-point caught the detective on the shoulder, gliding off the brass-work that had taken the deadly point. Again Locke struck at the hand that held it, knocking the forearm back.

There came a sudden rush of silver bubbles, spurring out and up, gushing from a rent in the rubber—the traitor had cut through his own suit. The knife went twisting down to the mud below as the man's clawing hands waved slowly, dreadfully. Kicking and struggling, the drowning man let go his hold of Ferrers Locke, and followed downward after the knife that had brought his own doom—the doom he had meant for Ferrers Locke!

Twisting and writhing, the diver lay on the mud, that fearful stream of air still spouting from his rent suit. A sickening horror seized Ferrers Locke as he was hauled up into the brighter green above.

And then, abruptly, he felt himself choking, fighting for breath, struggling for the air that had suddenly ceased to come!

And, in a moment, the detective knew the truth!

His air-pipe had become entangled with the lines of the drowning man.

Ferrers Locke felt his senses reeling.

He had ceased to rise now. The tangled lines had even dragged him down a little as the other man had gone swaying to the bottom.

Locke's head felt as though it were bursting. Choked and suffocated, he fought for breath within the confines of the diving-helmet, his brain singing. There were dreadful shooting pains behind his eyes—

And then Ferrers Locke's senses left him.

When he came round, it was to find himself lying in the launch, still in the diving-suit, though with the helmet

removed. And near him lay something else, at sight of which realisation of all that had happened came back to him in a flash.

The man who had posed as the diver, Walters, was dead.

The faces of Jack Drake and Tom Travers, and of the men with them, were more than grave as they bent over Ferrers Locke, the same startled, questioning horror in the eyes of each.

But before he spoke, Locke's hand went to the bag at his waist. The green spider was still there, safe.

The detective lay inert, drinking in the cold, sweet air. A grim smile flickered at the corners of his mouth.

INTRODUCTION.

Adam Guelph mysteriously disappears, and Tom Travers enlists the aid of Locke and Drake to find him. This they eventually do, for the old man has been kidnapped by the Wolves. But Guelph's rescuers are unable to discover the motive of the Wolves in capturing him, for the old miser is suffering from brain fever. Locke and his companions therefore set themselves the task of unravelling the mystery. After a series of thrilling hand-to-hand encounters with the Wolves, Locke & Co. learn that the Green Spider—an emerald ring resembling in shape a spider—holds the secret of the whereabouts of a vast hoard of treasure, and that it is this ring and the treasure it will lead to that the Wolves are seeking. This ring is given into Travers' keeping by Armitage, the butler, who knew of its hiding-place.

The Wolves, however, succeed in capturing the Green Spider; but in the chase across the Thames estuary that ensues their yacht is sunk—and the Green Spider sinks with it! Eager to regain the ring, Ferrers Locke engages a diver, and goes down beneath the water to superintend operations himself. No sooner has Locke secured the coveted ring, however, than the "professional" shows himself in his true colours—for he is an agent of the Wolves! A desperate fight ensues, and Ferrers Locke sees the glittering knife-point of his assailant plunging down at him!

(Now read on.)

"But what in heaven's name has happened?" muttered Tom.

"He attacked me!" said Locke quietly. "He is an agent of the Wolves. In the struggle below, his suit was ripped with the knife he tried to use on me. You can guess the rest."

There was a shadow in Locke's eyes as he spoke. Despite his steel nerves, that grim scene in the depths had been a shock to him.

"We realised at last that something had gone wrong," Jack Drake muttered, "and we hauled up as fast as we could on both lines. But this—crumbs, we never dreamed of this!"

"That," answered Locke slowly, "is a characteristic of the Wolves—one never dreams, till afterwards, what they are about to do next!"

* * *

The story told to Ferrers Locke, by Betts, the old diver, that night was just what the detective had expected.

Betts had been lured into a motor-car and driven some way out of Easterough, and had spent the night under the eagle eyes of his captors in a disused cottage on the Yarmouth road. By his description of his captors, it was clear enough that they were Silva, Scaramanga, and Kyushu themselves.

They also learnt from him that his mate, Walters, had been called away from the town by a faked telegram. Of the man who had posed as Walter—nothing was known at all. He was a stranger in the town.

Thanks to Locke's influence, they were able to leave Easterough without waiting for the coroner's inquest. Locke went to the village where he had left his car, the White Hawk, and that evening the detective, Jack and Tom Travers set off back to London.

Tom had been in communication with his management, and it had been

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agreed that he was to be allowed to recuperate from his present unfitness at Lone Manor, on condition that he was in the hands of a reliable doctor. Tom's trainer knew the young goalkeeper, and trusted him.

As the powerful car hummed along the Essex roads towards London, Tom examined curiously the ring that Locke had salvaged from the sunken River Ghost.

"Hanged if I can see how this thing can contain the secret of this hoard of jewels, Jack!" the footballer muttered. "There doesn't seem to be any mark upon it!"

"It's rum!" agreed Jack Drake. "Still, I s'pose we shall know all about it sometime. When your uncle gets better, he may tell us."

"Anyway," laughed Locke, "it's none of our business, the secret of this hidden treasure. Our job is simply to see that the Wolves don't get their greedy claws on it again!" He broke off suddenly. "Hullo, don't like the sound of that!"

"What's up, guv'nor?" asked Jack.

"Listen to the engine," returned Locke, slowing down a little.

There was no doubt that the White Hawk was not running as she should. A faint knock could be heard from the engine, which Locke's sensitive ear had detected immediately.

They had intended to motor on to Lone Manor that evening, but now the detective changed his plans.

"Can't have the car going wrong!" he said. "I'll leave her in town to be tuned up—she's needing it. We'll go down into Kent by train."

So seven o'clock found the three in a first-class compartment of a train that steamed out of Charing Cross over the dark-flowing Thames.

At Travers' request, the green spider was in Locke's keeping for the time being. As he pulled at his pipe in his corner seat, the detective's keen eyes were thoughtful.

"As I've said," he remarked suddenly, "it is none of our business, the whereabouts of this treasure Silva spoke of. But it would be uncommonly interesting to know where these wonderful jewels are hidden. Personally, my theory is one that may surprise you."

"What, d'you mean to say, guv'nor, you know where the treasure's hidden—without having solved the problem of that giddy green spider?" cried Jack.

Locke shook his head with a laugh.

"I don't know, young 'un—it's only a theory, as I say."

"Well, where do you think the jewels are? You're probably dead right!"

"At Lone Manor!" murmured Ferrers Locke.

"What!" cried Tom Travers, sitting up in his seat with a jerk. "What on earth makes you think that?"

"Suppose we look back a bit," went on Locke, puffing at his pipe. "You remember, Tom, the dread your uncle, Adam Guelph, had that the Wolves might visit Lone Manor?"

"Rather. He was terribly scared at the thought of that, as I know now."

"But why?" asked Locke.

"Because the ring was hidden at the house," returned Tom Travers.

But Locke shook his head.

"Had that been the only reason, he needn't have kept the ring there. He might have banked it."

"Then he was scared of the Wolves for what they might do," exclaimed Travers. "We know what human vultures they are. He feared their vengeance if he refused to reveal the secret he held."

Again Locke shook his head.

"If so, why stay down at Lone Manor, far from help if the Wolves should come—as in the end they did? He would have been safer in London." The detective leaned forward suddenly, his eyes gleaming. "No, it can't be fully explained that way. But suppose these jewels are actually hidden at the house? He daren't try to move them from Lone Manor, for fear that the Wolves are watching. And they were watching, too, like hawks—two were actually in the house as servants, had the old man only known. He daren't try to move the treasure, yet he will not desert his post. True to his trust, Adam Guelph stayed on, guarding the valuables entrusted to him by his Russian friends."

"You think that?" breathed Travers.

"I'm certain of it!"

"But why should he hide the treasure at Lone Manor in the first place?" objected Travers doubtfully.

"Silva himself told us that," smiled Locke. "The Russians, naturally, were not going to run the slightest risk of their Government's collaring the stuff! Mind you, I think they were wrong in thinking the Russian Government would have the power to claim this wealth, even though it had been declared forfeit. But how are they to know anything of English law as Silva said? They won't run the shadow of a risk, very naturally."

Travers stared out of the window, frowning. Suddenly he turned his head.

"You're right!" he cried. "I feel sure you're right! But if the treasure is at Lone Manor, why this queer business of the ring?"

"No doubt that was arranged before the treasure was taken to Lone Manor," answered Locke. "They'd have to fix up something, you see, in case your uncle died before the owners were able to claim their hidden property. Without doubt it was decided that Adam Guelph should conceal the treasure where ever he thought fit, and should afterwards send this ring to a representative of the Russians, telling them where he had hidden it, in case anything happened to him. To put that knowledge on paper in a letter that might be intercepted was obviously dangerous. But when the time came your uncle, Tom, was too scared that the Wolves were watching him to send even this ring, for fear that it might come into their hands and its secret be discovered."

The train, which had long been racing through London's suburbs, had reached the open country at last. Dark fields and hedges were flashing by in the dim moonlight, and the occasional light of some lonely farmhouse.

The train was not an express. It was stopping at all but the very unimportant stations. It was as they were drawn up alongside the platform at Shorley Junction that Jack Drake suddenly turned his head, listening.

"Hear that?"

The other two listened.

Coming down the dark, ill-lit platform could be heard a sound that had struck a sudden chord of memory in Jack's brain.

Tap, tap! Tap, tap! Tap, tap—

"What about it?" asked Tom Travers. Jack laughed.

"It reminded me, that's all," he answered slowly. "It made me think of Drood, the blind man. The tapping of a blind man's stick—"

Drake rose to his feet, and put his head out of the carriage window, staring up the platform.

Tap, tap, tap—

The sound was dying away, and

ceased abruptly. Apparently the blind man, whoever he was, had got into a carriage higher up the train. The guard's whistle shrilled, and with a jerk the train began to move again.

Heavy clouds were rolling up, obscuring the moon. It was none too warm in the carriage, and Travers, rather "groggy" as he was, shivered.

"Jolly cold!" he said. "It looks to me like more snow before the night's done."

"Good!" chuckled Jack. "We might get some skating on that giddy moat at Lone Manor."

The train was again decreasing in speed. Evidently they were approaching another station.

With the wheels clanking over points, the train drew to a standstill once more. Far in the rear of the train as the three were, the platform opposite their compartment was dark and unlit.

Footsteps could be heard approaching down the platform. Then they halted, and the handle of the compartment in which Ferrers Locke and his companions were was turned. Locke, Jack, and Jim were seated on the farther side of the carriage, and instinctively all three turned their faces towards the man who was opening the door.

He was a broad-shouldered, bearded man, with a felt hat pulled down over his heavy brows, and a coat collar that was turned well up. He stood on the wooden step, staring in, but made no attempt to enter farther.

Suddenly he spoke, and his voice was not quite English.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ferrers Locke and gentlemen!"

At the words the man drew from the side pocket of his heavy overcoat a snub automatic. It glinted menacingly in the light of the carriage lamp as it was directed towards the three seated at the far end of the compartment.

"My name," went on the stranger evenly, "is Strovolsky. I am a member of the Wolves. Possibly you have heard my name. The train is almost empty, the platform is deserted for a long, long way down. And I assure you that I am not in the least afraid to shoot."

Strovolsky!

They knew that name! Old Armitage, the butler at Lone Manor, had told them of Strovolsky, the Russian member of the Wolves!

"And now," went on Strovolsky, in the same low, even tones, "I must demand the green spider!"

The Commandeered Locomotive!

JACK DRAKE stared dumbly at the sinister figure at the open door of the railway-carriage.

Strovolsky, the Russian, with his broad-brimmed, black felt hat pulled tightly down over his shaggy brows, and his heavily-bearded face almost hidden, was a startling figure to see at a quiet English country station! But that menacing automatic in his hand was real enough—as was the Russian's quiet threat: "Believe me, I shall not be afraid to shoot!"

That was true enough, they knew. That could be read quite plainly in Strovolsky's eyes. Unless his coolly audacious demand were complied with, or if the three showed signs of resistance, that steady rim of steel would flash out its message of death.

Jack Drake wondered for a moment if he were dreaming. Could this be a serious attempt on the part of the Wolves to regain possession of the coveted green spider? Here, at a public railway-station? It was staggering!

And yet, one glance at Strovolsky's eyes assured him that it was real enough. The man was in grim, deadly earnest. It was a bold stroke, typical of the methods of the Wolves. Yet why not? At this lonely, deserted station, where the locomotive on their train was taking in water, with its dark, empty platform, and the almost empty train, why should not this audacious demand be carried out? With that sinister automatic in the Russian's hands, and the whole length of the carriage between them, they were powerless. Strovolsky held the whip-hand.

"Quick!" cried the Russian. "I repeat that I shall not hesitate to shoot! Mr. Locke, toss me the green spider, and I will catch it. But make no other movement—"

As he spoke, a faint sound had been drawing nearer down the platform—tap, tap, tap; tap, tap!

The stick of the blind man! Jack Drake had heard it before that night, but now, in a flash, he knew that his first vague suspicions had been true! This, surely, was Drood, the blind man!

Even as the thought passed through the youngster's head, the grim, sightless face of Drood came into the range of the light that fell out on to the platform from the lamp in Locke's compartment.

To Jack there was always something uncanny, horrible, about Drood. He felt a cold thrill down his spine now as he watched the blind man's face.

Drood was smiling that dreadful smile of his. His groping hand found Strovolsky's shoulder, and he turned his face towards the lighted carriage.

"So you have found them, Strovolsky?" muttered Drood, a soft, gloating note in his voice. Suddenly he laughed harshly. "Would that I could see them now. I'll wager their faces are a study! Mr. Locke, good-evening to you, sir! I am delighted that we meet again!"

"The pleasure is mine, Mr. Drood," returned Locke, smiling coolly. He was still sitting in his corner, leaning back as though utterly unconcerned. At Strovolsky's first appearance his eyes had widened for a moment in quick surprise, but now Ferrers Locke was quiet and unruffled, as though in his Baker Street study.

He laughed easily.

"Really, gentlemen, do not be ridiculous!" he murmured. "Of course I shall not hand the green spider over to you, even if I have it on me, which I do not admit."

Strovolsky's lips tightened.

"We know you have it with you—either you, or the footballer, Travers! I am getting impatient!" He tapped

Ferrers Locke felt himself choking, and a sickening horror seized him as he realised that his air-pipe had become entangled with the lines of the drowning man! (See page 23.)



his automatic with the forefinger of his left hand. "Quick, I say!"

Jack's eyes were on Locke's face.

What would the gov'nor do? With the Russian framed in the carriage door, and the length of the carriage between him and them, there was no hope at all of attacking the man successfully. Would Locke dare rely on the man's reluctance to act upon his threat to shoot? Not that Strovolsky would hesitate long, Jack felt convinced! In this deserted station, hemmed in by the night, it would be easy enough to shoot Locke dead in his seat, and escape into the darkness.

Travers, too, in the corner seat opposite Locke, was watching the detective breathlessly. Locke's face was a miracle of smiling nonchalance.

"I have something to tell you, Mr. Strovolsky," said Locke.

"What is that?" jerked the Russian impatiently.

"I would suggest a brief holiday for

you, Mr. Strovolsky," smiled Locke—"in Jericho!"

And even as he drawled out the deriding words, Locke acted.

In a flash his arm came swinging up, and in his hand was his walking-stick. There came a shattering crash of glass. With a quick, sweeping stroke, Locke had shivered the electric lamps in the roof of the carriage to atoms. In a moment they were in darkness.

Instantly Strovolsky's automatic cracked out.

Tom Travers saw the spurt of lurid flame, felt a sudden stinging pain across the back of his hand, as the bullet grazed along the skin. Then, with another crash, the window beside him fell from its frame in a hundred pieces, tinkling down to the side of the line in the darkness. The young footballer started to his feet with a cry, and was knocked sideways as the detective sprang from his seat towards the open door.

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But, in the confusing blackness, Locke missed his footing as he tried to avoid Jack Drake. He staggered, and clutched at the luggage-rack to steady himself. He heard someone come jumping into the carriage.

Locke ducked, expecting a second bullet to come ripping through the dark. But it did not come. He dived towards the man who had sprung in, and as he groped blindly for his foe, a smashing blow on the heart staggered him. He reeled, and hit out in answer, but he could see nothing, and his fist found only air.

There was a mocking laugh in the darkness, a laugh in the voice of Drood.

So it was the blind man! A lucky blow it must have been, thought Locke, to have found his heart—lucky for Drood, that was! And the detective felt a quick admiration for Drood's pluck. It needed grit on the part of a blind man to attack, even in the dark. For a blind man must be all but helpless.

Again came Drood's mocking laugh, followed a second later by a terrible, smashing blow straight between the eyes. Blinded, Locke pitched sideways. A third blow thudded upon his jaw, clean and crisp. Three straight, well-aimed blows in the dark—from a man who was supposed to be blind!

And in that moment there came to Ferrers Locke for the first time the doubt—was Drood really blind, after all?

Jack and Tom were on their feet now, groping through the blackness. They had heard those crashing blows, but neither suspected yet that it was Locke who was down. They had heard Drood's laugh, knew that it was the blind man with whom Locke was struggling; but how could a blind man have knocked out Ferrers Locke?

But in the darkness Drood was stooping over Locke, a dreadful smile upon his face. The dazed detective felt a cold rim of steel biting into his temple.

"My winning trick, I fancy!" murmured Drood. "Lie still, or you are a dead 'un, you meddlin' fool!"

Locke's head was aching from those terrible blows. He felt Drood's free hand run swiftly over him, heard the gloating laugh from the blind man—if blind he were! The next instant Drood had straightened himself, had leapt from the carriage. Tom and Drake heard the running footsteps of Drood and Strovolsky, as they raced off down the platform.

Ferrers Locke staggered to his feet, his aching head caused queer lights to dance before his eyes.

"He's got the green spider!" cried Locke swiftly. "After him! It was Drood! The man's not blind, I swear! After them!"

He tumbled out of the carriage, Jack and Tom at his heels.

A light rain had begun to fall, intermingled with snow. Farther up the train a few heads were protruding, but the train, as Strovolsky had said, was almost empty. From up the platform came the sound of hurrying feet. A hoarse shout rang out, and by the lights from the carriages, Jack saw a little knot of men, headed by the guard, running towards them.

The revolver-shot, and the noise of the breaking glass, had not been long in bringing an excited handful of passengers on the scene. Even as Locke turned to race down the platform after Drood and Strovolsky, a firm hand grasped his shoulder.

"Not so fast, my man!" It was the guard, a red-faced, burly individual, a grim light in his eyes. "What's all this here, eh?" he demanded. "Eh? What's all this here, eh?"

Locke shook himself free.

"A couple of crooks," he said in quick, cool tones. "They've bolted that way."

He turned to run down the platform, but again his shoulder was gripped by the guard. Tom and Jack Drake, too, were seized and held.

"Let me go, you ass!" cried Travers impatiently.

"Hold him!" commanded the guard majestically. "This wants lookin' into. an' I says, I says—"

What the portly guard said was never known. Ferrers Locke planted a steady hand in the man's waistcoat and pushed. The guard sat down on the hard, cold platform with a muffled roar.

"Hold him!" he bellowed. "They're wrong 'uns, and what I says is—"

Already he was scrambling to his feet. A large damp patch on his trousers showed that the platform was rather too wet to have been comfortable.

A tall, thin countryman was trying to take possession of Jack Drake. He little realised that he was attempting a 'ob which scores of men had tried before and failed to accomplish. Jack's anger was rising, and his fist shot out. The lean man doubled up over his last meal with a breathless grunt, and at the same moment Travers fought free from the three men who were trying to hold him.

"You fools!" gasped Jack angrily. "Don't you know a real crook when you see one? They're getting away, thanks to you."

"Look at that, man!"

It was the voice of Locke, angry and impatient. The detective had snatched out a card case, and by the light of the guard's lantern was thrusting it out for inspection. The red-faced official gave a gasp of sheer amazement, a sound, as Jack remarked afterwards, more like a punctured balloon than anything.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped the guard. "Mr. Ferrers Locke! The famous detective! An' I near hit him! Lawks, sir, but it was a misunderstanding, and I—"

"Never mind that!" cried Locke. "Get out of the way, that's all we ask."

Breathless with amazement and consternation, the little knot of men fell back, and the three darted down the platform.

The light rain was turning to a softly-falling powder of snow. On the wet platform the tracks of Drood and the Russian could be seen dimly by Locke's keen eyes, almost obliterated though the tracks were by now.

Down the sloping end of the platform they led, in among the dark sidings. The high black outlines of goods trucks loomed around them in the darkness, and the footprints of the fugitives were soon lost utterly. The three pursuers came to a halt in the centre of a railway track a couple of minutes later, and Locke's face was set with chagrin.

"If those idiots hadn't collared us we'd have been on the heels of the Wolves!" he muttered. "As it is—"

He broke off abruptly.

Jack Drake had gripped his arm, had flung out a pointing hand.

"There they go, guv'nor!"

Two shadowy shapes had been outlined for a moment not far away, stealing along a line of coal-trucks. Once more the three broke into a run. Instantly the fugitives raced off into the darkness.

The snow was thicker now, falling steadily in ever larger flakes.

It was like a game of blind-man's buff, stumbling on over the maze of sidings, weaving their way among the stationary wagons, stumbling over the sleepers and steel rails. They were hot on the heels of the fugitives one moment, the next they had lost them. Then they would pick up the trail again, and the hunt recommenced.

Once Strovolsky or Drood sent a bullet whining back towards their dogged pursuers. It flew wide, and buried itself into the wooden side of a truck. Locke laughed grimly.

"An unsteady hand there," he muttered.

The detective himself had an automatic in his pocket, but he was not using it yet. As they ran on the shrill whistle of a locomotive cut through the night.

"Look out for traffic on these lines," cried Travers warningly.

The three paused again, listening. There came no sound of the men ahead. Then out of the swirling whiteness to their right there loomed the shape of a slowly-moving tank-locomotive. Its pistons were pounding sluggishly, but gradually gathering speed. It passed near them, on another line, and suddenly Travers gave a shout:

"Look! There, on the footplate!"

Jack and Locke peered through the gloom.

The lurid glow from the locomotive's firebox lit up the four figures on the footplate.

"Great Scott!" cried Jack Drake, and broke into a run. "They're commandeering that loco!"

Increasing in speed, the engine swept by twenty feet away, and by the light from the firebox they saw Drood and Strovolsky with automatics clapped to the heads of the driver and fireman.

Swiftly the tank-engine was drawing away from them. Drood's harsh, mocking laugh came floating back to them through the swirling flakes.

On the Main Line!

TOM TRAVERS' face was aghast. They had never dreamed of such a coup as this on the part of the hunted men. But Drood and Strovolsky were playing for high stakes, and they did not mean to lose.

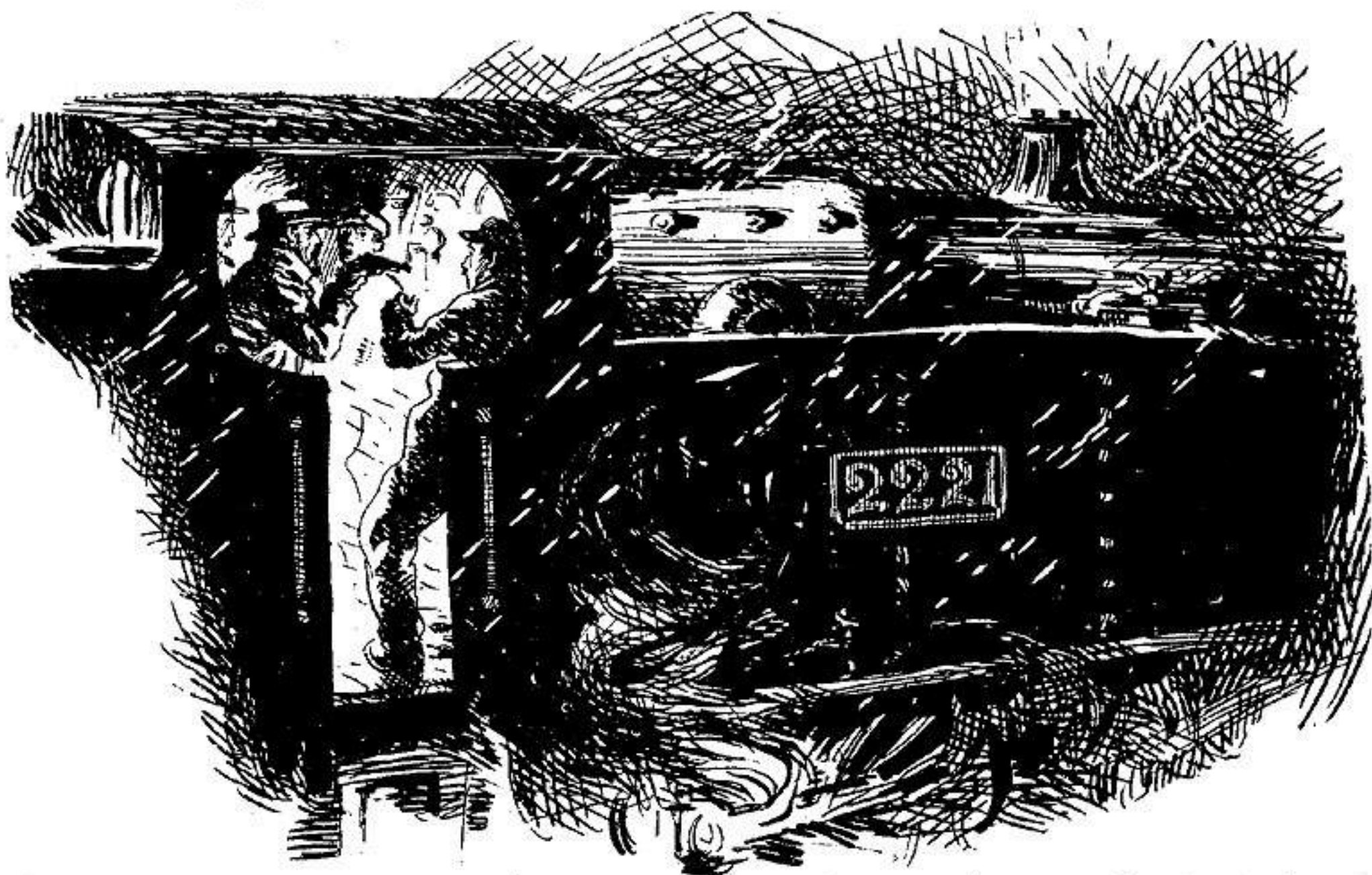
They had slipped through the fingers of Ferrers Locke, carrying with them that mysterious ring which held the clue to the treasure of jewels which Locke believed to be hidden at Lone Manor. Slipped through the detective's fingers with a mocking laugh, or had they?

Jack Drake, at any rate, was not so sure.

Already the pursuers were sprinting through the gloom. The tank-locomotive had not a very swift acceleration, and Jack was out to beat records this time.

Travers, badly unfit, was dropping behind. Locke caught his foot against one of the metal chairs of the track, and staggered, losing ground. But Jack, forging ahead in fine style, was overhauling the pounding locomotive as it puffed on through the falling snow.

Just what was in the youngster's mind Jack did not quite know himself. But if he could once gain the footplate—well, there would be three to two, armed though the two were. Despite those automatics, Jack fancied that he and the two railwaymen ought to be able to give some account of themselves.



By the light from the firebox Drood and Strovolsky were to be seen covering the driver and fireman with their automatics. (See page 26.)

The tail-light of the tank-engine was nearer now. A cloud of rolling steam damped down by the snow, swept past the lad's face. He was almost level now with the spinning wheels beneath the tank—

"My heavens! It's the youngster, Drake—"

It was Drood's voice, and Jack could see the man's heavy-jawed face staring down at him through the gloom.

"So you're not blind!" thought Jack grimly. "What was your giddy game; eh, pretending to be?"

"Locke's brat?" echoed the snarling voice of Strovolsky.

And then Jack hurled himself for the rail by his head, and hauled himself up on to the steel step.

"Throw him off!" cried the guttural voice of the Russian. Strovolsky was at the farther side of the footplate, his automatic pressed hard into the chest of the driver.

"I can't see him!" cried Drood, to Jack's amazement. He felt sure this man was not blind, for a moment before he had recognised him. Yet now, with the youngster's face full in the light of the glowing firebox, Drood professed to be blind! It was a mystery that Jack had no time to worry about now. He hauled himself up, till one knee was on the footplate.

He saw the wide eyes of the fireman staring down at him. The man was pressed back in a corner of the cab, Drood's automatic digging into the flesh of his throat. Drood kicked wildly sideways, and Jack gripped the man's ankle and tugged. Drood gave a scared cry.

"He's got my leg, man—"

The locomotive was gathering speed swiftly now. If Jack had been a moment later, it would have been impossible for him to have gained the footplate as he had done. Of Locke or Travers managing to overtake them now there seemed to be no hope.

With a grinding lurch, the locomotive took the points. Jack glimpsed a red lamp flash by—the red light of a signal set against them!

In the effort to free his leg, Drood forgot the fireman, and swung round to throw Jack off. The eyes that stared down at the youngster seemed to be sightless, and the way Drood groped for him was like the movement of a blind man.

The moment the automatic left his throat, the fireman flung himself upon Drood.

Reeling and swaying, the two men fought for the mastery. The fireman had a hand on Drood's wrist, was trying to wrench the automatic from the man's grasp. In the struggle, it cracked out suddenly, and the lead whistled past Jack's head.

"Hold on!" cried the youngster. "I'm coming!"

He dragged himself up on to the footplate.

Strovolsky was watching the fight with blazing eyes. But he dared not go to Drood's aid, could not for one moment leave the engine-driver, or their last advantage was gone.

Jack leapt at Drood, and his fingers clasped round the man's neck from behind, dragging back his head. As he did so, Jack heard a frightened shout from the fireman. His foot had slipped, and the next moment he vanished over the edge of the footplate into the darkness, his cry ringing in Jack's ears.

The locomotive had left the sidings now, was snorting with almost full steam up along the main line.

Drood gave a choked cry. Jack's fingers were still at his throat. The blind man—if he were blind—still held his automatic, and now he twisted round his arm to direct the weapon at the youngster. Jack swung aside to avoid the shot, and Drood fought free.

For a moment the two were face to face.

Drood's strange eyes glared past Jack Drake as though seeing nothing. He raised a shaking hand, directing the automatic clean above the youngster's head. Jack ducked as Drood pressed the trigger, and with that sharp report echoing in his ears, Jack felt himself go hurtling backwards.

Like the fireman, his feet had fouled the edge of the footplate, and he was dropping, dropping—

The locomotive swept on into the darkness, and was swallowed by the drifting snowflakes.

The youngster felt a stab of pain shoot through his arm as he thudded on to the soft earth of the embankment. Then he was rolling, helplessly, down the bank, fingers clawing out to stop himself. The thought uppermost in his mind was one of amazement that he had not been killed.

He rolled into a bush, and lay there, dizzy and breathless, before staggering to his feet. He stood reeling, staring up the line. The tail-light of the locomotive had been swallowed up in the darkness.

"And they've got the green spider!" he told himself bitterly.

He turned to run down the line between the gleaming rails. Suddenly he halted, as a thought struck him like a cold hand upon his heart.

"My heavens, but they're going up the down line!"

His heart was beating suddenly faster, thumping against his ribs.

"There'll be a smash—an awful smash! Oh, my heavens!"

(Were Drood and Strovolsky aware of the grave risk they were running—of crashing into a train proceeding from the opposite direction? Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 935.

"COKER'S NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS!"

(Continued from page 22.)

"We will discuss the question at length later on, Dr. Locke," he said. "Meanwhile, this foolish fellow—"

"You will kindly go away and clean yourself up, Coker," said the Head, addressing the luckless proctor in stern tones. "Then I shall expect to see you in my study immediately after. Go!"

Coker gulped, as though about to say something. Then, with a homicidal glare at the chortling juniors, he stamped away, shedding coal-dust in clouds as he went.

The Head dispersed the crowd, and walked indoors with Sir Philip Phadbury.

It was some time before Horace Coker succeeded in making himself presentable again. He went to the Head's study with a very red face and with vague feelings of apprehension assailing him.

Harry Wharton & Co. waited in the corridor, expecting a summons to the dread apartment. That summons was not long in coming, and the delinquents,

with rueful looks, went in to answer for putting their proctor in the coal-hole.

When the juniors emerged from the Head's study they were looking a little worse for wear. Frank Nugent was blowing on his palms. Peter Todd had his hands tucked tight beneath his armpits, whilst Bob Cherry was wagging his hands in the air, as though engaged in giving out semaphore signals.

"Licked?" asked Johnny Bull sympathetically.

"Yow!" said Bob Cherry, with a gasp. "Two swipes on each flipper! And didn't the Head lay 'em on, too! My word! Groogh! He's getting quite an athlete in his old age!"

"But it was worth it!" said Harry Wharton, with a grin. "We should have had Coker to tea if we hadn't shoved him down the coal-hole!"

"Rather!"

When Horace Coker left the Head's study he was looking furious. Harry Wharton & Co. tactfully gave him a wide berth, for the Fifth-Former had the demeanour of a Hun!

That evening an announcement in the Head's neat handwriting appeared on the board, to this effect:

"NOTICE!"

The office of Lower School Proctor having been found unnecessary and

superfluous, it is now abrogated. There will, in future, be no Proctor at Greyfriars.

(Signed) H. H. LOCKE,
Headmaster."

"Short, but to the point!" grinned Bob Cherry, when he read it, in company with his chums. "Poor old Coker! Here endeth his innings!"

And there ended, too, the carrying out of Coker's New Year Resolutions! His short reign as proctor had fired him with ardour, but now all his ardour was quenched!

The next day Greyfriars saw him as the same old Coker, minus every vestige of an even temperament and pacific demeanour!

Coker had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to keep to his noble ideals at Greyfriars, and that good resolutions, however worthy, had to go by the board when it came to dealing with the cheery heroes of the Remove.

THE END.

(Look out for another topping story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "QUELCHY'S QUEER ADVENTURE!" by Frank Richards. As the title suggests, the Remove Form master plays a prominent part. So don't miss this fine yarn, chums.)

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9-1-26

and trousers that had a crease of razor-blade sharpness down each leg, and brilliant patent-leather shoes, and spats! A dream of a topper adorned his head, and he carried a pair of lavender-coloured gloves and a gold-knobbed walking stick.

Coker, in fact, was a vision of radiant loveliness; a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

Blundell met him on the stairs, and he fell back with a gasp.

"Mum-m-my word!" he ejaculated.

Fitzgerald and Smith major, who were coming up behind, also stopped, and they gazed at the sight before them in breathless wonder.

"Faith, an' is that Coker?" said Fitzgerald, in a faint voice. "It can't be! I must be dreaming!"

"It is Coker!" said Smith major, looking hard at Horace. "Yes, by hokey, it is undoubtedly old Coker. But isn't he got up in style? Oh, scissors! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blundell and Fitzgerald also laughed, and Coker glared.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded, greatly incensed.

"I'm cackling at a silly imitation of a tailor's dummy!" said Blundell. "What are you cackling at, Smith?"

"I'm cackling at a frabjous, conceited idiot!" said Smith major. "What are you cackling at, Fitzgerald?"

"Faith, an' I don't know what it is," said the lad from Erin. "The ticket's fallen off entirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Coker snorted.

"You chaps can laugh, but you only show your silly ignorance!" he said disdainfully. "Perhaps, Blundell, when I have attained the captaincy of the Fifth, you will laugh the other side of your face!"

Blundell gave another roar.

"Oh, my hat! I see it all now!" he exclaimed. "This is another result of old Coker's New Year resolutions! He's out to maintain his dignity and deportment and to become captain of the Fifth and monarch of all he surveys."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fitzgerald and Smith major.

Coker went very red, but he restrained his ire. He must live up to his resolves, and maintain an even temperament and pacific demeanour in face of all obstacles. He must not allow anything to disturb his dignity and deportment. Resolutions were made to be kept, and it was up to him to set an example to the rest of Greyfriars.

So he gave a sniff of lofty contempt and walked on, followed by the laughter of his Form-fellows.

As he reached the lower landing a yell came to his ears, and, turning, he saw a party of Removites gazing at him.

Peter Todd shaded his eyes as he looked at Coker.

"My word!" said Peter. "He's washed his neck!"

"He's got a clean collar on!" exclaimed Squiff in tones of wonder.

"Look at his necktie—it properly hits you in the eye, doesn't it?" said Russell. "Where did you dig that up, Coker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker paused, and for a moment he contemplated making a rush at the chortling Removites. But once again his will-power came to the fore, and he contained his wrath, albeit with difficulty.

He walked on and passed out into the open air of the quadrangle.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 935.

Follows came rushing up from far and near to gaze upon the new Coker. They gazed at him and yelled. And Coker, as the general hilarity increased, grew redder and more inclined to give vent to his indignant feelings. He had intended that his dignified deportment should impress Greyfriars; that it should earn him a new respect in the Fifth and the veneration that was due to him from the fags. But things were not working out quite right, somehow. Instead of being impressed, the boys of Greyfriars seemed to be taking him as a huge joke. Coker couldn't understand it a bit.

"Silly little rotters!" he growled to himself as he made for the gates. "I'm blessed if I know what they're laughing at. I've—ahem!—forgiven the Removite kids for those jokes they played on me the other day. That ought to make 'em more respectful. The young blighters haven't got an atom of respect in 'em! Br-r-r-r-r!"

Coker walked on with his head very erect, and so went through the gates and along the Friardale Lane.

It occurred to Coker that he might try creating an impression at Cliff House. The snow had cleared; it was a fine, crisp afternoon, and he felt in the mood for walking. Yes, he thought, it would be a good idea to stroll over to Cliff House and see what impression he could make on the girls there.

Their opinion weighed a good deal with the Removites, he knew. Come what may, he was determined to bring the juniors in general, and Harry Wharton & Co. in particular, to a fuller realisation of his—Coker's importance. That having been achieved, he would have gained the first step in the fulfilment of his other resolutions—and particularly the one in which he aimed at becoming captain of the Fifth.

Coker walked on, swinging his cane and gaining in good-humour and confidence as he went. Eventually he arrived within sight of Cliff House, and he frowned a little when he saw a party of Removites chatting to Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. at the gate.

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith had ridden over on their bicycles after lessons to see their girl chums, and so had preceded Coker. But the great Horace was nothing daunted by this.

He paused down the lane to adjust his necktie and tilt his topper at the correct Bond Street angle. Then, gloves in hand, and his cane tucked jauntily under his arm, Coker strutted on, putting a good deal of grace and dignity into his walk.

Miss Clara was the first to notice Coker, and she gave a little cry.

"Don't look all at once!" she exclaimed. "But something really gorgeous is coming along the road. I do believe it's Coker!"

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at the apparition of loveliness they saw approaching. Marjorie and her chums smiled.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You're right, Miss Clara, it is old Coker! All dressed up in his best bib and tucker, by Jove! Doesn't he look the last word?"

"The last-wordfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Coker is truly terrific!" grinned Inky.

Coker walked up, and when he came opposite the gate he looked at the girls and raised his topper.

Marjorie & Co. smiled sweetly at Coker.

That encouraged Horace, and he made a bow.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene in a soft voice. "Isn't Coker excessively polite?"

"Well, we can be polite, too!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Come on, chaps, let's cap Coker! He's evidently out to be admired and respected—according to his giddy resolutions, you know?"

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith all raised their caps solemnly to Coker, and bowed as he passed by.

Coker gave them a condescending nod.



Inwardly, he was rejoicing at the impression he had made. The Cliff House girls were undoubtedly admiring him, and Harry Wharton & Co. were visibly impressed. They had actually raised their caps.

Coker looked back, and, seeing the girls still smiling, he raised his topper again. Harry Wharton & Co., with one accord, capped Coker in response, and Horace unbent still more.

He was getting on famously, he thought. He looked round again and again at the Cliff House girls, and every time he looked round Marjorie & Co. smiled, and Coker smiled, and Harry Wharton & Co. raised their caps to him respectfully.

Coker, indeed, was so taken up with impressing the girls, that he took no heed of where he was going. The lane curved just past

Cliff House, and there was a deep ditch at the side. Coker, instead of turning the bend, walked straight on, off the roadway and on to the grass.

He was turning round as he did so, and raising his topper again to Marjorie & Co. He even thought he might go so far as to wave his stick to them. But Coker's thoughts came to a sudden and abrupt termination. He reached the edge of the ditch and stepped blissfully over the brink. Coker was surprised to find his legs give way from under him, and next minute, with a fiendish roar, he went plunging wildly downward.

"Yaroooooogh!" Coker's stick went one way and his gloves went the other, whilst he himself went into the muddy, slimy depths of the ditch.

Splash! "Gerroooooooh!" Coker sank beneath the surface with that loud, gasping gurgle.

The Cliff House girls screamed, whilst Harry Wharton & Co., bursting with laughter, came running post-haste to the spot.

As they arrived at the top of the bank, Coker's head and shoulders, festooned with weeds, appeared out of the murky waters. Coker's mouth opened wide, and he gave vent to a series of remarkable, choking noises:

"Yugh! Gerr-ragh! Wah! Wow! Ooooooh!"

Coker looked so indescribably funny as he stood there in the ditch that Harry Wharton & Co. burst into yells of laughter.

Coker blinked at them through the mud and slime, and he continued to gurgle in a fearful manner.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Coker!" roared Bob Cherry. "Why didn't you look where you were going, you frabjous idiot? Now you are in a mess!"

"Gug, gug, gug!" came from Horace.

Johnny Bull picked up the gold-knobbed cane, and, using it as a rake, fished Coker's topper that was floating, half-submerged, in the ditch. With the topper dangling on the end of the stick, Johnny held it forth and deftly dropped it on Coker's muddy head. Then he gave the crown of the topper a jab with the stick, and this had the effect of fixing it securely to its owner's cranium.

A fresh shout of laughter arose from the Removites.

Coker, spluttering and gasping incoherently, scrambled out of the ditch. Harry Wharton & Co. promptly scattered as he did so. They had no desire to get near Coker in his present ghastly state, and the effluvia that surrounded him was sufficient to keep them at a respectful distance, in any case!

Marjorie & Co. were quietly laughing at the gate of Cliff House. They had been alarmed at first, when Coker had taken that sudden header into the depths of the ditch, but now he was on dry land once more, and no serious damage had been done, they saw the comical side of the affair.

Coker picked up his stick, and, still with the topper on his head, he squelched down the lane towards Cliff House.

He blinked dejectedly at Marjorie & Co. and gave a queer sort of gurgle as he passed them. The girls did their best to look serious, but Coker's appearance was so funny that they did not succeed in their efforts very much.

All the dignity and deportment had departed from the great man of the Fifth! Dripping with mud and slime, he squelched back the way he had come, and so finally disappeared from view, leaving a long, long trail of weeds and water behind him.

Harry Wharton & Co. returned to the gate of Cliff House to chuckle over the affair with Marjorie & Co. Coker, meanwhile, returned to Greyfriars.

By the time he arrived at the school most of the mud had caked on him, and he was in a parlous state indeed.

Fellows gathered round to look at him. Everyone asked him how he had managed to get into that awful condition. But Coker made no reply—he could not; he was too full for words. He strode on towards the School House, with mud squelching out of his boots as he went.

Coker went indoors, and made a beeline for the bathroom. He was not seen again for some time, but those who passed by the bath-room door heard him snorting and spluttering and gurgling, whilst all the time there was a great deal of splashing and scrubbing going on.

When at last Coker came downstairs his face was red and his hair tousled. He looked ready to slaughter

anyone on sight, so no one essayed to test Coker, by word or deed, to see whether he was still sticking to his resolutions. They let him go, and Coker went along to his study and there he snorted in solitude for the remainder of the evening.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Chance for Coker!

COKER looked rather gloomy and glum next morning. Blundell & Co., watching him, smiled at each other. Could it be that the great Horace was wavering, after all, in his will to keep those good resolutions he had made? Was it that the recent lively happenings had discouraged him? With another fellow, the answer might have been yes; but with Coker—well, Coker was different. His Form-fellows, having Coker's bulldog obstinacy in mind, wondered what he would be up to next. Surely he had not revoked his resolutions!

Many amused glances were cast at Coker in Hall that morning.

The great Horace stood there in the ranks of the Fifth, trying to appear loftily aloof, but still unable to disguise the melancholy of his manner.

Call-over was taken, and then, before dismissing the school, Dr. Locke stood up on his dais and regarded the assembled Forms gravely over the rims of his spectacles.

"Boys, I have an announcement of some importance to make," he said. "It has been suggested by Sir Philip Phadbury, one of the governors of this school, that a—er—somewhat unusual New Year innovation be made at Greyfriars. This, in effect, would be the appointment of a senior to assume the duties of a proctor—a proctor in charge of the Lower School."

There was a buzz of excited voices in Hall.

Dr. Locke raised his hand for silence.

"Lest there should be any misapprehension on the point, boys, I will explain more fully," he said. "A proctor at a college carries out duties that are similar to a prefect's in some respects, yet differing substantially from them, inasmuch as he is more of a tutor and counsellor to the boys under his jurisdiction, and works independently of the prefects."

"Broadly speaking, a proctor has more of a moral duty to his schoolfellows than a prefect. It is his place to advise and help the younger lads, to give them the benefit of his tact and considered judgment in all their difficulties and disputes. It devolves upon a proctor to look after the moral welfare of the juniors, to uplift them by pattern and example, and do his best to act as friend and guide in all aspects of school life."

"He has not the powers of a prefect to punish, yet he is vested with some of the authority of a master in advisory and tutorial matters. So far, the policy of this school has been carried on with the usual staff of masters and prefects, but, in deference to the suggestion of Sir Philip Phadbury, who is vastly interested in educational problems, I have decided to appoint a proctor for Greyfriars."

Everyone in Hall was interested and excited at the news.

"The Head went on:

"The question of deciding upon the senior lad most suited to perform the role of proctor is necessary a somewhat—er—difficult one," he said. "The proctor

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"Mastah Coker is the organ-grinder. 'You are da gr-r-reast Mastah Coke! You takin' on da poor starving musician—yes? You hava da vald heart, Mastah Coke!' (See Chapter 5.)