

"THE FELLOW WHO WOULDN'T BE CANED!"

This Week's Sensational School Story of Harry Wharton & Co.

No. 1,042. Vol. XXXIII. Week Ending February 4th, 1928.

The Magnet 2^d

EVERY SATURDAY.

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COKER COMES A CROPPER!

(An exciting incident from the Grand School Yarn inside.)



This Week:

Leicester City F.C.

The "nuts" of big football.

WHO are the real "nuts" of football—and why? Suppose you found that query staring you in the face among the general knowledge questions on an examination paper, what would be your reply? You don't know? Well, in that case I had better tell you, because there is always the possibility that the question may be put.

The "nuts" of big football are Leicester City. Why? I'll tell you that also. Listen. The first big football team in Leicester—called the Fosse—had its home in Walnut Street. Later the club moved its headquarters to Filbert Street, and there it remains to-day. Walnuts, filberts. Now you see the connection, don't you—the right of the Leicester City players to be considered the nuts of football?

And they look like nuts, too, in their smart royal blue jerseys and white knickers. And we could tell stories of "nutty" doings in the old days, too. I will content myself with just one such story, and in advance ask to be forgiven for recalling the circumstances.

The Reason Why?

There was a day near the end of the football season of 1908 and 1909 when Leicester Fosse, as they then were known, played Notts Forest in a League match. The Forest were not considered a good side, but they won by twelve goals to nothing. As that victory made their position in the League much more rosy, an inquiry was held into the why and the wherefore of such an amazing result. Some people suggested that the Fosse players hadn't tried.

The result of the inquiry didn't prove that the players who wore the Fosse jerseys on that memorable day had deliberately allowed the Forest to win by such a big margin. But it came out that on the day before the match was played some of the Fosse players had attended the wedding feast of one of their colleagues, and that the good things of that feast might have affected their football.

The Leicester football team hasn't been notable for the number of trees it has pulled up. Admission to the Second Division was gained in 1894. There the club stayed until 1907, when they won promotion to the top class with a fine

record. Alas, they fell from grace, and one season in the top class was enough. They were sent down again. And there in the second class they stayed until 1925, when they again rose to the giddy heights of the First Division. Never has the First League championship gone to Leicester, and the club has never appeared in either a final or semi-final for the Cup. But to-day the team is one of the best the club has ever possessed, and honours are sure to come sooner or later.

The Penalty King!

The players who represent the club in these days—the "nuts"—have been gathered from many "trees" growing in different parts of the British Isles.

Goalkeeper Jimmy McLaren, by way of example, comes from Falkirk, but he played a lot for Bradford City before he joined Leicester City last May. His speciality is the stopping of penalty kicks; and though any fool is supposed to be able to score from the twelve yards spot, the man who thinks it is easy to shoot past McLaren with a penalty kick has a shock in store.

In front of McLaren and on the right there is some more Scotch in Adam Black, a sound-as-a-rock defender. He won the D.C.M. during the War, and has on many occasions been worthy of the distinguished conduct medal since he first donned the Leicester jersey in 1920. Bathgate is his native town.

Leicester has not always been considered a fashionable place when football honours have been going round, but lately the authorities turned their attention to the City players. Or, rather, perhaps it should be said that they were compelled to notice one or two men. Among these was left-back Reg. Osborne, who played for England against Wales a few weeks ago. Reg comes of a footballing family; his brother Frank plays at centre-forward for Tottenham Hotspur.

The Finest Half-Back Line.

The City have this season had a lot of trouble owing to injuries to their half-backs. John Duncan, the skipper of the team, has been off for a while, and so has Sid Bishop, the half-back, who was secured from West Ham some little time ago. When Bishop and Duncan are in their places the City have one of the finest middle lines in the country, but it should be said that the deputies have done very well. George Carr, for instance, another of a famous family of football brothers, has often surprised the followers at Filbert Street with his displays at centre-half.

Willie Findlay, a right-half, came from Third Lanark in 1925, and is a nutty little player—attacker and defender both. And on the left of the middle line has also frequently appeared this season Baxter, another Scot, who had only a local reputation before joining the City.

(Continued on page 28.)

LEICESTER CITY'S LADS.



Reading from left to right, photo shows: Back row—Carr, Black, McLaren, D. Gardner (trainer), Bishop, Osborne (Capt.), Lochhead. Front row: Baxter, Adcock, Hine, Chandler, Findlay, Barry.

COKER ON THE WARPATH! Little things sometimes lead to big 'uns. Certainly, the "little thing" that causes the trouble between Horace Coker of the Fifth, and his Form master develops some alarming and unlooked for consequences!

The Fellow who wouldn't be Caned!



A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., featuring Horace Coker of the Fifth.

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Coker Asks For It!

COKER began it. Coker always did begin it. Whenever there was trouble between Horace Coker of the Fifth Form, and Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove, Coker always asked for it—indeed, as Bob Cherry declared, Coker begged and prayed for it.

Not that the chums of the Remove were exactly averse from trouble with Coker. They found it sometimes exciting, always entertaining. What he asked for they were quite willing to grant.

It was quite true that if Coker looked for trouble in the direction of the Famous Five of Greyfriars he did not have to look long. The five cheery juniors were quick on the uptake. Coker always began it; but the Famous Five were always ready to carry it on.

So it happened in the present instance.

Coker, as he often told Potter and Greene of the Fifth, had a short way with fags. The Remove were not fags; that was an undoubted fact. But Coker was superior to facts. And it was quite perilous to exercise a "short way" with the chums of the Remove. Coker was regardless of the peril. To his lofty mind, Lower Fourth fellows were fags; merely that and nothing more, and the treatment they required, to keep them from getting above themselves, was short and sharp treatment.

Horace Coker, walking the quad that wintry afternoon was already cross before he happened on the Famous Five. Many little things had occurred to disturb Coker's equanimity. Potter and Greene, in the study, had remembered an important engagement quite suddenly, while Coker was telling them how to play football. They had vanished as suddenly as if they were Boojums, leaving Coker to waste his sweetness on the desert air. So Coker had taken a walk abroad; and the spirit moved him to stride across the Sixth Form green.

Only the Sixth were allowed on that green. Coker knew it well enough; but

he liked to make it known that he thought very little of the Sixth. In Coker's opinion the Sixth, who thought a great deal of themselves, were in reality very small beer indeed; and instead of keeping that valuable opinion to himself, he gave it wide publicity. Possibly Loder and Walker of the Sixth were glad to see Coker's long legs striding across the Sixth Form green; it gave them an opportunity they had long desired, of taking down the great Horace a peg or two.

Loder and Walker pinned his arms, and walked him off the green by the shortest route. Coker, a hefty fellow, was quite able to handle a Sixth Form man, but not able to handle two at once. He was walked helplessly off the Sixth Form green, under the stare of a score of grinning fellows of the Shell, the Fourth, and the Remove, who all seemed entertained by the sight.

Catching his large feet in the chain that surrounded the green, Coker sprawled headlong when the two prefects let him go, amid laughter and cheers. He sprawled in a bank of snow, and gurgled and gasped there, while Loder and Walker strolled away, smiling.

Coker extricated himself from the snow, with a red face, and wrath gleaming from his eyes. He was powerfully tempted to rush after Loder and Walker, and hit out right and left. But even the warlike Coker realised that he must not punch Sixth Form prefects on the Sixth Form green. There were other Sixth Form men in sight, too; and undoubtedly the Fifth-Former would have been given the time of his life had he adopted such drastic measures. On the other hand he had been treated with contumely, and a mob of fags were laughing at him. Coker left the prefects alone—with unusual wisdom—and charged the fags, scattering them right and left. But they rallied, and drove Coker off with volleys of snowballs, so that Horace had to beat a retreat, even from such small fry as fags.

Coker departed hurriedly, followed by snowballs, yells, and catcalls.

By this time Coker's wrath was at boiling point.

The wrath of Achilles to Greece, the direful spring of woes unnumbered, was nothing to it—Coker being a much more important person than any Greek, ancient or modern.

In this mood Horace Coker happened on the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton & Co. were thinking of anything but Coker. Really and truly, they were not seeking trouble with their old adversary.

It was Coker who asked for trouble, and duly received it.

In a quiet corner of the quad, screened by old trees, the chums of the Remove had made a slide.

Indubitably, it was against all laws at Greyfriars, written and unwritten, for any fellows to make a slide in the quadrangle.

But that was no business of Coker's. He was not a prefect, though he had no doubt that he ought to have been; and only prefects had the right to issue commands to the Lower School, or to report them to their Form masters, or to request them politely to bend over for an application of the ashplant. No doubt if Wingate of the Sixth, or any other prefect, had chanced into that secluded corner behind the elms, and found the juniors whizzing along a forbidden slide, the ashplant would have been featured in the next scene. But all Coker had to do, as a Fifth Form man, was to go on his way and mind his own business.

It was a besetting weakness of Coker's that he never could mind his own business. It had caused him trouble before. It caused him trouble now.

Here were a gang of fags breaking a whole heap of rules, absolutely regardless of the frowning brow of a Fifth Form man arriving on the scene. Coker's wrathful mood required a victim. He was longing to wallop somebody. And if ever his short way with fags was needed, surely it was needed now, with these reckless, cheeky juniors breaking rules right and left.

"Stop that!"
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Coker rapped out the words sharply. Five juniors, spinning one after another along the slide, spun on, heedless of Coker.

"Do you hear me?" roared Coker, registering wrath and indignation, as they say in the film studios.

Like the celebrated Gladiator, they heard it but they heeded not.

They slid on cheerily.

"Stop!" bawled Coker. "You cheeky young scoundrels! You know you're not allowed to make a slide in the quad! Stop that immediately!"

Coker always was under the impression that he spoke as one having authority, saying, "Do this!" and he doeth it.

This impression Coker had, wholly to himself.

Nobody else at Greyfriars recognised Coker's voice as being authoritative; least of all the heroes of the Remove.

They whizzed on, still regardless, to the other end of the slide.

Coker strode towards the slide, and upon it—narrowly missing a tumble. He had to tread very carefully, for the frozen surface was very slippery indeed. He was after the juniors; but it was beneath his dignity to slide after them as if he were a junior himself. He walked; but, like Agag of old, he walked delicately.

Harry Wharton & Co., at the further end, turned round, and came sliding back. They came back with a rush—first Wharton, then Bob Cherry, then Johnny Bull, then Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh bringing up the rear. Possibly they anticipated a collision with Coker. Anticipated or not, it happened.

Wharton landed on him like a bullet from a rifle.

Coker spun.

Two seconds more, and five juniors were sprawling all over Coker; a wriggling, squirming heap of humanity with Coker underneath.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

And Gets It!

"O OOOOOOOOCH!"

Thus Coker, breathlessly. "Oooch! Moooch! Gerroff! Ooch! I'm squashed! I'll spifficate you! Grooooooooch!"

The Famous Five were in no hurry to get off. They had been sliding for some little time, and perhaps needed a rest. They sat on Coker, who sprawled face downwards, gasping and gurgling, quite unintentionally coming in useful as a sofa.

"Oooch! Gerroff!" spluttered Coker. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear old Coker!" said Bob. "Always asking for trouble—and always getting it!"

"Oooooooch!"

"Keep still, Coker," said Johnny Bull. "If you wriggle about like that I shan't sit on you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—" spluttered Coker. "Gerroff! You young demons! I'll pulverise the lot of you!"

"Go ahead!" chuckled Nugent.

That was the trouble—Coker could not go ahead. Five sturdy juniors sitting on him pinned him down helplessly. He wriggled and squirmed, but he could not rise; he could not pitch off the juniors—he could do nothing but struggle helplessly and furiously. His desire was to gain his feet and hurl himself on the juniors, smiting them hip and thigh. But the combined weight of five fellows was too much for him. Like the young man of Hythe, who was shaved with a scythe, he did nothing but wriggle and writhe.

Finding Coker comfortable to sit on, the Famous Five continued to sit. They wanted a rest, and the Fifth-Former had come along at the right moment. Nobody had ever considered Coker ornamental; but he could be useful. He was useful now. Like the hapless youth

in the song, his lodging was on the cold, cold ground; but the lodging of the Famous Five was on Coker, and they were not at all in a hurry to shift.

"Will you gerroff?" shrieked Coker. "We're sitting out this one!" explained Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash you!" roared Coker.

"The smashfulness will be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed Coker!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yaroooh! Gerroff! I—I—I—"

"You talk too much, Coker! Cheeso it!"

Coker gasped frantically.

"I say, you fellows— He, he, he!" Billy Bunter rolled up, and blinked at the scene through his big spectacles. "What's that you're sitting on?"

"Coker!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

More and more fellows came up, drawn to that previously quiet spot by the dulcet tones of Horace Coker. The spot was no longer quiet. Coker seemed to be understudying the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

Squiff of the Remove playfully pushed snow down his neck. Coker lifted his head to roar, and Vernon-Smith pushed snow into his mouth. The roar died away in a suffocated gurgle.

"Sorry we can't make room for you men!" said Bob Cherry. "All available seats are taken; standing room only, gents!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of Coker was sat upon; but Hazeldene and Ogilvy found standing room. Coker was scarcely visible now; but he was audible.

It was then that a portly figure appeared on the scene, with ponderous tread. Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was substantial enough to be seen at a distance; but the juniors were too busy with Coker to notice him till he was fairly on the spot. The wild roaring of Coker, and the laughter of the juniors, had drawn the Fifth Form master there; but he did not see immediately that a man of his own Form was involved in the proceedings. Mr. Prout blinked at the yelling crowd.

"What is all this?" he exclaimed.

"Oh!"

"Cave!"

The juniors jumped up at once.

Then Mr. Prout had a view of the sprawling Coker. Coker sat up dizzily.

"Bless my soul! Is that Coker, of my Form?" ejaculated Mr. Prout.

"Gerrroooooch!"

"Coker!" Mr. Prout's look and voice were thunderous. "How dare you play these absurd games with junior boys!"

"Eh?" stuttered Coker.

"Have you no sense of dignity—you, a Fifth Form boy?" hooted Mr. Prout.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Coker!"

"Groooch! I—I—I—"

"How dare you make a slide in the quadrangle!" continued Mr. Prout angrily. "Such conduct on the part of juniors would be reprehensible; but you, a Fifth Form boy—"

"I—I—I—"

"Disgraceful!" thundered Mr. Prout. "Coker, this will not be allowed! This will not be permitted! Once for all, Coker, I forbid you to join in horse-play with Lower School boys in the quadrangle!"

Coker blinked at his Form master, gasping helplessly. This misapprehension on Mr. Prout's part was the last straw; it was insult added to injury.

"I—I wasn't—I didn't—I never—" babbled Coker.

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NOW ON SALE.

"Silence! How dare you deny what I have seen with my own eyes!" thundered Mr. Prout.

"I—I—I—" spluttered Coker. "A slide—a slide in the quadrangle!" hooted Mr. Prout. "I might have slipped on it myself! The Head might have slipped on it! How dare you, Coker! I repeat, how dare you!"

"I—I never—" "If you please, sir—" gasped Wharton. Really, the captain of the Remove did not want to see Coker slated for having made that slide. Coker's adventures on the slide were quite inadvertent.

"Silence, Wharton!" "But, sir, we—" "I have told you to be silent!" boomed Mr. Prout. "Yes, sir, but—"

you as if you were a Lower boy yourself! Now go!"

Coker staggered away. Mr. Prout walked after him, fuming and frowning, and saw him safe into the House.

The Removites were left almost in hysterics.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Poor old Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Undignified games with Lower boys!" stuttered Nugent. "Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Poor old Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites. And Coker and his Form master having vanished from the scene, the cheery Removites resumed sliding—till the angular figure of Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, was sighted in the

pass lightly from the minds of the sitters, but was likely to linger longer in the mind of the sittee, so to speak.

Coker, in his study in the Fifth-Form passage, was in deep dudgeon.

Potter and Greene were sympathetic.

They fully agreed that the fags of the Lower Fourth were a cheeky set of young scoundrels; that it was high time they were taken in hand; that hanging was too good for them, even had it been practicable; that their Form master did not thrash them enough; that the Sixth-Form prefects did not give them enough ashplant. Having agreed to all this, Potter and Greene showed an inclination to let the subject drop.

Not so Coker.

His brow was gloomy over tea, and after tea it was still gloomy. His



While Coker tramped up the staircase, Potter turned suddenly into another passage, jerking Greene's arm. When Coker reached the Remove landing, and looked round he made the startling discovery that Potter and Greene were no longer in sight. (See Chapter 3.)

"Another word, Wharton, and I shall report you to Mr. Quelch for impertinence. Coker, get up at once! You will take five hundred lines for so far forgetting the dignity of a senior boy as to enter into rough horseplay with Lower boys in the quadrangle!"

"I—I never—" "Silence! You are utterly untidy—dishevelled—a shocking spectacle! I am ashamed to have such a boy in my Form! Go into the House at once!"

"I—I—I—" bumbled the wretched Coker.

"Silence, I say! I will listen to no excuse for your conduct—your outrageous and utterly undignified conduct! Go into the House immediately!"

"I tell you, sir—"

"Silence! Another word and I shall cane you, Coker! And remember this—if I find you, on another occasion, playing these ridiculous and undignified games with Lower boys, I shall chastise

offing, upon which the juniors disappeared like ghosts at cock-crow; and a totally uninhabited slide was left for the inspection of Henry Samuel Quelch.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Second Time of Asking!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., when they went cheerily in to tea in the Remove studies, were still smiling over the episode of Coker. But they soon dismissed that matter from their minds. It was not an important matter, in the estimation of the Removites; they came in hungry, and tea was a much more important matter. The Famous Five brewed tea in Study No. 1, and forgot all about Coker of the Fifth. It was otherwise with Coker.

Coker had been sat upon, in more senses than one. Such an episode might

wrongs and grievances lay heavy on Coker's heart.

"You see, such cheek to a Fifth Form man!" he said.

"Awful!" said Potter.

"Horrible!" said Greene.

Both of them glanced at the door. It seemed to them odd that old Horace never knew when he had exhausted a topic.

"And old Prout—" said Coker, in deep indignation.

"Bit of an ass, if you like," said Potter.

"Priceless old ass!" said Greene.

"Making out that I was playing games with kids!" said Coker. "Me, you know! Me! Fancy!"

"Fancy!" yawned Potter.

Once already that afternoon Potter and Greene had been called away suddenly while Coker was talking. They wondered whether they could venture to remember another engagement now.

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They did not want a row with Coker; but really they were fed-up with this topic. Privately they were of opinion that Coker had asked for all he had got, and couldn't be surprised when he got it. But it was no use telling Coker that. It would have led to trouble in the study.

"I'm not going to stand it, of course," resumed Coker. "I've got my position to consider. It's impossible to let the matter rest where it is. That is what I want to discuss with you fellows."

Potter resolved to make the plunge. "We've got to see Wingate about the footer, Greeney," he remarked. "I forgot that! Mustn't keep Wingate waiting."

"Blessed if I hadn't forgotten, too!" exclaimed Greene. "Come on! We shall be late!"

Coker looked grim.

"Stay where you are!" he said.

"You see, Wingate will be waiting for—"

"Let him wait!"

"Captain of the school, you know," urged Potter. "Can't very well keep him waiting."

"Never mind Wingate now," said Coker. "I shall want you two fellows to back me up in dealing with those fags."

"Oh dear!"

"You see," explained Coker, "I went to Wharton's study once to thrash him for some impudence or other, and instead of taking it quietly, he had the nerve to go for me—"

"What a nerve!" murmured Potter.

"Oh, these fags have cheek enough for anything!" said Coker. "The young rascal actually yelled to the other young villains, and they set on me, and I was rolled down the Remove staircase. Me, you know!"

"Better leave them alone," suggested Greene.

Coker looked at him with a freezing eye.

"Don't be a silly idiot, Greene!"

"Hem!"

"If you can help it, at any rate," said Coker. "Now, I've got a stick here. I'm going to the Remove passage to thrash Wharton—he was the ring-leader. If the other young scoundrels happen to be in his study, I'll thrash them, too. But Wharton's the leader in all this cheek, and he's the fellow I want to make an example of. You chaps are coming with me—"

"Are we?" said Potter doubtfully.

"You don't want our help in handling a few fags, old bean," hinted Greene.

"Of course not!" assented Coker. "All I want you fellows to do is to stand guard at the door of the study while I'm thrashing Wharton. You'll keep the rest of the inky little beasts from interfering—see?"

"Oh!"

"They'll be at tea now, and it's the time to catch them," said Coker, rising from his chair. "Come on!"

Coker put a stick under his arm. Potter and Greene exchanged glances. They did not want a row with Coker. Coker's study was a land flowing with milk and honey, owing to his frequent and generous remittances from his affectionate Aunt Judy. The tea that had just been disposed of had been stood by Coker; the supper of which Potter and Greene intended to dispose later was to be stood by Coker. Coker was a fellow who had a lot of uses, if a fellow handled him tactfully.

But on one point Potter and Greene had fully made up their minds. They were not going to the Remove passage to join in a shindy with a mob of Lower

fellows. That determination was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. If Horace Coker wanted to wake up a hornet's nest in the Remove passage, Horace Coker could wake up that hornet's nest on his lonely own, and have the hornets all to himself.

"Come on!" repeated Coker briskly.

"The—the fact is—" stammered Greene.

An icy eye turned on him.

"Are you coming, Greene?"

"Well, no," said Greene desperately.

"You see—"

"You see—" murmured Potter.

Coker laid down the stick, and pushed back his cuffs, a proceeding that his study-mates viewed with some alarm.

"When a friend lets me down," explained Coker, "I punch him! I don't argue with him. I just hit him! Which of you is coming on first?"

Potter coughed.

"You shouldn't make these little jokes, Greeney," he said. "Coker doesn't like them! We're ready, old chap!"

"Oh!" gasped Greene. "All right! Ready, old bean!"

"If you were joking, all right," said Coker. "But, as Potter says, I don't like such jokes, William Greene. Now come on!"

Coker led the way from the study. Potter and Greene followed him.

"Look here, Potter!" said Greene, in a fierce whisper.

"Leave it to me," murmured Potter.

"Oh, all right!"

A group of Fifth-Formers were chatting at the end of the passage, and they looked rather curiously at Horace Coker, with a stick under his arm, and a warlike frown on his rugged brow.

"Hallo, what's up?" asked Blundell of the Fifth.

"Coker's going to thrash the Remove," explained Potter.

"Oh, my hat! And you fellows are going to carry home what's left of him after he's done it?" asked the captain of the Fifth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any cheek from you, Blundell!" said Coker loftily, and he strode on past the grinning group, his nose in the air. "Come on, you men!"

Potter and Greene followed him as far as the Remove staircase. Horace Coker tramped up that staircase, while Potter turned suddenly into another passage, jerking Greene's arm. It did not occur to Coker to look round till he reached the Remove landing. Then, greatly to his surprise, he made the interesting discovery that Potter and Greene were no longer in sight.

"Potter!" he roared. "Greene!"

Only the echo of Coker's powerful voice answered him.

Coker frowned portentously.

But it was no time to hunt for the base deserters. Coker had come there to thrash the captain of the Remove, and any other young scoundrels who might be in the study with him; and Coker was not the man to look back when he had set his hand to the plough. He tramped wrathfully into the Remove passage.

Billy Bunter was loafing there, and he turned his big spectacles on the enemy in alarm.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. "Coker—Yarooooh!"

Coker smote, and Billy Bunter rolled along the passage roaring. Coker strode on to the door of Study No. 1, and hurled it open.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Horrid for Horace!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had finished tea. They were chatting in Study No. 1 in the Remove; and they were not, as Coker naturally supposed, discussing Coker and his mishaps. In their eyes, Coker did not loom so large as in his own. Actually, they had forgotten Coker. They were discussing matters much more important—in their own estimation at least. A football match with Redclyffe juniors which was coming off shortly. The sudden hurling open of the study door took them, therefore, by surprise.

Horace Coker strode in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Who the thump—"

"Oh, Coker!"

The Famous Five jumped up. Coker of the Fifth, frowning with Jove-like wrath, stood before them. He slipped the stick down from under his arm into his hand, just as he had often seen Sixth Form prefects slip the official ash-plant. Coker rather fancied himself in that act. His manner was impressive, indeed terrifying. It was an unfortunate circumstance that it neither impressed nor terrified the chums of the Remove. Instead of regarding Coker with fear and trembling, they smiled.

"Coker, old man," said Wharton, "didn't your Aunt Judy ever teach you to knock at a door before coming into a room?"

"Very careless of Aunt Judy," remarked Nugent, with a serious shake of the head.

"The carelessness was terrific," observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The manners of the excellent Coker are preposterously shocking."

Coker smiled grimly.

"I've come here to thrash you, Wharton."

"Call another day," suggested the captain of the Remove.

"Bend over!"

"Eh?"

"Bend over!" repeated Coker.

The juniors fairly blinked at Coker of the Fifth. They had never expected even Horace Coker to order a fellow to bend over, like a prefect of the Sixth. Coker was full of surprises, even for fellows who knew him well.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry, "this is the giddy limit! The very outside rim."

"I've told you to bend over, Wharton."

"Sing it over again," suggested Wharton.

"Are you bending over?"

"Now, am I bending over?" asked the captain of the Remove thoughtfully. "No, old bean, I think not. I've a sort of idea not—not quite."

"You'll get it worse if you make a fuss," explained Coker.

"Dear me! I think I'll chance that," said Harry. "I've got a feeling that I shall make an awful fuss."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Run away and play, Coker," suggested Johnny Bull. "Go and tell your funny stories to the Fifth."

"That's enough," said Coker. "You fags stand back, or it will be the worse for you. Now, then, Wharton!"

Coker strode straight at the captain of the Remove and grasped him with his left hand, the stick gripped in his right.

Whether Coker thought that he really was going to lick the captain of the Remove in his own study, with his chums looking on in awe; whether he

thought at all; whether, indeed, he was endowed by nature with the necessary apparatus for thinking, the Famous Five did not know and did not inquire. They did not waste time in words.

As Coker's grasp closed on Wharton the grasp of five pairs of active hands closed on Coker.

It had been Coker's intention to bend Wharton forcibly over the table and apply the stick in the manner of a prefect applying an ashplant. This intention he now abandoned. It was simply impossible to carry on according to plan, because in a fraction of a second Coker was lying on his back on the study floor. The stick was jerked away, and Coker was discovering, for the tenth time, at least, that five Remove fellows were much too much for him to handle with success.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

Bob Cherry's hands were entwined in Coker's thick shock of hair, and Coker's head was tapping on the floor—hard.

"Whooooo!" roared Coker.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

"Yarooogh! Leggo! Oh, my hat! Potter! Greene!" yelled Coker.

But Potter and Greene were far away. They had no use for a hornet's nest.

"Dear old Coker!" said Bob. "He's greedy—he never knows when he has had enough. Let's give him a little more."

"The morefulness is terrific."

"Hold him while I get the ink," said Nugent.

"What-ho!"

Coker struggled frantically.

He did not want the ink.

But he got it. A flowing inkpot was upturned over Coker's rugged features, and the ink ran in streams over those features, into his mouth, and down his neck. Coker spluttered wildly as it ran into his mouth.

"Grooooooh! Ooooooh!"

Streaks of ink across his speaking countenance gave Coker an eerie resemblance to a zebra.

"Now roll him out!" said Wharton.

"Go it!" chuckled Bob Cherry cheerily. "I roll, thou rollest, he rolls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker rolled. Coker was a powerful fellow, and he gave some trouble. But five pairs of hands were too many for Coker. He rolled out of the study into the Remove passage, and there he found the Remove gathering in great force, all of them pleased to see Coker.

"I say, you fellows, rag him!" yelled Billy Bunter. "The beast punched me! Lemme gerrat him!"

Bunter got at Coker. So did a dozen other fellows. A cloud of dust arose in the Remove passage, with Coker in the midst of it, gasping and gurgling and spluttering. He was rolled over and over, he was ragged and scragged, his collar and tie disappeared, his head was a dusty mop, his buttons flew far and wide. It seemed like some awful dream to Coker. His voice rang and echoed from one end of the Remove passage to the other, amid yells of laughter from the Remove.

Coker had been through this kind of thing before. It was really remarkable that he should have asked for it again. But as Bob had remarked, Coker never knew when he had had enough. Even now, reduced to a state of inky, dusty wreckage, Coker was thinking chiefly of vengeance, not of escape. He struggled wildly, and succeeded in planting two or three hefty blows, one of which landed on Billy Bunter's watch-chain, and sent the Owl of the Remove rolling away in a very winded state. Another brought a stream of red from Skinner's nose, another made Bolsover major roar. But these were trifling

incidents. There was no doubt that Coker collected most of the casualties.

"Now roll him down the stairs," said Harry Wharton, when Coker of the Fifth was a mere gasping, gurgling heap of breathlessness.

"Hear, hear!"

"Roll him!"

"Good-bye, Coker!"

Coker rolled. He travelled expeditiously down the Remove staircase and brought up on the next landing. There he lay spluttering. From the landing above the Removites hurled yells and missiles at him as he sprawled and gasped.

"Cave!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Prouty, and Quelch, too!"

"Oh, my hat! Hook it!"

Two frowning Form-masters were coming up the lower staircase. Mr. Prout stopped on the landing where Coker lay gasping, with portentous wrath in his majestic countenance. Mr. Quelch came on up the Remove staircase, but by the time he reached the Remove passage the juniors had vanished into their studies and all doors were closed. Mr. Quelch, with compressed lips, went down again to the lower landing, where the Fifth Form master was staring in thunderous wrath at the sprawling Coker.

"Mr. Prout, it appears to be a boy of your Form who is the cause of this disturbance!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "I leave the matter in your hands, sir."

The Remove master whisked away.

Mr. Prout did not answer him. Terrible wrath was in his plump face, and all his attention was given to the sprawling Fifth-Former.

"Coker!" he gasped at last.

"Ow! Ow! Groooooh!"

Coker sat up blindly.

"Coker, this is the second time to-day (Continued on next page.)"



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me; you can be sure of an answer in return.

FOR weeks past readers have been asking me for a Barring-Out series of Greyfriars stories. It would appear that great minds—excuse me—think alike, for just before Christmas Mr. Frank Richards and I talked over a theme for a new series of Barring-Out yarns, and without loss of time your favourite author set to work on these yarns. The result is first-class, A.1. top-hole! That bit of information will please you, I know, for Frank Richards at his best is absolutely unbeatable. The first story in this new series—get ready to cheer—will be in your hands next Saturday. How's that? Now you "Barring-Out" fans just scout round and tell all your non-reader pals that if they want to read the finest series

of school tales ever written the MAGNET is the paper to oblige 'em! Will you do it? Good! Next Saturday, then, will see the "kick off" of this amazing, original new series.

A NEW PAPER—"THE MODERN BOY!"

That's another bit of news for you fellows, and it's good news, too, for this paper strikes a new note in boys' literature. It's a superbly illustrated journal containing a special programme of tip-top fiction, amongst which looms prominently a South Seas adventure serial written by Sir Alan Cobham, the famous British aviator, and Charles Hamilton. Then there's a delightful

story by Gunby Hadath, whose work is well known to many of you. All the big events of the day are discussed in the pages of the "Modern Boy," and there are scores of wonderful photographs and black and white illustrations which will be of special interest to the boy who likes to keep in touch with what is going on in the world about him. The foregoing is only a sample of what this go-ahead paper contains, for space at my disposal is limited. But I must wind up with a mention of the

WONDERFUL METAL MODEL

of the new Great Western Railway express engine, King George V—that made some of the American railway speed men sit up and take notice a short time back—which will be given away FREE with every copy of No. 1 of "Modern Boy." That's another bit of news that will buck you fellows up, I know, for I call to mind the interest you showed in the topping metal models of famous railway engines that were given away in MAGNET a little while back. There are other models, too, of famous "giants of speed" which will be given away with subsequent issues, so make certain of collecting the entire set, chums. When does this wonderful new paper appear on the market? I know you are all voicing that query, and I'll hasten to answer it. No. 1 of this live-wire paper will be on sale at all newsagents on MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6th. If you're wise you'll give an order for it to-day. Don't forget, chums, ask for "Modern Boy."

Your Editor.

THE FELLOW WHO WOULDN'T BE CANED!

(Continued from previous page.)

that I have found you engaged in disorderly horseplay with Lower boys. On the former occasion I warned you what to expect if there was a recurrence of your foolish and undignified conduct, utterly unworthy of a senior boy. Coker, I shall cane you!"

"Ooooh! Wooooh!" gasped Coker. "I—"

"You will be caned before the whole Form to-morrow morning, sir!" hooted Mr. Prout. "Now go! Go! Not a word! Go!"

Once more Horace Coker was cruelly misunderstood. Once more the vials of wrath were poured upon his hapless head.

Really, life at Greyfriars seemed hardly worth living to a Fifth Form man who had a short way with fags.

Coker limped away gurgling.

He collapsed in the armchair in his study, and gasped and gurgled for quite a long time before he got his second wind. While in the Remove passage there were many chuckles and chortles, the wild adventures of Coker furnishing great entertainment to the merry juniors until his existence was forgotten again.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Serious Situation!

IMPOSSIBLE!

That was how it seemed to Coker of the Fifth. That word summarised the situation.

"Poor old Coker!"

That was what the other fellows said.

In the evening Coker gave no attention whatever to preparation, and allowed Potter and Greene to give very little.

At first, in his battered and breathless state, Coker had given little thought to Mr. Prout's sentence. But as he recovered from the casualties he had collected in the Remove passage he gave it more and more thought, till it filled his whole mind.

Coker was to be caned! Incredible, unbelievable, impossible, as it seemed to Horace James Coker, he was to be caned in the morning before all the Fifth Form, just like a junior of the Lower School—indeed, like a fag of the Second or Third.

The Sixth Form, of course, were never caned—that really was impossible. The Fifth were so seldom treated in that manner that it was practically unheard of, though it was always a possibility. For a senior fellow, a great fellow in tails, to be caned like a junior, was humiliating to him, humiliating to his Form, and humiliating to his Form master. It was liable to bring the Upper School into contempt; to make the Lower School mock at the Upper School. It was impossible; at least, it was awful to contemplate.

Had the wild idea ever entered the Head's mind of caning a Sixth Form man, all Greyfriars would have expected the skies to fall, or the foundations of the universe to rock. It was only a little less revolutionary for a Fifth Form man to be caned. The skies, doubtless, would not fall; the old universe would remain firm upon its foundations. But the occurrence would be a nine days' wonder. It would cause endless discussion; it would make the Lower School cackle at the Fifth; it would make the Sixth regard the Fifth with even more disdain than they did already, if that were possible; it would

make all the Fifth long to hide their blushing faces from the sight of the school.

Not that a man in the Fifth cared what happened to Coker personally. Coker, important as he supposed himself to be, was, in the estimation of his Form, nothing and nobody. If Coker's father, for instance, had flogged Coker at home, the Fifth, on hearing of it, would have said that it was a jolly good idea, and would have hoped, charitably, that it had done Coker good. But being caned by a master in school was a different matter. That was a humiliation to the Form to which Coker belonged. It levelled the Fifth with the Lower school. It showed the fags and juniors that even tremendous bloods like Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, were, in theory at least, liable to be caned just like the Remove or the Third.

Had Mr. Prout, in his wrath, thought of caning Blundell, the universe must have shuddered. Certainly, Mr. Prout was never likely to think of such an awful measure. But if he caned Blundell's Form-fellow, he demonstrated to all Greyfriars that Blundell was, so to speak, caneable. If one man in the Fifth could be caned, another man in the Fifth could be caned; what was sauce for a goose like Coker was sauce for a gander like Blundell.

Hence the deep frown that corrugated the brows of George Blundell, captain of the Fifth, that evening. Hence the visible frowning and audible grouching of the Fifth. Hence the amazement and rage of Horace James Coker. Hence the amusement and ribaldry of the lower Forms, who looked on this tragic incident as a howling joke. Hence the chirruping cheeriness of Hobson of the Shell, who had been ruthlessly turned down on the spot by Coker when he got his remove, as a mere Lower School person with whom Coker would have disdained to be found dead.

Coker of the Fifth dearly loved the limelight. It was this passion for the limelight that had landed Coker in many of the troubles of his chequered career at Greyfriars. Coker did not acknowledge that he loved the limelight; his view was that a fellow of his character was bound to cut a prominent figure in the school; he owed it to himself, and he owed it to the school.

But whether it was a love of the limelight, or a realisation of his bounden duty to cut a prominent figure in the eyes of the school, Coker ought to have been satisfied now, for his name was on every tongue, and it was impossible for one Greyfriars fellow to meet another without saying at once, "Heard about Coker?"

But Coker was not satisfied.

There is limelight and limelight. The kind that Coker was getting now was not gratifying.

In the memory of the oldest inhabitant, no Fifth Form man but Horace Coker had been sentenced to a caning. Any Fifth Form man, asked if such a thing was possible, would have replied that it was wildly impossible, that it was unthinkable—if he had not punched the nose of the questioner for asking such an insulting question.

And now it was going to happen.

Even a flogging for Coker would not have humiliated the Fifth so much. There was something awe-inspiring and dramatic about a Head's flogging. But Coker was not even going to be flogged—even that slight consolation was denied to the Fifth. He was going to be caned—just like Mr. Quelch caned the Remove, just like Mr. Capper

caned the Fourth, just like Mr. Wiggins caned the Third.

If it happened, the Fifth hoped that Mr. Prout would lay it on hard. That would be some little solace. But they fervently hoped that it would not happen. They foresaw the chipping that would follow. They foresaw the deadly blow to the dignity of the Fifth. They foresaw the ironical smiles of the Sixth Form men. They hoped that Mr. Prout would beg the Head to sack Coker, instead of caning him himself. The expulsion of Coker would have been a blow to Coker, but rather a relief to the rest of the Fifth.

All the Fifth agreed that there was too much of Coker. Anyhow, it would not have humiliated the Form. An expulsion was a solemn affair. The school would be assembled in Big Hall; two masters would be in their places in cap and gown, all the prefects at their stations, the Head solemn and majestic, the whole game, so to speak, solemn and thrilling.

If Coker had been sacked, there would have been dry eyes in the Fifth.

But caned—

"It's impossible!" said Coker, for the twentieth or thirtieth time, to Potter and Greene in the study.

In view of the serious state of affairs, of this crisis in the history of Greyfriars, Coker had overlooked the desertion of Potter and Greene on the occasion of his visit to Study No. 1 in the Remove. It was no time for paltry differences of opinion, no time for remembering petty faults or trifling offences. Coker had, indeed, almost forgotten his row with the Removites.

The dread sentence that impended over him like the suspended sword over the head of Damocles of old, banished all lesser considerations.

Had the Great Fire of London, the Earthquake of Lisbon, and the Battle of Waterloo all occurred that evening, Coker would have passed them by like the idle wind that he regarded not. Such trifles—in comparison—would not have drawn his attention for one moment from the serious matter in hand.

"It's impossible!" repeated Coker, for the twenty-first or thirty-first time.

"Well, impossible or not, you're for it!" snarled Potter.

"And serve you jolly well right, if it was only you to be considered!" added Greene.

Coker stared at them.

Now was the time for all just men to rally to the aid of the party, as it were; and his study-mates and comrades were fairly snarling at him—just as if they considered that Coker was to blame, somehow; Coker to blame, instead of being a deeply-wronged fellow and a prospective member of the noble army of martyrs.

"Why, you—you—you—" stuttered Coker.

"You've done it now!" said Potter, glaring at him. "How are we going to hold our heads up in the school after this? We shall be laughed to death by the fags! A Fifth Form man caned—yah!"

"Caned—like a fag!" said Greene, almost tearfully. "It's never been heard of! Blundell's as mad as a hatter about it!"

"The whole Form's raging," said Potter.

Coker smiled a little. This was the proper spirit, he thought. The Fifth Form had never given Coker the respect and admiration that were his due; they preferred a dud like Blundell for Form captain when they might have had Coker. They laughed when he talked cricket, and roared when he

talked football. But at least, it seemed, they could realise how serious it was for Coker to be caned.

"Well, that's all right," said Coker. "I'm glad the Form can see that it's serious. For a man like me to be treated like this—"

"You!" said Potter, with ineffable scorn. "You! What do you matter?"

"Eh?"

"What the thump do you matter?" demanded Greene.

"What?"

"It's the Form!" said Potter. "You don't matter a straw personally, Coker."

"I—I don't matter a straw personally?" said Coker dazedly. He could scarcely believe his ears. Large and prominent as they were, he thought that they must have failed to hear aright.

"Not a rap!" said Potter.

"Not a little teeny-weeny bit!" concurred Greene.

Coker was getting some home-truths now, such as he seldom got in his study. But Aunt Judy's munificent hampers mattered not a jot to Potter and Greene now. They were writhing, like the rest of the Fifth, under the shame and humiliation that Coker had brought on the Form.

"If you could only be sacked instead—" sighed Potter.

"Sacked!" stuttered Coker.

"Bunked!" said Greene. "If the Head would bunk you instead of old Prout caning you, it would be all right."

"Bunked!" murmured Coker.

"It's sickening!" said Potter. "I can jolly well tell you, Coker, that if you let down the Form to this extent you'll be jolly well sent to Coventry so long as you stay at Greyfriars."

"Sus-sus-sent to Coventry?"

"Yes, you frabjous ass! What do you expect?"

"Expect?" stuttered Coker. He was so taken aback that he seemed unable to do anything but repeat the remarks made to him like a parrot.

"The best thing you can do," advised Greene, "is to go to Prouty—"

"Go to Prouty?" repeated Coker, still parroting.

"And beg his pardon—"

"Bub-bub-beg his pardon?"

"Go down on your knees if he wants you to—any old thing—only get off that caning. The Fifth will never get over it."

Coker drew a deep, deep breath. He was beginning to understand how the wind really blew.

"Blow the Fifth!" he roared. "What do the Fifth matter? Bless the Fifth! It's me that matters! Bust the Fifth! I can tell you that I'm jolly well not going to be caned. I shall refuse. I shall tell Prouty so. But the Fifth can go and chop chips!"

"You silly chump!" hissed Potter. "If you tell Prouty that, you'll make it a point of honour with him to cane you!"

"Go and beg off, you frabjous dumny!" snarled Greene.

"Beg off!" roared Coker. "Catch me! I'm in the right, and old Prouty's in the wrong. I shall explain that to him. He may see reason."

Potter and Greene gazed fixedly at Coker. Their looks indicated that they did not consider it probable that Mr. Prout would see reason if Coker explained to him that he was in the wrong.

"Now shut up!" added Coker. "I expected support in my own study; I looked for loyalty from my own pals. You're letting me down—the Fifth are letting me down. I despise the lot of you. I shall refuse to be caned by Prout. If he is obstinate, I shall call on the Fifth to bar him out of the Form-room."



From the landing above, the Removites hurled yells and missiles at Coker as he sprawled and gasped. "Cave!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Frouty—and Quelchy, too!" The juniors hurriedly dispersed as the two frowning Form-masters came up the lower staircase. (See Chapter 4.)

"Bub-bub-bar Prouty out of the Form-room!" repeated Potter, like a man in a dream.

"Yes. That will be the only dignified course for the Form!" said Coker. "I've thought it out."

"You've thought it out! You're making out that you can think—that you've got anything to think with! You burbling chump!"

"Look here, Potter—"

"You footling fathhead!" said Greene.

Coker jumped up.

"I'm fed up with this!" he exclaimed hotly. "I'll jolly well bang your heads together, and see if I can knock a little sense into them!"

Coker—justly wrathful—rushed at Potter and Greene, with the fell intention of banging their heads together.

He had no doubt that he could do it. He really had no idea how much he owed to the forbearance of his study-mates, and their regard for the hampers that came from Aunt Judy.

He found out his mistake now.

Potter and Greene collared Coker together. Their heads did not bang; it was Coker's head that banged, on the study table. It made the table rock.

"Ow!" roared Coker.

"Give him another!" yelled Potter.

Bang!

"Whooooop!"

Coker, hurled on the floor, sprawled there in a dizzy state. Potter glared down at him.

"Now, you frabjous frump—"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"You've got to beg off from Prouty somehow!" hissed Potter. "If you don't

we'll scrag you! Scrag you bald-headed! Come on, Greeney; I'm fed up with that burbling idiot! Mind, Coker, if you don't get off that caning, you'll be ragged out of Greyfriars."

"Groooooogh!"

Potter and Greene departed, slamming the study door after them.

Coker sat up dazedly, rubbing his head. It was a hard head, and there was, fortunately, nothing in it to damage. Still, it felt pained.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "Oh, my hat! Oh, my head! Ow!"

Serious as the situation was, Horace Coker did not give it any further thought for some time. His head—never of much use for thinking purposes—was now too dizzy for thinking at all; and for quite a long time Coker sat and rubbed the outside and gave the inside a rest.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Great Expectations!

HOBSON of the Shell smiled as he came into the Rag.

Harry Wharton & Co. were there, and they were smiling.

All the fellows in the Rag were smiling.

Smiling seemed to be the order of the day in the Lower School at Greyfriars.

"Heard about Coker?" asked Hobson of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The question was superfluous; evidently everybody in the Rag had heard

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about Coker. A roar of laughter answered Hobson, which implied that the answer was in the affirmative.

It is said that an accepted wit has but to say "Pass the salt!" to set the table in a roar. Certainly any Greyfriars man had only to say "Heard about Coker?" to set a whole room in a roar.

That is to say, in the Lower School, or in the Sixth. To say "Heard about Coker?" in the Fifth was to evoke, if not weeping and wailing, at least the gnashing of teeth.

"Caned!" said James Hobson joyfully. "He's going to be caned, you know! Of course, I'm sorry for him."

Hobson did not look sorry. He did not sound sorry. His sorrowfulness would not have been described by Hurree Jamset Ram Singh as terrific.

"He was my chum in the Shell, you know," Hobson remarked. "When his aunt bullied the Head into kicking him up into the Fifth, he put on airs at once. More Fifth-Formy than all the rest of the Fifth put together. Now he's going to be caned! There isn't much caning in the Shell. But I dare say it's good for the Fifth!"

"Poor old Coker!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Of course, a man's sorry for him," said Hobson. "I was thinking of going to his study to sympathise."

"Guard with your left when you do it!" suggested the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't rub it in, Hobby!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Coker must be feeling it."

"He will be feeling it to-morrow morning, anyhow, when Prouty starts in with the cane," assented Hobby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy the Fifth!" grinned Peter Todd. "Coker bending over a desk like a fag-taking six! The Fifth will be ready to lynch him."

"Or Prout!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Or both!" said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rather a come-down for the Fifth," said Hobson happily. "They put on a lot of airs in the Fifth—make out that they're practically on a level with the Sixth, being seniors. And they ain't."

"No fear!"

"This will bring it home to them!" chortled Hobby. "This will clear their minds a little. They won't swank quite so much over fellows as good as themselves, or a little better. I passed Fitzgerald of the Fifth in the passage. I asked him whether any more of the Fifth were going to be caned, and advised him to put some exercise books in his bags when he went to see Prout. He looked quite wild."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had noticed that Hobson of the Shell had entered the Rag rather hastily. No doubt the wildness of Fitzgerald of the Fifth was the cause of his haste.

Harry Wharton & Co. chuckled. After rolling Coker of the Fifth down the Remove staircase, they had forgotten Coker—impossible as it would have seemed to Coker for anyone to forget him. But the news that Coker was to be caned had changed all that. Coker was in the limelight now—any stranger walking through Greyfriars would have heard Coker's name uttered on all sides, and would have supposed that Coker was a man of the greatest fame and importance. So he was—for the time. Members of the First Eleven faded into insignificance beside Coker now.

Probably Mr. Prout, when in his wrath he had sentenced Coker to be

caned in the Form-room, had not realised what a bombshell he was hurling into the little world of Greyfriars.

Probably, on reflection, the Fifth Form master might repent him of having hurled that bombshell.

But it was well known that Mr. Paul Prout was what he would have described himself as a man of firm character—what the juniors called an obstinate old beggar.

What he had said, he had said!

A score of ears had heard Coker's sentence, and as if that was not enough, Coker, in his indignation, had talked of it far and wide.

It was scarcely possible for a man of firm character, or an obstinate old beggar, whichever Mr. Prout was, to back out now. It would look as if he had yielded to pressure. It would endanger his authority as a Form master. It would not have done at all.

Unless he was furnished with at least a very plausible pretext, Mr. Prout could not recede from the position he had taken up, even if he desired to recede from it.

Harry Wharton was thinking this over, and he drew his chums into a quiet corner of the Rag to impart to them the result of his cogitations, what time Hobson of the Shell chortled joyously over the prospect of what was to happen to his former pal on the morrow.

"Coker's up against it, you chaps," said the captain of the Remove. "Of course, there's no reason why Fifth-Form men shouldn't be caned like anybody else. They're not really the salt of the earth."

"Not the least little bit!" said Bob Cherry. "It will take them down a peg to see Coker caned, and you can bet that the whole school will rub it in. I fancy Coker will be found dead in the Fifth Form passage shortly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about trying to get him off?" asked Harry.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Rot!"

"The rotfulness is terrific!"

Four members of the Co. seemed against the suggestion, but the captain of the Remove persisted.

"Look here, you men, that ass Coker isn't a bad sort. Of course, he's a fool! He's an ass! He's every known kind of a piffing, footling, frabjous fathead. But his heart's in the right place, though his head isn't much to speak of. He will feel this hard."

"That depends on how much beef Prouty puts into it."

"Be serious, old chap. Coker will feel it a lot, and the Fifth will slaughter him. They're frightfully touchy about their dignity—they'd rather see a Fifth Form man sacked than caned like a fag. Coker asked for it all; but he's not a bad chap, according to his lights. His life won't be worth living in the Fifth after this. And, besides, he's howling idiot enough to do something awfully reckless when Prout begins—might even punch Prout."

"Oh, great pip!"

"Even Coker wouldn't be such a potty idiot!"

"It's well known that Coker would be any kind of potty idiot. He's got no limit."

"Well, that's so," chuckled Bob Cherry. "I should be sorry to see the old duffer sacked. He doesn't deserve that, though he's very cheeky to the Remove."

"But we can't stop it," said Nugent. "Old Prout isn't likely to listen to us if we put in a word for him."

"The likeliness is not terrific."

"Besides, Prouty can't back down now, with all the school talking about it," said Bob. "He's an obstinate old beggar, you know. We can see that he's making a mistake in this; but he won't see it himself."

"He was wild with Coker," said Harry, "but really we had as much to do with the row as Coker had."

"Coker started it."

"We weren't exactly unwilling to carry on."

"Nunno! Six of one and half a dozen of the other," grinned Bob. "Do you want a licking for your share of the row?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No. I'm not suggesting going to Quelchy. But Prouty can't cane us; he's not our Form master. We could tell him how the matter stood, without getting licked. Look here, the fact is, the Fifth are not caned, and by this time old Prout will be jolly sorry he spoke, and my idea is that he would jump at a chance to let Coker off with lines or detentions instead of a caning. Well, let's give him a chance."

There was silence in the Co.

"But it would take the Fifth down such an awful peg!" pleaded Johnny Bull. "They don't waste much civility on us."

"I know, but——"

"It's a chance to chip the Fifth and take a rise out of them," urged Frank Nugent.

"I know. But look here, I think it would be the decent thing," said Harry. "Coker's always an ass, and sometimes an offensive ass; but we always knock him out when we have a row; we owe him no grudge. Let's do anything we can for him; it's really serious for Coker, you know, though it's a screaming joke for anybody else."

"Well, let's!" said Bob Cherry at last.

And so it was agreed, and the Famous Five left the Rag together, and made their way to Masters' passage to interview Mr. Prout. They left the whole crowd in the Rag chortling over Coker and Coker's mishaps, and it is very probable that had the Rag guessed the intention of the Famous Five, the Rag would have fallen upon them and smitten them hip and thigh, and certainly they would never have reached Mr. Prout's study except by passing over the dead body of Hobson of the Shell. So the chums of the Remove safely kept their own counsel, and, like the Arab who folded his tent, they stole silently away to do Horace Coker that good turn.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Putting it to Prout!

MR. PROUT, the master of the Fifth, sat in his study, frowning.

Mr. Prout was still cross. Coker of the Fifth was enough to try the temper of the best-tempered Form master, and Mr. Prout was not a specially good-tempered master. His temper, in fact, was quite unreliable in the sharp winter weather. Frosty weather brought certain little aches and pains into various parts of Mr. Prout's portly person, and Mr. Prout had a corn, his constant companion for years, that grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength, and that made its presence unpleasantly felt when the cold weather nipped Mr. Prout.

With a little rheumatic ache in his knee, and a little neuralgic pain in his eyes, and his favourite corn "shooting,"

sometimes taking single pot-shots, as it were, and sometimes volleying, Mr. Prout really was not in a state to stand too much Coker.

Once upon a time, if his memory served him well, Mr. Prout had been a mighty hunter of big game, a terrific climber of Alpine cliffs. Grizzly bears had rolled over before his deadly rifle; though, for one reason or another, Mr. Prout had not brought home their skins. Unnumbered buffaloes had perished under his withering fire, though various trifling circumstances had prevented Mr. Prout from adorning his walls with their horns. Mr. Prout had climbed the Matterhorn; though, owing to some petty incident he had not reached the top. No one, looking at the portly Form master, would have supposed that he had ever been, like Nimrod, a mighty hunter; and it was barely possible that Mr. Prout's memory did not serve him well. It was possible that memory fondly lingering on past glories, exaggerated those glories a little, indeed, a lot. That, at least, was the opinion current in Masters' Common-room at Greyfriars.

That he had shot the stag whose antlers decorated his study, Mr. Prout firmly believed; and the other masters believed as firmly that this was a delusion of Mr. Prout's. Coker's opinion was that Mr. Prout had bought those antlers second-hand; and it was just like Coker to state that opinion aloud one day in the Fifth Form-room, just as Mr. Prout was coming in to take his Form. If ever, on any occasion, there was anything into which a foot could be put, Horace Coker could be relied upon to put his foot in it.

Those mighty hunting days—if any—were over now, at all events, and Mr. Prout was now a rather irritable old gentleman, who had not seen his toes, let alone touched them, for years and years.

Years had touched his form to riper grace, as a poet has expressed it poetically. It was considered, in the Fifth, that it would have been a good exercise to walk round Mr. Prout. Grizzly bears, whose forefathers had fallen under Mr. Prout's deadly rifle, would have found it a soft job now to avenge those slaughtered forbears. So far from climbing the Matterhorn, Mr. Prout sometimes found a little difficulty in negotiating the stairs at Greyfriars. On this particular day, Mr. Prout's principal corn had been shooting with as much activity as if it had been in practice for a Bisley meeting. Whatever might have been the case with Mr. Prout's rifle, there was no doubt that the shooting of his corn was deadly.

On such occasions, the danger-signals were easily to be seen in a redness in Mr. Prout's plump nose, and a glint in his eye. The Fifth Form knew the signs well, and when Mr. Prout's nose knew the danger-signal, the Fifth were accustomed to sit up and take notice, to give Mr. Prout his head, and to walk warily. Except, of course, Coker! Coker's mission in life being to exemplify the ancient proverb, that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

Twice that day Coker had exasperated Mr. Prout, to the accompaniment of the shooting of his corn and the twinging of his knee. It was scarcely surprising that Mr. Prout had come down heavy on Coker. Five hundred lines for the first offence had not stopped Coker; like Oliver Twist, he had asked for more. And so it had come to pass that the Fifth Form master, breaking all traditions, had sentenced Coker to be caned before the

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But reflection had supervened.

Hours after Coker's offence, Mr. Prout was still of opinion that a caning would be for Coker's good; but had realised that it would not be for the good of the Fifth, or for his own good.

Tradition was strong in a school like Greyfriars. Precedent ruled supreme. Fellows did what other fellows did, and what earlier fellows had done before them. The most potent headmaster who desired to introduce a change of any sort, had to proceed cautiously and carefully. No fag in the school liked fagging; yet had Dr. Locke proposed the abolition of fagging, it would have been a severe shock to the whole school. Changes even for the better were regarded dubiously and suspiciously. And Mr. Prout had to admit that the change he was introducing was a change for the worse.

A great fellow in a tail-coat could not be caned without a loss of dignity to himself, to the Form to which he belonged, and to the Form master who caned him.

Justly exasperated as he was with Coker, Mr. Prout wished that he had not promulgated that sentence.

He knew that his Form was in a seething state of discontent about it. He could hardly blame them. Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, though not a Sixth Form man, or a prefect, was a "blood" of the first water, a great and magnificent personage, a member of the eleven, awe-inspiring to the Lower School. Certainly Mr. Prout, in his most exasperated moments, would never have dreamed of caning Blundell. But

it was very nearly as bad to cane a man in Blundell's Form; a man of the same standing in the school. It was a bitter humiliation to Blundell, almost as bitter as if he were caned himself. Mr. Prout understood it, and he was, as Harry Wharton had sagely divined, sorry that he had spoken. He did not want an exasperated and rebellious Form to deal with; he did not want to encounter black looks when he entered his Form-room; he did not want his colleagues, in Masters' Common-room, to remark to one another that he could not keep order in a senior Form without treating the seniors like fags.

Mr. Prout was accustomed to giving his colleagues advice—unrequested, as a rule—on the management of their Forms. He foresaw the half-concealed smiles of the other masters; he could already hear the murmured sarcasms, when the caning of the Fifth was discussed in Common-room. It would be discussed; there was no doubt of that. Everything that ever happened was discussed in Common-room; indeed, Coker had been heard to remark that when the masters got together in Common-room, they were like a lot of tattling old women.

The remark was not unfounded—and it was, of course, just like Coker to make it in the hearing of authoritative ears.

Mr. Prout, growing angrier and angrier with Coker, as he contemplated the disagreeable position into which his wrath had landed him, would have been

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glad of a way of escape; angry as he was.

But there was no way; what he had said, he had said. Having sentenced Coker to be caned, he had to cane him, or else appear to yield to clamour, to give way to Coker's insolence. Had Coker come to him, as Potter had advised, and begged pardon in a humble and contrite spirit, Mr. Prout would have found a way open; he could have acted magnanimously, and gated and lined Coker instead of caning him in the Form-room. But Coker did not come. He was persuaded that he was in the right; and Coker was far too lofty and independent to apologise when he was in the right.

Without humble advances from Coker, Mr. Prout simply could not recede from the position he had taken up; utterly uncomfortable and disconcerting as that position was.

Mr. Prout was thinking this over, with a black brow, when there came a tap at his study door.

He brightened up.

If it was Coker coming to beg off, the relief would have been immense. Mr. Prout was yearning for some plausible excuse to let him off.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Prout, quite briskly.

For the first time since Coker had been in his Form, he was anxious to see Coker.

But it was not Coker; it was a party of Remove juniors who entered Mr. Prout's study.

The Fifth Form master stared at Harry Wharton & Co.

He wanted to see Coker; decidedly he did not want to see any members of Mr. Quelch's Form. He stared at them—or rather, glared. Like the Alpine climber celebrated by the poet, his brow was black, his eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath.

"You! What do you juniors want?" snapped Mr. Prout.

"If you please, sir—" said Wharton meekly.

"Come to the point at once!"

"Yes, sir! It's about Coker, sir!"

"What?"

"Coker, sir!" murmured Nugent.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Prout, looking at the Removes as he might have looked over his rifle at the grizzlies in the dead dead days beyond recall. "Explain yourself, Wharton."

"You see, sir—" began Bob Cherry.

"I have told Wharton to explain!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"We—ahem!—feel that we ought to tell you, sir," said the captain of the Remove, "Coker wasn't so much to blame as you may have thought, sir. He got mixed up in a row with us, but, really, sir, he wasn't larking in our passage—as it looked, sir—the fact is, we rather ragged him."

"The ragfulness was terrific, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Prout.

His glare became a little less ferocious.

He realised that this was the chance he had been looking for. If these juniors confessed that they had been ragging Coker of the Fifth, that put a different complexion on the matter—at the very least, it enabled Mr. Prout to put a different complexion on it.

"Do you mean to tell me that Coker of my Form was not to blame in the—disgraceful disturbance on the staircase?" he exclaimed.

"Well, not much more than we were, sir," said Harry. "We were all a bit excited, sir."

"No doubt," said the Fifth Form master. "I am very glad you have

come and told me this, my boys. It is possible that Coker was not so much to blame as I concluded at the time."

"That's it, sir," said Wharton. "We—we thought we ought to speak out, sir, in fairness to Coker."

Mr. Prout's brow was no longer black: no longer did his eye flash like a falchion from its sheath. He actually smiled.

"Well, well, it is very right and proper for you to explain this," he said. "You have been very disorderly, I fear; but it is not my affair to comment upon that. I am not your Form master. Indeed, I am bound to say that you have acted in a very manly way in admitting your fault like this. I am much obliged to you."

"Thank you, sir."

And the Removes withdrew, and closed the door after them, leaving Mr. Prout in a very relieved frame of mind. His way was clear now—he would state, in the presence of the Fifth, that he had learned that Coker had been rather the victim than the aggressor in the disorderly disturbance in the Remove quarters, that he had been more sinned against than sinning, as it were: he would rescind the caning for that reason, and would give Coker a detention instead.

The whole unhappy affair would pass into oblivion, without such an outrage on all Greyfriars traditions as the caning of a Fifth Form man in the Fifth Form-room. It was such a relief to Mr. Prout, to be afforded an excuse for withdrawing his hasty words without appearing to eat them, that he felt that he could almost forgive Coker for all the trouble he had caused.

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled as they went down Masters' passage. They had been successful, they knew that.

"Prouty fairly jumped at it," said Bob. "You could see that, you fellows."

"The jumpfulness was terrific."

"I fancied he would be glad of an excuse to call it off," grinned the captain of the Remove. "It will be all right now, if Coker has the sense of a bunny rabbit."

But had he?

Fellows who knew Coker of the Fifth doubted it; and as the event was to prove, their doubts were justified.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Coker Defies the Form!

"FETTER the idiot in."

"If he won't come—"

"He will come if you kick him hard enough," said Blundell.

"Right-ho!"

And three or four seniors went to fetch the idiot in—if we, like Blundell of the Fifth, may apply such a disrespectful description to Horace Coker.

At the end of the Fifth Form passage, between the passage fire-place and the big window on the quad, was a room which was called the games study. Probably it was so called because the games committee of the Fifth held their meetings there: certainly not because the Fifth ever played any games, larks, or japes there; games, in that sense of the word, being miles and miles beneath the dignity of the Fifth. Just as the Rag was a sort of glory-hole for the juniors, so the games study was a general rendezvous for the Fifth, where, however, there never was any noise of ragging as in the Rag. The Fifth were a decorous Form and, as a rule, the games study was as sedate as the Prefects' room.

Just now, most of the Fifth were gathered in the games study, in an unusually excited state. Blundell, captain of the Form, presided over the meeting. There was a great deal of talk, all of it emphatic and much of it simultaneous. For once, the games study approximated rather to the Rag than to the Prefects' room in its manners and customs.

Blundell and his merry men had been discussing the case of Coker. They had come to a decision. Now Coker was required, to hear their decision: in other words—Blundell's words—the idiot was to be fetched in.

Fitzgerald and Price and Tomlinson went to fetch him. The rest of the Fifth sat around and waited. Bland slipped away for a few minutes, to return with a fives bat under his arm, which he laid on the table in the games study. Apparently it was considered that a fives bat might be needed to point the argument, when the Fifth argued the matter out with Coker.

"Tramp, tramp!"

Horace Coker's heavy tread was heard approaching the games study. He came not unwillingly: there had been no need for Fitzgerald, Price, and Tomlinson to kick him. They had been prepared to do so, willing to do so, indeed, keen to do so: but it was not needed; Coker was ready to face his Form. Possibly he supposed that the Fifth had decided to rally round him, and back him up, as they ought to have backed up so great a man. Possibly he expected to be greeted with cheers as he marched into the games study, followed by the fellows who had gone to fetch him.

If such was Coker's expectation he was disappointed. No cheers greeted him—neither was there any sign of loyal backing-up. The Fifth scowled at Coker like so many demons in a pantomime. Even Coker could see that his stock was low in the market.

Not that that affected Coker. Horace Coker was sufficient unto himself: all he needed was his own approval, and he always had that. To the disapproval of others, he could always oppose a lofty self-confidence, the self-reliance of a fellow who knew his own value. The scowls of the Fifth only added a dogged expression of defiance to Coker's rugged countenance.

"Oh! Hero you are!" growled Blundell.

Coker nodded coolly.

"Hero I am," he assented.

He made it quite plain that he was not to be overborne. Coker, who told all Greyfriars that he did not give a rap for the Sixth, was not likely to be overborne by the Fifth.

Perhaps he was a little pained to see the faces of Potter and Greene, his own familiar friends, scowling along with the rest. Perhaps he felt that he might have said, like Caesar of old, "Et tu, Brute." He had chummed with these fellows: he had told them how to play football; he had put them right lots of times when they erred; he had never tired of pointing out to them what footling asses they were. This was their gratitude.

No doubt Coker realised, in those painful moments, that ingratitude was sharper than a serpent's tooth. But he ignored Potter and Greene. Later on, perhaps, if they expressed their repentance with due humility, he might forgive them, and take them into favour again. For the present, he ignored them.

Standing at ease, with his hands in his pockets, pride in his port, and defiance in his eye, Coker stared back at the scowling Fifth. They were not



"You—you cannot—be—caned?" stuttered Mr. Prout. "No, sir," said Coker. "May I ask you to think the matter over further, sir? Perhaps by to-morrow morning you may be in a more reasonable frame of mind!" Mr. Prout spluttered for words, while the Fifth exchanged hopeless glances. (See Chapter 9.)

going to get any change out of Coker, that was clear.

"Now, we've talked over this," said Blundell gruffly. "We can't have you letting down the Fifth, Coker. It's disgrace enough to have you in the Form at all, without having you caned like a snivelling fag, and all Greyfriars laughing over it."

"Oh, can it!" said Coker disdainfully.

"What?" roared Blundell.

"Can it!" repeated Coker. "Put it in a can and put the lid on. I can see you're against me. That's enough! Shut up!"

George Blundell breathed hard and deep.

"I thought you'd decided to do the decent thing," said Coker scornfully. "If you haven't, can it!"

"What do you call the decent thing?" inquired Hilton of the Fifth.

"Backing me up," said Coker. "Prouty says he's going to cane me. I say he isn't."

"Oh! You say he isn't!" gasped Blundell.

"Certainly. I shall refuse to be caned—I have some sense of dignity, if Prout hasn't, and the Form hasn't. Back me up! If Prout handles the cane in the Form-room to-morrow morning, I'm prepared to push him out of the Form-room."

"Pip-pip-push a Form master out of his Form-room!" said Blundell dazedly.

"Yes. But, of course, I shall want backing."

"Bub-bub-backing!" Blundell seemed to be afflicted with a stutter.

"Naturally," said Coker. "There

may be trouble if I push Prout out of the Form-room on his neck."

"I shouldn't say there may be trouble, if you do that," remarked Bland. "I should call it a cert—a dead cert."

"Who cares?" sniffed Coker. "Back me up, and we shall be all right. My idea is to bar Prout out of the Form-room till he comes to his senses—if he's got any, which I doubt."

"That's the big idea, is it?" gasped Fitzgerald.

"That's it."

"And supposing," breathed Blundell—"supposing that we were as potty as you are, Coker, and did it, what would happen then? The Head would walk round to our Form-room."

"Bar him out, too!"

"Bar the Head?"

"Yes."

Evidently Horace Coker was prepared to go the whole hog—the entire unicorn, so to speak.

The Fifth were not. Not quite! A unicorn of those dimensions was much too much of a good thing for the Fifth. They gazed at Coker as if he had mesmerised them, at a loss for speech. Blundell found his voice at last.

"I suppose it's no good talking sense to you, Coker!" he gasped.

"You haven't tried yet!" retorted Coker.

"To come down to brass tacks," said Blundell. "We can't have a Fifth Form man caned. Mr. Prout can't retreat—he's got his dashed dignity to consider. But if you apologise humbly it will give him a chance. I fancy he would be glad to let this matter drop

if it were made easy for him. You're going to make it easy—see? You're going to apologise to him, beg his pardon, pile it on as thick as he likes—anything, in fact, to get him to give up this stunt of caning the Fifth. See?"

"I don't think!" said Coker derisively. "I'd apologise if I were in the wrong. I'd apologise if I made a mistake. I may mention that I've never had to apologise yet. What is there to apologise about? It's for Prouty to apologise. He's insulted me. I'm prepared to overlook the matter if he puts it civilly."

Obviously, it was no use talking to Coker. But Blundell made one more attempt.

"Never mind who's in the right or the wrong. That doesn't matter. You're to apologise, and beg off somehow. See?"

"Rats!"

"I shall come with you to see Mr. Prout, and see that you do it humbly enough—that you eat humble-pie just as much as is wanted to pacify Prout. Got that?"

Coker laughed. The idea seemed to strike him as amusing.

"You can come with me to Prouty if you like," he said. "I'm going to see him, anyhow. I'm going to tell him that I refuse to be caned. To give him a chance to back out while there's still time, before he makes a hopeless ass of himself!"

"Isn't it a jewel he is entirely?" ejaculated Fitzgerald, gazing at Horace Coker in wonder.

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(Continued from page 13.)

Blundell rose to his feet. The other seniors followed his example, circling round to cut off Coker's escape from the games study.

"You know what you've got to do, Coker," said Blundell. "I've told you—as your Form captain."

"What beats me," said Coker, "is that any Form should elect such a crass ass Form captain! I've never understood that."

"Are you going to do as you're told?"

"Hardly."

"Put him across the table," said Blundell, taking up the fives-bat. "It's not much good talking to you, Coker. I'm going to thrash you till you come to your senses. See?"

"Somebody will get hurt first," said Coker, taking his hands out of his pockets and clenching his hefty fists.

"Collar him!"

Horace Coker put up his hands as the Fifth closed in on him with vengeful looks. But at that moment a ponderous tread was heard in the Fifth Form passage, and Price whispered:

"Chuck it! Here comes Prouty!"

Blundell dropped the fives-bat behind a chair, and Horace Coker dropped his fists, unassailed, as the majestic form of Mr. Prout appeared in the doorway of the games study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

And His Form Master!

MR. PROUT gazed into the games study with a quite benignant expression on his plump face.

He had come there because he knew that most of the Fifth would be gathered there at that hour, and he wanted to speak what he had to say before the Fifth Form men.

Mr. Prout had decided what he was going to say. He was going to say that some juniors had give him further information concerning that shindy in the Remove, from which it appeared that Coker was not so much to blame as he had at first supposed.

This being the case, he had decided to rescind the sentence of a Form-room caning, and Coker would be detained for a half-holiday instead.

Mr. Prout knew how glad the Fifth would be to hear it—as glad as he was himself to say it. The whole disagreeable incident would fade away; no one would be able to say that the cane had been introduced into the Fifth Form-room. On all sides, dignity would be saved, this late discovery of Coker's comparative guiltlessness affording Mr. Prout an easy line of retreat.

All this was in Mr. Prout's mind, and he had already worked up a benignant and magnanimous expression to accompany the words he was going to utter.

In the circumstances, it was unfortunate that Mr. Prout did not speak first, before Coker had time to put his foot in it again. But Coker, though slow in many things, was always as swift as

the fleeting arrow when it came to putting his foot in it. Mr. Prout really had no chance. Coker spoke first.

"Mr. Prout! I'm glad you've come here, sir!" said Coker. "I'm glad to have a chance of speaking out plainly before the Form. You have sentenced me to a caning, sir. This is quite impossible!"

"What?"

Benignity and magnanimity vanished from Mr. Prout's face with startling suddenness.

He glared at Coker.

Glares, in the circumstances, failed to affect Coker. He went on regardless.

"The Fifth are not caned, sir! I am sure that if you think the matter over, you will see that it won't do. I could not possibly submit to it, sir. Absolutely impossible, sir!"

Mr. Prout gasped.

"Coker!"

"I hope I make my meaning clear, sir," said Coker.

"You—you—you impudent young rascal!" stuttered Mr. Prout.

"I'm sorry to see you take it like this, sir," said Coker calmly. "But the matter stands as I've said, sir. I can't be caned."

"You—cannot—be—caned?" repeated Mr. Prout, articulating every word separately, as if he found difficulty in getting it out.

"No, sir! May I ask you to think over the matter further, sir? Perhaps by to-morrow morning you may be in a more reasonable frame of mind," suggested Coker brightly.

Mr. Prout spluttered for words.

The Fifth exchanged hopeless glances. Coker had torn it now, that was clear. After what he had said, no Form master could possibly have receded an inch from the position he had taken up. It was a point of honour with the Fifth Form master to cane Coker now—that was obvious to everyone excepting Coker. It was just as well that Blundell had dropped the fives-bat behind his chair. At that moment he might have brained Coker.

"You—you—you—" stuttered Mr. Prout. "You—you—Coker, you—you insolent young scoundrel! You dare to talk in such terms to me, your Form master! You will be caned, Coker, and all the more severely for this unheard-of insolence! To-morrow morning, in the Form-room, Coker, you will receive six strokes of the cane!"

"Impossible, sir!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Prout.

"You see, sir—"

"Silence! Since you choose to act, Coker, like an unruly Lower boy, you will be caned like an unruly Lower boy. Not another word!"

"I hope you'll think better of it, sir!"

"Silence!" shrieked Mr. Prout.

"Go! Leave my presence! Depart!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Coker departed. Even Coker realised that it was wiser to say no more to Mr. Prout just now. The Fifth Form master was obviously in a towering rage. Why, Coker did not know. But he could see that it was so.

Coker's heavy footsteps died away down the Fifth Form passage. Mr. Prout struggled for articulation.

"Blundell!" he gasped at last.

"Yes, sir," mumbled Blundell dismally. He was well aware that Coker had torn it hopelessly, and that there was nothing more doing.

"I regret this, Blundell. I understand your feelings and sympathise with them. But that audacious boy has placed it out of my power to remit his punishment."

"I—I know, sir. But—"

"There is nothing more to be said, Blundell. I regret it, but there is nothing more to be said."

Mr. Prout rustled away.

The Fifth-Formers looked at one another with feelings too deep for words. They could guess why Mr. Prout had come to the games study; they could guess what he had been going to say, had Coker given him time. Now the last hope was gone. No language, living or dead, could have expressed the feelings of the Fifth.

It was just as well that Coker's departure had preceded Mr. Prout's. Just then his life would not have been safe in the games study.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Exciting!

HOBSON of the Shell wore a sunny smile the following morning.

Smiles abounded in the Lower

School.

It was a dim, winter morning, and the solar luminary had forgotten to shine, but there were sunny faces all over Greyfriars.

The caning of Coker, which was a tragedy to the Fifth, was a comedy to all Forms below the Fifth.

Especially did the Shell smile, and more especially Hobson of the Shell. The Shell prided themselves upon being Middle School—not mere juniors like the Fourth and the Remove, and having nothing whatever in common with the fags of the Third and the Second. But in the Shell the cane was used; on days when Mr. Hacker was cross it was even used liberally. The immunity of the Fifth from that form of punishment seemed, to the Shell, utter rot. Now all that was going to be changed.

Hobson looked as if he had come into a fortune that morning. Coker, when he had passed into the Fifth, had assumed at once the dignity of a senior. This was described by Hobson as putting on airs and graces. The two had been friends in the Shell; Coker's remove had dealt a sudden and fatal blow at that friendship. Coker of the Fifth was not the fellow to know a junior.

As for the Shell's claim to be Middle School; and not exactly juniors, Coker laughed it to scorn—after he left the Shell. And why had he left it? The story was current in the Shell that his Aunt Judy had seen the Head about it specially; that she had ragged the Head, actually jawed him, till for the sake of peace and quietness the Head had given Coker his shove. Billy Bunter of the Remove even asseverated that Aunt Judy had threatened the Head with her umbrella on that occasion, and that it was in bodily fear of the formidable old lady that the Beak had surrendered.

Bunter claimed to have witnessed the thrilling scene through the keyhole of the Head's study. Probably Bunter exaggerated. Anyhow, Coker had got his remove, and all the Shell knew that he hadn't got it on his brains or his acquirements. All that Coker knew, according to the Shell, could have been put into a thimble, leaving plenty of room for a finger. And before Coker had been ten minutes in the Fifth he had turned down the Shell as a mob of fags with whom it was beneath his dignity to consort.

The caning of Coker, therefore, came as a boon and a blessing to the Shell. It was a demonstration that Coker wasn't quite so Fifth-Formy as he supposed. It was a blow to his dignity.

from which he was never likely to recover. It gave the Shell fellows endless openings for jests at Coker's expense. Airs and graces would undoubtedly sit ill upon a senior who had been caned like a fag. Hobson & Co.'s only regret was that they would not be in the Fifth Form-room to witness the castigation. They wished fervently that Mr. Prout would have administered the caning in Big Hall.

"Fancy Coker bending over!" said Hobson, joyously, to Hoskins of the Shell. "Fancy Coker yelling when the cane comes down! We may hear him yell from the Form-room. What?"

And Claude Hoskins chuckled at the prospect.

All the Lower School were keenly interested in the matter. All of them regretted that they would not witness the caning, and hoped that they would hear Coker yell. This was the natural result of Coker's short way with fags. The fags were delighted to see Mr. Prout adopt a short way with Coker.

Harry Wharton & Co. came down that morning expecting to hear that the caning of Coker was off. They were assured that their intervention had been successful. Successful it had been, so far as it went; only they had not counted upon Coker's well-known knack of putting his foot in it. They soon learned that the caning of Coker, instead of being off, was still on.

The looks of the Fifth were sufficient to tell them so.

Every man in the Fifth seemed to have got out of the wrong side of his bed that morning. Tempers in the Fifth were execrable. Blundell, generally a quiet, amiable fellow, cuffed Billy Bunter for absolutely nothing. Potter and Greene kicked Temple of the Fourth simply because he looked at them. Just before breakfast a fearful din was heard in the quad, where Fitzgerald was banging together the heads of Hoskins and Stewart of the Shell.

At breakfast the Fifth Form table was as bright and cheery as an assembly of funeral mutes.

Some of the Sixth wore sarcastic smiles. Loder and Walker and Carne actually grinned when they glanced over at the Fifth. Wingate, the captain of the school, affected ignorance of what was going on. As if anyone could have been ignorant of the crisis that was shaking Greyfriars to its ancient foundations.

The Head did not breakfast in Hall, or surely he would have observed the electricity in the atmosphere. The Head was probably the only person at Greyfriars who did not know what was toward. Some of the Fifth had desperately suggested an appeal to the Head. But it was a futile idea. The Head, whether he approved or not of Mr. Prout's break with immutable tradition, was bound to support a Form-master. Appealing to the Head only meant getting into a row with Prouty for nothing.

Mr. Prout, who breakfasted with his Form, like most of the Greyfriars masters, sat at the table with thunder in his brow. His corn was troublesome that morning, and the mute indignation of the Fifth was not lost on him. Mr. Prout liked to be popular in his Form, and his popularity was dead as a doornail now. The Fifth loathed him, and loathed Coker, and looked as if they loathed the whole universe. Coker's was the cheerfulest face at the Fifth Form table. Coker was still bucked by his own hearty approval and unstinted admiration.

When the time came for the fellows to go into their Form-rooms all the juniors went reluctantly. They yearned

to gather round the door of the Fifth Form-room and watch the show. It was rumoured that Coker had declared categorically that he wouldn't be caned. Possibly there would be a shindy in the Fifth. So far, in the history of Greyfriars, a Form-master had never been punched by a member of his Form. If Coker was going to make new history, all the Lower School would have given a term's pocket-money to see him do it. Shakespeare's schoolboy, with his shining morning face, creeping like a snail unwillingly to school, did not creep so unwillingly as did the Greyfriars juniors that morning. They clustered in the Form-room passage, and their Form-masters had to shepherd them into the Form-rooms like sheep into the folds. Even then Billy Bunter jumped up in the Remove-room, cagerly, with a bright idea in his mind.

"I've forgotten my map, sir!" he gasped. "May I go and fetch my map, sir?"

Mr. Quelch looked at Bunter.

So did the Removites, enviously. They had not thought of so simple a dodge as this. Really, it was a brilliant idea. A fellow who had leave to go and fetch a map, or a book, might linger in the Form-room passage and witness the caning of Coker, or at least hear it, and thereby become quite a distinguished personage. A fellow who had seen a Fifth-Former caned would be some fellow. Barely had Bunter's voice died away than Skinner's was heard.

"I've forgotten my Virgil, sir. May I fetch it?"

Mr. Quelch opened his lips to speak, but before he could carry out that intention Bolsover major butted in.

"If you please, sir, I've left my watch in the dormitory. May I go up and fetch it?"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Quelch, just in time to cut short half a dozen other eager voices.

"Bunter!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "May I go, sir?"

"You may not go, Bunter!"

"My map, sir—"

"A map is not required for first or second lesson, Bunter."

"I—I mean my Latin grammar, sir!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "You mean your Latin grammar, Bunter?"

"Yee-e-es, sir! M-m-may I fetch it?"

"You may not fetch it, Bunter. You will take a hundred lines for forgetting your map."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"And another hundred lines for forgetting your grammar."

"Ow!"

"Skinner, you will take a hundred lines for forgetting your Virgil, and you will use that of the boy next you."

Skinner looked like a demon.

"Bolsover, you will take a hundred lines for leaving your watch in the dormitory, and you will leave it there till morning break."

"Oh!" gasped Bolsover major.

The other fellows, who had not had time to follow Bunter's bright example, were rather glad now that they had not had time. Evidently the Remove master was too old a bird to be caught with such chaff.

"Has any other boy forgotten anything?" inquired Mr. Quelch, in a tone of grim irony.

There was an unanimous silence. If any fellow really had forgotten anything, he did not feel disposed to acquaint Mr. Quelch with the fact just then.

"Very well, we will commence," said the Remove master.

"If—if you please, sir—" gasped Bunter.

"Well?"

"I—I find I haven't forgotten my map, sir—"

"Indeed?"

"Or—or my Latin grammar, sir. I—I've got them both here, sir. I—I suppose I—I needn't do the lines now, sir?"

"You need suppose nothing of the sort. You will take an extra hundred lines for having spoken untruthfully."

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Bunter.

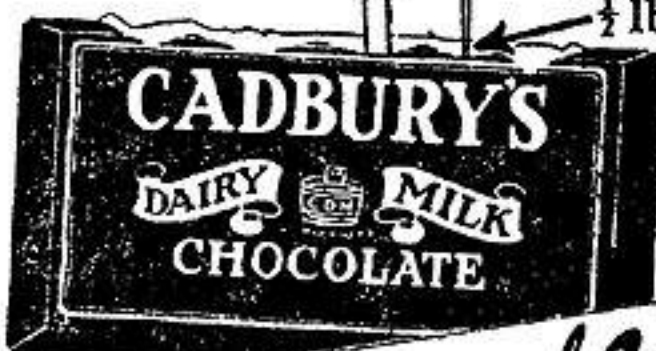
Skinner, who had discovered that he had not, after all, forgotten his Virgil, and Bolsover major, who was about to state that he had just found that his watch was in his pocket, both remained silent. They did not want to gain the reward for untruthfulness. Bunter, the richer by three hundred lines, repented him of that brilliant idea that had flashed into his fat mind.

(Continued overleaf.)

Get the
cream



$1\frac{1}{2}$
Glasses of English
full cream milk
in every
 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.



Cadbury's 2^d Milk
Big Bars
You can taste the cream

THE FELLOW WHO WOULDN'T BE CANED!

(Continued from previous page.)

Lessons commenced in the Remove Form-room, and the juniors listened with tense attention—not to the valuable instruction they were receiving from Henry Samuel Quelch. They listened for the sound of yelling, or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, for the sound of a shindy, from the Fifth Form room up the passage. And in all the other junior Form-rooms, fellows were listening intently for the same sounds, and the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of their Form masters passed by them like the idle wind which they regarded not.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Ajax of the Fifth!

THERE was a deadly stillness in the Fifth Form room at Greyfriars.

Mr. Prout's plump face was serious and solemn.

The Fifth were grimly silent.

Most faces were dark and gloomy; all were serious; it was a crisis in the history of the Fifth, and all present realised it. Even Fitzgerald, who never could keep silent, even at the most solemn moments, was silent now. It was an awe-inspiring moment.

Coker sat bolt upright.

As Mr. Prout went to his desk, and stood there surveying his Form, a pin might have been heard to drop in the Form-room.

Fellows breathed very deep.

In those solemn moments the Fifth Form room at Greyfriars bore some resemblance to the ancient Senate House of Rome, when Brennus and his Gauls butted in and found the senators sitting like wooden images. And—to use a less dignified simile—it bore some resemblance to a nest of mice with the cat at hand.

So deep was the stillness, so breathless the expectation, that when Mr. Prout at last spoke, his voice had an effect of thunder.

"Coker!"

The Fifth Form master's voice reverberated through the Form-room, startling the silent seniors. Some of them quite jumped.

Horace Coker rose in his place.

He was obedient to the voice of authority, so far as his sense of the fitness of things, and of his own dignity, permitted.

That he could be caned was impossible. Coker did not intend to let the impossible happen. Short of that, he was prepared to toe the line like a dutiful Fifth-Former.

"Yes, sir!" said Coker firmly.

"Stand out before the Form."

"Certainly, sir!"

Coker strode out of his place. The movements of Coker's extensive feet effectively banished the solemn stillness in the Fifth Form room. Coker's feet could not be moved without everyone within a wide radius becoming aware of the fact.

He stood out manfully, with the Fifth Form behind him, the Fifth Form master before him, facing Mr. Prout.

His attitude was calm and dignified, his eye steady and clear. He did not suppose for a moment that he looked like a cheeky ass. The other fellows in the Fifth supposed so; but they had never done Coker justice. Coker, had he been asked then what he thought he looked like, would have suggested Ajax.

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defying the lightning, or Horatius on the bridge defying the whole Tuscan army, or something of that sort!

It was an impressive moment, and Coker was convinced that he was equal to the occasion.

Mr. Prout, certainly, did not seem impressed. His eye glinted at Coker. In this calm dignity, Mr. Prout seemed only to discern fatuous cheek.

"Coker, you will now be caned!"

It was on Coker's lips to reply: "I don't think!"

That reply, however, was obviously unworthy of the occasion. Coker suppressed it unuttered.

Mr. Prout picked up his cane. He bent it, and swished it, as if to make sure that it was in good order for the execution.

Then he stepped towards Horace Coker.

"Coker!"

"Sir!" said Coker.

"Bend over that chair!"

Coker almost laughed, though the atmosphere was fraught with tragedy. It really was entertaining for Prout to suppose for one moment that Horace James Coker would bend over like a fag, and submit to a humiliating whacking.

Coker stood upright, squaring his hefty shoulders, like a fellow who might break but would never bend.

"You hear me, Coker?"

"I hear you, sir."

"Obey me at once!"

"Impossible, sir!"

"What? What?"

"I must point out to you once more, sir, that the Fifth are not caned," said Coker calmly. "There is a limit, sir. I decline to bend over."

The Fifth gasped. Mr. Prout, his grip on the cane almost convulsive, gazed at Coker.

There was a terrible pause.

In a junior Form-room such a reply would have been followed by a cheeky junior being taken by the collar, bent over forcibly, and whacked till he howled for mercy.

In the Fifth Form room that was impracticable.

The hefty Coker was actually taller than his Form master, and at least twice as good a man in a tussle. In a contest of physical strength, it was a fact that Coker could have caned Mr. Prout much more easily than Mr. Prout could have caned Coker. Sideways, Mr. Prout was a mighty man; perpendicularly, he was not imposing. Coker's shock of untidy hair towered over the bald spot on Mr. Prout's cranium.

It was not without reason that the cane was barred in the senior Form-rooms. It could only be used on a hefty senior if the fellow chose. A junior had no choice in the matter. A senior had. In senior Form-rooms, masters were supposed to rule by sweet reasonableness, and the prestige of authority. Physical force was out of the question unless a fellow chose to submit to it. Coker did not choose.

True, the penalty for defying a Form master was a report to the Head, and the "sack."

Coker was risking that.

The sack, of course, was a fearfully serious matter. But it was consistent with a fellow's dignity. A caning was not.

"Coker!" said Mr. Prout, at last. "I order you, boy, to bend over that chair immediately!"

"I am sorry, sir, but I am bound to refuse," answered Coker.

Mr. Prout breathed hard.

Properly speaking, he should at that point have sent Coker to the headmaster and washed his hands of him. But Mr. Prout was extremely unwilling to let Dr. Locke know that he could not manage his own Form without assistance from the headmaster. Many a time, in Masters' Common-room, had Mr. Prout commented sarcastically upon masters who could not preserve their authority without dragging in the Head.

Dragging in the Head was undignified. It was a confession of weakness, of incapacity. Mr. Twigg, of the Second, would drag in the Head when his Form got out of hand. Nothing could have been stronger than Mr. Prout's contempt for such methods. A Form master's own majesty should have been sufficient in his own Form-room. Mr. Prout had always said so—never having foreseen such an occurrence as this. Mr. Prout almost trembled at the thought of the sarcastic comments in Common-room if it became known that he had been defied by a boy in his Form, and had been driven to invoke the authority of the Head.

There were other ways.

"Coker, I give you one last opportunity of obeying my command!" breathed Mr. Prout.

"Impossible, sir!"

"Very well." Mr. Prout turned to his Form. "Blundell, Fitzgerald, Hilton, you will take Coker and place him in a position for caning."

"Yes, sir!" said the three seniors all at once.

They rose as one man.

The caning being inevitable, the dignity of the Fifth being outraged beyond redemption, the Fifth had only one desire left—that the caning should be severe; in fact, terrific. Their only possible consolation was to see Coker squirm under it.

Three hefty fellows stepped out to collar Coker.

Coker jumped away.

He had not foreseen this. It had been borne in upon his mind that the Fifth would not back him up, as was their plain duty. But that they would back up Mr. Prout had not occurred to his mind. He might really have thought of it; but anything in the thinking line came with some difficulty to Horace Coker. His powerful intellect moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.

"Why, you—you rotters!" ejaculated Coker. "Keep off! Don't you dare to lay a finger on me! My hat! Look here! Back me up! Shove Prout out of the room and bar him out! What?"

It was a last appeal.

It failed.

Blundell, Fitzgerald, and Hilton advanced on Coker with almost wolfish looks, and it was only too clear in the faces of all the Fifth that they were ready to take a hand if needed; that indeed they were keen to take a hand.

Coker backed away, clenching his fists. His attitude no longer resembled that of Ajax defying the lightning. He looked a good deal like a rabbit in the presence of three terriers.

"Keep back!" he roared.

"Secure him!" panted Mr. Prout.

The three rushed on.

Crash!

Fitzgerald of the Fifth was the first to reach Coker. Coker had backed as far as the door when Fitz reached him. Coker was desperate now. He hit out and caught Fitzgerald in the eye.

Fitzgerald measured his length along the floor of the Fifth Form room, with a loud concussion and a louder yell.

"Secure him!" shrieked Mr. Prout.

A dozen of the Fifth leaped up in

their places. Blundell and Hilton fairly jumped at Coker.

It was not Coker's way to retreat. Generally he disdained retreat, and declined to count odds. But there are crises in the careers of the greatest of men, when retreat becomes imperative. The Retreat of the Ten Thousand has been celebrated by Xenophon; the Flight of the Tartars by De Quincy; the Israelites fled from Egypt, the Persians from the Arbela. In more modern times, the great Napoleon ran away from the battle of Waterloo, and the Kaiser from Potsdam. It was even so with Coker of the Fifth. Obviously—even to Coker—he could not handle the whole Fifth Form of Greyfriars, with Mr. Prout thrown in. But the door was behind him; he clutched at the door, tore it open, whisked out of the Form-room, and slammed the door after him. Coker's footsteps died away down the

what was going to happen after this—unless the skies were to fall. In view of the amazing state of affairs in the Greyfriars Fifth, it was time they did.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Where is Horace Coker?

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came out in morning break, eager for news.

It had been, upon the whole, a disappointing morning to the Lower School.

Every ear had listened for sounds from the quarters of the Fifth; but the drums of war, so to speak, had not been audible.

Had Coker been, after all, caned?

Had he punched Prout?

What had happened, anyhow?

Some fellows said that they had heard

naturally a disappointment to the Remove.

They watched the Fifth when the seniors came out. All the Fifth were excited, and the news flew like wild-fire that Fitzgerald had a black eye. How Fitz had collected that black eye was not known; and it was obviously unsafe to ask the Fifth about it.

Where was Coker? Was he sacked, and gone already? It was a burning question. Had he punched Mr. Prout's nose certainly he would have been sacked. But he hadn't. Probably he had given Fitz that black eye; but a Fifth Form man wouldn't be sacked for giving another Fifth Form man a black eye. Black eyes were uncommon at Greyfriars, but they had happened and might happen again; no man had ever been sacked on account of a black eye or a thick ear. On the other hand, if Coker hadn't been sacked, where was



Like one man, Harry Wharton & Co. marched after Mr. Prout as he went rolling down to the gates. Unluckily, the Fifth Form master glanced back, and beheld the Remove in numerous array, stalking him. "Go back at once!" he hooted thunderously. (See Chapter 12.)

Form-room passage, leaving Mr. Prout and the Fifth staring blankly at the slammed door.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Prout.

Blundell was catching at the door-handle.

"Stop!"

"We'll get him, sir——"

"Stop!"

The Fifth-Formers stopped.

"That—that ridiculous and rebellious boy will be dealt with later!" gasped Mr. Prout. "Take your places!"

Mr. Prout carried off the extraordinary situation with what dignity he could. Chasing Coker up and down and round about Greyfriars was plainly out of the question. Mr. Prout did not want to provide the school with such a thrilling sensation as that.

Class began in the Fifth Form room in an electric atmosphere.

Coker did not return.

Where he was and what he was up to, nobody knew. Nobody could guess

a crash, or a bump, from the Fifth Form room. Others averred that they had heard the sound of running feet. Hobson declared that he had seen Coker whisk past the doorway of the Shell room, going strong. Dicky Nugent of the Second stated that he had glimpsed Coker in the quad from his Form-room window. Like the guests of the Lady of Branksome in olden time:

"Some heard a sound in Branksome Hall,

Some saw a sight not seen by all."

But the information was very vague, and all the fellows wanted to know. The Remove were out in time to see Mr. Prout rustling away from the Fifth to his study. He showed no signs of combat. His rubicund nose indicated that his digestion, that morning, was imperfect; and it was a safe surmise that his temper was still more imperfect. But his nose, crimson as it was, did not look as if it had been punched. It was

he? He was large enough to be seen if he was about; but he was not to be seen anywhere.

Venturesome fellows looked into Coker's study, and reported that Horace was not there. Other fellows peeped into the Fifth Form games study, and drew it blank. A rumour that Coker was under detention caused a rush to the Fifth Form room. But that room was vacant.

When the bell rang for third lesson Coker was still invisible. Unless he was provided, like Jack the Giant Killer, with a cloak of darkness, he could hardly have been in Greyfriars. But if not, why not, and where was he, anyhow? The Lower School thrilled with excitement.

"O where and O where can he be?" sang Bob Cherry, as the Removites went in for third lesson.

"The wherefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Janiset Ram Singh.

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In third lesson there was whispering in every class. Coker, as a topic, reigned supreme.

Lines fell like leaves in Vallambrosa; but the juniors hardly cared for lines then. They wanted to know, and as yet they did not know. Third lesson seemed endless to the Lower School.

But, like all things, it came to an end at last, and the juniors swarmed out.

"Seen Coker?"

That question was on every lip.

It was soon gathered that Coker had not turned up for third lesson in the Fifth Form room. He had cut class!

"We shall see him at dinner, anyhow," said the Bouncer.

"Sure to," said Billy Bunter. "A fellow might cut class, but he wouldn't cut dinner. That stands to reason."

But William George Bunter was wrong.

Coker did cut dinner.

He was not seen at the Fifth Form table. Mr. Prout was there, frowning portentously. The rest of the Fifth were there, and every glance that turned on the table lingered on Terence Fitzgerald's eye. In spite of all Fitz's efforts to arrest the natural progress of that eye, it was turning blacker and blacker. Obviously, it was going to be a prize eye. It was likely to adorn Fitz for quite a long time to come. Fitzgerald scowled every time he caught a glance at his discoloured eye. During dinner his scowl was a fixture.

By the greatest good-fortune, from the Lower School point of view, it was a half-holiday that afternoon. Classes, in the present state of affairs, would have been unendurably obnoxious. The juniors were free to devote the rest of the day, if they liked, to Horace Coker, and the disappearance of that great man.

Where was Coker?

Fellows waylaid the Head and searched his face with curious glances. They agreed that he did not look as if he had expelled a fellow that morning. He would not have been so calm, his smile would not have been so cheerfully benignant had he taken such a drastic step in dealing with a Greyfriars man. Indeed, Bob Cherry stated his belief that the Head did not know that anything unusual was going on at all.

"Depend on it, Prouty won't call in the Beak if he can help it," said Bob confidently. "He won't give the other masters the cackle over him. My idea is that the Head knows nothing of it."

Harry Wharton nodded.

That was his opinion also.

Mr. Prout would never make such a surrender of his lofty dignity if he could help it. If it remained in his power, he would keep the affair from the knowledge of the Head.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Prouty!" murmured Bob. "Wiggy is going to chip in. I can see it in his eye."

Mr. Prout, walking majestically out of the House, was intercepted by Mr. Wiggins, the master of the Third.

Mr. Wiggins was a mild gentleman, who had borne with exemplary patience much advice and many admonitions from Mr. Prout, who never could comprehend that other Form masters did not stand in need of his sage counsel.

It was Mr. Wiggins' turn now.

"Nothing serious, I hope, Mr. Prout?" he said blandly, in the hearing of about twenty Greyfriars fellows.

Mr. Prout's plump cheeks became as crimson as his nose.

"What—what?" he stammered.

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"I hear that there is trouble in your Form-room," said Mr. Wiggins, blandly sympathetic.

"A trifling matter, sir—a mere trifle!" gurgled Mr. Prout. "A matter of no consequence at all—none whatever."

"I am glad to hear it, sir!" said Mr. Wiggins heartily. "I was afraid that it was a very serious matter—very serious indeed."

"Not at all. Nothing of the kind."

"Not a case for expulsion?" asked Mr. Wiggins, still bland.

"Certainly not!" hooted Mr. Prout.

"That is very good news, sir. I feared that it was, and I and all your colleagues would have been very sorry to see such an occurrence in your Form, sir. I am really glad that no Fifth Form boy is to be expelled from Greyfriars, as I have heard rumoured, sir."

Mr. Prout gurgled something inarticulate and strode on. Sympathy from the Third Form master was more than he could stand. The mere suggestion that there might be an expulsion in his Form was an insult; such things did not happen in Mr. Prout's Form. The impudence, the imbecility, the idiocy of Horace Coker did not deserve that—or if they deserved it should, at all events, not receive it, not if Mr. Prout could help it. No member of the Greyfriars staff should ever have it in his power to say that one of Mr. Prout's boys had been expelled. Coker must be dealt with—severely, but with as little publicity as possible. Mr. Prout was already writhing, not to say squirming, under the publicity he was already getting. An expulsion would ring through Greyfriars; it would not be forgotten for terms. It would never do.

"You heard that, you men?" remarked Nugent. "Coker's not sacked; he's not going to be sacked. Then where is he?"

"Echo answers where!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The wherefulness of the preposterous Coker is an esteemed mystery!" remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "Perhaps he is keeping out of sight until the ludicrous Prouty is a little less infuriated."

"That's it!" said Wharton, with a nod.

"Inky's right," assented Bob. "Coker's lying doggo for a bit. Judging by Prouty's looks, he's acting a bit more sensibly than usual!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The general belief was that Coker was lying doggo, somewhere out of the reach of Mr. Prout's devastating wrath. Where, no one knew, but it seemed clear that he had shaken the dust of Greyfriars from his feet. It was reserved for William George Bunter to elucidate the mystery, Bunter having his own peculiar methods of gaining information. A little later in the afternoon Bunter was bursting with news. Linger near the study door of Mr. Paul Prout, by sheer chance Bunter had heard him at the telephone. Still by sheer chance, Bunter had heard all that Mr. Prout said on the telephone—quite a lot, and all by sheer chance. Bunter always heard things by sheer chance, and there was no doubt that chance favoured him to an extraordinary extent.

It was gathered that Mr. Prout, aware that the recalcitrant Coker had absented himself from the school, had rung up the police station at Courtfield for information. He had mentioned Coker simply as a truant—a description that would have made Coker gnash his teeth had he heard it. Inspector Grimes, who was an acquaintance of the Fifth Form master, had kindly

promised to do what he could, and Mr. Prout had rung him up again later to see what he had been able to do. He had received information—Bunter was sure of that, though he had not gathered precisely what it was. Grimey, according to Bunter, had been able to tell Prouty where Coker was. Bunter, even with the aid of a keyhole and a large pair of ears, had been able to hear only what was said at Mr. Prout's end of the wire. But what Mr. Prout had said had made it clear that Prouty now knew where to look for Coker.

"I say, you fellows, Prouty will go after him," said Bunter. "You keep your eyes open, and you'll see."

The Removites did not fail to keep their eyes open.

And they did see.

They saw Mr. Prout, in coat and hat, rolling down to the gates, and like one man the Remove marched after him. He frowned thunderously.

"Go back at once!" hooted Mr. Prout.

Sheepishly, the juniors retreated. Apparently Mr. Prout did not want to sally forth at the head of an army.

"No go!" said Bob Cherry sadly. "We shall miss the best thing of the term! It's rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

All the Removites agreed that it was rotten. Naturally, they wanted to be in at the death. But there was no help for it, and Mr. Prout, no longer stalked by the Remove, fared forth alone.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker On His Own!

AND where was Horace Coker all this time?

He was not far away.

His masterly retreat from the Fifth Form room had saved the situation for the time being. But only for the time being. Over his devoted head was still suspended the sword of Damocles, in the shape of Mr. Prout's cane. The worst had not happened. Coker had not been caned! Greyfriars had not, so far, sunk to that. There was hope for the old school yet. But since Mr. Prout had made it clear that force would be used to put Coker through it, it was clear that Coker could not, with dignity, remain within the precincts of Greyfriars.

Coker was, of course, incapable of running away from school like a naughty fag to escape punishment. But he could retire from a scene where his dignity was threatened and his prestige endangered. That was what he did—without delay. Some fellows would not have seen the difference between the two proceedings; but Coker was satisfied. He would have scorned to run away from school. He merely retired from the scene at a rapid pace.

A mile from Greyfriars, on Courtfield Common, Coker became aware that there was no sign of pursuit. He had had a vague idea that the whole Fifth would be whooping on his trail, led by Mr. Prout brandishing his cane. Nothing of the kind was happening. Coker looked this way and that way, like Moses of old, and no man was nigh. He was a little perplexed. It seemed incredible that he—Horace James Coker—could have withdrawn his important self from Greyfriars, leaving the school going on the even tenor of its way just as if nothing special had happened. That, however, appeared to be the actual state of the case.

Certainly, he was not pursued. Nobody was in sight—no living being,

save a donkey grazing on the common. The donkey lifted his head and brayed sonorously, perhaps in greeting to Coker, from some subtle sense of affinity. Coker did not heed him. For quite a long time he stared back towards Greyfriars, puzzled. He was relieved that there was no pursuit, but he felt a little slighted.

He walked on at last.

He was rather at a loose end. To return to Greyfriars until the matter of the caning was satisfactorily settled was, of course, out of the question. Coker did not even consider it. But what else he was to do was rather perplexing. He could not go home. He could not tell the old folks at home of the deep indignity that had been put upon him. Besides, he did not want to go home. He had no intention of leaving Greyfriars. He was anxious to return to Greyfriars—as soon as Mr. Prout came to his senses. But he was rather at a loose end till that should happen—and, so far, Mr. Prout had given no sign at all of coming to his senses. Coker was beginning to doubt whether he had any to come to.

Inward premonitions of dinner-time stirred Coker at last. He walked into Courtfield and dined at the Bun Shop.

After dining he strolled down the High Street, and observed that a policeman looked at him very attentively.

Coker's vast intellect did not work quickly. But it worked. Before half an hour had elapsed, it dawned upon him that Mr. Prout—utterly incapable of realising that Coker had simply retired with dignity from an undignified scene—must have supposed that he had run away from school. It was just what Prouty would suppose, Coker reflected bitterly. In that case, Prouty was quite capable of notifying the local police, and requesting them to keep an eye open for a runaway schoolboy. The attentive gaze of the Courtfield policeman was explained.

Coker walked hurriedly out of Courtfield when this became clear to him. He was prepared, if necessary, to punch a policeman, or anybody else, in defence of his just rights. But even Coker realised that if the punching of a policeman could be avoided, it was wiser to avoid it. To be marched back to Greyfriars with a bobby's hand on his shoulder was unthinkable. Punching a bobby was, to say the least, undesirable. It was better to keep clear of interfering bobbies. And for the second time that day Coker executed a masterly retreat.

Courtfield Common was a very pleasant place in the summer. In the winter it was rather damp and misty, and rather discomfiting. Horace Coker mooched about the common for some time, his future plans very hazy in his head. If Mr. Prout persisted in this attitude of taking absolutely no notice of Coker's evasion, it was a little difficult to see what Coker was going to do.

If, on the other hand, Prouty pursued him and discovered him, Coker's course was not clear, either. The juniors had wondered whether Coker would punch Prouty. But Coker was aware that he could not proceed to that length. Coker was clad in impenetrable fatuousness, as in triple steel; but even Coker knew that a fellow could not hit his Form master. Yet if Prouty ran him down and tried to march him back he was bound to resist—the caning of Coker being impossible and unthinkable.

It was undoubtedly a ticklish position, requiring all Coker's vast brain-power to deal with it adequately. If Prouty sent the Fifth after him—even if he sent the

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FROM
GREYFRIARS!"**

By Frank Richards,
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Sixth Form prefects after him—Coker was prepared to fight like a Berserker. But if Prouty appeared in person Coker was driven to the conclusion that he would have to dodge Prouty. It would be undignified, but, fortunately, it would not be difficult; Coker was active, and Prouty's days of activity were past.

Coker strolled about, dissatisfied, moody.

Presently he came on a gipsy caravan camped a little way off the road. Two rough-looking men were seated near it, smoking black pipes, while a bony horse grazed at a little distance. The two gipsies eyed Coker rather furtively. They muttered to one another and shook their heads. Coker looked a prosperous fellow, and had it been dark the two vagrants would have risked it. But in the broad daylight, close by the Courtfield Road, they would not venture. So Coker, and his watch and chain, and the ample supply of cash in his pockets, had a narrow escape, which Coker did not even suspect.

Not that Coker would have been robbed so easily as the two vagrants supposed. Coker might be every known kind of an ass, but he was a hefty fellow in a scrap, and he had a punch that was like a pile-driver. Possibly it was the gipsies who had the narrow escape.

Coker was a gregarious fellow, and he was tired of his own company by that time. He stopped to speak to the gipsies.

They answered him civilly, and Coker chatted with them for a few minutes. A policeman came along the road, going towards Courtfield, and he glanced at the gipsies and at Coker. But he passed on his way—to Coker's relief. Coker did not want to punch him, if he could help it, in defence of his liberty.

It was then that a brilliant idea came to Coker. If Prouty came along—Coker

felt certain that he would come along sooner or later—flight would be undignified, but unavoidable; hiding in a thicket or a ditch would be horribly damp and uncomfortable. The gipsy caravan solved the problem, or seemed to solve it.

"Look here, you chaps," said Coker. "Is a ten-bob note any use to you?"

The two gipsies looked at him.

"What-ho!" they answered simultaneously.

It was a case of two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one.

"Well, there's a man after me," said Coker.

"A schoolmaster?" grinned one of the gipsies.

"Well, yes."

"You've run away from school?"

The gipsies, having seen Coker mooching about aimlessly for a long time, and seeing that he was a schoolboy, had guessed that much. They knew more about it than Coker, in fact, for Coker was far from realising that he had done such an undignified thing as to run away from school.

Coker stared at the man haughtily.

"Certainly not!" he snapped.

"Oh!" said the gipsy.

"I've had a difference of opinion with a master and left him to think it over till he gets cool," Coker explained.

"Oh!"

"If he comes along I'd like to squat in your van for a bit," went on Coker. "I don't want to have to hit him—"

"Oh!"

"It's bad form to hit a master," Coker explained.

The two gipsies gazed at him.

"I just want to keep out of his sight. See?"

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"I see, sir."

The gipsies had no objection. A ten-shilling note changed hands. The two gipsies exchanged significant glances, of which the significance was wholly lost on Coker. They hoped that this prosperous-looking youth would remain with them till dark. If he did he would not be so prosperous when they parted company.

Coker sat down on a three-legged stool, more at ease in his mind.

He had a refuge close at hand now; if Mr. Prout's portly person appeared in the offing he had only to step into the gipsy caravan out of sight till the Fifth Form master had passed.

After that—

Later—after Mr. Prout had had ample time for reflection—Coker considered that it would be judicious to telephone to him from a Courtfield call-box. He would assure Mr. Prout that he bore no malice, that he was prepared to overlook the whole occurrence, to return to Greyfriars and resume his place in the Fifth just as if nothing had happened—the caning, of course, being off. That, Coker felt, was all that he could do. If Mr. Prout had come to his senses all would be well. If he had not yet come to his senses Coker's plans were vague, excepting on one point—he was not going to be caned. On that point there was no shadow of doubt, no possible, probable, shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever. Other matters might be doubtful, but not that.

The two gipsies smoked and spoke in undertones, with stealthy glances at Coker. Coker sat and watched, like Sister Anne, to see whether anybody was coming. He was, of course, watching in the wrong direction when, at last, in the falling winter dusk, a portly figure loomed on the horizon. The looks of the gipsies had been growing more and more stealthy as the dusk came on, their muttering more significant, and a sudden surprise for Coker was very near at hand when one of the vagrants discerned the portly figure coming up the road.

"Is that the bloke, sir?" he asked.

Coker started, and stared round.

"Oh, yes; don't give me away."

"No fear, sir!"

Coker vanished into the caravan like a rabbit into a burrow.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Painful for Prouty!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., headed off by Mr. Prout, as it were, had reluctantly given up the pursuit of the Fifth Form master. They had to content themselves with watching the gates, to see him on his return. More and more fellows gathered round the gates of Greyfriars. If Coker was marched in nobody wanted to miss it. And if Mr. Prout came back with a black eye, like Fitzgerald's, still more did nobody want to miss that. And really, there was no telling, with a fellow like Coker, what might happen.

More than once Mr. Prout glanced back as he puffed along the road. He did not want any observers on the scene when he met Coker. He, like the Greyfriars fellows, did not quite know what might happen. Certainly, he did not think of the possibility of a black eye. But he was not at all sure that Coker would submit to authority; the boy had had time to come to his senses but Mr. Prout doubted whether he had come. Matters were, indeed, rather complicated between Coker of the Fifth and his

Form master, with each waiting for the other to come to his senses.

But Mr. Prout was determined not to return without Coker. If the wretched fellow stayed out after lock-up the affair could not possibly be kept from the Head's knowledge. Coker's defiance of authority might easily mean an expulsion. Mr. Prout did not want that. On Coker's account merely he would have welcomed an expulsion, a flogging, perhaps even a boiling in oil. But Coker was in his Form, and he did not want an expulsion in his Form. He did not want the barbed sympathy of the whole Common-room. He did not want the Head to know that he had intended using the cane in the Fifth Form-room. Dr. Locke would never have approved of that—indeed, he would have been shocked by the knowledge. Mr. Prout could already hear him saying that chastisement was not the way to keep discipline in a senior Form. He would support Mr. Prout with all his authority, of course; he would expel Coker for his defiance. But—

By this time, doubtless, the rebel had come to his senses; he would have visualised expulsion and decided to submit to his Form master. Mr. Prout hoped so, at least.

Anyhow, Coker was going back to the school with him, if he had to pull Coker along by his ears. Once the wretched boy was inside the school again the matter would assume much less sensational dimensions.

Mr. Prout knew where to look for him, as Bunter supposed. Mr. Grimes had only to question some of the officers on duty. A Greyfriars senior had been seen in Courtfield about midday; later, in the afternoon, a constable coming in from his beat had seen a Greyfriars senior boy—his description easily recognised as Coker's—consorting with some gipsies camped by the road over the common. The gipsies had a caravan, and had been camped there for a couple of days: it was easy enough for Mr. Prout to find the place.

He found it.

The dusk was falling on the common when Mr. Prout's gleaming eye picked out the caravan, the two smoking gipsies, and the burly form of Horace Coker sitting on a three-legged stool.

Mr. Prout set his teeth and rolled on.

It was then that one of the vagrants espied him and warned Coker, and the rebel of the Fifth disappeared into the van.

As if Mr. Prout had been understudying Roderick Dhu, dark lightnings flashed from his eye.

He had run down the fugitive, and the fugitive had dared to conceal himself in the van, evidently ignorant of the fact that Mr. Prout had already seen him—which was very like Coker.

Mr. Prout came rolling on.

He left the road and tramped across the grass to the camped caravan, in which Coker of the Fifth now sat, like the heathen, in darkness.

Taking no heed of the gipsies, Mr. Prout tramped towards the door of the van. The two men rose at once and intercepted him.

"You can't go in there, old covey," said one.

"What—what?"

"Keep off!" said the other. "This here is our van, old covey!"

Mr. Prout's eyes flashed. Never in all his career had he been addressed as an old covey before. It was an unjust as well as rude appellation. Mr. Prout was not conscious of being old, and he was not a covey—whatever a covey might be.

"How dare you!" he rapped out. "Stand aside!"

"Oh, come off, old gent!" remonstrated one gipsy. "Poking your nose into a man's van! 'Ook it!"

"Give him a wipe, Jacob!" suggested the other.

"I'll give him a wipe fast enough, Charley, if he pokes his nose into our van!"

Mr. Prout trembled with wrath.

He did not know what a wipe was any more than he knew what a covey was, but he did not need telling that it was some form of assault and battery.

"Impertinent rascals!" he ejaculated.

"Wot?"

"A boy in my Form—a schoolboy who has run away from school—is hiding in that van!" boomed Mr. Prout. "I saw him enter! Turn that boy out of your van so that I may take him back to school. That is all I ask."

Jacob and Charley exchanged glances. Coker had tipped them in advance for the protection of their caravan; but Jacob and Charley were not gentlemen of a nice sense of honour; they would have given Coker away most unscrupulously had they not had private and personal motives for desiring his company till after dark. As the matter stood, however, they were prepared to keep off Mr. Prout by any rough measures.

"You 'ook it, old covey," said Charley. "My advice to you, old gent, is to 'ook it while you're still in one piece! See?"

"A schoolboy is in that van—a Greyfriars boy! I demand that that boy be handed over to me!" thundered Mr. Prout.

"If a young gent chooses to sit in our van, old covey, that ain't your business," said Jacob. "I don't want to 'urt you, and I fancy you'd burst like a blooming bladder if I 'it you! Take my tip and 'ook it!"

"I keep on telling you to 'ook it!" said Charley.

Mr. Prout did not hook it. His face was growing purple with wrath. The rebel of his Form was defying him—and, worse still, was consorting with lawless, ruffianly vagrants who threatened him. Wild horses would not have dragged Mr. Prout away from the spot. He was going to extract Horace Coker from that van if every vagrant in the kingdom stood in the way. The fighting blood of the Prouts was rising.

He raised his hand commandingly.

"I am here to take that boy back to school!" he thundered.

"'Ook it!"

"Stand aside!"

"Are you going to 'ook it, old covey, or ain't you going to 'ook it?" demanded Jacob, contracting his brows and thrusting out his stubbly chin in a very threatening manner.

"I will not stir one step from this spot without that young rascal!" roared Mr. Prout. "If you do not hand him over I will remove him from the van with my own hands, and you shall not stop me!"

"We'll stop you fast enough, old covey!" grinned Charley.

"Stand aside!" roared Mr. Prout, quite infuriated now.

"I don't think!" grinned Jacob.

Mr. Prout advanced resolutely. The two ruffians closed together in his path. But he did not stop; he shoved valiantly, and was shoved roughly in return; he struck, and was struck!

There was no doubt that Mr. Prout had pluck as well as a towering temper. But pluck, alas! did not suffice. He was not short of pluck, but he was short of stature and short of breath. If Mr. Prout had, indeed, been a mighty



The two ruffianly gipsies knocked Mr. Prout right and left. He would soon have been reduced to a state of horrible wreckage had not Horace Coker whipped out of the van at the critical moment. (See Chapter 14.)

hunter in his youth, no remnant of his ancient prowess had lingered on to middle life. Mr. Prout sometimes related in Common-room how he had in his Oxford days handled bargees. But the smallest bargee that ever barged could have handled Mr. Prout now with ease. Mr. Prout, like many another middle-aged gentleman, never could realise how many swift years had flown since the days when Plancus was consul, so to speak.

He seemed to expect to knock those two ruffianly gipsies right and left out of his majestic path. Instead of which, the two ruffianly gipsies knocked Mr. Prout right and left. His hat flew one way, his glasses another, and Mr. Prout found himself tossed about like a sack of straw, with two ruffianly, grinning gipsies punching him, pommelling him, smacking him, slapping him, and generally knocking him out of his seven senses. The universe reeled round the dazed and dizzy Form master, and Mr. Prout would very soon have been reduced to a state of horrible wreckage had not rescue been at hand. But it was at hand—and it came from an unexpected quarter.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fool's Luck!

HORACE COKER whipped out of the van.

Coker, inside the caravan, had grinned at first as he heard Mr. Prout engaged in wordy warfare with the two gipsies.

But when the warfare ceased to be wordy and became fistical Coker ceased to grin.

This was too much of a good thing. Coker was not the fellow to see his Form master knocked about by roughs.

Mr. Prout, in himself, might be nothing but an irritable, irascible old gentleman, obtusely unable to appreciate Coker at his true value. But he was Coker's Form master. From that circumstance he derived an importance that was not naturally his.

Coker certainly was quite out of patience with his Form master. He had disobeyed, disregarded, defied, and dodged him. But that was a very different proposition from seeing his Form master hustled and handled by roughs. Coker had no intention whatever of allowing that. He whipped out of the van with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

Of the ulterior motives of Jacob and Charley, Coker suspected nothing. So far as he knew, they were standing by him, defending him, earning the ten-shilling note he had tipped them. He would have been greatly surprised to learn that they were looking forward to robbing him as soon as they had cleared Mr. Prout off the scene. As Coker was under the impression that Jacob and Charley were handling Mr. Prout on his account, honestly earning their fee, it might have been supposed that Coker would hesitate to pitch into them. But Coker did not hesitate. Logic was not one of Coker's failings; sweet reasonableness never had appealed to him. He saw his Form master being knocked

about by roughs, and forgot everything else. As a matter of fact, Coker's intellect was capable of dealing with only one idea at a time, and even with one idea it dealt with some difficulty.

Mr. Prout was his Form master—a poor thing but his own, as it were. Coker was not going to see him knocked about. And, indeed, Jacob and Charley as they warmed to their work, overdid it a little; Mr. Prout was really not of an age and physique to stand all this thumping and clumping and bumping. Had not Coker rushed to the rescue the master of the Fifth would very soon have been a serious hospital case.

But Coker did rush to the rescue.

He came out of the van and whipped into the combat. His heavy right crashed on Charley's nose and his left on Jacob's jaw, and two simultaneous roars echoed over Courtfield Common.

"Chuck it!" shouted Coker. "Stop this at once."

He had punched his ruffianly allies merely to give point to his remarks. He was willing to let the matter drop at that.

Jacob and Charley were not willing.

For one thing, they had no idea of letting Coker escape them; for another, they were enraged. Charley's nose streamed crimson; Jacob's jaw felt as though a mule had kicked it. Leaving Mr. Prout, who sprawled helplessly and breathlessly in the grass, completely winded, the two ruffians turned on Coker like wild-cats.

"Stop it, I tell you!" roared Coker. "Can't you understand? Chuck it!"

They heard him, but they heeded not.

A moment more and Coker of the Fifth had his hands full.

Two hofty roughs attacked him together, and they attacked him with savage vim. They had only been playing with Mr. Prout; with Coker, it was serious business.

Coker did not retreat an inch.

He faced the attack gallantly; indeed, it did not occur to him to retreat.

His blood was up now, all the more when his nose spurted red under a crashing of grubby knuckles.

"Why, you cheeky rotters!" gasped Coker.

So far from retreating or giving in, Coker attacked the two roughs even more vigorously than they attacked him.

Coker was a fighting-man. What he did not know about boxing would have filled books—many books. But he had plenty of strength, unlimited pluck, and a Spartan indifference to punishment. He received, without heeding, savage knocks and jabs, and he gave back hefty drives that quite surprised Charley and Jacob.

Had those two ruffians attempted to rob Coker as they had intended, they would not have found it a soft job. This they realised now. Coker was a hard man to handle.

It was two against one, but the one was Coker, and the fight he put up was really terrific.

Mr. Prout, sprawling and gasping, gazed at the scene dizzily. Coker's intervention had saved him from serious damage, but he was far too damaged to intervene and help Coker. He gasped and gasped and gasped, and blinked dizzily at this Berserker fight, his brain reeling.

So far as he was able to think at all, he thought that Coker would be overwhelmed and smashed.

But Coker was not overwhelmed and he was not smashed.

He received punishment that might have made a prizefighter tired of the ring. He did not heed it. His nose streamed crimson; his eyes were blackening; his mouth had a list to port; his bumps and bruises could not have been counted. But all the time Coker was hitting like a steam-hammer, with undiminished energy and undiminished pluck.

Jacob was down at last, winded, covered with injuries as with a garment. He collapsed, panting and spluttering and groaning. Charley kept it up a few minutes longer, till a terrific drive on his nose almost drove that feature through the back of his head, and he went to grass.

Coker, victorious, stood swaying and panting, exhausted but unconquered, ready to go on till he dropped. But the fight was over. Jacob and Charley might yet have pulled it off by a determined attack; but, unfortunately, they did not possess the bulldog pluck of Horace Coker. They remained where they were, in the grass, and took it out in swearing.

"You cheeky rotters!" panted Coker. "By Jove! Come on, you scoundrels! I'll teach you! Come on, you cheeky cads! I'm ready for you!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Moooooooooh!"

Jacob and Charley did not come on. They crawled and limped away to their van, groaning, with lurid remarks that almost turned the atmosphere blue.

Coker glared at them.

"Shut up! Do you hear? Shut up!"

Jacob and Charley shut up.

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Coker turned to Mr. Prout.

He was almost staggering; both his eyes were closing, and he could hardly see. Mr. Prout picked himself up. He had recovered his breath a little by this time. He gazed at Coker almost in awe. Coker was, indeed, a sight for gods and men. Never in the history of Greyfriars had a Greyfriars man presented such an appearance of battered wreckage. But he was still game. Had Jacob and Charley gone on, Coker would have gone on. Coker never knew when he was beaten.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Coker. "Sorry those roughs handled you, sir. I've jolly well stopped them."

"My dear boy!" ejaculated Mr. Prout.

"Eh?"

"My dear Coker, you have acted bravely, nobly!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Coker.

It had not occurred to Coker that he had acted bravely or nobly. Still, he was willing to admit the fact, now that Mr. Prout had pointed it out.

"You see, I couldn't let those brutes assault my Form master, sir," explained Coker.

Mr. Prout beamed upon him.

Being quite unaware that he derived such importance as he had from the

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THE RIO KID!

Turn to Page Eleven.

fact that he was Coker's Form master, Mr. Prout naturally considered that Coker's words showed a very proper spirit. The boy had been disobedient and wilful, but he had fought to save his Form master from assault; that showed that his heart was in the right place, whatever might be said of his head.

"My dear Coker, you have acted with great bravery; you have more than redeemed your fault!" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "I am proud of you, Coker—proud to have such a courageous lad in my Form. You are injured, Coker. I will assist you back to the school."

Coker looked dogged at once.

"You see, sir—" he began.

"Your punishment is rescinded, Coker!"

"Oh!"

"Surely you do not suppose, my dear boy, that I should cane you after you have acted with such courage, and received such injuries in defence of your Form master!" exclaimed Mr. Prout.

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

"Come, my boy."

Coker came.

Slowly but surely it dawned upon Coker that he had, quite unexpectedly, quite unintentionally, quite inadvertently, earned his pardon; that the trouble was over—that he was not to be taken back to Greyfriars as a culprit to be caned, but as a noble-hearted youth who had sustained severe damages in a noble cause.

That, of course, made all the difference.

Coker could hardly walk. Mr. Prout gave him the assistance of a podgy arm. Fifth Form master and Fifth-Former progressed, towards Greyfriars, eyed with great interest by everyone whom they passed on the road.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Here they come!"

"They've been scrapping!"

"Prouty's blacked his eyes!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Half Greyfriars watched them come in. Coker's countenance, which was a study in every imaginable kind of damage, drew all eyes. Mr. Prout, flustered and untidy and dishevelled, also came in for great attention. The first impression was that Mr. Prout had inflicted those terrific damages on Coker and brought him back a prisoner, captive to his bow and spear, as it were. A huge crowd followed them up to the House. Juniors and seniors swarmed round them; masters came out of their studies; the Head himself met them in the doorway. Dr. Locke gazed at them like an old gentleman who could scarcely credit the evidence of his eyes or his glasses.

"Mr. Prout, what—what—what," he stuttered—"what has happened? What has happened to this—this boy?"

"This boy—Coker, sir, of my Form—has sustained these injuries, sir, in helping me. I have been assaulted by gipsies, sir, and Coker nobly came to my help, sir!" said Mr. Prout.

"Bless my soul!"

Coker was assisted into the House. The news buzzed all over Greyfriars. Coker, though he sturdily declared that it was nothing—was made to go to bed, and the school doctor summoned by telephone. Greyfriars rang with the story of Coker and his terrific combat. The Fifth heard it with amazement. But their amazement was mingled with satisfaction. The caning was off. That, at least, was clear.

There was not, after all, to be a caning in the Fifth Form room! That revolutionary break with tradition was not to happen. In view of Coker's conduct, Mr. Prout was able to recede, without loss of dignity, from the position he had taken up. Coker—no longer under sentence of caning—was able to resume his place in the Fifth Form, without loss of dignity on his part. Everybody's dignity was saved—the dignity of Mr. Prout; the dignity of Horace Coker; the dignity of the Fifth Form. Only Coker's black eyes and swollen nose looked a little undignified; but there is always a fly in the ointment somewhere; and these things, after all, were trifles. In the course of time Coker's eyes would reassume their natural hue, and his nose would once more look as much like an ordinary nose as it ever did.

"Good old Coker!" said Bob Cherry. "If there's anything funnier than the way Coker gets into scrapes, it's the way he gets out of them. This proves, my beloved 'earers, that there is such a thing as fool's luck."

Upon the whole, the Greyfriars fellows were glad that Coker of the Fifth had got off so well—that the affair which had looked so awfully serious at one time had ended so amicably. Only Hobson of the Shell, like Rachael of old, mourned and would not be comforted. But it was impossible to please everybody.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's grand story, chums; it's the opening yarn of a special "barring-out" series. Have a look at page 21 for further particulars.)

"STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE. . ." That's what many a prisoner told himself during the Great War. Certainly stone walls don't cause young Eric Milvain over much worry. His one idea is to escape from his German prison, and he jumps at the first opportunity, with both feet!



Additional interest attaches to this story in that the author was a British pilot during the Great War, and was taken prisoner by the Germans.—Ed.

An Amazing New Story of the Great War. (Introduction on page 26.)

The Strasbourg Prison Fort.

IN the midst of his guards, Eric was hustled from the room. The door closed, and inside sounded the rumble of low-toned voices. For ten minutes Eric waited with his guards, then Sergeant Schloss appeared, closing the door of the room behind him.

"You will return to the Gasthof with me!" he said harshly to the guard. "You will there obtain rations! The prisoner is to be removed to-night to the fort at Strasbourg!"

There was no explanation forthcoming. The sergeant made that bald statement only. Whether or not Strasbourg was to see the execution of himself, Eric did not know. Dr. Kauterfauld had obviously ordered his removal, and there came again to Eric that look of amusement in the man's eyes.

He knew only too well that his life was forfeit, that Kauterfauld would never allow him to escape again or ever leave Germany alive. Then what devil's work was to be carried out at Strasbourg?

Out in the darkened street Eric saw the shadowy outlines of German pickets. Here and there a bayonet glinted in the darkness, and murmured guttural words came to his ears. At the Gasthof, much to his surprise, he was given a meal of sausage and sauerkraut—that eternal German cabbage—washed down by a bowl of acorn coffee. Then his civilian clothes were searched by Sergeant Schloss himself.

"You will keep these till Strasbourg is reached," said the latter. "There they will give you the prison clothes."

An hour later, in the midst of his guards, he set out for Karlsruh Station. They handcuffed him this time, and Sergeant Schloss walked by his side.

It was by now the early hours of the morning. The platforms of Karlsruh Railway Station were crowded with grey-clad German soldiers. They were, for the most part, on their way back to the Western Front after leave. Their rifles were slung on their shoulders, and all were wearing the heavy grey

greatcoat used by the German Army in the field.

Some had parcels tucked under their arms, some were sprawled asleep on the platform seats. More than one was drunk, some boisterously, others pugnaciously. But on almost every face was weary apathy. And Eric was not slow to note the dreary hopelessness which seemed to weigh heavily on each pair of grey-clad shoulders. There was little joking, little laughter, just sullen, rumbling talk.

Talk of that stretch of mud which the world called the Western Front, talk of that line of British bayonets, that wall of solid steel! More than one growled menacingly as Eric passed with his guards, but the stern, set face of Schloss, rendered more forbidding by the red weal, prevented any demonstration of "hate." For let it be said that if the average German non-commissioned officer was not held in respect by those of inferior rank, he was, at least, regarded with a very lively fear. He held more power than did the non-commissioned officer of any other army in Europe. He could order punishments, the approval of his commissioned officer being, in many cases, only a matter of form.

How far the "blood and iron" rule of the German Army would have been carried out had it not been for the non-commissioned officers, who were ardent disciples of it, the world may never know.

Eric slept during the journey to Strasbourg, his manacled hands in front of him. It was broad daylight when eventually the train slid into the station of that town, and, stiff and weary and very little refreshed, Eric descended from the compartment with his guards.

He was marched through the town, and then for about two miles along the banks of the Rhine till he came to large iron gates fronted by a small enclosure of barbed wire eight feet high and four feet thick. The gates themselves seemed to open into the side of a small hillock, and this, Eric knew, was the entrance to the earth-covered fort, which was now overgrown with grass, long and rank.

Passing through the barbed wire on

closure, Eric's guards halted at the large iron doors whilst Sergeant Schloss spoke a few curt words to the sentry who stood on duty there. Then one door was swung back and the party passed into a damp, dimly lighted corridor of stone which was more like a subterranean tunnel than anything else.

Sergeant Schloss evidently knew his way, for without hesitation, he led the party through a maze of wide, winding corridors till eventually he halted at the iron door of a room. He knocked with the scabbard of his bayonet, and a guttural voice bade him to enter.

"Wait here!" he commanded, and entered the room alone, closing the door behind him.

Half an hour or more dragged past, then he reappeared. With him was a Bavarian sergeant-major, a massive brute whose grey, high-necked tunic was unbuttoned its entire length, and whose feet were thrust into a pair of dilapidated carpet slippers. This latter fellow subjected Eric to a cold stare.

"So this is the new one, Schloss?" he rumbled.

"Jawohl! This is the schweinhund, my Krote!"

Sergeant-Major Krote rubbed his unshaven chin, then spat on the floor.

"Well, I will keep him safe! Have no fear of that!" he growled. "But we must get the dog into prison clothes!"

He threw back his head and roared out an order. His voice echoed like a bull's through the corridors and died rumblingly away. Two soldiers appeared, their rifles slung on their shoulders. Their grey uniforms were dirty and shabby, and, like Krote, they were badly in need of a shave.

"Take this schweinhund to Number Sixteen cell!" ordered Krote. "Give him prison clothes and bring these he is wearing to me!"

The guards closed in about Eric, and he was marched along the corridor to the door of a cell. One of the soldiers unlocked it with a key from a bunch which hung from his belt. His companion swung the door open and gave Eric a push which sent him staggering across the threshold. Then the door

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slammed shut and the key grated again in the lock.

The cell was large, with a big barred window devoid of any glass. A man in tattered khaki, standing by the window, swung round as Eric entered.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Er—hallo!" exclaimed Eric. "Sorry to barge in like this, but I was assisted by a shove in the back!"

The man smiled.

Stopping forward, he seized Eric's hand.

"You're English?" he demanded.

"Yes!"

"Thank goodness for that! I thought I'd never see an Englishman again! I've been here three months, I think, but I've lost all count of time!"

Jacques!

FURTHER conversation was temporarily suspended owing to the arrival of one of the guards with an armful of prison clothes. Eric stripped off those which he had taken from the house near the Gasthof in Karlsruhe, and donned the black trousers with their thick yellow stripe down the side of each leg, and the ill-fitting tunic of the same material, on the shoulders and back of which were inserted pieces of diamond-shaped yellow cloth.

Whilst he was changing, Eric covertly studied his fellow-prisoner. The badges on the tattered khaki uniform showed that the man was a captain in the King's Own Scottish Borderers. He was tall and dark, and when he smiled he showed a set of perfect teeth—too perfect.

It was unreasonable, of course, Eric knew that, but, somehow, he didn't like him, and inwardly he called himself a fool for harbouring such sentiments. Dash it all, the man was an Englishman—a prisoner of war in enemy country!

The guard withdrew, and, waiting till the door had been locked on the outside, Eric's companion seated himself on one of the two straw palliasses which lay on the floor of the cell.

"Now we can talk!" he said. "And I'm dying to talk! I've got three months' conversation bottled up inside me! By the way, I'd better introduce myself. My name is Cranleigh! I was two months in the fortress at Lille before the Boche pushed me on here. I was captured on the Ancre. Had a ghastly time; first the gas, then machine-gun fire— But, I say, you must forgive me running on like this!"

"Oh, carry on!" grunted Eric. "Er—my name's Milvain!"

"Milvain—eh? But what the dickens have you been doing? I mean to say, it's only pretty serious cases which are treated like yours. Those prison clothes, you know! Dash it, the blighters might have let you keep your uniform! It's obvious they don't mean to allow you to escape!"

"They don't!" assented Eric grimly.

"Oh, why? What's the trouble?"

Again there came to Eric that feeling of dislike for the man. He wanted to talk, to discuss things; but, somehow, Cranleigh jarred upon him.

"Oh, I dunno!" he grunted. "There's a certain Hun who gets on his hind legs and sings the 'Hymn of Hate' every time my name's mentioned!"

Cranleigh stared at him for a moment, then grinned.

"That's why you're here, I suppose!" he said. "This camp is awful and Krote is a brute. He's virtually in

charge here, and there's precious little discipline; he does what he likes. There aren't many prisoners—about thirty all told, mostly Italians from the Austrian front. One or two Americans and an occasional Englishman passing on to some bigger camp. It's a sort of clearing-camp, you know!"

"But, look here, I thought you'd been here three months in solitary confinement!" said Eric slowly.

Cranleigh laughed.

"I have," he replied. "You're wondering how I know all these details—oh? I get all the news from Jacques! He's a Belgian prisoner—a half-wit! What he's been through has sent him a bit funny, you understand? He works in the kitchens here, and brings my grub twice a day. I got three months for escaping from the fortress at Lille—three months solitary confinement—and I think my time's about up."

The man spoke glibly, convincingly; but Eric's feeling of dislike for him was becoming tinged with a faint distrust. He could understand a man being garrulous after three months solitary confinement, but Cranleigh talked with a bonhomie, a certain gaiety, even, which one would not look for in a man who had undergone three months solitary confinement.

Eric sat in silence. He had other things to think about than Cranleigh. Here he was at Strasbourg. If only he could get out of this camp how near he would be to the buried plans near Mulden! Three or four days at the outside, and even that would be slow travelling. No, he might do it in two days with any luck. Once he could retrieve the plans he would lose no time in making for the line. But, he reflected uneasily, why was he here? Why had Kauterfauld countermanded the execution and sent him to Strasbourg? There was something behind it all, something to do with those plans. Eric was convinced of that.

A shuffling footstep outside in the passage cut in on his thoughts. The door was unlocked and a man slipped into the cell, carrying two bowls of soup in his hands. He was clad in a torn and tattered blue uniform of a Belgian infantryman. He was quite young, but his pale, drawn face was prematurely aged. The hands which held the soup-bowls were shaking as though with the ague. His eyes were alert and unnaturally bright.

THE STORY SO FAR.

Captain Eric Milvain, crack pilot of the 97th Bombing Squadron, receives orders to proceed on a perilous mission to Trier—behind the German lines. He is attacked by four enemy aeroplanes and, after a terrible fight, is forced to descend in a stretch of desolate moorland, his observer dead and his machine useless. There he encounters Birchington, a British Secret Service agent disguised as a German peasant. Fatally wounded by enemy soldiers, Birchington hands over some valuable plans to the young airman, and with his last breath implores Eric Milvain to bury them until they can be recovered and got through to the British headquarters. This is barely done before Milvain is captured by the party of Germans. He is taken to the military barracks at Hagenot, where he comes face to face with Dr. Kauterfauld, chief of the German Secret Service, whom Eric Milvain had known under the name of Rosen before the outbreak of war. Kauterfauld had been unsuccessful in his attempts to obtain the secret of a new high explosive, the invention of Professor Milvain, Eric's father, and he determines now to have his revenge on the young Englishman. Later, Eric is taken to Karlsruhe and though he manages to escape he has the misfortune to fall into the hands of Dr. Kauterfauld once again.

(Now read on.)

"Hallo, Jacques!" greeted Cranleigh. "Soup again?"

Jacques nodded, and, kicking shut the door of the cell with his foot, advanced into the centre of the floor. One bowl he placed by Cranleigh's palliasse, then turned and, bending down, placed the other by Eric.

His back was to Cranleigh, and as his eyes met Eric's he gave his head a sharp, short shake.

Puzzled, Eric stared at the man. Again the Belgian shook his head and glanced out of the corner of his eyes towards Cranleigh. That was all. The whole episode was over in a moment. Jacques straightened up and, turning, shuffled towards the door.

"Jacques!" Cranleigh spoke softly.

The Belgian halted.

"Yes, sir?" he said humbly.

"To-night—Krote, will he be in the camp?"

"No. To-night he goes to the town—to the beerhalle!"

"There will be no moon?"

"No."

"Then I get out to-night, Jacques! Two hundred pounds for you and Otto, lodged in the Bank of Holland, if I get clear. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

With that Jacques moved on towards the door. He opened it and paused a moment on the threshold. Again his eyes met those of Eric—eyes which seemed dumbly striving to convey a message, then the door slammed, and he was gone.

Cranleigh's Plan!

LOOK here, Milvain"—Cranleigh's voice was serious—"you heard what I said to Jacques! Well, I'm going to be perfectly candid with you! I've been here three months, and I haven't been idle. I started by sounding Jacques. He gets more kicks than ha'pence from the Boche in the camp, as you can guess. But they look upon him as harmless. Well, he's got a pal of sorts among the guards—a fellow from Alsace called Otto."

He paused for a moment, then went on:

"I've told you that discipline here is rotten. It is. Periodically Krote goes on the binge, gets frightfully drunk. I, Jacques, and Otto have been waiting for just such an outburst taking place. He started drinking a couple of days ago, and to-night he's off to Strasbourg town. When the cat's away the mice will play—or, rather, when Krote's away the guards will play. Cards or any bally thing they like!"

He leant forward and spoke impressively.

"This is an easy camp to get out of. I know that, because there's more than one got away. You see, as a rule, fellows are not here long enough to get the lie of the land and make plans. Well, with the aid of Otto and Jacques I go to-night, and I'm making for the Swiss frontier. Here, look at this!"

He rose to his feet, and with finger and thumb plucked a thin piece of folded paper from a crack in the cemented wall. He opened it out, and Eric saw that it was a map of Southern Germany, wonderfully drawn as to detail.

"Here is Strasbourg, and here is the Swiss frontier," pointed out Cranleigh. "See, I propose to take this route if I can get clear. It's not far, and I'll



Jacques' back was to Cranleigh as he prepared to set down the bowl, and as the Belgian's eyes met Eric's he gave his head a sharp, short shake. Puzzled, Eric stared at the man. Again, Jacques shook his head, and glanced out of the corner of his eyes towards Cranleigh. That was all.

(See page 26.)

raid orchards for grub under cover of darkness. I'll bet Krote won't know I've gone till morning. Gives me nearly ten hours' start."

He paused, staring at Eric curiously. "I don't know what your trouble is, and I don't know whether two of us could make a get-away as well as one. I'm going, that's certain, if I can. If it's possible for you to come as well, are you game?"

Eric was silent. His mind was still turning on the peculiar conduct of Jacques. The man had intended to convey some message. He had shaken his head. Did he wish to warn Eric against this attempted escape, knowing it must end in failure. But why should he? He had no reason to warn Eric or care much what happened to the boy.

"How do you intend to get out?"

Eric hedged by asking the question. Cranleigh shrugged his shoulders.

"This is an old fort, built originally, I presume, to withstand attacks from Austria in the olden days. Look at those bars. Solid enough, I admit, but the cement's as brittle as well could be, and a chisel will soon loosen that. Otto's getting the chisel, and Jacques is bringing it here. I'll bet there will be no one on guard in the corridor five minutes after Krote has set off for the beerhalle!"

"It's awfully good of you to suggest that I should accompany you—"

Eric slowly. "Oh, forget it!" Cranleigh made an impatient gesture. "If you're game, and it can be worked, you're more than welcome to stand in with me!"

Eric plunged his hands in his pockets and walked to the window. It looked out upon the canal at the rear of the fort. Funny how that dislike and distrust of Cranleigh persisted!

"We'll not get far in these clothes," he said, over his shoulder.

"No. It might be possible to get yours if they are in Krote's room. Otto's providing me with a field overcoat and a pair of marching boots and a forage cap."

"And if we get clear you're going to make for the Swiss frontier?"

"That's my idea."

Eric turned and faced Cranleigh determinedly.

"Look here," he said, "I'll stand in with you on this escape, and any help you want you can rely on me to give right up to the hilt. But if we get clear, we part company outside the camp. You go your route, and I'll go mine. If you agree to that, then we'll get right down to details."

Cranleigh looked at him sharply.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he snapped. "Why should we part company?"

"Never mind!" replied Eric doggedly. "I'm saying this now instead of saying it outside the camp, when you might be forgiven for thinking I was trying to let you down."

"Do you mean that you don't approve of the Swiss frontier route?" asked Cranleigh. "Because if you're thinking of taking a safer one, let's hear it, and I'll join you!"

For Cranleigh to join him was the last thing Eric wanted. He wished to go alone to Mulden in order to retrieve the buried plans. He didn't want Cranleigh butting in. Why? In very truth, Eric could find no answer to that question.

With a laugh, Cranleigh rose to his feet and clapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Let's get out of the camp first," he said genially. "We can settle then the

best route to take. It may turn out that we'll be chivvied into going to earth in some bally district through which we never intended passing. We'll slip out of this wretched country, somehow!"

All that day Eric wrestled with his problem. He could not afford to ignore this providential chance of escape which was offering. That brooked of no question at all. He must escape. But what about Cranleigh? If the latter insisted upon accompanying him through Mulden towards the line, or towards the Vosges, then Eric could scarcely tell him bluntly that his company wasn't wanted. Dash it all, the man was helping him to get out of the camp!

He could, of course, take Cranleigh into his confidence to an extent. Tell him that he had a certain mission to perform near Mulden and leave it to the fellow's good taste to refrain from further questioning. But no! Whether or not he was acting like a narrow-minded, prejudiced ass, Eric did not know, but some instinct warned him to be chary of what confidences he gave to the garrulous Cranleigh.

Afternoon gave way to evening, and dusk deepened in turn into night. Scarcely had darkness come than the tramp, tramp, tramp of the sentry in the corridor outside the cell ceased.

"I told you!" Cranleigh's voice was triumphant. "The drunken Krote has gone to pollute Strasbourg for the rest of the evening! The guards will probably be playing cards and smoking till he returns! After all, the prisoners are locked in their rooms, and there's not much danger of any of 'em getting out—unless, of course, they have—er—friends in the camp as you and I have!"

A key grated softly in the lock. The door swung open and Jacques shuffled into the room, holding an electric torch.

"Good man! You've got the chisel?" whispered Cranleigh.

"Yes! Otto says you must work

(Continued on the next page.)

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quick. He is on guard for only one more hour. Krote has gone!"

"And the inside guards?"

"They are in their quarters!"

"Good! Hold this blanket!"

Whilst Jacques held a folded blanket in front of the bars to help muffle any noise, Cranleigh went rapidly to work. Within an hour three bars were loosened and wrenched from their sockets.

"We're through!" Cranleigh's voice came in a glib whisper. "Are you ready, Milvain? It's not much of a drop and we fall on soft earth!"

"Yes, I'm ready!" replied Eric. "But, I say, why not take Jacques with us?"

"Don't be a fool!" rapped Cranleigh angrily, then bit off the words quickly and added, in a quieter tone: "It's impossible, man! Jacques cannot travel fast, and"—he lowered his voice—"he'd give us away! He's not responsible for his actions sometimes!"

"We can risk that!" retorted Eric. "I don't like leaving any man in Germany."

Cranleigh clicked his tongue impatiently.

"Jacques, do you want to come with us?" he asked.

"No-o!" replied the man slowly.

Eric gripped him by the shoulders.

"Don't you?" he demanded.

Jacques drew himself up.

"Yes, sir!" he said, and his voice was trembling. "I—I would like to come!"

"Jacques,"—Cranleigh's voice was sharp—"do you mean that?"

"I—I do mean it! I—I would like to come!"

Cranleigh was silent a moment, his face a white blur in the darkness.

"Then come, you fool!" he snapped.

"And if we're recaptured, it'll be your confounded fault! Give me the rope!"

From inside his tunic Jacques produced a thin, hempen rope, which Cranleigh tied to one of the bars, allowing the end to trail downwards on the outer side of the wall.

"It may reach the bottom and save us a drop!" he said. "You first, Milvain!"

"No, you first, Jacques!" said Eric.

"Get on, Milvain!" snapped Cranleigh. "We want someone with nimble wits to go first and make sure that the coast is clear!"

Without further ado, for there was wisdom in the words, Eric clambered over the sill and, gripping the rope, slid down into the night. A few moments later his feet touched loose earth.

With bated breath he stood listening.

"All clear?"

Cranleigh's voice floated down in a whisper.

"Yes!"

There was silence, a scuffling noise, another interval of silence, then a slithering as the dark form of a man came down the rope.

It was Cranleigh.

"Come on, Milvain," he whispered, "let's get away from here! Jacques isn't coming! He faked it at the last minute!"

"Did he?"

Eric's voice betrayed his incredulity. "What the dickens do you mean by 'did he?'" snapped Cranleigh. "I tell you he did, else he would have been here! Come on, let's get away!"

"Wait a minute," said Eric grimly, "I don't understand this!"

"Oh, shut up, and come on!" snapped Cranleigh. "If you don't, I go without you!"

A faint moan, scarcely audible, sounded in the stillness which followed his words.

"What is that?" whispered Eric sharply.

"I don't know! Are you coming?"

"No, I'm not!" retorted the boy. "By jove Cranleigh—"

He gripped the rope in his hands and commenced to swarm up. Cranleigh laid a detaining hand on his leg.

"Let go, or I'll smash your face in with my boot!" warned Eric savagely.

With a growl, Cranleigh released his hold. Up through the darkness to the cell went Eric, and, reaching the sill, clambered through.

"Jacques!" he whispered. "Jacques!"

A faint moan came from the floor, and, groping with his hands, he found the man sprawled full length.

He had the electric torch in his pocket and, pulling it out, he pressed the button. By the thin beam he saw the Belgian lying on his back, a knife hilt protruding from his chest.

Slipping one arm round the man, he raised him to a sitting posture.

"Did Cranleigh do this?" he demanded.

"Yes—yes. He did not want me—because—because—"

The man's voice trailed away. Then, as though summoning all his energies, he grasped Eric by the sleeve.

"Be warned—a plot—Cranleigh is not—"

Again the words trailed away. The hand clutched convulsively, the head fell limply back. Jacques was dead.

(What's going to happen now, chums? Will Eric have it out with Cranleigh straight from the shoulder, or will Jacques' half-uttered warning have fallen on deaf ears? Mind you read next week's amazing instalment.)

FAMOUS FOOTBALL CLUBS.

(Continued from page 2.)

The forwards are a progressive lot, believe me. They don't waste much time in weaving fancy patterns. Their motto is—the shortest way to goal is the best, and they get there in the least possible time.

Fleet-Footed Forwards!

As very near the country's finest right-wing pair commend me to Hughie Adcock, the outside-right, and Ernest Hine, the inside-right. See these two making headway; changing places and finding each other with the ball in such a way that you would think they never required to look up. That's real understanding. Adcock is real Leicester—from Loughborough, while Hine first earned a reputation with Barnsley.

Centre-forward Arthur Chandler is a London man, and I only need tell you that he has been known to score five goals in a match against such a side as Aston Villa to broadcast what sort of a player he is. He "hits 'em" on the run, but he is a footballer as well, and London people have never been able to understand why Queen's Park Rangers allowed him to depart.

A Scot—and Schemer, Too!

We have not yet finished with the tale of the Scots, for at inside-left there is another man from the land of cake—Arthur William Lochhead. He is a real Scot, too, in the way he sets about his work; wasting no energy, but quietly and calmly scheming all the time. I sometimes wish he would get more goals, but then we must remember that it is the duty of some players to make openings, while others bang the ball into the net. And Lochhead is one of the unselfish players who is happy when he is acting in the part of universal provider.

Having looked for an outside-left for some time, Leicester got one recently from Notts County in Len Barry. A big fee was paid for him. Having served in the Royal Air Force during the War, you would expect Barry to be a flyer. He is. No mistake about that. Altogether a team full of possibilities. Leicester City, given luck, may win the First Division championship at an earlier date than some of us suspect just now. Here's luck to them!

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WHEN ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS :: PLEASE MENTION THIS PAPER ::

"M. R. WISKERS, the cat's-meet man, to see you, sir!" Binding, the page at St. Sam's, looked into the Head's study, and made that announcement.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Dr. Birchmell. "Keep him out for a while, please, Binding!"

Evidently the venerated headmaster of St. Sam's did not want to see Mr. Wiskers. At the mere mention of the name, the eggpression on Dr. Birchmell's face had undergone a complete transformation.

Up to the time of Binding's entry, the Head had been grinning very cheerily. And with good reason, too. For after several strenuous efforts, he had at last succeeded in becoming a very capable ventriloquist. Under the tuition of the well-bred Professor Gargle, he had mastered the difficult art and was now able to throw his voice about with any man.

Now, to put an end to his happiness, here was Mr. Wiskers.

Dr. Birchmell realized, with a shudder, what that meant. For some time, Mr. Wiskers had been supplying the school cat with cat's-meet on tick. Evidently his patience was now exhausted, and he had come for his pound of flesh.

"Keep him out, for heaven's sake!" repeated Dr. Birchmell, anxiously. But the order came too late.

Even as he spoke, the visitor, with a stealthy cat-like tread, pushed his way into the study.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Mr. Wiskers gravely. "I've called about your bill for the meat."

"It will be met!" said Dr. Birchmell, a sickly pallor overspreading his forehead. "Do not ruin me for the sake of a miserable cat, sir! Pardon me, please!"

"I am only too anxious to meet you," said Mr. Wiskers, devilishly, after a pause, "but the question is: Is your tail genuine?"

"Certainly it is!" said the Head earnestly. "I realize that I am behind in my payments, but I fully intend to observe good faith with you as per agreement. You remember the claws?"

"I remember," assented Mr. Wiskers, "but I am not convinced about your good faith. Your reputation among local tradespeople is not of the best. I should like to see some dough, if you don't mind."

heard before. It was the sound of conversation going on outside. Evidently two gentlemen—probably masters—were discussing Dr. Birchmell, in blissful ignorance of the fact that their words could be heard in the study.

"What! Birchmell been left a fortune?" one of them was saying.

"It's a fact!" the other replied. "His wealthy uncle, who made a fortune in the dyeing industry, has died, and left him everything."

"Grate pip!" Then he must be as rich as Croesus!

"Not yet! They say it will take months—perhaps years—to settle up the uncle's estate and prove his will. But as soon as that's done, Birchmell will undoubtedly pay all his bills, in fact, I expect he'll pay his debtors double for having had to keep them waiting!"

"Fancy that! But then, he always was a very generous gentleman!"

The voices died away, and Dr. Birchmell, who appeared not to have heard them, pushed back his chair and rose from his desk again, still preserving his grave demeanour.

The eggpression on Mr. Wiskers's face, however, had altered considerably, by this time. Previously, he had looked pragmatic, and truckling, and suspicious, and looked the picture of friendliness.

"My dear Dr. Birchmell!" he exclaimed. "Let me assure you that there is now no hurry whatever. Pay whenever you like, and I will continue to deliver the cat's-meet as before. I quite believe you intend to foot the bill, in fact, I expect your eggplanation in too-toe."

He donned his hat and with a low bow, brushed out of the study. A few minutes later, Dr. Birchmell watched him crossing the quad.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "He larded till the tires ran down his tinkled cheeks in quite a cascade. Rattily had the reversed and dignified Dr. Birchmell been so highly amused."

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Fuctions! at St Sam's!

DICKY NUGENT



Almost the entire school had gathered round, now, and they stared wonderingly at the rekin-bent fingers of the four heroes of the Fourth. It was the first time on record Jack Jolly & Co. had ever quarrelled. They were, in fact, friends to a fault. To see them all lying there, victims of each other's blows, was unprecedented! At the crucial moment Dr. Birchmell stepped forward. There was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes as he gazed on the eggghastened Fourth Formers.

"Ha! Fighting, I see!" he murmured, jocularly, forgetting that only a few minutes before, he had been openly applauding. "When they come round, tell them to come up to my study, and I'll brinch them black and blue!"

"Indeed! I'll learn 'em!"

Rubbing his hands gleefully, he made his way thro the crowd, which parted respectfully to allow him to pass.

Already his ventriloquism was wreaking havoc at St. Sam's, for it was he, and not the journeymen themselves, who had caused the split in the Co., and undoubtedly their were fresh troubles in store for the School.

III.

"Well, gents, hear we are again!" at the Masters' Monthly Meeting! I hereby declare the meeting open. Now we'll get on with the giddy wadding. Or, to put it in vulgar parlance, let us proceed!"

Dr. Birchmell, presiding over the monthly chin-wag of the St. Sam's masters, seemed to be in his happiest mood. He sat down, after that preliminary speech, amid loud applause, and in his place Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, arose.

"My dear friends—" he began. "Facts!"

It was the unmistakable voice of Mr. Lickham, who stopped and stared with horrified eyes at the interrupter.

There was a chuckle from the rest of the masters.

"Do I here right?" gasped Mr. Lickham, turning as red as a pony. "Facts!" came the voice of Mr. Lickham, again. "And many of 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The masters fairly roared, while Dr. Birchmell rubbed his skinny hands with glee. Once again the ventriloquist of St. Sam's was at work. It was Dr. Birchmell, not Mr. Justus, who had made the interjection. But to the rest it sounded oggishly like Mr. Justus.

"Am you addressing me?" asked Mr. Justus, in surprise, suddenly tumbling to the fact that something was wrong.

"What's the merry idea, Lickham?" "Now, now, gentlemen!" said Dr. Birchmell, reprovingly. "No scripping till we get outside, please! On the bawl, Lickham!"

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Lickham, swallowing his anger with a gulp. "As I was saying, my dear friends—"

"Rats!"

This time the interrupter seemed to be Mr. Lickham, of the Third.

Mr. Lickham stopped again. He was not a good orator at the best of times, and interruptions always flummoxed him. He could only think that the other masters were trying to put a spoke in his wheel and land him in the cat.

His eyes fixed awkwardly on the innocent Mr. Tyzor. He felt himself ill-used. It wasn't cricket. Here they were, trying to pitch into him and stump him, and got him to make slips, just when he felt that he could cross up. He gave them a baitful look. It really was a bit off.

"Look here, Tyzor," he said heatedly. "Any more lip from you and you'll see stars for a week!"

"Me!" yelled Mr. Tyzor in astonishment. "What the thump—" interrupted Dr. Birchmell, scowling. "No rowing bear, if you here! Let's have a bit of peace!"

"As you wish, sir!" said Mr. Lickham, with a bough. "Well, as I was a-saying of—" "Domest und blitzed! Shut up mid yourself, for goodness' sake, sir!"

It was the voice of Herr Otto Guggenheimer, the German master.

"You—you—"

For a moment Mr. Lickham choked. Then he acted.

"You sossidge eater!" he booted. "I'll nook you into the middle of next week! Take that!"

Mr. Lickham, slung an ink-pot full into Herr Guggenheimer's pump dle, and there was a fearful howl as the ink shot all over the other masters.

"Ach! Hummel!" shouted the German master. "I will kill you mid meinself, ain't it? Ach! Grogoo!"

"Ow-wow!" roared Mr. Justus, ink running down his dle in streams. "Pho man's mad! Grogoo!"

The masters of St. Sam's, spluttering and choking, jumped to their feet and fairly yelled with rage, while Dr. Birchmell, in a safe corner, yelled with laughter.

Within a few minutes the Masters' Room was in a state of pandymonium. The stayed and dignified scholastic gentlemen were furiously hitting out in all directions. Broken furniture was strewn everywhere, and soon the room resembled that of a bare garden.

Herr Guggenheimer recoiled with a hard drive to the mouth from the warlike fist of Mr. Lickham, while Mr. Tyzor measured his length on the floor, holding his aching jaw which had come in contact with Mr. Justus' bunched nuckles.

"Enuff, enuff!" cried the Head, rearing at last from his fits of hysterics. "Cease this blackguardism and return to your studies at once before I use drastic measures and have the hole lot of you sacked on the spot!"

At this dreadful threat the masters ceased scripping, and with sheepish eggpressions on their diles, knickered the room like lambs.

That ended the incident. But it hadn't ended Dr. Birchmell's career as a ventriloquist. In a few short hours he had sown the seeds of dissension between old pals, both the masters and the boys, but their were more terrible things to follow.

THE END.

(Whether you do, chums, don't miss the next amusing yarn in this topping series, entitled: "EGGSI THE VENTRILQUIST!" Every time will raise a laugh.)

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