



Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, is generally in trouble—mostly of his own making. Skinner & Co., the black sheep of the Remove, provide some for him, by way of a change, in this very amusing school yarn.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Skinner's Little Scheme I

"YOW-OW-OW!"
 "Groogh!"
 "Oh, dear! The rotter!"

The remarks emanated from Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, of the Remove Form, at Greyfriars. The black sheep of the Remove did not appear to be enjoying life.

They were reposing on the grass at a quiet spot behind the chapel, in various attitudes of discomfort. Skinner was tenderly nursing an injured jaw, Snoop was caressing with much affection his not particularly beautiful nose, and Stott was doubled up in a position that seemed to suggest he had recently been kicked by a mule.

Round the corner of the chapel, the hefty figure of a senior was walking away from the scene with a somewhat jaunty air that conveyed an impression of something having been attempted, something done. The hefty

senior was Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form.

Horace Coker had a little habit of butting in. From the point of view of Coker, the whole wide world was waiting to be put right in various ways, and the one person in the world who possessed the qualifications for putting it to rights was Horace Coker. Consequently he had a little habit of butting in.

He had just butted in on a friendly little game of nap which the gay dogs of the Remove had been playing. Most of the Remove were playing cricket on that bright summer afternoon. Skinner & Co. preferred nap. Coker happened to walk round the chapel in the middle of the game, and as Coker disapproved of nap, Skinner & Co.'s game had come to a sudden termination.

"Well, of all the rotters——" gasped Snoop, staggering to his feet.

"Interfering brute!" hissed Harold Skinner, also getting up.

"I'd like to smash the cad!" was Stott's amiable comment as he rose painfully and joined his fellow "blades."

For gay dogs and men of the world, Skinner & Co. presented a decidedly woe-begone appearance at that moment.

"That's the second time he's gone for us this week," remarked Stott as they brushed themselves down.

"About time somebody put a stop to him I should think," said Snoop. "He's becoming a public nuisance here!"

"Somebody is going to put a stop to him before long," said Skinner darkly. "I've had enough of Coker, and I don't intend to put up with the meddlin' fool much longer!"

"Well, if you can think of a way of keeping his hands off us, I'm with you," said Stott. "What do you say, Snoopy?"

"Rather! That is, provided there's not much risk in it," added Snoop hurriedly. "Personally, I'd like to see the rotter bunked from the school!"

With that, the matter was dropped for the moment, but as the three black sheep strolled away from the scene of their discomfiture, there was a glint in Skinner's eyes that boded ill for Horace Coker, of the Fifth.

It was several days later before the subject of Coker cropped up again with Skinner & Co. Skinner, however, had by no means forgotten the cheerful Fifth-Former. The leader of the Remove "blades" had rather a long memory for injuries inflicted on his important person.

The three were having a surreptitious smoke in Study No. 11 just before bed-time one evening, when Coker was introduced into the conversation by Skinner suddenly exclaiming:

"Eureka!"

Snoop and Stott looked surprised.

"Eureka!" repeated Skinner, with a grin. "Got it! The very idea!"

"Eh?"

"Just the thing!" went on Skinner enthusiastically. "I've thought of a way to fix that idiot Coker at last."

"Oh, good!"

Snoop and Stott waited with great interest. They were as keen as Skinner on

"fixing" Coker, not only because they had many old scores to wipe off, but also because Coker's interfering habits had begun to render their "sporting" proclivities decidedly dangerous at Greyfriars.

"You know how Walker, of the Sixth, and Coker love one another?" said Skinner.

Snoop and Stott chuckled. The relations of Walker and Coker, as everybody knew, were the reverse of affectionate. James Walker was a prefect, and consequently a person of importance at Greyfriars. Coker, on the other hand, though a very great man in his own estimation, was of no importance whatever in the eyes of the school, and Walker took every opportunity of making that fact clear to Coker—hence the total absence of affection between Walker and Coker.

"Well, what about it?" asked Stott.

"I'll tell you," grinned Skinner. "As we all know, Walker would certainly step in and bag Coker if he knew Coker was at the Cross Keys, down in Friardale. He'd be only too glad of the chance."

"I suppose he would," admitted Stott, staring. "But what the dickens——"

"Coker never goes near the Cross Keys, you ass!" said Snoop. "What are you getting at, Skinney?"

"Coker would jolly soon go to the Cross Keys if he thought some Greyfriars fellows were there," remarked Skinner. "He thinks it's his mission in life to go round lammin' fellows, and puttin' them on the straight and narrow path."

"But——"

"I'll explain," said Skinner, interrupting the mystified Snoop. "My idea is this: we'll let Coker overhear us plannin' to go down to the Cross Keys. The silly ass is bound to fall for it and go down there after us, but, of course, we shall take jolly good care not to go anywhere near the place."

"Oh!"

"As soon as he sets off, we'll give the wire to Walker somehow or other, and Walker will be on it like a bird. He's not the kind to inquire too deeply into a thing so long as it suits his book, and he'll be quite

satisfied to catch Coker in the place without worryin' about Coker's motives."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Coker will be caught, and brought up before the Head," went on Skinner thoughtfully. "There will be a first-class row for him, and he'll be lucky to get off with a floggin'. And, of course, if anythin' is mentioned about us, we shall be able to prove an alibi. I'll see to that all right!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Skinner. "Jolly good, don't you think?"

"Oh, rather!" gasped Stott. quite faintly. "What a fine criminal you'll make when you're a little older, old man!"

"Rats!" replied the leader of the blades cheerfully. "I think it's a stunnin' idea. I'm quite keen on it, anyway. What do you think, Snoopy?"

"I'm on!" said Snoop, after a little hesitation. "There's not much risk, as far as I can see, and I'm keen enough on getting Coker into trouble. Serves him right if he's sacked!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Stott. "Count on me, Skinney!"

The three rascals of the Remove then began to discuss details of Skinner's re-



Skinner & Co., from behind the hedge, watched Coker tramping down Friardale Lane, wearing a heavy frown on his rugged face. (See Chapter 1.)

markable scheme, and by bed-time everything was arranged.

The following day was Wednesday—a half-holiday at Greyfriars—and just as it happened, everything was favourable to the execution of the plan. Coker's chums, Potter and Greene, being engaged at cricket, Coker wandered idly down to the school gates, and it was while he was standing

there that Skinner, Snoop, and Stott passed, discussing in unusually loud tones the prospects of a game of billiards at the Cross Keys that afternoon.

Had Coker been of a suspicious nature, he would have thought the circumstance of their discussing such shady matters aloud somewhat remarkable. But he was not, and after a few minutes' hesitation while he turned the matter over in his slow-working mind, he set out after them.

Skinner & Co., from behind a hedge, watched him tramping down Friardale Lane, wearing a heavy frown on his rugged face.

It was the work of a few minutes for Skinner & Co. to run back to Greyfriars. Luck was with them. Walker, of the Sixth, was just wheeling his bicycle across the quad. as they returned.

Skinner very quickly communicated to him the surprising news of Coker's intended visit to the Cross Keys, and Walker grinned as he listened. Walker knew well enough that Coker was not the kind of fellow to indulge in that sort of thing, and it was quite obvious to him that some "frame-up" had been arranged.

But Skinner had correctly judged the mentality of the Sixth-Former. Walker, as Skinner had guessed, was only too glad of a chance to "down" his old enemy, and within ten minutes of Coker's exit, he was cycling down Friardale Lane, in the direction of the Cross Keys.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Coker at the Cross Keys I

"My dear Coker——"

Coker frowned.

He had just reached the Cross Keys, at Friardale, and was about to enter that dingy inn, when the thin voice of Alonzo Todd, of the Remove at Greyfriars, fell on his ears.

The benevolent Alonzo had spotted him from the other side of the road, and had hastened across, his lean face wearing an expression of dismay.

"My dear Coker!" repeated the duffer of Greyfriars, laying a gentle hand on Coker's arm. "My dear, dear Coker! Thank Heaven I am not too late!"

"What the thump——"

Coker stared at Alonzo in surprise.

"I am shocked to think that you, Coker, should be taking the broad way that leads to destruction," said Alonzo, in tones of deep concern. "Pause, Coker—pause and consider, I beg of you, before you take one step farther!"

"M-my hat!" stuttered Coker, turning quite red. "You—you cheeky fag! What the dickens do you mean?"

"Think of your home, your innocent youth!" urged the duffer, quite dramatically. "Think of your dear schoolfellows, playing with the bat and ball, and perchance such thoughts will drive from you the desire to enter this place!"

"Why, you fatheaded chump, do you think I am going in here on the razzle?" Coker asked.

"I had thought, my dear Coker——"

"Well, have another think, then!" suggested Coker. "In any case, I don't want fags like you giving me pi-jaw; but, as a matter of fact, I'm going in here after some of your inky Remove pals who are acting the goat. And when I get 'em, I'm going to knock their silly young heads together as they've never been knocked before!"

"Dear me!" said the duffer, greatly shocked. "I am grieved beyond measure to know that schoolfellows of mine should be guilty of such a misdemeanour. Pray do not use violence, Coker. When you find them, urge them to come to my study. I will hasten to pass on some excellent advice my Uncle Benjamin has sent me for their benefit."

Shaking his head very gravely, Alonzo Todd moved off in the direction of Greyfriars, while Coker, with a chuckle, entered the Cross Keys.

A few minutes later, Walker, of the Sixth, dismounted from his bicycle and followed in the track of Coker.

The first person Coker met in the Cross Keys was Mr. Cobb, the landlord of the place. That bloated gentleman looked at him with a good deal of surprise. Horace Coker was not one of the select circle that went to the Cross Keys, and Mr. Cobb had

not previously had the pleasure of his acquaintance.

"'Afternoon, sir," remarked Mr. Cobb civilly.

"Are you the landlord of this dingy den?" asked Coker, without wasting time on formalities.

Mr. Cobb bristled.

"If you're referring to this 'ere 'ouse——" he began.

"Cut it out!" snapped Coker, with scant politeness. "I haven't come here to talk about the rotten place, anyway. I've come here for three silly young idiots from the school who are playing billiards here. Show me where they are!"

"Ho! So that's it, is it?" growled Mr. Cobb, eyeing Coker truculently. "Well, you can take it from me I don't allow any school-boys on these 'ere premises, Mister Nosey Parker, and there ain't any from the school 'ere now! Hop it!"

"I don't believe you!" declared Coker, ignoring the hint. "I'm going to see your billiards-room before I leave this place! Where is it?"

Mr. Cobb considered for a moment. Coker was big and authoritative in his manner. He might be a prefect, in which case it would be wise to keep on the right side of him. As it happened, nobody from Greyfriars had come along for a surreptitious game of billiards that day, and there was therefore an opportunity for Mr. Cobb to earn an official reputation as one who did not encourage schoolboys in his billiards-room. Mr. Cobb came to the conclusion that it would be wisest to let Coker have his way.

"You can 'ave a look round, then, if you won't take my word for it," he grunted at last. "There's the billiards-room over there, and you can search the rest of the house, too, if you want to!"

"That's better!" said Coker, and he crossed over to the door which Mr. Cobb had indicated, and flung it open, fully expecting, in spite of the innkeeper's statement, that Skinner & Co. would be there.

To his surprise, however, the "blades" of the Remove were conspicuous only by

their absence. The billiards-room, in fact, was completely deserted.

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Coker, very much taken aback. "I—I could have been sure they would have been here. I distinctly heard them say——"

Coker did not complete that sentence. While he was talking a hand was placed on his broad shoulder, and, swinging round, he found himself staring into the mocking face of James Walker, of the Sixth.

"Neat capture, what?" remarked Walker, with a sneering grin. "I didn't suspect you spent your half-holidays here, Coker. Having a merry old time, what?"

"What do you mean?" growled Coker, jerking himself free, and bestowing a glare on his old enemy. "What the dickens are you doing here, Walker?"

"I rather fancy that's the question you'll have to answer when I report this to the Head," replied Walker. "I saw you enter this place as I was cycling past, and, being a prefect, I naturally came in after you."

"Oh, you did, did you?" snorted Coker. "Well, now that you've come in, you'd better get out again. I can get on very well without you!"

Prefects held no terrors for Coker, of the Fifth, and Coker had no intention of humiliating himself by explaining the position to Walker.

"Better come along now," advised Walker, still grinning mockingly. "I hate to do it, of course, but I shall have to report a matter like this to the Head without delay. I suppose you've got no excuse?"

"That's my business," grunted Coker. "Don't think because you're a prefect that you can question me, Walker, because you can't! Any cheek from you, and I'll jolly soon punch you on the nose!"

"Oh!" gasped Walker.

That was about all Walker could say in the circumstances.

During the little dialogue between Walker and Coker, Mr. Cobb stood by, with a sour smile on his face. Walker was not unknown to him, although, of course, he had to conceal that fact while Coker was present.

"I hope you young gents are not goin'

to bring my name into any row that's on," he said as Walker, with a shrug, moved towards the entrance again.

Walker reassuringly closed one eye, and Mr. Cobb grinned, more or less satisfied.

"Follow on when you like, Coker!" called out Walker as he departed. "I warn you I'm going to report this matter to the Head at once, anyway."

"Report—and be blowed!" said Coker cheerfully. "If you're idiot enough to think I'm a visitor at this dingy hole, you deserve a dressing-down from the Head—and that's all you'll get for your trouble!"

Walker quitted the inn, and a few minutes later Coker, on considering the turn things had taken, decided to follow him back to Greyfriars, in order to straighten things out with the Head.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Shock for Coker!

COKER, with his customary self-confidence, did not imagine that it would be a very difficult task to straighten things out with the Head.

As it happened, it was not so easy a matter as Coker had imagined.

Walker, on reaching Greyfriars, walked straight up to the Head's study, and, assuming an air of grave perturbation, went in to report his discovery of a Fifth-Former entering premises that were strictly out of bounds.

The Head did not, as Coker had indicated, give Walker a dressing-down. Dr. Locke, as a matter of fact, knew far less about Coker than that self-important individual thought, and, although it was a shock to the worthy old gentleman to learn of Coker visiting the Cross Keys, it was only the same kind of shock as he would have felt had it been anyone else at Greyfriars—no more, no less. Walker was a prefect, and the Head accepted his version of the affair almost without question.

When Coker came back to Greyfriars, he soon learned that Walker had done as he had threatened.

"Which the 'Ead wants you at once, Master Coker!" called out Gosling as Coker

strode through the gate. "And wot I say is this 'ere——"

Coker didn't wait to hear what Gosling had to say. He was half-way across the quad. before Gosling had finished his sentence.

Walker was in the Head's study as Coker entered. Coker gave the black sheep of the Sixth a glare, which Walker received with the same expression of owl-like gravity which he had chosen to assume when he first entered the study.

"Ah! You have come, Coker!" said the Head, his glance dwelling sternly on the truculent-looking Fifth-Former. "Doubtless you have guessed the reason for my sending for you. Walker has reported——"

"Walker is a silly ass, sir!"

"Coker!" exclaimed the Head, quite shocked.

"Walker knows jolly well I wasn't in the Cross Keys, playing the fool!" said Coker warmly. "I didn't choose to explain things to him. I don't think much of Walker, as a matter of fact——"

"Coker! How dare you!" gasped Dr. Locke.

"But now that the idiot has seen fit to bring it before you, I don't mind explaining," said Coker generously.

"Dear me!" said the Head, gazing at Coker in perplexity.

"As a matter of fact, I went in there to turf out some juniors I thought were playing billiards there," explained Coker.

"Indeed! And since when have you taken on the duties of a prefect?" demanded Dr. Locke, frowning at Coker, in evident doubt. "If what you tell me is correct, why did you not report the matter to a prefect?"

"I thought I could manage a matter like that quite as well as Walker, sir—probably better," explained Coker, bestowing another glare on Walker.

"That is not for you to say, Coker!" retorted the Head. "And whom, may I ask, did you expect to find at the Cross Keys this afternoon?"

"H'm!"

Coker hesitated. Officious and interfering he might be, but he was not a sneak, and he did not feel particularly like divulging the names of the juniors for whom he had been searching at the Cross Keys—more especially in view of the fact that he had not succeeded in finding them.

Besides, for the first time, Coker began to have doubts. Possibly he had misunderstood what they were saying. They had certainly mentioned billiards and the Cross Keys, but there was just a chance—a bare possibility—that he had not heard aright, and that Skinner & Co. had been talking about someone else. Certainly it was curious that there had been no sign of them when he arrived.

If they were innocent of any intention of breaking bounds, then they would very quickly establish their innocence. And if they were guilty, but had somehow slipped away in time, they would certainly deny all Coker's allegations, and probably come forward with a complete alibi.

As Coker stood there pondering, he started. It was all very strange—Skinner & Co.'s disappearance and Walker's sudden entry. He remembered two recent occasions when he had expressed his disapproval of Skinner & Co. in no uncertain fashion, and felt sure that if they could find a way of paying him out they

would. Was it possible that it was all a "frame-up"?

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Coker as that dreadful thought entered his head.

"Well, Coker, I am waiting," said the Head, eyeing Coker with deep suspicion.

"I—I——" Coker's voice had become quite thick.

The thought that he might have fallen into a trap laid by his enemies overwhelmed him for a moment. Considerations of schoolboy honour had to go now.

"I expected to see Skinner, Snoop, and Stott," he muttered.

"And did you see them?"



"My dear Coker!" exclaimed Alonzo Todd, laying a gentle hand on Coker's arms
"My dear, dear Coker! Thank Heaven, I am not too late!" (See Chapter 2.)

"No, sir."

The Head compressed his lips grimly and rang the bell for Trotter, the page.

"Find Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, of the Remove Form, and send them to me, Trotter!" he ordered when Trotter appeared.

Trotter withdrew, and there was silence in the room for several minutes, the Head gazing gravely out of the window, Walker looking calm and serious, and Coker fidgeting uncomfortably, and trying to analyse with his slow brain exactly what his present position was.

Very soon the three rascals of the Remove came in, Skinner looking meek and respectful, and Snoop and Stott doing their best to appear a little surprised and extremely innocent.

The Head did not beat about the bush.

"Coker here informs me that it was your intention this afternoon to play billiards on premises which everybody knows to be out of bounds. I refer to the Cross Keys," he said.

"The Cross Keys!" echoed Skinner, his eyes opening wide in well-acted surprise. "Coker must be dreaming, sir! We've been watching the cricket all the afternoon—haven't we, you chaps?"

The "chaps" appealed to confirmed that statement with vigorous nods.

"What were you talking about, then, when you went out of the school gates this afternoon?" demanded Coker angrily.

"We haven't been out of gates!" said Skinner, without turning a hair. "Any one who's been on Little Side will tell you that."

Coker realised, with a fresh shock, that there had been nobody else about when Skinner & Co. went out. The cads of the school had chosen their time well. Even Gosling had been nowhere to be seen.

Coker gave a growl like an angry mastiff. "Why, you——"

"Silence, Coker!" broke in Dr. Locke sternly. "All your bluster is merely adding to the profound suspicion I feel in regard to your statements. I demand

silence while I go into this matter thoroughly."

Dr. Locke duly obtained silence, and duly went into the matter. But the result was the reverse of what Coker had confidently anticipated.

Within two hours of his visit to the Cross Keys, Horace Coker, of the Fifth, was pacing the punishment-room, awaiting the verdict of the Head. And by that time the realisation had been forced on him that he was booked for one of two things—expulsion from Greyfriars, or a flogging and a long period of detention—neither of which appealed in any way whatsoever to Coker. Coker had been in many scrapes in the course of his stormy career at Greyfriars, but it was doubtful whether he had ever before been in such a scrape as this!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER Alonzo Comes In Useful!

"THE footling chump!"
"The idiot!"

Potter and Greene were sitting in Study No. 4 of the Fifth-Form passage, discussing, in those uncomplimentary terms, their leader and study-mate, Horace Coker.

The news of Coker's downfall had spread through Greyfriars like wildfire, and the whole school had been staggered to hear that Coker stood convicted of frequenting the Cross Keys. All sorts of remarkable rumours were flying about. Potter and Greene, however, were in possession of authentic news, Potter having been up to the punishment room and listened to Coker shouting his version of the affair through the thickness of the stout oak door.

Most of the school, though surprised, were willing to admit that what was good enough for the Head was good enough for them. If Dr. Locke believed that Coker had been "blagging" down at the Cross Keys, then Coker had been "blagging," and there was nothing further to be said. It was regrettable and surprising, but there could be no doubt about its being true.

Potter and Greene, on the other hand, accepted Coker's story without question. As Greene said, they knew that Coker was

several sorts of an ass, but he wasn't that sort.

"If only he wouldn't be so keen on minding other people's business——" said Potter.

"If only he had one grain of savvy——" said Greene.

"But he won't, and he hasn't!" finished Potter. "And I suppose it's up to us to save the old duffer if we can!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Greene cordially. "We should miss him, you know, if he were bunked."

Potter nodded.

"It would be a good miss in some ways," he said, with a faint smile. "But in others——"

"In the grub he buys, for instance, and the treats he stands," murmured Greene thoughtfully.

"Exactly! I really think we ought to do our best for him."

"Quite! The question is, what the dickens are we to do, and how the thump are we going to do it? Come in, fathead!"

The polite invitation at the end of Greene's speech was in answer to a tap on the study door.

The two Fifth-Formers looked round in surprise as the door opened, and Alonzo Todd, of the Remove, walked in. Alonzo was the last person in Greyfriars they expected to see in Study No. 4.

The duffer of Greyfriars advanced to the study table, and relieved himself of the burden of a pile of little pamphlets he was carrying.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I expected to find Coker here. Can you, by any chance, inform me of his present whereabouts?"

Potter and Greene grinned.

"Mean to say you haven't heard?" asked Potter. "I imagined they knew all about it even in Timbuctoo by this time!"

"I fear that I do not altogether comprehend——"



"Which the 'Ead wants you at once, Master Coker!" called out Gosling. "And wot I says is this 'ere——" (See Chapter 3.)

"Here, cut it short!" interrupted Greene. "No need to make a speech about it, you know. Where have you been for the last two hours that you haven't heard?"

"I have been up in the box-room, inspecting my stock of uplifting literature," explained Alonzo. "But what——"

"And you've brought it to Coker?" asked Potter, staring.

"No; I desired Coker to indicate the names of some misguided schoolfellows of ours whom he was endeavouring to lead back to the path of rectitude this afternoon. I am not aware whether Coker mentioned the matter to you——"

"Great Scott, Greeney! Here's a clue!" exclaimed Potter. "Look here, young Todd, do you really know nothing about what has happened to Coker?"

"I do not comprehend the precise nature of your interrogation," said Alonzo, a little puzzled. "I saw Coker in Friardale this afternoon——"

"Did you, by Jove? Where was he?"

"He was about to enter a house of alcoholic refreshment," replied Alonzo guilelessly. "He appeared to be in a state of righteous indignation, and he indicated to me that he suspected some Form-mates of mine of being within the house, and intended to apply physical violence to them."

"My hat! Just what we wanted!" gasped Greene.

"The very thing!" agreed Potter excitedly. "Coker must have forgotten running into this walking dictionary, or he'd have had him before the beak to give evidence!"

"My dear Greene——"

"Did you happen to spot Walker, of the Sixth?" asked Potter as a sudden idea occurred to him.

"Yes. On my journey back to Greyfriars, I passed him, cycling in Friardale Lane. But pray tell me——"

"And that was after Coker had gone into the Cross Keys?" pursued Potter.

"About three or four minutes after, I should think," said Alonzo, completely mystified by all these questions.

"Proof conclusive that Walker's an untruthful," grinned Potter, with great satisfaction. "Walker's yarn is that he spotted Coker going in."

"That's true," said Greene, getting to his feet. "Great pip! It strikes me Coker is as good as cleared. 'Let's yank this chap along to the Head, and see how he takes it!'"

"My dear fellows—— Ow! Ooch!" yelled Alonzo as the two hefty Fifth-Formers seized him. "Pray release me! Grooogh!"

Potter and Greene were too excited to take any notice of Alonzo's protests. They bundled him out of the study, and rushed him along the Fifth-Form passage towards the stairs leading to the lower floors, attracting quite a lot of attention by their wild career.

They did not pause until the Head's study was reached, by which time Alonzo hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

Dr. Locke was very much surprised and disturbed when he heard Alonzo's account of his meeting with Coker. Alonzo Todd was the last fellow in Greyfriars who could be suspected of deceit, and the Head was willing to believe his story.

The fact that Coker had told Todd that he was after suspected Remove fellows threw rather a different light on the whole affair. Evidently Coker had not invented that yarn for the Head's benefit. And Todd's insistence on the righteous wrath of Coker rather impressed Dr. Locke. That worthy gentleman began to think he had acted a little hastily. Obviously the case was not so simple as he had imagined. If Coker's version was true, then Skinner & Co. had not been altogether truthful, and Walker had either been misrepresenting the facts or else had been mistaken. Dr. Locke felt very concerned about the matter.

Before bed-time that night the whole thing had been gone into afresh, and Walker, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott spent a very uncomfortable hour in the Head's study, doing their best to make out a case for themselves, while Coker, silent for once under the stern scrutiny of the Head, smiled grimly to himself.

"A very unsatisfactory state of affairs," was the Head's comment in the end. "Certainly there is not sufficient evidence to prove it, but it looks very much as though you Remove boys deliberately plotted the entire thing. I hope I am wrong. The circumstances are so uncertain that I cannot very well punish you, but I warn you that

I shall watch you very carefully for the future. You may go!"

Skinner & Co., looking quite scared, went.

"As to you, Coker," said the Head when Walker also had departed, "sorry as I am to have been unjust to you this afternoon, I must say that your behaviour is such that I can hardly wonder at any trouble that comes to you."

"Oh, sir!"

"It is quite obvious to me, from the attitude taken up both by Walker and the Remove boys, that you are officious and interfering in your ways!" said the Head severely. "It would seem that you consider yourself to be of the same standing as a prefect. Naturally, such behaviour arouses resentment in other boys."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Kindly remember for the future that, although you enjoy naturally the privileges of the seniority associated with membership of the Fifth Form, you have no official control over any other boys in the school," said the Head sharply. "If ever a case is brought to my notice where you seek to assume such control, I shall deal with you most severely, Coker!"

"But, sir——"

"Silence! I do not think this unsavoury business needs any further discussion! You may go, Coker!"

The Head's warnings had three effects. In the first place, Skinner & Co. for some time after were very careful to keep out of the way of Dr. Locke. Secondly, Walker



Heedless of Alonzo Todd's protests, Potter and Greene bundled him out of the study, and rushed him along the Fifth-Form passage, attracting quite a lot of attention by their wild career.

dropped his shady ways for a while, and endeavoured, by a great show of studiousness, to retain the Head's good opinion. Thirdly—and possibly most important—for a short period Coker kept surprisingly quiet, and for once in his life stopped making a habit of trying to put the world to rights!

However regrettable the affair had been in some ways, it had had the very gratifying result of providing a lesson for Coker.

But it was demanding too much of Horace Coker to expect that the lesson would be a lasting one. It wasn't, by any means; for three weeks later the great Horace was again "butting" into matters that did not concern him in the least—with results that were distinctly painful for Coker!

Still, as Potter remarked to Greene, "Coker would always be Coker as long as the world turned round"—a remark with which Greene fully agreed.

THE END



DR. HOLMES



MONTY LOWTHER

ERIC
KILDARE



TOM
MERRY



ARTHUR
AUGUSTUS
D'ARCY.



GEORGE
FIGGINS



HARRY
MANNERS



BAGGY
TRIMBLE



JACK
BLAKE



**"Leading
Lights"
AT
ST. JIM'S SCHOOL**

DICK
REDFERN



MR. SELBY
OF THE THIRD

PERCY MELLISH



MARTHA TAGGLES
(TUCK-SHOP KEEPER.)



RALPH CARDEW



HARRY
NOBLE



GERALD
KNOX



AUBREY RACKE



MR.
RATCLIFF



ERNEST
LEVISON



FATTY WYNN

