The Cliveden Sweepstake

In This Week's Fine, Complete Story Crane, Cuffy and Grahame Unfairly Take Advantage of the Combine and the Old Firm, but Fail in the End.

The 1st Chapter.
The Combine are Taken In.

TAP!

The Cliveden Combine—Neville, Flynn, and Poindexter—were hard at work in No. 4 study, when the tap came at the door.

"Oh, come in!" called out Dick Neville, without raising his eyes from the paper over which his pen was swiftly travelling in sprawling German characters.

The door of the study opened, and Dick glanced round. Then he gave a whistle. It was not a Fourth-Former who came in, but Crane—the great Crane—captain of the Fifth. And after him came Cuffy, his inseparable chum.

Work in No. 4 study ceased instantly. Crane and Cuffy of the Fifth were on terms of warfare with the Combine. A visit from the Fifth-Formers could hardly mean anything but a row. Neville slid his hand towards a ruler. Micky Flynn dropped his fingers on the inkpot. Lincoln G. Poindexter reached behind him into the fender and took hold of the shovel.

The preparations for warfare were quickly made, but Crane and Cuffy only grinned as they observed them.

"It's pax," said Crane. "It's all right, kids."

"Well, what do you Fifth Form bounders want in a respectable study?" said Poindexter, suspiciously.

"Came for a friendly talk."

"Very kind of you," said Neville. "But we're working at present, and haven't issued any invitations to a conversazione just lately."

"Sure and ye're interruptin' the washin'," said Micky Flynn. "Be off wid ye, like good boys. Run away and play."

"I say, it's rather important——"

"I guess it's important for us to get our work done," said Poindexter. "Go and talk to Pankhurst and Price."

"We have; and they're in it."

"In what?"

"The sweep."

"What sweep?"

"To be more exact, the Cliveden Sweepstakes," said Crane.

"That's it," said Cuffy. "The Cliveden Sweepstakes."

The Combine simply stared at them.

"I guess I've never heard of the Cliveden Sweepstakes before," said Poindexter. "What variety of animal are they?"

"I'll explain."

"Do you mind if you go outside and shut the door before you start explaining?" asked Neville. "I'm busy."

"Now, look here, Neville, it's an important matter. Pankhurst hinted that you fellows probably wouldn't have the nerve to join in."

The Combine jumped to their feet as if moved by clockwork.

"What's that?" exclaimed three voices at once.

Crane grinned.

"You see, we're getting up a little sweepstake on the Camperdown Cup," he said. "I may tell you that there's a prefect in it. It was Philpot's idea at the start."

"Then it's something caddish," said Poindexter.

"Oh, rats! You see, the Camperdown Cup is run for on Saturday, on the race-course the other side of the town, and we've got the idea of getting up a little sweepstake on the result."

"Do you mean betting on horse-racing, Crane?" asked Neville bluntly.

The captain of the Fifth turned red.

"No, I don't," he snapped. "You know betting's forbidden by the rules of the college."

"Yes, I know it is; that's what I was thinking of."

"Sure, and what do ye call a sweepstake, if it's not betting on horse-racing, Crane?" asked Micky Flynn, curiously.

"It's not the same thing," said Crane. "You see, we issue twenty tickets, at a shilling each. You don't gamble; you just buy the ticket for a bob. You can have it framed and hung up in your study if you like——"

"Oh, rats! Get on!"

"Well, the names of the twenty horses entered for the cup are written down, and shuffled up in a hat, and the twenty entrants draw one each."

"I know how a sweepstake is managed."

"The chaps keep their slips of paper with the horses' names on them," went on the captain of the Fifth, unheeding. "When the race is run, and the result declared, the chap who has the winner collars the quid."

"Exactly," said Cuffy.

"And what do you call that if not gambling?" asked Poindexter.

"I call it a sweepstake. You don't bet on any horse in particular; you take your chance of getting the slip with the name on it—a very different thing."

"I guess I can't see much difference."

"Who's afraid of breaking a rule or two, anyway?" said Crane. "We're not going to take the masters into our confidence. Of course, it would mean a licking if they knew. So it would if they knew you broke bounds, Poindexter, as I know you've done."

"That's different," said the American chum quietly. "Breaking bounds is against the rules, but it's not against acting like a decent chap. Gambling is."

"Oh, if you're going to preach——"

"I'm not going to preach, but I'm not coming into the sweep, thanks. I guess it's the sort of thing for a decent fellow to keep outside of."

"A lot of the Fourth are taking it up," said Crane. "It's an honour to your rotten Form to be asked to share in it at all."

"I suppose Fourth Form shillings are as good as any others," said Poindexter, with quiet scorn.

Crane flushed angrily.

"Do you mean to say you think it won't be run honestly?" he exclaimed.

"Things of this kind aren't always run honestly, I guess," said Poindexter. "Where you find gambling you generally find blackguardism of some sort."

"Oh, I see; you were brought up in the highly moral atmosphere of tinned beef, and you are shocked by our ways at Cliveden," sneered Crane. "Well, keep out of it if you like. Pankhurst wasn't far wrong."

"What do you mean? What did Pankhurst say?"

"Never mind. He was right enough. I say, Neville, and you, Flynn, are you coming in, or are you funky, too?"

"Who says we're funky?" exclaimed Poindexter, angrily. "A fellow can keep out of dirty gambling without being funky, I suppose."

"Oh yes; I know you're a good little boy," said Crane. "As for gambling, I say it isn't, and if it were a prefect wouldn't be in it."

"Is that a fact about the prefect? Which one is it?" asked Neville.

"Grahame."

The Combine sniffed together.

"Grahame! Well, we all know what a rotter he is."

"You'd better tell him so to his face."

"We have told him so to his face," said Poindexter disdainfully.

"Sure, if there's a prefect in it, though, it can't be up against the rules so much," said Micky Flynn. "I don't think we ought to have the Old Firm crowing over us, and saying we daren't do what they've done."

"Not much," said Neville promptly.

Poindexter looked undecided. His keen good sense warned him against taking any part in the business at all; yet it was hard to have Pankhurst and Price, the Combine's deadly rivals in the Fourth Form, crowing over them, and suggesting doubts as to their courage.

Crane winked at Cuffy, and drew a pocket-book from his breast.

"I'll put your name down, then, Flynn," he said, and wrote it down before Micky could reply. "Put your initials to it, will you? There you are."

Micky Flynn hesitated a moment. But it is proverbial that he who hesitates is lost. The next moment he took Crane's pencil and wrote his initials under the name.

"Your turn, Neville."

Flynn having signed, Dick Neville did not feel like holding back. He wrote his initials to his name in the list, and then Crane turned to Poindexter again.

"I suppose you're not going to stay out when your chums are in," he said. "Of course, if there's a row you could leave them to stand it alone."

Poindexter's eyes flashed.

"Give me the pencil," he said quietly.

And he wrote his name. Crane closed the book and restored it to his pocket.

"Good," he said. "That's all right. The drawing will be in Philpot's study after tea. Don't fail to turn up or you lose your chance. Pay up, please."

The juniors handed over a shilling each.

"Thanks," said Crane. "Come on, Cuffy."

The two Fifth Form fellows left the study, and closed the door. In the passage Cuffy looked curiously at Crane.

"You haven't seen Pankhurst and Price yet, Crane?"

"No; we're just going there."

And Crane walked along to No. 10, the apartment honoured by the residence of the Old Firm.

"But, I say, Craney, you told those young asses——"

"I didn't tell them anything," said Crane coolly. "They assumed from what I said that Pankhurst is in it, but——"

"I see; that was to draw them on?"

"Exactly. I shall work the same dodge on Pankhurst and Price. Ha, ha!"

But Cuffy did not laugh.

"That's rather low-down, isn't it, Craney?" he said.

"Oh, rot!" said Crane irritably. "We're bound to have those five fellows in it. You know they set up to keep a high moral standard in the Fourth Form, and they'd be down on a thing like this like a sack of coke if they were left out of it, and they'd be bound to make trouble. Now they'll be in it; and I tell you that the only way to make them join in was by playing on their rivalry. It's a good wheeze, and it was Grahame himself who suggested it to me."

Cuffy did not reply, but his expression showed that he did not exactly like the "wheeze," good as it was.

The 2nd Chapter.
The Sweepstake.

"I GUESS we've made fools of ourselves," said Poindexter abruptly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Neville. "They have sweepstakes in lots of schools I know. It's not necessary for there to be any real harm in it."

"It's gambling, I guess, whatever that bounder says," replied Poindexter. "The fact is, he bounced us into it by saying that Panky and Price would consider us funks if we didn't go in. But I don't like the idea."

"Well, we've paid up our money now, and we can't draw out," said Dick. "We don't want to look like prigs, either."

"Sure, and we're in for it now," said Micky Flynn, "and it will be rippin' to win the sov., you know. We'll give a big feed in the study."

Dick's eyes sparkled.

"Yes, and have the whole Form to it!"

"I guess——"

"Oh, rats! Don't grumble now!" said Neville. "We're in for it, and it's no good guessing any further. If you've finished tea we'll go to the drawing. We don't want to be late."

"Throw for ye, Dicky darling."

The Combine left No. 4 study. Dick and Micky were not much impressed by Poindexter's misgivings. Their chief thought was that they were not going to be crowed over by the Old Firm.

They went along the passage to Philpot's study. Philpot was the cad of the Fourth, and on very bad terms with the Combine. He gave them a nod, however, as they came in. All was grist that came to Philpot's mill, and he would have made money out of his worst enemy with all the pleasure in the world.

Crane and Cuffy were in the room, with several members of the Fourth and Fifth Forms. Dick looked round for the Old Firm, but they were not visible.

"When is the drawing?" asked Poindexter.

Philpot looked at his watch.

"In a quarter of an hour. It's a quarter past six now. We're waiting for the rest of the fellows to come in."

Fellows were dropping in, singly or in twos, every few minutes. All of them belonged to the Fourth or Fifth, and all were "in" the sweep.

"Hallo, here's Panky and Price!" muttered Neville.

The door opened to admit two juniors with very cheerful faces and very red hair. They came in arm in arm, and gave a genial grin round at the company.

"Hallo, kids, still alive?" said Pankhurst, coming over towards the Combine. "I heard that Mr. Lanyon had ordered you to wash your necks, and that you had died of the shock."

"You hear lots of things, I guess, with those ears of yours," said Poindexter, with a glance at the auricular appendages of Pankhurst, which were certainly of a very goodly size.

Pankhurst turned red. He was rather sensitive on that point.

"You let my ears alone," he began, wrathfully.

"My dear kid, I wouldn't touch them with a telegraph-pole," said Poindexter.

"Hallo, here's Grahame," said Price.

The juniors all turned round as the prefect came into the study.

Both the Combine and the Old Firm had had many a rub with Grahame, the prefect, and there was no love lost between them. But the fact that he was a prefect, of course, entitled him to some respect, though he deserved little enough.

He took no notice of them now. He came in, nodded to Crane and Cuffy, and turned to Philpot with a business-like air.

"Got the names written out, Philpot?"

"Yes, Grahame," said the cad of the Fourth, showing the prefect a respect which Dick Neville characterised as "crawling." "Here they are!"

Philpot had a number of slips of paper on the table, on each of which the name of a horse was written.

Grahame counted them, and looked them over, and gave a nod of approval.

"Everybody paid up?" he asked.

"Yes, everybody, Grahame."

Grahame looked round.

"Of course, you all understand this game?" he said. "Each of you will draw the name of a horse out of the hat, and the chap who gets the winner collars the whole of the stakes. I think it's a good enough competition myself, and I don't see anything to object to in it."

"That's all right," said Crane.

"There are some prefects at Cliveden," went on Grahame, "who would be down on this, and call it gambling."

"What rot!" cried Crane.

"I think it's harmless enough. Anybody who sees harm in it can keep out of the sweep, of course. Trevelyan, our captain, for instance, is too goody-goody to approve of it."

"Let Trevelyan alone," said Poindexter.

The prefect turned quickly towards him.

"What did you say, Poindexter?"

"I said let Trevelyan alone," said the American chum resolutely. "Whether this thing is right or wrong, you've no business to run Trevelyan down."

Grahame clenched his fist. But Crane whispered to him, and the prefect swung away without a word to the boy from Chicago.

"There are twenty-one slips here," said Grahame; "and there are twenty fellows in the game. I take two slips, and two chances, and I may add that I have paid in two shillings to the sweep. There are twenty-one horses at present likely to run, and their names are all down here. Some of them will be scratched later, but you have to take your chance of getting a blank."

"Who's the favourite?" asked Gatty, of the Fourth.

"Sweet Lavender," replied Grahame. "He mayn't win, of course, but the chances are that he will. The fellow who draws Sweet Lavender may feel pretty safe about the sov."

Philpot was shuffling the papers in his hat.

"We can't all draw at once," said the prefect. "The room's too small for the crowd. We'd better draw in turn and clear out, and let the others come in."

This was agreed to, and the drawing began.

Crane and Cuffy drew first, and each grunted with discontent as he drew the name of a rank outsider.

Then Grahame drew, and a scowl came over his face. The name on his slip was Nero, a horse that was hardly expected to run at all in the race, and not to win if he did run.

Pankhurst and Price drew, and then came the Combine.

Dick Neville and Micky Flynn were first, then Poindexter, and a curious smile came over the American's face as he looked at his slip.

"What have you got?" asked Philpot.

"I guess I've got the favourite."

Grahame looked quickly at the American's paper.

"By Jove! he's right. He's drawn Sweet Lavender."

"Good luck!" said Pankhurst, slapping Poindexter on the back. "I wish I'd had it, old kid, but I congratulate you."

"Thanks," drawled Poindexter. "I suppose this is as good as a guinea in my pocket, Grahame."

"Not exactly," said Grahame hastily. "Sweet Lavender is the favourite, of course, but you know the favourite comes in second or third as often as not. If you like, Poindexter, I'll give you five bob for that ticket."

Poindexter grinned.

"You're awfully kind, Grahame!"

"Oh, that's all right! It's a sporting chance, and you get your bob back, and make four, anyway, and I take the risk."

"Good! You're very generous, but I couldn't take advantage of your generosity," said Poindexter, shaking his head.

The prefect scowled.

"Do you mean to say you won't sell Sweet Lavender?"

"I guess so."

"Then you're a young fool! The horse very likely won't win!"

"Then what do you want him for?" asked Poindexter, innocently.

Grahame turned red.

"If you give me any of your cheek, I'll——"

"I'm off!" said Poindexter. "Good-night!"

And he walked out of the study, followed by his chums. How the rest of the drawing went, the Combine neither knew nor cared.

The 3rd Chapter.
Poindexter Holds On!

LINCOLN G. POINDEXTER was the object of a very respectful attachment in the Fourth Form at Cliveden the next day.

The fellow who held the favourite for the Camperdown Cup, and had twenty-one shillings to draw when the race was run on the Saturday afternoon, was a fellow to be respected. Poindexter was a little elated about it.

In his heart he disapproved of the whole proceeding, having a healthy, wholesome lad's natural distaste for any kind of gambling; but he also shrank from the least appearance of priggishness, and he disliked appearing to set up as a judge upon others. And so he did not say much about his opinion of the sweepstake; and, as a matter of fact, there was something gratifying in holding the expected winner, and getting ahead of the Old Firm in that line.

Many and tempting were the offers Poindexter received for Sweet Lavender. Grahame increased his offer to ten shillings, which the chum from Chicago refused, and Crane and Cuffy made up

twelve shillings between them and offered that sum, which Poindexter also declined with thanks.

"I hear you're going to give a feed if your horse gets the race, Puntdodger," said Pankhurst, meeting the chief of the Combine in the passage after morning school.

"I think so," said Poindexter.

"Good wheeze! But, I say, if you feel inclined to sell the ticket——"

"I don't," said Poindexter.

"But I thought you regarded a sweepstake as gambling?" said Pankhurst, with a wink at Price.

"So I do, Panky."

"And you disapprove of gambling?"

"Strongly."

"Then you had better sell the ticket, and get clear of the wicked business," said Pankhurst. "I'll give you six bob."

"I won't sell."

"But as you disapprove of gambling——"

"Yes, but it would be just as bad to sell the ticket. I should be making a profit out of the thing, you see."

"Oh, if that's the only difficulty, it's all right. I don't particularly want to buy the ticket; you can give it to me if you like. That will make it all right."

Poindexter grinned.

"I think I'll keep it, Panky, thanks all the same."

"But think——"

"Rats! I'm going to keep it."

"Look here, Price and I will make up half-a-sovereign between us, and go Co. in it," said Pankhurst. "Will you sell Sweet Lavender for ten bob?"

"Crane and Cuffy have already offered me twelve."

"My hat! We're not going beyond that."

"Quite so," said Price.

"And you won't let it go for twelve?" said Pankhurst. "Why, you must be off your rocker! A certain twelve is better than a possible twenty-one."

"Never mind: I guess I'm sticking to it."

"But, I say," said Pankhurst, changing his tone, "I'd let Crane have it, if I were you, Puntbuster. He's a Fifth-Former, and can look out for himself."

"I suppose I can do the same."

Pankhurst laughed.

"I don't know, kid. You know what Grahame is, and what Philpot is. If Crane won the sweep, he's captain of the Fifth, and Grahame wouldn't dare to try to swindle him."

"Quite so," said Price, with a nod. "But if a junior won——"

"If a Fourth-Former won," resumed Pankhurst, "there'd very likely be some rotten swindle, and you wouldn't get the money."

"The ticket wouldn't be much good to you, then."

"Oh, I don't know. If we were done, we'd raise Cain about it, I can tell you."

"And so would I," said Poindexter.

"Yes, but you fellows in No. 4 don't amount to much, you know. You couldn't do anything, and——"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Panky?"

"Oh, no offence, you know. I'm just pointing out a fact."

"Better chuck it, or I shall be just punching a nose!"

"But, seriously, you'd do better to let Crane have the ticket," said Pankhurst.

"I'm going to stick to it. If I'm done, there will be a row. The fact is, I was bounced into this thing, and I wish I'd kept out of it. But as I'm in it, and it's got to go through, I'm going to see that it's honest. See the point?"

"Good idea—if you can manage it."

"I guess I'll have a try. If Sweet Lavender had fallen to anybody else, I'd back him up in getting fair play. You fellows ought to back me up."

"Oh, rather! It's all in the Form."

"I guess so, especially as you were really the cause of my getting into it, against my own better judgment," said Poindexter.

Pankhurst stared at him.

"Well, I don't see how you make that out, Puntbuster," he said. "Price and I didn't like the idea at first, but we weren't going to have you say we funked it."

"What!" yelled Poindexter.

"Well, that's how Crane put it," said Pankhurst. "As you were already in it——"

"Already in it! Why, when he came and asked us, he said you two were in it!"

"Eh?"

"And he said you thought we'd funk it."

"But he asked you first——"

"He told me he had asked you first."

Pankhurst rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"There's some lying been done somewhere," he said. "I suppose the fact of the matter is, that Crane played us off against one another, and, like a pair of silly jays, we tumbled into the trap."

Poindexter nodded gloomily.

"Well, of course I never suspected a fellow of telling a lie," he said. "It was easy enough for the rotter to take us in."

"Well, it's done now. The only thing we can do now is to see that it's run on fair-play lines, and make the rotters cash up."

"I guess so."

"The money's in Grahame's hands, but Philpot has a finger in the pie. They won't part with it if they can help it. So long!"

And the Old Firm walked off. Philpot came along the passage, and saw Poindexter standing alone, with a thoughtful frown upon his brow. The cad of the Fourth came up to him immediately.

"I say, Poindexter!"

The chum from Chicago stared at him.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Only a word or two. It's about that little sweep——"

"Well, what about it?"

"You know, of course, that the sweep amounted to a sov.?"

"Yes; but as Grahame took two chances, the sum comes to a guinea."

"Yes, but there's the expenses——"

"What expenses?"

"Well, as I had all the trouble of getting it up, and writing out the papers, and so on," said Philpot, with an injured look, "I think I'm entitled to the odd shilling."

"Rot!" said Poindexter. "The whole amount of the sweep goes to the winner. That's the agreement, and we stick to it."

"Don't be mean——"

"It's a matter of principle with me," said Poindexter, flushing however. "I was got into this thing by a cad's trick, and now I'm in it I'll see fair play, or burst something. The whole amount of the stakes are going to be handed over."

"But—well, if you choose to be miserly——"

Poindexter thrust his hand into his trouser pocket and drew out a shilling.

"If you want a bob," he said, "there is one. Take it."

Philpot stared at the shilling, but did not take it.

"Take it!" roared Poindexter.

"But——"

"You said I was mean. Take that shilling, or I'll knock your confounded head against the wall."

Philpot took the shilling, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

"Now, that's settled," said Poindexter. "If you want a shilling for the trouble you've taken, there it is; but the whole amount of the sweepstakes will be handed over to me, and you can tell Grahame so."

And the American chum walked away in high dudgeon.

The 4th Chapter.
The Sportsmen!

THERE was a growing excitement in the Fourth Form at Cliveden as the Saturday drew near.

It was not the healthy excitement of anticipation which usually preceded an important football or cricket match. Nothing of that kind! It was the feverish excitement which is inseparable from the spirit of gambling.

Every boy who had drawn a ticket in the sweepstake was anxious for his horse to win, as a matter of course. Those who had drawn outsiders were discontented. It was not only that they stood to lose their shillings—though a shilling was not a small sum to a junior. But every entrant in the sweepstakes had turned over in his mind so often how pleasant it would be to win the stakes, that he already regarded the twenty-one shillings almost as his own, and was certain to feel a proportionate disappointment if he lost.

Keen anxiety therefore reigned among the juniors, especially among those who had borrowed the money to buy the ticket. Teddy Trimble was the first to get an absolute blunk, his horse being scratched two days before the race. Teddy shed tears over the useless bit of paper, which bore the name of a steed that would never even run. He had paid a shilling for that ticket—sixpence of his own, and sixpence that he had borrowed of Greene and had to repay out of his next week's pocket-money. And his horse was not even to appear on the course at all!

Naturally, the others were eager to know whether their horses were scratched, and what chance they were supposed to have by the men in the know, and, consequently, there was a rush on the sporting papers in the local newspaper shop.

On Friday morning it was known that three more horses had been scratched, and three more of the young "sportsmen" were in despair. Philpot's horse was among them, and the other two belonged to Gatty and Greene. On Friday afternoon the keenness grew more tense. It was pretty certain that not more than seven or eight horses would run in the race, and so the greater number of the tickets were certain blanks.

Trevelyan, the captain of Cliveden, noticed something of the suppressed excitement among the juniors, and spoke to Grahame about it.

"Anything up in the Fourth that you know of, Grahame?" he asked.

The prefect shook his head.

"No, not that I've noticed."

"Some of the youngsters seem to have something on their minds," said Trevelyan. "Some of the Fifth, do, too. I thought there might be something going on. You never know how to take these youngsters, really."

"That's true enough. Perhaps there's another Form row brewing. You know the Fourth and the Fifth were at loggerheads the other week on the question of fagging."

"Ah, yes, perhaps it's something of the sort."

And Trevelyan dismissed the matter from his mind. After tea on Friday evening he was working in his study when Greene of the Fourth tapped at his door and entered. Greene's horse had been scratched, but he had purchased a ticket from another youngster, and was now the proud possessor of a slip bearing the name of Auld Reekie, a horse that was supposed to have next best chance to the favourite.

Trevelyan looked up from his work.

"What do you want, Greene?"

"Can you give me a pass, Trevelyan?" asked Greene hesitatingly. "I want to go down to Clivebank for something important."

"It's nearly locking-up," said Trevelyan, looking at his watch.

"Yes, I know, but——"

"You wouldn't be back till long after calling-over. What do you want to go for?"

"It's rather important."

"That's rather vague," said the captain of Cliveden, with a smile. "I suppose it's to smuggle food in from the tuck-shop, eh?"

"Oh, no, Trevelyan; honour bright!"

"Then what is it?"

"Oh, I just want to get a paper," said Greene, turning very red.

Trevelyan stared.

"You want to go out after locking-up to buy a newspaper?"

"Yo-es."

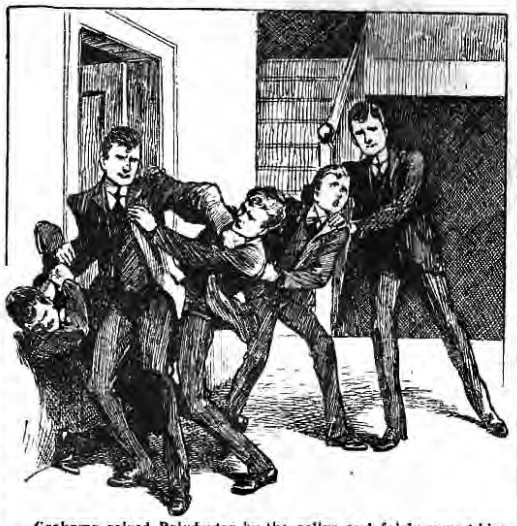
"Well, you can't! I think you must be a fool, Greene, to come to me with such a request," said Trevelyan severely. "You can't go!"

Greene went out, looking very crestfallen. Philpot met him in the passage.

"Has he given you the pass?" asked the cad of the Fourth.

Greene shook his head dismally.

"I'll tell you what," said Philpot, "my horse is scratched, just like yours was. I'll give you a bob to go Co. in Auld Reekie, and I'll get over the wall and go down to the village for the 'Sporting News.'"



Grahame seized Poindexter by the collar and fairly swung him off his feet. But in a moment Neville and Flynn rushed to the rescue. The big senior and three juniors surged through the doorway, and right into the captain of Cliveden, who was coming up the corridor.

"I say! I gave three bob for the ticket——" began Greene.

"Yes, I dare say you did, but the horse may be scratched by this time," said Philpot persuasively, "and I have all the risk of breaking bounds to get the paper."

"Oh, all right," said Greene, "hand over the bob!"

Philpot handed over Poindexter's shilling, and wrote his initials on Greene's slip. Then they parted. Greene was anxious to have the sporting paper to know whether his horse was still in the running, and he was not sorry upon the whole to hedge a little. Philpot chuckled as he walked away to Grahame's study. The astute young financier had done a good stroke of business, from his own point of view.

"Hallo," said Grahame, as he looked up from a yellow-backed novel he was reading, "have you got that paper?"

Philpot nodded, and pulled a folded sporting paper down from inside his waistcoat, where it had been concealed. The young rascal had already fetched it from the village, but he had taken care not to let Greene be aware of that.

Grahame threw his novel aside. Grahame was what he was pleased to call a sportsman, and he betted on races, and played cards, and smoked, and was fond of reading novels. A healthy and exciting football story would have bored him, but the latest sensational novel was exactly suited to his mind.

"Give it to me, young 'un!"

He took the paper, and opened it, and ran his eye down the column where information was to be found concerning the Camperdown Cup.

"Russell scratched, Lord Tom scratched, Blue Bean scratched," he said. "That's all, so far. Sweet Lavender still the favourite, and Auld Reekie pretty certain to come in second."

"Good," said Philpot, "I've a half share in Auld Reekie."

"Oh, have you," said Grahame, sitting up and looking at him. "Who's got the rest?"

"Greene of the Fourth."

"It's rot for Greene to have him," said Grahame. "Come to think of it, the favourite is pretty unreliable, and Auld Reekie may pull it off yet. Go and bring Greene here."

Philpot grinned and left the study. In a few minutes he returned with Greene.

"I say, young Greene," said Grahame, looking up from the paper with a very serious face, "I hear you've got Auld Reekie!"

"I've got half," said Greene, looking scared. "Is that the paper, Philpot?"

"Yes," said Philpot unblushingly.

"But you told me—I mean, you never told me——"

"Oh, rats! Grahame's talking to you."

"I'm sorry for you, young Greene——"

"I—I say, he's not scratched, is he?" said Greene, in dismay. "Don't tell me he's scratched, Grahame."

"Not exactly scratched," said Grahame. "It's pretty certain he'll run, but something's gone wrong with him, and he hasn't an earthly."

Greene looked inclined to cry.

"I'm sorry," said Grahame. "You're a regular young sportsman, and I shouldn't like you to get hard hit the first time. What did you give for the ticket?"

"Three bob, but Philpot has taken half for a shilling——"

"Oh, he's taken half for a shilling, has he?" said Grahame. "Well, if you like, I'll take the other half for—for sixpence, and I'll give you Nero."

"Nero! But he's a rank outsider."

"Not so much an outsider as Auld Reekie is now," said Grahame, smiling.

"But—but if Auld Reekie's no good, what do you want him for?" asked Greene timidly.

Grahame frowned darkly.

"I was going to do you a good turn, you ungrateful young hound!" he exclaimed. "But don't sell me Auld Reekie if you don't want to. Get out of my study, confound you!"

"But—but I say——" hesitated Greene.

"Sell, you duffer!" whispered Philpot. "Grahame will make it warm for you if you get his back up, you know that."

"I don't mind selling to you, Grahame," said Greene. "I—I'll take sixpence, and Nero."

"Just as you like," said Grahame, with a yawn. "And I'll tell you what, young Greene. If Auld Reekie wins, I'll make it another bob for you. Not that I think he will win, mind. I'm doing this out of good-nature."

A prefect was too formidable a person for a lad like Greene to argue with, but he couldn't help wishing that Grahame would keep his good-nature to himself. He dared not say so, however. With a hesitating hand he drew out the ticket, and handed it over to Grahame. He received in return sixpence, and the slip of paper bearing the name of Nero, considered the rankest outsider entered for the Camperdown Cup.

Greene, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or miserable, quitted the study. Grahame kept the paper in his hand.

"I see your initials are here, Philpot," he remarked. "I'll give you back your shilling, if you like, and keep the lot."

"It's half mine," said Philpot. "Auld Reekie is very nearly as good as Sweet Lavender. You can have my half share for five shillings."

"Why, you young Shylock, you gave Greene only a shilling——"

"Greene is a nug," said Philpot coolly, "and I'm not. If you want my half of Auld Reekie, you know the price."

Grahame's brows darkened.

"I don't think it will pay you to quarrel with me, Philpot," he said significantly. "I will make it half-a-crown."

"Five shillings."

"I'm afraid I shall have, as a prefect, to be down on this gambling business," said Grahame. "If I did my strict duty, I should not pay out the money, but should hand it back to the subscribers. I've been thinking over it lately, and I really think that that's what I ought to do."

Philpot sneered savagely.

"No gammon!" he said.

Grahame started to his feet.

"What do you say? I'll teach you to speak a bit more respectfully to a prefect!" And he snatched a cane from the table.

Philpot gritted his teeth.

"Don't touch me," he said.

"I'll give you the biggest licking——"

"Better not. Do you want me to go straight to Dr. Rayne and tell him the whole story?"

"If you dared——"

"Better sit down, Grahame. You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire," said Philpot. "You know you'd be expelled, and as you can't frighten me. Stand back; I swear that if you lay a finger on me, I'll go straight to the Head."

Grahame gave him a glare of rage, but he sat down again.

"Now, if you want my half of Auld Reekie, you can have it for three-and-six," said Philpot. "That's cheap, too."

Grahame hesitated a moment, then he paid over the three shillings and sixpence, and the cad of the Fourth left the study with the silver jingling in his pocket and a grin of satisfaction on his face.

How the sweepstake turned out Philpot cared nothing now. Whatever horse won the race Philpot had made money out of the affair, as he usually succeeded in doing in any of his little transactions.

The 5th Chapter.
Poindexter's Little Deal.

"HALLO, young Greene! What's the matter with you? I guess you look as if you were going to your own funeral."

Greene was certainly looking very lugubrious that Saturday morning, as Poindexter came upon him in the Close soon after breakfast. He was leaning against a tree, his hands in his pockets,

and an exceedingly miserable expression upon his face.

"What's the row?" asked Poindexter.

"That rotten sweepstake," said Greene. "I've been done!"

"Your horse scratched?"

"Oh, yes; but that's nothing. You take your chance of that. But I bought Auld Reekie from Simpson for three bob, and—and—and——"

Greene broke off, the tears of vexation and disappointment welling up into his eyes.

"Phew!" said Poindexter. "Don't do that, old chap. It's not manly, and waterworks are barred in the Close. What's the trouble, anyway? I heard somebody say that Auld Reekie was second favourite, and that there was now even betting on him and on Sweet Lavender."

"Yes, that's just it. Grahame led me to think that—that he was no good, and he gave me sixpence—sixpence—and Nero for my ticket," said Greene, fairly weeping now. "I sold half to young Philpot, and got sixpence and Nero for the other half. I—I'm out of it now, and—and——"

"Well, don't blub. You can't wash your ticket back again, you know," said Poindexter practically, though he was touched. "But you've been done—rottenly done. We can't handle a prefect very well, but as for Philpot——"

"Oh, he was in the game with Grahame, I can see that now."

"Here he is," said Poindexter abruptly. "Here, Philpot!"

He ran quickly towards the end of the Fourth who showed a strong disposition to avoid him.

Philpot, seeing that there was no help for it, stopped.

"Can I do anything for you, Poindexter?"

"Yes; you can give Greene back the half of the ticket——"

"Can't! I've sold it to Grahame."

"Is that the truth?"

"Ask Grahame!"

And Philpot walked away grinning.

He was quite secure from reprisals.

Poindexter looked puzzled, and Greene knuckled his wet eyes.

"So Grahame is the sole owner of Auld Reekie now," said Poindexter. "I'm afraid your chance is gone for good, Greene. It serves you right for gambling; but—well, it's a rotten swindle! Still, you've got Nero."

"I don't suppose he'll run," said Greene; "and if he does he'll come in about tenth, I suppose. I wouldn't mind so much, only I sold my silver-handled knife to raise the money, and—and it was a birthday present from my governor, and he's coming down to Cliveden in a few days. And he's bound to miss it, and—and——"

And Greene's tears flowed afresh.

"I guess you're the stupidest young ass I ever struck," said Poindexter. "How much can you get your knife back for?"

"Three and six."

"Will you sell me Nero?"

Greene stared.

"Sell you Nero? It's no good."

"I know it isn't," said Poindexter. "But I'll give you three and six for Nero, if you like, to get you out of this scrape."

"I—I couldn't take it."

"Yes, you can, and shall. Give me the ticket."

"I say, this is awfully good of you, Poindexter."

"Rot! Here's the money!"

Greene gladly handed over the slip of paper, and took the three shillings and sixpence.

Poindexter thrust the slip carelessly into his pocket along with the one already there bearing the name of Sweet Lavender.

"Thanks, old chap," stammered Green. "I say, I'm awfully grateful, you know. I should have got into no end of a row with the governor. If he had a suspicion that I'd been gambling he'd—he'd——"

"Well, don't gamble again," said Poindexter. "If three and six will keep you from growing up into blackguardly habits it's money well spent."

"I won't," said Greene solemnly. "I promise you. I've had enough of the rotten business to last me some time, I can tell you."

And Greene went away in search of the purchaser of his knife with a light heart.

Lincoln G. Poindexter was looking a little gloomy. As a matter of fact funds were not very high with him just then, and the three and sixpence he had paid to Greene left him with only threepence in the world.

And, as the day was a half-holiday, he was likely to want money that afternoon.

When morning school was over, and the Fourth Form poured out of the class-room, Neville and Flynn linked their arms in Poindexter's.

"May as well get in the things for tea," Dick Neville remarked. "We shan't have any time in the afternoon, with the football practice."

"Sure, and you're right," said Micky Flynn. "And sure, too, I could do with a snack before dinner in this cowld weather. Come on, Pointbuster!"

Poindexter turned red.

"You'll have to stand it, kids," he said. "I'll make it up afterwards."

Neville gave a whistle.

"But I'm stumped," he said. "How are you off, Micky?"

"Two bob," said Micky Flynn cheerfully. "I daresay we can get up some sort of a tea on that. But sure ye were in funds this morning, Pointplunger. Have you been squandering your wealth in reckless extravagance, or buying a new motor-car, or what?"

"I've bought Nero of young Greene for three and six," said Poindexter.

"Sure, and it's an ass ye are, then," said Micky. "Why, Nero is the rankest and rottenest outsider entered for the race."

"I know he is," said Poindexter. "But I've done it, and there you are. Can't be helped now. Hallo, Panky! Wherefore those glum looks?"

The chief of the Old Firm had a paper under his arm, and a decidedly gloomy look on his face. Price was looking equally downcast.

"Oh, nothing," said Pankhurst. "Only this is the morning's paper, with the latest scratchings. My horse is gone, and so is Price's. We're out of it."

"What about Heather Bell?" asked Neville anxiously.

"Scratched!"

"My hat! That's my horse. Micky's is Breezy Boy. Is he there still?"

"No, he's scratched too," grinned Pankhurst.

"Ochone!" said Micky. "Sure, and it's an unlucky baste I am intoirely."

"There's a regular crop of scratchings to-day," said Pankhurst. "There are only six horses left to run. Sweet Lavender and Auld Reekie are equal favourites now."

"What about Nero?" asked Poindexter.

"Oh, I expect he's scratched too. No, here he is," said Pankhurst, looking at the list in the paper. "Nero is going to run. Of course, he's no good."

"I've bought him."

"Have you? Well, you know the old saying about fools and their money," said Pankhurst comfortingly. "Soon parted, you know."

"Quite so," said Price.

The Old Firm walked away.

Neville and Flynn were grinning.

"Panky is getting quite sage," remarked Neville. "I endorse his observation."

"Sure, and I——"

"Oh, rats!" said Poindexter. "Give it a rest. I don't care a rap whether I win or not; but if I do, there's going to be fair play, that's my point."

The 6th Chapter.

An Unexpected Winner — Grahame's Little Game—The End of the Sweep.

THE Combine threw themselves into the football practice that afternoon with their usual zest, and so did the Old Firm; but when the practice was over, and they left the field, they remembered the race, and, in spite of themselves, they were eager to hear the result of it.

The race was over at four o'clock at the latest, and so the result was already known in London; but when it would reach Cliveden was a question.

A telegram from the race-course was hardly feasible, and might have led to discovery.

The juniors found that the others were as ignorant of the result, and as anxious about it as they were.

"Well, I guess I'm not going to worry about it," said Poindexter. "Let's get a clean up, and then go and have tea. I hope you've got something decent for that two bob, Micky."

"Middlin' 'dacent," said Flynn. "A better feed than you'll get out of your winnings, I expect."

The juniors were in their study about six o'clock, having tea, when Grahame the prefect came in. There was a curious expression upon Grahame's face.

"Hallo! Had the news?" asked Poindexter.

"What news?" asked Grahame, colouring a little.

"About the race? Who's won? Sweet Lavender?"

"Oh, we haven't any evening papers yet," said Grahame. "The result will be in the Sunday papers to-morrow. I want to speak to you, Poindexter."

"Speak away."

"I gave my ticket to young Greene," said the prefect. "It was for Nero, you know. A rank outsider. He thinks himself wronged by the affair——"

"So he was," said Neville.

"I guess it was a pesky swindle," said Poindexter bluntly.

"Sure, and——"

"I didn't come here to ask your opinion about that," said Grahame, who evidently had some reason of his own for not losing his temper. "I've changed my mind about it, and would have taken Nero back; but young Greene says he's sold him to you."

"That's the fact."

"Well, I'll buy him of you if you like. Of course, he's a worthless outsider, but I don't want any fellow to feel that I've done him. I'll give you two shillings."

Poindexter looked closely at the prefect.

Although not of a suspicious nature, he was as keen as a Sheffield blade, and he smelt a rat immediately.

"I gave Greene three-and-six," he said slowly.

"Very well, if you want to sell, I'll make it three and six."

"I guess I don't want to sell."

"Sure and don't be an ass," whispered Flynn excitedly. "Get the tin back, and we'll have a rippin' feed to make up for this measly tea——"

"Don't be a fool, Poindexter," said Grahame sharply. "I am willing to give you all you gave Greene for a worthless strip of paper——"

"It's no good beating about the bush," said Poindexter abruptly. "If it were a worthless slip of paper, you wouldn't give me a red cent for it. You did Greene over the matter, and you'd do me if you could. If you really want to buy back Nero, it's because you've got some news from the race-course, and you know he's got a chance of winning, after all."

"My hat!" shouted Dick Neville. "That's it. The race was over before four o'clock, and Grahame has somehow got news——"

"Sure and it's a janius ye are," shouted Flynn, hugging the astonished Poindexter. "It's a rule janius ye are, as sure as I'm the descendant of the ancient kings of Ireland——"

"If it's only as sure as that——"

"Faith, and what do ye mane, intoirely? I——"

"Dry up," said Neville. "Let's get this thing settled."

"Faith, but——"

"Shut up. You may as well own up, Grahame. You've had news that the race is won, and that's why you want to buy Nero back."

Grahame bit his lip, but did not speak.

"Well, I'm not going to sell," said Poindexter. "I've got Sweet Lavender and Nero, and if either has won, I'm going to have the tin."

"Your confounded young rat, suppose it is true," blurted out the prefect. "Do you think I am going to be dictated to by you? As a matter of fact, I have gone to the expense of wiring to a sporting paper office in London, and I've just had the reply at the post-office. I haven't done it for nothing——"

"No, you've done it to try and swindle Poindexter," exclaimed Neville excitedly. "But you won't succeed, though, you rotter."

"Hold your tongue, Neville."

"I won't hold my tongue! You're trying to cheat Poindexter——"

"Sure and ye're a——"

"I guess it's all right, kids," drawled the American. "He can try till he's black in the face, but he won't succeed. I've got the tickets, and I hold on right."

Grahame turned a face inflamed with rage upon the cool junior.

"Stick to the tickets, then," he exclaimed. "You won't get the stakes——"

"You dare not keep them——"

"You'll see! As a matter of fact, you are no entitled to the stakes. Nero was my horse, and there was really a sale in the competition that no competitor was to be allowed to sell his ticket, to prevent speculation——"

"My hat!" said Poindexter. "My only old sombrero! My ancient tile! If that doesn't take the whole of the giddy biscuit factory. You've just made up that rule——"

"Don't answer me. Under the circumstances the stakes will not be handed over to you!"

"Won't they?" said Poindexter, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"Certainly not. I am willing to give you five shillings for the ticket——"

"Twenty-one shillings, and not a cent less."

"Then you will have nothing. I——"

"Very well." Poindexter walked to the door and threw it open. Grahame looked after him uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I——"

"Get out of our study. I'm going to have the stakes, if I make all Cliveden ring with the matter. As a beginning, get out, you swindler."

"What?" yelled Grahame, in a rage.

"Swindler!" said Poindexter. "Cheat! Thief, if you like that better!"

The prefect sprang towards him.

"By George, I'll make you——"

"You won't make me take back those words! You're a low, dishonest, gambling thief," said the American between his teeth. "Now——"

He got no further. The grip of the infuriated Sixth-Former was upon him, and he was fairly swung off his feet. But in a moment Neville and Flynn rushed to the rescue. The big senior and the three juniors, struggling wildly, surged through the doorway, and right into a fellow who was coming quickly along the corridor.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the voice of Trevelyan. "What's this? You—rowing with the juniors, Grahame! What does this mean?"

"Thafe!" howled Micky Flynn. "Swindler! Hand over the stakes."

"Hold your tongue!" gasped Grahame, who would have handed over the stakes, or anything else in the world, rather than have been betrayed to the captain of Cliveden. But Flynn was too excited to hear or heed.

"Hand over the stakes, you thafe of the worruld," he bawled. "Sure and Pointpusher has won the sweep, and ye're not goin' to——"

Trevelyan's hand gripped Flynn by the collar.

"Shut up," he said quietly. "No need to tell all Cliveden. Now, what is this about? I know too much for you to keep it dark. There has been a sweepstake, and you have had a hand in it; is that it, Grahame?"

"Suppose it is," snarled Grahame.

"Then you're a cad, and you ought to be sacked from the school for encouraging the juniors to gamble," exclaimed Trevelyan hotly. "Poindexter, tell me all about it. It's too late to think of keeping the secret now."

That was plain enough. Poindexter hesitated a moment, and then explained succinctly.

The prefect listened with lowering brows.

"Is all that correct, Grahame?" asked Trevelyan at last.

"About right," said Grahame, with an attempt at bravado. "It was only a yarn about not handing over the stakes, to make him sell the ticket——"

"Liar!" said Trevelyan contemptuously. "You meant to rob him. Not a word; if you answer me back I'll march you straight to the Head."

The prefect cowered.

"You are holding the stakes," said Trevelyan. "It seems that Poindexter has won. He will not take the money. The money will be handed back to every subscriber. You will send me a list of their names, and they will report to me that they have had their money back. Do you understand?"

"I suppose so," snarled the prefect. "But——"

"That's enough. It will be done in an hour, or you'll go up before the Head; and you know what that will mean. Get out of my sight."

Grahame slunk away like a whipped cur. Trevelyan turned sternly to the juniors.

"I am surprised to find you three taking part in a thing of this kind," he said. "I have always looked upon you as worthy to lead the Fourth Form. I am sorry to find myself so disappointed. I have been deceived in you."

"I say——"

"Sure——"

"I guess——"

"Don't try to justify yourselves. I'm disappointed in you. That's all." And the captain of Cliveden swung away with a clouded brow.

"I guess he's in a tantrum," said Poindexter uncomfortably. "I know we were wrong, but not so wrong as he thinks. As for the money, rats to that. I don't want to touch money won on a race. But—but it's rotten to have old Trevelyan thinking us a set of cads."

"Sure, and he won't let us explain——"

"Well, we can't explain away the fact that we were in the sweep. It's—it's rotten! I'd rather have the worst licking possible from the Head, than have old Trevelyan look at me like that! But we'll make him see yet that we're not the rotters he seems to think," exclaimed Poindexter. "We'll show him that we're fit to be the top of the Fourth Form—and, by Jove, let any chap ever propose a sweepstake again in my hearing, and I'll make him think an earthquake has fallen on him!"

And the chums of the Combine gave an emphatic assent.

THE END.

The door of the study opened, and in came Crane and Cuffy, of the Fifth. A visit from the Fifth-Formers could hardly mean anything but a row. Neville slid his hand towards a ruler, Micky Flynn seized the inkpot, and Poindexter reached behind him and took hold of the shovel.

NEXT WEEK—

"THE CLIVEDEN VALENTINES,"

A Very Laughable Complete Story.