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The

Boys' Herald 1^d

EVERY BOY'S AND YOUNG MAN'S
STORY AND HOBBY PAPER.

No. 247, Vol. V.

EVERY WEDNESDAY—ONE PENNY.

WEEK ENDING APRIL 11, 1908.



Lawrence, the schoolhouse servant, was being led along between two policemen. Then Blake sprang forward, white as a sheet, and pointed to the central group. "That man must be released!" he cried. "He's innocent, and I can prove it!"

The Cliveden Minstrels



Of all the Humorous Stories Mr. CHARLES HAMILTON has written for us I think my friends will admit that "The Cliveden Minstrels" is absolutely the best and funniest.
—YOUR EDITOR.

The 1st Chapter.

Good Samaritans!

LINCOLN G. POINDEXTER, the American chum in the Fourth Form at Cliveden, gave a sudden start.

"I say, kids! What was that?" Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn were strolling along the passage towards their study, No. 4 on the upper corridor at Cliveden. A sound from behind a closed study door had caught Poindexter's ear—a sound that made him stop suddenly.

It was the sound of a sob. Poindexter was as hard as nails to an enemy, and a pretty tough customer at any time, as Pankhurst and Price of the Fourth had found to their cost; but, all the same, he had a tender heart, and a sound like that was sufficient to awaken all his sympathy in a moment.

"Did you hear it, kids?" "Rather," said Dick Neville. "Somebody had a licking, I suppose, and turning on the tap as a relief."

"It didn't sound like that kind of a howl," Poindexter remarked thoughtfully, looking at the door of the room from which the sound had proceeded. "It's Philpot's study. Philpot generally manages to wriggle out of lickings, too. I wonder if anything is wrong with Cliveden's champion cad."

"Sure, and it's likely enough," Micky Flynn remarked. "Faith, his dirty tricks are bound to come home to roost some day, you know."

Poindexter grinned. But his face became grave again in a moment.

"There it is again!" It was another sob from the study. As Poindexter had said, it did not sound like the kind of "howl" that relieved a junior's feelings after a licking. It sounded as if something serious was the matter. The chums of the Fourth looked at one another, and looked at the study door—hesitated.

They were not on good terms with Philpot. Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn—the Cliveden "Combine"—had had to come down heavily on the cad of the Fourth on more than one occasion. Philpot was not a pleasant character. He hated all manly sports, and he had not the excuse of being devoted to study. He almost preferred lying to telling the truth, and was never known to follow a straight path if a crooked one was to be found. His dislike of the Combine was very keen, and it was cordially repaid by the Fourth Form chums.

Yet now that he seemed to be in trouble, the good-natured lads would willingly have helped him if they could, cad as he undoubtedly was.

"Can't go in very well," said Neville, shaking his head. "If there's anything the matter, he would think we had come to taunt him; he's cad enough to do it himself."

"I guess so." "Faith, and sure he's got himself to blame for it, whatever it is," Micky Flynn remarked, with conviction.

"Rather! Still—" "I guess we'll see what's the matter, anyhow," said Poindexter. "I hate to see a fellow doubled up without trying to lend him a hand."

And the American chum tapped at the door. There was no reply from within.

Poindexter waited a few moments, and then opened the door and looked into the study. It was indeed Philpot who was in trouble. The cad of the Fourth was sitting at the table, his elbows resting upon it, his head in his hands. As the Combine looked at him, he gave another sob, which shook him from head to foot. All feelings of dislike vanished from the breasts of the juniors at once. They saw that the boy was in trouble—deep trouble—the severest flogging could not have accounted for a sob like that. What was the matter with Philpot?

"I say, Philpot!" Philpot had not heard the tap, nor had he heard the door open. But Poindexter's voice startled him, and he looked up suddenly. He showed a ghastly face—white, drawn, and tear-stained.

"What's the matter, old chap?" "Get out!" muttered Philpot hoarsely.

"Get out! Let me alone!" At any other time the chums would not have needed telling twice that they were unwelcome. But the case was unusual now. Instead of leave-

ing the study, they came further in, and Micky Flynn quietly closed the door.

"What's the matter, kid?" "Mind your own business!"

Even at that Poindexter did not flinch. He came closer to the junior. Philpot gave him a bitter, savage look.

"You are going to stay!" he muttered. "You enjoy this, of course. Stay, if you like; I can't turn you out. I hate you!"

"That's not the way to speak, Philly." "I hate you! You've always been against me—all three of you!"

"I guess we've been against your dirty tricks." "Faith, and we—"

"Get out of my study! You said that I ought to be expelled from Cliveden. Well, I'm going to be expelled now, so you can be satisfied. Now leave me alone."

The Combine stared at him in amazement. "You're going to be expelled?"

"Yes. Don't say you're not glad," said Philpot bitterly. "There's not a fellow in this college wouldn't be glad to see my back."

"If that's the case, it's your own fault, Philpot. Nobody ever got generally disliked without the fault being in himself," said the American chum quietly. "You know what I think of you and your ways, anyhow. But if you're going to be expelled, I'm sorry for you. Is it really as bad as that?"

"Yes, it is." "But has the doctor said—"

"The Head hasn't said anything yet. He doesn't know."

"Doesn't know what?" "What I've done. He'll know soon enough, and then I shall be expelled. You can go and tell the whole Form, if you like. I don't care. I hate you all!"

"Don't talk rot, Philpot!" said Poindexter sharply. "If you really felt like that, you want a good hiding; but I don't believe you do. We haven't come in here to crow over you, as you seem to think. If you're in trouble we'd like to help you."

"You could help me, if you liked—you more than anybody else at Cliveden," said Philpot eagerly.

Poindexter looked puzzled. "I don't see how that can be. But explain. How can I help you?"

"Because you're rich." The American chum stared at him. "You don't mean to say it's money—"

"Yes." "You are in want of money? All this fuss because you want—"

"You don't understand. I owe Grahame, the prefect, four pounds," faltered Philpot. "You—four pounds! What on earth—"

"I—I lost it on—a horse." "And Grahame wants it back?"

"Yes." "And you can't pay it?" "I haven't more than five bob in the world."

"But that's nothing to howl over. I can't understand a prefect lending a junior four pounds; but if he did it, he ought to take the consequences of being such a careless idiot. Tell him you can't pay. You're not afraid of his speaking to the Head, I suppose? Dr. Rayne would jump on him for lending you the money."

Philpot caught his breath. "You—you don't understand, Poindexter."

"No, I don't," Poindexter looked at him keenly. "Is there something more behind this?"

"Ye-e-es." "What is it?" "I—I borrowed the money of Grahame."

"Well?" "Put—but Grahame—"

"Go on!" "Grahame doesn't know!"

It was out at last. Philpot sank into his chair again, and covered his face with his hands. The Combine looked at one another, sufficiently impressed now by the gravity of the case. It was serious—more serious than they could have imagined. Philpot was a thief!

"Come right out of your little black feet—I mean come right out of your cabin sweet."

A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer. Neville had not the nerve of Lincoln G. Poindexter, and he was getting mixed. "Go on, Brudder Sambo," exclaimed Poindexter, as Neville paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main on the banjo.

"Yes, rather," said Dick Neville, in his straightforward, sincere way.

"Faith, and that's throe, although it's a baste cad ye are, Philly."

Philpot stared at the chums incredulously. "You've always been my enemies," he said.

"Never mind that now. What's the trouble? I guess we'll help you out of it if we can."

"Faith, and we will." Philpot's face brightened up.

He had evidently deemed himself quite friendless in his misery, and the offer of aid from the boys he had always disliked and several times injured, came like a ray of light in great darkness.

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The 2nd Chapter.

Poindexter's Promise.

POINDEXTER was the first to break the silence.

"I understand now," he said quietly.

Philpot sobbed miserably. "You mean that you stole the money from Grahame?"

"No, no, not that!" moaned Philpot. "I knew where he kept it, you see, and I was quite certain that Freezing Point was going to win—"

"Another of your dead certs, I suppose?" the American chum remarked contemptuously.

"I was told it was a dead cert by a man who knows—"

"But it lost?" "Yes. Kidd says it was pulled—"

"And you took four pounds of Grahame's money to lay on that horse?" "Ye-e-s, with Kidd the bookmaker."

"And there's no chance of getting it back again, I suppose?" Philpot looked up in amazement.

"Get money back from a bookmaker!" he ejaculated.

"Well, I guess it's impossible." "I should say it is."

"Then, this is what it comes to—you borrowed, as you call it, four pounds of Grahame's money to lay on Freezing Point, and the money's gone, and you can't replace it."

"I've got hardly five bob in the world." "Your people—"

Philpot shuddered. "If I asked my father for four pounds, he would write to the Head and want to know what was the matter. My people are not rich."

"H'm, that wouldn't do!" said Poindexter, looking perplexed.

Philpot gave him an entreating glance. "You're rich, Poindexter—and you've said you'll help me—"

"My father's rich," said Poindexter. "But you don't think I carry such a sum as four pounds about with me, do you? It's as much as I have in a whole term, unless my governor gives me a special tip for something. And at the present moment I certainly haven't as much as ten shillings in the world, and I owe some of that at the tuck shop."

Philpot moaned. "Then it's all up!"

"I could raise half a sovereign by writing to my guardian," said Dick Neville uncomfortably. "I wouldn't mind putting that in."

"What could you do, Micky?" asked Poindexter.

Micky Flynn made a grimace. According to his own account, Flynn was a lineal descendant of the ancient kings of Ireland, but those royal gentlemen had left very little besides blood-royal to the Flynns of Ballyflynn, for Micky was always in a state of impecuniosity.

That was, however, partly due to his reckless generosity whenever he had any money. Nobody ever asked of him in vain while his funds lasted.

"Faith, and I'll fork out all I have!" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid it's little, but I'm willing to shove it in the hat."

And he turned out his trousers' pockets on Philpot's table. Three pennies, a broken pen-knife, a piece of sealing-wax with some jujubes clinging to it, a length of twine, a small peg-top, and a fragment of milk chocolate—such was the wealth which the descendant of the Irish kings brought to light by a thorough and exacting search. Poindexter looked them over.

"Is that all, Micky?" "That's all, me bhoy."

"Then you can shove 'em into your pockets again, and use that threepence to start an account at the Bank of England," said Poindexter. "I'm afraid we can't solve the difficulty with a busted pen-knife and a bit of sealing-wax."

"Faith, a fellow can't do more than his best, Pundodger."

Philpot was sitting white-faced and miserable. The thought that Poindexter would have the money had brightened him up for a moment. He knew that Poindexter's "popper" was a Chicago millionaire.

But the brief hope was gone now! Poindexter had not the money; and from the transitory gleam the wretched lad sank at once into the depths of despair again.

Poindexter looked perplexed.

He was determined to help Philpot; but how to do it was a puzzle. An appeal to Grahame was not to be thought of. Grahame was the most unpopular prefect at Cliveden, and as hard as iron. He was of a "sporting" taste himself, and probably his bad example had in the first place led Philpot into the wretched sin of gambling which had been followed by sorrow. But that would make no difference to Grahame. If he found his four pounds gone, he would make Cliveden ring with his loss. The Combine knew Grahame well, and they did not even think of trying to appease him. The money had to be replaced before the prefect discovered the loss. But how?

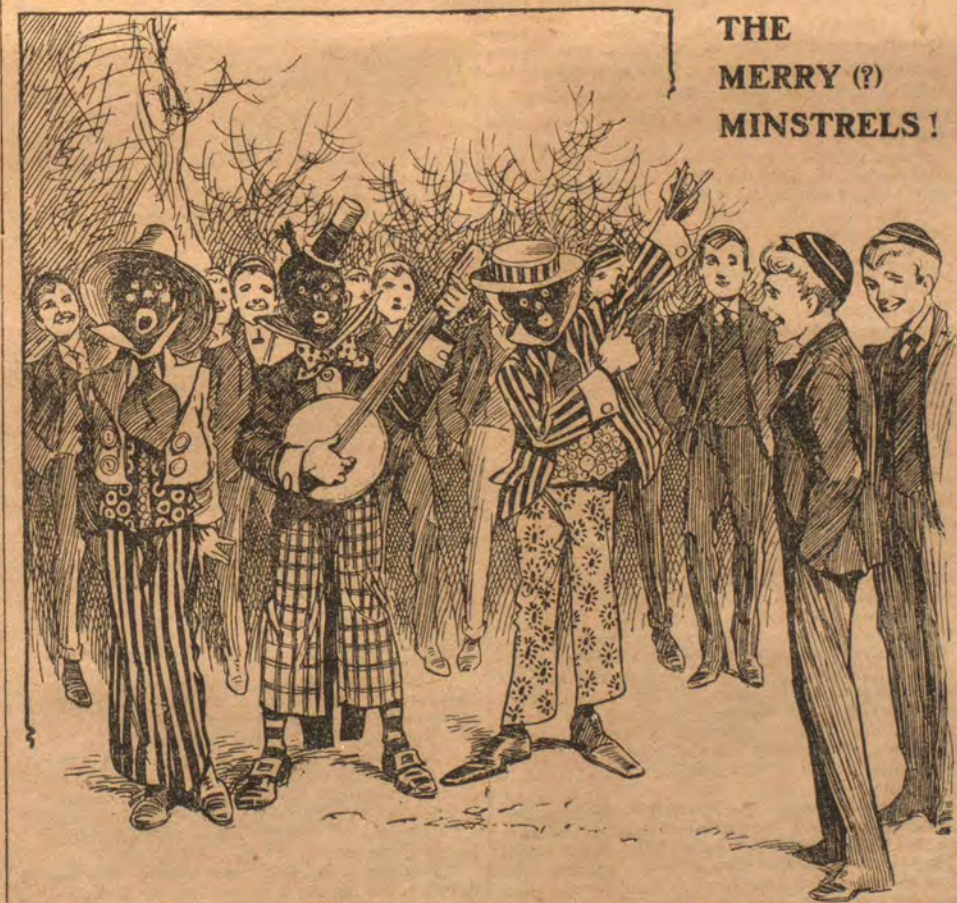
The juniors did not reflect upon one side of the matter. Philpot had not intended to steal the money; they believed that. But the fact that he was a thief, whether he had intended to replace the money or not—that was a serious aspect of the case. In their pity for the wretched culprit, the Combine had rather recklessly taken on the responsibility of hushing up his fault. After all, if he were saved, this terrible experience would be certain to be a lesson to him.

But could he be saved?

Where was the money to come from?

"Four pounds," muttered Poindexter restlessly. "We can raise ten bob towards it. You can get another ten by writing to your pater, Dick—"

"There's no time," groaned Philpot, "even if it were any good. Grahame is certain to discover his loss to-morrow, if not to-night."



THE MERRY (?) MINSTRELS!

"How's that?"
"He'd put the money aside in a drawer in his desk, to pay for a new camera he's just ordered. The man is going to bring it over from Carbury to-night or to-morrow."

Poindexter's face became graver.
"Then what on earth is to be done?" muttered Neville.

"Blessed if I know!"
"Faith, and sure it's a puzzle intirely."
Philpot threw himself forward, his face on the table, shaking his head to foot with a passion of misery and terror.

"It's all up! Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? I shall be expelled! What will my father say? Oh, what shall I do?"

The Combine looked at him in grim silence.
It was of no use then to say what was in their minds—that if a fellow were dishonest, if he were dishonourable, if he entered into blackguardly pursuits, he must naturally expect to have to pay the penalty when the time came.

It was all true, but the harm was done now; reproaches were not wanted; a way out of the terrible difficulty was what was wanted.

The school might be all the better for Philpot being expelled, but that was not the question now. They forgot that he was the cad of the Fourth; he was a Form-fellow—a Cliveden junior in distress—that was all they thought of now. He must be helped—he must be saved! But how?

"I am done for! Oh, what can I do?"
The boy's terror and despair were almost hysterical. Poindexter laid a hand upon his shoulder—a strong, comforting hand.

"Back up, Philpot. We'll see you through."
The words were spoken upon a generous impulse; the means were as unknown as ever. But Poindexter was so well known as a true and honourable fellow at Cliveden that the words were as the balm of comfort to the unhappy young gamester. He raised his haggard face hopefully.

"Do you mean that, Poindexter?"

"I guess so."

"But you have no money."

"I—I'll get some, somehow."

His chums looked doubtfully at him. But their faith in Poindexter was also strong, and they felt something of assurance as they read his determined expression.

Philpot gave a choking sob.

"If you can get me out of this, Poindexter, I swear it will be a lesson to me—I'll never gamble, or smoke, or lie again! Oh, if I can only get out of this!"

Poindexter did not reply to that. He knew that this would be a lesson to the young black-guard; whether a permanent one or not remained to be seen.

"Keep your pecker up, kid," he said at length. "I've given you my word—I'll get the money from somewhere—and to-day, if possible. Mind, not a word to a soul. And we'll keep mum, too. Come along, you chaps."

The Combine left the study, leaving the cad of the Form comforted, half-tearfully hopeful. Poindexter's face was very grave.

The 3rd Chapter.

Pankhurst Smells a Rat!

"FAITH, and what are ye goin' to do, intirely?" asked Micky Flynn, as the Combine walked up the passage.

The place seemed deserted, and in fact was almost so, for it was a half-holiday at Cliveden, and the whole school had turned out in the fine spring afternoon. The Combine had been just going out when the sob from Philpot's study had stopped them in the passage. They did not feel much inclined for holiday-making now!

"Where are we going?" asked Dick Neville.

"No. 10," said Poindexter briefly.

Neville whistled. No. 10 study was the dwelling-place of Pankhurst and Price, the Old Firm, the Combine's deadly rivals in the Fourth Form at Cliveden.

"And what's the wheeze?"

"We've had so many rows with Panky and Price, that they're sure to back us up in the hour of distress," said Poindexter. "We've got to raise four pounds by to-night. They may be able to help us."

"H'm! Not likely."

"We can try, anyhow."

No. 10, however, was drawn blank. Pankhurst and Price were not indoors that bright April afternoon. The Combine went out into the green school Close to look for them, and found them chatting under the elms.

"Hallo, what price tinned beef?" said Pankhurst genially, as the Cliveden Combine came up.

Poindexter, for once, took no notice of this gentle allusion to the fact that his "popper" had made the Poindexter pile by exporting beef—and other things, perhaps—in tins from Chicago.

"I want to speak to you chaps," he said.

Pankhurst ran his fingers through his red hair in a doubtful way.

"H'm! I don't know about that."

"Don't know about what, fathead?"

"You see, we're rather particular who we're seen speaking to," explained Pankhurst blandly.

"That's how the matter stands. What?"

"Quite so," said Price.

"Faith, and I—"

"Oh, don't rot now," said Poindexter.

"We—"

"Sure and it's interruptin' me ye are, Point-pusher."

"Oh, shut up, Micky. It's a rather serious matter, Panky."

Pankhurst and Price became grave at once.

"What is it?" asked Pankhurst. "If there's any trouble we'll do anything we can, of course. What is bothering you?"

"We're in want of tin."

"Rather a common want at school, I believe," Pankhurst remarked, grinning. "Still, it's lucky

you've just come to me. I've had a postal order

from my mater."

"Good."

"Yes, and if five bob would be any good to you—"

"Five bob," said Poindexter, his face falling.

"Thanks awfully, but—but we want four pounds."

The Old Firm stared at them.

"You want four pounds!" said Pankhurst in measured tones.

"Yes, that's the figure."

"And you think you may be able to borrow four pounds off a junior in the Fourth Form?" said Pankhurst sarcastically. "Off your rocker?"

"It's awfully important."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to work it, Punt-dodger. You might ask the Head; he's about the only person at Cliveden who's likely to have four pounds to lend."

Poindexter could not help smiling at the idea of asking the head for a loan.

"Joking, I suppose," said Pankhurst. "What on earth do you want the money for? And why don't you wire to your popper for it. He'd send you some dollars down in a canned beef tin in no time—"

"No time," said Poindexter. "Must have the tin to-day. Of course, I never supposed you'd have it—I just asked you on the off chance. But every little helps, so we'll scoop in that five bob if you don't mind."

"Here you are."

Five bright shillings changed hands, and the Combine strolled away. Pankhurst and Price looked after them, and then stared at one another. The Old Firm were amazed.

"Blessed if I know what to make of this," said Pankhurst at last.

"Quite so," said Price.

"They're up to something."

"Looks like it."

"What on earth can Poindexter want four pounds for?"

Price shook his head. The problem was too much for him, and he gave it up.

Pankhurst wrinkled his brows in an effort of reflection.

"Of course they've got something on," he said. "It's not exactly something up against us, or else Pointpusher wouldn't have tried to borrow the money of us. He wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Quite so."

"But it's some big wheeze, I should think, to bring them to the front, and leave us out in the cold."

"Most likely."

"The question is, are we going to stand idle while they carry out the wheeze, and put us into the shade?" demanded Pankhurst.

Price shook his head.

"Not much!"

"We're on to this," said Pankhurst, with a decided nod. "Look, they're going out now—and they've gone up towards the village. This is where we play the giddy detective."

"Quite so," grinned Price.

And the Old Firm, taking care not to allow their movements to be observed by the three juniors they were shadowing, left the school grounds and followed the Combine up Clivebank Lane.

The 4th Chapter.

Poindexter has an Idea.

THE Combine, for once, were not on the watch for a hostile movement from their rivals in the Fourth Form at Cliveden.

The affair of Philpot was in their minds, to the exclusion of other matters. As a rule, a half-holiday did not pass at Cliveden without a skirmish of some kind between the Combine and the Old Firm.

"I'm going to try to wire to the popper," said Poindexter, as they left the school. "It's the only thing I can think of so far."

"But then the money couldn't come down to-night, could it?"

"I guess so. I'll ask him to telegraph it."

Dick Neville whistled.

"Yes; I never thought of that, but it's pretty steep to wire to your governor, asking him to wire you as much as that. I shouldn't care to try my guardian that way."

"Faith, and the same here," grinned Micky Flynn. "Sure and I doubt if there might be as much as four pounds in Castle Flynn at the present moment. We live in a part of the old country where they never pay rint."

"I don't know how it will turn out," Poindexter admitted. "My popper knows I'm a business-like chap, and he trusts me too much to think I might want the money for any dirty gambling or anything of that sort. He's stood the test nobly before now—but I've never had the cheek to ask for so much money without an explanation. Still, we can only try."

They walked into the village. The Clivebank post-office was also a grocer's shop, one of the five or six shops which stood in the ancient High Street. There was a crowd outside the shop as the three juniors drew nigh, and the loud twanging of a banjo told the reason. Two nigger minstrels were giving a dance and song in the street, and the gaping faces of the villagers showed how much they enjoyed the novel entertainment. The boys stopped to look on.

There were two of the minstrels, one a young man who twanged the banjo and danced, the other an old fellow who sang in a shaky tenor voice. They were evidently two strolling players who had chanced upon Clivebank in the course of their wanderings, and were gathering in what they could. The song and the twanging ceased, and there was a general bravo. Then the man with the banjo went round collecting, and there was quite a shower of coppers into his hat. The chums

of Cliveden each threw in twopence, and then passed into the post-office.

Poindexter stopped at the telegraph desk, and took up the pen, and gnawed the end of the holder thoughtfully.

The twanging of the banjo outside had recommenced, and the quavering voice was heard singing about a coon and a moon and a marriage soon. Poindexter dipped the pen in the ink and wrote.

"How do you think that will do, kids?" he asked, showing his chums the form when he had written the message.

Dick and Micky grinned as they read it.

"Dear Popper, will you wire me four pounds at once, and oblige, Lincoln. Most important."

"Short and sweet," said Neville.

"Faith, and that's true for ye."

"I guess I can't make it longer. You see, the governor knows it costs a halfpenny a word, and if he thought I wasted a halfpenny on politeness, he wouldn't have any faith in my business ability. Then it would be all up with the four pounds. This will fetch the tin if anything will."

"Well, send it off, and let's see."

Poindexter wrote in the address, "Poindexter, Hotel Cecil, London," and handed the form to the young lady behind the counter.

He paid for it, and it was ticked off, and then the chums had an interval to fill in. The telegraphist told them it would probably be an hour or more before the reply came, and it was useless to wait in the post-office.

They strolled out into the village street. The nigger minstrels had moved off further down, and halted outside the second-hand clothes' dealer's, and were making sweet music once more. For want of something better to do to fill in the time, the juniors joined the listening circle. Again they saw a capful of coppers gathered in. A strange gleam came into Poindexter's eyes as he watched.

"Come away, you fellows," he said abruptly, tossing a couple of pennies into the cap held out for his contribution.

Neville and Flynn followed him, somewhat surprised by his manner. He was looking excited now, as if a new idea had taken possession of his mind.

"What is it?" exclaimed Dick Neville. "What have you got in your noddle, Puntbuster?"

"An idea."

"Well, get it off your chest."

"Faith, and how can he get it off his chest if it's in his mind?"

"Oh, don't ask conundrums now, Micky! What's the game, Punty?"

"A wheeze for raising the wind." Poindexter's eyes were gleaming. "In case the cash doesn't come from my popper, you know. What's the matter with turning nigger minstrels?"

Neville and Flynn jumped.

"Eh?"

"Phwat?"

"What's the matter with turning nigger minstrels?" said Poindexter more calmly, as his comrades grew excited. "You saw what a harvest those fellows were scooping in. We can do the same, can't we?"

"My only pyjama hat!"

"Faith, and it's a janus ye are!"

"Good! You see, I know how to thump the banjo," said Poindexter. "I've done it in the study often enough."

"Too often, as a matter of absolute fact," murmured Dick Neville.

"And you can sing, Neville—after a fashion, of course."

"There are jolly few tenor voices like mine," said Neville indignantly.

"I know that, and it's a jolly good thing, too, old fellow. But you could buzz out a coon song. What's that rot you wrote yourself and sang last Christmas—I mean that song—something about a moon and a boon."

"The 'Coon's Boon'?"

"That's it. You could howl out that while I thumped the 'jo, and Micky could go round with the hat, collecting."

"Sure, and I can sing!"

"We can't all sing, Micky; and a coon with a Tipperary accent would be no good in this sort of a show," said Poindexter.

"Thru for ye, but sure—"

"We can easily get the rig at Isaac's," said Poindexter, with a nod towards the second-hand shop. "This is where we got our disguises for that waxwork wheeze, you know, and he's sure to have nigger outfits. We shall have to pay for the hire of them."

"We have enough tin for that, and we could make up in the study at Cliveden."

"We'll make up in Isaac's back-parlour, and run no risk of getting spotted," said Poindexter.

"Mind, mum's the word, now and for ever. If it got about the school that we had ever gone busking as nigger minstrels, we should be chipped absolutely to death."

"Faith, and it's right ye are there! Panky and Price would never let us hear the end of it, darlings."

"But there's one thing you've overlooked," said Neville.

"What's that?"

"Those fellows were making a pretty good harvest—for them—but I doubt if their takings all the afternoon will amount to a pound."

"Rather under that I should say."

"And we shall come second, after they've roped in all the cash that's going. How on earth do you propose to rake in four pounds, then?"

"We only really need about three pound ten."

"It might as well be three hundred and fifty, for all I can see."

"I guess you can't see much, Neville. I didn't mean to stick in this sleepy hollow of a place to make the money," said Poindexter.

"Where then? Over at Carbury?"

"Sure it's a market town," said Micky Flynn.

"Yes; but to-day's not market day, and the place is as dead as a cemetery."

"I wasn't thinking of Carbury," said Poindexter quietly.

"Where then?"

"Cliveden."

Dick and Micky stared at him in blank astonishment.

"Cliveden! The school!"

"Why not?"

"My only hat!" said Dick Neville. "Of all the nerve—"

"It's a rippin' idea!" exclaimed Micky Flynn. "Faith, and it's a howlin' janus ye are, Puntbuster darlin'."

"Why not?" repeated Poindexter. "We shall be so disguised that nobody could possibly recognise us. The Cliveden fellows are generous enough, and the entertainment would be absolutely novel there. We know the ropes, and we get in and get a crowd in a spot where we're likely to be bothered by an interfering master. There's no reason why we shouldn't rope in a regular harvest of sixpences from the juniors, and shillings from the seniors, if we give a good show."

The proposal had almost taken Dick's and Micky's breath away at first. But now they came to think of it, there was certainly a good deal in what Poindexter said. The very boldness of the idea appealed to the juniors. And it was the only method that could be hit upon for raising the required money.

"Well, are you game?" asked Poindexter.

And Dick and Micky replied together, "We are!"

"That's settled, then. Let's go to the office now, and see if there's an answer to our wire."

The 5th Chapter.

Amateur Minstrels.

THE Combine entered the village post-office, and inquired for the answer to Lincoln G. Poindexter's telegram, and sure enough there it was. The chum from Chicago opened it eagerly. Then a look of disappointment overspread his face.

"No good?" asked Dick.

Poindexter silently handed him the telegram.

"Poindexter, Post-office, Clivebank—Your father away on business. Have sent on your telegram. Will wire again later.—BLAINE."

"Who's Blaine?" asked Dick Neville.

"Popper's secretary."

"H'm! Then your dad hasn't seen the wire—may not see it to-day at all? And may not see the cash if he does. I fancy the game's up in the direction, Puntbuster."

"I guess so."

"Suppose you leave instructions here for any thing that comes for you to be sent up to the school, and then—we'll busk it."

"That's right."

It was done, and the chums left the post-office. Hope from that quarter was practically over, and if Poindexter's pledge was to be deemed, it was necessary to find some other means of raising the wind. The nigger minstrel idea might be a wild one, but it was the only one they had at present, and there was no other course. The idea was to be carried out.

Mr. Isaacs was a second-hand clothes dealer, naturalist, dealer in athletic goods and fishing tackle, and costumier, and half-a-dozen other things all rolled into one. He had good customers in the Cliveden Combine, and they found him very obliging. He was surprised to learn what they wanted, but he knew the Combine, and asked no questions. Their money was safe, and that was the chief object with Mr. Isaacs. He had the things they wanted, from coloured pants to top and grease-paint, and for the charge of a few shillings he was willing to lend the properties for the afternoon, with as much make-up as the juniors required. And, moreover, to lend his valuable assistance in the process of making up in the stuffy little back-parlour.

Under Mr. Isaacs's skilled hands the Cliveden Combine, divested of their own attire, were transformed into three very good imitations of nigger-minstrels. Mr. Isaacs declared that he would never have known them from the genuine article. Their faces were black and shiny, and were their hands, and they wore striped red pants and gay jackets, and thick woolly wigs. It would indeed have needed a keen eye to detect the Cliveden Combine under that remarkable disguise.

Poindexter took the banjo provided by Mr. Isaacs, and strummed on it. Poindexter would play the instrument quite well enough for a schoolboy, but Dick did not feel so sure about his singing, when it came to the point. As for Micky, there was no doubt that he could do his part of the business, and take round the cap. Whether he could collect three pounds ten shillings in a night was another question.

"This is ripping, I guess," said Poindexter surveying himself in a cheval-glass. "We're a treat! How do you feel, Dick?"

"Rotten!" said the straightforward Neville.

"That won't do, old fellow," said Poindexter anxiously. "Remember, if we got spotted in this rig at Cliveden, life wouldn't be worth living afterwards. We simply must not give ourselves away."

"Oh, I'll be jolly careful!"

"And faith, so will I," said Micky Flynn. "I'll say things to put them off the scent."

"No you won't!" exclaimed Poindexter. "You'll keep your head shut, you ass! I don't know your pesky Tipperary tongue at once."

"Sure and it's an illigant—"

"It may be illigant enough," said Poindexter, "but I guess it's no good for a nigger. You're not to say a single word."

"Faith, and I—"

"Mum as an oyster. Remember!"

"Oh, anythin' for a quiet life, Puntbuster!"

"You'll take round the cap, keeping your

The 6th Chapter.

A Select Entertainment, Funny without being Vulgar.

"WHAT'S that row?"
"Sounds like a banjo."
"And that other noise—is that somebody singing?"

"Yes, or else a dog run over!"
"What on earth does it mean?"
Such were some of the ejaculations of the Cliveden fellows as a strange, weird noise made itself audible in the old Close.

In a spot where the big trees hid them from the view of the windows, three young nigger minstrels had taken up their stand.

They had walked in at the open gateway of Cliveden with all the coolness imaginable, followed by curious glances from the fellows who happened to see them. They stopped under the elms, and the individual who carried the banjo began to strum. The noise was heard near and far, and curious fellows crowded to the spot. In less than a minute fifty fellows at least were crowding round the minstrels, among them Pankhurst, Price, and their friend Greene. Trevelyan, captain of Cliveden, coming in from the fields, stopped to listen and look on in utter amazement. Such an invasion of the sacred precincts of Cliveden College had never happened before in his recollection.

"Twang! pang! pang! pang!"
"Sing up, Brudder Sambo!"

"Honey, honey, I see your loving coon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"

"Here, you mustn't make that row here," said Trevelyan, coming forward.

"Nigger minstrels are not allowed in the grounds."

"Oh, let 'em alone," called out Pankhurst. "They're not doing any harm, and it's a treat, Trevelyan."

The captain of Cliveden hesitated. He knew that the Head would not like it, but he was a good-natured fellow, and he saw that the juniors, at least, were delighted with the novelty. He stepped back.

"Well, you can have a show," he said. "But cut it short. If a master comes along you will get slung out."

"Thank you, brudder," said Pankhurst solemnly.

Trevelyan started. There seemed to him something familiar in the voice, though the accent was new. Pankhurst hastily strummed on his trumps after all!

Neville started off again, while Micky Flynn kept time with his feet.

"Honey, honey, I see your loving coon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"
"Honey, honey, I want a boon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"
Come right out of your little black feet—
I mean come right out of your cabin sweet."

A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer. Neville had not got the nerve of Lincoln G. Pankhurst, and he was getting mixed. "Go on, Brudder Sambo," exclaimed Pankhurst, as Neville paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main.

"Faith, and sure—"
Pankhurst kicked Flynn, and fortunately the banjo drowned the remark. Dick Neville hastily started off again. But his confusion was worse than ever now, especially as he discerned peculiar grins upon the faces of Pankhurst and Price. They were watching him with such curious expressions that a dread feeling seized him that they had penetrated his disguise. He plunged into the song again, starting the second verse, and in his confusion getting it mixed up with the first.

"Honey, honey, I want a boon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"
Come right out in your little black moon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"

The Cliveden fellows roared with laughter. They could see that the minstrel was confused, though why he had lost his nerve was unknown to them. But his peculiar version of that coon song was certainly funny. Pankhurst and Price and Green clapped till their hands ached.

"Bravo!" shouted Pankhurst. "Ripping! Come right out in your little black moon!"
"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"
"Shut up!" exclaimed Grahame the prefect. "Give 'em a chance."



Poindexter opened the packet. Philpot watched him with burning eyes. The American boy gave a sudden whoop. "Hurrah! Popper's turned up his trumps after all!"

"My hat! Here's Grahame wants fair play for somebody. Wonders will never cease!" exclaimed Pankhurst, dodging the prefect. As a matter of fact, Grahame was more eager to be down on the Old Firm than to secure fair play for the minstrels. But the interference of a prefect quieted the yelling crowd, and there was a pause for the resumption of the song. Dick Neville was crimson under his black, and even Lincoln G. Poindexter was feeling somewhat troubled in his mind. But there was a gleam of hopefulness—fellows who had had a hearty laugh were likely to shell out, so even Neville's blundering might be turned to good account.

"Honey, honey, I want a moon—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come right out on your little black coon, Tra-la-la-la-la!"
Honey, honey, I've bought a ring, Listen now while I sweetly sing, Come right out and—and—and—and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Plenty of 'ands.'"
"Is that all?"

"Aren't there any more little black feet?"
"No; it's all 'ands, and no feet now," chuckled Pankhurst.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Come right out and—and—and—and—"

"Faith, and ye—"
"Hullo, I know that voice!"

Poindexter strummed desperately. He gave Micky Flynn a dig in the ribs, and whispered to him fiercely:

"Go round with the hat, and keep your silly head shut."

"Sure and I will, Pointshifter. I won't say a word—Ow!" Micky Flynn hopped on

"Ass! Just ten shillings—just enough to pay for the hire of the costumes!"
"Howly mother av St. Patrick!"
"My hat," said Neville, in dismay, "it hasn't panned out quite so well as we expected!"
"I guess—"

Poindexter broke off. They had reached the gateway, and they found it crammed with grinning juniors. Pankhurst and Price were there, grinning like Cheshire cats, and Greene was with them, and each of the three had his hand behind him.

"Let us pass, please," said Poindexter. Pankhurst shook his head.

"Just a minute, Snowball! There's a little black on your face."

The juniors howled with laughter. "Let us pass—"

"Clean 'em!" shouted Pankhurst. Three hands came out from behind three juniors, and three dripping wet sponges were revealed. They were squeezing upon the faces of the nigger minstrels the next moment.

Poindexter gave a yell, and his banjo crashed upon Pankhurst's head, and shivered into twenty pieces. But resistance was too late, and it was futile, for a dozen juniors, let into the secret by Pankhurst, hurled themselves upon the nigger minstrels and held them fast while their faces were rubbed with the sponges. In a few seconds the white came out through the black, and the Combine were shown up, literally, in their true colours!

The 7th Chapter.

Saved!

"HA, ha, ha!"
The Cliveden juniors were yelling with laughter.

"It's the Combine!"
"Good old Poindodger!"

"Fancy a Chicago millionaire raising the wind this way!"

"Anybody got a copper for a descendant of the Irish kings?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Combine struggled desperately in the grasp of their assailants. Their wigs came off in the struggle, and the black was nearly all rubbed off their faces. Further disguise was hopeless. Nearly all Cliveden seemed to be crowded round them, laughing hysterically; and at last the three chums incontinently bolted, and did not stop till they were safely locked up in their own study. Even then the passage without rang with endless laughter.

"My only hat!" gasped Poindexter. "This has been a time! We shall never, never hear the end of it."

"Howly St. Patrick! If this is a sample of your ideas, Poindodger—"

"I guess it would have worked all right but for Pankhurst and Price."

"They've done us this time."

"Faith, and it's thrue for ye intirely."

"They must have spotted the wheeze in Cliveden, after all," said Poindexter ruefully. "It was decent of them to let us send round the hat before they jumped on us. But we're done for now; and we shall be chipped to death. Let's get these horrible things off, and make ourselves look decent again."

The juniors changed their clothes and washed off the remnants of the colouring. Then they felt rather better. They had tea in the study, to the accompaniment of some allusion to their adventure shouted every few minutes through the keyhole. But Poindexter was grave now—he was thinking of Philpot. The scheme of raising the wind had been carried out, and it had raised just enough money to pay its own expenses. The sum wanted for the saving of Philpot was as far off as ever.

There was a knock at the locked door.

"Can I come in?" It was Philpot's voice.

Poindexter made a grimace, and unlocked the door. The cad of the Fourth came into the study, his face almost as haggard as when the chums had seen it last. He fixed his eyes on Poindexter.

"Have you any news yet, Poindexter?"

The American chum shook his head.

"Not yet, Philly."

"Remember," said Philpot, licking his dry lips feverishly—"remember I rely on you. I have your word to save me."

There was a knock at the door.

"Oh, go away, fathead!" roared Poindexter. "Packet for Poindexter from the post-office," said the Cliveden buttons, entering the study.

Poindexter gave a jump. He tossed the lad sixpence, and opened the packet.

Philpot watched him with burning eyes. Poindexter gave a sudden whoop.

"Hurrah! Popper's turned up trumps after all!"

Philpot gave a choked cry.

"The—the money! You have the money?"

"Here it is! Take it, and buzz off! And don't forget your promise to chuck up being a cad and a blackguard! Now's your chance, too—Grahame's in the Close."

Without a word, Philpot seized the four golden sovereigns and tore out of the study.

Poindexter gave a gasp of relief.

"We've saved that rotter, kids! I wonder if he was worth saving, and whether we have a right to shield him? But I suppose it's always right to help a lame dog over a stile. I think it will be a lesson to him, anyway. But, oh—oh, kids, when shall we hear the end of the nigger minstrel business!"

"Echo answers 'when,'" said Dick Neville. "Faith, and it's right ye are!"

And, needless to say, it was long—long before Cliveden, and especially the Old Firm, ceased to chuckle over the adventure of the Cliveden Minstrels.

THE END.

("Cliveden's Little Mystery" next week.)