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

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EVERY WEDNESDAY—ONE PENNY.

WEEK ENDING MAY 16, 1908.

THE WOLF PATROL

A Story of
Baden-Powell's
Boy Scouts
By
John Finnemore



Read how Chippy, the Great Scout, gets the "sack"; how the Raven Patrol save an old man's stall from being plundered; and how Dick Elliott finds Chippy a new job with good wages.

The Cliveden Wheelers



The Chums Go Cycling This Week, With Amusing and Disastrous Consequences.

WRITTEN BY.

CHARLES HAMILTON.

The 1st Chapter.

Poindexter Suggests Cycling.

"TIS now the merry month of May!" Lincoln G. Poindexter made that poetical remark quite suddenly, in No. 4 study at Cliveden, and Dick Neville and Micky Flynn looked at him.

The American chum in the Fourth Form at Cliveden was cleaning a bicycle lamp, when he made the remark. Neville and Flynn were eating chestnuts.

"Go on," said Dick Neville. "That may be a new and interesting piece of information to you, Puntpusher, but I've known it for a week past. In fact I've noticed that, as a general rule, May follows April every year, and so you really know what to expect. But if you—"

"Tis now the merry month of May," repeated Poindexter, with emphasis. "And I've been thinking—"

"Faith, and sure that accounts!" said Micky Flynn, with a nod.

"Accounts for what?"

"Why, and if ye do all ye're thinkin' in May, Puntpusher, that accounts for ye're asinine conduct for the rest of the year."

"I guess you're an ass, Micky. I've been thinking that, as it is now the merry month of May, wheeling is about the proper caper for three individuals about our size."

"Cycling? Yes, rather," said Dick Neville. "I was thinking of a run to-morrow afternoon. But—"

"I was thinking of something more than that."

"Faith, and if it's a new idea ye have—"

"I guess that's so."

"Then get it off your chest," said Neville. "It's the penalty we pay for having your charming society, to have to listen to all your new ideas. Get it over as quickly as you can, old fellow."

But Poindexter only laughed good-humouredly. "What price a Cliveden Cycling Club?" he asked. "You haven't anything of the sort in the Fourth Form."

"There's a cycling club in the Sixth."

"That's nothing to do with us. The hoary patriarchs of the Sixth Form are not likely to ask us to attend their runs. There's no reason why the juniors should not have a cycling club of their own. Us at the head of it, of course."

"Of course!"

"Faith, and it's a janius ye are, Puntpusher," exclaimed Micky Flynn. "We three can start the club on our own, and then enrol members. Shall we let Panky and Price into it, though?"

"I guess so, if they know how to keep their place, and don't want to run the show," said Poindexter. "They can ride, you know, and they have a pair of ripping jiggers. When we've got the club into going order, we can get up runs on half-holidays, and have a regular good time. There's some beautiful cycling country round Cliveden, especially Cliveden Hill. You can free-wheel there for a mile on end."

"And break your neck at the finish, if you're not jolly careful," said Dick Neville.

"I guess my neck's all right," said Poindexter. "But, of course, you young fellows will have to be careful—"

"Us what?"

"You lads," said Poindexter, with a superior smile. "But I shall look after you, of course."

"Yes, you'll look after me, from a long way behind, when I ride with you, I expect," said Neville, with a sniff.

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Well, shall we speak to Panky and Price on the subject?" said Poindexter, "or shall we start the club on our own, and make them gnash their teeth?"

The Cliveden Combine looked very thoughtful. It was a knotty point. Pankhurst and Price, otherwise known as the Old Firm, were the rivals of the Combine, and therefore deadly enemies. The rivals of the Cliveden Fourth were always seeking to get the upper hand of one another, but neither party could deny that honours were about equally divided so far. Poindexter's ideas should bring a certain amount of eclat to the Combine, yet the presence of Pankhurst and Price as early members of the cycling club would assuredly make the thing go better in the Fourth at the start.

"Faith," said Micky Flynn. "I think—"

"You see—"

"Sure and it's interruptin' me ye are, Dicky darling."

"If a chap didn't interrupt you sometimes, Micky, he might as well be dumb," said Neville. "You go on like the little brook."

"I guess—"

There was a knock at the door of the study. "Oh, come in, fathead," sang out Poindexter.

The door was kicked open, and two red-haired youths presented themselves to the view of the Combine. And Neville, Flynn, and Poindexter rose simultaneously to their feet. A visit from Pankhurst and Price to No. 4 study generally meant warfare.

The 2nd Chapter.

Curious Coincidences.

PANKHURST grinned amiably at the Combine, and waved his hand in sign of peace.

"Keep your wool on, my infants," he exclaimed. "We haven't come here for a row. We have come bearing the olive-branch, so to speak."

"Quite so," said Price.

Poindexter sat down again, but he looked at the Old Firm suspiciously.

"Well, what do you want?" he said. "Naturally we're on the look out when we see the danger signal."

But Pankhurst and Price were too used to chipping on the subject of the colour of their hair to mind that allusion. Ginger for pluck, was the motto of the Old Firm, and they certainly had plenty of pluck. They only grinned at Poindexter's remark.

"You needn't be afraid—"

"Who's afraid?" demanded Dick Neville.

"Well, you needn't be alarmed—"

"Sure and who's alarmed."

"Well, startled—"

"I guess a chap can't help being startled at having two chivvies like yours sprung on him suddenly," said Poindexter. "But go on. What's the row?"

"We've got an idea—"

"One of ours, I expect—an old one done with in this study."

"Nothing of the sort," said Pankhurst warmly.

"You wouldn't catch us picking up any of your mouldy old ideas—"

"What about the mag? You boned that!"

Pankhurst chuckled.

"Ha, ha. Yes, and we did you brown!"

Poindexter's hand slid casually towards the inkpot.

"But it's pax now," grinned Pankhurst.

"Keep your wool on your youthful heads, Pricey and I have an idea—"

"Quite so."

"A really ripping idea. It's May now—"

"Quite so. It's May—"

"You're late," said Dick Neville, shaking his head.

"Late! What do you mean?"

"Poindexter made that discovery before you entered the study. He had just told us about it."

"Oh, cheese it," said Poindexter.

"Get on with the washing, Panky."

"Well, it's May now, and fellows have been going out on their machines a lot since the weather turned so well."

The Combine exchanged glances.

"So we've got an idea," resumed Pankhurst, watching them. "We could have carried it out all on our

lonesome, but we have decided to let you chaps into it."

"That's really kind of you, Panky. I guess."

"Faith, and what's the idea intirely?"

"We're going to form a cycling club—"

"A what?"

"A cycling club," said Pankhurst, pleased with the impression he had made. "They have one in the Sixth, you know, and I don't see why we shouldn't have one in the Fourth Form as well."

"Tis now the merry month of May—"

"What?" shrieked Dick Neville.

"Tis now the merry month of May, and the time for wheeling has arrived," said Pankhurst.

"What do you say to forming a joint cycling club? It seems to us a jolly good idea."

"Quite so."

Dick Neville looked from Pankhurst to Poindexter, and from the American chum back to Pankhurst.

"And, now, where did you get that idea from, Panky?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"And where did you get it from, Poindexter?"

"Eh?"

"Faith, and where did ye both get it from, and the poetical quotation about the merry month of May into the bargain?" giggled Micky Flynn.

Poindexter blushed, and so did Pankhurst.

"I don't quite follow," said the chief of the Old Firm. "What—"

"Oh, rats! Poindexter has just proposed a cycling club, in just the same words—"

"Oh!"

"Merry month of May and all," grinned Micky Flynn.

"Great minds run in grooves," said Poindexter.

"Clever people often think of the same thing at the same time."

"Yes, but that wouldn't apply to you or Panky."

"Faith, and ye're right, Neville. They've both picked up the idea from the same source, and sure—"

"Well, you see—"

"Well, you see—"

"Hullo, you chaps!" said a voice; and Greene, the amateur photographer of the Cliveden Junior Hobby Club, looked into the study.

"Panky and Price here, too! I'm glad; I want to speak to the lot of you."

"Oh, don't bother."

"It's important," said Greene, coming into the study. "It's an idea that I want you all to back me up in, and I think it will be a good one, if it's handled properly."

"Oh, go ahead," said Pankhurst resignedly.

"You see," said Greene, "I go in for photography more than anything else, but a cycle is just what an amateur photographer wants in the summer. You get about, and get such a ripping variety of views. Then it's jolly good exercise, and livens you up after being stuck in the beastly dark room for an hour."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about cycling. My idea is that we should form a cycling club in the Fourth Form. 'Tis now the merry month of May—"

"What?"

"Tis now the merry month of May—"

Micky Flynn gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's another of them!"

Poindexter and Pankhurst turned very red, and stared at each other, and then at Greene.

Greene seemed surprised by the reception his suggestion had met with in No. 4 study.

"Don't you think it's a jolly good idea?" he asked. "Tis now the merry month of May, and the time for wheeling has arrived. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where did you get the idea?"

"Oh, it's my own idea."

"Sure, and it's Puntpusher's and Panky's, too!"

"What do you mean?"

"They've just suggested the same thing—same words—same merry month of May," Dick Neville chuckled.

"Well, that's curious," said Greene. "I got the rough idea from a magazine, and thought it out—"



"Tis now the merry month of May, and the time for wheeling has arrived," said Pankhurst. "What do you say to forming a joint cycling club?" Dick Neville looked from Pankhurst to Poindexter, and back again to Pankhurst. "Where did you get that idea from, Panky?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop your cackling!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Any more ideas?"

"You've got a fearful row going on here, said Jeffreys of the Fourth, looking into a study. 'I want to speak to you chaps.'"

"Oh, come in," said Neville. "There's much room, but you can pack yourself in anywhere like a sardine."

"I want to speak to you chaps," said Jeffreys, taking a folded paper out of his pocket and holding it over. "This is the latest number of 'Boys' Realm,' and there's a ripping suggestion in the cycling column. I was told that you chaps might like to take it up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle like that. I can't see it's a laughing matter. Shall I read it out to you?"

"Go on."

Jeffreys found his place, and started.

"THE 'BOYS' REALM' CYCLING COLUMN."

"Tis now the merry month of May, and the time for wheeling has arrived. Some hints for forming a junior cycling club may be useful to our readers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Neville and Flynn.

And Poindexter and Pankhurst could not help joining in. The source of the great cycling club idea was now pretty evident.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jeffreys looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I can see what there is to cackle at," he said. "If you don't want me to read it out, I won't."

"That's all right, kid," chuckled Neville. "We've had it all before, from Poindexter and Greene and Panky."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Micky Flynn. "I shall know where the latest Puntpusher wheezes come from now."

"I guess I got the rough suggestion—"

"That's it," said Pankhurst. "The rough outline of the idea."

"Exactly," said Greene.

"Tis now the merry month of May," said Dick Neville. "My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'm not going to stay here while you goes off like a giddy alarm clock!" said Pankhurst. "Come on, Pricey!"

And the Old Firm marched out of the study. A roar of laughter followed them down the corridor from the convulsed Neville and Flynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The 3rd Chapter.

A Cycle Run!

"I GUESS we'll let that cycling club stand over for a bit," said Lincoln G. Poindexter thoughtfully, the next morning. "The whole Form seems to have taken else to chuckle over at present."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Combine had come out to dinner, and were bending their steps in the direction of the bicycle shed. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Cliveden, and one of the sunniest of May afternoons.

"Oh, don't cackle," said Poindexter, suppose Panky and Price have been giving version of the story all over the place."

"Sure, and we've been giving our version too."

"I don't believe they'll ever forget about the merry month of May," growled the chum from Chicago. "We shall have to live it down."

"You will, you mean. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we'll get a run this afternoon," said Poindexter, changing the subject. "It's a beautiful weather, and it will be ripping in the hill."

Think you fellows can ride up Cliveden Hill? "We can manage it if you can, Puntpusher."

"Then we can free-wheel down the side, and come round home by way of the Priory," said Poindexter. "We don't negotiate the hill coming back. Let's jiggers out now."

The three juniors looked very fit and wore Norfolk jackets and knickers. They entered the cycle shed, and found that it was not uncommon. Two red-headed youths were engaged in getting their bicycles out.

"Hullo, here are the copper merchants," said Poindexter. "Going for a run, Panky?"

"Yes," said Pankhurst, looking round. "Like to take you chaps along, but we've got over Cliveden Hill, and of course, you can manage that."

"Faith, and we—"

"I guess we could give you points and you there, Panky," said Poindexter. "Going over the hill ourselves."

"You'll have to walk your machines up the hill, imagine."

"No fear."

"Come on, Pricey. We shall be able to back from the top of the hill and see the crawling up and pushing their machines."

Pankhurst.

"Quite so."

And the Old Firm wheeled their bicycles to the shed. Poindexter gave a wrathful stare.

"The cheek some youngsters have is more than I can stand," he said. "We'll make things hum on the hill, I guess, and pass those cheeky rotters' jiggers out."

"Faith, and I remember now I had a ture!"

"Well, you are an ass, Micky Flynn. You want to start in a hurry, you remember you've got a puncture," said Poindexter, disgust.

"Sure, and I—"

"Yank the jigger out, and let's look at goodness' sake!"

Micky's machine was soon turned over, and Poindexter, who was a great hand at mending anything, soon had the puncture located and repaired. But the Combine were ten minutes behind the Old Firm when they wheeled their bicycles across the Close. The fine weather had drawn all Cliveden out of doors, and many grinning glances were cast towards the Chicago chum.

"What price cycling clubs?" called out Jefferys.

"Is now the merry month of May!" sang out Gatty. "The time for wheeling has arrived, Poindexter!"

Poindexter turned red.

"Oh, luck up!" he said. "I'm blessed if I can see what you are cackling at, you two kids! Let's get into the road."

"Be, ha, ha!"

They wheeled their machines out at the gates, and mounted. Poindexter looked down the road for the Old Firm, but the auburn-haired chums of Cliveden were not in sight.

"They're slogging up the hill by this time," said Neville. "I'll wager a lot that we shall see them wheeling their machines."

"I guess so."

"Faith, and if they look back, they'll see us wheeling ours!" grinned Micky Flynn.

"Oh, we're going to ride up," said Poindexter. "Don't funk it, Micky."

"Faith, and I'll stick it out as long as you do. I've got a change gear on my machine, anyway, and I'll last you out."

The chums rode at a good pace along the lane. That was easy enough going, but when they turned into the road over Cliveden Hill, it was another matter. The road, or rather lane, was steep and dusty. It ran under the shadowy branches of trees, bordered on either side by a thick wood, and the shade was very pleasant in the hot May sun. But the way was steep, and growing steeper.

Micky Flynn soon changed to his lowest gear, and his feet went flying round, Neville and Poindexter slogged on, neither liking to give in. But few grown cyclists would have undertaken to ride all the way up the hill; but the Cliveden Combine were not noted for the modesty of their undertakings.

"Faith, and who feels like a rest?" inquired Micky Flynn, at last. His good-humoured face was red and dripping with perspiration.

"Oh, stick it out!" gasped Neville.

"I guess I'm going to," panted Poindexter. Micky gave a breathless chuckle.

"It's another half-mile to the top," he remarked. "Oh, cheese it!"

"And it's steeper higher up."

"You confounded Job's comforter, shut up!"

"Better chuck it now."

"Rats!"

And Poindexter and Neville slogged on, at a crawling pace, jamming down their pedals fiercely to keep the machines going at all. Micky had a far easier time of it on his low gear, but he was getting lagged too. Suddenly at a bend in the lane, a long straight stretch came into view before the young cyclists, and they had a view of the road for a quarter of a mile in advance.

Micky Flynn gave a yell.

"Look there!"

Neville and Flynn looked and grunted.

Ahead on the long, white, dusty lane two figures could be seen, walking, and laboriously pushing their machines up the steep road.

Even if the Combine had not guessed their identity, the glimmer of the sun on red hair would have revealed the Old Firm of Cliveden.

"There they are!" grunted Poindexter. "Wheeling their bikes, by Jingo!"

"The rotters!" gasped Neville. "Been wheeling them for the last half hour, too, I expect, while we've been slogging on the machines."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Micky Flynn. "They're gettin' on about as fast as we are, too, during."

"I guess it would be rather ripping to pass them on the machines," said Poindexter. "It would make them look small."

"Can't do it!" gasped Neville. "I'm off."

And he plunged off his machine into the grass by the roadside, and sank down there in a sitting posture, his legs shaking and thrilling from over-exertion.

"Faith, and sure I'm off too!" exclaimed Micky Flynn, dismounting and leaning, exhausted, on his machine.

Poindexter snuffed.

"I guess I'm going on, for the credit of the Combine."

"You can't do it."

"I guess I'm going to try."

And Poindexter rode on determinedly, his teeth set and his nostrils dilated. But even the grim determination of Lincoln G. Poindexter could not effect an impossibility. A dozen yards further in the lane a sharp rise in the ground, and the machine simply refused to take it. Poindexter made a gallant effort, but his lagged legs could not carry the pedals round, and the machine reeled seaward into the grass under the trees.

"Hurt, old chum?"

"No!" gasped Poindexter, sitting up in the grass. "No, only a shake. I guess I bit off a little more than I could chew that time, Dick."

"I guess you did, Punty."

Poindexter rose and rubbed his legs. He stood on his hands and took a grip on the centre of the handlebar.

"Come on," he said. "After all, we needn't be doing the same. They won't have the grin."

"Faith, and it's right ye are."

"Right!" said Neville cheerily. "Get going!"

And the Combine wheeled the machines up the steep. From the brow of the hill Pankhurst and Price looked back. They waved their hands, showing that they saw the Combine wheeling the bicycles, and the echo of a distant laugh floated down the hill. Then the Old Firm disappeared.

The 4th Chapter.

Reckless Riders.

"HERE we are at last!" gasped Dick Neville, as the last slope was left behind, and the chums stood with their machines on the summit of the white road over the hill. "Now for a glorious free-wheel."

"Faith, and let's get our breath back first," said Micky Flynn. "Can ye see those copper merchants, Puntbuster?"

Poindexter shaded his eyes with his hand and looked down the steep slope of the lane. The Old Firm were not in sight. There was a bend of the lane a hundred yards ahead, and the view was shut off.

"They're not in sight, Micky. I guess they've got over a lot of ground on the free-wheel. Most fellows shove their brakes on on this slope."

"Sure, then, and if we don't we may overtake the spalpeens."

"Yes," said Neville, "with our necks broken."

"Sure, and I wouldn't think of thrifles when it's a question of getting the better of the Old Firm," said Micky reproachfully.

free-wheeling without their brakes on, and passing the bend they had run right into the drove.

It was a reckless thing to do; but the Old Firm, like many other reckless cyclists, had calculated upon the country road being clear. The drove of cattle came as a surprise to them, and undoubtedly they came as a surprise to the cattle.

Before they knew what was happening, Pankhurst and Price were in the midst of the startled animals. The shepherd in charge of them waved his hands frantically and shouted, but that did no good at all. Pankhurst and Price would gladly have got out of the drove, but it was impossible.

From the higher slope the Combine looked on with interest.

"Shows what comes of being reckless," said Dick Neville sagely. "I wonder how Panky will get out of that?"

"Faith, and he's in danger if one of the bulls spots his hair," remarked Micky.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see how we're to help them. No good getting into that crush."

"Not much."

"It's rough on Panky."

"He doesn't look as if he were enjoying himself either."

Pankhurst and Price were certainly not enjoying themselves. They were jammed up among the moving cattle, and it was impossible to dismount, and almost equally impossible to keep the machines going.

Pankhurst had taken a wild grip upon the rough neck of a bullock, and was being towed along,

rolled over too, and disappeared among the sheep.

"Come on!" exclaimed Poindexter.

He slid his machine against a tree and dashed down the lane, and Neville did the same and followed him. They overtook the slow-moving drove, and plunged among the sheep. Micky was seized and dragged out, looking very dusty and dishevelled. His machine had been tramped over by the rearward sheep.

"Faith, and what's happened? Sure I——"

"You've acted the giddy goat!" grunted Poindexter. "Come on, and let's see if we can fish out Panky and Price!"

Price had, by this time, succeeded in dragging himself and his machine to the side of the lane into the shelter of the trees. Pankhurst's machine was lying in the road, passed over by the cattle, and Pankhurst, who seemed to have quite lost his presence of mind, was clinging round the neck of an old sheep, who was making frantic but vain efforts to shake him off.

Poindexter grasped him by the shoulder and shook him.

The sheep tore its head loose, and ambled away after the moving flock, and the shepherd, swearing, in a broad, country dialect, shook his fists at the Cliveden juniors and strode on wrathfully.

Pankhurst sat up and gasped.

"My hat! I——"

The Combine chuckled.

"You see what comes of being reckless, you young donkeys!" said Neville. "Lucky we were here to look after you!"

"Lot of good you did!" gasped Pankhurst.

"We've saved your life——"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha! Well, it was worth the trouble to see those two silly cuckoos stuck among the sheep!" chuckled Poindexter. "I wish Greene had been here with his camera."

"Jolly glad he wasn't!" grinned Pankhurst. "We came round the bend with a rush, you see, and we were in the cattle before we knew where we were. We rang our bells, and we couldn't do more."

"Quite so!"

"Suppose instead of cackling you were to help us look over our machines, and see if there's any damage done!" suggested Pankhurst.

"Faith, and it's a good idea intirely!"

"I guess we will!" assented Poindexter. "We can't ride down at anything like speed till the cattle have turned into the Carbury Road, anyway. Let's have a look at the jiggers!"

And both the Combine and the Old Firm were soon busy examining the machines and repairing the damage done to them.

The 5th Chapter.

A Catastrophe for the Old Firm.

THE damage to the machines was fortunately slight. A great deal of time had been lost, otherwise neither cyclists nor cycles were much the worse for their adventure. By the time Poindexter calculated the drove of cattle would have turned off into the Carbury Road the machines were ready, and in the golden glow of the May afternoon the young wheelers prepared to mount.

"Now for a jolly easy run!" said Pankhurst, as he threw his leg over his machine. "I'll race any of you bounders to the bottom of the hill!"

"I guess you'd better keep your brake on, Panky!"

"Rats! I'm going to have a spin!"

"You've had one, and spun into a flock of sheep."

"Oh, come on, Priccy!"

"Quite so!"

The Old Firm threw themselves upon their machines, and went down the steep lane at a rush, evidently not taught caution by their late experience. Micky Flynn jumped on his bicycle to follow at top speed, but Poindexter caught him by the shoulder, and the starting cycle described a half-circle as he swung the Irish junior round.

"Faith, and phwat are ye doin' intirely, Puntpotter?" roared Micky Flynn.

"You're not going to ride without the brake on!"

"Sure and Panky and Price are doin' it."

"Let 'em! They'll be breaking their necks, but when they're doing it, we don't want to pile on top of them!"

"Faith, but I——"

"Rats! Cheese it! Neville, mount on the other side of him, and we'll ride holding. I tell you I won't have him breaking his neck."

"Sure, Puntdodger——"

"Shut up!"

"But——"

"Rats!"

The reckless Irishman's protests were in vain. Poindexter and Neville mounted one on either side of him, and holding with a single hand, held on to Micky's shoulders with the other. Poindexter and Neville kept their hub brakes gently on so as to moderate the speed of the descent; and it was impossible for Micky to run away from them, even if he rode without the brake.

Micky grumbled, but Poindexter was firm. Had he been alone the American chum might have taken the slope without the brake, for he was keen-eyed, cool, and plucky enough; but, like many a cyclist, he felt more anxious about other fellows' necks than about his own, and he felt it his duty to set the example of caution. Besides, if the Old Firm came to grief in the road ahead, it would never do to swoop down upon them at top speed. Such a contingency might easily prove fatal.

The speed of the three was very fast, all the same. They went down the hill road with



But the boy was powerless against the man. Lights danced before Poindexter's eyes. There was a sudden buzz of bicycle bells in the dusk. Ting-ting-ting! Poindexter, with a terrible effort, tore the clutching hands from his throat and shrieked for help.

"Ha, ha! You see I've got only one neck, and it's got to last me seventy years or so," said Neville. "I'm going to take care of it."

"I say, what's that fearful row?" said Poindexter, bending his head to listen. "It's bicycle bells, and somebody shouting. It's down the road. Can the copper merchants have got into any trouble?"

"Faith, and if they have, we're the boys to get them out of it!" exclaimed Micky Flynn.

"Come on!"

And he jumped upon his machine. Poindexter and Neville were not long in following suit. They might be the deadly rivals of Pankhurst and Price within the walls of Cliveden; but if the Old Firm were in trouble, the Combine were ready to stand by them shoulder to shoulder like true schoolfellows.

"Brakes on!" shouted Poindexter.

"Sure and we're in a hurry——"

"Brakes on, fathead, till you get round the corner!"

"Oh, very well! Anythin' for a quiet life."

With their brakes on, the three juniors went down the slope free-wheeling at a good pace. Without the brakes they would have flown. They passed the bend, and Poindexter uttered a warning shout and jammed his brake on harder.

"Look out!"

A curious scene was presented to the view of the startled cyclists. Pankhurst and Price were in sight again, and so were other objects. The road was thick with a drove of sheep and cattle, evidently being driven down the lane to turn into the road to Carbury, the market town. Pankhurst and Price had come down the slope

and Price was sprawling half on his machine and half on the backs of the sheep jammed up close to him in the narrow road.

"My hat!" gasped Pankhurst. "This is rough!"

"Quite so!" gurgled Price.

"Can't you get out of the road?"

"No, I can't."

"I shall go under this beast if I let go of him, and he's—he's—ow! Help!"

The bullock appeared to have grown tired of towing Pankhurst along. He was shiring his head angrily and rearing, and the chief of the Old Firm was compelled to let go. His machine reeled over away from the bullock, and Pankhurst plumped down upon the backs of the sheep.

There was a wild baa-baa-ing and scrambling of the frightened sheep, and Pankhurst and his machine disappeared from view in the midst of the woolly backs.

Poindexter uttered an exclamation.

"I guess we shall have to chip in, somehow, kids!"

"Faith, and sure it's the same I'm thinkin'!" exclaimed Micky Flynn, jumping on his machine again. "Come on!"

"Come back——"

But the excited lad from Tipperary was gone, free wheeling down the hill at express speed, forgetful of his brakes.

"Come back, you ass!" roared Neville.

"Stop, Micky! Stop!"

But Micky was already crashing into the drove. His machine rolled over, and Micky

a rush, with the wind singing in their ears and the trees flitting by as if by the windows of an express train. The speed was enough to satisfy anybody except Micky Flynn.

Ahead of them the sloping road ran straight for a mile or more. Far ahead they could see Pankhurst and Price, whizzing along at an alarming rate, and getting smaller in the distance every moment.

"They'll have the laugh of us at the bottom of the hill intirely!" grumbled Flynn.

"If they get there," said Poindexter. "Suppose a cart should pull out of one of the side tracks now, just ahead of them."

"Faith, they'd have to turn the machines into the bank!"

"And buckle them up into scrap iron."

"Thru for ye! But there's no cart in sight, and, faith, I—"

"Oh, rats! We're going like an express now."

"Hullo, look there!" shouted Dick Neville.

"I guess I said so all along."

Catastrophe had overtaken the racing cyclists ahead; or, to speak more correctly, it had met them. Exactly what happened the following Combine could not see, but Poindexter guessed that some animal had skipped across the lane in front of the whirling wheels, possibly a rabbit or a stoat, and though it escaped the wheels itself, it was enough to throw the whizzing cyclists off their balance. Price gave a start, and his machine turned a little towards Pankhurst's in the flurry of the moment, and Pankhurst only avoided a collision by turning his machine into the bank. There was a deep ditch in this spot, overgrown with thick fern, and half full of water. It was, perhaps, fortunate for Pankhurst—but it was not pleasant. His machine went headlong into the ditch and curled up in the mud and fern, and Pankhurst was flung with a sounding splash into the water, and disappeared entirely for the moment. His face came up again smothered with mud and slime.

Price, naturally startled and confused by the mishap, forgot himself for a moment, staring after Pankhurst; and that moment was enough. His machine dashed right into the ditch, and Price splashed off it into the water.

Splash!

"Gerr-o—ooh!"

Two muddy and drenched faces looked out of the ditch. Three cyclists, riding abreast, came dashing gaily by. The Combine could see that the Old Firm were not hurt, and their alarm had vanished, and they were laughing heartily as they rode past. Lincoln G. Poindexter let go for a moment of his machine to wave his cap, keeping his other hand on Micky's shoulder.

"Good-bye, Bluebell," sang out Dick Neville.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Combine were past.

Pankhurst and Price looked at one another ruefully, and crawled out of the ditch. They rubbed the mud and water from their eyes

and blinked after the Combine going on down the hill with a rush, and already far away.

"My hat!" said Pankhurst. "This is a go!"

"Quite so!"

"Might have broken our necks."

"Ow!"

"Smothered with mud—drenched to the skin—bikes filthy—and those rotters ahead of us after all. I almost wish we had used the brakes."

"I quite wish it."

"Well, it's no good grumbling. Let's get dry and follow on. I know the way the beasts are going. There's only one good cycling road back to Cliveden, and they will have to take it. We may pass them yet and get into school first. They are sure to stop and feed somewhere."

"Quite so."

And having wrung the water out of their clothes as well as they could, and wiped down their machines and set them to rights, two muddy and dishevelled cyclists mounted and followed on the track of the Combine, now well out of sight.

The 6th Chapter.

The Combine in Danger.

"A, ha, ha!"

The Combine laughed loud and long at the remembrance of the ridiculous spectacle of Pankhurst and Price's muddy faces looking at them from the ditch as they rode by. They laughed again and again at the recollection of it as they dashed on down the slope of Cliveden Hill.

The bottom of the hill was reached at last, and the pace slackened; but for a great distance along the level road they were able to free-wheel on the impetus gained in the long run downhill.

"I guess we'll stop and have some tea soon," Poindexter remarked. "I feel a little peckish. So long as we get into Cliveden by calling-over we shall be all right."

"Good," said Neville. "We've got our lamps with us, so it doesn't matter if we're out after dusk."

"Faith, and sure it's hungry I am," said Micky Flynn, "and thirsty too, by the same token. The sun's hot."

"Here's a place," said Poindexter presently, pointing towards a pretty little inn looking out from a group of trees, with a stretch of grass and benches in front of it. "I know this place, and you can get a good feed here at a moderate figure."

"Faith, and it's the place for us, then; but I hope the feed won't be very moderate."

It was one of the wayside inns which, since the wonderful growth of cycling, had almost lost its old character, and had become a place of temperate refreshment—places common enough on the English cycling roads. The Cliveden juniors dismounted and leaned their machines up against a tree in a group, and were soon seated at one of the long tables under the trees, discussing bread and cheese and milk—a meal fit for the gods, as Dick Neville remarked. And indeed a more enjoyable repast could hardly have been partaken of by the hungry cyclists, under the shade of the big trees in the golden afternoon of May.

The juniors were in no hurry, and they rested there a while before taking the road to Cliveden. Poindexter had just risen to settle the bill when a bicycle-bell rang on the road, and two extremely soiled-looking riders came in sight. Micky Flynn burst into a roar.

"Faith, and there's the Old Firm intirely!"

"My hat," said Neville, "they look as if they had had a day out! I say, Panky—good-afternoon, and have you used any soap lately?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Pankhurst, as he jumped off his machine. "Come in here, Pricey, and let's get a wash."

"Well, you need it, I guess," commented Poindexter. "Don't stay here talking to these two tramps, kids. Let's get on the wheel."

They paid their bill and departed. Pankhurst and Price had gone indoors for a much-needed wash before having their tea. The Combine were in a high good humour as they mounted their machines and rode away in the setting sun. They had had a good time, and they had had a better ride than their rivals, and they were satisfied. They followed the road round by the ancient Priory towards Cliveden College.

"Take it easy," said Poindexter. "I guess there's no need to hustle now, kids. We shall get into the school by calling-over easily."

"Faith, and those bounders will try and pass us yet if we give them half a chance, Puntdodger darling."

"Let them," said Dick Neville. "If we hear them coming on we can put on speed and race them to the school."

Poindexter nodded.

"I guess that's what I was thinking," he remarked. "It's no good racing with such a start as we've got now. We'll wait till they're in sight."

Micky Flynn looked round.

"There's no sign of the spalpeens yet, Puntdodger."

"And won't be for half an hour yet," said Poindexter.

The American chum was right.

After the substantial meal they had eaten at the little inn none of the three felt really inclined for scorching. They rode on at a moderate pace. Half an hour passed, but Poindexter, looking back, could not see the Old Firm in sight. But the dusk was gathering now over the landscape, and the lane was dim to the view. Poindexter looked at his watch.

"It's not lighting up time yet," he remarked. "It's safer, though, as a matter of fact, with the trees so thick over the lane and shutting out the light."

"Sure and we may as well light up," said Micky, dismounting.

Poindexter and Neville dismounted, too. Dick drew out a box of matches and lighted the three

lamps in turn. The trees, arching over the narrow lane, made the spot very dark, though the sky was yet rosy with the last rays of the sun overhead. Dick threw down the stump of the match and closed his lamp with a snap. Three burly figures loomed up in the gloom at the same moment.

"Hullo!" said a rough voice, and a foul smell of strong liquor accompanied the voice.

The chums drew instinctively closer together.

Three burly, rough-looking tramps had appeared out of the shadows. They had apparently been resting and eating under the wayside trees, for one of them held a hunk of cheese in his hand, and another an open knife. They stood in the path of the young cyclists, blinking in the light.

"Hullo!" repeated the rough fellow who had spoken.

"Hullo!" said Poindexter civilly. "Just lighting up, you see. Let us pass, will you?"

The man exchanged glances with his companions.

"Are you in a hurry?" he said, with an inflection of mockery in his voice which did not escape the ears of the juniors.

Neville quietly detached the pump from his bicycle. He thought he might need a weapon soon. In that lonely road, at that hour, the boys were at the mercy of the tramps.

"Yes, I guess we're rather in a hurry," said Poindexter. "You're in the way."

The man did not move.

"You're in the way, Nailer," said one of the others, with a coarse laugh. "Why don't you get out of the way, Nailer?"

Nailer chuckled.

"Please stand aside," said Poindexter quietly.

"Can't you 'elp a poor man with a few coppers?" said Nailer.

Poindexter hesitated.

The request was a veiled threat, and he knew it. The tramps had evidently made up their minds to profit by the loneliness of the place and the hour, and if it came to a fight the three boys were at a hopeless disadvantage. It might be wiser to propitiate the ruffians if possible.

"If a couple of shillings would be of any use to you—" began Poindexter.

Nailer chuckled again.

"I think a couple of pounds would be nearer the mark. What do you think, Ginger?"

"You're right, Nailer."

"What do you think, Bunker?"

"You're right, Nailer."

"You see," said Nailer, turning to the boys again, "you can go for a couple of pounds, otherwise we shall have to borrow your bicycles for a time—to be returned, of course, right side up with care, when we've done with them."

And the three ruffians chuckled in chorus.

Poindexter knitted his brows.

"We haven't so much money about us," he said; "nor anything like it. But if we had, we shouldn't hand it over to you."

"Faith, and ye're right, Pointhifter."

"Rather," said Dick Neville.

"Oh, we ain't pertieckler," said Nailer. "If ye hain't the money we'll put up with your tickers and tie-pins, and so forth."

"You won't touch them."

The ruffian's manner changed. He made a step towards the junior, his brow dark and threatening.

"Now, then," he rapped out savagely, "are you going to hand over your watches?"

"I guess not."

"Faith, and we're not intirely, ye rotten spalpeen!"

"Then we'll take them."

"Stand back!"

"Bah!"

The three ruffians sprang forward. They expected to knock over the boys in a moment without an effort. But they were surprised and disappointed.

Each of the juniors had grasped his cycle-pump, and they were ready for action. They had let go the machines, and stood shoulder to shoulder. As the tramps sprang at them they struck out fiercely. Nailer reeled back with a savage oath as Poindexter's pump crashed into his face. Ginger and Bunker each received a fierce blow, but they came on in spite of it, muttering curses. Dick Neville was seized in a powerful grip and borne to the ground. Micky Flynn, struggling furiously, was hurled down by Ginger, and a heavy knee was planted on his chest, pinning him down.

Poindexter, however, had followed up his attack. His pump, bent by the first blow, crashed again across the forehead of Nailer, and the ruffian reeled and fell on one knee. The pump descended again; but Nailer dodged it, and sprang upon the boy. Poindexter was grasped in muscular hands, and, in spite of his fierce resistance, he was borne to the ground, and Nailer's knee was planted on him, Nailer's savage hands were at his throat.

The ruffian was red with rage, savage with pain.

"Now I'll teach you, you whelp!"

Poindexter struggled fiercely. The ruffian was gripping him by the throat as if to throttle

him. There was no telling what he might do in his fury, and Poindexter fought as if for life.

But the boy was powerless against the ruffian's savage face glaring down at him, seemed double in size before his failing vision, and ruffian's eyes to burn with a demoniac light.

There was a sudden buzz of bicycle bells in the dusk.

Ting—ting—ting!

Poindexter, with a terrible effort, tore his clutching hands from his throat, and shrieked for help.

"Help! Help!"

The 7th Chapter

The Old Firm to the Rescue!

"COME on, Price!"

It was Pankhurst's voice, and he had it sounded so welcome to the ears of the Cliveden Combine.

"Help!"

"We're coming!"

"Quite so."

Pankhurst and Price had jumped instantly from their machines, leaving them to fall where they would. To dash into the fray, denting sledge hammer blows among the tramps, did not take the juniors a second.

Nailer reeled off Poindexter as Pankhurst clenched fist came like a hammer under his chin, and he rolled gasping in the road.

Price hammered at Ginger, and then Pankhurst sprang at Bunker, and the two rascals were dragged off their victims in next to no time.

Neville and Flynn staggered to their feet. Poindexter lay gasping for breath in the road.

"Sock it to 'em!" shouted Pankhurst.

And he rushed at Ginger again.

The rascal did not stay for him. He leapt into a run, and disappeared into the dusk down the lane. Price and Neville sprang at Bunker, who proved true to his name, and "bunked" promptly.

"They're gone."

"Here's one of them," exclaimed Price, jumping on Nailer as he was rising clumsily, and pinning him down again. "Collar the beast!"

The juniors piled on Nailer, and he was crushed down, in spite of his struggles, and nearly suffocated into the bargain.

Poindexter staggered up. His throat had been bruised by the ruffian's savage fingers, and he was gasping painfully for breath.

"Hold that brute! Don't let him get away!"

"Faith, and we've got the spalpeen intirely! He can't get away while I've got me knees on his chest and me fingers twisted into his necktie!"

"Don't choke him, Micky!" gasped Dick.

"Faith, but Puntdodger says we're not to him get away."

"Ow! Leggo! Ow!"

Poindexter looked grimly down upon the ruffian wriggling in the grip of four sturdy juniors, and utterly unable to escape. The American chum looked thoughtful.

"I guess we can't carry him on our bikes to the police-station," he remarked; "we'd have to let him go. But he ought to have a lesson first. Roll him over into the ditch. There's a foot of water and about two feet of mud, I guess, so he will have a regular treat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and it's a janius ye are, Puntdodger! Roll the spalpeen over!"

The grinning juniors bundled the struggling ruffian over and over, through the grass, to the edge of the deep ditch, and there rolled him. He sank almost out of sight in the ooze, gasping and cursing furiously. A clod of earth landed in his mouth cut short his flow of language, however, and the laughing juniors returned to their machines.

"Thanks awfully, Panky," said Poindexter, patting the chief of the Old Firm on the shoulder. "You came up in the nick of time. That was nearly choked me."

"We were almost riding over you when we heard you yell out," grinned Pankhurst. "I'm glad we caught you up in time to be of use. We're inclined for a race to Cliveden!"

"Hardly. I am going to take it easy."

"Oh, all right; so will we. Let's keep people to the school."

"Right you are," said Poindexter. "When we get to Cliveden, we'll have tea again in No. 4, if you chaps will come. We've got good feed there, and we'll be glad to have you."

"I rather fancy we will come," chuckled Pankhurst.

"Quite so," said Price heartily.

And the tea, as Pankhurst said, was piping hot, and of both quality and quantity, and was done full justice to by the Cliveden Combine.

THE END.

("The Cliveden Gardeners" next week—very funny story.)

AFTER MEALS

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