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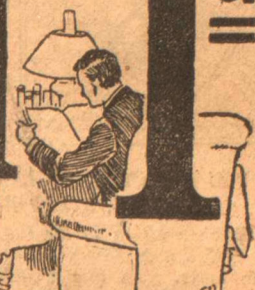
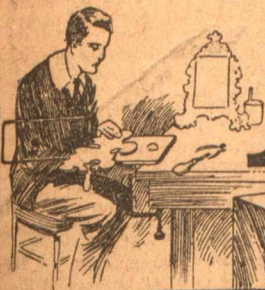
OUR BOY SCOUT STORY

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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 APRIL 11, 1908.

SEXTON BLAKE AT SCHOOL.



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—and 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.

"I say—" "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?"

"Ye-es." "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?"

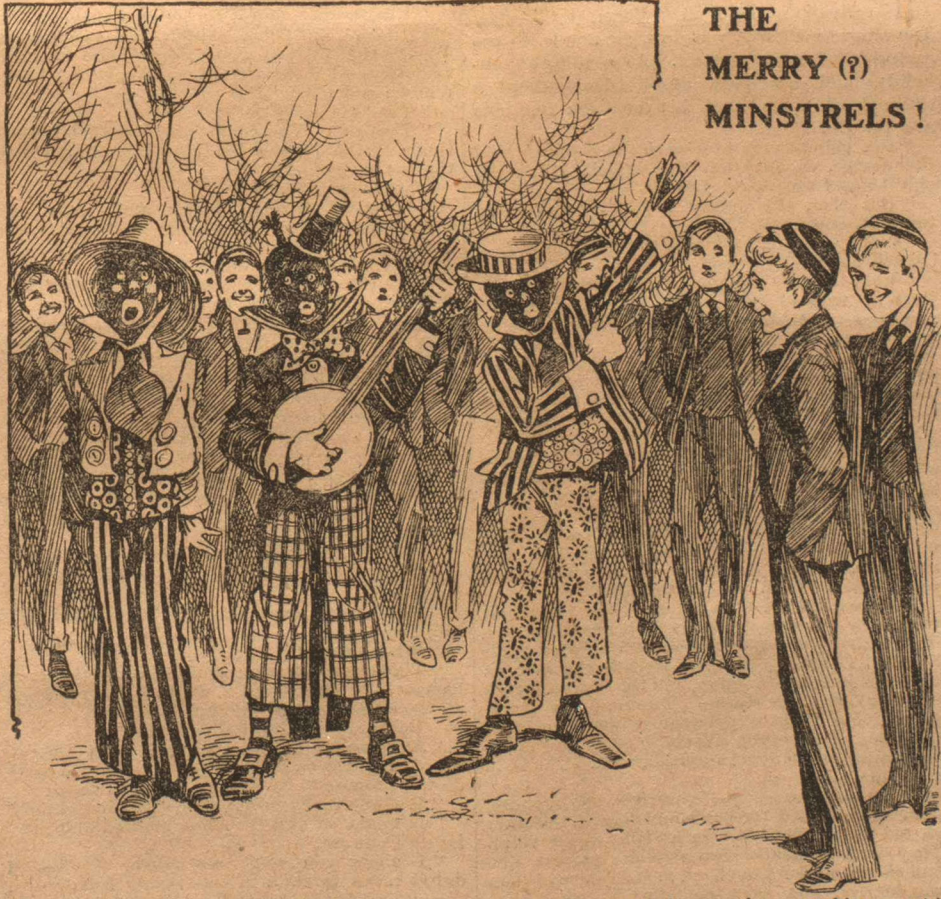
"Ye-e-es." "What is it?"

"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!



THE MERRY (?) MINSTRELS!

"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.

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 jubes clinging to it, a length of twine, a small pegtop, 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 boy."

"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, Puntodger."

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 worse. 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 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 Poindexter solemnly.

Trevelyan started. There seemed to him something familiar in the voice, though the accent was new.

Poindexter hastily strummed on his banjo, and Dick 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. 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.

"Faith, and sure—"
Poindexter 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."

"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



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

one foot, the other having been jammed under Poindexter's heel.

"Ow! Sure and phwat did ye do that for?" yelled Flynn.

There were exclamations of amazement from the nearest of the crowd.

Micky Flynn's voice and beautiful accent were well-known.

"Shut up!" whispered Poindexter, in an agony. "Can't you see they'll guess? Go round with the hat, and shut up!"

"Sure and I—"
"Take the hat, you villain!"

Flynn took round the hat. Some of the fellows were staring at him in blank amazement, not knowing what to make of the matter. Most of them were laughing hysterically, the result of Neville's pathetic song. All seemed to be in a generous mood, for coppers rained into the hat, and there was here and there a glistening of silver among the bronze. Pankhurst and Price paid up; and hardly one fellow let the hat pass him by.

Micky Flynn was grinning with delight as he carried the hat back to Poindexter, who was still twanging away on the 'jo.

"Faith, and it's a rare harvest, Puntddodger!"
"Shut up."
"Sure and I—"

"Oh, come along; we've finished here!"

Poindexter caught Micky by the arm, and Neville took him by the other, and the three minstrels moved towards the gates. Pankhurst and Price had disappeared.

"Thank you, gentlemen!" said Poindexter, twanging again. "Dat is bery liberal of you; and we will come again anoder day."

"Better not," grinned Trevelyan. "Off you go!"

Poindexter roughly counted the proceeds in the hat as they went down to the gate, a curious crowd following them. His face was a study when he had finished.

"How much do you think?" he asked.
"Fifty pounds?" said Flynn vaguely.

"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 Pointddodger!"

"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, Puntddodger—"

"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 intoirely."

"They must have spotted the wheeze in Clivebank, 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.)