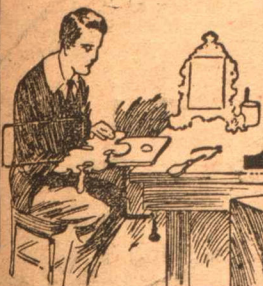


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EVERY BOY'S AND YOUNG MAN'S
STORY AND HOBBY PAPER.



No. 281. Vol. VI.

EVERY WEDNESDAY—ONE PENNY.

WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 5, 1908.

SEXTON BLAKE AT OXFORD.



H.M. Lewis.

A sudden rustling on his left made Blake leap aside, and he had a momentary glimpse of a huge, bloated, spider-like object darting over the wall above the bed in an erratic curve. (Read the thrilling description of Sexton Blake's terrible experience.)

A Mixed Match

The Most Laughable Story of a School Football Match Ever Written.

- BY -

CHARLES HAMILTON.



The 1st Chapter.

A Challenge to Cliveden.

"ANYTHING up, Micky?"

Dick Neville, of the Fourth Form at Cliveden, asked the question. His chum, Micky Flynn, had taken a letter down from the rack, addressed to him in a big, boyish hand. Micky had opened the letter carelessly enough, and glanced through it. Then he had ejaculated "Begorra!" and started reading the letter through again more carefully.

Dick Neville and Lincoln G. Poindexter watched him curiously.

"Anything up?" repeated Dick.

Micky Flynn did not reply till he had finished the letter. Then he looked up, and again uttered the ejaculation "Begorra!"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Neville. "Is anything up? This is the third time of asking!"

"Faith, and there is!"

"What is it, then? What's the latest trouble you've been getting into?" said Lincoln G. Poindexter severely. "I guess it takes us all our time to look after this wild Irishman, and then we can't always keep him out of a scrape."

"Faith, and it's a curious matter intirely!" said Micky Flynn, staring at the letter again. "Have you ever heard of Muggleton?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard of Patrick Sullivan?"

"I guess not. The name sounds slightly Irish," said Poindexter thoughtfully. "It's either Irish or Welsh, I forget which."

"Faith, and don't be funny, Puntdodger! Are we doing anything on Wednesday afternoon?"

"You young ass!" exclaimed Dick Neville. "Why can't you keep to the point? What has Wednesday afternoon to do with Muggleton, and what has Muggleton to do with us?"

"Faith, and I'm keeping to the point intirely. You see—"

"Are you going to explain, or are you going to let us get on to the footer?" exclaimed Neville.

"Faith, and sure I'm explaining as fast as I can, darling! You see, when I was in the train last Saturday going to Carbury—"

Dick Neville gave a howl of remonstrance.

"You—you shrieking duffer! Keep to the point!"

"Sure, and I'm keeping to it intirely! When I was in the train—"

"Oh, come on!" said Poindexter. "Let's get down to the footer. I guess Micky's off his rocker!"

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Or else he's pulling our leg. Let's get out."

"Sure I—"

"Cheese it, Micky, and come on!"

"But I want to explain to you!" roared Micky Flynn. "I tell you it's important, if you don't want Cliveden to back down intirely before another footer team!"

"Eh—what's that about backing down?" exclaimed Neville.

"Faith, and if ye— Ow! Oh! Phwat are ye doing intirely?"

Lincoln G. Poindexter and Dick Neville had suddenly seized him by the shoulders, and jammed him up against the wall. He struggled vainly in their muscular grip.

"Now then," said Poindexter grimly. "I guess you're going to explain yourself in double-quick time, or else have your head biffed on the wall. Go ahead!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Quick!"

"When I was in the train last Saturday going to Carbury—"

"What's that got to do with Muggleton, or Wednesday afternoon, or backing down before another football team?" roared Poindexter.

"Faith, and I'm tryin' to tell ye—"

"Better give him a biff!" said Neville.

"He's too long-winded, anyway!"

"Faith, and I— Ow!"

Biff!

It was not a very hard biff, but it made Micky Flynn roar. He struggled in the grasp of his two chums, but without avail.



"No good wriggling!" said Poindexter. "We're not going to have our time wasted for nothing. Now, if you haven't made the matter quite clear in one minute, you'll get another biff, and a harder one! I say, Greene!"

"Hallo!" said Greene, of the Fourth, stopping.

"Time us, will you? We're allowing Flynn a minute before we biff him."

"Certainly!" said Greene, pulling out a big silver watch.

"Faith, and I—"

"Will you explain?"

"Faith—"

"Ten seconds gone!" said Greene.

"Better buck up, Micky, I calculate!"

"Ye howlin' omadhauns—"

"Twenty seconds!"

"Faith, and I'm explaining as fast as I can intirely. When I was in the train goin' to Carbury the other day—faith, it was Saturday—I met a chap I used to know in old Ireland named Sullivan—Pat Sullivan—"

"What on earth—"

"Ye're interruptin'—"

"Thirty seconds!" said Greene. "Half the time gone, Flynn!"

"How can I get on when a silly spalpeen keeps on interruptin' me intirely? I was talkin' to Sullivan, and he's living at Muggleton now, and he's skipper of the Muggleton Wanderers. Of course, we started talkin' footer—"

"Forty seconds!"

"Do shut up, Greene, ye spalpeen! Sullivan was only in my train for one station, and we hadn't time to say much; and, faith, he had to get out before I'd had time to much more than tell him that Cliveden beat the record for footer, and that we'd be glad to wipe up the ground with Muggleton any time it plazed him intirely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fifty seconds!"

"Of course, as an old friend of my youth, I was bound to rag him a bit—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And, sure, I told him we'd run the Muggleton Wanderers off their legs any time he plazed, and he said they'd be happy to wipe the ground up with Cliveden Juniors, and sure we parted on the best of terms—"

"Time's up!" said Greene.

"Hold on—hold on! Oh—"

Biff! Biff!

"Ye spalpeens— Ow! Faith, and I'll—"

"We warned you!" said Poindexter grimly. "The minute's up, and you haven't made the matter clear. We'll give you another minute before the next biff!"

"Faith, and I'll—"

"Better make the most of it!"

"Sure, and isn't it all clear now?" exclaimed Flynn, rubbing his head ruefully. "This letter is a challenge from Sullivan."

"Oh, I see!"

"Faith, and I'll read it out to ye, if ye will take ye're paws off me for a bit!"

"Go on, then! It's all right, Greene; we've done with your watch."

"Good!" said Greene, but he did not walk away.

He was curious, too, to know all about the matter. Two or three other fellows were gathering round, attracted to the spot by the drastic measures adopted towards Micky Flynn.

"Read it out," said Poindexter.

"Faith, and here ye are! 'Dear Flynn,— You may remember the piffle you were talking in the train the other day—sure, that's only Sullivan's playful way of puttin' it, you know—'about Cliveden Juniors being able to wipe any other team same age off the face of the earth. We're going to give you a chance, you gassing gossoon.' Sure, and it's a polite jintleman Sullivan is intirely. 'When I got home to Muggleton, I asked the fellows about you, and they all said they had never heard of Cliveden, and didn't believe there was such a place.'"

"My hat!" exclaimed Dick Neville. "I think I shall have to have the gloves on with your friend Sullivan!"

"Never heard of Cliveden!" said Greene.

"What utter rot!"

"I guess he's japing," said Poindexter.

"Go on, Micky!"

"Faith, and here ye are! Says Sullivan: 'But they agreed to give you a lesson, if you did exist, and we're setting aside Wednesday afternoon for you entirely, and, sure, we'll be glad to hear by return if you want to make your words good. We shall have the finest pleasure in the world running you off your legs and sending you home on an ambulance!'"

Poindexter snapped his teeth.

"Will they, by Jove? Go on!"

"Faith, and that's all, excepting the kindest regards—"

"Never mind the kindest regards. We're going to accept the challenge, and wipe Muggleton Wanderers off the earth, I guess."

"Faith, and that's my own opinion intirely."

"Only we've got a match on for Wednesday afternoon," said Dick Neville. "The second Form match with Pankhurst's team."

Poindexter nodded.

"I guess so. We shall have to combine with Panky and Price over this, and put up the best team the Cliveden Fourth can muster. No good running the least risk. We don't know anything of the Muggletonian form—"

"As a matter of fact, I've never heard of them before."

"Ha, ha! Same here. I suppose there really is such a place as Muggleton?"

"Faith, and me friend Sullivan is their skipper, so it stands to reason intirely that they exist," said Micky Flynn.

"Well, we'll take it for granted that they exist, and we'll take out our strongest team, and lick them hollow. Better get along, and speak to Panky and Price about it. There isn't any too much time to make the arrangements, as to-morrow's Wednesday. Your friend Sullivan is just a little hasty in fixing up his fixtures, Micky."

"Oh, I dare say some team has scratched for Wednesday," said Micky, "and that gives him a chance to meet us. He would have had the date filled up."

"Well, we shall have to scratch the Old Firm," said Poindexter. "Come along!"

And the Cliveden Combine ascended the stairs to the Fourth Form studies, and kicked at the door of No. 10, the room belonging to their rivals in the Fourth, Pankhurst and Price.

The 2nd Chapter.

A Friendly Visit.

"COME in, fathead!"

It was Pankhurst who sang out that polite invitation; but it was hardly needed, for the kick had flung the door wide open, and the Cliveden Combine marched in.

Pankhurst and Price were there, engaged in inflating a football. They ceased their occupation, and Price took a grip on the inflater, while Pankhurst's hand strayed to a bottle of ink.

A visit from the three chums known as the Cliveden Combine sometimes meant war, for the rivalry between the two parties in the Fourth Form was very keen. The red-headed chums of the Fourth were on the alert.

"Hallo, Puntshifter!" said Pankhurst affably, with the bottle of ink in his hand behind him. "I'm sorry, but we don't want any."

Poindexter stared at him.

"Eh? You don't want any what?"

"Tinned beef."

"You ass—"

"Isn't that what you've come about?" asked Pankhurst innocently. "I thought perhaps you'd had a fresh consignment of tinned beef from your dad in Chicago, and wanted to pass some of it on."

"Look here—" began Poindexter wrathfully.

"Certainly. I'm looking. Just a word about that canned beef. If you turn any of it out of your study, mind it doesn't walk in this direction."

"Quite so," said Price. "Ha, ha!"

Micky Flynn and Neville were cackling, too, and Poindexter gave them a glare.

"Blessed if I can see anything to go off like a cheap alarm-clock for!" he said. "I've come here, Pankhurst, to—"

"Yes, I can see you've come," said Pankhurst, with a nod. "Now I'm waiting to see you go."

"Quite so."

"It's an important matter—"

"Which reminds me of a conundrum," said Pankhurst. "It's one you ought to be able to answer, Puntpoker, as you come from Chicago. What is American tinned beef made of, and what is the most merciful way of killing it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess—"

"That's right, guess the answer."

"I'll jolly well give you a thick ear, you red-headed chump, if you don't shut up!" roared Poindexter.

"Faith, and it's a good idea entirely. Let's give 'em a thick ear each, and then we can come to business, darlings. Sure, we haven't had a row for hours."

"Come on!" said Pankhurst. "We're open to take all the thick ears you can give us!"

"Quite so."

"Faith, and sure I—"

"We'll take anything from you but tinned beef. We—"

"You'll take a licking, then!" shouted Poindexter; and, forgetting that he had come on a friendly mission, the American chum rushed at his old enemy.

Swish! Pankhurst's hand came out from behind him, and the ink from the bottle swished out in a stream, and caught Poindexter on the chin.

It splashed over his face, and transformed him into a Christy minstrel with startling suddenness.

"Oh!" roared Poindexter. "Ow! Gerrooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Pankhurst and Price.

Poindexter staggered back, but only for a moment. Then he rushed forward, and caught Pankhurst round the neck.

"Come on, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Neville and Flynn seized hold of Price at the same moment. Price fought valiantly, but they were two to one, and they were soon rubbing his hair in the ink which had swamped on the floor.

The mixture of Price's red hair with the black ink had a rather weird effect. Meanwhile, Poindexter and Pankhurst were reeling and staggering all over the study.

Poindexter's face was smothered with ink, and he was trying to rub it against Pankhurst, and Pankhurst naturally was trying to keep his face away from the contact.

They crashed against the table, and sent it reeling, and a shower of books and an inkstand toppled over on Flynn, Neville, and Price. Then Pankhurst fell over a chair, and went to the floor, with Poindexter on top.

"I guess I've got you now!" remarked Lincoln G. Poindexter.

"Ow! Oh! Ooooooh!"

Poindexter's inky face rubbed lovingly over Pankhurst's nose and cheeks. In a minute or less there was almost as much ink on Pankhurst's face as upon Poindexter's.

"Ow! You beast—"

"Ha, ha, ha! One good turn deserves another, you know. Have some more!"

"Oh! Ow! Gerrooh!"

"What's all this thundering noise about?" exclaimed Trevelyan, the captain of Cliveden, bursting into the study. "Why—how—who—Great Scott!"

The juniors ceased their struggle immediately, and jumped up. It occurred to them—rather late—that they had been making a tremendous noise. They looked sheepishly at Trevelyan, and the Sixth-Former stared at them in blank amazement.

"What have you been doing to your faces, you young rascals? You're smothered with ink!"

"Ink?" said Pankhurst.

"Ink?" said Poindexter.

"Yes, ink! And Price's hair! Ha, ha, ha! What have you been doing to your hair, Price?"

"N-n-nothing!" gasped Price.

"I suppose this is some more of your rowing!" exclaimed the captain sternly. "You make a hullabaloo every other day with your absurd disputing!"

"Oh, I say, Trevelyan—"

"As you are in Pankhurst's study, I must conclude that you are to blame, you three young rascals. You can come along to my study," said Trevelyan.

"I guess—"

"Come along! Perhaps six each with the cane may teach you to settle disputes without disturbing the whole school!" said the prefect.

"Oh, draw it mild, Trevelyan! We only came here to speak to Panky and Price in a friendly way—"

"I guess so. A little talk about football—"

"Faith, and ye're right. We—"

"I guess—"

"And Pankhurst and Price gave you an equally friendly reception, I suppose?" said Trevelyan, laughing.

"Well, I guess there was a slight misunderstanding—"

"That's it," said Pankhurst. "Some ink got spilt, but we really meant to be as friendly as possible."

"Quite so."

"Faith, and sure I—"

Trevelyan laughed.

"Well, as you are all so friendly, I suppose I had better let you off; but next time you pay a friendly visit, you had better moderate your transports a little, that's all."

And the Cliveden captain left the study, with a warning shake of the head. The juniors grinned at one another rather ruefully.

"Well, of all the asses—" said Pankhurst.

"Well, of all the asses—" said Poindexter.

(Continued on the next page.)

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The 3rd Chapter.

The Old Firm Come Into Line.

PANKHURST burst into a laugh. "Well, you look rather a wreck, considering that this was a friendly visit," he remarked.

"Look in the glass, and I guess you won't talk about wrecks," said Poindexter drily.

"Quite so."

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Your head will want cleaning, and no mistake, Pricey," Neville remarked. "Still, it may put the fire out, and that will be an advantage, if you wash all that ink off."

But Price only grinned. He was too accustomed to allusions to the fiery hue of his hair to take them in ill part.

"If you utter duffers had explained that this was a friendly visit at the beginning," said Pankhurst, "this wouldn't have happened."

"You didn't give us a chance, you howling asses."

"Well, you started talking about tinned beef—"

"I!" howled Poindexter. "You started talking about tinned beef."

"Oh, don't argue! That's the worst of you chaps," said Pankhurst. "You always will argue. Never met anybody like it."

"Quite so," said Price.

"If you came on a friendly visit," said Pankhurst, "I shall be much obliged if you'll add to your kindness by taking a friendly departure, and I can go and get a wash."

"Well, you need it. But it's an important matter."

"Not more important than getting a wash at the present moment," said Pankhurst, with a shake of the head. "Bunk, old chap. Besides, your face worries me."

"Look here—"

"Well, that's a pretty reasonable request, when I've just told you that your face worries me," said Pankhurst, in a tone of remonstrance. "Really—"

Poindexter looked, for the moment, on the point of renewing the combat. But he remembered the important business in hand, and restrained himself.

"Oh, cheese it, Panky! I tell you this is an important matter. It's about the footer."

"Want to cry off the match to-morrow?" said Pankhurst, with a grin. "Well, I don't blame you. You haven't a look in."

"Oh, don't be an ass—"

"We'll let you off," said Pankhurst. "Mind, you will have to own up to all the Form that you didn't want to come up to the scratch."

"I guess—"

"It's all right. We'll post a notice up on the board that the Cliveden Combine has gone out of business, and doesn't play footer now, owing to physical deterioration, caused by over-consumption of tinned beef."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Price.

"You silly asses!" broke out Poindexter hotly. "Will you listen, or shall I wipe up the floor with you both?"

"Better wipe up the floor with us both, I think."

"Quite so."

"Oh, be sensible!" said Neville. "We do want to put off the inter-Form match to-morrow, as a matter of fact, but not because we're not up to the mark. Of course, we should beat you hollow."

"Rats! Canned rats!"

"You see," said Poindexter patiently, "we've received a challenge—a challenge to the Cliveden juniors generally—"

"Hallo! That ought to have been sent to me, as head of the Fourth Form."

"Oh, don't talk utter rot, Panky! Head of a tribe of monkeys would be nearer your mark, I guess."

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Well, what's the challenge, anyway?" said Pankhurst. "Have you got into a fix, and want us to help you out of it? We don't mind. As heads of the Fourth, we consider ourselves bound in a measure to look after you."

"Quite so."

"It's a challenge from Muggleton Wanderers," said Poindexter. "They want us to meet them on Wednesday afternoon."

"Rather sudden, isn't it?"

"I guess so, but it's due to this ass Flynn. He was gassing in a railway-train to another mad Irishman—"

"Faith, and I—"

"And this is the result. Muggleton have Wednesday clear, and they want us to go over and wipe them out. I thought you fellows would agree to putting our home match off till another occasion, and backing us up to give Muggleton a licking."

"Good!" exclaimed Pankhurst heartily. "We'll push the home match off till any time you like, if you're going to back us up to give Muggleton a licking."

"You're going to back us up—"

"Rats! You're going to back us up."

"Now, don't you be an ass, Panky—"

"Then don't you be a duffer, Puntbuster."

"Look here—"

"Hold here—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Neville, the peace-maker. "Suppose we back one another up?"

"I guess that's all right."

"Good!" said Pankhurst. "I agree to that. We'll back one another up, and none of your tinned-beef cheek about being leaders."

"I guess—"

"Anyway, we'll pull together," said Neville. "We'll get up the strongest team that the Fourth Form at Cliveden can produce, and fairly wipe up the floor with the Muggletonian mugs. Read out your letter to Panky, Micky."

"Faith, and I will with pleasure, darling." Micky Flynn read out the famous letter. It made Pankhurst and Price snort, and they were just as eager as the Combine to get over to Muggleton and give the Wanderers the lesson they needed.

"Right-ho!" said Pankhurst. "We're with you in this, and we'll get up a team in the Fourth that will walk over Muggleton. You chaps can reply to the letter, and tell 'em we're coming—and I'll go and get that wash."

And that being settled, the rivals of the Fourth separated. Rivals they were, and keen ones at that, but they were ready to pull together heartily for the honour of Cliveden.

The 4th Chapter.

Cliveden's Reply.

THAT much-needed wash having been obtained, Poindexter and his chums repaired to Study No. 4 to indite the reply to the skipper of the Muggletonians. Poindexter had remarked that a letter like Patrick Sullivan's couldn't be replied to off-hand—it needed a little thought.

"A curt, formal note would look as if we'd got our backs up," Poindexter remarked. "At the same time—"

"Faith, and ye'd better let me write it, darlings."

"How would you begin?"

"Sure, somethin' like this: 'Ye thick-headed gossoon—'"

"Ha, ha! Is that the special Flynn brand of politeness?"

"Well, perhaps it might be modified a little. Suppose ye begin: 'Dear Duffer, or something like that? Dear Ass,—We shall have the greatest pleasure in the wurrind in acceptin' your challenge, and makin' ye wish ye'd never sent it. We'll come over and wipe up the ground wid ye—'"

"I guess that's a little bombastic."

"Faith, and we—"

"Let's think it out," said Neville, with a wrinkle in his brows. "Suppose you begin: 'Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand—'"

"Well, that's better. Bosh is strong, but the 'Dear Sullivan' shows we mean to be polite," agreed Poindexter. "I guess that will do. Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand. Next?"

"We shall be happy to accept your challenge for Wednesday afternoon. We had a match on, but are putting it off for the special purpose of knocking some of the conceit out of you—"

"Faith, and that's comin' to the point intirely."

"As for sending us home on an ambulance, we'll see that you want all your ambulances for home consumption—"

"I guess that won't do, Dicky."

"Why not? Consumption's a good word."

"Yes; but that means eating, doesn't it? They don't eat ambulances."

Neville looked thoughtful.

"It might be misunderstood," he admitted.

"We want the letter to be crushing, with nothing at all funny in it for them to giggle at."

"I guess so."

"Well, then, 'we'll see that you want your ambulances for yourselves. We hope you will be able to last out the game, so that we can have a good chance of wiping you off the earth.'"

"Off the earth. Good! Next?"

"We must be careful not to make the letter at all bombastic," said Neville thoughtfully. "Nothing's more rotten than a fellow bragging about what he can do at footer. Let's see. Suppose you say next: 'We hope that after the game is over, your friends will be on the spot to collect up what is left of you—'"

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Don't forget that we've never heard of Muggleton," said Micky Flynn.

"But you have, Micky."

"Faith, I'm not writing the letter, am I? Besides, if they've never heard of Cliveden, it would be beneath our dignity to have heard of Muggleton intirely."

"Good! I'll put that in. I've never heard of the place, anyway. Anything else?"

"That's all, I think. Put in kindest regards."

"Good! That will do, I guess."

Pankhurst and Price looked into the study,

all the better for their wash, though there were still very visible traces of ink about Price's hair. They grinned good-humouredly at the Combine.

"Got that letter written?"

"Faith, and we've just finished it intirely."

"I guess I'll read it out to you," said Poindexter. "We've tried to keep our end up, you know, without saying anything that might be construed into boastfulness."

"Go ahead!"

"Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand. We shall be happy to accept your challenge for Wednesday afternoon. We had a match on, but are putting it off for the special purpose of knocking some of the conceit out of you. As for sending us home on an ambulance, we'll see that you need all your ambulances for yourselves. We hope you will be able to last out the game, so that we can have a good chance of wiping you off the earth. We hope that after the game is over, your friends will be on the spot to collect up what is left of you. We have never heard of Muggleton."

"Kindest regards, etc."

"Ha, ha ha!" roared Pankhurst. "That will hit the mark, I think. What I like about it is the way you avoid anything like boasting."

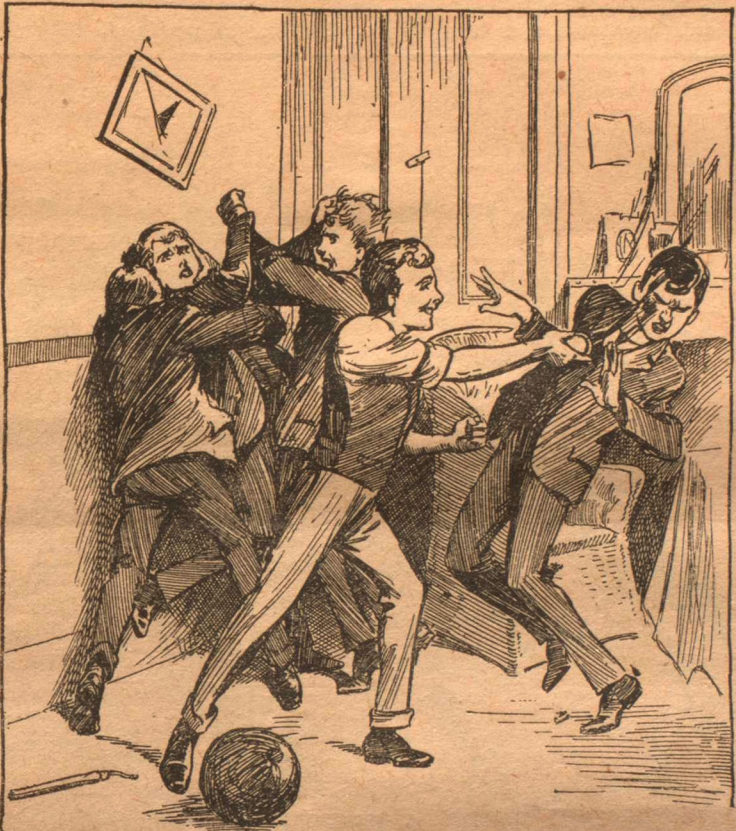
"Ha, ha, ha! Quite so."

"I guess we've got to keep our end up, you know."

"Oh, of course! That letter will do. They haven't fixed the time in theirs, so you had better tell them we shall be over at three. Make it a P.S."

"Good!"

Poindexter added the postscript, and the letter was sealed up. Neville cut across to the school letter-box to post it. It would get to Muggleton on the following morning, in plenty



Swish! Pankhurst's hand came out from behind him, and the ink from the bottle swished out in a stream, and caught Poindexter on the chin. It splashed over his face, and transformed him into a Christy minstrel with startling suddenness.

of time to let the Wanderers know that the Cliveden fellows were coming.

"Now, about the team," said Pankhurst. "We'd better put our heads together over that. I've got a list here of about sixteen, for you chaps to look over."

"Good! Hand it over."

Dick Neville returned to the study, and the five juniors conned over the list of the junior footballers. Almost every member of the Fourth Form at Cliveden belonged to the Fourth Form Football Club. It was always possible for the Combine and the Old Firm to get up a twenty-two for a match among themselves. And so they had a good selection for making up a combined Form eleven.

Knowing nothing whatever of what the Muggleton fellows were like, or what Form they might be in, the Cliveden leaders were naturally anxious to put the best possible junior team in the field. They went over a long list of names, selecting and rejecting. They wanted six fellows beside themselves, and slowly they made up the six from the list.

"Philpot would do well in goal, but we can't rely on him," said Neville. "I suppose we shall have to put in Medway. He has been improving very much lately, since he's given more attention to footer and less to his horrible concertina. Greene and Sid Price for the backs; Gatty, Simpson, Flynn, halves; Poindexter, Pankhurst, Neville, Cameron, and White, forwards. How does that strike you?"

"I guess that's about the best we can fix up."

"Quite so."

And so it was settled.

The 5th Chapter.

Grahame is Amused.

THE next morning both the Combine and Old Firm were down early, and they brought down with them Medway, Gatty, Greene, Simpson, Cameron, and White, the other selected members of the junior eleven. It was a fine, keen winter morning, and Dick Neville, who was junior football captain, meant to give his team some hard practice before breakfast.

The footballers were in good condition, but when they were going to face an unknown team, Neville naturally wished to put them through their paces at least once first.

On the football ground the mutual chipping of the Combine and the Old Firm ceased from troubling, and they threw themselves into the play with their whole hearts.

The result of the practice satisfied them. They were fit to face any team of their own age and weight, or even a little bit over, and they were quite prepared for the tussle with the Muggleton Wanderers.

"I guess we shall do," Poindexter remarked, as they walked back to the house, glowing with the splendid exercise. "Muggleton Mud-catchers will have to be in very good trim to walk over us, anyway."

"Faith, and ye're right, darling. It's a dangerous team we are, and sure we're goin' to take two danger-signals with us to warn the Muggletonians of that same."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What are you cackling at?" said Pankhurst, pretending not to understand the allusion to his rich auburn hair. "Blessed if you fellows aren't always making a row of some kind! What's the matter with your neck, Neville?"

"Nothing!"

"Then why are you making a row like an old hen with the croup?"

"Look here, you ginger merchant—"

"Oh, go and eat tinned beef!"

And Pankhurst went indoors. The junior footballers were in high spirits. They met Grahame, the prefect, in the hall as they went in. Grahame was the most unpopular fellow in the Sixth, and on very ill-terms with the heroes of the Fourth. He looked at them as they came in, apparently taking exception to their high spirits.

"Hallo, you noisy rats!" he said, in his amiable way. "What mischief have you been up to now to make you so jolly?"

"Faith, Grahame, and sure we—"

"It's all right," said Pankhurst. "We're going to play Muggleton Wanderers this afternoon, and we're going to lick them."

Grahame stared at them.

"You're going to play Muggleton Wanderers?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Poindexter.

"At football?"

"Yes. Why not?"

Grahame's face relaxed into a grin. The juniors looked at him in surprise. They could see nothing in the matter to excite the merriment of the prefect.

"Nothing surprising in that, is there?" asked Neville. "By the way, you know Muggleton, don't you, Grahame? I've heard you speak about it, now I remember."

"Yes," said Grahame. "I've got a cousin there, in the Muggleton senior team."

"We're playing the juniors, of course. Do you know anything of their form?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to laugh at in that, Grahame!" said Pankhurst. "I asked you if you knew anything of their form."

"Well, I do," said Grahame, still laughing. "They're hot stuff—very hot!"

"Perhaps you think they'll lick us," said Dick Neville, turning red. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't play them, Grahame."

The Sixth-Former roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps you will when you get on the ground."

Poindexter looked at the prefect keenly. He could see that Grahame's mirth was not assumed. It was genuine enough; the prefect was almost weeping with merriment. But for the life of him Poindexter, cute as he was, could not see where the laugh came in.

"I don't see it," said Neville. "Why shouldn't we meet them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think they're above our weight?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Well, we'll show you, anyway," said Neville; and he marched on into the dining-room.

Grahame held to the wall and roared again. Trevelyan came along, and stared in surprise at Grahame and then at the juniors.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I know!" said Poindexter. "Grahame's got a pain somewhere, I think, and he's trying to laugh it off."

"Oh, it's nothing!" gasped Grahame. "Only those young rotters are going to play Muggleton Wanderers this afternoon."

"Well, why shouldn't they?" demanded Trevelyan.

"Ha, ha, ha! No reason at all, if they want to. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Grahame almost staggered away, with tears of laughter in his eyes. Trevelyan stared after him, and then went into the dining-room. The junior footballers looked at one another rather uncomfortably.

"What the dickens does it mean?" muttered Pankhurst. "I don't see why Grahame should cackle like that at the idea of us playing Muggleton."

"Blessed if I do, either!"

"I guess he thinks they're above our weight, and we've bitten off more than we can chew. We'll show him," said Poindexter, with a gleam in his eyes. "Anyway, Grahame's cackling won't make any difference to us. We're going to play Muggleton, and either lick them or get licked."

"Quite so!"

And the juniors went in to breakfast. But some of them could not help remembering that curious outburst of merriment on Grahame's part, and wondering what it meant, and they looked forward with curiosity—not without a tinge of anxiety—to their arrival on the Muggleton ground.

The 6th Chapter.

A Surprise for Cliveden.

WEDNESDAY was a half-holiday at Cliveden. Immediately after the midday dinner the junior footballers prepared for the journey to Muggleton. Most of the other fellows were busy at football practice, and the eleven went on their journey alone.

Muggleton was a considerable distance from Cliveden, and the admirers of the junior team were not inclined to expend the railway-fare to see the match, apart from the other attractions of the afternoon—a Sixth Form match being in progress on the home ground and attracting general attention. A crowd of juniors gave the team a cheer at starting, and they set out.

From Cliveden a swift train bore them on their way, and after changing twice—Poindexter having carefully looked out the route in a railway guide—they entered the local train for Muggleton.

"Here we are at last!" exclaimed Dick Neville, as the slow train stopped in a sleepy little station. "This is Muggleton!"

"Muggleton" was visible on the station wall, and the juniors poured out of the train and took their bags. They left the station, and found a somewhat ancient-looking brake standing outside. A lad of about fifteen was sitting in it, with his feet over the side. He jumped down as the Cliveden fellows came in sight. He was a pleasant-looking lad, but he did not look like a schoolboy. Neville remembered that the Wanderers were a town team, and he guessed who the youth was.

The stranger came towards the Cliveden team and lifted his cap slightly.

"From Cliveden?" he asked.

"Yes," said Neville.

"Good! I've brought the brake to take you to the ground. Sullivan sent me, you know. I'm Harris—Jack Harris, very much at your service."

"I'm Neville, Cliveden skipper. Thanks awfully for the brake! Is it far?"

"About a quarter of an hour's walk, or twenty minutes in the brake," said Harris, with a grin. "But it will save your legs. You'll want 'em this afternoon. Hallo, there, Johnny! Wake up! Your passengers have come!"

"Werry good, sir!" said the driver, clambering up to his seat.

Harris looked the Cliveden fellows over with a quick eye.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"The others!" said Neville. "What others?"

"The other fellows?"

"Oh, nobody's come with us!"

"But—but—" Harris looked puzzled. "I mean haven't you any more players?"

"Oh, no; we haven't brought any reserves, if that's what you mean!"

"But—" Harris broke off. "Well, jump in. There's room for the lot of you, with squeezing. If there had been any more, you'd have had to sit on one another's knees. I expected—but, never mind, you can settle that with Sullivan. I've got my bike here. Drive on, Johnny!"

"Yes, zur!"

Harris jumped on his machine and shot ahead. The brake followed. The Cliveden footballers gave one another puzzled looks.

"Anybody know what he was driving at?" asked Poindexter.

"Faith, and I don't intirely!"

"I believe he's grinning," said Pankhurst, looking after the cyclist. "What the dickens does it all mean? What was Grahame laughing at, too?"

"Oh, hang Grahame!"

"With pleasure! But I'm beginning to feel a bit uneasy about this match. What did that chap mean by saying we could settle it with Sullivan? Settle what with Sullivan?"

"He seems to be keeping something back."

"And sure he's grinning at something or other, the baste!"

"I fancy there's something wrong, somewhere, somehow," said Pankhurst, with a shake of the head. "First Grahame, who knows Muggleton, went off into a fit at the idea of us playing the Wanderers. Then this chap grins like a hyena when we arrive. There's something fishy about it somewhere. I suppose, as a matter of fact, you fellows have made a muck of it."

"I guess—"

"It was Micky Flynn who fixed it up, and we all know Flynn. He'd get up in the middle of the night to make a blunder."

"Faith, and sure—"

"Well, we shall soon see," remarked Neville. The brake drove on after the cyclist. There was no doubt that Harris was grinning, for they caught full sight of his face at a corner of the road. He was wearing, as Pankhurst expressed it, a grin of the largest size.

The brake came in sight of the football-

ground—a pleasant-looking field, with a large crowd already gathered round the ropes. It was a fine, clear afternoon, and it had evidently tempted out a large number of the Muggleton folk. Doubtless the locals took a great interest in the doings of their junior team. There was a shout in the field as the brake turned in at the gate and drew up.

Poindexter stared in blank amazement at the goal-posts. A glimmering of the truth dawned upon him.

"Faith, and there's Sullivan!" exclaimed Micky Flynn.

A number of fellows were already punting a ball—an oval-shaped ball—about. They stopped and looked towards the brake. A big, handsome fellow of about sixteen came quickly towards the Cliveden fellows as they alighted.

"Glad to see you!" he exclaimed heartily. "But—what—why—faith, where are the rest of you?"

"That's the lot!" yelled Harris.

"How the dickens many did you expect?" demanded Neville. "I suppose eleven is the right number for a footer match, isn't it? Unless I don't know anything about footer!"

"I guess so."

Sullivan stared blankly at the Cliveden crowd.

"Holy Moses!" he yelled. "And do you mean to say that ye didn't know we were a Rugby team?"

The 7th Chapter.

A Curious Compromise.

RUGBY!

"Rugger!"

"A Rugger team!"

"Great snakes!"

"My only hat!"

These, and various other exclamations, burst from the amazed Clivedeners. Then, with one accord, they turned upon Micky Flynn. They



"Play up, Cliveden!" Cliveden played up. The forwards were on the ball in no time, and rushing it through the Muggletonians. But Sullivan, who was playing three-quarter, captured it, and with the leather under his arm, sped up the field. There was a wild yell from Cliveden. "Hands!" "It's all right!" gasped Neville. "It's Rugger—on their side!"

grasped him, and they jammed him, breathless, against the brake.

"You howling lunatic!" roared Poindexter. "You maniac! Why didn't you tell us Muggleton was a Rugger team?"

"Faith, and I—"

"You dangerous lunatic!" shrieked Neville. "Fancy bringing us all this way to play a Rugger team! So that is what Grahame was laughing at!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Scrag him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Bump him!"

"Hould on!" yelled Micky Flynn. "I didn't know! Faith, and Sullivan never told me! And how was I to guess it was a Rugger team at all, at all?"

Sullivan burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! I never thought of mentioning that. Micky was bragging about wiping us up, and, sure, I never thought he was talking about Soccer."

"Faith, I never dramed ye were talkin' about Rugger."

"You should have told me—"

"You should have told me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Neville, shaking his fist at Micky. "I might have known that villain would get us into some pickle!"

"I could have told you," said Pankhurst; "but—"

"Well, you didn't, anyway."

"I mean I could have told you, you fellows were bound to come a mucker somehow."

"Oh, ring off, Panky! Don't you start! I

say, Sullivan, it's rotten, but I don't see what's to be done. We don't play Rugger. Some of us know the ropes, but some haven't played the game in their lives. And there's only eleven of us."

"Sure, we could get you some of our reserves, and make up a fifteen."

"And then wipe us up," said Neville. "No, thanks! I'll tell you what—drop four of your players, and then make it a Soccer match."

Sullivan grinned, and shook his head.

"Bedad, but it can't be done! You see, most of my fellows have never played Soccer, and you'd win hands down."

"Well, it seems rotten to come all this way for nothing!"

"I guess so."

"Play up!" came a yell from the spectators, who were waiting impatiently for the kick-off.

"Why don't you start?"

Sullivan looked uneasy.

"Faith, and I forgot the crowd!" he exclaimed. "You see, they've come out to see the match. A lot of them have had to get off from business on purpose, and they'll be wild at having to miss the sight. I don't know what's to be done."

"Suppose you adopt my suggestion, and make it a Soccer match?"

"Suppose you adopt mine, and make it a Rugger?"

"Can't be did!"

"Faith, and I've got a ripping idea intirely!" exclaimed Micky Flynn. "Sullivan can cut down his team to eleven, and we'll play the match on mixed rules!"

"Eh?"

"We'll play Soccer, and they can play Rugger, and—"

"You utter ass!"

"Faith, and it's not such a bad idea!" exclaimed Sullivan eagerly. "It's the only way out of the difficulty, anyway, without missing the match. And the people yonder have a right to be considered. I'll explain to them—"

The kick-off fell to the visitors. Dick Neville kicked off the ball, and the game started.

"Play up, Cliveden!"

Cliveden played up. The forwards were on the ball in no time, and rushing it through the Muggletonians. But Sullivan, who was playing three-quarter, captured it, and with the leather under his arm, sped up the field.

There was a wild yell from Cliveden.

"Hands!"

"It's all right!" gasped Neville. "It's Rugger—on their side!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if they take it as a joke, sure it will be an entertainment, anyway! Suppose I put it to them, as the best thing we can do not to disappoint them? I'll explain that it was a misunderstanding."

"Well, of all the ideas—"

"I guess we can fix it," said Poindexter, grinning. "It will be fun, anyway—and a record match. We'll play by Soccer rules, and you fellows play by Rugger rules. Of course, you'll play an equal number of men."

"Oh, of course; equal numbers, and different rules!"

"My hat!" said Neville. "It will be easy to see that this match was arranged by two Irishmen. But I'm agreeable."

And so it was settled. Sullivan made a speech to the impatient spectators, which was received with stares of blank amazement, and then with yells of laughter. And the Cliveden fellows went into their dressing-room to prepare for the most peculiar match they had ever played in.

The 8th Chapter.

A Rather Mixed Match.

THERE was a cheer from the crowd as the Cliveden footballers came out, in the red shirts and white knickers of Cliveden School. Most of the spectators were laughing, which was not to be wondered at. A football match played with Association rules on one side, and Rugby rules on the other, was likely to be a curious one.

The Cliveden footballers laughed most of the way home; and when they related their adventures at Cliveden, all Cliveden laughed, too. Everyone agreed that it was Micky Flynn's fault—everyone but Micky. But it had been fun, anyway; and the chums of the Fourth Form often enjoyed a hearty laugh over the remembrance of that mixed match.

THE END.

(A Splendid Long, Complete Boy Scout Story Next Week.)