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EVERY WEDNESDAY ONE PENNY.

WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 19, 1908.



H.M. Lewis.

"See, come here and stand by me—so," said Balkrishna. "Place the tips of your fingers on the pulse of my wrist. You shall see my home, far away in India, through my eyes. Keep your own on what you are pleased to call the nasty black mess in the grubby hand of the little beggar, and try to think of nothing—nothing at all whatever."

The Poindexter Musical Society

A Laughable Complete School Tale.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.



The 1st Chapter. A Mysterious Expedition.

HUSH!"

"Faith, and I—" "Quiet!"

Lincoln G. Poindexter pressed his hand over Micky Flynn's mouth, and the Irish junior had no choice but to be quiet. It was a dark night, and the vast mass of the buildings of Cliveden College lay in black shadow. A faint crescent of moon showed over the clock-tower, but the Close was very dark.

Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn stood in the shadow of the old tree near the doors of the School House, listening with painful intensity. Ten o'clock had just struck from the clock-tower—half an hour later than the bed-time of the Fourth Form at Cliveden. Yet here were the three heroes of the Fourth fully clad, and out in the dark Close. It was no wonder that they were keenly on the alert, for if a prefect had caught them out of bed at that hour, the result would have been very serious to the three juniors known as the Cliveden Combine.

"I'm sure I heard something," muttered Poindexter.

"Gr-r-r!" "Hold your row, Flynn!" "Faith, and it's cho-cho-chokin' me, ye are!" "Well, shut up, then. I guess there's somebody on the track."

"I heard nothing," murmured Dick Neville. "Faith, and it's myself that heard nothin' either!" "Quiet!"

Poindexter listened intently. A cold wind was sweeping through the Close, shaking the leafless branches of the trees. It waivered round the ancient roofs and chimneys of Cliveden, but no other sound was audible.

The juniors had left the school by way of a window in one of the deserted class-rooms, and Poindexter's eyes were fixed upon that window now. But he could see nothing but the faint glimmer of the glass.

"I guess it's all right," he said, at last; "but we want to be careful. I'd almost swear I heard something. It would be no joke to be collared by a prefect now."

"Faith, and ye're right!" "Besides the licking for breaking bounds of a night, the secret would very likely get right out."

"We should have to own up," said Dick Neville. "If we were nabbed, they'd think we were going out for something rotten—there's more than one fellow at Cliveden like Philpot, who goes down to the pub in Clivedale."

"I guess we mustn't get nabbed, then!" "Faith, and it's nervous ye are, Poindexter. Come on!"

Lincoln G. Poindexter cast a last suspicious glance round, and then nodded and turned away. The night was still, save for the wailing of the wind, and he was at last almost satisfied that he had been mistaken.

"Well, don't make a row, Flynn! I'd almost rather a prefect caught us than Panky and Price—and it's really them I was thinking of. I thought I heard something at Pankhurst's bed as we came out of the dorm."

"Oh, I think he was asleep, right enough!" said Neville. "He would have called out to us if he'd been awake."

"Ye-es, unless he thought of shadowing us. You see, if Pankhurst and Price were to get on to this little wheeze, the game would be up, so far as our getting ahead of them is concerned."

The three juniors plunged on through the darkness. They disappeared in the gloom of the Close; but a couple of minutes later faint and stealthy footsteps were audible under the shadowy trees.

"Don't make a row, Pricey." "Quite so."

Two red-headed juniors peered out from the shadow of the trees in the direction in

which the Combine had gone. They were Pankhurst and Price—the Old Firm—and the deadly rivals of the Combine for the leadership of the Fourth Form at Cliveden. Pankhurst bent his head and listened intently.

"I can't hear them now, Pricey."

"Quite so." "You heard what they were saying?" went on Pankhurst. "I told you they were up to some game."

"So you did, Panky."

"It's something up against us, too. They've got some wheeze on—though what on earth it can be, I can't imagine. Can you?"

"Haven't the faintest idea." Pankhurst wrinkled his brows.

"Mind, this isn't the first time they've sneaked out of the dorm of a night. I've suspected it before, and that's why I stayed awake to-night. You know how sleepy they've been every morning for a fortnight past."

"Quite so," said Price, his usual remark. Price was a fellow of few words.

"But where have they gone?" said Pankhurst, looking puzzled. "I can't hear them. They haven't gone towards the wall."

"Then they're not going out of bounds." "No. But what—why—" Pankhurst broke off. He was fairly puzzled. If the Combine had crept out of the dormitory to go down to the village, or to go rabbiting in the woods that dark night, it would have been easily understood. But what could they possibly want to come out into the cold, dark Close for, unless there was an expedition in view?

"I don't catch on!" muttered Price. "Is it possible they knew you were awake, Panky, and were only japing you?"

Pankhurst gave his chum a withering glare in the darkness, which Price did not see, or he would not have continued in the same strain.

"You see, Panky, if they knew you were awake, they might go out just to lead you a dance, and then cut back to the dorm, and when we go in we may find them there, and the whole Form laughing at us."

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Pricey?" asked Pankhurst, in his most honeyed tones.

"Eh?" said Price, starting back. "No; what do you mean?"

"Then don't be funny at this time of night." "I wasn't being funny. I was suggesting—"

"Then don't suggest, if you can't suggest anything sensible! Let's go and have a look for the rotters. They may have heard us, and be hiding somewhere in the Close. Perhaps they've dodged into the old tower."

And Pankhurst led the way. Price followed in silence. In the gloom the two juniors picked their way cautiously towards the old tower, a relic of the earliest days of Cliveden. Pankhurst gave a sudden start, and clutched Price with one hand, and with the other pointed up to the tower.

"Look!" he muttered.

"My hat!" murmured Price, in amazement. From a casement of the old tower, on the side turned away from the school, a light gleamed.

"They're there!" "Quite so. But what—what—" "Blessed if I know! Hark!"

Through the dim night came the faint strains of music. The red-headed chums stared at one another in blank amazement. The sounds came from the old tower. What did it mean?

"My only hat!" muttered Pankhurst. "I—I don't catch on to this at all. I suppose they're not off their giddy rockers?"

"Shouldn't wonder!" "I knew there was something on, and it's pretty clear now—but what can it be?" muttered Pankhurst, in utter amazement.

"Let's go and see." "Oh, yes, rather! Come on, Pricey, we're on this!"

And the Old Firm stole silently to the tower. The ancient oaken door was ajar, and the strains of music were more clearly heard. Pankhurst silently pushed the door open, and the chums entered, and stole quietly up the stone stairs

towards the chamber whence the light glimmered forth into the night.

Whatever might be the little game of the Cliveden Combine, the Old Firm were on the track!

The 2nd Chapter. Poindexter's Latest.

GOOD!" said Poindexter.

"Faith, and it's right ye are, Puntodogler!"

The strains of music died away.

It was a curious scene in the room in the ruined tower. Through the empty window, and more than one rift in the masonry, the wind waivered in, and made the lamp flicker as it stood on a ledge on the stone wall.

Five juniors sat in the room, each of them armed with a musical instrument. First and foremost, there were the Cliveden Combine—Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn. Then there were Jones, of the Shell and Harris, of the Remove. Harris, the Removeite, belonging to a lower Form than the Combine, comported himself with becoming humility in such distinguished company. But in the manner of Jones, of the Shell—the next Form above the Fourth—was easily to be discerned a tincture of patronage. The Shell boy was fully conscious of the honour he did the Fourth-Formers in associating with them at all.

Pankhurst and Price, peering into the room from the darkness of the stone stairway, looked at the scene in blank amazement.

They had been prepared for anything but this. They had not expected to surprise a youthful orchestra at work in the old tower at past ten o'clock at night. They remained as still as mice, and stared blankly into the room.

The musical party had not the faintest idea that they were being watched. In fact, at that moment Poindexter was feeling particularly elated at having so cleverly outwitted his rivals in the Fourth.

"I guess that was all right," he remarked. "We're all keeping in time and tune, excepting Flynn."

"Faith, and I—" "I guess your cornet's always a bit out," said Poindexter, shaking his head. "I don't see what you want to come groaning on behind with that thing for?"

"Sure, and it's an illigant cornet—" "Oh, the instrument's all right!" said Jones, of the Shell, in a tone that implied that his opinion of the player was not very high.

"Flynn will improve," piped young Harris, of the Remove—the Lower Fourth—with the idea of saying something agreeable to the Irish junior.

Micky Flynn turned his head, and gave the Removeite a glare that might have frozen a stone image. "Faith, and I'm glad of ye're good opinion, intirely!" he said. "Sure it's a recommendation intirely to be praised by yerself, and I'm thinkin' I might give ye a thick ear for your cheek, too!"

"Oh, really, Flynn, I didn't mean—" "I'm talking about what you said, darling, not what you didn't mean—" "But really—"

"Faith, and I hope nobody here agrees with Harris," said Micky Flynn, with a challenging glance round at the assembly.

"I don't," said Jones, of the Shell, promptly. "Faith, and that's—" "You see, Harris said you would improve in time," explained Jones. "I don't see any sign of it myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I see anythin' to cackle at in that, ye gossoons!" said Flynn. "Sure, and me cornet's the loudest instrument we've got, and the other instruments ought to follow it."

"Well, we try to," said Neville pathetically. "But just when we think we're overtaking it you back up and leave us behind, or else you slow down, and we shoot ahead."

"That's it," said Jones, of the Shell. "Flynn had better listen to my clarinet, and—" "Sure, I can't listen to a clarinet while I'm playin' the cornet!"

Jones turned to Poindexter.

"What do you think of scratching the cornet?" he asked.

"Faith, and if anybody scratches me illigant cornet, I'll give him a thick ear! I'm not goin' to have me instrument damaged!"

"Ass! I mean cut it—" "Sure, cutting it would be worse than scratching it—"

"Howling duffer! I mean kicking the cornet out of the orchestra!" roared Jones. "If this is to be the last rehearsal, and the concert's coming off to-morrow, I don't see how Flynn is to get his hand in in time."

"I don't see how we could leave the cornet out," said Poindexter doubtfully. "Besides, Flynn is entitled to play as a member of the original musical society."

"Faith, and I should say so, intirely!" "If you fellows liked," said Jones condescendingly. "I'd take the whole matter in hand, and run it for you on improved lines."

The Combine exchanged expressive glances. They were strongly inclined to say things to the obliging Jones, but they restrained themselves.

"Thanks awfully!" said Neville. "But we really think we can run the show."

"Besides," said Poindexter, "Cuffy, of the Fifth, is going to conduct, and if we resigned the management he would naturally expect us to resign it to him."

"Oh, I would conduct for you!" "Ahem! In this case, Cuffy's the man."

We have to have a piano in the orchestra, you see, and Cuffy's the only pianist we can get. When there's a piano in the orchestra, the pianist always conducts."

"Yes; but—" "We're awfully glad to have you in the show, Jones," said Poindexter. "I guess I don't know what we should do for a clarinet. But you mustn't forget that this is a Fourth-Form musical society."

"Oh, rats!" said Jones, of the Shell.

"It was my idea to start with," said Poindexter, growing rather warm. "I said to Neville that it would be a ripping idea to have a musical society in the Fourth Form."

"So you did," said Neville; "and I suggested at once practising in secret, so as to come out suddenly with a performance, and take Cliveden by surprise."

"Faith, and it was meself that pointed out what an illigant jape it would be on the Old Firm, and how it would make 'em sing small!"

"I guess so. The idea was ripping. Of course, there were disadvantages. We couldn't make up an orchestra of three, and by letting other members of the Fourth into it we should have risked the Old Firm getting on to the secret."

"Sure, and I suggested young Harris, knowin' he could play the flute—" "I'm very much obliged to you, Flynn," piped young Harris.

"Faith, and ye seem so when ye're talking about me illigant cornet!" said Flynn severely.

"Oh, really—" "It was an afterthought to ask a fellow of a higher Form," said Poindexter. "I guess we weren't looking for a general manager, though."

Jones, of the Shell, snorted.

"I admit that Jones plays the clarinet jolly well," said Poindexter. "If we hadn't had Jones with his clarinet, we should have had to ask Medway of ours, with his concertina; and I'm not denying that an orchestra would suffer with a concertina in the place of the clarinet."

"Well, rather!" said Neville. "Blessed if I know what Medway plays that horrid thing for. If he'd take up the trombone or bassoon instead, we'd be glad of him in the orchestra."

"Of course, the society will grow," said Poindexter. "It's only in its beginning now. We are going to rope in the kudes, I guess, by giving a performance all at once, without allowing the Old Firm any time to get up a rival show. They will have to sing small, and acknowledge that we're the cocks of the Fourth."

"Yes, rather!" "After that, though," said Poindexter generously, "we'll let them join the Poindexter Musical Society, if they like to learn suitable instruments."

"Yes, that would only be the decent thing, so long as they fully acknowledge all the time that we're at the head of it."

"Of course, that's understood."

"That's all very well," said Jones, of the Shell. "Blessed if I take much interest in the rivalry of a rotten set of fags, though!"

"Faith, and it's polite ye are, Jonesy!" "You see, it's a bit below my dignity as a Shell fellow to come out here and practise with a set of fags."

"Oh, come off!" said Poindexter. "After all, perhaps, we'd better put up with Medway's concertina, kids, and let Jones take his clarinet home."

"Faith, and ye're right!" "Oh, no, don't think I mean that!" said Jones, who was secretly only too anxious to give a public exhibition of his powers with the clarinet, as Poindexter knew very well.

"I'm glad to play for you. Only Cuffy won't come to these rehearsals."

"I guess it wouldn't be much good if he did," said Poindexter. "He couldn't bring the piano along with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Besides, a Fifth-Former naturally puts on a few airs," said Neville. "It's the nature of the beast, and we have to be patient. We don't expect any bosh of that sort from a Shell fellow."

"Oh—er—no; of course not!" said Jones. "Better get on with the washing, though."

"We want to go right through the business to-night. We shan't have time for any more rehearsals, except a bit along with Cuffy and the piano before the performance to-morrow evening."

"Right you are."

And the youthful performers turned their music and recommenced. Once more the sweet strains of cello, violin, cornet, flute, and clarinet echoed through the old tower.

The 3rd Chapter. A "Facer" for the Old Firm.

PANKHURST and Price had heard every word. They drew back into the deep shadows of the stone stair as the music recommenced, and looked at one another gloomily.

"My hat!" said Pankhurst. "It was all he could say."

"Quite so!" murmured Price. "A junior musical society!"

"Quite so!" "And we never thought of it!" "Quite so!"

"It's—it's sickening."

"Quite so!"

"Almost as sickening," said Pankhurst savagely, "as to have a silly ass jabbering the same words over again like a silly parrot instead of saying something sensible when you speak to him."

"Quite so!" murmured Price. "Er—I—I mean—"

"Oh, don't jaw, for goodness sake! What do you think about it?" said Pankhurst somewhat inconsistently. "I feel that I could kick myself. I've a jolly good mind to kick you!"

"Quite—Oh, Panky—"

"Why didn't you think of it?" demanded Pankhurst fiercely.

"I—I— How was I to think of it?" said Price, in dismay. "Do be reasonable, Panky. You didn't think of it yourself, you know."

"Oh, don't argue!" said Pankhurst crossly. "I hate a fellow who's always arguing!"

"Yes; but—"

"Oh, don't! I tell you I can't stand arguing when I'm bothered. You make me tired. Fancy Poindexter thinking of starting a musical society in the Fourth!"

"It's a ripping good idea!"

"Well, I suppose it is," said Pankhurst rather grudgingly. "It's a good idea. What amazes me is that I didn't think of it myself."

"I suppose it didn't come into your head?" murmured Price, who hardly knew what to say to allay the irritation of his chief.

"No, I suppose it didn't," assented Pankhurst sarcastically. "If it had come into my head, I should have thought of it, I suppose."

"I mean—"

"Oh, never mind what you mean! We've got to think things out," said Pankhurst. "What a row they're making in there."

The Old Firm had drawn back from the door, quite out of hearing, so far as their voices were concerned; but, of course, the strains of music were audible all over the old tower. Price, who as a Welshman naturally had an ear for music, listened rather appreciatively to the youthful orchestra.

"I say, Panky old man, that's not bad."

"Panky old man" snorted.

"But it isn't," said Price. "They're playing an adaptation of a march from 'Carmen,' and it's jolly lively—the opening of the last act, you know. They must have got somebody to score it for them for such a giddy small orchestra, and it's jolly well to their credit to play up like that under such difficulties. They've only got five instruments there, and not even a double-bass to give the thing a background. Yes, you can snort if you like, Panky; but you can't teach me anything about music, anyway."

"I know I can't, Pricey," said Pankhurst, in a more subdued tone. "I wasn't snorting at you. Don't mind my ragging you just now. I feel this very much."

"Of course, I don't mind," said Price, instantly. "You can rag me as much as you like, old chap, and I won't say a word, if it relieves your feelings."

Pankhurst grinned a little.

"It's so jolly rotten, Pricey," he said. "You see, if the idea had only struck us, we could have worked it easily; and, without bragging, I think I can say that we could work it better than the Combine."

"Quite so!"

"You are an awfully musical chap, and you can play half the instruments in an orchestra," said Pankhurst glumly. "And I can play the cornet—better than that goat Flynn, anyway."

"You play the cornet jolly well, Panky," said the loyal Price. "I won't say you keep perfect time, because you don't; but you're yards nearer the music than Flynn is."

"Cuffy would have punched the piano and conducted for us, and we could have got Jones with his clarinet, and that Remove kid with his flute, just as easily as Poindexter," said Pankhurst. "I—I could kick myself! Why didn't I think of it?"

Price offered no solution to the mystery this time.

"I ought to have thought of it," said Pankhurst. "But I didn't, and there it ends. We've got to sit down quietly, and let the Combine gloat over us."

"Oh, I say, Panky—"

"We've got to let them triumph, and sing small ourselves," persisted Pankhurst, in a vein of determined pessimism. "I know it's rotten. You can bang my head against the wall if you like."

"The chaps would throw things at him."

"Well, I suppose they would. I've felt like doing it myself when I've heard him practising in his study. It's a cheap German concertina he's got," said Price. "An English concertina you pay a good price for is all right; but a cheap German one—oh, dear!"

"It's no good!" said Pankhurst desperately. "We may as well knuckle under. I—"

"Hold on! They're stopping; they'll hear us."

The strains of music died away. The voices of the Poindexter Musical Society were audible once more. The Old Firm, with gloomy faces, peeped into the lighted room again.

The 4th Chapter. Pankhurst Thinks It Out.

POINDEXTER laid down his bow, with a smile of satisfaction.

"I think that went better than the first bit," he remarked. "Of course, you can't judge of the full effect till you play along with the piano."

"I should say not," grinned Jones.

"But so long as we get our parts perfect, it's all right. We know Cuffy is a good pianist, and he can keep time to anything, and he's practising his part on and off."

"Faith, and we can rely on Cuffy," said Micky Flynn; "though, in case of doubt, you know, you can always follow the cornet."

"Blessed if I know where it would lead us!" said Neville, with a sniff. "I wish you had a double-bass instead of a 'cello, Puntodger. Even Flynn could hardly get out if you were sawing away under his ear on a double-bass."

"We ought to have both," said Poindexter. "But it's no joke buying a double-bass, and we've nobody else to play the 'cello. My popper has come up pretty well as it is in standing this instrument. He's stood me the 'cello; and if I had the bass, there's nobody to take this instrument. Of course, later on, when we let the Old Firm into the Society, Price can play the 'cello, and then I'll try to work the dad for a bass."

"Faith, and it's a janius you are, Puntbuster!"

"But at present we shall have to make it do," said the American junior. "After all, when Cuffy gets going on the piano, that will give the thing a background. Flynn will have to keep his cornet a little quieter."

"Sure, and I'm playin' up so that you can follow me instrument, and keep in time."

"Then don't! You must regard the 'cello as if it were a bass, and play up to it. Don't you worry about the rest of the orchestra, Micky. Stick to your cornet, and keep in time yourself."

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Get on to the next item," said Poindexter. "We're limited to an hour, you know. I had some lines this morning for being sleepy in class. Lanyon doesn't make allowances for these rehearsals."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Play up, then! said Jones of the Shell. "I'm getting sleepy. I say, what piano is Cuffy going to punch for us to-morrow. The Head's not likely to let us have the grand piano in the hall."

Poindexter grinned.

"No. I asked for the hall and the grand piano, through Mr. Lanyon, but it can't be did. I don't think the Head regards junior orchestral societies with a properly serious eye."

"He would if he caught 'em at rehearsal," grinned Micky Flynn.

"Besides, the Sixth are using the hall to-morrow evening for a rehearsal of their rotten Latin comedy," said Neville.

"We've got No. 8 Room on the ground floor," said Poindexter. "It's quite large enough for our purpose, and by arranging the seats we can make room enough for an audience of sixty or seventy. I don't suppose we shall have more than that."

"Faith, if there's more, there's standin' room," said Micky Flynn; "and we can put up a notice outside, 'Standin' Room Only,' and it will look ripping. Faith, we might put up the notice, anyway, to keep up appearances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, it's a good idea—"

"I guess it's a ripping way to attract an audience," said Poindexter wittingly. "Do

stick to your cornet, Micky, and don't make suggestions. We've got to get the room full, if we have to drag fellows in by their necks, or else the grin will be up against us. That's an advantage of having a smaller room, too—you can say truthfully that the place was crammed to suffocation, without having a tremendous audience to cram it. It sounds well."

"True for ye."

"No. 8 will suit us down to the ground. The piano in the room is an upright grand, and a jolly good instrument; in fact, Cuffy does most of his practice on it. There's an advantage in having Cuffy to thump the ivories," added Poindexter. "His chum Crane is sure to come and bring a lot of Fifth Form fellows, and that will give the performance a sort of tone, you know."

"Faith, and sure there's somethin' in that, Puntbuster."

"Let's get on."

"Just what I was going to suggest," piped little Harris.

"Troth, and what do you mane by makin' suggestions to your seniors? If you want to go out of this orchestra on your neck, young Harris—"

"I—I mean—"

"Oh, get on wid yer flutin'!"

And the orchestra struck up once more. Out on the staircase, Pankhurst and Price listened with mingled feelings.

"It's jolly decent!" muttered Price. "Of course, the piano takes the parts of the second violins and the viola. It will sound different when Cuffy is doing his little bit. That's a dish-up of the Third Overture to 'Leonora'



The strains of music died away, and Pankhurst and Price, peering into the room from the darkness of the stone stairway, looked at the scene in blank amazement. Five juniors were in the room, each of them armed with a musical instrument, and first and foremost was the Cliveden Combine.

they're playing now. Fancy, their having the cheek to tackle Beethoven!"

"Oh, they've cheek enough for anything!" said Pankhurst despondently.

The red-headed chums were silent for some time. Pankhurst made a movement at last.

"Let's get back," he said. "We'll keep this dark. No need to let on that we're up to the game. We'll think it out, and I'll think of some wheeze for dishing them, between this and to-morrow, or bust my brain-box!"

"I hope so."

"Come on."

The Old Firm stole silently away. They entered the house as they had left it, and returned to the Fourth Form dormitory. They went to bed quietly, without awakening anyone, and Price was soon asleep. Not so his chum. Pankhurst lay awake, thinking it out. He had a problem to solve. How was he to "dish" the Combine?

Meanwhile, the amateur orchestra progressed with their rehearsal, and finished it, with much satisfaction to themselves. Poindexter rose at last, and returned the violoncello to its case.

"I guess we're in pretty good form," he remarked. "We'll wake snakes to-morrow evening, my pippins!"

"Faith, and ye're right!"

The instruments were carefully packed away in a chest that had been smuggled into the tower for the purpose. In their nocturnal expeditions it would have been a little too risky to attempt to get a 'cello and a violin-case out of window, to say nothing of the cornet. Harris and Jones, however, took their flute and clarinet away with them. The juniors returned to the schoolhouse, having extinguished the light in the tower. Harris and Jones went their ways, and the Combine climbed in at the classroom window.

All was silent in the Fourth Form dormitory when the chums entered it.

"Asleep, you fellows?" muttered Lincoln G. Poindexter.

There was no reply, save a faint snore from Pankhurst's bed. The Combine returned to bed without a single misgiving.

But Pankhurst was not asleep. Long after the Combine had dropped off, the chief of the Old Firm lay awake, staring at the ceiling, and thinking over the problem he had to solve.

And suddenly a chuckle broke the silence of the Fourth Form dormitory. Lincoln G. Poindexter started in his sleep, and awoke.

"Hallo!" he murmured drowsily.

Pankhurst was silent as a mouse now. Poindexter soon dropped off to sleep again. In his bed, Pankhurst was almost squirming with delight, and exercising all his will-power to keep back the yell of laughter he longed to utter.

He had solved the problem, and whenever he thought of the "wheeze" he had mapped out he could hardly restrain a shriek of merriment. He fell asleep, at last, and grinned in his sleep over his dreams of the coming downfall of the Poindexter Musical Society.

The 5th Chapter. The Programme.

POINDEXTER and his musical society had an air of suppressed importance the next day which would have aroused the suspicions of the Old Firm, even if they had known nothing of the nocturnal rehearsals in the old tower.

But the muttered talk of the musical society, their whispered consultations with Cuffy of the Fifth, Poindexter's examinations of the No. 8 Room, with an eye to cramming in a large audience, young Harris's surreptitious tootlings on the flute, and the yelps of the clarinet from Jones's study—all passed, now, without notice from the Old Firm.

For the Old Firm were lying low.

Pankhurst and Price made no sign, and, indeed, appeared outwardly to be thinking of nothing but the next football match. They discussed football loud and long whenever they were within hearing of any member of the Combine, and the Combine chuckled gleefully to think how far Panky and Price were from getting on the track.

And Panky and Price smiled.

Pankhurst had confided his scheme to Price before breakfast that morning. Price had listened in astonishment, then with a grin—and the grin had expanded into a laugh—the laugh into a roar. Then Sidney Price laughed till his ribs ached.

"Oh, my only hat!" he exclaimed.

"What price that for a joke on the Tinned Beef Combine?" demanded Pankhurst.

"Oh, it's too rich!"

"I fancy it will be a dot on the nose for young Chicago."

"Ha, ha! Rather rough on the musical society!"

"Can't be helped. If we had got up the musical wheeze, the Combine would be hunting for a chance to bust our concert, wouldn't they?"

"Quite so."

"Now the boot's on the other foot, and we're going to bust theirs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're giving a concert in No. 8 Room," said Pankhurst grinning. "The partition between No. 8 Room and No. 7 Room is only lath and plaster. You remember, when we've had lessons in No. 7, we could hear the buzz from No. 8?"

"Quite so, rather."

"If they give a concert in No. 8, why shouldn't we give one in No. 7?"

"Echo answers why?"

"If they've bagged all the good performers, why shouldn't we make up an orchestra composed of bad performers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If the partition's thin, and we make too much row for their performance to be heard, whose fault is that?"

"The chap's who built the partition."

"Exactly."

"But you'll have to get permission to use No. 7."

"Easy enough. The Combine got permission to use No. 8 from Lanyon. I'll ask Quince to let us have No. 7. He doesn't know anything about the musical society, so he can't guess there's anything on. He'll let me have the room, as Fifth Form master."

"Quite so."

"I'll ask him immediately after breakfast, to make sure."

And Pankhurst did. The master of the Fifth willingly gave the juniors permission to use No. 7 Room, which was not wanted that evening by anybody. The Old Firm kept it very dark. Sometimes they chuckled irrepressibly; but whenever any of the musical society were near, Pankhurst and Price were gravely talking football.

After school that day, the Combine came out of the Fourth Form room in great spirits. Everything was going well for the musical society, and apparently there was no suspicion raised yet. But as the concert was to take place after tea, it was time for the secret to be let out, and Poindexter, accompanied by his chums, marched up to the notice-board in the hall, and fastened up a notice there.

There was immediately a rush of juniors to read it. Dick Neville was football captain of the Fourth, and the impression at first was that the notice had something to do with the junior football club.

There were blank stares of amazement when

the notice was read, from all but Pankhurst and Price, who, of course, knew what to expect.

The programme of the amateur musical society was an ambitious one. The notice ran as follows:

NOTICE.

"The Poindexter Musical Society beg to announce that they are giving an orchestral performance in No. 8 Room this evening, to commence at seven sharp.

"Admission free to all Cliveden fellows, but if any ginger merchants come, they will be expected to put on clean collars, wash their hands, and behave themselves generally.

"Trevelyan, our respected captain, has promised to be present, so if any of the aforesaid ginger merchants are thinking of kicking up a row in the room, they will be disappointed, and forthwith ejected on their necks.

"Roll up in your thousands! All are welcome. A cordial invitation extended to all masters. Come early and avoid the crush.

"The programme is appended.

(Signed) Lincoln G. Poindexter, Founder and President, P. M. S. Richard Neville, Vice-President, P. M. S. Michael Murphy Flynn, of Castle O'Flynn, Secretary."

PROGRAMME.

- Overture, "Up North," The Orchestra.
Prelude to Act IV, "Carmen" (Bizet) The Orchestra.
Violoncello Solo, "The Broken Melody," Lincoln Grant Poindexter.
Third Overture to "Leonora" (Beethoven) The Orchestra.
Coon Dance with Violin Solo "Come and Kiss Me, Honey," Richard Neville.
Flute Solo, "The Whistling Coon," George W. Harris.
Intermezzo, "Cavalleria Rusticana," The Orchestra.
Cornet Solo, "On the Ball," Michael Flynn.
Piano, "Polonaise" (Kutumofski) Herbert Cuffy.
Conductor, H. Cuffy.

"My only Aunt Belinda!" said Pankhurst, as he finished reading this ambitious programme aloud. "They may manage 'On the Ball,' or 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey,' but I expect there will be casualties when they begin on Beethoven."

"And Mascagni, too," grinned Price. "I hear that the Intermezzo to Cavalleria, is always encored, but I fancy there will be a change this time."

"And the 'Broken Melody,'" grinned Philpot. "There will be more than one broken melody, I expect, to say nothing of broken harmony."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Lot of cheeky kids," said Medway. "I would have put in a concertina solo for them if they had asked me."

"Perhaps they've carefully calculated how much the roof will stand," remarked Gatty.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I think Medway's concertina would have been ripping," said Pankhurst.

"Yes, it would have ripped the ceiling," said Greene.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Medway strode away. Pankhurst and Price trotted after him, and entered his study.

The 6th Chapter.

The Pankhurst Musical Society.

"HALLO!" said Medway. "What do you fellows want?" "You offered to play the concertina for us once—"

"You want a tune?" asked Medway, who was always looking out for a victim. "Certainly. What shall I play you? The overture to Tannhauser arranged for the concertina, or a little thing of my own?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Pankhurst, for Medway was already reaching for his instrument of torture. "I don't mean now. I'm thinking of giving a concert—"

Medway grinned. "Getting up a rival concert already?"

"That's it. Will you let me put your name down for a solo on the concertina?"

"Certainly. I'll give you as many as you like."

"Well, if you could manage half a dozen—"

"A dozen if you like."

"Good. I say, we're getting up an orchestra to rival the Combine's rotten show, and, of course, we rush to secure you first thing."

"Well, I think I may say that you don't often hear a chap play the concertina as I do," said Medway modestly.

"I quite agree with you."

"Quite so."

"We're giving it to-night, at seven sharp, in No. 7 Room," explained Pankhurst.

Medway stared at the red-headed chums of the Fourth.

"Why, they'll hear it in the next room."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm certain of it. The partition is only lath and plaster. You know when that ass Cuffy, of the Fifth, is playing the piano in No. 8, it's as plain as anything in No. 7."

"Well, that can't be helped," said Pankhurst. "I dare say if we play loud enough, their noise won't interfere with us."

"We may interfere with them."

"Of course, that's their look-out. We've got plenty to attend to, without attending to their business for them."

"Ha, ha! I suppose so. It's all right; I'll be there. We'd better lock the door before we start, though."

"I'll see to that. I can rely on you, then?"

"Yes, rather. They'll be sorry they left me out of the programme."

"Ha, ha! I think they will!"

And the Old Firm left the study eminently satisfied with themselves. They left Medway practising on his German concertina; but whether he was playing the overture to Tannhauser arranged for that instrument, or a little thing of his own, it was impossible to tell by listening to it, and the auburn-haired chums did not stay to listen, either.

"We've got to finish making up the orchestra," grinned Pankhurst. "I shall have my cornet, and you can have your trombone. We've got two other instruments—your 'cello, and the bugle we use on a paper-chase, and there's the castanets, too. Every little helps. We want three more instrumentalists. I say, young Trimble."

"Did you call me Panky?" said Teddy Trimble, looking round.

"Yes. Come into my study."

"Right you are."

Teddy Trimble looked at the Old Firm rather wonderingly as he followed them into No. 10. Pankhurst took the castanets out of the drawer.

"Can you use these, youngster?"

"Yes; but—"

"I'm giving an orchestral performance this evening, and I want you to play the castanets," explained Pankhurst. "Will you do it?"

"But—but I've never—"

"That's all right. All you've got to do is to keep them going, and make as much row as possible."

"I am glad to see so distinguished a company gathered to listen to our modest efforts," said Poindexter, gazing from the edge of the dais upon the crowded audience.

"It is gratifying to me as president of the 'Poindexter Musical Society.' The concert will now commence."

"Oh, I don't mind doing that!"

"Good. Be in No. 7 Room at seven sharp, then. Mind, not a word to a soul—it's a dead secret."

"Right you are, Panky."

"And pass the word to Fish and King to come here."

Teddy Trimble nodded and departed, and a few minutes later Fish and King came in. The two were the gluttons of the Fourth, and the message had caused them to scent a feed.

They looked disappointed when they saw the table bare of everything but musical instruments.

"Hallo," said Fish, "I—I thought you wanted us."

"So we do," said Pankhurst blandly.

"Quite so."

"What is it, then? I don't mind going down to the tuck-shop for you, if you like," said Fish generously.

"I'd go with pleasure," said King.

"This is how it is," said Pankhurst. "We're giving a concert this evening—"

"Oh! There was a very visible decrease of interest in the fat countenances of Fish and King."

"Hold on. Let me finish. When it's over, we're going to stand a tea to all the members of the orchestra."

"Now you're talking!"

"We want you fellows to play for us."

"I'm willing to do anything I can," said Fish. "I've never played any instrument, but I'm willing to try."

"Ha, ha! I want you to play this violoncello."

"Blessed if I know how to, you know."

"That's all right. It's going to be a classical concert, so it's not necessary to have any tune. You take the bow and keep on sawing across the thickest string—just here, you see?"

"But—but will that make any music?"

"It will make music enough for our purpose. I want you to blow the bugle, King."

"Right-ho! I can blow calls on the bugle."

"It doesn't matter much what you blow, so long as you make plenty of row, and keep it up."

"Good. And the feed—"

"We've got a ripping tea, and we're going to have it immediately after the—the concert."

"Bravo! You can rely on us."

And the two gluttons of the Cliveden Fourth left the study, looking decidedly pleased. The Old Firm grinned at one another.

"Now we'll look in on Philpot, and ask him to bring his mouth-organ," grinned Pankhurst. "Then I fancy the Pankhurst Musical Society will be complete."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite so!"

The 7th Chapter. Rival Orchestras.

GENTLEMEN—"Hear, hear!"

"I am glad to see so distinguished a company gathered to listen to our modest efforts," said Lincoln G. Poindexter, gazing from the edge of the dais upon the crowded audience in Room No. 8.

"It is very gratifying to me, as founder and president of the P. M. S. I am glad to see practically the whole of the Fourth Form present, and attribute the absence of any ginger merchants to the fact that I insisted, in my notice in the hall, upon their wearing clean collars if they came."

"Ha, ha, ha!"



beftited the occasion, with a nice rose in his coat, and his hair brushed back from his forehead, and an artistic little curl straying carelessly over his brow—a careless curl that had taken him half an hour to arrange.

"Here goes!" murmured Gatty. "On the ball!"

"Play up, there!"

The orchestra played up. There was a burst of music—and a minute later there was a terrific roar in the air that drowned the efforts of the orchestra.

The audience started and stared.

The crash of unmusical discordance came through the thin partition from the next room, but it was as plainly audible as if it had been in that room.

The members of the orchestra looked at one another in amazement and dismay. Exclamations of amazement were heard on all sides, mingled with laughter.

The instruments stopped one by one. Still from the adjoining room the crash proceeded. The tones of a trombone, a 'cello, a cornet, a bugle, a terrible concertina, and a tin whistle were blended with the clicking of castanets and the stamping of feet.

Poindexter jumped to his feet. He guessed now why the Old Firm were absent from the audience.

He strode furiously to the partition, and rapped on it with his knuckles. The audience, beginning to "tumble" to the little game, were going off into yells of laughter. But the members of the Poindexter Musical Society did not feel like laughing.

The rap of Poindexter's knuckles on the wall was followed by the cessation of the pandemonium.

"Hallo!" called out the voice of Pankhurst. "Anything up?"

"I guess so! Stop that row!"

"What row?"

"That fearful din you're making. We're giving a concert here."

"Rats! We're giving one here!"

"You rotters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and it's thyrin' to bust our illigant concert they are."

"Rats!" called out Pankhurst through the partition. "We've got Mr. Quince's permission to give a concert in this room this evening. You can go and ask him. We are the Pankhurst Musical Society, and this is our variety of music."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

"We may not be quite in time and tune," went on Pankhurst. "That's because we haven't had time for any rehearsals in the old tower."

The members of the Combine stared at one another blankly.

"Then they knew!" muttered Neville.

"I—I guess so."

"Faith, and it's japin' us, they are!"

"Hold your row in there!" yelled Poindexter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll scrag you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come and play up!" said Poindexter desperately.

The audience were in convulsions. The orchestra, though with great misgivings, recommenced the overture. Hardly had the music started than a crash of discordance came from the next room. The noise of all the instruments playing continuously, without any regard to time or tune, of course drowned the sound of an orchestra playing in tune. The discordance was horrible, and every fellow there who had a musical ear, was stopping it.

"My hat!" gasped Crane, of the Fifth. "This is rather more than a joke! I don't want my eardrums busted! Come on, you chaps, somewhere where we can get a laugh in peace!"

And the Fifth-Formers, shrieking with merriment, rushed from the room.

The orchestra, though viewing with dismay the rapid melting of their audience, played on grimly. And still from the next room came groan and crash and grunt and shriek and crash and bang. It was impossible to distinguish anything that Poindexter's band were playing.

Cuffy jumped up from the piano before the overture was finished.

"Oh, hang!" he exclaimed. "This is what comes of playing for you kids! I'm off!"

"Hold on, Cuffy! I say, old chap, I—"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Cuffy. "I'm not staying here to be deafened. I'm off!"

The audience, shrieking with laughter, followed rapidly. Poindexter was desperate. But a rapid examination of the door of No. 7 showed that it was locked, and that there was no way of getting at the rival orchestra.

And the Poindexter Musical Society, with glum countenances, turned out the light, and vacated No. 8. The performance had been a ghastly fiasco, and the honours remained with the Old Firm. And when the rival orchestra learned, from the silence in No. 8, that they had conquered, they laid down their instruments, and rolled on the floor, and simply yelled.

It was long before Cliveden left off laughing over the story of the rival orchestras, though it was some time before the Combine could join in the laugh. But the Poindexter Musical Society was reorganised, with the Old Firm as members, and after that Poindexter "guessed" that they would go ahead. And they did!

THE END.

(A splendid complete Boy Scout story next week.)